

# Walt Wittman: The Universal Poet and the American Ideal- A Socio-cognitive Analysis

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## Abstract

Walt Whitman is one of America's most iconic poets. He is renowned for his innovative and linguistic style, which embodies the spirit of revolution. His poem "Song of Myself" from his collection "Leaves of Grass" captures the essence of this revolutionary spirit, as it challenges traditional norms and explores the possibilities of realizing the American ideal. The study delves into the process of power and its ability to regenerate a sense of life. This analysis not only sheds light on Whitman's unique use of language and form but also explores how his poetry captures the possibilities of realizing the American ideal. Whitman's use of the present participial form in the closing lines of "Song of Myself," where he writes "I stop somewhere waiting for you," is a prime example of his innovative linguistic style and his vision of the present being connected to both the past and the future. This paper attempts to analyze this poem in the light of socio-cognitive approach.

**Keywords:** Walt Whitman • Song of myself • Socio-cognitive • Universal • Language

## Introduction

Walt Whitman is one of the most influential and celebrated poets in American literary history. His ground-breaking work, particularly his masterpiece poem "Song of Myself," has left an indelible mark on the world of poetry. Whitman's use of free verse in "Song of Myself" is a testament to his rejection of the established norms and his desire for freedom of expression. This form of poetry, which abandons traditional rhyme and meter, allows Whitman to explore the vastness and diversity of the American experience in a way that is both personal and universal. Whitman's "Song of Myself" reflects his belief in the inherent interconnectedness of all individuals, regardless of race, religion, or gender. This belief is evident in lines such as "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" and "In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less. Whitman's poetry, with its expansive and representative egotism, breaks down boundaries and embraces the idea of unity in diversity. Furthermore, Whitman's poetry is not only a celebration of individuality, but also a political statement about the importance of democracy in American society.

Walt Whitman's poetry is renowned for its poetic language and its profound exploration of the American experience. Whitman's use of expansive and representative egotism allows him to capture the vastness and diversity of America in a way that is both personal and universal. He goes beyond the confines of his individuality and becomes a symbol of the collective American spirit [1]. In Whitman's poems, the use of "I, Walt Whitman" is not limited to a literal interpretation. Rather, it represents a larger force, a moral and spiritual energy that transcends the boundaries of the individual self. This poetic force, as Whitman himself explains, is not confined to his own persona. Whitman's poetry invites anyone who assumes the position of the poetic "I" to embody this force and become part of the expansive and representative egotism that Whitman celebrates. This allows for a sense of inclusivity and universality in Whitman's work, as readers from all backgrounds can find themselves within his poems.

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Moreover, Whitman's poetry captures the possibilities of realizing the American idea. He embraces the concept of democracy and celebrates the revolutionary spirit that it embodies. Whitman's poems are a testament to his belief in human freedom and the power of the individual to shape their own destiny.

Walt Whitman's revolutionary poems are a powerful reflection of his deep-seated desire for societal change and his belief in the power of the individual to ignite a revolution. One of Whitman's most well-known poems, "Song of Myself," serves as a testament to his ambition and aspiration to become the "American Bard" [2]. Whitman displays his desire to capture the essence of American democracy and westward expansion. His new poetic style aimed to encapsulate the larger theme of American democracy and westward expansion, where American principles would expand into the wilderness and shape the nation's destiny.

In his preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman declared his ambition and aspiration to be the "American Bard," signaling his intention to become a poetic voice of the nation and inspire change through his words. Whitman's poems, such as "I Sing the Body Electric" and "The Stranger," reflect the spiritual component of his work, echoing the ideas of American transcendentalism [3]. As a universal poet he inspires the people to prove their identity and connect with the metaphysical realm. In addition to his pursuit of societal change, Whitman's poems also showcase his deep empathy and sympathy towards others. This is particularly evident in his poem "Song of Myself," where he seeks a truly "sympathetic and imaginative self". Whitman's poem explores the theme of freedom and equality, highlighting his desire to sympathize and identify with marginalized individuals, such as fugitive slaves. Whitman's exploration of the plight of fugitive slaves demonstrates his commitment to empathizing with and giving voice to those who have been oppressed.

## Significance and innovation of the study

Walt Whitman is hailed as one of the most influential and ground-breaking poets in American literature. His poetry has managed to transcend time and place, making it a universal phenomenon that resonates with people from all walks of life. Whitman's ability to connect with readers across cultures and generations can be attributed to various factors. Firstly, Whitman's poetry is characterized by its expansive and inclusive nature. He truly embraced the idea of democracy in his work, exploring themes that were deeply rooted in the American experience.

