

LITERARY AND STYLISTIC INVESTIGATION OF SELECTED DEATH POEMS IN WALT WHITMAN'S *LEAVES OF GRASS*

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Abstract:

This article explores Walt Whitman's death poems' linguistic constituents. The study analyzes nine poems and highlights their phonetic, syntactic, and semantic characteristics that make Whitman a representative poet in American poetry. Relying on the stylistic approach, this article underscores literary and stylistic features Whitman's poetic language conveys.

Keywords: *Whitman, death, style, stylistics, literary, analysis, poetry.*

Étude littéraire et stylistique d'une sélection des poèmes sur la mort dans *Les Feuilles d'Herbe* de Walt Whitman

Résumé :

Cet article explore des constituants linguistiques des poèmes de Walt Whitman abordant la thématique de la mort. La présente étude fait l'analyse de neuf poèmes de Walt Whitman et met en évidence certaines caractéristiques phonétiques, syntaxiques et sémantiques qui lui confèrent le titre d'un poète représentatif dans la poésie américaine. S'appuyant sur l'approche stylistique, cet article tente de mettre en lumière les caractéristiques stylistiques et littéraires que transmet le langage poétique de Whitman.

Mots-clés : *Whitman, mort, style, stylistique, littéraire, analyse, poésie.*

Estudio literario y estilístico de una selección de poemas sobre la muerte en *Las hojas de hierba* de Walt Whitman

Resumen:

Este artículo explora los componentes lingüísticos de los poemas de Walt Whitman que tratan del tema de la muerte. Este estudio analiza nueve poemas de Walt Whitman y destaca ciertas características fonéticas, sintácticas y semánticas que le otorgan el título de poeta representativo de la poesía estadounidense. Partiendo del enfoque estilístico, este artículo trata de resaltar las características estilísticas y literarias que transmite el lenguaje poético de Whitman.

Palabras clave: *Whitman, muerte, estilo, estilística, literatura, análisis, poesía.*

Introduction

Walt Whitman, the poet known as the American bard (D. D. Kummings, 2006, p. 18), was born in West Hills, Long Island in New York, on May 31, 1819. The second of nine children, Whitman, was raised and educated on Long Island and in Brooklyn. An American poet, journalist and essayist, Whitman, is one of the most prominent figures of the modern literature.

Many critics often roughly depict Whitman as the greatest American poet, not only on the ground of his keen interest in the political and national issues of his time, but also on account of his celebration of death and other mystic truths of life, afterlife, and immortality. Critical interventions sustaining the above view on him include statements from Harold Bloom, Theodore Roosevelt, Donald D. Kummings, Havelock Ellis and Ralph Waldo Emerson. For (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 264), “No Western poet, in the past century and half, not even Browning, or Leopardi or Baudelaire, overshadows Walt Whitman.” The foregoing connotes that Browning, Leopardi or Baudelaire cannot equate Whitman in terms of literary, historical, political, and social impacts. Bloom (1994, p. 266) further argues that Whitman affected the twentieth-century poets such as Ezra Pound, Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams, Carlos Sandberg, and others. So far, Whitman’s popularity rests largely on his interest in the political and national issues, yet he has marvelous views on larger cosmic issues and mystic truths like life and death. In this connection, the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, stated the following about him: “All of the poets of the nineteenth century, Whitman was the only one who dared to use anything that was strikingly and vividly typical of the humanity around him” (L. Untermeyer, 1949, p. xxv). In like manner, Kummings (2006, p. 1) reiterates the same view, calling Whitman the “bard of death” for his keen interest in death, which the poet considers as “the real reality” behind “the shifting forms of life” (M. Warner, 2004, p. 125). Whitman himself believes that, modern poets must write about death (in E. Folsom, 2010, p. 68): “In the future of these States must arise poets immenser far, and make great poems of death.” In this vein, Ellis (2005, p. 115) entertains that Whitman “aspires to reveal the loveliness of death” and “speaks not only from the standpoint of the most intense and vivid delight in the actual world, but possesses a

practical familiarity with disease and death which has perhaps never fallen to the lot of a great writer.” The foregoing naturally positions Whitman as a poet of death.

Critics specifically agree that Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* is a good representative of his perception of mortality. Lawrence (1962, p. 19) holds: “if ‘*Leaves of Grass*’ is remarkable for anything, it is its celebration of death.” This connotes that Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* has largely depicted death. In the same vein, presenting Whitman as an American literary giant, Emerson, the father of American Transcendentalism, could not resist saying:

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of Whitman’s *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. I have great joy in it. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging (in L. Untermeyer, 1949, xxiii).

