

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**ECHOES OF EMERSON IN WALT WHITMAN'S "SONG OF
MYSELF"**



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LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is the result of my original research, except for references to other studies which have been duly acknowledged, and that no part of it has been published or presented as part of the requirement for any degree in any University.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father, Mr. Edward Doughan Kweku Hammah, and my mother, Mrs Beatrice Hammah. This thesis is both a culmination and a testament of your unrelenting efforts to goad me up the summit of academic achievement. My success is your success.



ABSTRACT

This study explores fundamental relationships existing in the works of two great American Scholars of the 19th century: Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. It argues that, “Song of Myself”, the poetry collection in Whitman’s major literary work *Leaves of Grass*, echoes or re-emphasizes some of Emerson’s significant ideological and philosophical beliefs. Ralph Waldo Emerson, recognized as the founder of America’s transcendentalist movement, was a key figure in America’s intellectual and literary revolution in the 19th century. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s publication of “Nature” in 1836 began a process of creating a new condition of American thinking, severed from European cultural and intellectual influences.¹ In “The American Scholar” and “Self-Reliance”, Emerson called for an original American literature that truly depicted the American taste and condition.

His philosophy of “trusting in one’s self”, breaking away from theological and institutional dogmas and believing in the “divine” human personality, influenced other writers like Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau just to mention a few. Like Emerson’s first work “Nature” (1836), “Self-Reliance” (1841) was recognized for its peculiar character as a work of social commentary, espousing ideals of ‘how men ought to live’ while deemphasizing the asphyxiating pressures of external authority. The study illustrates the inter-textual ties and influences between Whitman’s long poem “Song of Myself” and aspects of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s major literary works. The study investigates this relationship by examining the thematic and philosophical concerns expressed in Whitman’s poetry and juxtaposes it with its literary predecessor/precursor rooted in a selection of Emerson’s major transcendentalist literary works. Employing T.S Eliot’s theory of influence in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) as a framework to interpret the echoes, the study challenges

¹ Sections of this abstract taken from an abstract posted on academia.edu under the title “Echoes of Emerson in Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself.” Also authored by the researcher of this thesis.
https://www.academia.edu/6185657/Echoes_of_Emerson_in_Walt_Whitmans_Song_of_Myself_-ABSTRACT

traditional notions of influence that privilege the precursor influence as a “standard” to evaluate the later artist’s work and concludes that although Emerson is echoed in Whitman’s text, the relationship of influence between these two writers (per a critical literary interpretation of texts) is not one in which the precursor is seen in the simplistic light of “flowing into”, or sending forth “power or virtue” to the later artist. Rather, the relationship of influence is a sort of symbiosis in which the precursor and the later texts mutually transform and reinforce each other.

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Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship (Emerson, "Nature", 7).

INTRODUCTION

This section acts as a background to the study that highlights the very distinct biographies of the two great American literary artists being studied. It provides a description of the tenuous social and political climate in which both writers produced their works and hint at the motivations behind their works.

A study of the literary works of both Whitman and Emerson would reveal a deep concern for “the human personality” (struggles and identity; weaknesses and capabilities), a preoccupation with the enchantment of nature and the comfort it assures and an examination of the nature of religion (dogmas and abuses). Both writers were concerned about America; the social and political condition of the American state in the 19th century was an issue of popular debate among writers at the time.

Whitman’s poetry, very much like Emerson’s literary works, employs or evokes images of the American mainland. In “Song of Myself”, the poet calls up names of American states like California, Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas and Tennessee just to mention a few. Emerson’s major treatises like “Self-Reliance”, “The American Scholar” and “The Divinity School address”, mostly in the form of orations delivered at public gatherings, address pressing issues facing the American social and political order. Both writers acknowledge their citizenship in their literary works and demonstrate their avowed commitment to correct the ills plaguing the American society. For instance, both Whitman and Emerson were against the institution of slavery which was still being practised in 19th century American society; they were against the restrictive and stifling dogmas of institutions like the church and the

universities and instead preached the virtues of “self-expression”, “free-will” and “non-conformity”.

The transcendentalist movement which emerged in the 19th century could be seen as a needed response to particular social issues the American society was facing at the time. Both writers contributed immensely to the intellectual and literary revolution that transformed the fortunes of American society. While the title of Whitman’s text (“Song of Myself”) may seem to suggest a preoccupation with “the self”, it expresses or reveals profound comments about the nature of the ideal collective American state; one that transcends the individual; that moves away from dogmatism and blind worship of the past to make way for an embracing of intuition; one that reflects the truly liberated American state.

I. Biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts on May 25, 1803, son of Ruth Haskins and Rev. William Emerson, a Unitarian Minister (Richardson, 18). He was the second of five sons who survived into adulthood; the others were William, Edward, Robert Bulkeley and Charles. Three other children- Phebe, John Clarke and Mary Caroline- died in childhood (Baker, 3). Emerson was raised by his mother, with the help of his aunt, Mary Moody, when his father died from stomach cancer less than two weeks before Emerson’s eighth birthday. Some accounts of Emerson’s biography reveal that Aunt Mary Moody had a profound influence on Emerson’s intellectual growth. Mary Moody Emerson was known not only as her nephew Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “earliest and best teacher,” but also as a “spirited and original genius in her

own right". In one of his later lectures, Emerson considered her presence in his life a "blessing which nothing else in education could supply".

After studying at Harvard and teaching for a brief time, Emerson entered the ministry. He was appointed to the Old Second Church in his native city, but soon became an unwilling preacher. Unable in conscience to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper after the death of Ellen Louisa Tucker, his nineteen-year-old wife, of tuberculosis, Emerson resigned his pastorate in 1831. As he wrote, "This mode of commemorating Christ is not suitable to me. That is reason enough why I should abandon it" (Packer, 39). As one Emerson scholar has pointed out, "Doffing the decent black of the pastor, he was free to choose the gown of the lecturer and teacher, of the thinker not confined within the limits of an institution or a tradition" (Ferguson). Some accounts of Emerson's life, have highlighted this moment as a significant moment in Emerson's 'coming of age' and subsequent criticism of institutions that stifled any form of personal experience and instead branded any such attempts at "thinking outside the box" as rebellious and discordant. Writing in his journal in June 1832, Emerson expressed thus: "I have sometimes thought that, in order to be a good minister, it was necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers."

Emerson became known for challenging traditional thought. In 1835, he married his second wife, Lydia Jackson, and settled in Concord, Massachusetts. Known in the local literary circle as "The Sage of Concord," Emerson became the chief spokesman for Transcendentalism, the American philosophic and literary movement. Centred in New England during the 19th century, Transcendentalism was a reaction against scientific rationalism. Emerson's motto "trust thyself" was viewed as a statement of

non-conformity and a reliance on intuition as the only way to comprehend reality. Emerson's other volumes include *Poems* (1847), *Representative Men*, *The Conduct of Life* (1860), and *English Traits* (1865). His best-known addresses are "The American Scholar" (1837) and "The Divinity School Address", which he delivered before the graduates of the Harvard Divinity School, shocking Boston's conservative clergymen with his descriptions of the divinity of man and the humanity of Jesus. Emerson discounted Biblical miracles and proclaimed that, while Jesus was a great man, he was not God: historical Christianity, he said, had turned Jesus into a "demigod, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo". His comments outraged the establishment and the general Protestant community. For this, he was denounced as an atheist and 'poisoner' of young men's minds (Buell, 161). His address to a Harvard audience in 1837, published with the title "The American Scholar", has been called America's "intellectual Declaration of Independence." Emerson said, toward the end of his writing career, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." Emerson is believed to be one of the foremost American scholars to have conceptualised the philosophical movement known as Transcendentalism, with the support of such key adherents as Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickson and Henry David Thoreau. He referred to "the splendid labyrinth of one's own perceptions"--in the face of society's pressures on people to conform in both thought and deed. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1842 lecture "The Transcendentalist":

The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy. He wishes that the spiritual principle should be suffered to demonstrate itself to the end, in all possible applications to the state of man, without the admission of anything unspiritual; that is, anything positive, dogmatic,

personal. Thus, the spiritual measure of inspiration is the depth of the thought, and never, who said it? And so he resists all attempts to palm other rules and measures on the spirit than its own. (96)

Transcendentalism thus evolved as a literary philosophical movement that had as its ultimate aim, the rejection of all forms of 'restrictive' dogmatism, with an appeal to generating a form of self-awareness and belief, liberating the human psyche from conventionalism in order to facilitate full and genuine expressionism. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men" (71).

Ralph Waldo Emerson died of pneumonia in 1882.

II. Biography of Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was born on Long Island, New York in 1819 to a small farmer who later moved to Brooklyn to become a carpenter. As a young boy he attended school only briefly. After leaving school he trained as a journeyman printer, part-time farmer, schoolteacher, carpenter and later as a journalist. In his spare time he travelled widely in the United States. A self-educated man, Whitman read widely on his own, spending whole days in libraries across New York. Ultimately he learnt how to express himself in his private notebooks and began writing poetry vigorously throughout the 1850s and 1860s. In January 1873 Whitman suffered the first of a series of strokes that would leave him a semi-invalid for the rest of his life.

Whitman once said of his works: “I was simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil.” Whitman’s first major work, *Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1855 and contained 12 poems. In this first edition of *Leaves of Grass* published at the poet’s own expense, the Preface described America as “the greatest poem.. What I tell I tell precisely for what it is.” Whitman’s concern in his literary works was with the ordinary people of America. He says in the Preface: “Re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the richest fluency.” In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman concerns himself with the unity of body and soul. The ‘I’ in the poems is a visionary in search of himself in others.

He wrote mainly about America, its people and democracy, hence he was somewhat regarded as a national poet. Unlike other poets of his generation, he was not a university graduate, and therefore rather than looked to English poetry for his sources and inspiration, he looked to himself and his environment. He refuses to look back to the past and the classics and makes his own rules to operate by, as represented in his indulgent use of the “I” which affirms the sort of uninhibited self-love portrayed in “Song of Myself”. Whitman’s patriotism and love for America is very much like Emerson’s devotion to the American state; they both possessed and represented the need for an ideological re-orientation of the American people that would ensure that America moved away from European conventionalism.

III. America in the 19th Century

A number of key events characterized the social and political milieu of America in the 19th century. Issues of immigration, poverty, labour, women struggling for a place in

this period and issues relating to slavery characterized this period of American life. All American peoples, except for Native Americans have emigrated from other countries. Most of the early immigrants came from the British Isles. Immigrants followed from every European country. Immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Italy and Scandinavia played key roles. Blacks brought from Africa as slaves were also significant in this influx. Important immigration also came from China and Japan. Edgar Lee Masters in his book *The Living Thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, explains that Emerson was engaged in a fight against the perception of America as a province, a mere feeding-ground for merchants.

He was against conservatism in religion, politics and business. It was strange that a people fresh from revolution with a broad fertile land and unmeasured opportunities should engraft upon themselves the tyrannies and the superstitions of a Europe that was really defunct. But Emerson found...that there was little independence of mind in America, and little freedom of discussion. He knew that great writers and thinkers could not exist in America without the freedom of opinion. And for the purposes of his emphatic reaction to repressed conditions it was well enough that he was born and lived in New England where the theocracy of Puritanism had survived the Revolution and was stronger than ever. (Edgar Lee Masters, pg. 18)

Edgar Lee Masters further explains that New England at the time that Emerson emerged was much like his own town in Illinois.

Self-repression was a feature of the Puritan religion, and distrust of nature was something enjoined upon the mind and heart. That Emerson freed himself of these restrictions and wrote in the essays and poems the wisdom by which that was done fitted him to publish declarations of intellectual independence for his countrymen. Who else really did this?

America, when he came on the scene, was conservative in religion and business and in politics...' (Edgar Lee Masters, pg. 16)

No assessment of America's developmental history would be accurate without highlighting the immense contributions this influx of people of diverse origins had on America's growth. Other notable developments within this period include America's gradual rise to the status of an industrialized nation and noteworthy experiments of the democratic machinery of governance. America in the 19th century evolved from a largely agricultural society to the world's most important industrial power. Bountiful natural resources, a foundation of English law, a free enterprise system, an effective public education system, and immigration combined to make America potentially the most powerful country in the world. Other historians focus on the negative: the concentration of wealth, child and female labour, unfair and unsafe working conditions, and other social problems.

Otto, in trying to describe the social and political circumstances in which Emerson and Whitman wrote, explains: "The intention of American democracy was distinctly stated in the country's motto, *e pluribus unum* (from many, one), which suggested that America was one community created with the equal efforts of its numerous individuals. But that ideal was not blossoming due to the growing emphasis on individual economic advancement. America had many citizens but those many were not working towards one true democracy."²

Expressing his disillusion and frustrations with American society, Emerson laments in his diary thus:

Alas for America, as I must so often say, the ungirt, the diffuse, the profuse, procumbent- one wide ground juniper, out of which no cedar, no oak will rear

² Eric C. Otto. "Misdirected American Democracy: Emerson's Solution in "The American Scholar"." <http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/vol1/issue2/emerson.htm>

up a mast to the clouds. It all runs to leaves, to suckers, to tendrils, to miscellany. The air is loaded with poppy, with imbecility, with dispersion and sloth. Eager, solicitous, rabid, busy-bodied America attempting many things, vain, ambitious to feel thy own existence and convince others of thy talent... catch thy breath and correct thyself, and failing here, prosper out there; speed and fever are never greatness; but reliance and serenity and waiting. America is formless, has no terrible and no beautiful condensation” (Edgar Lee Masters, pg. 23).

The evolution of a ‘free enterprise system’ or a capitalist economy, has been identified as evidence or elements that lend support to the creation of a highly ‘individualistic’ economic setup, that based on its theoretical assumptions, ensured a form of equal opportunity to individuals for the creation of wealth.

Religion, its nature and character, was also an issue of immense public concern. Puritanism, which reared its head in the New England territories, was believed to have had significant telling effects on religious conduct in American churches and especially on the ideals of society’s moral constitution. Some perspectives on the nature and character of Transcendentalism in America, intimate that Transcendentalism may in some way be indebted to Puritanism. The logic being that, both theorised a rejection of some form of convention. Puritanism, itself a form of dogmatism with its strict moral codes, emerged as a rejection of some form of administrative and biblical abuses within the Church.

IV. Statement of Problem

Some of the available literature and critical essays that deal with the associations between Emerson and Whitman, seem to represent Emerson and Whitman as though

they were the same people; that there is a palpable, conspicuous symmetry of thought between the two individuals, such that it was impossible to tell them apart. Most proponents of this argument, seem to conflate or confuse their transcendentalist sway with the possible influence one could have had on the other.

V. Objectives of the Study

The study intends to critically examine Whitman's poetry with the ultimate objective of showing 'how' and to what extent 'Emerson' is echoed in the text. To achieve this ultimate objective, the study also hopes to achieve the following:

- Compare and contrast Whitman's themes and ideological concerns with Emerson's.
- Assess to what extent Whitman 'deviates' (moves away or rejects) or accepts the beliefs of Emerson's precursor texts.
- Establish the relevance of the literary works of both writers and how this aided the intellectual and literary movement of 19th century American society.
- Evaluate how the 'free-form' of Whitman's poetry reinforces the ideas he expresses.

VI. Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that the study would be useful in a number of ways:

- That it would help reveal or facilitate an understanding of how the predecessors' influence on the text, in this particular situation, indicates strength and not weakness.
- That through the exploration of Whitman's and Emerson's texts, the study would enable an appreciation of the deep social commitments these two writers owed to 19th century American society.
- Whitman freed poetry from the bondage of verse. Whitman made poetry prose. Regarded as the Father of modern poetry, Whitman's technical innovations or 'meddling' with style was a major influence for African writers and modern poets. Thus, his influence on modern writing is important.

VII. Delimitations of the Study

Ideally, a study such as this one, which aims at interrogating the works of Whitman and Emerson, to reveal the extent of influence Emerson's work had on Whitman's, should have employed a greater corpus of Whitman's poetic works (the entire Anthology of *Leaves of Grass* preferably). However, "Song of Myself" which this thesis particularly focuses on, contains the ethos of Whitman's poetic argument in the entire collection of *Leaves of Grass*. As a Song of Himself, "Song of Myself" epitomises and provides a near-absolute description of his poetic disposition. Of all the works produced by Whitman, "Song of Myself" is the work that attracted the most intense criticism and public interest. Consequently, it could be argued that the results of the study may not be fully representative. Despite this limitation, I believe that the study would not only use "Song of Myself" to interrogate its hypotheses, but draw on other works from the Anthology of *Leaves of Grass*.

VIII. Theoretical Framework

The thesis employs the American New Critical methodology of studying texts as a preferred system of inquiry into the literary depths of Emerson and Whitman. A new critical analysis thrives on the notion of the “literary text” as autonomous and self-sufficient, and proceeds to do an intrinsic study of the text, based solely on a critical appraisal of the aesthetic merits of its form. New Criticism argues that each text has a central unity, and that all extra-textual information should be ignored in the pursuit of trying to unravel the ambiguities, tensions, ironies and paradoxes within the text.

As a study that deals with influence and accompanying issues of originality and indebtedness, the thesis specifically employs Eliot’s conceptualisation of literary influence in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) as a means to interrogate the echoes (the points of departure and convergence between Emerson and Whitman).

Eliot argues, *inter alia*, that:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead (37).

Eliot insists that the author as creator or artificer of the text may not be looked at as an originator, a stand-alone entity complete within and of itself. He insists on the inescapable presence of the influence of past forms (dead poets, literary predecessors) in the work of the belated poet or artist in his “psychological agon” (Bloom) to assert his own contemporaneity. Eliot further argues:

The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.(37)

Eliot, in his proposition of this theory of influence, argues that the assumed, yet inescapable relationship between the modern scriptor and his literary predecessor is not one in which the predecessor assumes a place of superiority and the belated poet assumes the role of imitator or dependant, rather their relationship is one of a mutually enforcing and transforming synergy in which the new reconstitutes the old. The thesis adopts this framework as a relevant tool to discuss the influence of Emerson in Whitman's "Song of Myself."

