

PARALLELISM IN WHITMAN'S "LEAVES OF THE GRASS"

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Abstract

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is an exceptional poet both in the position he occupies in the American literature and in the kind of poetry he wrote. Whitman's poetry is unconventional especially in his use of parallelism and its relation to the unity of nature, which he both held and expressed in his poems. In other words, he used parallelism to describe nature and through which God's presence in the working of nature. Parallelism is a literary activity, which aims at creating patterns on the verbal level with the effect of creating texture and unity besides the aesthetic effect that such patterns offer to the work. Parallelism is a familiar phenomenon in art but to shed some light on it in Whitman's poetry in relation to his concept of unity can be of great help for us to appreciate his poetry.

unified by the usage of parallelism. This research is an attempt to show the way in which Whitman is able to achieve coherence and unity to his poems with special emphasis on his famous poem "Song of Myself" through using this stylistic device, namely, parallelism.

1.2 Theoretical Background

1.2.1 What is parallelism?

Prominence occurs when "a writer temporarily renounces his permitted freedom of choice, introducing

1.1 Foreword

Whitman's most important accomplishment is a collection of poems known as "**Leaves of the Grass**". It is a collection of poems showing the poet's feelings and attitudes towards different aspects of American life as well as other universal concerns. Though the poems are loosely knit together, yet they are

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parallelism in the widest sense of this word (leech, 1969:62).

Crystal (2004:466) defines Parallelism in general terms as "The use of paired sounds, words, or constructions." Allen (1969:410), on the other hand, specified the definition in the followings items:

Parallelism is sometimes a repetition of grammatical constructions and often of words, but the main principle is the balancing of thoughts alongside or against each other.

uniformity where there would normally be diversity." (leech, 1970:122). For instance, a writer may use a noun phrase of the structure 'noun + prepositional phrase' throughout the whole poem, while he has other choices which he declines to use, in order to establish a norm and this is

An example given by leech (1969:66) may clarify the idea:

Where	<u>wealth accumulates</u>	and	<u>men decay</u>
	Subject + verb		subject + verb

as in the following lines from Robert Frost's verse (1957:81):

And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

It may be noticed that the repetition of the grammatical structure does not extend to absolute duplication

exact repetition of a sentence, as in the chanting of crowds (we want alf! We want alf! , etc.) is not counted as parallelism, because parallelism requires some variable features of the pattern- -some contrasting elements

Though these two lines consist of the same words and construction, this is not considered parallelism for parallelism is "an apportionment of variants and variables" (Jackobson, 1966:423). Leech (1969:66) shares this view with Jacobson when he says: The

and it is achieved by two means: first, when the second line enforces the first by repeating the same thought; second, when the second line does not have to be identical with the first in its thoughts yet parallel or similar to it:

which are parallel with respect to their position in the pattern.

Allen (1969:409) classifies parallelism into the following types:

1. Synonymous parallelism: it is the most frequent type of parallelism

No one can acquire for another- -not one,
No one can grow for another- -not one.

(p.182)

2. Antithetic parallelism: in this type, the second line denies or contrasts the first:

Let that which stood in front go behind,
Let that which was behind advance to the front,

(p. 281)

3. Constructive parallelism: here the second line or several consecutive lines complete the first:

Come said the muse,
Sing me a song no poet yet has chanted
Sing me the universal.

(p. 185)

line takes words from it and completes it:

4. Climatic parallelism: it is a sort of repetition where the first line is itself incomplete and the second

But O ship, the immortal ship! O ship aboard the ship!
Ship of the body, ship of the soul, voyaging, voyaging, voyaging.

(p. 212)

sentences. Otherwise, the mystery remains of how a reader interprets them as coherent (ibid). Parallelism is often accompanied and reinforced by parallel wording and sound. Repetition of words may occur at the beginning or at the end of lines or at both (Galperin, 1977:211) as in the following example:

I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
I will scatter myself among men and women as I go,

(p.119)

Dowden (1969: 136) comments on his poetry in these lines:

No single person is the subject of Whitman's song or it can be that the individual suggests a group a multitude, each unit of which is as interesting as every other unit and possess equal claims to recognition. Selection seems forbidden to him; if he names a race of mankind, the names of all other races press into his page; if he mentions one trade or occupation, all other trades and occupations follow.

