

FROM PROSE TO POETRY: WHITMAN'S TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS LEAVES OF GRASS

Journals of Arts & Humanities Studies

Vol. 1: Issue 2

Page 12–22 © The Author(s) 2025

Received: 31 May 2025

Accepted: 17 June 2025

Published: 26 June 2025

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Walt Whitman's literary transition from prose to poetry, focusing on his anonymously published novel *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* and its relationship to *Leaves of Grass*. The analysis explores the role of the narrator, narrative strategies, and the linguistic and thematic evolution that underpins Whitman's creative development. It argues that Whitman's dissatisfaction with the structural limitations of the novel genre led him to embrace poetry as a medium better suited to express his philosophical and democratic ideals. The rediscovery of his prose work illuminates the complexity of his self-perception as a writer and offers critical insights into the formation of his poetic identity.

KEY WORDS

Narrative Structure, Author-Narrator Relationship, Literary Transition, American Identity

Walt Whitman is renowned primarily for his poetry, yet scholars have discovered that he also produced a significant body of prose. In 1852, while working on his iconic collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, he anonymously published *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography: A Story of New York at the Present Time in which the Reader Will Find Some Familiar Characters* (Whitman, 2017). This 36,000-word story was published in six installments in *The Sunday Dispatch*, a New York newspaper, and subsequently faded into obscurity for more than a century. In 2017, Zachary Turpin, a graduate student at the University of Houston, uncovered the work which showed that Whitman was simultaneously working on two books. The first was serialized in *The New York Times* before vanishing shortly after. The second, *Leaves of Grass*, became celebrated and influential volumes of poetry in American literature. The discovery has exposed valuable insights into Whitman's literary development, highlighting certain thematic and stylistic parallels between both literary genres. Moreover, it helps point similarities between both works and answers the question regarding Whitman's transformation from prose to poetry.

Whitman initially explored a variety of popular literary genres, demonstrating his versatility as an author. As early as 1850, he began to write what would become *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of poetry which he would continue editing and revising until his death in 1892. His aspiration and personal choice was to become a poet and to lay the foundations for the independent American literature. The rediscovery of *Life and Adventures...*, however, has opened up many avenues for scholarly research into Whitman, challenging previously held ideas and offering fresh perspectives on his creative evolution.

The role of the poet, which he created himself, seems to be at the centre of his artistic expression. The Poet-Priest mission (Bakratcheva, 2013, p.45), which he meticulously developed and fulfilled, was taken from Emerson's essays (Emerson, 1983) and became his priority for the rest of his life. *Life and Adventures...* thus, allows the reader to see Whitman as the novelist and reveals a pivotal stage in Whitman's transition from prose to poetry. According to Henryk Markiewicz's theory (Markiewicz, 1984, p.73-96) every utterance is the

consequence of the actions of a certain psychophysical perpetrator. From that perspective the novel *Life and Adventures...* contains a valuable source of knowledge about Whitman and his role as the author of the novel. This leads us not only to the written words on the pages of a novel, but also to the conscious choices he made while writing the novel and after its publication. By publishing his own prose work anonymously and later distancing himself from it, he expressed his attitude towards the results of his creative endeavours. This information can be the key to further reflections on poetry as the outcome of a long creative search. In addition, it proves that he made creative attempts in the genre of the novel. It also raises the question of what poetry enabled him to do and why it closed the way to prose.

It is essential to take a closer look at the novel and its complex internal structure. Janusz Sławiński (Sławiński, 1974), highlights the problem of the structure of an epic work, which can be divided into two areas: (1) verbal shaping, including narration, statements, methods of quotation, and (2) the construction of the plot, encompassing the organisation of time, the development of characters, and the position of the narrator. The following work will allow for an analysis of Whitman's novel, trying to show how Whitman fits into the framework of a traditional novel, and how he echoes the voice of a precursor of new creative solutions which finally will find its realisation in *Leaves of Grass*.

The first part of this work will focus on the position and role of the narrator. The novel will be considered a special act of communication in which both the narrator and the author play a key role. Although both should be placed on two separate levels of research into the structure of the novel, there is a specific type of relationships between both of them (Markiewicz, 1984, p. 73-96) that will be the starting point for further considerations. The present analysis will attempt to show that in a novel, the author will be a source of knowledge about the making of the book itself and vice versa, a literary work, even if it is not attributed to anyone, will carry information about the author.

Whitman could be seen in the position of an uninvolved author and an instance external to the statement. He could be in a dominant position, authorised to impose anonymity on the text, thus freeing the text from the shackles of biographical external influences. On the other hand, a noteworthy original work is rarely rejected by the creator. Only unsatisfactory artistic attempts at the end of the creative process seem to condemn the work to rejection. However, there are always some specific linguistic expressions, attitudes and beliefs that flow from it. This would make it possible to define the characteristics of a creative personality. Whitman's anonymity as the author of the novel and the introduction of a first-person narrative are a deliberate attempt to shift authorship within the text. According to Markiewicz's approach, we could speak here of the personality of the internal author, who is not identical with the speaking voice of the text. The so-called textual subject presents himself at the beginning of the text revealing his name as Jack Engle. He takes on the social role of a member of the New York community who, from the perspective of hindsight and experience, talks about events in which he himself was a central figure. We would treat him as a personality implied by the characteristics of this statement, characterised by self-presentational information that clearly differs from the author what is reflected not only in the text itself but also in the title of the novel. The narrator is given a different name and other biographical details to separate him from the author. Whitman as an internal author not only deprives himself of authorship mentioned in the text by creating a textual subject, but also by means of a post-textual anonymity that cuts the author off from the text itself.

