

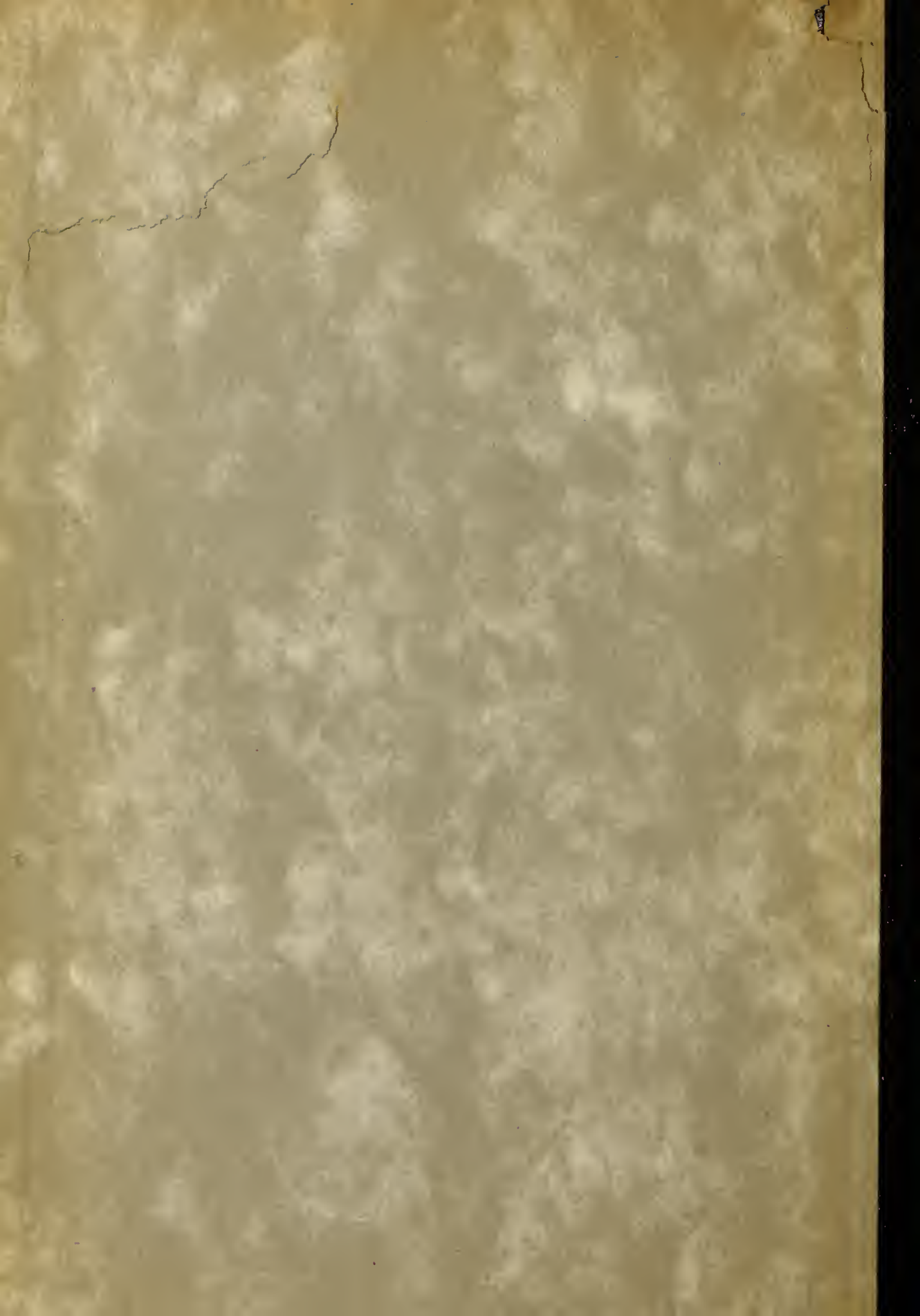
1931

Romanticism in Walt Whitman

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/18223>

Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository

1931 bart
L. Darthen



- 1 -

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS
ROMANTICISM IN WALT WHITMAN

SUBMITTED BY

HELEN LOUISE BARTHEN
"
(B.A., ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, 1930)

In partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1931

upstairs
378.744
B0
A.M. 1931
hart

OUTLINE

Foreword.....VI

Introduction:-

Romanticism: Its historical basis and development.....1

 I Neo-classicism.....1

 A. Emphasis on reason and common-sense

 II Influence of Hobbes' Leviathan.....3

 A. Speculation on the society of primitive man.

 B. Influence on Locke.....4

 1. Theory of social contract

 III Rousseau and his romanticism.....6

 A. Natural rights of man

 B. Social Contract

 C. Conflict with neo-classical ideas

 D. Imaginative elements

 IV Development of Romanticism.....6

 A. Revolt against neo-classicism

 B. Popular notions of freedom

 V Essentials of Romanticism.....7

 A. Naturalism


 B. Individualism

 1. The "escape" element

 2. Freedom

 C. Love of the remote in time or place

 D. Appreciation of the unusual and the beautiful



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/romanticisminwal00bart>

VI	Some essentially romantic ideas.....	9
	Romanticism in Walt Whitman.....	12
I	In his literary-critical philosophy	
A.	Fundamental, romantic doctrines	
1.	Equalitarianism.....	12
<u>a.</u>	Political democracy.....	12
<u>b.</u>	Complete social democracy.....	13
1'	Absolute equality of all regardless of sex, race, creed, occupation and personal achieve- ment.	
2'	All accepted; none excluded	
2.	Individualism or Belief in the Innate.....	16
	Goodness of the Individual	
<u>a.</u>	Place in Equalitarianism.....	16
<u>b.</u>	Supremacy of the natural individual...16	
<u>c.</u>	Value of human companionship.....	17
<u>d.</u>	Sentimentalism.....	19
3.	Back to Nature.....	21
<u>a.</u>	Whatever is natural is right	
1'	Divine essence in that natural human being	
<u>b.</u>	Nature the source of all good, the cure for all evil	
1'	Evil effects of artificiality	
<u>c.</u>	Following the "open road".....	23
<u>d.</u>	Inspiration and peace in nature	

B.	Romanticism in poetic concepts.....	26
1.	Exaltation of Personality.....	26
<u>a.</u>	"Cosmic self-contact".....	26
1'	Expansiveness.....	28
<u>b.</u>	Egoism.....	32
2.	Mysticism.....	35
<u>a.</u>	Attitude towards the mysteries of life.....	35
1'	Affinity with nature	
2'	Nature as a medium of truth	
<u>b.</u>	Use of symbolism to suggest meaning.....	35
<u>c.</u>	Romanticism of mysticism.....	36
<u>d.</u>	Whitman's consciousness of a mystical attitude.....	37
II	In specific ideas.....	
A.	Romantic theory of love.....	39
1.	Unrestraint	
<u>a.</u>	Anti-conventionalism	
<u>b.</u>	Romantic freedom	
2.	Intensity	
3.	Perpetuity	
B.	Wordsworthianism.....	42
1.	Unconscious affinity with Wordsworth	
2.	Whitman exemplified in his own being what Wordsworth held in theory.	

III	In form of expression.....	45
	A. Lack of form	
	1. Unrestraint	
	2. Independence	
	B. Free verse.....	47
	1. Initiated by Whitman	
	2. Later development	
	3. Romantic element	
	Summary and Conclusion.....	49
	Bibliography.....	54

Foreword

Before undertaking this study, Walt Whitman had captivated my interest because I believed I might find in him the most representative American poet. Since then I have discovered that he is not representative at all, but most unique.