IX. Methodology

This study is a study of influence; in effect, it takes the form of an intertextual study. The study focuses on Whitman and "Song of Myself", with a view to investigating the ways in which Whitman incorporates or abandons Emersonian values or beliefs, in order to determine influence, originality, indebtedness and deviation. Secondary sources serve to buttress the comparison. This will also take the form of citing texts that are relevant to the study under the literature review.

X. Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction gives a background overview of the work, setting out the Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the study, Significance and Delimitations of the study. It also presents brief biographies of the two writers under study. Chapter One reviews the available literature and criticism on the history of influence between two writers and also establishes the main concerns of this research. The chapter attempts a comprehensive discussion of theories of influence and inter-textuality and also explores theories relating to the Formalist school which serves as the framework for the study of Whitman. Chapter Two offers a New American critical analysis of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and investigates how the poetic form reinforces the themes or ideals he espouses. The third chapter offers the first section of the discussion of the Echoes that focuses on Emerson and Whitman's theorizing on religion. The fourth chapter provides the next section of the discussion of the echoes and focuses on the preoccupation of the two writers with the self and Nature. Both Chapter three and Chapter Four offer an exploration of Whitman's "Song of Myself" with the objective to define lines of originality, indebtedness or deviation.

The thesis ends with the conclusion of the study. It offers the researcher's concluding remarks on the nature of the "echoes" unearthed (deviation/indebtedness/originality), based on an informed study of the works of both writers.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews relevant scholarly works on Formalist reading and New Critical literary theory in a bid to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the theoretical framework on which this study is based. It also studies schools of thought on intertextuality and influence as modes of exegesis, and how they relate to the theoretical and thematic demands of this research. A study of the literary critical model that will be employed in this study is crucial because of the thematic as well as ‘formalist’ demands of the inter-textual hypothesis.

This chapter also reviews relevant literature and critiques on the literary works of Emerson and Whitman. It also focuses on literature that investigate the ‘echoes’ or describes the relationship between Whitman and Emerson. This section will also review a few works that address the literary concerns of both writers vis-a-vis the social and political milieu of the period in which they wrote.

Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, since its first publication in 1855 to its 1892 death-bed edition, has received significant attention from critics, scholars and other writers. Intense public and scholarly debate on Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, seem to oscillate between discussions on what they term, “the sexually perverse” nature of Whitman’s imagery in most of his poems and the unrestrained egotism or what some have referred to as narcissism of the persona’s disposition, especially in “Song of Myself”. Although some critics of Emerson label his work as “philosophical idealism” or a “strand of radical mysticism”, the bulk of scholarly dialogue on

Emerson's work seem to focus almost entirely on the philosophical merits of the values he espouses to the social condition or intellectual revolution of America.

1.1 Review on the Formalist School and Theories of Influence

Literary criticism and interpretation has for the most part, had to deal with issues concerning originality, authenticity, fidelity and indebtedness. These debates have oscillated between author-centred approaches and 'text-centred' approaches and how these approaches resolve the highly sensitive issues of indebtedness, influence and originality. Generally, author-centred approaches argue for the primacy of the author or 'originator' in the process of interpretation and often assume that there is 'an intention' of the author that is embedded within the literary work. "Intentionalists" (critics who believe in the intention of the writer as an interpretive and evaluative strategy) like H.P. Grice and E.D Hirsch, believe that locating the author's "intention" within the literary piece is crucial to getting at the heart of meaning. E.D Hirsch in "Validity in Interpretation" (1967) defends intentionalism by asserting unequivocally that 'a text means what its author meant.'

Other intentionalist arguments can be found in H.P Grice's theory of 'non-natural meaning' and Austin & Searle's "Speech Act theory." H. P Grice argues that all linguistic meaning must ultimately be explicable in terms of intention. In their "Speech Act theory", Austin & Searle reinforce the intentionalist argument that ties the linguistic material or verbal act to the 'utterer' or the intent from whence it originated. They argue that 'intention has an essential role in the analysis of speech acts (such as promising, asserting or questioning)' and that the illocutive force is very much evident and desirable in appreciating the meaning of a word.

In direct contrast to the intentionalist stance on interpretive procedure is Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy." As a statement of anti-intentionalism, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue against the monolithic interpretation of texts that creates and sustains an insistence on the author as a primary site for interpreting a text. They argue that 'intention is not a standard for literary interpretation or evaluation.' In poetic analysis or exegesis, Wimsatt and Beardsley contend that privileging the intent of the artificer, which is neither available nor desirable, is fraught with issues. They assert that 'the poem is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it.'

For anti-intentionalists like Wimsatt and Beardsley, the text and its merits are and should be the only real standard for interpreting and evaluating a text. What is interesting in all of these debates about authorial intention is that, while one group privileges "external evidence over internal evidence", the other group stakes a claim to the autotelic nature of the literary text and regards as extraneous any detail that is not intrinsic. It is pertinent to point out that although Wimsatt and Beardsley acknowledge the possibility of the 'designing intellect' being the cause of the poem, they do not agree to its usage as a standard for judging the poem. Peter Lamarque, explaining the anti-intentionalist impetus or thesis asserts thus:

... it was an assault on more than just intention. Its target was a certain kind of Romanticism along with an assortment of associated notions, including 'sincerity', 'fidelity', 'spontaneity', 'authenticity', 'genuineness', 'originality'. Here was a clash not only between styles of criticism but between fundamentally different conceptions of Literature: the Romantic conception which sees literature as a vehicle of personal expression and the Modernist conception which sees literature as pure linguistic artefact or, in Wimsatt's terms, as verbal icon (178).

The anti-intentionalist argument, in the exegesis of a literary work does provide some merits. Poetry in particular employs what Cleanth Brooks refers to as ‘the language of paradox.’ Language in poetry is necessarily non-referential (having a determinate signified); instead, the language of poetry lends itself to ambiguities, tensions and paradoxes. The meaning of a word in poetry is constantly in a state of flux as meaning may be deferred. Barthes explains that ‘a text is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.’ Thus, to insist on the designing intellect as the primary source of interpretation, as the intentionalists argue, is to limit the text and deny oneself the intellectually gratifying process of intrinsic interpretation.

Roland Barthes, in his famous essay “The Death of the Author”, agrees with this point. He argues thus:

The image of the author to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions... To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing (*Image, Music, Text*, 147).

Here, Roland Barthes’ call for the “death of the author”, is akin to Michel Foucault’s theorizing of the relationship between the text and the author in “What is an Author?” Foucault de-legitimizes the place of the author within interpretive discourses. He argues against the “author function” that seems to legitimize authorial claims to their status as infinite sources of meaning. Foucault, in his poststructuralist rhetoric, makes a number of interesting arguments. He explains that although the author precedes the text (creates it), he remains outside of the text. He employs the Derridean concept of ‘centre’ to describe the author’s place within interpretive discourse. Foucault

deconstructs the 'authorial centre' and frees literary interpretation from the tyranny of the artificer.

Barthes theory of 'écriture', whereby 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' buttresses this ideal of de-centring or deconstructing the author's place within literary discourse. The notion of the text as a self-sufficient mode of interpretation, as has been suggested by the anti-intentionalist arguments above, provide a useful departure for a discussion on intertextuality and influence as a way of appreciating the formalist school of the American New Critics.

Nathan Bailey in the "Universal Etymological Dictionary" (1721) defines influence as "a flowing into, a sending forth power or virtue; the power of a superior over an inferior." Influence thus becomes very closely linked with the notion of "agency", of establishing or identifying the source of the 'textual' link or similarity, which as Nathan Bailey explains, is assumed to be the author. The notion of "influence" assumes a sort of historicism wherein the "out-of-text" associations between two writers, becomes a tool for interpreting a text or drawing lines of symmetry or convergence between writers instead of between texts. Barthes' "destruction" of the voice and his belief in the "clashing" and "blending" of writings facilitate a move away from value-based criticisms which employ the 'superiority-inferiority' labels in literary criticism of the inter-text.

Thus, inter-textuality is more readily understood as a "blending" and "clashing" of texts, not people. In "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality", Clayton and Rothstein explain that "tracing influences was an essential element in the rise of nineteenth century historicism, developed as it was under the aegis of idealistic theories that stressed agency." Historicist interpretation

assumes that the social ‘saturates’ the literary object and proceeds to get at the heart of meaning of the text by consulting sources outside of the text such as the biographies of authors, the cultural climate and the social and political milieu in which they wrote. The issue with this form of interpretation is that a literary text loses its autonomy; the aesthetic merit of the literary work is submerged under the weight of extraneous social and biographical evidence. A ‘text’ becomes subject to its age and its writer; interpretation of a text becomes an inquiry into biography and history, instead of being an “impersonal” investigation of the literary text itself. Historicist interpretation seems to operate the intentionalist argument as they stress a “subject-centred” approach to literary interpretation instead of a “text-centred” one.

Mid-eighteenth century interest in originality and genius sparked off the intense discussion on influence, and the concept (as it is employed in literary discourse today) bears marks of that origin (Clayton and Rothstein). For the authors of “Conjectures on Original Composition” (1759) and “An Essay on Original Genius” (1767), Edward Young and William Duff, originality played a crucial role in a work of literature and was the only true sign of an author’s genius. Clayton and Rothstein explain that in such a climate (where the literary atmosphere was intoxicated with a deep concern for influence), “it was only natural for critics, bent on evaluation, to look for influences that lessen an author’s claim to genius and for poets, bent on immortality to guard against such influences by searching for the new in both style and subject matter” (5). From the foregoing literary period, it can be assumed that writers and critics, in an age where concern for originality and tracing influences had become the dominant practice, incorporated these pervasive pressures into the wielding of their art. Clayton and Rothstein note that one of the primary challenges of influence studies was how to discriminate genuine influences from commonplace images, techniques, or ideas that

could be found in almost any writer of a given period, how to “distinguish between resemblances that inhere in the common subject-matter of two poems and resemblances that may really be due to direct imitation” (Dodge 215-6). A principal issue with influence study is not only its placing of the author in the centre of interpretive discourse, but also in its presumption that the predecessor (author) occupies a place of privilege, from the heights of which he “flows into” or influences the belated artist. Michael Baxandall attempts a shift in focus from author-centred criticism that challenges precursor-privileging theories of influence by claiming the agency of the author being influenced:

“Influence” is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who is the patient: it seems to revere the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality... If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to, pick up, take on, engage with, react to, quote, differentiate oneself from, assimilate oneself to, assimilate, align oneself with, copy, address, paraphrase, absorb, make a variation on, revive, continue, remodel, ape, emulate, travesty, parody, extract from, distort, attend to, resist, simplify, reconstitute, elaborate on, develop, face up to, master, subvert, perpetuate, reduce, promote, respond to, transform, tackle... - everyone will be able to think of others. Most of these relations just cannot be stated the other way round- in terms of X acting on Y rather than Y acting on X. To think in terms of influence blunts thought by impoverishing the means of differentiation. (58-59)

Baxandall’s inversion of theory of influence by his theorizing of the agency of the receiving author, allows for an interpretation of influence study that perceives the precursor less as a despot.

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, T.S Eliot proposes a theoretical model for studying influence that acknowledges the distance between the precursor and the receiving artist, while insisting that the dialogism between the past and the present is a mutually transforming one. Eliot argues:

One of the facts that might come to light... is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects or parts of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. (36)

Here, Eliot explains a key motivation that is at the heart of critical practice that intends to chart originality by identifying the aspects of a literary text that indicates a moving away from the precursor’s influence. He says we “pretend” to find what is individual; suggesting the faults of this form of critical practice that desires to lay a claim to something, which as he goes on to explain, is non-existent. He continues:

Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously... Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged. (37)

Eliot, in affirming the presence of the precursor's influence in the text of the belated poet, also acknowledges that the poet need not be a mere imitator, a dependent caught up in a "blind or timid adherence" to the precursor influence. "Tradition" (the world of precursor influences), as Eliot perceives it, should not be a restraining factor barring innovation; "that novelty is better than repetition.'

In order for the poet to come to terms with the presence of the precursor's influence, Eliot argues that the poet or artist needs to acknowledge "the historical sense" that (Eliot believes), will resolve the spatial or temporal conundrum between the past and the present. He explains that the historical sense involves:

a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (37)

For Eliot, recognising that a literary history exists and pre-dates the moment of literary production (writing) allows the artist to situate himself or herself within the historiography of influences and ensures that the artist is certain or "acutely conscious" of his place in time. As he further explains, "the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show." The precursor

influence, as Eliot explains, is neither a constraining factor nor a despotic influence on the receiving poet, rather, the poet's consciousness of this literary tradition allows him or her "to continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career." What is striking in Eliot's proposition is that, although he argues that nothing radically innovative can ever be produced, he seems to place a premium on innovation and conservatism (simultaneously).

Eliot argues that poems depart from the Romanticist ideology of poems; that poems do not express the personal feelings and personality of the poet in the way that Romantics would have it. In his theory of influence, Eliot argues a concept of self-effacement (of the poet) that he believes will divert interest from the poet to poetry. He argues thus:

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality... Poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. (39, 42)

Eliot's theorising of "the escape from personality", both as a critical rule and writing methodology, facilitates a move away to more text-centred approaches to investigating influence rather than those that adopt historicist models that stress on the primacy of agency as a critical tool in investigating influence.

In explaining one of the inter-textual problematic (the "father-son" problematic) which this study attempts to address, Clayton and Rothstein explain that "influence is

a personal agon, a struggle of one individual with a strong precursor, modelled on the son's conflict with the father in the Oedipus complex" (Clayton and Rothstein, 9). Clayton and Rothstein's parallel of the father-son inter-textual problematic with the oedipal struggle introduces an element of 'fatedness' into the discourse. Influence becomes an inescapable reality; one that takes place within the writing process and also in the interpretive process.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom expresses an unwavering insistence on the centrality of the author to investigating the inter-text. He explains:

The meaning of a poem can only be another poem...Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem...Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are not texts, but only relationships between texts (*Anxiety* 94, 96; *Map* 3).

Bloom's belief that it is possible to know "the hidden roads" that link texts presents a problematic. For Bloom, every literary text is an invocation of an earlier artist; texts emblemize the relationship between persons. Although he seems to suggest that these links are "hidden", he also makes it quite clear that these relationships are a given. Regarding texts as having pre-established connections with earlier artists, may stifle or discourage any purposeful intrinsic study of literary texts, as readers may approach the text with the pre-conceived idea of "finding the text in the man" instead of "finding the man in the text."

"Finding the man in the text" (investigating the relationships between writers) assumes that, the text is central to any interpretive cause to "find the man", and that, interpretation should necessarily employ an "impersonal" investigation of verbal matter within the text. Bloom, however, disagrees with privileging the intrinsic study

of verbal matter as a mode of establishing or investigating the inter-text. He contends that we sustain a terrible “humanistic loss”, if we yield “to those like Derrida and Foucault who imply... that language itself writes the poems and thinks”; “influence remains subject-centred, a person-to-person relationship, not to be reduced to the problematic of language.” (*Map* 60, 77)

For the American New Critics, this “humanistic loss” is a non-literary factor that should not be employed either as an interpretive or evaluative strategy. Roots of the New Critical Methodology may be found in the works of I.A Richards *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and Cleanth Brooks’ *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947). New Critical Methodology assumes that the decoding of meaning is possible for all readers and regards the text as a self-sufficient unit. New Critical Methodology employs an intrinsic and formalistic approach to studying texts which operates within the framework that, a detailed analysis of the literary form is crucial to ‘unlocking’ the meaning of a text; external factors (such as authorial intent and the notion of a ‘theological meaning’) are undesirable within this framework. Texts are ‘unlocked’ from the inside; a new critical reader, acknowledging the principle of the unity of form and content, enters or immerses himself in the text and experiences the text for himself, without recourse to authorial intent.

New Critical approach encourages an intimate engagement with the textual features, such that, an investigation of form becomes an intellectually rewarding enterprise. It assumes that, there is always a tension in the aesthetic text, consisting of several minor tensions, all culminating in a major tension in the text, and that in the end, all the tensions including the chief tension are reconciled.

The discussion of critical approaches in this section provides an explanation of the 'lacuna' that this research seeks to fill. Existing works that deal with the inter-textual ties between Whitman and Emerson assume a 'father-son' relationship between the two writers that is not based on a critical study of verbal matter. Conversely, the study intends to investigate this 'father-son' relationship by focusing solely on the verbal matter; by identifying the tensions and ambiguities that words represent and reconciling them in order to arrive at the inter-textual thematic.

1.2 Review on Scholarly debates: History of Influence of Emerson on Whitman

In a letter to Whitman from Ralph Waldo Emerson, dated 21 July 1855, Emerson expresses profound words of encouragement to Whitman. Whitman, without asking Emerson's permission, gave this private letter to Charles Dana for publication in the *New York Tribune* on October, 1855.

'DEAR SIR--I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "LEAVES OF GRASS." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our western wits fat and mean.

I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

I did not know until I last night saw the book advertised in newspaper that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

R.W. EMERSON. Concord, Massachusetts, 21 July, 1855.'