Furthermore, Whitman does not praise himself even when he says, "I celebrate myself and sing myself." Whitman does not mean to celebrate himself as Walt Whitman is endowed with a definite biography or personality distinguishing him from others but as a

Hoey (1996:167) adds that there are pairs of sentences in which no parallelism is apparent for the reason is that "there are parallels but a greater or lesser extend, hidden." They can, however, be uncovered by a number of simple processes. These processes echo the mental processes of the reader as he or she makes sense of the

These parallelistic lines are used in this poem to generalize the topic of the poem.

1.2.2 Parallelism and Human Nature

One of Whitman's names is "the poet of democracy" (Miller, 1962: 62), for he celebrates and praises no particular person but embraces all humanity. And this can be seen throughout his poems, not only in "Song of Myself". For instance, in his poem "When lilacs last in a Dooryard Bloom'd", he is supposed to praise and glorify the dead president Lincoln , a man whom he much admired and loved , he ends up praising and celebrating death itself . Edward

In the analysis, Sections and stanzas are referred to as they stand in the original poem. And they are selected according to the existence of parallelism in them which happened to be eight.

Section 3: Stanza 2

1. *There was never any more inception than there is now,*
2. *Nor any more youth or age than there is now,*
3. *And will never be any more perfection than there is now,*
4. *Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.*

- This stanza consists of synonymous parallelism since the same thought is repeated in the four lines of it. The repetition of the structure "than there is now" creates a framework surrounding the whole stanza.
- Ellipsis in line 2 "nor (there was) any more" and in line 4 "nor (will be) any more heaven" enforces the structure of parallelism establishment in lines 1 and 3.
- The four lines consist of the repetition of the following words: 'any ', ' more', ' than ', there ' and 'now ' gives the sense of unity of

man or, in other words, as a "human being" which is the characteristic of everybody.

The expression of such doctrines demands a form in which distinction is eliminated and units coordination emerge. And this is obvious in his utilization of parallelism which becomes, later on, the foundation of his rhythmical style.

As mentioned earlier in this study (section .3.2.3.), parallelism can be either a repetition of the same lexical item or a repetition of similar syntactic structures. Generally speaking, Whitman uses both of them to build up an effect of sameness and similarity, a sense of repeated system to suggest the systematization of the universe. The repetition is also used to draw the attention of the reader to certain important points that the poet wishes him to consider.

1.3 Analysis of parallelism in the "Song of Myself"

"Song of Myself" is Whitman's longest poem and most controversial one .It consists of fifty two sections and is marked by great depth and complexity. Furthermore, it contains most of the general features of Whitman's poetry.

- The ellipsis in lines 3 and 4 'and I know that.... . ' enforces the cohesion of the structure .

Section 15: Stanza 1

1. *The married and unmarried children ride home to their thanksgiving dinner ,*
2. *The pilot seizes the king-pin he haves down with a strong arm,*
3. *The mate stand braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,*
4. *The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,*
5. *The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,*
6. *The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,*
7. *The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on the first day loafe and looks at the oats and rye.*

- This section is built on a synonymous parallelism. It gives various examples of life, incidents that the poet is witnessing through his senses. The incidents which are not, in the normal state of affairs, are made part of a larger scheme of a unified universe through

the thought that the poet wants his reader to share with him.

Section 5: Stanza 4

1. *And I know that the hand of god is the promise of my own ,*
2. *And I know that the spirit of god is the brother of my own ,*
3. *And that all the men ever born are also my brothers , and the women my sisters and lovers ,*
4. *And that a kelson of the creation is love ,*
5. *poke – And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields ,*
6. *And brown ants in the little wells beneath them ,*
7. *And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and weed.*

- The poet pronounces his strong belief in the fact of a unified universe. His belief is a stable fact ; the fact of the unity of the universe is reflected in the parallelism which resembles the system of the universe.

- Besides parallelism, the repetition of the conjunction 'and' and the structure "conjunction + subject + verb + that clause ' provides a strong structure to the poem.

the "night" the dominant unifying element.

