

**RESEARCH TITLE**

**The Usage of Symbols in the Poetry of Walt Whitman**

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**Abstract**

Walt Whitman is the most famous poet of the 20th century, widely regarded as the pioneer of American poetry and the resonating literary voice of the tangible nature of ideal democracy. The aim of Whitman's primary artistic focus was on the final rewriting of *Leaves of Grass* in each of its subsequent editions. The volume *Leaves of Grass* deals with studying the epic of America and the epic of science and democracy. Whitman is an American poet who accurately and comprehensively portrays the culture, way of life, and spirit of the nation. It acts as a reflection of contemporary American culture.

The analysis of Whitman's selected poems' symbolism and symbols is the main subject of this study. The purpose of this paper is to interpret the meaning of symbols found throughout Whitman's masterworks, with particular attention to those that are used in poetry. The poet takes advantage of the symbolism found in his works. Whitman's poems "One's Self I Sing," "Song of Myself," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and "Passage to India" are among his greatest literary works. Whitman uses vague and occasionally elastic symbols in his poems.

The critical study of symbols in Whitman's poems is summarized in this paper. Indeed, the poet uses symbols such as grass, sea, plants, trees, earth, birds, the 'self,' and the actual trip to India to convey the poet's perception of transcendental mystery. His work is quite descriptive; it implies symbolic images used to communicate fundamental truths and his apprehension of the mystery of the universe to his readers in his poems.

**Key Words:** Walt Whitman, Symbols, Symbolism.

## استخدام الرموز في شعر والت ويطمان

### المستخلص

الت ويطمان هو أعظم شاعر في القرن العشرين، ويعتبر على نطاق واسع أب الشعر الأمريكي والصوت الأدبي الرنان للطبيعة الملموسة للديمقراطية المثالية. كان الهدف الأساسي لويتمان هو التركيز الفني على إعادة الكتابة النهائية لديوان *أوراق العشب* في كل من الطبقات اللاحقة. وأن ديوان *أوراق العشب* يتناول دراسة ملحمة أمريكا حيث انها ملحمة العلم والديمقراطية. يصور الشاعر الأمريكي ويطمان بدقة وشمولية ثقافة الأمة وأسلوب حياتها وروحها. إنه بمثابة انعكاس للثقافة الأمريكية المعاصرة.

إن تحليل الرمزية والرموز لقصائده هو الموضوع الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة. و أن الغرض من هذه المقالة هو تفسير معنى الرموز الموجودة في جميع أعمال ويطمان الرائعة، مع اهتمام خاص للرموز المستخدمة في الشعر. إذ يستفيد الشاعر من الرمزية الموجودة في أعماله، حيث تعتبر قصائد ويطمان "أنا أغني ذاتي"، و "أغنية نفسي"، و"خارج المهد أتأرجح إلى ما لا نهاية"، و"الممر إلى الهند" من بين أعظم أعماله الأدبية. إذ انه يستخدم رموزاً غامضة و مرنة أحياناً.

تم تلخيص الدراسة النقدية للرموز في قصائد ويطمان في هذا البحث. إذ في الواقع، يستخدم الشاعر رموزاً مثل العشب والبحر والنباتات والأشجار والأرض والطيور و'الذات' والرحلة الفعلية إلى الهند لنقل تصور الشاعر للغموض المتعالي. أن عمله وصفي تماماً، حيث إنه يتضمن صوراً رمزية استخدمت لتوصيل الحقائق الأساسية وفهمه لسر الكون لقرائه في قصائده.

الكلمات المفتاحية: والت ويطمان، الرموز، الرمزية.

## Introduction:

Walt Whitman, one of the most influential figures in American literature, stands as a revolutionary poet whose works bridge the realms of individual experience, democracy, and universal spirituality. His poetry reflects a deep awareness of human identity and an intimate connection with nature, freedom, and the divine. As the founder of a distinctly American poetic voice, Whitman broke away from traditional forms and embraced free verse to express the ideals of equality, individuality, and unity that characterize the American spirit.

Symbolism occupies a central place in Whitman's poetic universe. Through symbols, he captures the essence of human existence and the interconnectedness between the physical and the spiritual worlds. His use of natural symbols—such as grass, sea, birds, and plants—reveals profound philosophical meanings related to life, death, rebirth, and transcendence. In *Leaves of Grass* and other poems like “One's Self I Sing,” “Song of Myself,” “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” and “Passage to India,” Whitman employs imagery and symbols not merely as decorative elements, but as vehicles to convey universal truths about the self, nature, and divinity.