Emerson's statement "I greet you at the beginning of a great career", became a subject of great debate as it was interpreted as signifying a 'father-son' relationship between Emerson and Whitman, and for good reason. In the letter, Emerson expresses his initial surprise at Whitman's genius as he 'rubs his eyes to see if this sunbeam were no illusion.' However, Emerson's surprise is dispelled because he believes Whitman's genius to have been inspired by some 'large perception', or that, Whitman had had 'a long foreground somewhere.' In every line of this letter, Emerson seems to investigate or hint at the real possibility that Whitman must have been inspired by someone, the transcendentalist school or himself, even though this interpretation is shrouded in rhetoric. Nonetheless, Emerson in this letter shows how the ideas Whitman expresses in his work, "delights him" and is very much in line with his own beliefs. Jerome Loving in *Emerson, Whitman, and the American Muse* says

For the printing of the letter in the *Tribune* and the use of Emerson's letter in the 1856 edition, Whitman has been repeatedly scolded by critics ever since. Generally, the act has been viewed as a slick promotion scheme, done by a man with little sense of propriety. It is difficult even today to excuse Whitman for his actions, but a closer look at the circumstances may mitigate the offense. Whitman wanted the world to know what Ralph Waldo Emerson thought of his poetry; but he also used the letter in self-defence, as a counterbalance to what he considered a partially negative review (the very first review of his book) in the *Tribune* of 23 July 1855. (89-90)

Kenneth M. Price in *Whitman and Tradition*, also expresses thus:

"Emerson's praise greeting him at the beginning of a great career was at the same time exhilarating and discomfiting, since it came from a benefactor he had denied. (38-39)

Price describes Emerson as a "pure and honored authority", an already established literary luminary, whom Whitman desired to establish a connection with, in order to provide strong public endorsement of his work.

Ezra Greenspan, writing in *Walt Whitman and the American Reader* explains that "It is not hard to imagine what this letter meant to Whitman; it brought him high praise from, in his hero-worshipping eyes, the highest source." (141-42)

David Reynolds in *Walt Whitman's America*, captures the profound impact Emerson's letter had on Whitman's literary career by revealing thus:

the letter was by far the most glowing and, in terms of Whitman's poetic aims, the most appropriate. . . . In its simple elegance, this is the Gettysburg Address of American literary commentary. If Lincoln's Gettysburg Address remade America, as Garry Wills says, Emerson's letter came close to making Whitman. It was constantly reprinted, quoted, and cited by Whitman's defenders, often with Whitman's encouragement. Just as the Gettysburg Address soared above details of battles or political squabbles and made an eloquent generalization about the goals of the nation, so Emerson's letter made a holistic, transcendental statement about Whitman's poetry. (341-42)

It is evident from the above quotations that Emerson's letter to Whitman, prior to the first publication of *Leaves of Grass*, contributed immensely to Whitman's recognition as a literary artist and the later successes he enjoyed. However, this "influence" of

Emerson has either been exaggerated or understated in some discussions on the relationships these two writers shared.

Whitman and Emerson's literary works are deeply rooted in the social or economic struggles of 19th century American society. Emerson's earliest literary works like "Nature" (1836), "The American Scholar" (1837) and "Self-Reliance" (1841) reflect ideals of non-conformity, self-belief and self-worth, targeted at instigating a re-orientation of the mindset of the American community. A still-growing industrial nation at the time, the economic opportunities this age of industrialisation created, introduced a highly competitive and individualistic market environment that gradually eroded the virtues of 'fellow-feeling' and common interest. In *Social Criticism and 19th century American Fictions*, Robert Shulman explains thus:

Whitman's Song of Myself is a powerful alternative...to basic tendencies of the American market society. In the hard-bargaining mid-19th century world, American men relentlessly pursued their own advantage. As Tocqueville points out, having severed the ties that connect men to each other in traditional societies, the American individualist relentlessly competed with men similarly competing for wealth, power, and a sense of self-worth. Achieving financial success, as Max Weber indicates, was the *summum bonum* of this ethic...In contrast to the intensities and tight discipline of the capitalistic work ethic, Whitman dramatizes a totally opposed style (211).

In the opening lines of "Song of Myself", the poet says:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,	1
And what I assume you shall assume,	
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you	3

The poet rejects the possessive individualism and absence of ‘fellow-feeling’ in America’s capitalistic market economy, for he says “what I assume you shall assume”. In section 3 of the poem, the poet says:

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the
beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end. 39
There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth than there is now,
And there will never be any more perfection than there is now...
Urge and urge and urge, always the procreant urge of the world.

In these lines, the poet frees himself from restrictions, conventions, dogmas and affirms his conviction that “there will never be any more perfection than there is now.” In Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”, a similar idea is expressed. Emerson says “speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost...” He believes that the eminence of Moses, Plato and Milton follows from their resolve to ‘set at naught books and traditions’ and rather reveal what was innermost in their hearts. In “Nature”(1836), Emerson expresses a similar sentiment; he says “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?...why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.” James Miller, in

Walt Whitman, explains that in Whitman's world, there are no tight boundaries or restrictions.

Jerome, in *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*, explains that "Whitman offers instead precisely what the Protestant Etiquette suppresses: pleasure, instinctual gratification, and self-assertion, the out-pouring of erotic feelings and the barbaric yawp, the whole charge of deliberately rude self-satisfaction that constitutes poor taste on the standards of the official etiquette, ethic and aesthetic." The love scene captured in section 5 of the poem not only illustrates Whitman's conception of 'freeing oneself' but also shows precisely how Whitman affronts the Puritanist-induced Protestant codes of 19th century America.

I mind how we once lay, such a transparent summer morning 87
How you settled your heart athwart my hips, and gently turned
over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my
feet.

Shulman explains that "for Whitman, this natural energy is more sexualized than it is for Emerson, although it has the same divine quality."

Indeed there were those who were strongly opposed to Whitman's lewd depictions of sexual love in his poetry. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier was said to have thrown his 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* into the fire (Callow, 23). Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote, "It is no discredit to Walt Whitman that he wrote 'Leaves of Grass,' only that he did not burn it afterwards." Critic Rufus Wilmot Griswold reviewed *Leaves of Grass* in the November 10, 1855, issue of *The Criterion*, calling it "a mass

of stupid filth" and categorized its author as a filthy free lover (Loving, 184). Griswold also suggested, in Latin, that Whitman was guilty of "that horrible sin not to be mentioned among Christians", one of the earliest public accusations of Whitman's homosexuality (Loving, 185). Griswold's intensely negative review almost caused the publication of the second edition to be suspended.

Ezra Pound in *What I Feel About Walt Whitman*, explains thus:

I see him America's poet. The only Poet before the artists of the Carmen-Hovey period, or better, the only one of the conventionally recognised 'American Poets' who is worth reading.

He *is* America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it *is* America. He is the hollow place in the rock that echoes with his time. He *does* 'chant the crucial stage' and he is the 'voice triumphant.' He is disgusting. He is an exceedingly nauseating pill, but he accomplished his mission.³

Whitman inspires the reader to adopt a totally opposed style of individualism to that of 'Capitalistic America.' "I harbour for good or bad," Whitman tells us, "I permit to speak at every hazard...Nature without check with original energy." Shulman explains that "this fearless, immoderate expression of "nature without check with original energy" is designed to free us, to put us in touch with the natural, originating energy that for Whitman animates the poem, poet and universe; the energy that he believes flows within each of us and relates to each other and all of existence." In "Nature", Emerson expresses a fundamental inter-connectivity that exists between man and nature. He says:

³ Ezra Pound. *What I Feel About Walt Whitman*.
m.poets.org/poetsorg/text/what-i-feel-about-walt-whitman

More servants wait on man than he'll take notice of." -----

Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man." (12)

Both Emerson and Whitman show a deep preoccupation with nature; nature that is exempt or liberated from the restrictions and dogmatism of modern society. On the nature of Whitman's poetry, Shulman explains that "the open form, the free verse appeals to intuition, pleasure and spontaneity and function as models of freedom and power."

Alex de Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, claims that as of the 1830s, "the Americans have not yet, properly speaking, got any literature" (147).

In the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman seems to envision a sort of public authority and responsibility for poets: "Presidents shall not be Americans' common referee so much as their poets shall. The Poet is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land." (iv)

According to Bennett in *Poets in the Public Sphere*, "poetry functioned as a form of public speech that played a vital role...within the intersubjective framework of the public sphere."(5)

Whitman had, as Reynolds describes, "a strong impulse to hold America together... He believed that resolution could be achieved through poetry that powerfully affirmed

the individual while equally, powerfully absorbing the mass” (“Politics and Poetry” 89).

As someone who worked tirelessly to revolutionize the American intellectual psyche, a lot of the reviews Emerson got, emphasized the great impact the ideals he espoused in his essays and public speeches was making among the educated and uneducated alike. Herman Grimm, a German critic of great influence in his own works, says of Emerson thus:

... Emerson’s theory is that of the ‘sovereignty of the individual.’ To discover what a young man is good for, and to equip him for the path he is to strike out in life, regardless of any other consideration, is the great duty to which he calls attention...Emerson’s essays are, as it were, printed sermons- all having this same text... What he has written is like life itself- the unbroken thread ever lengthened through the addition of the small events which make up each day’s experience (*Essays*, 12-13).

Emerson’s ideas and values he expressed in his essays, albeit sometimes philosophical and “ethereal” (as Thomas Carlyle describes it), concerned the nature of America, state and citizens alike; the values he espoused were both a blueprint and testament of “how men ought to live.”

In 1841, Carlyle, in a letter to John Sterling, at the time of the publication of Emerson’s essay in England, writes in glowing terms about the unmistakable intellectual worth of Emerson’s writing. He confesses thus:

I love Emerson’s book, not for its detached opinions, not even for the scheme of the general world he has framed for himself, or any eminence of talent he has expressed that with, but simply because it is his own book; because there is a tone of veracity, an unmistakable air of its being his, and a real utterance of a human soul, not a mere echo of such. I consider it, in

that sense, highly remarkable, rare, very rare, in these days of ours (ibid, 15).

Carlyle sees in Emerson's beliefs, a representation of the author's persona; Emerson's "self", character or disposition was present in every line he wrote. Indeed, Emerson himself, in "Self-Reliance", says "speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost."

Indeed, E.P. Whipple, a well-known American critic, seems to agree with Emerson's "immortalising" of himself in the ideas he espoused:

But sweetness and light are precious and inspiring only so far as they express the essential sweetness of the disposition of the thinker, and the essential illuminating power of his intelligence. Emerson's greatness came from his character. Sweetness and light streamed from him because they were in him. (ibid, 17-18)

The various reviews that have been discussed in this chapter, highlighted the social and political impacts of Whitman's and Emerson's writings, while describing public or scholarly impressions of the work that they both produced. These reviews provide a thematic background to the subsequent discussions of Whitman and Emerson's work in the next chapters. Hopefully my discussion of their works will create room for more reviews and readings of Whitman and Emerson.

1.3 Understanding Emerson: Emerson's Ethos

“What he was saying was similar to what others said, but it was how he said it that made all the difference” (David Lamberth on Emerson).

Emersonian thought and public interest in Emerson's ideas have often been linked almost exclusively to his philosophy of nature. Emerson's deep love for nature and his ideal of “immersing” one's self in nature, seems to take precedence over any of his other values and beliefs. However, it is pertinent to point out that, although Emerson advocated for the “immersion of all peoples in nature”, (which some critics have interpreted as an absolute retreat from “man's society”), he also stressed some significant values about the individual, society and nature and the interrelationships that may exist between them.

In 2000, Sarah Ann Wider declared: “It is time to expand the Emerson canon beyond “Nature.” This thesis intends to contribute to the renaissance in Emerson studies, already begun by scholars such as Maurice Gonnaud, Len Gougeon, Charles E. Mitchell and Peter Field, that looks away from treatises on Emerson's nature philosophy, in order to unlock other corners in the treasure house of Emerson's beliefs.

These works, differing from conventional ones, unfold Emerson as a social-oriented figure (Cayton 111). These new interpretations of Emerson, succeed in refuting the assertion that Emerson was a man whose “prevailing moods are lofty”, and those that regarded him as a “superior person incapable of ease and friendly contacts with ordinary people” (Jackson 172).

In doing this, the thesis attempts to dispel the orientation that Emerson was a “remotely representative man peculiarly detached from the social circumstances of his age” (Cayton 113). In the introductory section to “Nature”, Emerson sets forth the crux of the issue he attempts to address in the essay- the need for man to have an original relation to ‘God and nature’ instead of resorting to histories, biographies and criticisms. Emerson, in this essay, argues for men to aspire to an “original” intuitive understanding of the universe and its workings, instead of clinging to the ‘dead’ ideas of the past.

The ideal form of religion, he explains, is one that emphasizes deep personal relationship to God and nature, one that is driven by especial revelation, and not one that builds upon traditions and histories. Although “Nature” does not particularly explore, to a great extent, this thematic issue of man and God’s relationship and the conduct of religion, it introduces Emerson’s somewhat ‘contra-ecclesial’ beliefs. In his later works like “The Over-Soul”, “The Divinity School Address” and “Self-Reliance”, Emerson expands this idea.

In the “The American Scholar” (1837), Emerson’s presents his first major public treatise on the conduct or nature of American society and the American intelligentsia in particular. In this text, Emerson sounds the clarion call for the American intelligentsia to sever their age-old imperial ties with Europe in order to forge ahead towards an American renaissance. In “The American Scholar”, Emerson de-centres Europe and re-centres America as the only true afflatus for literary and scholarly development. He urges Americans to nurture and feed their creative impulses using America as their source. Severing any ties with the “past” in order to allow for an appreciation of the present, is one of Emerson’s key themes. Interestingly, although

Emerson argues for the ‘casting away of the dry bones of the past’, he doesn’t seem to reject outright the values or ideals that may be inherent therein, and this presents a sort of philosophical paradox especially in “Self-Reliance” (1841).

For Emerson, the beauty or allure we perceive of foreign lands, should not ‘intoxicate’ us so much that we lose sight of the invaluable gems present within our own surroundings. In “Self-Reliance”, he explores this theme a bit further. An intellectual revolution was very much upon Emerson’s heart; he lamented America’s pitiable groping upon European tastes and convention, and sought to lead the charge towards a re-discovery of what was distinctly American instead of submitting to the ‘sere’ traditions of Europe.

In the “The Divinity School Address” (1838), which Emerson presented at Harvard on July 15, 1838, he offers his foremost critique of the nature and conduct of Christianity. In the address, Emerson makes a number of critical observations about what he perceives to be a distortion or misinterpretation of what ideal Christianity should be. Most of the arguments he makes in this address focus on ‘God’, historical or traditional Christianity, ‘the Soul’ and the divinity and morality of man. Emerson argues that there is divinity in man; that the deifying essence that connects man to nature also aids in his perception or understanding of what constitutes good and evil. Thus, virtue is a quality that is innately inspired and generated; it proceeds from intuition not from society or circumstances. He rails against the (Calvinist) doctrine of predestination, which argues that at birth, an individual is automatically, either doomed to spend eternity in Hell or “chosen” amongst the few who are destined for Heaven. The divine nature that works within the individual, allows him to act in accordance with the workings of the universe in order to reach true goodness.

In “The Divinity School Address, just as in “The Over-Soul”, Emerson’s ‘theo-rhetoric’ succeeds in putting across the merits and significance of having a personal relationship with divinity, without ecclesial intermediary — the church. While Calvinism stressed the utter depravity of man and man’s total dependence on a ‘three-person’d God’, Emerson emphasized an innate divinity and an optimistic view on human nature. In explaining the impacts Emerson’s ‘theo-rhetoric’ had on established notions of divinity, David Lamberth, professor of theology and philosophy says: “Emerson offers the idea not that we are like God, but rather that we are divine, insofar as we act out of this inner, essentially moral or ethical law which is within us.”⁴

“The Divinity School Address” stirred up intense scholarly critical debate than did any of Emerson’s earlier writings. Most critics like James Russell Lowell and Matthew Arnold, poked fun at some of Emerson’s ideas he espoused, labelling it as mere mysticism and philosophical idealism. In “Self-Reliance” (1841), Emerson, with admirable oratorical rhetoric, offers persuasive arguments on his principle of “trusting in oneself.” He says:

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day...To be great is to be misunderstood (145-146).

⁴ <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2012/02/when-religion-turned-inward/>

For Emerson, to be non-conformist is to be inconsistent; to break away from the mechanical laws that govern customs, traditions and conventions and require individuals to submit to a norm (to be consistent).

In “The Poet” (1844), Emerson conceives of the true poet as ‘one who functions on the behalf of men’. He argues that a poet’s musings and the art he produces are a reflection of society’s musings and desires and are not peculiar to the poet. Emerson argues that the true poet is a ‘man of beauty’, who is in tune with nature and appreciates the intrinsic beauty of nature in his art. He explains that the poet assumes the role of an interpreter, a mediator between the physical and spiritual worlds; a translator of physical representations into their true aesthetic or spiritual forms. He says:

The breadth of the problem is great, for the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth. The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more (242).

At the end of his essay, Emerson calls out to his true poet; one that embodies all the ideals he discusses and can stand in ‘for partial men’ to apprise America of the ‘commonwealth.’

I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not, with sufficient plainness, or sufficient profoundness, address ourselves to life, nor dare we chant our own times and social circumstance. If we filled the day with bravery, we should not shrink from celebrating it. Time and nature yield us

many gifts, but not yet the timely man, the new religion, the reconciler, whom all things await...We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the middle age; then in Calvinism (261-262).

He says that America is in dire need of a poet who will represent its vast geography and capture the distinct cultures in lines of poetry. "The Poet" offers Emerson's reaching out to a true, non-conformist poet who will translate the American condition into lines of poetry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SONG OF HIMSELF: WHITMAN'S ETHOS

"We confess that it moves us, disturbs, will not lose its hold upon us."-Ferdinand

Freiligath on Whitman's text

2.0 Introduction

This chapter employs the New Critical literary approach to investigate Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." The chapter studies the textual and aesthetic matter of Whitman's "Song of Myself" with a view to establishing the inter-text. The New Critical literary approach is employed because of its concerns with the "form" of the text and its disregard of extraneous data or information. The information gleaned from the critical inquiry "into" Whitman's text would be employed in a discussion of the inter-text (Comparison of Whitman and Emerson's ethos) in the next chapter. In this chapter, "words" and recurrent structures in the form or "non-form" (as some critics have suggested) of "Song of Myself" will be interrogated in a bid to generate a near-comprehensive understanding of Whitman's ethos.