There are those who deny that Whitman is a poet. Even the recent critic William Barton says that Leaves of Grass "is a book which some people believe to be poetry, and others classify as very dull prose"¹, but there are very few who question his Americanism. As early as 1856, this was recognized by Thoreau in a letter to Harrison, in which he says: "On the whole, (Leaves of Grass) sounds to me very brave and very American...it is a great, primitive poem ringing through the American camp." Emerson too, the great intellectual leader of his time, recognized this element in Whitman's work for in 1856 he wrote to Carlyle saying that his book was "indisputably American."² Long after, 1921, an American historian of literature, William Cairns pointed out that "in Europe, especially on the continent, it has been the fashion to look on Whitman as the one distinctly American poet, in whom the American idea found its appropriate expression."³

1 Barton, p. 124

2 Perry (Walt Whitman), p. 122

3 Cairns, p. 394

Practically all of Whitman's critics and admirers have noted his Americanism and its influence on the literature of foreign countries as well as his own. Norman Foerster, in his essay on "Factors in American Literary History", maintains that, "In Whitman, the frontier background of Emerson's idealism becomes foreground", and that, "Whitman's years (1819-1892) cover the flowering and fading of the pioneer spirit."¹ Barton too believes that Whitman was interpreting American ideas and the country itself, - first in its material resources, and later in aspects "more nearly spiritual." He is convinced that Whitman "thought of America itself as a song."²

Whitman is not so much an American even by birth, ancestry, education, environment, and experience as he is by reason of his spirit, ideas, point of view, ideal, and message. In fact, it seems that Whitman is the genius of America.

Too many critics have expounded Whitman's distinctly American characteristics and attitudes to necessitate a repetition of them here. Moreover most if not all literary authorities agree that he is a poet and one of distinction and great influence. Therefore, we may take it for granted, and trust it is not too arbitrary to say that, although Whitman is not a typical or representative American poet, he is

1 Foerster, (Re-Interpretation of Literature) p. 29

2 Barton, p. 137

a poet, and he is the personification of an ideal "typical American". At any rate, we are not particularly concerned with this aspect of the poet as we are not primarily interested in the man or his personality, but in his work and in a particular element in his work. However, it is necessary to note his Americanism as it so thoroughly pervades all his creative work and has led critics especially abroad to characterize similar work as distinctly American.

As Dobell says, "Whatever else may be in dispute about Whitman, it is at least certain that he is a good subject to write about."¹ Truly, "It is difficult to say anything new about him", and I agree with Dobell that "it must be confessed that when one begins to study the man and his work, it is almost impossible to avoid falling under the influence of a certain spell which they have about them". However, I am quite sure that this "spell" can, in no way, prejudice me in this rather technical consideration of Romanticism in Walt Whitman.

1 Thomson, p. V

INTRODUCTION

Romanticism:-Its historical basis and development

Neo-classicism is that literary-critical philosophy which prevailed as the most outstanding influence in literature in England during the eighteenth century and in France in the preceding age. It is characterized by insistence on "nature", i.e., human nature in what the neo-classicists held to be its best and most highly civilized form; on imitation of the old Greek and Roman masters of literature and literary criticism, and in strict adherence to their "rules", especially those of Aristotle; on "good sense"; and on decorum by which is meant an elaborate system of rules determining definitely and dogmatically the proper procedure in expression of thought as manifested in plot construction, character portrayal, dramatic probability, and every other element of literary art.

In each of these traits of neo-classicism, the reasonableness of the idea is stressed. Highly civilized man was admired because this type represented the culture and refinement which raised humanity infinitely above the lower forms of life. The thing that made this civilization possible is man's intellect. Therefore it was this faculty which was most highly esteemed by the properly civilized neo-classicists. The old Greek and Roman artists were greatly admired because the clear, cold logic of their literary principles appealed to the common sense thinkers of the age. In Aristotle's Poetics they discerned "rules" definite and decisive which, no doubt,

Aristotle himself with all his dogmatic authoritativeness never intended to be so interpreted.

"Good sense" meant to the neo-classicist restraint and propriety in all things especially social manners and expression. Only the higher things in life such as art, "high society" functions, classical mythology, and such matters were considered worthy of discussion among human beings of the higher order. Moreover, these discussions must never be impassioned or enthusiastic, but always proper, restrained, almost impersonal. The intellectuality of a person determined his social and literary status. In the "best circles" men admired women for their intellectual powers and in some cases real platonic love was an actuality.

The idea of decorum in art was widely held. There were certain things which were always proper and sensible and thus had to be observed at all times. Certain characters always acted in such and such a way if they acted reasonably. Therefore the artist who surely wanted to make his characters reasonable, took care to see that they were depicted in the accepted fashion. Action must be plausible and must emphasize plausibility; the merely possible event did not suffice; it had to be probable as well. Given a definite situation, the probable outcome was always the same. Thus with all the other elements of literary art,--there was for each a certain and definite rule of decorum to be observed and followed.

Naturally enough, this developed into a very formal and elaborate system of rules. Drama especially was restricted and restrained by decorum. The neo-classicists believed it was sensible and reasonable to follow the rules of decorum because they were based on common sense.

From these observations it is obvious that in neo-classicism intellect was supreme and Reason the sole criterion of certitude in all things, - Religion, Political Government, Literature, and so forth. Since reason was believed to be the infallible basis of truth and all truth is a unity, there was no place for individual interpretation of anything. Hence the "private" or "individual sense" was of no value unless it conformed to the "general sense", therefore of course losing its identity.

As in the case of any abstract ideal, absolute conformity to the practice of neo-classicism is inconceivable. The ideal, however, did exist and the thinkers of the age did strive to stifle individualism in an attempt to achieve universality.

Even before neo-classicism reached its height in France, Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher wrote a book, Leviathan (1651), which all unknown to him was to play an important part in changing the whole tendency of human thought away from neo-classicism and into the direction of a totally different literary-critical philosophy. Of course it would be perfectly

inane to assume that this one man and his work are responsible for this great change, for many others helped to create the same influences which gradually brought into being a general and inevitable revolt against neo-classicism. Hobbes is outstanding merely because his work had a definitely known influence.

In Leviathan, Hobbes formulated a theory of the society of primitive man. He maintained that the natural state of man is savage, antagonistic, rebellious, and fiercely independent. Then, strangely enough, he reached a very conservative conclusion in which he justified the existence of a state of society in which a monarchical government is not only a possibility, but a necessity. Perhaps this apparently ill-founded conclusion may be accounted for in a consideration of the fact that this was written at the time of the Restoration and Hobbes did not wish to arouse public opposition.

John Locke, another English philosopher, also essayed a theory of the natural or original state of man. On the most arbitrary hypothesis, he declared that the first state of man was one of goodness and perfection and that man was gloriously free and independent in this state. He possessed certain natural and inalienable rights including those to property and personal freedom. Since history offers no evidence of the existence of such an ideal state, Locke determined that it was pre-historical and thus existed before "civilization". It is

amazing to consider that the whole romantic theory of democracy which grew out of this idea is based on an intellectual fallacy, for truly it is fallacious to maintain without reason or any proof that man has inalienable rights. Locke accounted for the present state of society by presuming that, in the course of the development of the human race, men banded together forming "society". This grew out of man's desire for protection. The need for protection may have been brought about by the decline of man's physical prowess, the increasing harshness of nature, or discord among men who came in contact with each other. In banding together men agreed not to attack each other, and, in united form, to defend themselves against mutual enemies. In his voluntary assumption of such a state of living, however, man consented to give his rights also into the care of this impersonal society. This natural agreement comprises the "social contract". In time society or the state of living in communion with other men became more complex so that the governing class became a separate element in society. In the possibility of the governing powers misusing the rights which individual man has entrusted to them through this society, man possesses the right and power to take his rights away from the government since they are his own inalienable rights which he can entrust to another but which cannot in any other way ever be separated from him. Thus the Social Contract is truly a con-

tract since it is binding on both parties and may be voided if either neglects to fulfill his part of the agreement.