This study, titled “The Usage of Symbols in the Poetry of Walt Whitman,” aims to analyze the symbolic dimensions of Whitman's poetry and explore how his symbols function as expressions of his transcendental vision. It also investigates how Whitman's symbolic language elevates ordinary objects into representations of profound philosophical concepts. By decoding the symbols embedded in his works, the study seeks to uncover Whitman's unique way of merging art, spirituality, and democracy into one poetic synthesis that continues to inspire generations of readers and writers alike.

## Symbol:

The Greek verb *symbollein*, which means ‘to put together,’ is the root of the term ‘symbol,’ as is its noun *symbolon*, which means ‘mark,’ ‘emblem,’ ‘token,’ or ‘sign.’ It is an item, living or inanimate, that ‘stands for’ or ‘represents’ anything else. A setting, item, character, or incident in a story that conveys more than its literal meaning and thereby represents something important to comprehending the meaning of a literary work is referred to as a symbol. In other words, all symbols have a literal (concrete) and an abstract (figurative) meaning. Symbols used commonly have a predetermined meaning. (Cuddon, 1977, p. 671).

## The History of Symbolism and Its Origins:

The symbolist movement emerged during the 1850s in France and flourished until about 1900 in literature. Symbolism maintained a significant influence on twentieth-century literature, making the transition from realism to modernism. It also created a powerful impact on the arts, encompassing theatre, painting, and music. The symbolists aimed to depict very private, unreasonable, and dreamlike phases of consciousness, depending greatly on symbolic phrases to suggest or portray an immortal spirit of being that they thought was separated from the extent of the five senses. These literary principles emerged as a response to the prominence of positive thinking, which promoted logical thinking, objectiveness, and the analytical technique. Symbolism also signified a revolt against realism and naturalism in literature, which aimed to precisely portray the real universe of nature and the human community with representations of truthful realities. (Galens, 2002, p. 326)

Symbolism is a literary school that refers to three stages in the emergence of literary modernism: first, an aesthetic movement in France and Belgium in the latter half of the nineteenth century; second, and more significantly, its explicit origins in French poetry beginning in the 1850s; and third, the effect that both of these had on the following literary

modernism and its influence on both European and American literary masterpieces during the first 19th and 20th centuries. The designation's first and formal use was limited to the second phase, which must be acknowledged as being the least important from a literary standpoint. The four great predecessors of the Symbolist movement, who remain among the most significant authors of the French tradition, not only concerning France's poems, transcended national constraints and genres of writing and were the focus of attention due to the movement's perceived inability to produce significant works by the 1920s. As a result, the particularly suggestive expression 'Symbolist' had become connected mainly with these writers. The four poets who came before the Symbolist movement were Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98), Paul Verlaine (1844–96), and Arthur Rimbaud (1844–1926). They are also the main sources of inspiration for many writers from countries other than France who were drawn to the new aesthetic movement they contributed to defining. The major strands of French literary heritage, dating back to the sixteenth century, combined with German, British, and American contributions to Romanticism, were each responsible for significant inventions. Symbolism is a valuable phrase when used in the works of poets since it alludes to a significant aspect of poetic substance and an attitude towards the figurative operation of literary language, going beyond the simple designation of an aesthetic inclination. Romantic poetry contributed to the symbol's popularity in modern literature and its connection to the visual image. In nineteenth-century writing, which, as Philippe Harmon and others have noted, is characterized by an increased propensity towards the visual referent, tropes like the symbol were particularly prevalent. A thing or a location that is depicted as the embodiment of a bigger truth is typically the subject of a romantic symbol. Furthermore, the greater truth is typically clear in Romantic poetry. (Bradshaw, 2006, pp. 155-156).

Walt Whitman was born in West Hill, Long Island, New York, on May 31, 1819. He is a significant poet as well as a notable figure in American literary history. He went from being relatively unknown to an enormous celebrity, becoming a recognised national personality. His accomplishment is significant, yet it has occasionally been overshadowed by unjustified, hostile criticism or, on the other hand, effusive acclaim. Although his accomplishments as a philosopher, mystic, and critic have also been highlighted, his primary talent is as a poet. The Civil War (1861-1865) was a crucial event in Whitman's life and writings. In 1862, Walt's brother George was wounded in the Civil War. Whitman saw a lot of the injured in hospitals when he went to Virginia to see him. Whitman's career was significantly impacted by the Civil War, which sparked his imagination and sensitivity while also moulding him into a healer of both physical and spiritual wounds while serving as a volunteer in hospitals. (Geismar, 1955, p. 15).