2.0.1 "Song of Myself": An Interpretational Mosaic & A Search for Genre

Literary scholarship and criticism on Whitman's "Song of Myself" have spanned over a hundred years and yielded a lot of interesting interpretations of Whitman's work. Critics like Harold Aspiz, Todd Lieber, Ivan Marki and Jerome Loving have offered very distinct interpretations of Whitman's text. While some critics like Ivan Marki and Roland Wallace perceive a dramatic structure within the text and undertake a study of the "story" therein, others like Albert Gelpi, Todd Lieber and E. Fred Carlisle

deal with the character of the persona within the poem. Their interpretation revolves round a search for identity and hints at the mystical and psychological aspects of the Whitman's persona. Todd Lieber, in an interpretation of the 'sectioned' "Song of Myself", explains that section 1 to 6 of Whitman's text, suggests that "we find the central paradox of the poem and the central tension of Whitman's thought: how the self can be at once both individual and cosmic and how the poem can be the 'thoughts of all men in all ages' and at the same time be uniquely personal" (76). The character and almost mythical scope of the persona in "Song of Myself" has been a subject of literary discussion since Whitmanian studies began a century ago.

Some critics have argued that Whitman's "Song of Myself" defies literary categorization; that, placing Whitman's text within a particular genre is elusive. Although the structure of Whitman's "Song of Myself" is set in verse, critics contend that the language Whitman employs in his verse is really not poetic at all, and that Walt Whitman's language may best be described as a versification of prose (language).

Mutlu Blasing in 1987, asks:

How is 'Song of Myself' to be classified? Is the poem a lyric or an epic, is its 'I' the observed or an observer; and does the poem unify a fragmented objective experience' or does it fragment a unified subjective state? (134)

The 'Song' in "Song of Myself" may suggest its classification as a poem of the lyric order. However, there has been some scholarly dispute as to whether Whitman's "Song of Myself" fits this description. Citing Whitman's creation of an almost

mythical or epic persona in “Song of Myself”, some critics argue that Whitman’s text merges lyric and epic features to create a poetic form that is almost unrecognizable. Arguments oscillate between whether he deliberately sets out to blur the lines between poetic forms or simply fails at executing the technique of a chosen literary genre.

Pearce (1961) explains thus:

This is a new heroic poetry- not an epic, but an American equivalent of an epic. In this proto-epic, the new hero releases the full creative force of the self, defines the realia of his world and takes from them his name, his office, his phenomenal existential qualities... The new heroic poem, the specifically American epic, is one of ordering, not of order; of creation, not confirmation; of revealing, not memorializing (73, 83).

George Constantine Cristo in an M.A thesis titled “Unravelling Walt Whitman” explains that Whitman, “rather than communicating his beliefs through a pre-existing literary form, “tailored” the poetry of his time to meet the demands of his lofty ideas (19).” In his thesis he explains that what Whitman did with his poetry was similar to what Shakespeare did for England; that just as Shakespeare “articulated” a distinct representative voice for England, Whitman sought to do the same for America with his “meddling with style.” He expands on this further:

Taking this advice to heart, Walt Whitman set out in America to create “an articulate voice” for the still young nation, capable of speaking “forth melodiously what the heart of it means.” To this end, Whitman adopted a free-verse form that attempted to capture the ruggedness and rusticity of a still untamed America and its people. He would not be classified along with the American poets who had unsuccessfully attempted to tame the American spirit by placing it within the framework of a European poetic, but instead saw in the pioneering spirit of America one that matched his own. (23)

Indeed Whitman's text has been described or labelled as a text of literary rebellion due to Whitman's non-conformity to established conventions of literary genre. His adoption of free verse and 'unnatural' use of language made his work and his text, subjects of extreme criticism. However, critics like Lawrence Buell (1973) acknowledge the literary value of Whitman's non-conventionalism. In his judgment of *Leaves of Grass*, he explains that the text "stands as both the culmination and epitaph of literary transcendentalism" (326). Buell's description of Whitman's text as "transcendentalist" evokes the ethos of the transcendentalist movement: breaking away from established forms in order to facilitate genuine unfettered self-expression. Whitman, just as Shakespeare, may have felt that his own literary immortality was tied to his poetry and thus, sought to forge new paths, declining to tread paths that 'had been trodden black' (Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken").

For Daiches (1959), the impact of Whitman's non-conventionalism was immense. His experimentation or meddling with form, albeit initially received with much scepticism and unfair criticism, illuminated new insights of literary practice for later generations of American literary artists. He explains Whitman's influence on 20th century thus:

The mosaic of ideas in Eliot, the stream of consciousness in the modern novel, and all those extraordinarily subtle devices through which the modern novelist and poet have tried to explore ways in which an individual sensibility can be modulated into an exclusive consciousness and sympathy, using the sense of self-identity as a means of projecting oneself into the identity of others- that, I think, is Whitman's most valuable legacy to modern literature (48).

Daiches explains that Whitman's text provides literary artists with interesting ways of experimenting with "the individual self" or persona within a text. Whitman employs an "I" persona that defies or transcends conventional limitations; "I contain multitudes", the persona explains in "Song of Myself." E. Fred Carlisle, in a discussion of Whitman's use of "personas" in "Song of Myself" suggests that the poem "moves essentially from a concentration on the monological self to a discovery of the dialogical self- the man who shares his being and experience with the external world and others" (177-78).

Whitmanian studies suggest varying interpretations of "Song of Myself" that reveal a wide variety of perspectives. While others have approached the text with a mythical or religious lens, others have employed a linguistic, historicist and literary aesthetic means of interpreting the text. With various methodologies employed in a bid to decode the text, a consensual reading seems almost elusive. No reading of Whitman, no matter how acute or interested can encompass the whole mosaic of interpretations.

After the first publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, which was a text of only twelve poems, Whitman kept tinkering with the text and re-publishing. In all, *Leaves of Grass* has had nine editions from 1855 to 1892. In the analysis, sections and stanzas are referred to as they appear in the original "sectioned" editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

2.1 New Critical Analysis of "Song of Myself"

Section 1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

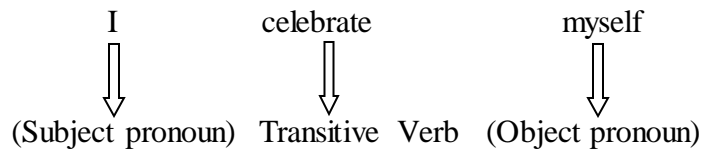
1

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you

3

The poem opens with a “celebration” of selves: “myself” and “you.” The word, **celebrate**, is from the Latin word “celebratus” which means to mark (a significant time or event) with an enjoyable activity. When the word “celebrate” is employed in its transitive form, the word means ‘to extol or honour in a solemn manner.’ The verb “celebrate” as employed in its transitive usage above, has “myself” as the object that is being celebrated. Thus:



“Myself” is the object that is being celebrated; the recipient or beneficiary of the action of “celebrating.” The persona celebrates “myself” (himself) and sings of “myself” (himself). In the traditional or conventional mode, the persona’s intent or desire to “celebrate” the self falls within the lyric practice (evocative of the lyric poetic form) in which the thoughts and feelings of the poet or persona is celebrated. The title “Song of Myself” further reinforces any suggestions of lyric elements or objectives that may be embedded within the text.

Leimberg explains:

Syntactically seen, the words "Song of Myself" function in two different ways. Firstly the "of" indicates the "maker or author of a work: This is a "Song" made or written or, as we shall immediately hear, sung by "Myself." Secondly it indicates "the subject matter, As Milton invokes the Muse to sing "Of Man's first disobedience," this is to be a "Song of Myself." The maker and the subject matter of the song are essentially the same. If the expression is taken as a genitive construction, "Myself" is subject and object, like God in "Love of God." God is the one who loves and is loved. "Myself" is the one who sings and is sung. When the title melts, as it were, into the first line both meanings

are augmented: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." Not only is "Myself" the maker of the song but he also makes it publicly known with his own voice. He did not write it to hand it over to someone else for recitation but he himself sings the "Song of Myself" and consequently, true to the bardic tradition, he sings himself. Since, moreover, his singing is coupled with celebrating, the action and the meaning are charged with sacramental overtones. "Myself" celebrates and sings and is sung and celebrated, he is subject and object of the solemn rite (168).

Thus, thematically, semantically and syntactically (the transitive verb "celebrate" and its direct object "myself", also a reflexive pronoun), the first line indicates or suggests a preoccupation with the self, with the individual as a distinct or independent entity. However, the persona also suggests that "every atom belonging to **me** as good belongs to **you**" and that "what **I** assume **you** shall assume." Although the self-reflexivity is apparent in the first few lines of the poem, what is also evident in section 1 is the persona's creation of a dialogic between **I** and **you**. Thus, even though the first line of the poem suggests a "celebration" of the "self", it also quite clearly represents a celebration of "I" and "you", because as the persona says "what I assume you shall assume."

The persona "loafes and invites" his "soul" (section 1, line 4) at his 'ease observing a spear of summer grass' (section 1, line 5). The word "loaf" in its denotative and connotative usage, indicates an idling about, without purpose or objective. As an Americanism, the word traces its roots back to the 1820-30's *landloafer*, which was a label quite suggestive of a vagabond, a vagrant, having no settled home. The word's usage in section 1 seems to unite all the denotative and associative implications of the word. The persona's "loafing" or idling about is captured in his "observation" of a "spear of summer grass." 'Observing the spear of summer grass' suggests the

persona's attachment or filiation to Nature, as he reveals that 'every atom of his blood, form'd from this soil, this air' consolidates his descent as a person of 'the soil' because his parents and parents' parents (section 1, lines 6-8), were people born **here**, "on the grass." In the last quatrain of section 1, the persona explains thus:

Creeds and schools in abeyance, 10
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbour for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

To hold something 'in abeyance', suggests a state of inactivity, cessation or suspension of an activity. Thus, "creeds" and "schools" in abeyance, suggests a cessation in their activities. "Creeds" and "schools" can be interpreted as metonyms or metaphors representing any form of established authority: "church" (creed) or school. Sometime ago (retiring back a while), these institutions wielded or exerted some form of influence or authority because they were not 'in abeyance.' In the present moment, the persona is free, 'not in abeyance', because as he proclaims he harbours for good or bad, and permits to speak at every hazard with a form of 'original energy' that has its source in nature. The word "hazard" connotes the absence or lack of predictability; chance; uncertainty. The persona is thus, an individual whose predilections, desires or thoughts would not be restricted; 'with his natural original energy' his thoughts are given free vent at every opportunity or chance.

It is pertinent to point out that this original energy the persona wishes to express is very much in line with his celebration of the self.

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes, 14

I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,

The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odourless,

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.

20

(Section 2, Lines 14-20)

“Perfume” is a word from Middle French *parfum*, a noun derivative of *parfumer*, which refers to a substance or preparation for diffusing or imparting an agreeable or attractive smell. The mention of the word “fragrance” in the line structure further reinforces the idea of a pleasant or sweet smell. However, it is important to point out that the persona says ‘the shelves are **crowded** with perfumes’ and that he shall not let the fragrance (represented by the pronoun referent “it”) “intoxicate” him. Used as an adjective, the word “crowded” indicates filling up a space almost completely, leaving little or no room for movement. The word “intoxicate” is from an early 15th century Middle Latin *intoxicates*, from *intoxicare* which means “to poison.” In the 1570’s, the verb meaning, “to poison”, was also employed to suggest “to make drunk” (intoxicate).

Thus, a contrast is created. The argument moves from an initial agreeable or pleasant smell of perfumes to a disagreeable condition of intoxications; the perfumes on the crowded shelves have the propensity to “intoxicate”, make drunk or cause the persona to lose his faculties, but he shall not let it.

In contrast to the ‘crowded houses and shelves’, the atmosphere is odourless, it is not a perfume. Moving away from the crowded houses and shelves, the persona realizes

that the atmosphere (employed as a metonym for Nature) does not possess ‘intoxicating’ tendencies because it is not scented, ‘it is odourless.’ For this reason, the persona is in love with the atmosphere (Nature) and will become ‘undisguised and naked’ for it to be in contact with him. The word “naked” means “being without clothes or covering.” Thus, the word “undisguised” which suggests “without concealment of the true nature and existence of an identity” reinforces the idea of ‘being naked’ and the atmosphere’s ‘odourlessness.’

The persona seeks an ‘original’ or ‘naked’ relationship with Nature, an unmitigated association with Nature that bears neither the crowdedness of ‘houses and rooms’ nor the intoxicating qualities of ‘perfumes.’

Have you practis’d so long to read? 31

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look
Through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books, 35

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

(Section 2, lines 31-37)

Lines 31-32, present a syntactically parallel structure evidenced by the use of interrogative structures.

Have you practis’d so long to read?

(Subject pronoun) (Verb) (intensifier + adjective)

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of
poems?

(Subject pronoun) (Verb) (intensifier + adjective)

The syntactic parallels indicate or suggest the thematic symmetry or nexus in both questions: the ‘practice’ of reading as a way ‘to get at’ the meaning of poems. These lines also represent a continuation of the “I-you” dialogic. The “I” persona assures the unnamed “you” that he shall possess the origin of all poems. The word “origin” is from early 15th century French *origine*, from Latin *originem* which means “beginning, source.” Thus, the persona suggests that he shall reveal the source or beginning of **all** poems. For this, the “you” will cease ‘to take things at second or third hand’ or ‘look through the eyes of the dead or feed on spectres in books. A spectre, in the associative and denotative meanings of the word, may represent an image or figure particularly that of a ghost or an incorporeal spirit, having no material existence. It is interesting to see how these meanings agree or coincide with ‘looking through the eyes of the dead.’

The persona suggests getting at the source of poems is a more valuable or rewarding enterprise than ‘feeding on spectres in books and looking through the eyes of the dead.’ This introduces a tension between the past (dead, spectres) and the present. The past seems to be a spectral or ghostly presence (in books and poems) that limits or discourages the search for the source (origin) of knowledge.

It is important to note that this persona does not see himself as an unrivalled, ultimate source of knowledge; he says that you shall not look through my “eyes” or take things from me. ‘My eyes’ seems like a pun that could be interpreted as “my I’s”, signalling the almost ubiquitous or predominant use of the personal pronoun “I.” Even though the poetic narration is done through the “eyes” or “I’s” of the persona, he does not argue to be seen as an indisputable source of knowledge, because as he says, ‘you can filter them (the knowledge or ideas he presents) from your self.’

Furthermore, these lines present an example of the free verse form that the poet employs throughout the text. The lines assert a certain “freedom” from conventional poetic forms, in its use of unrhymed lines and its adoption of a variable metrical pattern. The inconsistent metrical pattern and the unrhymed lines are symbolic of the persona’s leisurely attitude, of his “loafing on the grass.”

|You shall | |no long | |er take | |things at| |second| |or third| |hand, nor |look
 |Through the| |eyes of| |the dead,| |nor feed | |on the| |spectres| |in books,|
 |You shall| |not look| |through my| |eyes ei||ther, nor| |take things||from
 me,|

The uneven or inconsistent realisation of metre, as can be seen from the syllabic segmentation above, shows how the free verse form (deliberately) goes against established rhyme or meter cadences; in “Song of Myself”, this is a very useful technique as form and content coalesce. In blank verse, even though there is also the use of unrhymed lines, there often exists a consistent metrical system, often the iambic pentameter. Shakespeare, for instance, employs the iambic pentameter a lot in his verse.

In the first stanza of Section 3, the persona furthers the discussion of the tension between the past and present. He says “I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end, but I do not talk of the beginning or the end” (Section 3, lines 39-40). By referring to people engaged in “the talking” as simply “talkers”, the persona seems to strip them of any purpose or meaningful objective; they are just “talkers”, and as “talkers” they only “talk.” The derivational morpheme “er” attached to the verb “talk” creates a noun “talker” (whose function or purpose is

to talk). Just as a teacher teaches, and a painter paints, a talker talks. By labelling these people as “talkers”, the persona succeeds in trivialising the subject of their discussion: ‘the talk of the beginning and the end.’ Because:

There was never any more inception **than there is now,** 40

Nor any more youth or age **than there is now,**

And will never be any more perfection **than there is now,**

Nor any more heaven or hell **than there is now,** 43

This stanza from Section 3 is an example of a synonymous parallelism as the same thought is repeated in each line. The repetition of the clause structure “than there is now” establishes a framework for the entire parallel stanzaic structure. For the persona, what matters most is “the now”; he has very little regard for the talkers’ “talking about the beginning and the end.” The persona argues a *carpe diem* ethos that transcends the triviality of the talkers’ talking about the beginning and the end; the ideal of the present moment, not subordinated to the musings of ‘the beginning and the end.’ In each of the four lines, there is the repetition of the words ‘any’, ‘more’, ‘than’ and ‘there.’ These repetitions enforce the unity of the parallel structure and could be interpreted as a ‘structural’ metaphor for the persona’s argument in this section.

The persona expresses a pervasive unity of ideas and beings in Section 3 with a series of paradoxical statements. He says “clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul. Lacks one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen, till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.” (Section 3, lines 52-54).

Look at the line syntactically, the interpretation of a unity of ideas and beings can be inferred.

Line 52

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

↓
↓
↓

(Clause 1)
(Conjunction)
(Clause 2)

Line 53

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,

↓
↓
↓

(Clause 1)
(Conjunction)
(Clause 2)

till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

↓
↓

(Subordinator)
(Clause 3)

Line 52 is an example of a compound sentence made up of two independent clauses. As a combination of two independent clauses, line 52 has two structures that could very well function as syntactically independent structures. However, the conjunction “and” succeeds in ‘knitting’ together these two structures, illustrating the thematic

unity between the two structures and unravelling the paradox; ‘Clear and sweet’ is the persona’s soul, and all other ‘souls’ that are not his.

Line 53, on the other hand, is made up of two independent clauses and one dependent clause. The tension between the ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’, as the persona explains, is unravelled (receives proof) because just as ‘the unseen’ is proven by the presence of ‘the seen’, ‘the seen’ in due time becomes ‘unseen’ and ‘receives proof in its turn.’ Thus, the use of the subordinating word, ‘till’, does not suggest a relationship of subordination between ‘the seen’ and ‘the unseen.’ Rather, it illustrates the mutually dependent and mutually enforcing relationship between the two realities.