Section 24 - stanzas 2 and 3

- 1- *Unscrew the locks from the doors,*
- 2- *Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!*
- 3- *Whoever degrades another degrades me,*
- 4- *And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.*

- 1- Lines 1 and 2 depict a quest to be free from the conventions and to search for the truth, which lies outdoors. This is done through paralleling the two lines in an imperative structure (v + nominal group+ prepositional phrase) which is also accompanied by the repetition of the words 'unscrew' and 'doors'.
- 2- In lines 3 and 4, the poet announces his unity with others as his equality with them. Parallelism is achieved here by the initial repetition of relative pronouns 'whoever' and 'whatever' and by the final repetition of the item 'me'.

parallelism and the repetition of the item 'the'. The section consists of 131 lines and, out of which 82 instances of the structure (the + subject + verb) are registered.

- The lexical set 'children', 'pilot', 'mate', duck-shooter', 'spinning-girl' and 'farmer' are all considered equal through the repetition of the item 'the'.

Section 21: Stanza 6

1-press close bare – bosom; d night – press close magnetic nourishing night,

2-night of south winds—night of the large few stars:

3- still nodding night – mad naked summer night .

- In this stanza, parallelism is achieved through alternating the sequence of adjectives that are qualifying the word "night". In line 1, we have two sequences of prenominal modifiers followed by two sequences of post-nominal modifiers in line 2.
- The repetition of the word "night" in each part of each line gives more unity to the stanza. Thus, making

In this stanza, parallelism is also achieved through the repetition of the same structure (subject +relative clause + verb 'passive voice') and the two parts of the line are linked by the repetition of the word ' each'.

Section 52: Stanza 2

1. *I too am not a bit tamed , I too am untranslatable ,*

2. *I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the word.*

- In the last section of "Song of Myself", the poet is emphatically admitting his difficulty to be understood through the repetition of the parallel structure (subject + verb + adjective) as shown in line 1.

Section 41: Stanza 2

1- *I heard what was said of the universe,*

2- *Heard and heard it of several thousand years;*

3- *It is middling well as far as it goes - - but is that all?*

This stanza is built on climatic parallelism.

- The repetition of the words 'heard' in line 2 is used to re-open the discourse topic and to comment further on it. It picks the same topic of hearing something about the universe, which was imitated in line 1 with the structure "I heard", and the repetition of the word "heard". The reference to it, in lines 2 and 3 substitute for what was said of the universe cause the entire phrase to be retrieved in the mind of the reader and secure a cohesive structure to the stanza (subject + v + noun clause) in "I heard what was said of the universe".

Section 43: Stanza 8

1 *Each who passes is considered. each who stops is considered not a single one can it fail.*

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Conclusions

The most dominant feature in Whitman's poetry is parallelism. The poet uses parallelism to activate the rhythmic effect of his poem an effect that satisfies the pattern of repetition which is essential to the working of ordinary rhythm. Parallelism is also used to create an overall effect of unity and similarity. The varied instances, even the contrastive ones, would seem united inside this overall systems as a consequence of belonging to it. In short, parallelism imitates the unity that the poet wishes to impinge on his universe.

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الإيقاع التوافقي لشعر وتمن لوصف الطبيعة

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الخلاصة

يعد والت وتمن شاعرا استثنائيا سواء أكان ذلك في المكانة التي يحتلها في الأدب الأمريكي او في نمط الشعر الذي يكتبه. لقد كتب وتمن شعرا غير تقليدي في استخدامه الإيقاع التوافقي خاصة وصلة هذا الإيقاع بوحدة الكون الذي عبر عنه في شعره. وبمعنى آخر ، استخدم وتمن الإيقاع التوافقي لوصف الطبيعة للتوصل الى الوجود الإلهي والإيقاع التوافقي ظاهره أدبيه تهدف لخلق انظمة نسيج مترابط وانسجام داخل النص الشعري الى جانب المؤثرات الجمالية التي تضيفها مثل هذه الأنظمة على العمل الأدبي فدراسة هذا الإيقاع صلته بمفهوم الوحدة يعين على فهم أفضل لشعر والت وتمن .