Up until the appearance of a letter from Emerson expressing a profound sense of their power and magnitude, the *Leaves of Grass* (1855) received little attention. His admiration for it as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed" immediately made him realize its brilliance and splendor. Whitman was once again inspired to think creatively by the unvarnished, terrible landscape. He discovered a counterpoint to the wild abandonment of the Western perspective and confirmation of the wild, unfettered spirit that inspires his poems. Even though he was old and seeing the sight for the first time, he had long since talked to the scene's living spirit while reading the early *Leaves of Grass*. Certainly, the title's reference to "the eternal cycle of life" is a perfect one for one of its central themes. (Rossetti, 1901, p. 12) A mystical sense of unity with the world, which had its reinforcement, if not its birth, in emotion, is reflected in Whitman's great novel, *Leaves of Grass*, which is a reflection of inner illumination. The roots go deep in the body and spirit of a young man—a body that is clean and sensual and a soul that has not yet been tormented by the more profound mysteries. Walt Whitman was not always an irrational libertine, yet to

think so would be to misunderstand who he was. In a recent essay, Mr. Chesterton claims that to enjoy anything, there is required “a certain boyish expectation.” Purity and simplicity are essential to passion, even to evil passions. Even vice demands a sort of virginity.” (Perry, 1906, p. 47) Whitman realized readers’ inspiration and comprehension are two key indicators of great poetry. “To have great poets,” he said, “there must be great audiences, too.” (Cowley, 1948, p. 333) He contributed to his disqualification from the greatest accolades by making claims that meet this standard’s strictest requirements. There should be only one example: “The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferred till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.” (Holloway, 1938, p. 320)

### **Whitman’s Symbolism:**

Whitman is frequently mentioned in connection with contemporary symbolism. The elements that have easily prompted comparison with symbolist aesthetics include his notion of poetry as an indivisible art, his propensity to treat the world of objects in terms of his subjective perspective, and the comprehensive use of poetic symbols to portray that foresight. Whitman, of course, has a very different sensibility from French symbolism or its 20th-century successors, who have adopted some of their defining attitudes. When analyzing Whitman’s symbolism, it is crucial to emphasize several key distinctions between current aesthetic philosophy and Transcendentalism, which Whitman is thought to have shared with Emerson, as well as Romanticism and Transcendentalism. However, these distinctions frequently get lost in Jean Cartel’s and Feidelson’s analyses of Whitman’s symbolism. Whitman’s desire to unite the material world with the soul, in Cartel’s opinion, is what distinguishes him as a symbolist. Whitman thought there was a mystical connection between the spirit of things and his own spirit. However, this should not be mistaken for the symbolist viewpoint. The symbolist correspondence theory did not imply any such mysticism. The symbolists saw the universe as little more than a ‘shop of images’ that could be used to personify and evoke a person’s feelings or state of mind. (Chari, 1971, pp. 173-174)

Whitman used symbols in part to uphold his belief that poetry should be evocative. In addition, he believed that using symbols was essential to conveying his ideas, including his belief in the “oneness” of all people, his understanding of the spiritual reality hidden behind the sensual and phenomenal, and the sense of ‘fluidity,’ ‘liquidity,’ or ‘shimmer’ of firm truths. He had to use the ‘seen’ objects in a way that implied the ‘unseen’ to convey all of this. An image, or a thing that engages the sense of the eye, ear, nose, or, in certain situations, heat and pressure, is a sensory item in a literary work. Whitman’s imagery has multiple levels of effectiveness. Whitman always used imagery to transport the reader from the realm of sensory awareness to the realm of intellect, where the former gains some perspective. ( Dr. Sen, 1982, p. 14)

### **Key Symbols in Whitman’s poems:**

The stars, the sea, the birds, the grass, the calamus plants, and the lilac represent some of Whitman's most prominent symbols. Most of his poetry employs symbols with clear, comprehensive meanings. This contrasts with the symbolist poets, whose symbols were often so subjective that they were incomprehensible.