Emerson represents Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* as one of the best nineteenth-century American literary productions due to his extensive and skillful depiction of death and the literary stylistic devices used therein.

For Khan (2015, p. 10), stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics, originated as a way of applying linguistic models to literary texts. Widdowson (in Khan, 2015, p. 10) defines it as “the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation”. According to Short and Candlin (1989), stylistics is an approach to the analysis of literary texts using linguistic description (in Khan, 2015, p. 10). From the preceding, stylistics analyzes a literary text from a linguistic perspective to point out its literary devices. A stylistician herewith accounts for the way a literary text or a passage may strike the reader through his/her analysis, unlike a linguist who is generally satisfied with the mere analysis of a piece of writing. Therefore, considering the aforementioned critical views on both Whitman himself and his *Leaves of Grass*, this essay analyzes nine (9) selected death poems and examines the stylistic and literary devices hidden therein. Differently put, the stylistic analysis in this essay purports to show how some linguistic tools are deployed to analyze selected poems. Interestingly, the value of stylistic analysis is that it can provide the means whereby the reader can relate a piece of literary writing to his/her own experience of language and so extend that experience.

The stylistic analysis of Whitman’s selected death poems addresses three aspects in the context of this essay. First, it offers an overview of the concepts of style and literary

stylistics before focusing on the literary stylistic devices in the poems. Second, it analyzes the targeted poems as being made up of phonetic and syntactic stylistic features. Finally, the essay demonstrates that Whitman's selected death poems are made up of semantic features.

1. Style and Literary Stylistics

According to Udeze (2017, p. 113), style is the basic thing which gives uniqueness to every writer. Addressing style in the context of this paper is of paramount importance due to Whitman's uniqueness in American literature. Style in literature can be considered as the literary element that describes the ways an author uses words – the author's word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentences arrangement – to establish mood, images, and meaning in the text. Style, therefore, describes how the author describes events, objects, and ideas.

One way to understand literary style is to think about fashion styles. Clothes can be formal and dressy, informal and casual, preppy, athletic, and more. Literary style is like the clothes that a text puts on. By analogy, the information underneath is like the person's body, and the specific words, structures, and arrangements that are used are like the clothes. Just the way one can dress in several different fashions, a single message can be dressed in several different literary styles. Siobhan Chapman (in S. Yoshifumi, 2012, p. 117) defines literary style as follows:

While other styles show recurrent features, literature is distinguished by what can be described overall as pattern. The text will show selection and arrangement of items that contribute to the total effect; elements that would be absent or incidental in other styles are important for the fulfillment of purpose. Poetry shows such patterning devices as meter, rhyme, assonance, alliteration; prose may contain similar devices, less regularly arranged. Both types of literary discourse will have careful and often unexpected selection of words and syntactic constructions. Figures of rhetoric will give unusual prominence to certain items.

Understandably, although there are other types of styles, poetic style shows certain patterning devices – such as meter, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, etc. – that are regularly arranged. Specifically, a poetic style has to do with the manner in which a poet (ess) expresses himself or herself in language, including his or her choices of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or poetic and sound devices.

Adjei and Angsotinge (2006, p. 32) equally define style as the manner in which language is used in prose or verse – it is how speakers or writers say whatever they want to say. The style of a particular work may be analyzed in terms of its diction, or choice of words; its structure or pattern of sentences (whether they are predominantly simple or complex, or a mixture of both); the density and types of its figurative language; tone, mood, the patterns of its rhythm, sound, and other formal features; and its rhetorical aims and devices.

Casting an insight into language through the study of poetry in his Moscow period, Roman Jakobson nurtured a consuming interest in the structure of poetic language throughout his life. From the early stage of his career, he had approached poetry in terms of different linguistic functions. His recognition of the aesthetic function as the dominant trope of a poetic work led him to distinguish between two different functions of language (referential and expressive), and further to explain poetic language.

Moreover, there are two phases in the stylistic analysis: the analytic phase and the interpretive phase. For Jakobson, the task of stylistician in the analytic phase consists in selecting and studying hundreds of linguistic features in the literary text (a poem, for instance). When it comes to the interpretive phase, the stylistician has to show how linguistic features form coherent and integrated patterns by grounding his/her judgments about the significance of such patterns in relation to the context of the work as a whole (S. Yoshifumi, 2012, p. 117). In the same vein, Verdonk (2002, p. 4) defines stylistics as “the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect”. Stylistic analysis hereby discusses three main facts in a text, namely linguistic features inside a text, the aim of their uses, and their effect on the readership.