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, 82

And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,

Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,

Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvéd voice 86

(Section 5, lines 82-86)

The structure “I believe in you my soul” presents interesting interpretations. The word “believe” (Old English *befyan*, 16th century *beleve*) means ‘to have confidence in the truth, the existence, or the reliability of something, although without absolute proof that one is right in doing so.’ However, it is important to explain the way in which the verb has been employed in this line. In line 82, the word “believe” is employed as a phrasal verb “believe in.” In its transitive usage, the word represents two possible meanings. The phrasal verb “believe in” means “to ascribe existence to”; it may also

mean “to have confidence in the ability or power of”, as in “I believe in you! You can do it!” Line 82 seems to merge both interpretations of the word as employed in its transitive context. The persona believes in the existence of the soul, as well as has confidence in the ability or power of the soul. Also, it is important to point out that, in the structure, “you” and “my soul” are in an appositive relationship. Besides the evidence that the persona confers personage unto the soul, by the use of the personal pronoun “you”, “my soul” is in an appositive relationship to the pronoun “you” because they both represent the same referent.

Even though the persona believes in **his** soul (use of the possessive pronoun), “the other I am” **must not** abase itself to the soul. The use of the modal verb “must” indicates obligation or necessity. Thus, it is obligatory that “the other I am” not abase itself to the soul. The word “abase” (Late 14th century *abaishen*, from Old French *abaisser* “diminish, make lower in value or status) means to reduce or lower, as in rank, office, reputation, or estimation. Thus, the persona suggests that the relationship between “the other I am” and the soul, would be one of mutual co-operation, not of abasement.

Just as in Section 1, “the grass” is mentioned in this section as well. The persona after throwing the invitation to his soul in Section 1, entreats the soul to “loafe” with him on the grass. The libertine or leisurely disposition of the persona that is hinted at in Section 1 (“observing a spear of summer grass”) is also represented in this section. This freedom or leisurely attitude is reinforced by “loosening” the stop from the throat and the repetition of the “not” structure. In the structure “Not words, music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best”, the inversion and the use of the negating word “not” suggest that the persona’s attachment to his soul is an

extraordinary one (inverted, out of the ordinary) and that he desires not the rigidities of custom nor the tedium of lectures, all he wants is ‘the lull and hum.’

It is important to point out that these lines create a contrast of an auditory nature. The relatively high-pitched music, rhymes, customs and lectures are contrasted with the more soothing soft-pitched hum of the “valvéd” voice. The persona furthers his love for ‘the soul’ by revealing a rather sensual aspect of his desire. He says thus:

I mind how we once lay such a transparent summer morning, 87

How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn’d over upon me,

And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my
bare-stript heart,

And reach’d till you felt my beard, and reach’d till you felt my feet. 90

Lying on the grass with “his soul” on a transparent summer morning, the persona describes in rather vivid detail, the events that transpired as they “lay” on the summer grass. With the use of the conjunction “and” which is repeated in this narration, it is possible to follow in quite logical, sequential detail what transpires between this duo. A ‘settling of the head athwart the persona’s hips’, a gentle ‘turning over upon’ (a cognate of ‘on top of’; up + on), a ‘parting of the shirt from his bosom bone’ and an eventual ‘plunging of tongue to his bare-stript heart (employs ‘heart’ instead of ‘chest’) reveals the sequential progression of their summer morning affair upon the grass. Words like “bosom-bone” and “bare-stript heart” not only vivify this sensual

encounter but also crystallise the “closeness” or ‘bosom-boned’ affection the two share.

And I know that the hand of god is the promise of my own, 92
 And I know that the spirit of god is the brother of my own,
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters
 and lovers,
 And that a kelson of the creation is love,
 poke – And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
 And brown ants in the little wells beneath them, 97
 And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and weed.

The lines above represent an effective fusion of parallel structures and Anaphor. The structure “And I know that” is evident in each of the lines, even though there is an ellipsis in lines 94 and 95. The persona expresses his conviction that all things within the universe are connected or share a relation of some sort: ‘the spirit of god is the brother of my own, and that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers.’ Thus, the parallel structure “And I know that” reinforces the interconnectedness (parallelism) of the persona’s universe.

The repetition of the conjunction ‘and’ and the structure ‘conjunction’ + ‘subject’ + ‘verb’ + ‘that clause’ can be interpreted as not only supporting the ethos of interconnectedness expressed by the persona, but also ensuring a cohesive structure in which form and content seem to coalesce.

A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
 How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.
 I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
 Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
 A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,

Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and
remark,
and say Whose?
Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic, 106
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them
the same. (Section 6, lines 99- 109)

In this section, the persona attempts to unravel one of life's conundrums (at least in the view of the child): "What is the grass?" Even though the persona concedes that 'he does not know', he proceeds to offer a number of suggestions. He says it **is** 'the flag of his disposition', 'the handkerchief of the Lord', 'the produced babe of the vegetation' or 'a uniform hieroglyph.' It is important to know that even though the persona tells us that he does not know what the grass is any more than the child does, he employs the stative verb "to be" in his conjecturing, instead of employing the verb "might" or "may." Thus, it seems that all of the answers he gives are viable possibilities of what the grass **is**. As a uniform hieroglyphic, the grass is a unifier, 'sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones, growing among black folks as well as white.' The persona creates an interesting parallel- just as the grass grows everywhere, under the feet of a Kanuck, congressman and Cuff alike, the persona is also impartial in his relation with other men, irrespective of descent or social standing, because he 'gives them the same and receives them the same.'

For the persona, there are really no absolutes or certainties in life ('I do not talk of the beginning or the end'); he explains that 'the smallest sprout shows there is really no death, and if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it...all goes onward, nothing collapses (Section 6, lines 126-129).' Death is not

finality, neither is life a beginning, only a 'procreant urge' of death wherein all goes onward and nothing collapses. Life and Death are knit in a cyclical bond flowing outward and onward into each other. He furthers this paradox in the first few lines of Section 7 when he says "Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born? I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it (Section 7, lines 131-132).

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new wash'd babe... 133

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,

I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself,

(They do not know how immortal but I know.)

The persona seems to assume a sort of mythical personage when he positions himself within the events of death and life ("passing death with the dying and birth with the new wash'd babe"). He is present at the 'entry' of life and the 'exeunt' of life (but of course, the persona sees both life and death as 'entries' and 'exeunts', no absolutes). What is important in the persona's attitude towards death and life is that he does not present them as polarities or extremes; rather he presents them in a sort of nexus or cyclical relationship (flowing into and out of each other). This hint of mythical status is furthered in line 137 as he claims that 'he is the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself.' The Anaphor "I am" in the successive structures and the use of the stative verb reveals what **he is not** and what **he is**-immortal.

The word “immortal” is from Latin *immortalis* (late 14th century), from in- “not” + *mortalis* “mortal” which means “deathless.” Employed as an adjective, the word has 3 possible implications.

1. not mortal; not liable or subject to death; undying
2. remembered or celebrated through all time
3. not liable to perish or decay

It is possible to argue that all three implications of the word are at play here. In his mythical (beyond the ordinary) identity, the persona is not mortal or subject to death as mortals do. In his assumed comradeship and ‘filiation’ with all people, the persona desires to be ‘immortalised’ (to etch his name indelibly through time). Thus, the immortalising act is complete, such that neither his mythical identity nor his comradeship is ‘liable to perish or decay.’

However, it is pertinent to point out the effectiveness of the simile used in that structure. The ‘immortalis’ is not unique to the persona alone, for ‘all (the people) are just as immortal and fathomless as the persona (myself).’ The simile, repetitions and parallel structures mirror the interconnectedness the persona preaches. In the first stanza of the poem (Section 1), the persona says “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” Two possible interpretations inferred from this statement seem to have been transferred onto this section. Inasmuch as the persona desires to share his “atoms” with “you” because they ‘belong to me (him)’, “your atoms” are as good as “my atoms” (his atoms).

In Sections 8 to 10, the persona journeys across a host of places communing with different people. The poetic narration leads us to ‘the blab of the pave, tires of carts and the talk of the promenaders’ (Section 8). The persona also tells of more rustic or pastoral settings as he speaks of ‘the big doors of the country barn and the dried grass of the harvest-time loads.’

Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt, 175

Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,

In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the night,

Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-kill’d game,

Falling asleep on the gather’d leaves with my dog and gun by my side.

The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud,

My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me 182

This section provides a suitable archetype for the persona’s journeying and communing with different people. What is striking in these lines is the almost “prosaic” linear progression of the persona’s narration. This sequential progression of narrative detail is achieved by employing structures like “I hunt” (present tense, which may also indicate a habitual activity of “hunting”), “wandering”, “choosing”, “Kindling” and “Falling” (‘-ing’ suffix indicating the present continuous tense). In the order in which they appear in the verse above, the ‘-ing’ suffixes seem to illustrate a narrative detail in which one event logically follows the other (in a continuous tense). The persona, while still “on the grass”, sees the people like the Yankee clipper and the boatmen and clam-diggers engaged in their daily labour.

I am of old and young, of foolish as much as the wise, 330
 Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as the man,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine, 334
 (Section 16, lines 330-334)

The persona furthers his treatise on 'the sharing of his atoms' and the interconnectedness of all that exists in the universe. He insists that he **is of** (relates to or belongs to) the old and young, just as he is paternal and maternal, stuff'd with coarse and fine stuff alike. The simile "as well as" and "as much as" create a comparative or relational framework for the persona to commune with these distinct categories. Another logical inference from these lines is that the persona seems to assume multiple states (mostly polar or antithetical states); he defies description. By assuming these multiple states, the persona establishes a 'beyond-real' identity and creates a cosmos where nothing is absolute in and of itself; where 'traditional' boundaries are usurped or violated and everything is in a flux, merging, flowing inward and outward. In doing so, the persona expresses the absence of restrictions that is evident in his 'loafing' on the grass and the 'freedom' of his verse.

These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,
 If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing, 356
 If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are nothing,
 If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.
 This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,

This is the common air that bathes the globe.

360

The verse above is the entirety of Section 17. In this section, the persona renders ‘immortalis’ his verse and his thoughts. The demonstrative pronoun “these” simultaneously refers to ‘the thoughts’ and the entirety of the verse in “Song of Myself.” By employing the structure “If they are not + they are nothing” (two clauses: dependent + independent clause), the persona juxtaposes the ideals that make up ‘his thoughts’ and for which reason they are rendered ‘immortalis’ (becomes the common air that bathes the globe). He claims that his thoughts are not unique to himself (they are yours as much as mine); and in a paradoxical way, they are (at the same time) the riddle and the untying of the riddle, just as close as they are distant. In lines 359 and 360, he proclaims (by employing the demonstrative “this”) that the transcendence and universal appeal of his thoughts is as pervasive or ubiquitous as the grass that grows underfoot or the air and water that saturate the globe. It is important to emphasize that he employs imagery from nature to make this transcendental argument.

Sections 18 and 19 continue this discussion on the transcendent argument of the persona’s thoughts. He argues that “I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer’d and slain persons (Section 18, line 362).” In his all-encompassing identity (maternal as well as paternal), the persona preaches the virtue of equal regard for the victor and the conquered. In Section 19, he says:

This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,

372

It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all,

I will not have a single person slighted or left away...

There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

The persona sets forth his 'universalising' objective in no uncertain terms; that he shall not have a single person slighted or left away, the wicked and the righteous alike have a place at his table for the meal is equally set. The diversity associated with the collective becomes unitary so as to form a unit in which none is discriminated against (no difference between them and the rest). The demonstrative "this" is repeated in this line to emphasize the thematic association or parallel that has been carried forth from preceding sections into this section. Seen in this light, the structure or arrangement of the verses and the thematic run-ons become a 'structural metaphor' for the persona's ideal of interconnectedness within his cosmos.

He goes ahead to insist that "I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my bones. In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less, and the good or bad I say of myself I say of them (Section 20, lines 400-402)." Although the persona recognizes or acknowledges his singularity (individuality), he does not deny his connection with the world 'en masse'. Thus the tension between the singular and the collective, the individual and the world en masse is represented in this line. Even though he claims he finds no sweeter fat than sticks to his bones (hinting at a sort of egoism or narcissism), he dispels the assumptions of self-centredness by projecting his self upon all other selves by glorifying the companionship that is achieved by 'seeing other people in oneself.'

This hint of ‘the individual’ amidst the collective, this assumption of non-conformity is furthered at the end of the section when he says “I exist as I am, that is enough, if no other in the world be aware I sit content, and if each and all be aware I sit content.” The persona seems to argue that his contentedness with himself is not bound by or dependent upon the impressions of the world (en masse) because “I exist, as I am”, nothing changes. The syntactical composition of the structure “I exist as I am” lends support to the persona’s unchangeable or unchanging stance in the face of worldly impressions of his character. The clause structure employs two **independent** clauses: “I exist” and “I am.” The syntactical independence of the clause structure reinforces the independence that is suggested by the persona’s insistence on his self-contentedness. It is also equally important to notice that the structure employs verbs of an intransitive nature. Both verbs (‘exist’ and ‘to be’) are used intransitively, meaning that they do not require an object in order to be a complete meaningful structure. Thus, this syntactical analysis is in sync with the persona’s arguments; he is a self-contented individual, he does not require public endorsement in order to be fulfilled.

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, 422

The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,

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


I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,

And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man 424


In these lines, the persona continues his argument for an identity that merges assumed polarities or antitheses: heaven and hell. The word “heaven” is from Old English *heofon* which means “home of God.” The word, in Christian rhetoric or theology is often used to refer to the abode of God, the angels, and the spirits of the righteous after death; the place or state of existence of the blessed after mortal life. In another usage of the word, it is employed as a metonym for God. The word “hell” on the other hand is from Old English *hel, helle* which means “nether world, abode of the dead or infernal regions. Again, in Christian theology, the word refers to a place or state of punishment of the wicked after death; the abode of evil and condemned spirits; a place of torment and misery.

Looking at the syntactical structure of the first line (“I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul”), the persona assumes the role of Subject in the sentence, such that it is he who performs the action, he carries the verb -“I am.” However in the next line, he assumes object location.

The pleasures of heaven **are with me** and the pains of hell **are with me**



(object; recipient of the action)



(object; recipient of the action)

As object of the sentence, the persona ‘receives’ the action of both subjects: Heaven and Hell. He experiences the torments of hell and enjoys the gratification that heaven assures. Also, the persona (furthering his rhetoric of ‘the meal being equally set’) insists that his verse has a ‘trans-sexual’ appeal; that it does not belong exclusively to either sex, because as he says (employing a simile) ‘it is as great to be a man as a woman. The persona assumes multiple states and attempts to create uniformity or

cohesion out of antitheses. He says ‘I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also (Section 22, line 463).’

The persona does not only seek ‘communion’ with the grass alone, he desires for all of Nature to be in contact with him.

You sea! I resign myself to you also... 448

We must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of sight of the land,

Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,

Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you...

I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases. 458

He desires the sea to be ‘in contact’ with him’ to merge with both land and sea. What is striking in these lines is the highly suggestive diction that the persona employs. The words he uses are of a sensual (sexual) nature and evoke hints of erotic imagery. Structures like ‘having a turn together’, ‘undressing’ and ‘dashing with amorous wet’ support this observation.

Section 24 of “Song of Myself” is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is the first section to mention the name of the poet and attempt a description of his personality. Also, the section sets forth some anti-ecclesial and somewhat narcissistic or egotistic arguments.

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, 497

Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,

No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,

No more modest than immodest.

500

The word “Kosmos” (English: cosmos) from its Greek origin means “order, good order, orderly arrangement.” However, the ‘Kosmos’ has been employed in describing the physical world, the universe. Cosmos thus refers to the world or universe regarded as an orderly, harmonious system. Walt Whitman, as a Kosmos, epitomises or represents the persona’s quest for instinctual gratification (loafing on the grass and prioritising the “I am” above all else) and desire to harmonise the diverse or antithetical in a unitary collective whole (a Kosmos).

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch’d
from,

The scent of these armpits aroma finer than prayer,

525

This head more than churches, bibles and all the creeds.

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my body, or
any part of it,

Translucent mould of me it shall be you!

528

The structure “Divine am I inside and out” is an inversion of “I am divine inside and out.” By inverting the structure, the persona succeeds in expressing an idea or argument that seems abrasive to orthodox Christian theology- the divinity of the inward and outward. His claim to ‘making holy whatever he touches or is touched from’, can only be interpreted as heretical within Christian discourse. He ‘turns on its head’ conventional theology that perceives divinity to be outside of mortal earth, hidden somewhere within the firmament. The paradox in this reasoning or argument

is that the persona, even as he claims divine status or personage, also revels in the mortal essence by suggesting that he is “fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding, no stander above men.” The ‘scent of these armpits’ as aroma finer (pleasing to the olfactory senses) than prayer, crystallises his dissonance from ‘churches, bibles, and all the creeds.’ His worship of ‘the body’ (his body) attests to his personality as a poet of the Body. Without mincing words, the persona says “I dote on myself (Section 24, line 544).”

In Section 32, the persona almost apotheosizes his admiration for animals by asserting his desire to ‘commune’ with them too. He says “I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain’d, I stand and look at them long and long.” Then he explains the reason for his fixation or admiration:

They do not sweat and whine about their condition, 686
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things

The repetition of the structure “They do not” indicates a certain desirable consistency in the actions of the animals. The structure of the persona’s arguments is set within a comparative framework. Although the verse does not specifically state the group to which the animals are being compared, we can infer that the persona juxtaposes the actions of man to that of animals. In the persona’s eyes, animals portray ideals he would like to see in the actions of man; he despises man’s constant whining and

weeping to God just as much as he despises the materialist, self-seeking, self-serving attitude of man (mania of owning things). For as he says:

This is the city and I am one of the citizens, 1075

Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets, newspapers, schools,

The mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores, real estate and personal estate. (Section 42, lines 1075-1077)

The persona is not only concerned with events in nature, he is also very much interested in happenings outside this world (the city). Factories, mayors and councils concern him just as much as his emotional or sensual attachment to nature.