### **The symbols in “One’s- Self I sing” and “Song of Myself”:**

The exaltation of the ‘self’ is certainly Whitman’s poetry’s most significant element. His approach to the themes of love and death, his mysticism, and the democratic impulse are all aspects of his poetry that are tied to his belief in the self. Whitman’s entire poetic universe is an expression of the various aspects or facets of the self. It represents men and women, slaves and masters, soldiers and saints, every atom of this creation and the entire universe, the subtle

and the gross, the sacred and the ordinary, the sublime and the grotesque. Whitman thus seeks to convey multiple ideas at once through the symbolic use of language. In this sense, a symbol is associative and immediately conjures up pictures in the reader. (Lal Sharma, 2000, p. 36)

In “One’s-self I Sing”, Whitman writes about “one’s-self”, which stands for a simple person as well as ‘En-Masse.’ “One’s-self, I sing” alludes to the poet’s singing of oneself, but it also alludes to the reader. The poet sings of himself as “a simple, separate person,” but he also sings of the people in general and the ordinary person. However, he mentions the words ‘democracy’ and ‘mass,’ and he is a democrat, a supporter of camaraderie and empathy. His poetry captures the fundamental essence of democracy—what the word ‘En-Masse’ denotes. His poetry is concerned with democracy. (Tilak, 2008, p. 144) The ‘self’ is the most important symbol. Whitman’s idea of the self is unquestionably symbolic because it is limitless and has endless ramifications. Whitman refers to a ‘self’ that is more than just a person (a man, a woman, etc.); according to Chari, it also refers to the “transcendental witness” within us, the soul, the divinity present in every human being, the over-soul, and the totality of the cosmos. Whitman’s usage of the first-person singular ‘I’ carries a wealth of metaphorical implications. In fact, Whitman’s repeated usage of the ‘I’ protagonist in Leaves of Grass overlaps with the idea of the “self” and its explicit and implicit meanings. (Lal Sharma, 2000, p. 37) In “One’s-self, I Sing”, the poet seeks to develop in his unique way a picture of the interplay between the self and other selves, the natural world outside, and other moments in time other than the one he is currently experiencing. The poet’s relation to the outside world is not one in which the poet relies on the natural world for scenic inspiration or as a setting for human emotion. (Dr. Sen., 1982, p. 27)

“Song of Myself”, the poem for which Whitman is best known and which contains practically every literary invention, theme, and subject found in Leaves of Grass, is the center of the significant text of Whitman’s poetry. The poem thus exhibits the basic ideas and originality of Whitman’s work while also serving as an example of many of the advancements and changes that Whitman’s poetry underwent over his career. (Casale, 2010, p. 82) “Song of Myself” creates the New World personality, a new conscious selfhood that serves as a role model for modern man and America. The poet magnifies himself:

*“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you  
I loafe and invite my soul,*

*I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.”* (Whitman, 1995, p. 26)

The long poem’s theme is introduced in these lines. It examines the poet individually. He will sing about himself, and because he discovers his entire identity in the difference between himself and others, he will also sing of others. In “Song of Myself”, Whitman concisely states that “I assume you shall assume,” for “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” These lines serve as a visual representation of the fundamental unity between the poet and the reader, the lover and the beloved, and the first- and second-person singular. Whitman says, “Thou reader, throb best life and pride and love the same I./ Therefore, for thee the following chants,” which elegantly dissolves the line between the poet’s ‘I’ and the reader’s ‘you.’ Whitman’s feeling of unity and comprehension derives from his intense identification with the second-person singular and the wider world. Whitman’s ‘You’ is illuminated by ‘a nimbus of gold-colored light,’ emphasizing its glorious atmosphere. In a symbolic sense, the

Whitmanesque ‘you’ merges with the ‘I’ and the self. The persona achieves the tranquility that mystics thought to be necessary for entering a visionary state and speaking inspired words by lounging (and therefore relaxing his physical and mental tension) and by inviting his soul to spiritual communication. He prefers the elevated air of the inspirational afflatus to the ‘perfumes’ that stand for manufactured doctrines, and he takes pleasure in his good health since it makes him feel as important as a participant in the divine plan. But the persona presents the philosophic (and personal) dualism that underlies most of *Leaves of Grass* by urging his soul to join with whatever aspect of himself is not his soul. (Aspiz, 2004, p. 35)

