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College Writing 2

"Interconnectedness and Democratic Individualism in Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself”

"Song of Myself" is a poem written by American poet Walt Whitman, first published in his collection of poems titled "Leaves of Grass" in 1855. It is considered one of Whitman's most significant works.

Walt Whitman’s "Song of Myself" is a masterpiece of American poetry that explores various themes such as identity, democracy, nature, and transcendence.Throughout the poem, Whitman uses vivid sensory imagery to describe the natural world and the human experience. He celebrates the diversity of human experience and asserts that all individuals are equal. He portrays the self as an extension of the divine and sees every individual as an expression of the greater whole. Whitman's language is often sensual and erotic, and he uses sexuality as a metaphor for spiritual transcendence.The poem is a celebration of the self and the interconnectedness of all things.

In this paper, I will analyze "Song of Myself" and draw on two academically sound articles, namely, "Whitman's Assumptions" by David Bromwich and "The Ecstatic Epistemology" by James Trecker. The paper will have a thesis that demonstrates how Whitman's assumptions and

ecstatic epistemology inform his poetic style and contribute to his portrayal of the self and the world.

Through the integration of ideas from Bromwich and Trecker, this paper argues that Whitman's poetic style in "Song of Myself" is informed by his assumptions of the self as an extension of the divine and his ecstatic epistemology, which privileges subjective experience over rationalism. These assumptions contribute to the portrayal of the self and the world as interconnected, and the poem serves as a celebration of democratic individualism.

Whitman's assumptions of the self as an extension of the divine inform his poetic style in "Song of Myself." According to Bromwich, Whitman assumes that "the self is not an isolated, autonomous being but a part of a greater reality" (‘qtd. in’ Bromwich 152). This assumption is evident in the poem's opening lines, where Whitman declares, "I celebrate myself and sing myself, / And what I assume, you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1-3). The use of the first-person pronoun "I" is not a declaration of individualism but an assertion of the interconnectedness of all things. Whitman sees the self as a microcosm of the universe and believes that every individual is an expression of the divine.

Whitman's ecstatic epistemology also informs his poetic style in "Song of Myself." According to Trecker, Whitman's epistemology privileges subjective experience over rationalism and relies on intuition and feeling (‘qtd. in’ Trecker 310). This is evident in the poem's use of sensory imagery and the emphasis on bodily experience. Whitman believes that knowledge can be

obtained through physical sensation and that the body is a source of wisdom. For example, in section 5, he writes, "I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other" (30-31). Here, Whitman asserts that the soul and the body are equal, and one should not be privileged over the other.

Whitman's assumptions of the self as an extension of the divine and his ecstatic epistemology contribute to the portrayal of the self and the world as interconnected in "Song of Myself." The poem celebrates the democratic individualism that arises from this interconnectedness. For example, in section 15, Whitman writes, "The pure contralto sings in the organ loft, / The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp, / The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner" (94-96). Here, Whitman portrays individuals from all walks of life as interconnected and contributing to the greater whole. The poem celebrates the diversity of human experience and asserts that all individuals are equal.

To sum up in the end through his use of free verse, catalogues, and sensual imagery, Whitman creates a poetic language that is both democratic and transcendental, inviting the reader to participate in his ecstatic vision of the self and the world. He celebrates the beauty and diversity of nature, the vitality and creativity of human life, and the potential for spiritual renewal and transformation.

Overall, "Song of Myself" is a visionary and transformative work that challenges conventional notions of identity, morality, and spirituality. It invites us to embrace our own uniqueness and interconnectedness, to celebrate our own divinity and that of others, and to participate in the ongoing creation of a more just and loving world.

Works cited:

Bromwich, David. "Whitman's Assumptions: 'Song of Myself,' in Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman." Social Research, vol. 85, no. 3, Fall 2018, pp. 503-519. Academic Journal.

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