The persona takes certain moral liberties as he 'skirts the sierras' communing with different people. His libertine disposition is reinforced by the 'freedom' of the verses.

He says:

I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires, 817

I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,

I tighten her all night to my thighs and hips. 819

In the persona's kosmos, instinctual or self-gratification is presented as a pervading influence. What would seem unacceptable or judged inappropriate is made to seem 'normal.' The licentious or perverse assumes a garb of ordinariness; becomes usual as the poet of the Body seeks 'contact' with nature and other selves within it.

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,

And I have said that the body is not more than the soul, 1270
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is...
And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God, 1278
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God...
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself. 1282

The persona expresses his conviction about the equality of body and soul, that none is greater than the other. The word "soul" is from Old English *sawol* which means the 'spiritual and emotional part of a person.' The soul is regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, believed to survive death after the physical part (the body) exhausts its existence. Although the soul is regarded as the transcendent, 'imperishable' aspect of man, the persona insists that the soul is not greater than the body, acknowledging the mutually enforcing nature of their relationship; just as the body functions as a receptacle for the soul's earthly existence, the soul in turn provides a spiritual continuity after the earthly existence elapses.

He entreats mankind not to be curious (inquisitive, expressing an eagerness to know) about God, because God is present in every object. He sees the 'Godhood' or divinity in the material or physical existence. His insistence on the divinity of his being is captured in the last line when he says 'who there can be more wonderful than myself.' He furthers his argument of a ubiquitous or diffuse divine presence when he argues in the concluding part of section 49 that "in the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass, I find letters from God dropt in the street, and everyone is sign'd by God's name."

In the final section of “Song of Myself” (Section 52), he tells us that he is “untranslatable.” The word implies that an idea, person or event defies easy interpretation. From the discussions of the persona’s arguments (the paradoxes and interpretive conundrums) and his description of himself, it is easy to agree with his assessment of himself as “untranslatable.” The final stanzas of the poem read thus:

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. 1340

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,

But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,

And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,

Missing me one place search another, 1345

I stop somewhere waiting for you.

As the persona departs, he ‘bequeaths’ himself to the grass he loves. Here, the biblical allusion that can be inferred from this section seems to have been turned on its head (inverted). While the biblical Jesus ascends (as a way of departing from his disciples), the persona ‘descends’ (bequeaths himself to the dirt and grass). Within the context of the anti-ecclesial argument that the persona makes in earlier sections of the text, this interplay of ascent and descent could be interpreted this way: while Jesus’ ascent is a moving away from mortal earth, the persona’s descent is not a moving away from earth (desires to be ‘contact’ with them). Rather, by bequeathing himself to the dirt and grass, the persona hopes that his ‘disciples’ would find him under their boot-

soles. The tercet employed in the final two stanzas illustrates the order or consistency that comes to dispel the uncertainties and paradoxes of earlier sections.

At the end of the section, the tension between the individual and the collective is resolved, as the persona bonds with nature and all of man by bequeathing himself to the dirt. Also, the poem seems to end exactly where it began- on the grass.

CHAPTER THREE

ECHOES: ARGUMENTS ON ECCLESIAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONDUCT

I act as the tongue of you, it was tied in your mouth...in mine it begins to be loosened.

(Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself")

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the 'echoes' that come to the fore after a critical discussion or interrogation of Emerson and Whitman's works. The chapter is ultimately a search for points of divergence or convergence that can be deduced after a careful study of both writers. It specifically employs Eliot's theory of influence (already explained in the theoretical framework and literature review of this study) in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) to discuss the echoes. It attempts to examine these 'echoes' by placing the discussions under four headings: On the Issue of Creeds and Schools, On the Issue of the Divine Personage and Immanence of God, On Nature and Trusting thyself. The first two issues (On the Issue of Creeds and Schools and On the Issue of the Divine Personage and Immanence of God) will be dealt with in this chapter and the other two in the next chapter. It is important to state that the echoes identified in this study are by no means absolute. Rather, the echoes identified and explored in this section are a product of careful interrogation of the thoughts (arguments) of Whitman unearthed in the previous section's New critical Analysis of Whitman's text.

3.1 On the Issue of Creeds and Schools

Both Emerson and Whitman express a deep disregard for the restrictive tendencies of institutions like the church and school, in their imposition of what is assumed to be 'conventional' or 'standard' knowledge. For Emerson, this absolutist stance on

knowledge results in a sort of zombiism or robotic consistency that militates against genuine self-expression. Emerson, in “Nature”, “the American Scholar”, “the Divinity School Address” and “Self-Reliance”, argues for a severing of the ties from the dogmatism of schools and churches. He says “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day...To be great is to be misunderstood (“Self-Reliance”).”

Holding ‘creeds and schools in abeyance’ (Section 1, “Song of Myself”), Whitman reiterates Emerson’s ideal to move away from ‘consistency’, to contradict oneself. In Section 51, the persona says “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.” For Whitman and Emerson, knowledge should not be seen as a static reality; rather, knowledge should be seen as an experiential product, a sum total of an individual’s lived experience, tentative and contradicting. For Whitman, ‘the past and the present wilt’ because he has ‘fill’d them, emptied them’ and proceeds to ‘fill his next fold of the future (Section 51).’ Emerson agrees with Whitman’s idea of a lived experience that informs or illuminates the path to the future. He says “the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing...Greatness appeals to the future (“Self-Reliance”, 146).”

As has been already explained, a principal issue with influence study is not only its placing of the author in the centre of interpretive discourse but also in its presumption that the predecessor (author) occupies a place of privilege, from the heights of which he “flows into” or influences the belated artist. Eliot, in his proposition of this theory of influence, argues that the assumed, yet inescapable relationship between the (modern) scriptor and his literary predecessor is not one in which the predecessor assumes a place of superiority and the belated poet assumes the role of imitator or dependant, rather their relationship is one of a mutually enforcing and transforming synergy in which the new reconstitutes the old.

Thus, Emerson’s act of ‘agreeing’ with Whitman on the issue of severing ties with the dogmatism of schools and churches, in Eliot’s view, eliminates the notion of predecessor privilege. For Eliot, the inter-text that is deduced from the study of Whitman and Emerson (the texts, not the personalities) legitimates or recognizes the position of the predecessor (Emerson) while equally affirming the novelty of the belated poet (Whitman). Eliot explains that “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (38). Thus the nexus we perceive, the *déjà vu* experience we notice in Whitman’s text does not suggest, contrary to traditional notions of influence, a situation of ‘*imitatio*’ that confers the

status of dependent on the later artist; rather, Eliot argues that the new (“the supervision of novelty”) re-orders, reconstitutes and readjusts the “traditions” of influence that precedes it. Thus, where others perceive banality, Eliot perceives novelty; Emerson’s (old) ideas and words being echoed in the works of Whitman assumes a freshness that is a logical consequence of the reordering and transformations of the existing order.

Emerson says in “Self-Reliance”:

If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument...most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion...Their every truth is not quite true (144).

Here, Emerson seems to be saying ‘tell me someone’s philosophy, worldview, and I’ll predict his perspective on reality’. Like he doffed his priestly apparel, Emerson wishes that society would shun the life of pretence and imitations that is bereft of genuine personal expression. He expresses extreme dislike for members of sects and communities of opinion because “their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right” (“Self-Reliance”, 144). Clad in the prison-uniforms of the party or sects to which we belong, the very character and nature of our lives becomes a drama of compulsions and pretensions in which everyone wears “a forced smile”.

He argues further:

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure...but the sour faces of the multitude like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs...it is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated

classes...but when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and howl, it needs the magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment (144-145).

Prior to publishing "Self-Reliance", Emerson had felt or experienced first-hand the chastisement and extreme loathing society visited on individuals who chose to rebel against popular doctrine. He had been "whipped" by the Church and despised by a considerable number of Boston's conservative clergymen after his "Divinity School Address." Emerson explains that what is disheartening about this "outrage of multitudes" is the manner in which it lacks "any deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs". Emerson seems to lament the disparaging position of all non-conformists in a society where loathe of their kind summons the disgust of even the "unintelligent brute force".⁵ Whitman agrees with Emerson's dislike for sects and the form of consistency and conformity these sects demand. In "Song of Myself" the persona does not assume any sect; he says "I contain multitudes" and goes ahead to assume different guises: "maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man, stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine." (Section 16, lines 330-334).

Emerson's (old) ideal of non-conformity to sectarian rules (consistencies) is "transformed" or re-ordered by Whitman. Whitman expands the idea of non-conformity to sects to embrace the idea of *pluribus* where the individual (by assuming different guises) not only empathises with these distinct groups, but also cannot be "anticipated" as he or she is not "attached to communities of opinion" (Emerson). In

⁵ Edmund Hammah Ankomah. "Text, Society and Author: A Socio-biographical Analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance".
https://www.academia.edu/5889475/Socio-biographical_Analysis_of_Ralph_Waldo_Emersons_Self-Reliance_

the opening paragraphs of “The American Scholar”, Emerson explores one of the transcendentalist tensions or paradoxes: the ‘mass’ versus the individual (affirming Whitman’s adoption of *pluribus* in “Song of Myself”). He suggests that in the ideal state, man is not pinned down to any human labour; “man is all.” He explains that in this ideal state, man performs multiple tasks and assumes varied roles without ‘disintegrating’ the self; the self is intact whilst Man performs all these duties- farmer, soldier, professor and engineer. However, in the divided or social state, the ideal of cohering is neglected, the ‘original unit’ is destroyed; “man is amputated from the trunk” and becomes an individual, a planter, a priest, a mechanic. Having lost the knowledge of his original self as “Man with infinite possibilities”, man’s intellect becomes under-utilized and wanes. Rather than be a “mere thinker”, Emerson argues that the true scholar must be “Man Thinking”; with all his intellectual faculties operating at the optimum levels.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man, – present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parceled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, – a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man (52).

Severing any ties with the past in order to allow for an appreciation of the present, is one of Emerson's key themes. Interestingly, although Emerson argues for the "casting away of the dry bones of the past", he does not seem to reject outright the values or ideals that may be inherent therein, and this presents a sort of philosophical paradox especially in "Self-Reliance" (1841). This past versus present conundrum is not only present within Emerson's works, but is also represented in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" and other transcendentalist works of Henry David Thoreau. Emerson opens his speech thus:

Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids...Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests (51).

What is particularly intriguing about Emerson's discussion of the uneasy relationship between past knowledge and present knowledge is his inter-weaving, into this puzzle, of the equally unfairly negotiated meeting between foreign tastes and local tastes. For Emerson, the beauty or allure we perceive of foreign lands, should not 'intoxicate' us so much that we lose sight of the invaluable gems present within our own surroundings. In "Self-Reliance", he explores this theme a bit further. An intellectual revolution was very much upon Emerson's heart; he lamented America's pitiable groping upon European tastes and convention, and sought to lead the charge towards a re-discovery of what was distinctly American instead of submitting to the sere traditions of Europe. For Whitman, the solution to the uneasy relationship between the past and the present is simple, for as he says "I do not talk of the beginning or the end... there was never any more inception than there is now" (Section 3, lines 39-40). Emerson's call for local tastes and a move away from the allure of foreign lands is

given poetic manifestation in the lines of “Song of Myself” as the persona only “sings” of what is local: California, Kentucky, Oregon and Texas.

Eliot, in explaining his theory of influence, insists that “the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show” (4). The later artist or poet in his “refinement” or “development” of the old, transforms it in a way and to an extent “which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show.” The conscious present (which is an awareness of the presence of the past) in the work of the later artist succeeds in resolving a temporal and spatial tension between the precursor influence and the later artist’s desire for novelty. This is because, as Eliot explains, the conscious present is not only the presence of the present (moment) but also the presence of the past.

In “The American Scholar”, Emerson states unequivocally that true scholarship is neither deference to past thinkers nor a regurgitation of past ideas. He explains that books are a repository of past knowledge; that the best way to study history is through the book. However, he cautions against the idea of a “book-worm”; that books may very well pose a great danger to the scholar’s growth. He argues that books are essentially a ‘distillation’ of truth; by exercising his creative energies, what an author captures within the pages of a book do not constitute universal truths or absolute truths. Rather, the ideas contained in a book are reflective and representative of a particular individual’s experience; they are the ideas of a particular time and age. Thus, he argues that each age must create its own truths; scholars must reject the supposed notion of the idea of a book as unrivalled knowledge and create its own truths. According to Emerson, a book is really alive; the author breathes life into the

text once he or she writes it. He sees that there is a problem in glorifying a text and holding up a text as “unbreakable.” He sees as a detriment to the life of the scholar, a situation where the value of the text outweighs the value of continued thought and contemplation of the ideas within the text. Excessive deifying and glorification of the genius of past thinkers, only succeeds in discouraging the exploration of new ideas and founding of new truths.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system (56).

Rather than produce new, original creative pieces, Emerson claims that English dramatic poets have resorted to the ‘unscholarly’ habit of “Shakespearizing” for two hundred years. Emerson criticizes the sort of bland conventionalism that stifles creativity and robs an age of its true thoughts and desires. However, he does argue that it is quite possible, and indeed entirely permissible for one author to inspire another. “Man Thinking” should only resort to books for inspiration when he cannot find inspiration within himself. Emerson explains thus: “Books are for the scholar’s idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted on other men’s transcripts of their readings” (57).

It is interesting to follow Emerson’s contemplation on the value of a book and how it could either help create his ideal ‘Man Thinking’ or turn him into a ‘regurgitating man’ (a man whose intellectual faculties are limited or curtailed by his groping among the dry bones of the past). Emerson desires that men view books not as statues set in form, but a lump of clay that the reader can actively sculpt to reveal his or her

interpretation. “A good reader must be an inventor”, Emerson argues; that generations have to define themselves through their text. Whitman agrees with Emerson’s distaste of the abuse or misuse of books. In the Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he argues inter alia: “argue not concerning God, devote your income and labor to others...re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the richest fluency...”⁶

Here, we see that Whitman does not simply re-state or repeat Emerson’s arguments. He introduces the dimension of rejecting whatever insults the soul. Although Emerson also acknowledges the intuitive potential of the soul, Whitman extends this knowledge in his argument for a rejection of ecclesial or “school-knowledge” that insults the soul.

Emerson laments the form of prayer that “looks abroad and asks for some foreign virtue, and loses itself in endless mazes of natural and supernatural, and mediatorial and miraculous... but prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft.” He explains that the mode of prayer that desires to “cause something to happen” without man’s physical exertion (to effect a private end) is meanness and theft. Prayer that is mendicant (giving to begging) is not rewarding; ideal form of prayer is “the prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar, are true prayers...our valors are our best gods”. Man is already one with God; thus offering prayer ceases to be act of begging (asking for

⁶ Walt Whitman. XV. Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855.
www.bartleby.com/109/15.html

some foreign virtue), it becomes an affirmation of that which already is in action; that which already is.

Whitman seems to agree with this argument. He says that the “scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer, this head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.” In Section 32, where the persona juxtaposes the animal and human worlds, he expresses his disgust at the sickening act of men “discussing their duty to God.” Rather he delights in watching the “farm-boy ploughing the fields, the woodman and the mechanic going about their daily labours and the soldier camp’d upon the march” (Section 47).

Thematically, both Emerson and Whitman express a keen desire to wrest themselves from creeds and biblical knowledge that suppress the essence of the individual by “intoxicating” the senses with the stale knowledge of “crowded houses and rooms” (“Song of Myself”, Section 2).

3.2 On the Issue of the Divine Personage and Immanence of God

Whitman says “Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be ceremonious? (Section 20)”; he says “he is divine inside and out, and makes holy whatever he touches or is touched from”; he argues that if he worships one thing more than another it shall be the spread of his own body (Section 24).’ In Section 48 he says:

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God, 1278

For I who am curious about each am not curious about God...

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,

Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself. 1282

Whitman entreats society not to be curious about God and stresses the Godhood of the individual and the ubiquity and immanence of the divine in nature (in every object). In these lines, Whitman seems to echo the exact thoughts of Emerson in essays like “Nature” and “The Divinity School Address.”

In “The Divinity School Address”, Emerson argues that there is divinity in man; that the deifying essence that connects man to nature also aids in his perception or understanding of what constitutes good and evil. Thus, virtue is a quality that is innately inspired and generated; it proceeds from intuition not from society or circumstances. He rails against the (Calvinist) doctrine of predestination, which argues that at birth, an individual is automatically, either doomed to spend eternity in Hell or “chosen” amongst the few who are destined for Heaven. The divine nature that works within the individual, allows him to act in accordance with the workings of the universe in order to reach true goodness.

The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus; in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire... If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. A man in the view of absolute goodness, adores, with total humility. Every step so downward, is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself (74).

Emerson perceives the set of morals that instruct, dictate or guide the life of man as emanating from within the self; arising from personal experience, contemplation and intuition, not from external ‘rigidities’ that constrict man’s transcendent soul. The over-soul thus becomes the transcendent reality of man that both affirms and creates

man's virtue and divinity. Although Emerson's theo-rhetoric seems not easily digestible, he succeeds in putting across the merits and significance of having a personal relationship with divinity, without ecclesial intermediary — the church. While Calvinism stressed the utter depravity of man and man's total dependence on a "three-person'd God", Emerson emphasized an innate divinity and an optimistic view on human nature.

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his world. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, 'I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or, see thee, when thou also thinkest as I now think.' But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and the following ages! (77-78)

Emerson rejects the divinity and God-personage of Jesus and rather classifies him as one of the prophets. In doing this, he challenges Calvinist trinitarianism which represents God as a three-person divinity. He seems not to agree with the doctrine that claims that Jesus was "divinity turned mortal"; that Jesus had a hitherto divine celestial personage before assuming the mortal garb. Jesus was man! As a prophet, Jesus appreciated the divinity of man with God's incarnation of himself within man. Man became divine by the outpouring of divinity into him—the mortal had become divine. The paradox of Emerson's argument lies in his belief that man is as divine as he is mortal.