The French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, followed up this idea and developed it to its highest form in his Natural Rights of Man theory and in the theories of his Social Contract. He is popularly credited with the original idea of the natural rights theory, but most scholars today point out his dependence on Locke. To Rousseau, however, we are indebted for such relatively clear-cut ideas as those incorporated in the doctrines of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. His "all men are free and equal" became a universal belief and the philosophical basis of the doctrine of democracy which brought into being the modern republics of France, the United States, the South and Central American countries, and so on.

The reason of neo-classicism refutes the idea that all men are free and equal. From a dispassionate and logical point of view all men have different abilities and opportunities and hence are not equal. Moreover, all men are bound, and, to a certain extent, enslaved by such things as custom, propriety, convention, religion, government, and what moderns would term psychological inhibitions, - so they are certainly not free. The idea that all men are free and equal cannot be considered absolutely reasonable or even comparatively reasonable. Hence it can be seen at once that the whole idea is not

based on reason at all but on imagination. Here we have the key-note to the whole new movement of thought which succeeded neo-classicism and became known as Romanticism. It is based on imagination and emphasis on imagination (which includes stress on feeling, instinct, and emotion) to the exclusion, or at least the subjection of pure reason.

The "nature" and naturalism which romanticism insisted upon was an original or primitive state of man and nature proper. However, this was not actual primitive nature that history and experience reveals to man; but it was an idea of nature conceived through the unreality of imagination.

The above type of Romanticism in literature has been termed simply the Romantic Movement. Its elemental determinant is individualism. Thus the "strange, unexpected, intense, superlative, extreme, unique, and such" in the thought, expression, and even personal actions of the romantic writers is expected and always found in some form or other. This is due to an attempt on the part of everyone of the romanticists to prove his independence and originality.

Individualism developed in all ways, but the "escape" element is common to all. This term "escape" is necessarily vague. It is interpreted differently by every romanticist.

Wordsworth attempted to escape from civilized city-life to the calm and inspiration of primitive nature which he found in rural society and country landscapes, but not in "wild"

nature. Byron, on the other hand, found his escape in renunciation of social conventions and in intense love of wild nature and elemental passion. Emerson sought escape especially from the restrictions of formal philosophy and orthodox religion. Southey and Coleridge among other things rejected organized government and even planned an independent form of government in the Susquehanna project. Scott fled from modern civilization to an idealized medievalism. Coleridge in his poetry dwelt on distant climes and remote ages. His Kubla Khan is a masterpiece of imagination the very charm of which consists in the vagueness of its setting and its indefinite outcome. Thoreau in his retreat to Walden achieved to a certain extent his escape from a government which he had defied and a society which he disdained. And thus with all the romanticists. Although each differed widely and curiously in his individual tenets, they all upheld an elastic creed expressed in the cry of "Back to nature! Back to simple, elemental feeling! Back to the "real" history of our forefathers!" It must be remembered, however, that this "nature" was unreal; this "simple, elemental feeling" was abstract, undetermined; and the "history" they imagined never occurred. The very impossibility of actuality in every romantic idea is its distinguishing characteristic. It is in Romanticism's revolt against the narrowing certainty, simplicity, and restraint of neo-classicism that its own uncertainty, vagueness, remoteness, and complexity is determined.

Another main characteristic of Romanticism is its love of the wonderful in all things. The unreality, indefiniteness, incompleteness which begets wonder, fostered the love of mystery, of the supernatural, of aspiration to "higher" things (considered higher because unknown). Expression of this passion for the wonderful necessitated individual originality and the utmost freedom of thought, fancy, and expression. The very "darkness" or obscurity of medievalism was its charm for the romanticist. His worship of beauty was founded on the mystery of it which fills the human soul with awe and wonder as well as admiration.

The Romanticist opposes reality absolutely and offers in its stead an imaginary state of unreality such as never existed and never could exist. If the existence or origin of a thing is unaccountable and not dependent on reason, that thing is potentially a romantic subject. Thus each of the following ideas are romantic;-

1. Equalitarianism or the belief in the romantic theory that all men are free and equal.
2. The belief in the innate and infallible goodness of the individual and all his feelings, thoughts, and actions. Often the expression of his belief degenerates into the sentimental and melodramatic.
3. "Back to nature" as the sole source of all good and the ultimate cure for all evil.

4. Anti-conventionalism which is romantic because it lacks the "sensible" basis of formal sanction which depends on authority of some sort, e.g., that of church, government, or society.
5. Stress on the importance of the individual and the supremacy of the ego. Independence, freedom (expansiveness) and originality of the individual emphasized.
6. Consciousness of unreality often brought out in the expression of mystical ideas.
7. The exaltation of the spontaneity of the child or the savage which is preferred to the cold intellectuality of the civilized adult because in the former the motives of action and the sources of thought are absolutely and definitely unaccountable.
8. Elemental feeling as far as it is undetermined and undeterminable, as the basis for all thought and action.
9. Emotions when considered in their idealized state of impossible intensity and unattainable perfection.

Throughout the whole philosophy of Romanticism, it is remarkable to note that what is unknown or uncertain is considered superior to positivism in any form. Thus imagination is superior to reason; feeling is superior to thought; legend superior to pure history; religion to philosophy and so forth.

In considering the very nature of Romanticism, it is obvious that generalization in definition or absolute definition is impossible. All critics recognize this. Hence, they do not attempt definition at all in the ordinary sense. The only possible study of Romanticism and its prevalence in any work lies in a search for its spirit and a thoughtful determination of the conformity of manifestations of this spirit with the generally accepted ideas of Romanticism. This shall be attempted in studying Walt Whitman and in determining as far as possible his romantic tendencies.

ROMANTICISM IN WALT WHITMAN

FUNDAMENTAL ROMANTIC DOCTRINES:--

1. Equalitarianism

Walt Whitman's whole philosophy is based on a romanticism similar to that of such men as Rousseau. Although he may have been totally ignorant of their explicit ideas as set forth in their writings, he was at one with them in the ideas themselves and perfectly ^Tatune ^Awith the whole spirit of Romanticism which in his age pervaded the very atmosphere of England and America. Throughout the modern world of the last three centuries, many men have professed a belief in the romantic theory of equalitarianism briefly summed up in the creed, -- all men are free and equal; but few, very few men of importance and influence have so thoroughly endorsed and embraced the theory in its entirety as the poet Walt Whitman. The leaders of the French and American revolutions believed in the right of the individual to personal freedom and in the right of the "people" of a nation to political independence. The founders of the Republic of the United States upheld the theory of the political equality of individuals and of individual states. In this practical application of the theory of political democracy the popular idea of total democracy itself is thoroughly satisfied. Most people find their democratic ideals perfected, completed, attained and applied in the every-day

life of a modern republican. To the average man the ideals of equalitarianism are realized to complete satisfaction in the conviction that all men are equal before the law; that each man is free to choose his own career, to live wherever he pleases, to seek and obtain the education he desires, to ply his trade in free competition with other men, and to embrace and follow whatever religious creed he chooses. In other words, complete political, economic, industrial, educational, and religious freedom and equality (as far as the corresponding rights of other individuals are not violated) satisfy the equalitarianism upheld by the most liberal, even radical romanticists up to Whitman's time.