As for Harris (1992, pp. 392-93), stylistic theory stands as “a tool to analyze texts to discover characteristic features that may help in the identification of the author or the date of composition.” He further defines it as “the study of the totality of the choices available for expressive effect in a given language” as well as “the analysis of phonological, semantic, and syntactic characteristics of a text or a set of texts.” This essay relies on the latter definition of stylistic theory to examine the stylistic devices in Whitman’s death poems.

2. **Phonetic and Syntactic Stylistic Features in Whitman's Death Poems : Alliteration, Anaphora and Cataloging**

The literary critic Anthony Burgess defines literature as "the aesthetic exploitation of language" (A. Burgess, 1992, p. 379). Though literature is written language by this definition, it does not primarily focus on the linguistic features of phonology or phonetics. However, sound patterning plays a pivotal role in literary discourse in general, and in poetry, in particular. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2006) defines phonetics as the science and study of speech sounds. Alliteration and anaphora are the phonetic features under consideration in Whitman's poems in this essay.

Whitman uses many phonetic or sound devices to enhance his poems in *Leaves of Grass*. He uses alliteration hundreds of times throughout his poems for multiple reasons. Webster's Dictionary defines alliteration as the repetitive use of the same sound at the beginning of words or in emphasized syllables of words. Less frequently and for no apparent reason, Whitman uses alliteration unintentionally numerous times throughout his poetry. However, his intentional use of alliteration amplifies his unique style, which emphasizes repetition through parallelism, assonance, and refrains (A. Macleish, 1961, p. 19).

Whitman deploys alliteration the most to improve rhythm, and substitutes rhyme for alliteration; a unique rhythm which distinguishes his style of writing. This poet uses alliteration by mistake through common diction, but most of all, he uses it to further improve rhythm and create his distinctive style. Clearly, alliteration shapes his unique poetic pottery through repeating constant sounds.

Observably, writers, singers and actors unintentionally use alliteration for basic diction purposes. In his "Song of Myself," Whitman uses alliteration by starting each stanza with "Or I guess..." He says in one stanza, "Or I guess the grass itself is a child..." (S.6, l.105). Here, he uses alliteration unintentionally to speculate on his metaphoric connection to grass being a child. This use of alliteration is not meant to improve the poem's rhythm, or to emphasize his style: Whitman is expressing his thoughts. Alliteration can be found through many forms of arts and writing, but it is not there to serve any purpose or meaning, most of the time. Whitman tends not to use rhyming in his poems.

In order to give rhythm to his poems, Whitman substitutes rhyming for alliteration. He begins his "To Think of Time" as follows: "To think of time.... To think through the retrospection, to think of today..." The recurrence of the constant sound 't' allows the

poem to start a constant flow. The alliteration propels the starting rhythm to start an active circulation of rhythmic poetry. Without a rhythm, the poem is uneasy to read; however, Whitman needs alliteration to work as the rhythm and keeps the poem flowing strong.

Edward Hirsch defines anaphora as the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of a series of phrases, lines, or sentences. Recalling Cassius Longinus and George Puttenham's definitions of the concept, Hirsch (2017, p. 12-13) argues that while Longinus treated anaphora as an imitative action and a key feature of the sublime, Puttenham deemed it "the figure of report." Many of Whitman's poems rely on anaphora to create a captivating, spellbinding quality of incantation. Often, this poet begins several lines in a row with the same word or phrase, a literary device called anaphora.

"To Think of Time" is an example of Whitman's anaphoric poem. In reading this poem which is about the dead and their corpses, the reader can feel the "persona's fascination with death, his latent terror of death, and his desire to discover how a better understanding of death and decay might afford him a measure of emotional stasis" (H. Aspiz, 2004, p. 78). Whitman's definitions of time in the poem are, firstly, the means to measure activities and secondly, a sign of the endlessness of our existence:

To think of time – of all that retrospection,
To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward
Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?
Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you? (Section 1, Ll. 1-5).