Emerson bemoans some errors he perceives in the administration of Christianity as an institution. He explains that the doctrine or practice of holding up Jesus as

an “eastern monarch”, as a “man above all men”, serves to de-emphasize the transcendence and significance of the “souls of men” (79). For Emerson, this practice succeeds in weakening man and prevents him from realising the God within. Instead of watering down the humanity of Jesus, he suggests that Christianity stress on the divinity that was present in his human existence in order to encourage man to unlock this same divinity within themselves.

In the introductory section to “Nature”, Emerson sets forth the crux of the issue he attempts to address in the essay- the need for man to have an original relation to God and nature. Emerson says that natural beauty has the power to deify humanity; make man god-like. He explains that nature, working in concert with the divinity inherent in man, is able to enhance the capabilities of man. Man’s true self, the divinity of his persona, is given full expression on the vast canvas of nature. Emerson argues that God is not found in a particular building or in a church, but that God is found in the self; that every person is a piece or part of God.

He deplores the seeming lifelessness of historical or traditional Christianity that submits to conventions and codifications, and argues for one that stresses the primacy of the soul. It is important to point out that, the soul, for Emerson is crucial in elevating “human self” to “the divine self.”

He suggests that the remedy to these “errors”, begins with the Church’s acceptance of the primacy of the soul as a way of re-centering man to his place of importance in religion. He explains that the Church needs to move away from its traditional static stance; that the church need not fear representing the humanity of Jesus and preaching personal revelation and intuition as a means of achieving divinity. He explains that

true religion does not place its faith in pre-established schemes but rather believes in and pursues the boundless capabilities of man. At the centre of Emerson's theology is man, not God. Whitman expresses this Emersonian desire to re-centre man to his place of importance in religion. He says "nothing, not God is greater to one than one's self is" (Section 48, line 1271). Whitman says "in the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass, I find letters dropt in the street" (Section 48, lines 1285-1286). In the dialogue between the precursor and the (modern) scriptor, as Eliot explains, the precursor's statements are given a new lease of life as they transformed and readjusted by the belated artist's echoing of them. Eliot explains:

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. (3)

Whitman, in expressing Emerson's belief in an immanent divinity, develops or expands the idea of immanent divinity by merging it with the idea of diffuse or ubiquitous divinity ("letters from God dropt in the street").

Emerson advocates for a new form of spiritualism that believes in the power of the individual soul and seeks a direct connection with God. He explains that society's values are limiting and constricting and that it is only by unlocking the divinity within man that man is able to transcend worldly statutes and conventions.

It is important to note that although Emerson observes a range of issues within the church, he does not argue for a complete rejection of all the dated Christian rites. Rather he argues that new life be breathed into these old forms; that personal

revelation and intuition be placed at the centre of these practices. Whitman says in “Song of Myself”:

I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over, 1096
My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,
Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun, 1100
Making a fetich of the first rock or stump, powwowing with sticks in the circle
of obis,

Whitman, in these lines, seems to respond to Emerson’s call for a re-constitution of religious conduct, of religion in its entirety. In doing this, Whitman proposes to “enclose” the worship of “ancient and modern”, “making a fetich of the first rock or stump.” Here, we observe the synergy or relationship of influence Eliot talks about. The precursor-late artist dialogic is not one where old knowledge becomes a template (“tradition”) for the later generations; rather the dialogic is a continuum where the late artist (in his psychological agon) asserts his contemporaneity by expanding the precursor’s ideas.

Furthermore, Whitman seems to respond to a lot of Emerson’s ideals of who a true American poet is. In “The Poet”, Emerson says that the poet is “representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth.” Emerson also argues that a poet’s musings and the art he produces are a reflection of society’s musings and desires and are not peculiar to the poet.

Whitman responds to this when he says in Section 17 that “these are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me.” He employs this “commonwealth” in his assumption of different guises and his interaction with different people within the text.

Emerson uses the soul to describe the spiritual inspiration which is the afflatus of the poet. He believes the poet to be inspired by a spiritual creative impulse that flows with an especial force into and within him. He explains this thus:

There is no man who does not anticipate a supersensual utility in the sun, and stars, earth, and water. These stand and wait to render him a peculiar service. But there is some obstruction, or some excess of phlegm in our constitution, which does not suffer them to yield the due effect. Too feeble fall the impressions of nature on us to make us artists. Every touch should thrill. Every man should be so much an artist, that he could report in conversation what had befallen him. Yet, in our experience, the rays or appulses have sufficient force to arrive at the senses, but not enough to reach the quick, and compel the reproduction of themselves in speech. The poet is the person in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and its representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart (243).

In “Song of Myself” we see that “impressions of nature” do not fall “feebly” on Whitman. The persona in “Song of Myself” confers with the whole of nature; he perceives a “supersensual utility” in all that is within nature and “undrapes” as he “loafes” on the grass and entreats the sea to “dash him with amorous wet” (Section 22, line 452).

Emerson goes ahead to argue that beauty is already contained within nature, and that the poet in his role as “the sayer” need not paint or adorn nature in a bid to confer beauty upon it because “the world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the

creator of the universe.” He refers to poets as “men of a delicate ear” who are able to penetrate the world of nature where “air is music” in order to transcribe the “beautiful” cadences within nature.

The sign and credentials of the poet are, that he announces that which no man foretold. He is the true and only doctor; he knows and tells; he is the only teller of news, for he was present and privy to the appearance which he describes. He is a beholder of ideas, and an utterer of the necessary and causal. For we do not speak now of men of poetical talents, or of industry and skill in metre, but of the true poet.’ (244)

He argues that the poet is “a teller of news”; the poet creates or depicts only that which he witnessed or is privy to. Here, Emerson creates a bit of a paradox. Although he acknowledges the creative impulses that stir up the poet’s work, he seems to limit the poet’s creative ability by referring to him as a “teller of news” of only that which he was present and privy to. The poet’s creative force lies in the power of his art; in his success at defamiliarising the common and familiar to make it seem “strange.” The language of poetry aims not at expressing the familiar. Victor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Technique” in explaining his coinage of the word “ostranenie” (defamiliarization), argues that the point of all art is to make language strange, as well as the world it presents. However, Emerson and Shklovsky perceive the nature of language employed in poetry differently. Shklovsky argues that defamiliarization can be achieved through the use of ‘elevated’ or difficult language. He explains thus:

According to Aristotle, poetic language must appear strange and wonderful; and in fact, it is often actually foreign: The Sumerian used by the Assyrians, the Latin of Europe during the Middle Ages, the Arabisms of the Persians, the Old Bulgarian of Russian literature, or the elevated, almost literary language of folk songs” (19)

Shklovsky conceives of the language of poetry as being “foreign and elevated.” However, this stance represents a major point of departure for Emerson. Emerson delights in the use of language that is local and is in tune with the commonplace. Another interesting issue Emerson explores in “The Poet” is the skill of his ideal poet. He argues that conventional poets are not “children of music” but “men of talents” who regard the finish of the verses as superior to the “argument.” Emerson calls for a poet who acknowledges that the argument is primary, and the finish of the verses is secondary. He asserts thus:

For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem,—a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing.’
(245)

He argues that the poet recognizes that nature is emblematic and is an externalization of the soul. However, he explains that the poet does not simply use language to represent nature as a symbol; imagery drawn from nature is not mere imagery. Rather, the poet is able to reach into the ‘divinity’ evident within these significations and represent it in its spiritual form.

Emerson argues that poems need not be of a lengthy composition. He argues that ‘the thought’ that influences word use in poetry possesses an immense significance; in other words, the value of words in poetry is tied to the thought that constructs them.

He says:

Thought makes every thing fit for use. The vocabulary of an omniscient man would embrace words and images excluded from polite conversation. What would be base, or even obscene, to the obscene, becomes illustrious, spoken in a new connection of thought. The piety of the Hebrew prophets purges their grossness. The circumcision is an example of the power of poetry to raise the low and offensive. Small and mean things serve as well as great symbols. The meaner the type by which a law is expressed, the

more pungent it is, and the more lasting in the memories of men: just as we choose the smallest box, or case, in which any needful utensil can be carried (250).

His belief that thought can purge a word from the obscenity or pungency of its literal (natural) state is particularly interesting within the context of Whitman's supposed use of erotic imagery in "Song of Myself." Thus, we find that the precursor text (Emerson) legitimizes Whitman's use of erotic imagery in the text. Emerson's idea of the thought behind or within words may be interpreted as an indication of the ambiguity of poetic language. Poetic language lends itself to multiple interpretations because words in poetry do not represent a single signified. Poetic language succeeds in evoking multiple images, interpretations and emotions. Any other interpretation of 'thought' that confers primacy to the author, poet or originator, runs the risk of falling into Wimsatt and Beardsley's categorisation of the intentional fallacy because words in poetry are in a flux, they are de-centred; the thoughts of the writer are neither present nor desired in the interpretation of a word.

Emerson refers to poets as "liberating gods" who are able to redeem men from their imprisoned imagination. He explains that the poet is the unfettered man; the man whose imaginative faculties are fully operational.

Whitman responds to this Emersonian argument by his adoption of the free verse form that does not seek to impose a musical order on poetry by preoccupying itself with rhymed lines and a consistent metrical system. As the "unfettered man" and one whose imaginative faculties are fully operational, Whitman constructs his poetry as an organic piece unconstrained by the mechanical laws of poetry and frees poetic imagination from imprisonment.

At the end of his essay (“The Poet”), Emerson calls out to his true poet; one that embodies all the ideals he discusses and can stand in ‘for partial men’ to apprise America of the “commonwealth.”

I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not, with sufficient plainness, or sufficient profoundness, address ourselves to life, nor dare we chant our own times and social circumstance. If we filled the day with bravery, we should not shrink from celebrating it. Time and nature yield us many gifts, but not yet the timely man, the new religion, the reconciler, whom all things await...We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the middle age; then in Calvinism (261-262).

Emerson argues that America is in dire need of a poet who will represent its vast geography and distinct cultural peoples in lines of poetry. ‘Our own times and social circumstance’ are also worthy of poetic representation, for as he says “America is a great poem.” Oregon, Texas, America’s Negroes and Indians are “yet unsung” and demands a true American poet who will “sing” of these in poetic lines. In “Song of Myself”, Whitman represents America in the text by evoking imagery that is peculiar to the American landscape; he sings of the “Missourian” and the “Wolverine.” He also journeys along the Louisianan and Georgian landscape (Section 17).

CHAPTER FOUR

ECHOES: THE “I” AND NATURE

4.0 Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion of the echoes. It examines Emerson and Whitman’s musings “On Nature” and the transcendentalist ethos of “Trusting Thyself.” Here also, the study specifically employs Eliot’s theory of influence in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) to examine the echoes. The two writers’ arguments “On Nature” and “Trusting Thyself” represent their most conspicuous points of convergence.

4.1 On Nature

Both writers portray a deep emotional and spiritual attachment to nature. Emerson in “Nature” and “The poet” expresses the spiritual essence present in all of nature and the need for man to immerse himself (wholly) into nature. Emerson’s essay, “Nature” (1836), presents an almost fully representative document of Emerson’s abyssal love for nature and the benefits it bequeaths or affords mankind. Essentially, “Nature” presents a veritable, formidable argument for man to see himself and nature, not as exclusive entities, but as mutually enforcing and enriching parts of a whole.

To achieve this (full) contact with nature, Emerson, in “The Poet”, escapes from society into the world of nature. He says that “to go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society.” Emerson, in finding the ideal solitary state (being with oneself; internal; without the company of another human-being), advocates for a move away from society (that which is not me). However, he explains that although “nobody” (human being/person) is with him while he is

solitary, he is really not alone for the stars are with him. True solitude, as Emerson explains it, is when one is in touch with nature.

Whitman, however, seems to disagree with Emerson's move away from society (man's world). Even though Whitman, in "Song of Myself", juxtaposes the world of man and nature (animals), in which he describes the animal world in a more positive light than man's world, he does not completely shun the companionship or society of man. In "Song of Myself", the persona communes with both man and nature. Just as he "undrapes" in order for the sea to be in contact with him and "loafes" on the grass, he also "skirts the sierras" communing with different people. He assumes multiple identities: "a Southerner as soon as a Northerner, a Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, a Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my skin, a boatman, a Hosier, Badger, Buckeye" (Section 16, "Song of Myself"). In "Self-Reliance", Emerson argues that "society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." Emerson perceives a constriction of the individual (the manhood of its members) within the collective human enterprise called society. Whitman's persona in "Song of Myself" disagrees. Even though the persona in the text, is "a true individual" (in every sense of the word) portraying almost narcissistic or egotistic tendencies, he does not shun the company of others. He is able to fit into the collective enterprise (the world en masse), without having to sacrifice his individuality. Assuming multiple guises allows him to empathize with distinct categories of people: "farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker, prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest" (Section 16, "Song of Myself").

However, it is important to also state that Whitman acknowledges Emerson's need to "go into solitude" in order to truly appreciate nature. In Section 2 of "Song of

Myself”, the persona says nature doesn’t possess an intoxicating influence like “crowded houses and rooms”; rather, ‘the atmosphere is odorless, he is in love with it and mad for it to be in contact with him’ (“Song of Myself”). Emerson says that “In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes (Nature).” While Emerson’s desire for solitude (away from other men) in nature is so that he can appreciate nature fully (awakening of the senses) and flee from the worldly (human society) dangers of calamity and disgrace, Whitman desires to form companionship with man in nature; he embraces all, maternal as well as paternal, the wicked and the righteous, he will not have a single person slighted or left away (Section 19, “Song of Myself”).’

Whitman’s simultaneous acceptance and departure from Emerson lends support to Eliot’s argument on the nature of influence. In his essay, Eliot argues that the late artist needs to acknowledge the “historic sense” that precedes the compositional process. He explains that this historic sense “involves not only the pastness of the past, but of its presence” (37). He further argues that “the historical sense, which is a sense of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity” (37). Eliot’s argument is that within the temporal (moment), the past and the present (moments) are both present (existing or occurring at the same time). Eliot argues that the presence of the

past does not trap the “real present” within a given time; rather it allows the “real present” to move onwards to assert its own contemporaneity, its own agency. As Baxandall, Clayton and Rothstein have persuasively argued (in the literature review), the simple interpretation of the precursor as agent, acting directly on the recipient, is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of influence. Baxandall offers an alternate theory of influence in which the transmission of influence (power) flows from the late artist (the recipient) into the precursor. Although Baxandall adopts a more radical approach to reconstituting influence theories by subverting the old order of precursor as agent, Eliot adopts a framework in which the old order and the new order exist simultaneously, (simultaneously) asserting their agency. Thus, Whitman’s departure may be interpreted as his attempt to assert his contemporaneity, his agency.

Emerson presents the three properties inherent in “natural” beauty. First, he suggests that nature has a reinvigorating quality; that nature has the ability to restore man’s dulled senses in order to perceive the desirable natural beauty that gives unrivalled pleasure to man. Also, Emerson says that natural beauty has the power to deify humanity; make man god-like. He explains that nature, working in concert with the divinity inherent in man, is able to enhance the capabilities of man. Man’s true self, the divinity of his persona, is given full expression on the vast canvas of nature. The persona in “Song of Myself” responds to Emerson’s belief in a deifying quality of nature as he assumes multiple personalities and moves across time and space within the poetic narration. The persona says he contains multitudes, that he is ‘deathless’; that he is divine inside and out and makes holy whatever he touches or is touched from (“Song of Myself”).

The stars, the vast landscape and other elements of nature, Emerson argues, are not to be perceived as fragments or isolated entities, but integrated parts of a composite piece, and not merely as a collection of individual objects. He further explains that the poet is the person who is able to move past or do away with superficial perceptions of nature. The poet is one who is able to cast off “the dry bones” of the past and immerse himself into nature with “new eyes”, as childlike as possible without all the years of manipulation and assimilation of dead theories as an adult would.

He argues the Wordsworthian belief that Nature is inexhaustible as a teacher. Emerson insists that Nature makes us childlike in the joy that we derive when we are appreciating nature; that immersing ourselves in nature leaves us feeling recharged, youthful and reinvigorated.

He argues that it is not easy for adults to see nature; that adulthood robs an individual of the right faculties or the innocence needed to fully appreciate nature. He explains that adults see nature on the most superficial level- for its use as a commodity for profit. The poet, on the other hand, assuming a “childlike” disposition is able to commune with nature and appreciate fully all the treasures it affords. Emerson says:

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows (10).

These lines are particularly relevant, as it provides an apt description of the persona Whitman employs in “Song of Myself”. The persona in “Song of Myself” is a true lover of nature, whose “wild” delight is very much evident in his desire to “undrape”

in order to fully bond with nature. Whitman portrays this Emersonian desire for a “childlike” disposition in “Song of Myself.”

A child said *What is the grass?* Fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he. 100
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrance designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner’s name someway in the corners, that we may see and
remark, and say *Whose?*
Or I say the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation. 105

The childlike disposition allows for a certain innocence, uncontaminated or polluted by knowledge from external sources. The state of being childlike allows for genuine expression and search for new experiences. The persona imagines the many possibilities to the child’s question: “a flag”, “a handkerchief of the lord”, then “a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.” In the “child-state”, the persona explains that one is able to appreciate that the possibilities in life are endless; that knowledge should be a personal quest, not a regurgitation of “sere” knowledge.

The entirety of Whitman’s “Song of Myself” takes place in nature (on the grass), with the persona journeying across the vast landscapes of America, bathing in Manhattan waters and singing of the beauty of nature and human relationships he experiences. Emerson’s escape from the external (society) into another external (nature), allows

him to fully experience and unlock the in-**tuitive** treasures of the internal. Emerson finds in nature, a sort of much-yearned-for liberation; in nature, Emerson 'sees not decay or decline' but 'perpetual youth' and a discovery of his innate or immanent divinity.