Critics have thought of *Song of Myself* as one of the most distinguished works of a poet who is obsessed with misogyny, many scholars have explored its issues of power and complicity. However, it is important to recognize that poetry, like any form of art, can be interpreted differently by different individuals.

Whitman's poetry goes beyond the boundaries of a single interpretation, allowing readers to find personal meaning and connections within his words. Furthermore, Whitman's poetry embodies a sense of universality that speaks to the human experience as a whole [2]. His metaphors and imagery evoke emotions and sensations that are relatable to all, regardless of their background or culture. Whitman's poetry is also known for its celebration of the physical world and the human body. He celebrates the beauty of nature, the wonder of the cosmos, and the power of human existence.

## Methodology

The current study aims to delve into the socio-cognitive analysis of "Song of Myself," exploring the intersection of literature and the class struggle movement. The importance of utilizing a socio-cognitive approach in this study lies in its ability to shed light on the societal dynamics and power structures depicted in literary works and how they reflect the realities of class difference and oppression. This methodology is particularly relevant in the context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when social inequalities were rampant and class divisions were deeply entrenched. The socio-cognitive approach emerged as a significant movement in Britain in the 1970s, paralleling the growing awareness and activism surrounding class struggle.

This approach draws upon the fields of cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and artificial intelligence to provide a comprehensive understanding of how literary works shape and are shaped by socio-cognitive processes. It recognizes that literature is not just a form of entertainment or aesthetic expression, but a reflection of the social and cognitive realities of its time. By analyzing "Song of Myself" through a socio-cognitive lens, we can gain insights into the underlying social and psychological factors at play in the text and how they contribute to the larger class struggle narrative [4].

This study is significant since it explores the increasing prominence of Walt Whitman as a universal poet. Whitman's work, particularly his poem "Song of Myself," has gained recognition as a seminal piece in American literature and has expanded its influence beyond national borders. The acceptance and acknowledgement of Whitman as a universal poet are based on several factors. One of these factors is the allegorical interpretation found in Whitman's work. Because of its sensuous nature, the poem's acceptance into the canon was based on an allegorical interpretation, expounded first by Hebrew and later by Christian scholars.

Another significant aspect is Whitman's role as a political poet. Whitman's notions of "the real me/Myself" served as symbols of individuality in American democracy. He believed in the power of the individual and expressed this belief through his poetry. In his work, Whitman often expressed his belief in the power of the individual and used his poetry as a vehicle to promote this idea. In the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman declared his ambition to be the "American Bard", emphasizing his desire to encapsulate the spirit of the American people through his poetry.

According to Gates in her article, "Forging an American Poetry from Speech Rhythms", Whitman's new poetic style was rooted in the larger theme of American democracy and westward expansion [5]. Whitman's poetry encompassed the ideals of American principles expanding into the wilderness and embracing natural forms that incorporated and grew out from there. This idea of the individual's power and the expansion of American principles are evident in Whitman's work. Furthermore, the "Whitman tradition" in American poetry, named after Walt Whitman himself, also highlights the celebration of individuality and the realization of the American ideal.

One of the key characteristics of Whitman's political poetry is its focus on the individual. Whitman believed that each person had a unique and valuable voice, and he sought to give full expression to the cosmic sense of life within each individual.

## Results

"Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman is a thought-provoking piece that delves into the concept of universal incitement. Whitman's exploration of universal incitement in "Song of Myself" reveals his deep concern for ethical principles and individualism within the context of his time. In this epic poem, Whitman challenges the norms and conventions of his contemporary society, raising important questions about the fundamental values that shape human existence. Whitman's main theme of power and individualism is evident throughout "Song of Myself." Whitman believes in the interconnectedness of all individuals, transcending barriers of race, religion, and gender. That's why he became a universal poet because he feels that humans can change the world by recognizing their shared humanity and embracing their individual power. In "Song of Myself," Whitman lays the grounds for a unique vision that transcends the individual and embraces the universal. Source: In Whitman's verses, the particularities of individual identity recede, making way for a more inclusive vision. Whitman sees himself in everyone and everyone in himself, emphasizing that every atom belonging to him also belongs to others. Furthermore, Whitman emphasizes the idea of individuality as a symbol of democracy within American society. Whitman's belief in the power of the individual to shape democracy is evident in his poetic expression. In the opening lines of "Song of Myself," Whitman declares, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I shall assume you.