Whitman's consideration of democracy is, in his own words, "sentimental". In general it follows the regular conception of democracy as formulated by the political philosophers such as Rousseau. However, he goes much further than these romanticists in his interpretation of democracy. Throughout his whole Democratic Vistas¹ he stresses freedom, equality, and individualism in all things: "We shall....find the original idea of the singleness of man, individualism, asserting itself, and cropping forth even from the opposite ideas.....Something a man is, standing apart from all else, divine in his own right, and a woman in hers, sole and untouchable by any canons of authority..."

1 Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 815-818

...This idea of perfect individualism...deepest tinges and gives character to the idea of the aggregate (because) man, properly train'd in sanest, highest freedom may and must become a law." It is this doctrine that had led the French critic Bazalgette¹ to ^{Maintain} claim that, "Whitman is the greatest romantic, because he wrote a new Social Contract." In his ideal democracy all men must be free and equal in all things. Complete moral freedom and social equality are as necessary as political and economic independence to satisfy his interpretation of equalitarianism. Woman is equal to man; she is entitled to as much freedom, -- political, moral, and social as man. The educated person is equal to the ignorant laborer; he is of the same value (no more, no less) to society. The child is equal to the adult; the savage is equal to the most highly civilized, most exquisitely cultured man. The wife is equal to the mistress, -- she is no better, no worse; the mother is no better than the prostitute. Almost every word the poet utters illustrates this firmly established conviction in utter equality. To him the runaway negro slave is as dear as a bosom friend; the general is no better than the common soldier; the President of no more fundamental importance than the ordinary citizen. At times it is difficult to understand how a sane man can honestly believe all this. There is no reason to hold that Whitman was not sane, and it is cer-

1 Bazalgette, Preface p. IX

tainly apparent that he is sincere. The only approach to an understanding of his doctrines is to be found in an acceptance of his deep and sincere belief in complete equalitarianism. He accepted all people; he excluded none. "Not till the sun excludes you--do I exclude you¹". Absolute equality of sexes, races, intellects, occupations, and accomplishments; utmost freedom of thought, action, and expression are the bases of his philosophy and consequently of his creative work.

I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign
of deomcracy

By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot
have their counterpart of on the same terms.²

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. II, p. 161

2 " " " " " Vol. I, p. 62

2. Belief in the innate goodness of the individual.

Whitman's equalitarianism is, to a great extent, based on his firm belief in the innate and infallible goodness of the individual. He believed that the most normal, and hence, in his opinion, the most nearly perfect individuals were to be found among the common people. To him each of these unsullied persons is innately and inevitable good. This perfection is manifested in,¹ "Their manners, speech, dress, freindships....the freshness and candor of their physiognomy...the picturesque looseness of their carriage...their deathless attachment to freedom...their aversion to anything indecorous or soft or mean.....the practical acknowledgment of the citizens of one state by the citizens of all other states....the fierceness of their roused resentment....their curiosity and their susceptibility of a slight....the air they have of persons who never knew how it felt to stand in the presence of superiors....the fluency of their speech.... their delight in music, the sure symptom of manly tenderness and native elegance of soul...their good temper and openhandedness." Whitman was convinced that man is originally and primarily good. Hence the individual human being composed of body, mind, and soul, -- all equally important, is the most beautiful creature in the universe. In fact, he is perfect and hence worthy of complete admiration and love. Whit-

1 Whitman's Preface to Leaves of Grass quoted in Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 774

man was sincere in his belief, that this is actually true. Song of the Open Road is the poem in which Whitman expresses best the exultation he derives from the conviction that the individual is innately good and essentially happy. In verse four he says,¹

I think whatever I shall meet on the road I shall
like, and whoever beholds me shall like me,
I think whoever I see must be happy.

In direct consequence of his complete conviction that man is essentially good, he held that human companionship and intimate friendship are man's highest privileges and greatest possessions. Practically the whole group of poems entitled Calamus is concerned with the expression of the poet's conception and appreciation of friendship which includes the "platonic love" of man for woman as well as the love of man for man. He claims as the main part of The Base of All Metaphysics:²

The dear love of man for his comrade;
the attraction of friend to friend

To his romantic mind the establishment of a spirit of comradeship towards all is truly the substantial basis for a perfect life. Therefore the chief work in his own life is an attempt to "establish the institution of the dear love of comrades." In his love for mankind, Whitman finds complete happiness:³

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass Vol. I p. 180
2 " " " " " I p. 147
3 " " " " " I p. 117

I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is
enough

To stop in company with the rest at evening is
enough

.....

There is something in staying close to men and
women that pleases the soul well.

A final summation of what friendship means to Whitman and the supreme confidence he has in the divine essence and unlimited power of his own, the poet's universal love is best expressed in his own words:¹ "The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet...His love above all love has leisure and expanse...he leaves room ahead of himself. He is no irresolute or suspicious lover...he is sure...he scorns intervals. His experience and the showers and thrills are not for nothing. Nothing can jar him...suffering and darkness cannot...fear and death cannot. To him complaint and jealousy and envy are corpses buried and rotten in the earth...he saw them buried. The sea is not surer of the shore or the shore of the sea than he is of the fruition of his love."

Since Whitman believed that all individuals are essentially, completely and equally good, he embraced everyone as a comrade. Everyone was his friend, -- the soldier, the

1 Whitman's Preface to Leaves of Grass as quoted in Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 777

sailor; the ferryman; the bus driver; the doctor, the nurse; the ally, the "enemy"; the boy, the man; the child, the mother; the farmer, the laborer; the beggar, the thief; the girl, the woman; the "sinner", the "saint"; -- everyone. Friendship was to him the dearest thing on earth. He had an insatiable desire to make new friends. He siezed every opportunity of striking up an acquaintance and then eagerly sought the development of that acquaintance into a more intimate relationship. To Whitman friendship was not an abstract thing but something vital, real, actual, although of course, in a strict sense, intangible. He wanted to be near his friends, to talk to them, even to caress them. This intense feeling of love for comrades, especially since everyone and anyone must be considered a comrade, appears to the average normal man as excessively sentimental. The whole idea of the innate goodness of the individual is developed to such an abnormal degree as to appear in itself an excessively sentimental theory. For example, consider Whitman's attitude toward those persons who, under no ordinary circumstances, could be considered "good", -- for example the "profligate" of The Child and the Profligate¹. He defends these persons by maintaining that their true personalities are submerged for the present in a maladjustment to life, and when the proper circumstances are provided to lift these persons out of

1 Whitman Complete Prose, p. 359-365.

their unfortunate ways of living, their natural goodness will be revealed. No one is really wicked, no one really desires evil to befall his fellow-man. This attitude is not only optimistic, it is down-right sentimental. However, when this strange emotion of excessive charity is traced to its source, i.e., the conviction that every person is really good and worthy of the greatest love and esteem, the idea does not seem so irrational. Of course, it is not absolutely reasonable either; but then it is a romantic idea not founded on reason at all but on feeling. Whitman simply felt that all men are good. He could not prove it, but he felt certain that it is true. He is more than a casual optimist who believes every man has a "good side"; he believed that every man is thoroughly good.

3. Back to nature.

The Romanticists held that whatever is natural is right. Therefore nature was of paramount importance and interest to them. They interpreted nature in the old Greek sense of original, unsullied, unaffected state of being. "Nature" in the more limited significance of uncultivated landscape also played an important role in the conception, interpretation and appreciation of this theory.

Whitman in his complete sanction of this doctrine is enrolled in the school of romanticism and both his poetic concept and his poetry itself are stamped as distinctly romantic at least in this important element.

It is quite evident from his work that he does believe whatever is natural is right and beautiful too and that nature itself is the most sublime element in the universe. In his Preface to Leaves of Grass¹ he says, "The whole theory of the special and supernatural, and all that was twined with it or eduved out of it, departs as in a dream...It is not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women."