In a stubborn belief that death is not something to fear, the persona asks the reader about "one's fear of the grave" (H. Aspiz, 2004, p. 79). Anaphora serves here as an organizing poetic strategy of repetition with difference. That is, each line of the above poem is a repetition with difference. Robert Alter (in E. Hirsch, 2017, p. 13) calls it "a productive tension between sameness and difference, reiteration and difference." Something is reiterated; something else is added or subtracted. The repetition of "To think of" and "Have you" at initial positions of the lines intensifies the musicality of the poem and the importance Whitman attaches to the subject of death in this poem, like in many others.

Another lengthier stanza from "Song of Myself" shows the complexity and variety of Whitman's repetitions:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own, 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,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields, And brown ants in the little
wells be-neath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed
(Section 5).

The repetition of "And" at the beginning of lines sets a firm rhythmical frame based on anaphora. The alliteration and anaphora as addressed in Whitman's "Song of Myself" and "To Think of Time" transform his poems into celebratory chants, with the joyous form and structure reflecting the joyousness of the poetic content. In clear and as is discussed above, alliteration and anaphora serve multiple functions in maintaining poetic quality in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Syntax is a set of rules in a language. It dictates how words from different parts of speech are put together in order to convey a complete thought. Miller in (F. Alqahtani, 2019, p. 77) states that, "syntax has to do with how words are put together to build phrases, with how phrases are put together to build clauses or bigger phrases, and with how clauses are put together to build sentences." In the context of this paper, the syntactic analysis is conducted to express Whitman's artistic effects, like mood and tone as demonstrated in his use of 'cataloging.'

Whitman filled his poetry with long lists. Oftentimes, a sentence is broken into many clauses, separated by commas, and each clause describes some scene, person, or object. These lists create a sense of expansiveness in the poem, as they mirror the growth of the United States. Called "cataloging," this literary device is used in poetry and prose whereby a list of things is enumerated to create a rhetorical effect. Therefore, cataloging provides writers with a tool to portray their feelings, emotions, and ideas in a logical sequence. Catalog is defined here as a list of prepositional phrases deliberately inserted to make the readership enjoy the conventional style of poetry. According to (M. Swayne, 1941, p. 162), this technique is "one of the most characteristic features of the strophic rhetoric in Whitman's poems." Interestingly, Whitman extensively used this technique to make his poems simpler, as the following text testifies to its simplicity in art:

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity. Nothing can make up for excess or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art (Erkkila, 1965, p. 59).

The above recalls Whitmanian cataloging style in art as his glaring example below illustrates:

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
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 odorless,
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me ("Song of Myself," Section 2).

This second section of the poem is about celebration and the poet wants the entire world to be part of this jubilation. He tries to contain the whole world within himself. Therefore, he provides a list of whole stuff belonging to him. In this part, he presents the catalog of things he loves and wants to keep in life. He presents a list of things through a chain of associated thought to make the meanings clear, giving a unique quality to the poem.

3. Semantic Stylistic Features: Whitmanian Symbolism, Apostrophe, Contradiction and Allusion

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2006) defines semantics as the study of the meaning of words and phrases. Stringer (2019, p. 180) traces semantics to the study of how language is used to represent meaning. More precisely, semantics aims to explain how literal meanings are linguistically encoded and decoded by speakers and hearers. Pardede (2016, p. 11) reinforces the foregoing, saying "semantics is concerned with the relation between words or other symbols and objects or concepts to which they refer... [...]." A semantic analysis, therefore, is concerned with meaning and is interested, among other things, in those elements of language which give the sentence a "truth value." A truth value determines the conditions under which a particular sentence may be regarded as true or false.

Whitman equally uses symbolism as a rhetorical device and a semantic feature in his poems. First, (J. Lennard, 1996, p. 15) defines symbolism as the use of symbols to convey messages. Its use in literature purports to give a meaning that goes beyond physical representations. Whitman's following poem, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," (stanza 1), exhibits some symbols:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night, I mourn'd, and yet
shall mourn with ever-returning spring.
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring, Lilac blooming perennial and
drooping star in the west, and thought of him I love.

For instance, "lilac/s" in the first and fifth lines stands for the narrator's love for the "star": Lincoln. In stanza 2, he reiterates that symbol of star in a vivid way: "O powerful western fallen star!" Whitman uses these symbols to depict the assassination of Lincoln.

