



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

— ❖ ❖ ❖ —
Excerpt from “Song of Myself”

Culver Pictures

Whitman, Walt (1819-1892),



This picture is a gentle
homage. We colorized a
classic image of Whitman
and placed him behind
"Walt's Tree"

[http://www.liglobal.com/wal
t/birthplace.shtml](http://www.liglobal.com/walt/birthplace.shtml)



Be simple and
True with
American
raised on a
lady and
less than

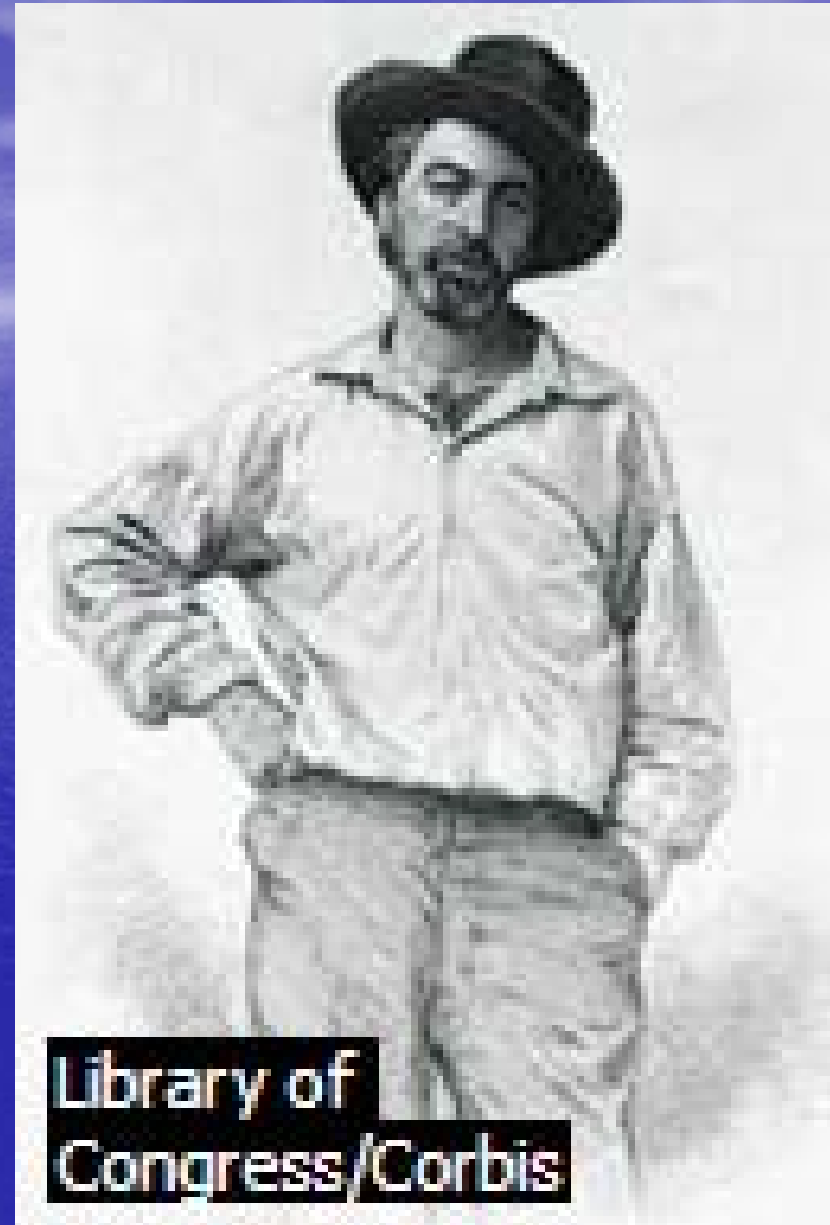
His Importance in American Literature

1. Created new poetic forms and subjects to fashion a distinctly American type of poetic expression.
2. His use of long lines, free verses, and vocabulary.
3. Free verse.

Leaves of Grass

- In 1855 Whitman issued the first of many editions of *Leaves of Grass*, a volume of poetry in a new kind of versification, far different from his sentimental rhymed verse of the 1840s.
- Because he immodestly praised the human body and glorified the senses, Whitman was forced to publish the book at his own expense, setting some of the type himself.

- His name did not appear on the title page, but the engraved frontispiece portrait shows him posed, arms akimbo, in shirt sleeves, hat cocked at a rakish angle.



Responses

- Emerson: “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet to contribute”
- Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and Thoreau: not impressed
- Whitman: worse than failure (from a business viewpoint)

Preface to *Leaves of Grass*

- Declares that the new American poet will create new forms and subject matter for poetry

Question

- What, according to Whitman, will be the new American poet's subject matter, vocabulary, and verse forms?

“Song of Myself”

- Free verse

Catalog technique

- Using the catalog technique, Whitman lists the kinds of ordinary Americans who make a good life for themselves: a carpenter, a mason, a boatman, a shoemaker, a woodcutter, and mechanics. Also included in Whitman's catalog are women, the homemakers--a mother, a young wife, and a girl. The idea of the goodness of American freedom is developed in each person's being able to pursue "what belongs to him or her and to none else." (from e-note)

Catalog Technique

- A democratizing device, to create the many in one.
- Though images seem irrelevant, they unite to produce a unified impression.
- In his preface, America is a poem, and he is its seer. So his catalogs would be his way of calling the roll for the nation?

Structure (by Snodgrass)

- I. Introduction (1-7)
- II. Expansion through Exploration (8-23)
- III. Return to the Individual (24)
- IV. Expansion of Sense Experience
- V. Expansion through Species, Abstract Entities, into Suffering and Death
- VI. Restoration of Faith (37-51)
- VII. Acceptance of Death (52)

Question

- In which way does Whitman fulfill Emerson's hope for the American scholar?

Question

- In which ways is Whitman an epic bard of democracy?

“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”

- About the birth of the poet

Question

- Why does the boy's realization of the significance of death lead to his birth as a poet?

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”

- Written a few weeks after Lincoln’s death on April 14, 1865.

Pastoral Elegy

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elegy)

- elegy, an elaborately formal lyric poem lamenting the death of a friend or public figure, or reflecting seriously on a solemn subject. The tradition of the *pastoral elegy*, derived from Greek poems by Theocritus and other Sicilian poets in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, evolved a very elaborate series of conventions by which the dead friend is represented as a shepherd mourned by the natural world; pastoral elegies usually include many mythological figures such as the nymphs who are supposed to have guarded the dead shepherd, and the muses invoked by the *elegist*.

Question

- What is the role of the nature in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”?

Links

- Biography of Whitman: <http://www.top-biography.com/9036-Walt%20Whitman/ata glance.htm>
- Manuscripts and notebooks: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwhtml/wwhome.html> at Library of Congress