The word ‘I’ has a symbolic meaning, and all of the other symbols that are constantly related to it are gathered around it. The entire world is symbolized by ‘grass’ in the identical way that ‘I’ represents the universe’s individual and collective self. Of course, under this broad definition, ‘summer grass’ takes on a variety of connotations; it may be the visible symbol of his self or his poetic ego, and it may also stand for God, the Supreme Self; it may also stand for man and the hope of the future, equality, and comradeship; it may also symbolize both life and death. Whitman’s crucial idea of democracy—individuality in accord with the mass, distinct singleness in harmony with enormous grouping—becomes graphically represented in the grass. The spear of summer grass represents the wonder of the universe. It sets the poet off on a mystical journey. The universe’s mystery is revealed by the silent spear of grass. It is the ideal representation of democracy in nature and, in its simplicity, it symbolizes the splendor of the world. It serves as a bridge between the earth and the heavens, the ordinary and the divine. (Dr. Sen., 1982, p. 14)

In words of astounding creativity, the enormous task of expressing the mystique of life and death is stated:

*“A child said What I the grass? fetching it to me with full hands,*

*How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he does.*

*I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.*

*Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord.”* (Whitman, 1995, P. 31)

These lines are taken from Whitman’s poetry in its entirety. These ambiguous phrases from the poem’s section “Grass” demonstrate the existence of God. A child asks the poet what the tuft of grass represents, and the poet responds with a variety of responses. A child gives the poet a spear of grass and inquires about its composition. The persona’s delightful acknowledgement that he is unable to put this master symbol into language that will satisfy the child or satisfy himself, however, is a rhetorical technique used to start a succession of hesitant explanations intended to demonstrate how thoroughly Whitman has explored this riddle. The poet uses analogy and metaphor, rhetorical techniques he employs throughout the poems, to clarify the meaning of death in answer to the child’s request to explain the significance of the grass. Of course, the grass is a master metaphor in and of itself, and as with all metaphors, it is defined by the use of other metaphors. The persona makes the playful (and subjective) conjecture that the grass that covers the earth may be the objectification of himself, “the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven,” even though the grass appears in the Psalms as a symbol of mankind’s powerless susceptibility to mortality and dissolution. (Aspiz, 2004, 37) A child is curious as to what a spear of summer grass means. Because he is unsure of the nature of the question, the poet finds it challenging to respond. The grass may represent his personality. He then explains to the child that it symbolizes his personality. (Tilak, 2008, p. 85)

This epic poem's central symbol, 'Grass,' depicts the spirituality of daily objects. As grass is an image of the everlasting cycle of life found in the natural world, which assures each man's eternal existence, the natural beauty of grass illustrates the subjects of death and eternity. Given that God's immortal presence in the natural world is apparent everywhere, nature symbolizes God. Grass holds the keys to how man and the divine interact. It implies that everything is God and that God is everything. (Carey, 1972, p. 18) The poem makes a forceful argument for the fusion of the subjective and objective worlds. 'Grass' serves as the section's primary symbol. Whitman speculates with confidence that it is either the 'flag of my disposition' or 'the handkerchief of the Lord.' Additionally, the grass stops being literal and becomes a 'uniform hieroglyphic.' In this context, grass represents the permanence of the life-death cycle and the ordinary existence of man. As a result, this representation of 'grass' takes on the characteristics of a 'baby of vegetation' and a 'child.' Additionally, it refers to the wonderful 'uncut hair of graves.' Whitman sees deathlessness as he writes about the symbolic meaning of 'grass':

*"The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,  
And if ever there was, it led forward life and does not wait at the end to arrest it,  
And ceased the moment life appeared"* (Whitman, 1995, P. 31)

The section clarifies the whole meaning of a grass leaf, which represents Whitman's poetry's primary symbol. As a result, the symbolic representation of the 'grass' plays a significant part in helping Whitman recognize the presence of a subtle and profound process in a man's existence that is defined by eternity. It also highlights the poet's optimistic and cheerful personality. He is so enthusiastic that, contrary to what is typically believed, he sees death as only a metamorphosis. When he proposes that the corpses of the dead sprout in the shape of grass blades growing on the graves and thus continue to live even after their so-called death, he expresses the scientific conviction in the indestructibility of matter. This section is therefore of utmost relevance because it combines mysticism and science. (Ranchan, 2000, p. 24)