## Discussion

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" explores the concept of a universal poet, one who transcends boundaries and connections with all aspects of human existence. Furthermore, Whitman emphasizes the importance of achieving a position in the world rather than simply pursuing personal interests. According to Whitman, the universal poet is not confined by individualistic pursuits but rather seeks to connect with the collective experience of humanity. Whitman's poetry reflects his deep belief in the power of democracy and the role of the poet as a symbol of individuality within American society [6].

As a political poet, Whitman conveyed his notions of the real self and individuality in American democracy. Whitman's "Song of Myself" portrays his transformation and growth as a poet, represented by the symbolic death-cry of the mockingbird in "Out of the Cradle" in 1859. This transformation served as a catalyst for Whitman's exploration of his own identity and his understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Furthermore, Whitman's vision of the present as continuously linked with both the past and the future highlights his metaphysical perspective.

Stein's references to Whitman " Song of Myself," she references Walt Whitman as a universal poet. Stein recognizes the genius of Walt Whitman as a pivotal figure in the continuation of the free-verse moment in English poetry [7]. Stein acknowledges that without Whitman's influence, the free-verse movement may have faded away like other passing trends. Whitman's work, with its unconventional structure and expansive themes, challenged the traditional notions of poetry and paved the way for a more inclusive and open form of expression.

Stein's recognition of Whitman as a universal poet highlights the impact of his poetry on not only the American literary landscape but also on a global scale. Stein's acknowledgement of Whitman as a universal poet emphasizes his ability to transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with readers from different backgrounds. Whitman's poetry captures the essence of humanity and speaks to universal experiences, making it accessible and relatable to people from all walks of life [8]. Furthermore, Stein's reference to Whitman as a universal poet also speaks to the enduring relevance and timelessness of his work. Stein's recognition of Whitman's universal appeal suggests that his poetry continues to resonate with readers across different time periods and cultures. Stein's reference to Whitman as a universal poet in his poem "Song of Myself" highlights the profound influence and lasting impact of his work.

Van Dijk's in the light of the socio-cognitive approach, the study shows the process of power and ability to regenerate a sense of life. This analysis not only sheds light on Whitman's unique use of language and form, but also

explores how his poetry captures the possibilities of realizing the American ideal. Whitman's use of the present participial form in the closing lines of "Song of Myself," where he writes "I stop somewhere waiting for you," is a prime example of his innovative linguistic style and his vision of the present being connected to both the past and the future [9].

In this poem, it can be noticed very well that the theme of power plays an important role. Walt Whitman, known as a universal poet, symbolizes the power of the voice. Whitman's poems embody the power to transcend boundaries and connect with readers on a deep level. Whitman's exploration of power in his poetry goes beyond traditional notions of authority or control. He delves into the power of self-expression, the power of the individual to navigate and understand the metaphysical realm, and the power of language itself to shape and influence the world. Given this explicit claim that Whitman represents the beginning of the modern movement, it is evident that his contributions to literature and poetry were ground-breaking and influential [10]. Whitman's work embodies the core principles of American transcendentalism, which emphasized the individual's ability to perceive and understand the metaphysical realm.

Whitman's poems, such as "I sing the body electric" and "the stranger," reflect a deep spiritual component that goes beyond traditional literary forms. His exploration of the human body as a vessel for the divine and his openness to diverse perspectives challenged conventional notions of poetry and paved the way for the emergence of modernist poetry. Furthermore, Whitman delved into the influence of other poets, such as Rumi, and incorporated their ideas into his own work [11].

## Conclusion

This study was a socio-cognitive perspective towards the analysis of Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself'. It was argued that unlike most of the poems by Whitman, this poem tries to show a universal man who is fighting very hard to establish his position in the society. This approach delves into the social and cognitive factors that influenced Whitman's writing and explores how these elements contribute to the overall meaning of the poem. This iconic poem serves as a primary text for understanding the themes and intentions behind Whitman's work. Through socio-cognitive approach emphasizes the influence of subtle changes in situations on human behaviour. In relation to 'Song of Myself', situationism highlights the power of seemingly "small" changes within society to shape an individual's struggle for recognition and belonging. This poems, portrays a universal voice that is striving to establish its place in society. In Whitman's verses, the particularities of individual identity recede, making way for a more inclusive vision. Whitman sees himself in everyone and everyone in himself, emphasizing that every atom belonging to him also belongs to others. Furthermore, Whitman emphasizes the idea of individuality as a symbol of democracy within American society. Whitman's belief in the power of the individual to shape democracy is evident in his poetic expression. In the opening lines of "Song of Myself," Whitman declares, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, and what I shall assume you.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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