Whitman believed that all the unhappiness in the world, all the frustration, despair, sickness, and relative "evil" was due to man's alienation from nature. Artificial

1 quoted in Thomson, p. 26

learning, (formal education); artificial living in the close quarters of civilized cities, in accordance with confining conventions; and an artificial sense of values, which emphasized material prosperity, and useful accomplishment, were to him direct sources of all human misery. Whitman believed himself to be the disciple predestined to educate the world to the idea of the indefectibility of nature. In one of his self-criticisms he says¹ "You have come in a good time Walt Whitman! In opinions, in manners, in costumes, in books, in the aims and occupancy of life, in associates, in poems,.... conformity to all unnatural and tainted customs passes without remark while perfect naturalness, health, faith, self-reliance, and all primal expressions of the manliest love and friendship subject one to the stare and controversy of the world."

Whitman never tired of pointing out the weaknesses and general ineffectualness of formal education. To him direct contact with nature is the only means of arriving at a true knowledge of the universe. He says,²

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns
before me,

When I was shown the charts and diagrams to add,
divide and measure them,

1 quoted in Perry, p. 112

2 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. II, p. 32

When I sitting heard the astronomer where he
lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by my-
self,

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to
time,

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

To return to an original state of goodness and happiness,
man must abandon all artificiality and go "back to nature."
He must abandon civilization and follow the "open road",
for,¹

-----here is happiness,
I think it pervades the open air, waiting at all times
and²

Now I see the secret of the making of the best
persons,

It is to grow in the open air and to sleep and eat
with the earth.

In the simple, direct, and earnest study of nature, all
truth will be revealed. Learn the functions of nature from
an observation of them. Live a full, real, natural life in
obeying the impulses of nature. Instincts are infallibly good;

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol.I p. 183

2 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 181

they inevitably lead to health and happiness. Therefore it is sensible to follow them. Although Whitman did not object to cities or to urban life, it is remarkable to note that the things he admired in them were the natural things, the human things. He loved the great, moving masses of people with which the cities teemed. He loved the throbbing, vital hordes of men and women who jostled against him in the busy streets, who ferried with him across the crowded rivers, who rode with him atop the avenue busses. Still, for the keenest enjoyment of life, Whitman turned to the lovely uncultivated nature of the countryside, especially that of the gentle, wooded hills; great, green pastures; and glorious, white sea-shores of his native Long Island. It is impossible to decide which held the greater charm for the sensitive poet, -- the warm, teeming earth with its profusion of ever-fresh, ever-blooming flowers, its generous mantle of common, yet beloved "leaves" of grass; or the great mysterious sea with its mighty power and soft, insinuating magic. To Whitman it is not impossible for man to live in intimate communion with nature. Indeed it is his sole salvation, his only hope for real happiness and full enjoyment of living. Although he considered nature independent of and superior to all purely human institutions, he felt that, if the reverse of such a relation were possible, he would still feel "no conflict between outside authority and free nature." The irrationality of such

an attitude renders it romantic. The poet has no reason to consider it probably true or even remotely possible; he believes in it simply because he would like it to be so. Personal feeling is the sole basis of his conviction.

Romanticism in Poetic Concepts

1. Exaltation of personality

a Cosmic self-contact

Whitman conceived a very unusual idea of the cosmos and the individual's place in it. He considered the individual soul the matrix of all activity and sensibility in the universe. Moreover he believed that the poet's soul or personality constitutes the personification of the most highly developed form of a single, independent, human being. As Whitman considered himself the poet, par excellence, he felt that the emanations of his personality were infinitely extensive and extremely influential. He felt an intimate self-contact with the whole universe. Consciousness of this power brought into being a feeling of responsibility for guiding his fellow-man to a more direct contact with the cosmos (or harmonious universe) as manifested in the phenomenon of life. He satisfied the demands of this innate feeling of responsibility by creative writing. Both his prose and his poetry represent a man speaking to each individual in the universe exhorting every one to follow him through the safe, unerring course of nature to the ultimate source of truth and light, - the perfect human personality. This "personality" is similar in some respects to Emerson's "over-soul". It is dissimilar in its essential human element. ¹

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 21

I am the credulous man of qualities, ages, races

I advance from the people in their own spirit

Whitman had another peculiar idea, - his concept of America. To him, America seemed to have a "personality" not very unlike that of an individual human soul, and which he, in some mystic manner, identified with his own personality. He felt that the soul of America was speaking through him. He represented, he thought, the essential democracy of America's being. The love of freedom, the wild spirit of the boundless plains was personified in him. To him was given the power of expressing the nation's personality.

(For You O Democracy¹:)

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,

I will make the most splended race the sun ever yet shone
upon,

I will make divine magnetic lands

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the
rivers of America and along the shores of the great
lakes, and all over the prairies

I will make inseparable cities with their arms about
each other's necks.

(Me Imperturbe²:)

Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 142

2 " " " " Vol. I, p. 12

Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in the midst of
irrational things,

Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,
Finding my occupation, poverty, notoriety, foibles,
crimes, less important than I thought

Me toward the Mexican sea or in the Manahatta or the
Tennessee, or far north or inland,

A river man or a man of the woods or of any farm-life of
these States or of the coast, or of the lakes or Kanada,
Me wherever my life is lived.

Whitman considered the expression of his nation's personality his highest power, his greatest duty. He was filled with a spirit of expansiveness which enabled him to embrace the whole land with all its physical properties and all its teeming wealth of human souls. In his Preface to Leaves of Grass, Whitman expresses this idea clearly:¹ "The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions...he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit...he incarnates its geography and natural life --- When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south. He spans between

1 Whitman's Preface to Leaves of Grass, quoted in Quinn,

them also from east to west and reflects what is between them --- To him the hereditary countenance descends both mother's and father's. To him enter the essences of the real things and past and present events -- of the enormous diversity of temperature and agriculture and mines ---- the haughty defiance of '76, and the war and peace and formation of the constitution -- the union always surrounded by blatherers and always calm and impregnable ----- the noble character of the young mechanics and of all free American workmen and workwomen --- the character of the northeast and of the northwest and southwest -- slavery and the tremulous spreading of hands to protect it, and the stern opposition to it...Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated and that finish the verse. No¹ so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative and has vista."

Whitman was the mouthpiece of the struggling, inarticulate hordes of people; the mirror of a million souls; the spirit of the masses. Thus he fused his own personality, the ideal poet's personality, and America's personality into one, -- Walt Whitman, the poet of America.

Whitman's most unique manifestation of romanticism is incorporated in this peculiar interpretation of Personality. It is true that every romanticist puts himself into his work and seeks to express not a disembodied idea of beauty, but

his own personality; but it is apparent that Whitman's presentation of personality is all this and much more besides. His fusion of three distinct personalities, -- his own, the ideal poets, and America's, into a single Personality is an exceedingly mystic and romantic idea, and, indeed, is rather difficult to comprehend. Many uninitiated readers, because of this confusing difficulty fail to understand the poet's use of the personal pronoun, "I", and, interpreting it in the ordinary sense of the individual ego, miss the import of his whole concept. The term "I" as he usually uses it signifies this single, unified, indivisible Personality which is a fusion of all these other "personalities". Thus in his opening Inscription, entitled One's - Self I Sing, Whitman does not mean simply or exclusively his own self, or any other man's self but this extensive Personality.