### **The symbols in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"**

The poem's title, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", offers a framework for analysis. The 'cradle' symbolizes beginnings, motion, and childhood. 'Endlessly rocking' signifies both the development of the child into a man as well as the difficulties that a man must face in life. The title really refers to an endless birth process. (Lal Sharma, 2000, p. 40) After several pictures of birth and beginnings in the opening stanza, the poet considers his lyrical abilities, which cause him to recollect a potent childhood memory. The poet recalls a specific sequence that he saw as a child, and it later inspired him to become a poet. His self-description, "chanter of pains and joys, the uniter of here and hereafter," demonstrates what a poet does for a living. Whitman's childhood, as stated by Frances Winwar, was wonderful, spent by the sea and surrounded by nature:

*"best of all he liked the summer when he could feel the warmth of the sun on the hard sand beneath his feet, or plunge into the waves and lie floating on his back, watching the clouds change in the sky. . . . He soared with the water birds that made their home in the bays and learned from the life about him more than from any book. He knew joy and gladness and the exultation of a healthy body, but he learned also that all was not happiness in life, that parting and sorrow, too, formed the heart of experience."* (Winwar, 1941, p. 20)

In her subsequent explanation of 'Cradle,' Winwar expresses a literal interpretation of the young child's memories. "Walt recognized the song of the sorrowful bird as something

ineffable even though he was just a kid when he first heard it.” One is the poet’s use of a group of pictures (boy, bird, and sea) to develop his theme through dramatic colloquy. (Ibid., 1941, P. 25).

*“Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,  
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,  
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,  
A reminiscence sign.”* (Whitman, 1995, P. 228)

He imagines himself as a small boy exploring the sands near the sea. He observed the environment around him with interest. The poem’s main symbol is a pair of birds. The birds are keeping an eye on the eggs in their nest. He heard the joyful singing of two mockingbirds. He was delighted to see them:

*“Two feather’d guests from Alabama, two together  
And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown,  
And every day the he-bird to and fro, near at hand,  
And every day the she-bird crouch’d on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,”*  
(Whitman, 1995, P.229)

Unfortunately, one of the birds perishes because she never returns to the nest. The he-bird is in excruciating discomfort. Here, Whitman uses the poetic device of contrast to great effect. The overabundance of joy from the birds’ solidarity has been exquisitely juxtaposed with the shock and jolt of mortality. The poet intentionally shakes the boy from the inside out. He empathizes with the suffering of the abandoned he-bird, Walter Sutton states:

*“The influence of music is seen in the device, inspired by the model of the opera, of the arias or bird songs, of fulfillment and frustration, which provide interludes of lyric expression of the feelings and emotions aroused by the events presented and analysed in the narrative and dramatic frame-work of the poem.”* (Miller, 1957, p. 29)

Whitman highlights the bird’s desire by making him wait an eternity for his mate. By hearing the bird’s painful states, the child understands the agony and misery of the animal. As a young boy, the poet feels the bird’s suffering, identifies with it, and establishes a bond with it by referring to it as ‘brother’. Mocking-birds stood for love. In every instance of the bird imagery in *Leaves of Grass*, this symbolism is there. James Miller aptly says, “The mockingbird symbolizes the creative transfiguration brought by consuming but unfulfilled love. And when the sea sends forth its word of death as the ‘clew’, the boy requests the ‘out setting bard’ has found the theme of all his songs.” (Ibid., 1957, p. 30) The poem’s mocking-bird is related to love, one of the themes that the bird is connected to. Their love was symbolized by a bird, and the phrase ‘two together’ perfectly captured their being. He addressed the wind, saying, “Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok’s shore; I wait and wait till you blow my mate to me,” the he-bird eagerly awaiting her. The curious child who ‘treasured every note’ was moved by his singing because he learnt the significance of the bird, which he referred to as his ‘brother.’ (Carey, 1972, p. 44)

In “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” Whitman describes the sea as ‘some old crone rocking the cradle.’ The sea is a kind of motherhood emblem. The kneeling, observant child is perplexed by the poet’s description of the two birds as ‘two feather’d guests from Alabama’ and the death of the female bird that follows. He never stops ‘cautiously peering.’ The boy is faced with the brutal reality of death after witnessing a bird die. The old crone (the sea), shaking the cradle, ultimately gives him the “clew” he needs to solve the riddle of death

in the world. It symbolizes life, motherhood, birth, and deathlessness. The sea was definitely speaking about death before this, but towards the end, it was rocking the cradle, signifying rebirth and regeneration. Whitman has therefore deliberately and purposefully used the symbolism of the 'bird' and the 'sea' to give the child (the protagonist) a sense of maturity and knowledge. (Lal Sharma, 2000, p. 41).

