



## “CONTRASTING MYSTIC TRADITIONS: EXAMINING WHITMAN'S DEPARTURE FROM THE NORMS”

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper delves into the mystical dimensions of Walt Whitman's poetic works, focusing on his departure from conventional norms within the realm of mysticism. Whitman, a quintessential American poet of the 19th century, is celebrated for his transcendentalist and free-verse approach to poetry. However, beneath the surface lies a profound engagement with mystic traditions that sets him apart from his contemporaries. This paper aims to explore the contrast between Whitman's mysticism and established norms, shedding light on the unique synthesis of mystic elements that characterize his poetic vision.*

**Keywords:** Norms, Walt Whitman, Mystic, Elements, Poetic.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the tapestry of American literature, Walt Whitman emerges as a luminary whose poetic brilliance transcends the conventional boundaries of expression. Born in 1819, Whitman lived during a pivotal period in American history, witnessing the tumultuous currents of change in a burgeoning nation. While celebrated as the "Bard of Democracy" and a prominent figure in the transcendentalist movement, Whitman's legacy is equally defined by his exploration of mysticism within the poetic realm. This research seeks to unravel the intricacies of Whitman's mysticism, delving into his departure from established norms within mystic traditions. Beyond the facade of free verse and egalitarian themes, Whitman's work reveals a profound engagement with mystical elements, challenging pre-existing paradigms and enriching the very essence of spiritual thought.

Against the backdrop of 19th-century America, Whitman's literary odyssey unfolded amidst the fervor of transcendentalism, a philosophical movement emphasizing the inherent connection between humanity, nature, and the divine. However, Whitman's contribution to the literary landscape extends beyond the confines of this movement. His seminal work, "Leaves of Grass," serves as a testament to his departure from conventional norms, both stylistically and thematically. Rejecting the constraints of traditional poetic forms, Whitman embraced free verse, allowing his words to flow unencumbered, mirroring the expansiveness of his mystic vision.

Whitman's mysticism is not confined to a mere echo of transcendentalist ideals. Instead, it weaves through the fabric of his poetry, unveiling a unique perspective that diverges from

traditional mystic traditions. The exploration of mystic elements within Whitman's work forms the crux of this research. Pantheism, the belief in the immanence of the divine in all aspects of existence, emerges as a recurrent motif in Whitman's verses, challenging established religious paradigms. In poems like "Song of Myself," he exalts the interconnectedness of all living things, portraying a world where the divine is not distant but intricately woven into the fabric of life.

The cosmic consciousness that permeates Whitman's work further distinguishes him within the realm of mysticism. "Leaves of Grass" expands to encompass cosmic and universal themes, delving into the interconnectedness of the human experience with the broader cosmos. This exploration aligns Whitman with transcendentalist mysticism, where the poet's gaze extends beyond the immediate and earthly to contemplate the vastness of existence. The cosmic dimensions of Whitman's mysticism add layers of complexity to his poetry, inviting readers to contemplate the sublime and the infinite.

As we embark on this exploration of Whitman's mysticism, the objectives of this research crystallize. We aim to identify these key mystic elements within Whitman's poetry, contrasting them with traditional mystic traditions, both Eastern and Western, to unveil the distinctiveness of his approach. Moreover, we seek to analyze the implications of Whitman's departure from established norms, considering its influence on subsequent generations and its broader cultural impact.

## II. MYSTIC ELEMENTS IN WHITMAN'S POETRY

Walt Whitman's poetry stands as a testament to the transcendental and mystical currents that flowed beneath the surface of his verses. His exploration of mystic elements elevates his work from mere poetic expression to a profound contemplation of the divine, the cosmic, and the interconnectedness of all existence.

**Pantheism:** At the heart of Whitman's mysticism lies a fervent pantheism, a belief in the immanence of the divine in every aspect of the material world. In "Song of Myself," Whitman declares, "I celebrate myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." Here, the poet blurs the boundaries between the self and the universe, embracing a pantheistic worldview that sees the divine in the smallest atom and the grandest cosmos. This departure from traditional religious paradigms positions Whitman as a mystic who finds the sacred not in distant realms but woven into the very fabric of earthly existence.