The critic¹ who holds that Whitman "made of himself a symbol of what he believed to be the longing of his land and time for a wider and freer life," is inaccurate. The poet did not consider himself a symbol of the longing of his land, -- he was the longing and he was the land itself. It is not a case of symbolization but of identification. Only to Whitman is it possible to identify ideas with things and persons with objects. Thus only to him is such an identification of personalities possible and conceivable. Philosophers

1 Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 773.

of most schools of thought would scoff at the irreconcilable entities in this supposition but perhaps a romantic Transcendentalist could accept it. However, Whitman was no philosopher, -- he was a poet to whom nothing was impossible.

b Egoism

Aside from this idea of cosmic personality, or, rather, as a part of it, is Whitman's conceptualization of his own exalted personality which he "expressed" frequently and eloquently throughout his poems in terms of glowing praise of his own great power and glory.

The opening verse of Song of Myself¹

I celebrate myself, and sing myself

And what I assume you shall assume

is certainly in praise of his own self, even though he adds,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to
you.

Later on in this same Song of Myself, he describes himself as,

..... the caresser of life
wherever moving, backward as well as forward
sluing,

To riches aside and and junior bending, not a per-
son or object missing,

Absorbing all to myself

The emphasis on the individual ego is marked throughout all of Leaves of Grass. Whitman himself is thoroughly conscious of this, for he says:²

I will effuse egotism and show it underlying all,
and I will be the bard of personality.

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 33

2 " " " " Vol. I, p. 25

It is this egoism which immediately captures the attention of the reader of Leaves of Grass. Whitman really believed that he was not only the greatest poet that ever existed, but also the personification of the ideal poet, who represents, it must be remembered, the highest type of man (in Whitman's category).¹

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the
Soul

The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of
hell are with me.

The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter
I translate into a new tongue.

He gloried in his consciousness of perfection. He considered himself utterly self-sufficient, blissfully independent, and gloriously free. He believed he could do no wrong; he was incapable of making a mistake; it was impossible for him to be in error.²

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-
fortune,

Henceforth I wimper no more, postpone no more, need
nothing,

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous
criticisms,

^h
Stong and content I travel the open road.

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass , Vol. I p. 58

2 " " " " Vol. I p. 177

The powerful giant, the intellectual genius, the man of vast imaginative resources, the great spirit rose triumphantly above the trifling annoyances of life, above the petty bickerings of little men, above the misunderstandings of hypocrites, and yet, he "kept the common touch". In his magnanimity he forgave all injuries, he sympathized with the weakest, dullest mortals, he embraced all men, -- all kinds of men. Never for a moment, did he lose sight of his superior power of infinite expansion. Nor did he ever cease to revel in the glory of this conviction. In the happy world of his imagination he was a great man, the greatest man, the prophet of the New World.

2. Mysticism

Although Whitman is not a mystic in the strict philosophical sense because he is not one who believes in the doctrine that "the ultimate nature of reality may be known by means of immediate insight differing from all ordinary sensation or ratiocination", he certainly approaches the mystic in his attitude towards the solution or interpretation of the eternal mysteries of life. He is conscious of a sense of unreality in many human experiences. His own indefinable, intangible sense of affinity with nature as manifested in all the wonderful forms of natural phenomena (-the ever-fascinating sea; the vast, mysterious firmament; the teeming earth with its wealth of plant and animal life from the tiniest spire of grass to the mighty, rolling plains, from the solitary thrush warbling a human dirge to the lonely man mourning alone by the sea or a stricken nation grieving as one in the loss of a hero-leader,) is mystic in the extreme. Throughout all his thought there is an undercurrent of feeling, as intangible as it is positive, that convinces him that he is approaching reality to an extent hitherto unknown and that this is made possible by means of an immediate insight peculiar to him which cannot be expressed by the ordinary means of pure ratiocination or emotional expression. Therefore, he employs symbolism as a means of suggesting his meaning which, however, he does not expect to be understood fully.

Thus in When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, he uses the symbolism of the singing thrush, the blooming lilac-bush, and the fallen western star to suggest his interpretation of death and grief. The simple fact of Abraham Lincoln's death is the occasion for the poem, but it is not the essential basis of the whole poetic theme, for that is incorporated in a consideration of the great mystery of death and its inevitable associate, grief, -- dull, paralysing grief, unreasonable, uncontrollable. Thus also in the poem, Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking. Under the symbolism of the mated birds, singing their song of love, and then the single bird singing his song of grief, the poet suggests his interpretation of the mysterious tragedy of life which bestows on man the gift of love only to make the grief of inevitable separation the keener.

Mysticism is essentially romantic, by reason of its emphasis on pure feeling as the basis of knowledge and its concern with unreality itself. Mysticism thoroughly pervades Leaves of Grass both as an important element of the whole idea involved and as the proper medium of the poet's expression of his thought and spirit.

¹"That Whitman must be considered as a mystic becomes immediately apparent when one examines the writings of (pure) mystics... (who have) the same sense of special knowledge. In the mystic's mood, in his vision, he sees -- he knows not

1 Carpenter, p. 50

how -- the greater scheme of creation and his own relation to it; but this knowledge is ineffable; it cannot be uttered; it may only be adumbrated or symbolized -- It is, moreover, a knowledge that brings peace and joy. The light breaks in upon the mystic and pervades him. The whole universe opens before him. He sees all and is all. There is no beginning and no end to what he sees; cause and effect are identical; the spirit of the universe is one, and that spirit is love --- This state of feeling is 'cosmic consciousness'; and 'out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seems to dissolve and fade away into boundless being' ----(It is) not a confused state but (to the mystic) the surest and clearest."

In reviewing this analysis of mysticism, a feeling of familiarity is aroused by the similarity between the whole spirit of mysticism and the spirit pervading Leaves of Grass.

Whitman is keenly aware of his "special knowledge", and expresses a mystic attitude in his dedicatory inscription,--

Come said my soul

Such verses for my body let us write

In fact all of Whitman's Inscriptions are merely acknowledgments of his exclusive and superior power of ascertaining the ultimate reality of things by means of a special insight.

For example,¹

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully
stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then
averts his face,

Leaving it to you to prove and define it.

As has been suggested, this special knowledge may only be symbolized, and Whitman's means of adumbration are most charming, beautiful, and effective. He usually selects Nature, - the great matrix of mysticism as a medium of symbolization.

In Eidolons¹ truly, "the whole universe opens before him. He sees all and is all. There is no beginning or end to what he sees; cause and effect are identical, the spirit of the universe is one" - For,

Ever the dim beginning

Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle

Ever the summit and the verge at last, (to surely
start again,)

Eidolons! eidolons!

Whitman, in his Preface² declares definitely,--"The poets of the Cosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagens to first principles."

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass Vol. I, p. 5

2 as quoted in Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 780

Romantic theory of love

Anti-conventionalism

Another element of romanticism revealed in Whitman's poetic concept is found in his thoroughly romantic theory of love. It seems certain that Cairns is mistaken when he declares that¹, "Among Whitman's many deficiencies are the lack of any romantic element ... and (disregard) of romantic love." In his wide concept of love, Whitman held the Platonic notion which includes man's affection for man as well as for woman. As Bailey says,² "Love in Whitman is as love in Plato, -- an energy exalting and ultimately transcending the body, a vital force to be used alike by body and spirit not a dangerous enemy to be conquered and trampled down." Love in this more general sense of real affection for mankind and an eager desire for friendship has been discussed before. Here love in the more limited consideration of sexual love is to be observed in Leaves of Grass. Love, to Whitman, is the greatest human passion. Unlimited intensity and unbounded freedom are essential. While he certainly stresses the physical side of love, he just as certainly did not ignore the purely emotional and spiritual elements. His words³,
"I love you, O you entirely possess me,"
signify the surrender of the whole man,-- mind, body, and soul.