Since childhood, the poet has returned to the location numerous times at night because the experience of the child's intense love and heartbreaking loss has stayed with him or her. Then, one day, as the poet is still standing on the sand, the sea's swelling waters surround him. The waves wash over his feet, midriff, chest, and head:

*"But edging near as privately for me, rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and loving me softly all over,  
Death, death, death, death, death."* (Whitman, 1995, P. 230)

The 'sea' at this point has been presented as the mother, an 'old crone' rocking the cradle. Whitman has effectively made the reader aware of the message of death. However, the message of 'the cradle,' which is being rocked by an 'old crone,' is one of resurrection, renewal, rebirth, and life. In reality, Whitman attempted to answer the riddle of death and rebirth in the poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." He believes that although dying is an unpleasant and fundamental element of life, it is also possible for the beginning of life to grow at the moment of death, and death is an integral part of the never-ending process that is life. The poet's pain and despair stop when he realizes he has a more excellent vision. The boy has a sincere desire to comprehend the meaning of death, which is not the conclusion but rather a stage in an endless, never-ending process known as life, and this desire has been greatly aided by the bird's song. The bird symbolizes love, agony, and longing, as well as the poet's soul (inner self), which has been forced to endure the painful pain of separation, in contrast to the youngster, who stands for inquisitiveness, curiosity, fresh perspective, creativity of thoughts, innocence, and purity. The sea is a symbol of life and a mother (Mother Nature), who, perhaps on a spiritual level, rocks the cradle of a new life. Also, the sea is eternal; it is timeless. It seems to follow a cycle of tides and currents, like the cycle of life. It ebbs and flows, like a lifetime. These symbols have been skilfully employed to underline and highlight the evolution of the poet's mind from that of a child. As Geoffrey Dutton puts it, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking washes up with the sea images of birth, death, love, and music." (Miller, 1957, p. 40) The poem's original title was "A Child's Reminiscence." However, it appears more like the memories of a wise, experienced person who develops into a 'chanter of pains and joys' and a 'writer of here and hereafter.' In conclusion, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is a unique poem in which Whitman uses rich but complex symbolism to emphasize the maturation of the poet in the boy, who is an experimenter and a quester par excellence and achieves maturity and holistic growth at the end of the poem. To conclude with the words of Walter Sutton:

*"This poem reveals the detachment of the poet and a distancing of a subject through the device of the three related central figures who, as dramatic characters, contribute to the development of the theme. The poem's dramatic quality is heightened by the lyric interludes already discussed. The figures of the boy, the bird and the sea (as earth's mother) are introduced, the significance of their roles is revealed, and the conclusion of the poem resolves the colloquy as the bird's cries of unsatisfied love and the message of death whispered by the sea are fused the poet's own songs awakened from that hour." (Ibid)*

## The symbols in “Passage to India”

The poem “Passage to India” is overflowing with hints of symbolism. This poem largely focuses on man’s never-ending quest for knowledge and exploration of both the physical and spiritual worlds. Whitman’s commemoration of the Union Pacific Railroad’s completion, the laying of the transatlantic cable, and the opening of the Suez Canal The poem aims to track the development or coming of a poet as he presumes a contemporary, epic, and noble subject; therefore, it may be more about poets and poetry than it is about the significant achievements of the nineteenth century. (Davidson, 1983, p. 59) The completion of the physical journey to India in Whitman’s poem merely symbolizes the beginning of the spiritual trip to India, the East, and eventually to God:

*“In the Old World, the East, the Suez Canal,  
The New by its mighty railroad spann’d  
The seas inlaid with eloquent, gentle wires;*

*Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee O soul,”* (Whitman, 1995, P. 372)

