

## FREE VERSE IN WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY

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**Abstract:** One of the primary issues when examining each artist's work is how to balance tradition and innovation, as well as how to combine originality and imitation. Our focus is drawn to the emergence of a particular author's style, new ideas, and subjects, particularly when discussing such a complicated artistic process as the beginning of the 19th century. The article analyzes the relationship between tradition and innovation from the perspective of creative movements, as well as the gradual emergence of distinct trends in American poetry over the course of the century. In addition, the famous American poet Walt Whitman's works are analyzed from the point of view of tradition and innovation.

**Keywords:** Tradition, innovation, individual style, allusion, translation, adaptation, imitation, collage.

**Introduction.** An open style of poetry known as free verse developed from the French vers libre form. It doesn't follow any regular musical rhythms, rhymes, or meter patterns. As a result, it often follows the tempo of spoken language. The literary style, which gained popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has developed into the kind of poetry that is currently most frequently produced. Free verse poetry, to say it simply, defies the limitations of form and meter. And while free verse poetry frequently plays with sound, it doesn't always follow a predetermined, conventional rhyme structure. With the release of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a seminal work in the genre, the impromptu and innovative poetry technique has earned popularity and praise from readers. The genre's range and breadth have contributed to its ongoing, escalating success in the present.

The term "father of free poetry" is still used to describe Walt Whitman, who helped to start the free verse movement. Together with authors like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, he also contributed to the transcendentalist movement, a similar philosophical school that emphasizes nature, idealism, and individualism. Whitman's life's work, *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of roughly 400 poems that he spent decades refining, stands out. Although the famous work is now regularly taught in English courses, when it was first published, audiences were scandalized by its clear lack of form and its themes of sensuous homoeroticism.

**Main Part.** In the prologue to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes: "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." He thought that the poet and society had a necessary, symbiotic relationship. In "Song of Myself," in particular, he reinforced this link by employing a compelling first-person narrator. In an American epic, the lofty hero was abandoned in favor of assuming the persona of the ordinary people. The effect of recent urbanization on the general populace in the United States was addressed by *Leaves of Grass* as well. Walt Whitman attributes a great deal of his creative inspiration to the theater and the opera, and he has been reported as saying that *Leaves of Grass* would not have been without the opera. One of the most significant periods in American history was the publication of *Leaves of Grass* (and subsequent printings). It would be impossible to identify all of the historical events that had an impact on the themes in *Leaves of Grass*, but a few significant ones are highlighted below.

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Whitman was in his early to mid-forties at the time of the American Civil War. Whitman went to Virginia to assist with the war effort after his brother, George Whitman, was hurt there early in the conflict. Whitman was a fervent admirer of Abraham Lincoln and the Union army, but he felt that excesses and absolutes should be avoided on all sides of the struggle.

After assisting his brother in Virginia, he relocated to Washington, D.C., and enlisted in the army as a volunteer nurse. After the war, Whitman was able to stay in Washington for ten years, earning a living as a government clerk. He cared for soldiers on both sides of the fight, developing a close friendship with Peter Doyle, who was later identified as one of his lovers after his passing. Whitman's poetry were significantly impacted by the Civil War, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

**Analysis and discussions.** Walt Whitman composed the elegy "O Captain! My Captain!" in 1865 to mark the passing of President Abraham Lincoln. The poem was initially released in *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1865), a compilation of Whitman's poems motivated by the American Civil War's events. The poem is arguably Whitman's most well-known, which is paradoxical considering how conventional the meter, form, and subject are in comparison to much of Whitman's other writing. One of Walt Whitman's most popular and frequently quoted poems, "O Captain! My Captain!" unquestionably conveyed the tone of a nation in mourning, despite some detractors' claims to the contrary.

Abraham Lincoln was a subject that Walt Whitman regularly discussed in *Leaves of Grass*. "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" are two well-known poems that were inspired by Lincoln's assassination and presidency. When Lincoln was killed, Whitman was deeply moved. Later in his life, he composed a lecture series about Lincoln, which he then gave to various audiences between the years of 1879 and 1890.

*Leaves of Grass* is unique because it changed the genre of poetry in America. Through Whitman's political, Transcendentalist, and Romantic engagements in the text, it became one of the United States' most renowned works. Whitman also used free verse, prose rhythm, and symbolism to make *Leaves of Grass* stand out as no work of American poetry had before.

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;  
    Here Captain! dear father!  
    This arm beneath your head!  
    It is some dream that on the deck,  
    You've fallen cold and dead.  
My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

The harrowing loss and trauma that followed one of the most infamous political assassinations in American history are captured in the poem "O Captain! O Captain!" At the same time, it implies that the country will endure and even prosper after the death of its president. Ultimately, the poem suggests that the United States is a political endeavor that can and must transcend the existence of any one individual, even if people are still very essential. This is done through challenging the link between the individual and the larger political community.

The fact that the poem begins with a repeated apostrophe, which readers would recognize as being directed at Abraham Lincoln given the situation, also instantly establishes the president as being in responsible for this significant victory. Lincoln is compared to a captain directing a "ship of state" in the poem's expanded metaphor, which describes how he led the Union through the Civil War. However, contrary to what might immediately appear, the "captain" of the title is less crucial to the country's continued success and togetherness. At first glance, it appears that the "captain" President Lincoln, is exclusively accountable for the ship's safe return once it has "weather'd every rack" that is, made it through every storm and arrived at its destination. But the poem also hints that this is not entirely the case: even in the first stanza, the speaker refers to the voyage as "our fearful trip," implying that the community has survived these trials by banding together and assuming shared responsibility.

The country survives without President Lincoln, but the speaker is unable to fully share in the celebrations because the death of his boss is still excruciating. In closing, the poem seems to be making the case that unity is essential to the survival of the United States, but it also recognizes the important roles that individuals play within this unity.

**Conclusion.** Walt Whitman's achievement as a poet and prophet is truly monumental. He exercised a deep influence on his immediate successors in American letters, and even on modern poets, although he himself was a highly individualistic poet. As a symbolist, his influence was felt in Europe, where he was considered the greatest poet America had yet produced. His high style and elevated expression found echoes in Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, and others. Whitman as a stylist is the culmination of the sublime tradition in America, and even Allen Ginsberg, so different from Whitman in so many respects, follows the Whitman tradition of using invocative language. Whitman, though a man of his age, an essentially nineteenth-century poet, exercised a profound influence on twentieth-century poets and modern poetry in the use of language, in the processes of symbol and image-making, in exercising great freedom in meter and form, and in cultivating the individualistic mode. In many ways Whitman is modern because he is prophetic; he is a poet not only of America but of the whole of mankind. He has achieved the Olympian stature and the rare distinction of a world poet.

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