1 Cairns, p. 393

2 Bailey, p. 151

3 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 112

He believed that lovers must be mutually devoted and both indifferent to public censure or sanction. A disregard for social conventions when they interfere with the "higher" demands of love is also essential. He says plainly,¹

O that you and I escape from the rest and go utterly off free and lawless

O you and I! what is it to us what the rest do or think?

What is all else to us?

Real love, the poet believed, was everlasting, -- as great in extent as in intensity. He insists on sincerity and perpetuity of emotion,²

The oath of the inseparableness of two together, of the woman that loves me,
And whom I love more than my life, that oath swearing,
(O I willingly stake all for you
O let me be lost if it must be so!)

The chief characteristics of Whitman's theory of love are intensity of passion and completeness of surrender, -- both extremely romantic. The free rein given to the natural instincts and impulses in his whole theory of love is also decidedly romantic. The intensity of the emotion idealized is impossible in actual life and unreasonable even in theory.

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. I, p. 112

2 " " " " Vol. I, p. 112

The definite anti-conventionalism throughout the whole idea is marked.



Wordsworthianism

Whitman shows a positive, although, no doubt, unconscious affinity with the great romanticist, -- the English poet, William Wordsworth. It has been a common and frequent practice among critics to bring out the romantic traits of a poet by comparing him with Wordsworth. An elaborate comparison is not intended here. Only a few points of similarity are selected not to identify the two men as in reality one romantic poet speaking through two, but simply to show a definite and important affinity.

What Wordsworth held in theory, Whitman exemplified in his own being. The basis of Wordsworth's philosophy is his belief in immortality and in pre-existence. As a direct result of this idea, his belief in the superiority of the child is evolved. In this theory, the child's soul is nearer the supernatural world because it has so recently emerged from the state of pre-existence. Hence he can sense true reality clearer than the adult whose perceptions have been dulled by the long "sleep" of life. Whitman's mind is like that of the child because he never really emerges from the imaginative realms of the world of ideas. Dobell¹ in quoting P. W. Roose of "The Gentleman's Magazine" brings out the "Child-Poet" in Whitman: -- "If the lips of some newborn babe could be opened, its utterances might, we fancy,

1 Thomson, P. XXVIII

MEMORANDUM

TO : [Illegible]

FROM : [Illegible]

SUBJECT : [Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

[Illegible]

be something of the nature of what is continually to be met with in Walt Whitman. The child, as he grows older, forgets his early revelations, and though the splendor of them may still, in fitful glimpses, attend him on his way, it is sure to fade back into the shadows as the morning; so that, by the time he has acquired the power of speech, their significance is gone. What constitutes the peculiarity of Walt Whitman is that he kept the vision of his infancy with him through life; it never melted into the light of common day. Is it not a fact that to those who are in any way attracted to him, his image has a charm akin to that of childhood?" Whitman lives the life of contemplation which Wordsworth idealized.

Whitman and Wordsworth are similar in their interpretation of nature's function in affiliating man to the ultimate realities of the living universe. To both poets nature was the medium of truth through which man could grasp the light of understanding.

In their insistence upon the independence and superiority of the individual human soul, Whitman and Wordsworth show a remarkable likeness. They are one in the belief that the individual is primarily good and ultimately self-sufficient. Thus, if unmolested, he is capable of solving all his own problems, and, as far as possible, of interpreting correctly every phenomenon of life around him.

The two poets also resemble each other in their acute consciousness of the whole creative movement of life and its lyrical, subjective, and spiritual elements.

Wordsworth and Whitman show a resemblance even in their style which at first seems so dissimilar.

Wordsworth at the beginning of his literary career was a daring innovator in his insistence upon the introduction into English poetry of the prosaic-poetic style which he defeuded in his critical Preface to Lyrical Ballads and which he illustrated in his own poetry. Wordsworth's influence was widespread. Practically all the romantic poets of his own period and later felt this influence and revealed their reaction to it in their works. To Wordsworth may be given the credit for abolishing the older doctrine of a distinct vocabulary and style for poetry.

Whitman carried out Wordsworth's stylistic theory to its extreme in his substitution of colloquial expressions and common terms for "poetic" diction.

Romanticism in Form of Expression

This foregoing consideration leads us directly to a brief study of Whitman's form of expression.

The Gothic lack of form in his poetry is the element which first impresses the reader of Leaves of Grass. His verse is unrestricted by any standard meter, or by rime although he frequently uses both. In Whitman's time this was an innovation the novelty of which attracted some admirers and a great many more adverse critics not a few of whom refused to recognize such verse as poetry. Perhaps for this very reason Whitman's work has had greater influence and more followers than that of any other American poet. His influence is by no means limited to its effect on the literature of his native country, for it was first felt in France and England, and, indeed, might never have reached America at all except for the recognition of enthusiastic foreign critics.

Whitman was an innovator in both poetic concept and form of expression. The influence of romanticism was felt in America after it had reached its height in England and its highest form of development (characterized by the work of the great romantic poets, -- Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and so forth,) flourished here before its first stage of development, viz., a revolt against classicism. In Whitman both these phases of the Romantic

Movement may be observed. He was a more or less unconscious anti-classicist. There is no evidence to show that he was either a thorough student of classicism or even a casual reader of classical works. Still, he had an innate aversion to that type of literature so dearly prized and so highly developed by the neo-classical artists. In his poem, "Thou Mother with thy Equal Brood", he says,

The conceits of the poets of other lands I'd bring
thee not,

Nor the compliments that have served their term so
long,

Nor rime, nor the classics, nor perfume of foreign
court or indoor library.

Burroughs' description of Whitman's poems as "formless lessons in freedom, power, grace, and spiritual suggestion", is quite satisfactory. He stresses the natural and spontaneous rhythm as one of the chief attractions of the poet's verse. Like many others, he believes that Whitman's great achievement is due to a natural adherence to the high principles of art,- proportion, continence, restraint, naturalness, causality, and what Matthew Arnold might term "high seriousness".

The rise and development of free verse depend to a great extent upon the original impetus of Whitman's form.

Modern free verse finds its chief source in Walt Whitman's work. Many of the earlier poets, especially in England, approached what is now known as free verse in their elimination of either meter or rime but never both. For example, Dryden's "Alexander's Feast", Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", Arnold's "Dover Beach", and Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" are, Mr. Hubbell asserts, to be distinguished from free verse only by the use of rime.¹ Rime itself was rare in old English poetry and was practically unknown until after the Norman Conquest.

It was Whitman, however, who fought and won the battle for free verse although his only metrical innovation consisted in discarding at once both meter and rime. His idea of introducing democracy into all things, even the form of poetry necessitated the elimination of rime and meter because absolute freedom of expression as well as thought was to him essential and fundamental.

Although the leading contemporary poets in both England and America use free verse much less than it is generally supposed, it has been and still is a very popular form. Whitman's influence upon these contemporary writers of free verse is very great. To him they owe the credit for original innovations in form and subject-matter. He taught them "not only how to handle free verse but also how to paint the poetic aspects of our modern urban and industrial life."²

1 Hubbell, J. and Beaty, J. --An Introduction to Poetry, p. 364

2 " " " " " " " " " " p. 381

Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters are the most notable exponents of free verse among the American poets. Sandburg uses it to the exclusion of regular forms. Among the recent English poets Wilfrid Wilson Gibson and the late William Ernest Henley are the most important writers of free verse.

The chief object of writers of free verse is "to create new rhythms as the expression of new moods", and certainly it is in Whitman's creative work as seen to the best advantage in his poetry and in his critical doctrines as set forth specifically in both his poetry and his prose, that the first and greatest impetus for this form of versification is found. This free verse form is thoroughly romantic in its unconventional rejection of standardized and established rules of verse formation. Freedom, originality, and novelty characterize the deeply cadenced, naturally rhythmical verse of Whitman. His prose is not very unlike his verse. Its distinct lack of form, its disregard of all the rules of classical style, and its emphasis on details are its distinguishing elements and are all romantic.