The poem’s primary symbolism refers to the geographical east, specifically the east of the Suez and the east past the ‘mighty railway.’ Then, as ‘India’ represents the essence of old faiths and scriptures, which further symbolizes spirituality, the focus shifts. India also represents ‘primal thought.’ According to Whitman, India is the ‘moral, spiritual fountain’ and the ‘source of affection.’ Whitman’s trip is transformed into a “passage to more than India” in the poem’s last section, symbolizing the soul’s ongoing, tireless search for a union with God. ‘More than India’ has broad symbolic ramifications, involving ‘the earth and sky,’ ‘waters of the sea,’ ‘woods and fields,’ ‘strong mountains,’ ‘prairies,’ and ‘grey rocks.’ (Lal Sharma, 2000, p. 41) Through a past that involves the present—a vision from history as a ‘retrospect’ of what is coming into being—the poet travels through imagination and history. Everything that had ever been was in the past. Even a voyage across America is a restitution of what dreamers and mystics saw and knew in ancient times, and the vision of the Genoese explorer, Christopher Columbus, is confirmed in the modern era. The poem also represents man’s past, which is full of religions, the Bible, stories, and fables—all of which represent spirituality or the soul’s search for the divine—as well as the Garden of Eden, from whence Adam and Eve descended and from where they and their children started their excited spiritual quest. It also represents the location where a person can find inner peace, fulfil their purpose, and live a simple life in harmony with the environment. (Davidson, 1983, p. 59) Man must be committed to making this journey. He must keep moving forward ‘like trees on the earth.’ In the poem’s final lines, the word ‘India’ is changed to ‘soul,’ which Whitman exhorts to travel as far as possible:

*“O my brave soul!  
O farther, farther sail!  
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail”!* (Whitman, 1995, P. 375)

Invoking the divine, the poet exhorts his soul to travel ‘farther than India’ and attain the mystic union with the divine, which is the ultimate goal or purpose of human life, without which the soul is miserable and dissatisfied. The physical exploration undertaken by sailors, navigators, adventurers, and explorers through railroads and steamships is symbolized by ‘The Passage.’ ‘The Passage’ represents man’s investigation into his past and progress to a time of myth and religion. It stands for his intellectual quest to link the past, present, and

future—that is, to comprehend space-time continuity. Finally, it represents spiritual awakening, which results in the unity of the human spirit with the divine. Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, the image of a procession, a journey, a quest, or a voyage is used. The ‘open road’ invites the self towards the goal of uniting with the over-soul or the divine source. The significance of the symbol is made obvious in “Passage to India.” The idea of life is a quest for reality. The ‘river’ and ‘stream’ symbolize a lifelong journey that leads to the ‘mystical Ocean:’ “Bathe me O God in thee, morning to thee,/ I and my soul to range in a range of thee.” (Tilak, 2008, p. 170)

Even though the soul may ‘farther and farther sail,’ the poet’s place and identity remain uncertain. By this point, Whitman had realized that his goal and ideal of a new poetry for America had suffered an impediment. He had pretended to be able to contain many people at first. He was referring to the fact that he could take on a variety of forms just as himself. His presumption was carried out by the recurrence of fresh appearances, shapings, and constant triplings and doublings in which he would simultaneously be himself and everyone else. Because all elements are similar and all forms are one form, distinctions and hierarchies would vanish. The poem’s final lines, which begin, “O thou [or God] transcendent, / Nameless the fibre and the breath. / Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou center of them,” culminate this progression from collective experience to personal knowledge, from material success to spiritual success, and from fear and solitary confinement to tranquility and liberty. It concludes by tracing the development of India as imagery, from its origins as a geographical region to the perennial human desire for the knowledge of God. In this rich, evocative poetry, the words ‘passage’ and ‘India’ both have a developing symbolic meaning and importance, and the development of both meanings is indirectly tied to the poem itself. (Davidson, 1983, p. 60)

### **Conclusion:**

In terms of the structure of Whitman’s poetry and his method of communication, Whitman was a major revolutionary and technical pioneer. The greatest American poet of the 19th century, he foresaw some of the most important and creative technological advancements of the 20th century. Even when symbolism became a political movement in Europe, he was a symbolist. He conveyed transcendental truths—his understanding of the mystery of the universe—to his readers through “indirect” language and symbols. In conclusion, Whitman’s claim to be a modern symbolist must rely on a few unique passages, like those in his poems. He does not resemble the symbolists in either his style of writing or the way he has organized his greatest works. Whitman generated a great number of symbolic pictures, some of which are employed as organizing symbols around which whole poems are structured and others of which are prevalent pictures that propose a particular meaning in the larger picture of the poetry. The life of plants serves as a symbol of development and variety through Whitman’s poems. Constant plant growth corresponds to a steady population increase in the United States. A grass leaf with several leaves represents democracy. Whitman’s interest in a person is seen in his respect for the individual. He views the self as the origin of poetry and establishes relations between the self and the concept of poetry through his writing. His poems, “One’s- Self I Sing”, “Song of Myself”, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” and “Passage to India”, show how symbolically charged these poems are. Whitman’s writing style shows a stronger affinity with symbolist language. (Nathanson, 1992, p. 44)

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