In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God...In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages (10-11).

Emerson's sentimental outburst of the "gifts" of nature could be very much compared to Duke Senior's famous lines in the Forest of Arden, in Act 2 scene 1 of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

Are not these woods more free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter's
wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,
even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
'This is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.
...And this our life exempt from public haunt
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything.
I would not change it.'" (Act 2 scene 1, *As You Like It*)

Both extracts emphasize the invaluable relief and comfort nature affords, as compared to the ‘public haunt’ of ‘the streets or villages.’ Emerson’s retreat into the world of nature is however voluntary, out of his own free-will, Duke Senior’s presence in the Forest of Arden, on the other hand, is compelled by the “unkind eyes” of his usurper brother who banishes him from the courts into the Forest. However, as is the case in most pastoral literature, city dwelling is held up as an undesirable antithesis of “forest” or rural life. Although banished, Duke Senior finds in nature, a haven, a sanctuary away from all the guile and corruption of the courts. Emerson almost apotheosizes his love for nature, as he expresses the immeasurable benefits that come forth from man’s communion with nature. Whitman’s persona in “Song of Myself” is very much aware of the serenity and leisure nature affords as he “loafes” on the grass. He says:

I am satisfied- I see, dance, laugh, sing;

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As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of night with stealthy tread,

Leaving me baskets cover’d with white towels swelling the house with their plenty.

In the tranquil atmosphere of nature, the persona is satisfied (dances, laughs and sings); he “loafes” on the grass in the summer mornings and lies with his “hugging and loving bed-fellow at night.

4.2 Trusting Thyself

It is important to state that although Whitman and Emerson both express the transcendental ethos of “trusting in oneself”, they approach the issue differently. While Emerson’s exegesis of the principle is highly philosophical, Whitman adopts a highly sensual (sexual), solipsist, almost narcissistic representation of the ideal. The very first stanza (indeed the entire first section) of “Song of Myself” reveals this. He says “I celebrate myself, and sing myself” and that “I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard, nature without check with original energy.” It is important to understand that this celebration of the self, for Whitman, is not just a philosophical ideal. As a “Poet of the Body”, Whitman actually devotes verses to celebrate the physical self along with other selves in the text. In Section 12, the persona “spies on” the blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests, in section 13 his almost picturesque description of “the negro” reinforces the persona’s obsession with the human body.

The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he stands
pois’d on one leg on the string-piece,
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-
band,
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away from
his forehead
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his polish’d
and perfect limbs
(Section 13, lines 226-229)

Harvey O’ Higgins explains that “I celebrate myself” is “the resolve of a Narcissan thinking only of his fiercely-loved physique... It is the impulse that drove him to celebrate himself in his own flesh and form, undraped, regardless of modesty or law (704).” In his expressed will of ‘speaking at every hazard’ with the original energy that flows within the self, he tells us that he “resists anything better than his own

diversity (Section 16)”; “he exists as he is, that is enough”; “he dotes on himself (Section 24).”

The ideal of ‘trusting in oneself’ is a dominant theme in all of Emerson’s texts. The crux of his oratorical prose rested on this belief. Emerson’s “Ne te quaeseveris extra” in the opening lines of “Self-Reliance” sums up this belief. To wit, the Latin “ne te quaeseveris extra”, admonishes not to ‘seek for answers outside oneself.’ Emerson believed in a ‘power that resided in man’ and gave him ‘new nature’ and the initiative and will to break away from dogma. Also, Emerson’s theory of trusting in oneself is more a crusade against schools and religious institutions than anything else.

Whitman, on the other hand, extends this non-conformist theory to embrace a form of self-gratification that, some scholars argue, is, at times, socially abrasive due to the erotic imagery he employs. Victorian ideas of propriety and acceptable conduct were ingrained in Whitman’s America. Sexual imagery and innuendos were considered ‘improper’ for conversation. In Section 5, the persona describes a sensual encounter with ‘the soul’; in Section 11, the persona describes an ‘unseen hand passing over the bodies of the twenty-eight young men bathing by the shore’; in Section 33, he turns the bridegroom out of bed and tightens the bride to his thighs and lips.’ In “O Hymen! O Hymenee!” (a poem in the anthology of *Leaves of Grass*) the persona says:

O hymen! O hymenee! Why do you tantalize me thus?
O why sting me for a swift moment only?
Why can you not continue? O why do you now cease?
Is it because if you continued beyond the swift moment you would soon
certainly kill me?

Whitman's liberation from sexual and social prohibitions is analogous to the freedom of his verses and his desire to speak his "latent conviction."

Also, both Whitman and Emerson express the urgency in severing the ties with 'past knowledge.' In "Self-Reliance" (1841), Emerson believes that what is genuine; what is created and nurtured from within the individual possesses a sort of beauty or excellence that is transcendent. He believes that there is an individual 'essence' wherein lies the gift of true genius, for "in every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till...A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. (139)

He argues that the entire educational structure is designed to ensure that individuals do not arrive at the conviction that "envy is ignorance and imitation is suicide" (139). Emerson, through his educational years in the Boston Latin School and Harvard Divinity School, partook in an educational system that was essentially designed to make students assimilate or conform to some kind of curricula, dogma or convention. "External" education in whichever form, naturally meant unquestioned conformity to established norms, beliefs and practices. Emerson believed in a power that resided in man and gave him "new nature" and the initiative and will to break away from dogma and go chasing after "that divine idea which each of us represents". His belief here is

that true accomplishment and peace are achieved when man has put **his heart** into **his work** and done **his best**.

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark. (139-140)

In the quote above, Emerson presents a seemingly irresolvable internal contradiction or disjunction within the text. In one breath, Emerson proclaims “trust thyself”, in another breath he hopes that we would “accept...the society of our contemporaries.”⁷ The persona in “Song of Myself” constantly reminds us that he has “transcended” this conundrum or tension between the contemporary and the ancient, because for him “there will never be any more perfection than there is now” (Section 3, line 42). He adds that “I pass death with the dying and birth with the new wash’d babe” (Section 7, line 133). Whitman’s persona does not seek to unravel tensions between the past and the present because, as he says, “I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself.” Eliot argues against “our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man” (36). He explains that if we eschew the practice of “dwelling with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors”, we would find that “not only the best, but the most individual parts

⁷ Edmund Hammah Ankomah. “Text, Society and Author: A Socio-biographical Analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”.”
https://www.academia.edu/5889475/Socio-biographical_Analysis_of_Ralph_Waldo_Emersons_Self-Reliance_

of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality vigorously” (37). Although Emerson was not a “dead poet” at the time Whitman composed his verse, Eliot’s argument does not seek legitimation in the death or otherwise of a precursor; for as he argues, the laudable aim is to “divert interest from the poet to poetry.” The essence of Eliot’s argument is in the relationship between the precursor (text) and the later text. Thus, even though Whitman’s text seems to have resolved this tension between the past and present, Emerson is still a “vigorous” conspicuous presence in Whitman’s work.

Emerson explains his non-conformist stance further:

What pretty oracles nature yields us on this text, in the face and behaviour of children, babes, and even brutes! That divided and rebel mind...their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces we are disconcerted. Infancy conforms to nobody: all conform to it...’ (140)

Emerson evokes peculiar treasures that lie within that condition of being “infant” to buttress his convictions about the perils of conformity. Emerson, in this quote, seems to reverse (as he does in most parts of this essay) traditional notions of infancy as a period of weakness and vulnerability to one of strength. Gazing at infancy with Emersonian lenses, we see a period rich in its incorruptibility and steadfast in its distrust of conformity. Infancy does not wish to be a part of any dogma or philosophy; it seeks genuine self-expression.⁸ Emerson believes that voices we hear in solitude “grow faint and inaudible as we enter the world” (141).

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members

⁸ *ibid.*

https://www.academia.edu/5889475/Socio-biographical_Analysis_of_Ralph_Waldo_Emersons_Self-Reliance_

agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs (141).

Emerson posits that society is a construct or institution that avowedly extinguishes any attempts at realising “manhood”. Manhood crumbles under the sheer weight of Society; for society to survive, manhood cannot and should not be realised. The will or desires of the individual cannot be placed above the collective interests of the “joint-stock” company. Society’s aversion to self-reliance is representative of its stifling and repressive character.⁹

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind...No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.’ (141)

Whitman reiterates this urgent need to foster an original relation to the universe. In Section 2 of “Song of Myself” he says “you shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books...you shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.” Both Emerson and Whitman appreciate the intellectual value or merit in forging new paths and this is exactly what Whitman achieves by employing free verse and perhaps Emerson achieves with his revolutionary poetic prose.

Having discussed the echoes, upon a careful study of the inter-text, we find that both writers are men of similar tastes and inclinations. Emerson’s deep love for Nature is

⁹ *ibid.*

https://www.academia.edu/5889475/Socio-biographical_Analysis_of_Ralph_Waldo_Emersons_Self-Reliance_

re-enacted in Whitman's verses with just as much emotional and intimate intensity. They are men of nature who receive of the divine afflatus in order to gain a transcendent view of life that appreciates the fellowship and comradeship of man; 'they contain multitudes.'

Also we find that their non-conformist stance on dogmatism and repressive institutions like the church and school, was not an act of wanton rebellion, but was driven by a genuine desire to break away from the 'sepulchres' of Europe in order to appreciate "the now" (the present moment). For as Emerson says "The sun shines to-day also", Whitman insists that "there will never be any more perfection than there is now."

However, even though they both recognize the value of trusting in oneself, Whitman extends this idea of liberating oneself from social demands and conventions, to accommodate a sensual, erotic poetic agenda in his verse. The persona's encounter with the twenty-eight young men bathing by the shore and the unmistakable eroticism of Section 5 (parting the shirt from his bosom-bone, and plunging his tongue to his bare-stript heart) has been cited as evidence, by critics like Vivian Pollak, for the homoerotic in Whitman's "Song of Myself."

CONCLUSION

*Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, Missing me one place search another, I
stop somewhere waiting for you.*

-Walt Whitman ("Song of Myself")

This thesis set out to discuss the ideological and thematic concerns expressed in the works of two great American writers: Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Per extant literature or critical works that explore the similarities in thought these two writers shared based on historicist data and other non-literary modes, this thesis set out to investigate the inter-text, employing the New American critical (formalist) methodology as a distinctly 'literary' way of appreciating Whitman's text ("Song of Myself") and adopting Eliot's theory of influence to investigate the echoes. Thus, the researcher hoped, by employing the strictly formalist mode of the New Critical literary interpretation, the study would help establish an essentially literary interpretation of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and contribute literary evidence to the debates of originality and indebtedness that form the core of Whitmanian and Emersonian studies. Thus the study hoped to argue for a change in discourse in the study of influence between Whitman and Emerson that neglects a strictly literary interpretation of Whitman's text "Song of Myself" (the late artist's text), in place of historicist bias and other non-literary modes of studying Whitman's text.

The literature review section of this study shows that public and scholarly debate on the 'literary' association between Whitman and Emerson, tend to view this relationship within the framework of indebtedness; that Whitman's ideas were simply a re-statement of arguments Emerson had made in earlier works and that the fact that Whitman sometimes 'denied' this indebtedness was testament to Whitman's public

image as ‘a man of improprieties.’ We find that Emerson is almost idealized to the extent that Whitman’s ‘lewd depictions’ of erotic imagery attract the sort of revulsion that accompanies the socially abrasive and deviant. In all of this, what was lacking in the reviewed literature was that which focused on Whitman’s success as a literary artist and evaluated his works solely on aesthetic merits, not on social or other non-literary criteria. On the basis of this exclusively literary lacuna, that seemed to have been ignored in Whitman studies, the study reviewed literary approaches that were either ‘intentionalist’ (investigating the writer’s intent in producing a literary work and employing that as a basis to interpret or evaluate the text) or anti-intentionalist (disregarding the writer’s intent as unavailable and undesirable as an interpretive strategy and resorting to the form of the text instead) in their claims to indebtedness and originality. The study finds that the New American methodology (an anti-intentionalist stance) is effective in investigating the form of the text without having to resort to precursor historicist biases. It is pertinent to point out that, even though the study recognizes the auto-telic nature of the text, it does not argue against the existence of textual relationships. Thus, Eliot’s theory of influence was employed in order to resolve this theoretical conflict: New Critical methodology was employed to study Whitman’s text, while Eliot’s theory was employed to investigate the echoes.

The study also discussed Emerson’s philosophies expressed in a selection of his major transcendentalist essays. We find that Emerson’s arguments reveal the deeply philosophical, spiritual and idealist argument that formed the core of American Transcendentalist thought. Firstly, the belief in the intuitive faculty and the insistence on the individual as the spiritual centre of the universe (a ‘Kosmos’) is a conspicuous argument in all of his essays. Emerson also argues that individual happiness stems from a realization of the infinite powers of the self-reliant individual. Emerson argues,

quite paradoxically, that an individual needs to 'go into solitude' (withdraw, remain separate) in order to embrace the world, become one with the world *en masse*. Emerson's insistence on the ubiquity of the life force (God) was not a heretical statement that was targeted at challenging the existence of God; only that Emerson advocated for 'the thinking man' who recognized his place within the social and spiritual space and desired to assume his proper place within those spaces, realizing that divinity of man and speaking his latent conviction unencumbered.

The thesis also observes that the New Critical interpretation of Whitman's "Song of Myself" reveals major points of convergence between Whitman and Emerson's arguments. It finds that although Whitman and Emerson both express an extreme preoccupation with the natural world, Whitman communicates this love of nature in a more sensual light. Whitman's love for nature is not only spiritual (as Emerson's love is), it is also sensual. Also, Emerson's call for a true American poet who would poeticise America and make the commonplace or the local, a fit subject for poetry is made manifest in Whitman's "Song of Myself." Whitman, in "Song of Myself" is able to achieve the Emersonian objective of poeticizing America by rejecting European settings and poetic conventions and choosing instead to write in free verse singing of Oregon and Texas. However, this thesis argues that although these Emersonian 'echoes' are evident within Whitman's text, Whitman's text is able to assert its contemporaneity amidst the 'anxiety' of the precursor's influence. As Eliot insists, the historical sense (the late artist's knowledge and acceptance of past influence) compels a man to write "not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (37).

The thesis argues that studies that adopt a purely literary approach to investigate textual relationships, move away from evaluative judgments of indebtedness and authenticity (as Eliot's theory of influence has shown us). It argues for a strictly literary approach to investigating the inter-text that does not proceed with a non-literary bias, but recognizes the need to interpret a text based solely on the aesthetic merits. The thesis employed the New American formalist methodology to appreciate Whitman's text for its aesthetic merits, and employed Eliot's theory of influence which challenges traditional notions of influence, by regarding the precursor and the later artist as elements within a literary historical continuum, mutually transforming and reinforcing each other; "the existing order is altered by the supervention of novelty" (38).

Whitman's technical innovation with regard to free-verse impacted on later generations of poets like Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost. Ute Ferrier, in "Walt Whitman's Influence on Germany", argues that "a century after his death, writers around the world are still in dialogue with him, pondering the questions he posed, arguing with him and elaborating on his insights." He explains that Whitman's impact lay not in his experimentation with form, but in the universal appeal of the content of his work. Ferrier reveals that "authors from India, for example, have been able to identify with Whitman on a spiritual plane, seeing in him a Hindu vision." Gay Wilson Allen, a devout Whitmanite agrees with Ferrier's argument on the universal appeal of the literature Whitman produced to the international literary and even non-literary community. He explains that "Whitman's influence in World literature has been mainly in the realm of ideas, and especially as a symbol of love, international brotherhood, and democratic idealism rather than in aesthetics." The study finds that Whitman studies not only fulfill or satisfy a literary objective, but also has a

(transcendent) benefit of appealing to the human psyche in all aspects of life, thus fulfilling a social utilitarian function.

Freiligh Ferdinand, a German poet and friend of Karl Marx, after describing Whitman as “the only poet America has yet produced”, appreciates that Whitman was “no follower in the beaten track of the European muse but fresh from the prairie... and from earthly smells in hair and beard and clothing of the soil from which he sprang.” Whitman’s significance or contribution to American literature (and World literature) was not only in his adoption of the free-verse form or his attempt to invert the *Ars Poetica*, his ‘poeticizing’ of nature contributed immensely to his ‘leaping’ the bounds of America into Europe and may have led to the publication of *Grashalme* (German *Leaves of Grass*).

Johanes Schlaf, explaining what he termed, the ‘sublimity of Whitman’s religion’, says Whitmanian theology lacked the cultism and imperative dogmas of old religions, but had “the powerful broad awareness of life whose force comprises the cosmos with love and wonder, the intimate, the jubilant.”¹⁰ Ultimately, the thesis observes that both Emerson and Whitman explored a range of issues that were immensely relevant to the human condition, that it can be said of their works (quoting Shakespeare) that ‘so long as men can breathe or eyes can see’, they had earned their place in the hallowed halls of literary Olympus.

¹⁰ Ute Ferrier, “Walt Whitman’s Influence on Germany.”
<http://www2.binghamton.edu/history/resources/journal-of-history/whitman.html>

5.1 Recommendation

As has been discussed so far, studies in inter-textuality are a fascinating and rewarding enterprise. Literary studies that seek to investigate influence or textual relationships, as has already been discussed in this thesis, need not proceed to interpret the later artist's text with a pre-conceived precursor historicist bias or employ other non-literary parameters as interpretive tools to account for the inter-text. Even though this thesis aims to investigate the inter-text between Whitman and Emerson's work, it by no means presumes to account for all the echoes that could emerge in a literary investigation of the works of these two great American writers. It is hoped that other studies would contribute to Emerson and Whitman studies by employing other theories of influence and inter-textuality such as Kristeva's "intertextualité", Baxandall's model or Bakhtin's model to enhance the overall study of Whitman and Emerson's texts.

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