Summary and Conclusion

In the brief review of romanticism which preceded this study of Walt Whitman certain ideas were stressed as pre-eminently romantic. Among these are the theories of Equalitarianism; a belief in the innate goodness of the individual; and a "back to nature" movement as the ultimate salvation of mankind. All these ideas are fundamentally and essentially romantic as they are based on emotional feeling and on imagination, and not on pure reason or common-sense. All three of these important philosophical concepts, -- Equalitarianism, Individualism and romantic Naturalism are found in Walt Whitman's fundamental doctrines. Thus his whole purpose in writing and his entire literary creed are determined by a romantic point of view. He was intensely sincere in his romantic purpose,¹--

Not to exclude or demarcate, or pick out evils from
their formidable masses (even to expose them)

But add, fuse, complete, extend - and celebrate the
immortal and the good.....

To span vast realms of space and time.

He celebrated "the immortal and the good" by eulogizing the individual, -- the common, ordinary, "average man". It has been seen that he firmly believed in the fundamental

1 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Vol. III

and natural goodness innate in every person no matter how hidden and submerged by apparent weaknesses heaped upon the innocent individual by the evil powers of an artificial, conventional, unnatural life. It was the poet's conviction that no one should be so enslaved because everyone was born free and equal and by the law of poetic justice should retain his natural freedom and equality throughout his life. Man should be absolutely free to pursue happiness in his own natural way. Moreover, every person should recognize his neighbor as an equal in all things. Superficial differences of age, color, race, creed, social position, intellectual achievements, and such must be ignored. Yet each person must be ever conscious of his own inviolable individuality. A deep respect, reverence and love for humanity as represented first in his own being and then in that of his fellow-man; and a worship of nature constitute Whitman's whole creed. In his Preface he proclaims as one inspired,¹-- "Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labors to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young

sp

1 Quinn, Baugh, Howe, p. 776

and with the mothers of families re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul." Is there a single un-romantic element in this whole doctrine? Is there a single sensible, reasonable idea in it? There is not a thing in it based on pure thought, reason, or dispassionate judgment. It is an emotional outburst based on a real conviction of the supremacy of natural feeling and on an optimistic faith in the reality of an imaginative world, a world in which no one is ill-disposed to anyone else, a world in which love reigns supreme, and in which happiness is as complete, perfect, and inevitable as nature itself.

Fundamentally then, Whitman is a romanticist, -- his whole philosophy is permeated with romantic ideas and is itself essentially romantic.

A study of the more specific details of Whitman's work reveals a further and deeper development of romantic tendencies. His whole poetic concept, distinguished particularly by his unique interpretation and extreme exaltation of Personality is distinctly romantic by reason of its imaginative individualism. His uncontrollable feeling of expansiveness and even his egoism are but extenuations of this theory of individual supremacy.

Several other important elements in Whitman's poetic concept have been pointed out as preeminently romantic. The mystical elements of thought expressed frequently in Leaves of Grass are essentially romantic in their imaginative source and emotional basis.

Whitman's theory of love which, as in all lyrical verse plays an important part in his poetry is decidedly romantic in the intensity of the emotion idealized and in its anti-conventional unrestraint.

Whitman's affinity with the great romanticist Wordsworth reveals to a greater extent, his innate romanticism. Their fundamental poetic concepts are similar and even their doctrines concerning poetic style show basic resemblances.

Romanticism is finally and definitely emphasized in Whitman's form of expression. His lack of definite form is at once apparent. He initiated free verse which is characterized by lack of any standard metrical treatment and by the absence or arbitrary use of rime. There is in Leaves of Grass a natural rhythm or cadence which resembles the rhythm of nature itself as revealed in all kinds of natural phenomena, --from the beat of the human pulse to the incessant roll of the mighty ocean. Freedom and individuality are the essential elements of Whitman's form even as they are the foundation of his whole poetic concept.

In summing up Walt Whitman's romantic tendencies, we note: the essential romanticism in his fundamental doctrines of Equalitarianism, Individualism, Naturalism; and in his unique literary-critical philosophy which is distinguished by his extremely original conception of Personalty, with its elements of cosmic self-contact and pure egoism; by its portions of pure mysticism; by a romantic ideal of love; by Wordsworthian characteristics of natural goodness and simple dignity in thought and expression; and, finally, by romantic lack of restraint in form of expression.

We conclude that Whitman is preeminently romantic in his fundamental poetic doctrines and in many specific elements of his work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AMERICANA ENCYCLOPEDIA

Poetry (p. 277-278)

by Alden

Realism and Natualism (p. 255-256)

by Lennox

Romanticism (p. 655-656)

by Creighton

BABBITT, IRVING

Rousseau and Romanticism

(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919)

BAILEY, JOHN

Walt Whitman

(Macmillan Co., 1926)

Chap. V--A Walk Thru Leaves of Grass

BARTON, W. E.

Abraham and Walt Whitman

(Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928)

BAZALGETTE, LEÓN

Walt Whitman. The Man and His Work

(Doubleday Page, 1920)

BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

Vol. 14, -- 14th Edition

Locke

BEERS, H. A.

A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth
Century

(H. Holt & Co., 1898)

Chap. I -- The Subject (Romanticism) Defined.

BURROUGHS, JOHN

Birds and Poets

(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1897)

Chap. X -- The Flight of the Eagle

CAIRNS, W. B.

A History of American Literature

(N. Y. Oxford U. Press, 1921)

p. 386-395

CARPENTER, G. R.

Walt Whitman (from English Men of Letters)

(Macmillan Co., 1924)

CORBETT, ELIZ. F.

Walt The Good Gray Poet Speaks for Himself

(F. A. Stokes Co., 1928)

FOERSTER, N.

Nature in American Literature

(Macmillan Co., 1923)

Chap. VI -- Whitman

FOERSTER, N.

Reinterpretation of Literature

Factors in American Literature

(Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1928)

HUBBELL, J. and BEATY, J.

An Introduction to Poetry

(Macmillan Co., 1929)

Chap. X -- Free Verse

MICHAUD, RÉGIS

The American Novel Today

(Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1928)

MORE, PAUL ELMER

Shelbourne Essays. Fourth Series

(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906)

(Essay on) Walt Whitman

MORRIS, H. S.

Walt Whitman--A Brief Biography with Reminiscences

(Harvard U. Press, 1929)

PERRY, BLISS

A Study of Prose Fiction

(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920)

Revised Edition

Chap. V -- Romanticism

PERRY, BLISS

Walt Whitman (American Men of Letters)

(Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906)

(Second Edition)

Chap. III -- Leaves of Grass

PHELPS, W. L.

The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement

(Boston, 1893)

THOMSON, J. ("B. V.")

Walt Whitman. The Man and the Poet

(Dobell, London, 1910)

Introduction (by Dobell)

WHITMAN, WALT

Complete Prose Works

Specimen Days and Collect

November Boughs, and

Good Bye My Fancy

(Small, Maynard & Co., 1907)

Taken from 1891 ed.

WHITMAN, WALT

Leaves of Grass (3 Vols.)

(Doubleday, Page & Co., 1920)

Taken from the edition by Harned, Traubel, 1902

Taken in turn from Whitman's 1891-1892
edition.

WHITMAN, WALT

Selections and Notes in

Quinn, Baugh, Howe

The Literature of America

(Scribner's, 1929)

BOSTON UNIVERSITY



1 1719 02573 0344