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" roughly imagines death as an integral part of life. The speaker here realizes that flowers (lilacs) die in the winter, but they rebloom in the springtime, and he vows to mourn his fallen friends every year just as new buds are appearing. Other symbols abound in other stanzas of the above poem – bushes, wheat, trees, and other plants – to signify the possibilities of regeneration and re-growth after death. Stanza 3 provides a glaring example: "In the dooryard fronting an old farmhouse near the white-wash'd palings, / Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green, / With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love."

As the speaker mourns the loss of Lincoln in stanza 1, he drops a lilac spray onto the coffin: the act of laying a flower on the coffin not only honors the person who has died but lends death a measure of dignity and respect.

"O Captain! My Captain!" uses short lines and words such as "heart" and "father" to mournfully incant an elegy for the assassinated Lincoln. Describing the life cycle of nature helped Whitman contextualize the severe injuries and trauma he witnessed during the Civil War – linking death to life helped give meaning to the deaths of so many soldiers. The foregoing vindicates Whitman's symbolism in "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

Moreover, although "Of Him I Love Day and Night" initially depicts, to a certain extent, the historical setting and context of American cities in the course of the Civil War, it equally reveals the omnipresence of death through symbols: "And I found that every

place was a burial- place;/The houses full of life were equally full of death, (this house is now,)/The streets, the shipping, the places of amusement, the Chicago, / Boston, Philadelphia, the Manhattan, were as full of the dead as of the living.” The various cities and towns referred to in the poem symbolize the most victimized settings by the American Civil War. Symbolized by “Night,” death was present in the above cities, shortening people’s lives:

Of him I love day and night I dream’d I heard he was dead,
And I dream’d I went where they had buried him I love, but he was not in that place,
And I dream’d I wander’d searching among burial-places to find him, And I found that every place was a burial-place;
The houses full of life were equally full of death, (this house is now,)
The streets, the shipping, the places of amusement, the Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, the Manhattan, were as full of the dead as of the living,
And fuller, O vastly fuller of the dead than of the living;
And what I dream’d I will henceforth tell to every person and age.

The preceding has underlined examples of symbols – lilac, star, heart, father, night, bush and tree – in Whitman’s studied death poems.

A Greek word, apostrophe, means “turning away,” Marcus Quintilian (in E. Hirsch, 2017, p. 16) defines apostrophe as “a diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge.” It is an exclamatory figure of speech. In a play, it occurs when a speaker breaks off from addressing the audience and directs his/her speech to a third party such as an opposing litigant or some other individual, sometimes absent from the scene. Often the addressee is a personified abstract quality or inanimate object. In dramatic works and poetry, such a figure of speech is often introduced by the vocative exclamation “O.” Apostrophe is expressed in Whitman’s “O Captain! My Captain!” a few lines of which follow:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won; The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting, While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies, Fallen cold and dead.
O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle trills; For you bouquets and ribbon’d wreaths – for you the shores a- crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning. (Ll.1- 12)

Abraham Lincoln, the man Whitman deeply admired, is the captain referred to in this instance. No doubt, Lincoln's death mostly affected Whitman to the point that he memorialized the greatest president in the United States history with "O Captain! My Captain!" He hereby paid tribute to Lincoln with this poem taking the form of an ode, characterized by sustained noble sentiment and appropriate dignity of style – beginning with an apostrophe, as with most odes.

The poem is an extended metaphor for four reasons, at least. First, Lincoln is the captain who has "fallen cold and dead," having been assassinated shortly after the Civil War had ended. Second, the "fearful trip" is the Civil War. Third, "the prize we sought" is the preservation of the Union, something both Whitman and Lincoln felt was the supreme reason for fighting the War. Lastly, "the ship" is the United States.

The poet's grief is accentuated by the contrasting celebrations of victory and lamentations of death. He recognizes the importance of victory, calling out "Exult O shores, and ring O bells!" (L. 23), but his "mournful tread" prevents him from truly taking part in the festivities. The image of the dead captain – "O heart! heart! heart! / O bleeding drops of red" (Ll. 5-6) – haunts the poem and the reader is constantly reminded that he has "fallen cold and dead."