**Ecstatic Vision:** Whitman's mysticism is further evident in the ecstatic nature of his poetic vision. The celebratory tone that permeates his verses reflects an ecstatic experience akin to the mystic rapture described in the works of spiritual visionaries. In the section "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman exalts the physical form, declaring, "I sing the body electric, / The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them." This celebration of the body and the interconnectedness of human souls hints at an ecstatic communion with the divine, transcending the boundaries of individuality and embracing a collective spiritual experience.

**Cosmic Consciousness:** Whitman's mysticism extends to a cosmic consciousness that transcends the limitations of earthly perspectives. In "Leaves of Grass," he invites readers to join him in contemplating the vastness of the cosmos, proclaiming, "I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other." Here, Whitman's cosmic consciousness envisions a unity that surpasses individual distinctions, urging readers to embrace a higher understanding of their place within the expansive cosmos. This exploration aligns Whitman with transcendentalist mysticism, where the poet becomes a conduit for the contemplation of universal truths.

Whitman's mystic elements, woven seamlessly into the fabric of his poetry, redefine the boundaries of spiritual expression. His pantheistic vision, ecstatic celebration of existence, and cosmic consciousness invite readers to embark on a mystical journey that transcends the ordinary and delves into the sublime. As we navigate the mystic realms of Whitman's poetry, we encounter a visionary poet whose verses resonate with the echoes of ancient mystic traditions while forging a distinctly American mysticism that celebrates the divine in the tapestry of everyday life.

### III. CONTRASTING WITH TRADITIONAL MYSTIC TRADITIONS

Walt Whitman's mysticism, while rooted in a profound spiritual exploration, diverges markedly from both Eastern and Western traditional mystic traditions. The contrast between Whitman's approach and established norms within mysticism illuminates the distinctive nature of his poetic vision.

#### *Eastern Mysticism vs. Whitman:*

In comparing Whitman's mysticism with Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, notable distinctions emerge. Eastern mysticism often emphasizes ascetic practices, meditation, and the transcendence of individual ego to attain spiritual enlightenment. Whitman, on the other hand, celebrates the material world and the interconnectedness of all existence. While Eastern mysticism seeks to transcend the self, Whitman's mysticism embraces the self as an integral part of the divine tapestry, reflecting a departure from the renunciatory path often associated with Eastern mystics.

#### *Western Mysticism vs. Whitman:*

In the Western mystical traditions, particularly Christian mysticism, the focus often revolves around the transcendence of the soul toward a union with God. Whitman's mysticism diverges from this emphasis on transcendence by accentuating immanence. While Christian mystics seek union with a transcendent God, Whitman finds the divine in the immanent, material world. His celebration of the body, nature, and the here-and-now contrasts with the traditional Western mystic's yearning for a union with a transcendent deity beyond the material realm.

#### *Implications of Departure:*

The departure from traditional mystic traditions in Whitman's work holds significant implications for the broader understanding of mysticism and its role in literature and philosophy.

### **Influence on Subsequent Generations:**

Whitman's departure from established mystic norms has had a lasting impact on subsequent generations of poets and thinkers. His fusion of transcendentalist ideals with a uniquely American mysticism paved the way for a reimagining of the relationship between the individual, the divine, and the cosmos. Poets and philosophers in the American literary tradition drew inspiration from Whitman's departure, contributing to the evolution of a distinct American mystic voice.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Walt Whitman's departure from traditional mystic norms illuminates a unique and transformative contribution to the landscape of American literature. Through the exploration of mystic elements in his poetry, such as pantheism, ecstatic vision, and cosmic consciousness, Whitman redefined the boundaries of spiritual expression. The contrast with both Eastern and Western mystic traditions highlights the distinctiveness of his approach, where immanence takes precedence over transcendence. The implications of Whitman's departure extend beyond the realms of literature, influencing subsequent generations of poets and contributing to a cultural redefinition in 19th-century America. In essence, Whitman's mysticism becomes a pioneering force, inviting readers to reconsider the intersections of poetry, philosophy, and the divine, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to resonate in the intricate tapestry of American literary history.

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