Whitman equally deploys contradiction in his poetic universe, a device that occurs when two statements seem to disagree with each other, creating a paradox. Equally termed paradox, contradiction is readily used by poets, mandating Cleanth Brooks (in E. Hirsch, 2017, p. 215) to declare that "the language of poetry is the language of paradox." For example, in "This Compost" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the poet examines the process of death and rebirth, and his interpretations of the dead changes as he realizes that death is just the fuel for new life. A distant observer who approaches the mechanics of death as a part of life in "This Compost," Whitman, is able to separate the emotional from the physical and perceives the dead just like the fuel of the Earth that "grows such sweet things out of such corruptions" (L.42) and "gives such divine materials to men" (L.46). This perspective allows him to represent death not as a something to be feared, but as an entity that should be embraced, because without the death process, nothing can live. This contradiction continues in "The Cradle Endlessly Rocking" when Whitman recounts his realization that death, beyond being a fuel for life, can also be the source of a poet's muse, which he demonstrates in his "reminiscence" of the death and longing for a she-bird he had often heard sing. The poem shows a boy, widely regarded to

be Whitman himself, witnessing the life and death of a she-bird and the effect it has on her mate, a he-bird. The boy translates the he-bird's mourning song into words, "My own songs, awaked from that hour" and the boy has given him "already a thousand singers – a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours, / A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, / Never to die" (Ll.188; 151-3).

Whitman's writings unveil the impact of the Civil War on him in its wake. His work is far less romantic and focuses on the experience of the present with a sharpness that would come naturally to one who has witnessed immense suffering and deaths attached to war.

Accounts of Whitman's volunteering as a Union wound dresser (army nurse) provide explicit and heartbreaking details of the human cost of war. "The Wound Dresser" closes mournfully:

The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young. Some suffer so much, I recall
the experience sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)

These lines reveal Whitman's contradictory attitudes when he was medically assisting wounded people in the course of the war. This is first revealed by "experience sweet and sad." The death and misery he witnessed as an army nurse was produced by the struggle between two war machines designed and empowered with the same science and industrial might that Whitman had previously endorsed without reservation.

This could only have added to the bitterness of his war-time experience. The war saw many technological innovations such as the introduction of the legendary ironclads, the use of rapid-fire guns, and the inauguration of the mechanically fused land mine in warfare. The poet's disgust at the deconstruction of that beautiful night's sky into charts and equations does not contradict the awe he expresses for science in his earlier works when viewed in this historical context.

Lennard (1996, p. 32) defines allusion as "a reference to something outside the immediate scope of what is being presented." Biblical allusion is apparent in Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (Stanza 3, Ll.20-22): "It avails not, time nor place – distance avails not,/I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence."

Line 21, "I am with you ... so many generations," reverberates Jesus Christ's following statement in Matthew 28. 20: "I am with you always even unto the end of the world." In "Song of Myself," the poet makes an allusion similar to the preceding one: "This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,/It is for the wicked just same as the righteous,/ I make appointments with all."

Through the use of these allusions, the poet compares himself to Jesus who invited and is still inviting the wicked as well as the righteous to fellowship and commune with Him for their salvation. Similarly, the speaker not only underscores the differences within the people and the geography of the nation, but he also shows the obligation of togetherness as they all share human experience. In all likelihood, the poet seems to be promoting the unity of these differences in the nation as different people and he himself were, are still, and will be crossing the ferry between Brooklyn and Manhattan no matter the passing of time and the change of society. Though death is not explicitly mentioned in these lines, the poet surmises that all living beings share the same human experience of death. Whitman is also alluding to his being immortal, like Jesus who is still alive after His death (Mark 16. 19). Tentatively, Whitman alludes that though he is dead physically, he still has victory over death through his body of works, as he claims to be the "American New Jesus" (M. Edmundson, 2019, p. 3).

Conclusion

This essay has focused on the literary stylistic features in Whitman's selected death poems. It has examined the phonetic, syntactic, and the semantic devices in the poems under consideration. These features serve as literary and poetic tools for the expression of Whitman's death concepts. Whitman's literary, poetic and rhetorical devices exposed in his death poems has helped improve with accuracy and effectiveness the readership's use of language in an artistic and aesthetic way through the application of a heap of these devices. The study of the selected poems has established that death is not the end of life for Whitman as he earnestly endeavors by means of his stylistic features to convince people to accept death as the daily companion of both humans and living creatures along with his contemporary Emily Dickinson. Whitman charges the cosmos with transferring deaths to new lives to keep the ongoing movement of life and death cycle. His celebrations of death by means of

the stylistic devices mandate the readership to grasp key understandings about life and death: death is the faithful friend during life time. Ultimately, the Whitmanian various stylistic devices debunk death. Death must not be feared or over-grieved; instead, it must be welcomed pleasantly as it frees the body from its pain, separates the body from the soul and ultimately catapults the soul into eternity.

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