According to Markiewicz, each utterance is a consequence of the actions of some psychophysical perpetrator, whom we call the author. Although the separateness of the internal author and the textual subject has occurred in literary fiction, this specific type of relationship changes its character depending on the historical and literary moment and the reader's perspective. Especially today, research has moved away from attempts to equate the author and narrator (even in situations where the lyrical voice is identical to the author). What allows for the search for common features is the history of literature and the trends prevailing in it. Historical conventions have determined how the narrator in a literary text should be treated. The tendency during the European Romantic era (Markiewicz, 1984, p. 93), which had a significant influence on the emerging American literature, was decisive in identifying the narrator with the author. In the Romantic era, the author's voice was identified with the speaking voice, if not in terms of facts, then in terms of attitudes, judgements and general evaluations.

From this perspective, one could be tempted to identify common features between the seemingly different textual subject and the author in Whitman's novel. European Romanticism undoubtedly influenced American writers. The way readers perceived the author of a novel and the voice of the narrator during the

Romantic period impacted the way the narrative was created. The authors of novels incorporated their own beliefs and concepts into the seemingly author-independent narrator. What connects both the author and the narrator in *Life and Adventures*... seems to be the language used to create new reality and specific beliefs. This approach would make it possible to define the role that the speaking voice assumes in the novel and to compare it with the role of the Poet-Priest presented in poetry (Bakratcheva, 2013, p.45). This conscious choice is an acceptance of the representation of certain attitudes of Whitman himself. It will also be an indication of a disagreement with the genre requirements of the novel and a final departure from this genre.

The identity of the author of the novel with the narrator could be considered at the level of writing the book. The narrator observes and reports what he sees in front of his eyes, something that he praises and condemns. The narrative voice is the voice of a moralist: "Old Wigglesworth! I must drop a word of praise and regret upon you here; for the Lord gave you a good soul, ridiculous old codger that you were." (p.263) The narrator constantly addresses the reader and this apostrophe goes outside the mainstream of the plot and creates a parallel type of narration. The narrator reveals his own personal attitude towards some of the characters, then he steps back into the background to maintain a more objective distance, from which he can moralize and criticize others' behaviours: "Old Wigglesworth had been well off once. The key to his losses, and his old age of penury, was nothing more nor less than intemperance. He did not get drunk, out and out, but he was never perfectly sober. Covert now employed him at a salary of four dollars a week." (p.264)

The title given by the narrator himself underlines the significance of the present time and the location of the story. The speaking voice reveals his willingness to share with the reader his own autobiography which is incorporated into the current life of the American society. He shows the dynamism of the fast developing city of New York and the complexity of its inhabitants. In order to increase the reliability of the story the narrator addresses the reader using metalanguage. The unwritten agreement between the narrator and the reader becomes a guarantee of the truthfulness of the novel:

"Candidly reader we are going to tell you a true story. The narrative is written in the first person; because it was originally jotted down by the principal actor in it, for the entertainment of a valued friend. From that narrative, although the present is somewhat elaborated, with an unimportant leaving out here, and putting in there, there has been no departure in substance. The main incidents were of actual occurrence in this good city of New York; and there will be a sprinkling of our readers by no means small, who will wonder how the deuce such facts, (as they happen to know them) ever got into print. We shall, in the narrative, give the performers in this real drama, unreal names; and for good reasons, throw just enough of our own toggery about them to prevent their being identified by strangers." – p.262

In addition, the narrator's statements and judgements do not require the novel's author to reinterpret them. They convey a clear message and lead to generally accepted moral principles, according to which we are used to acting. The line between good and evil is clearly defined. The narrator, like the author, has full control over the characters' statements. He appears as the creator of the text who always creates his own statements, only pretending to reproduce them. It is the narrator who seems to assign the title of the novel and the chapter titles.

The narrator takes over the role of the author, pushing him into the background. However, discovering the narrator of the novel *Life and Adventures*... allows us to discover a new side of Whitman. In the novel, the narrator is distinct from the author, because the personal data is inconsistent with the author's. However, this invention is a literary device or a manifestation of the author's creativity. The ways of linguistic expression and the interpretations, evaluations and generalisations seem not to differ from the author's. The majority of texts from that period were an expression of the author's own beliefs, especially those that ended in moral teachings. Usually, as in the case of the novel *Life and Adventures*..., they contained a model of dignified living.

The choice of narrator and his relationship to the depicted world are a conscious decision of the author of the novel and might carry additional information about the creative process. This is information about the scope of knowledge about the world while maintaining a certain cognitive distance. The degree of visibility and involvement of the narrator can also be distinguished. Narration is undoubtedly a statement presenting a sequence of past events arranged in chronological order. In the novel, first-person narration allows Whitman to take on the perspective of the character and better understand the emotions and motives of the characters' actions. The story from hindsight gives the statement itself the status of credible, verified and enriched by

experience. The narrator's perspective creates a community of characters with the reader, and as we know, communication has always played an important role in Whitman's work. However, the perspective in Whitman's novel is not uniform and changes. The change to third-person narration results in greater objectivity and creates distance.

In the context of the development of the novel as a genre, the choice of first-person narrator is not groundbreaking, but rather significant from the point of view of the novelist's conscious choice of means. It becomes important to establish the relationship between the narrator and the essence of epic poetry. The narrator becomes an intermediary in the presentation, a structural necessity for the epic and a carrier of knowledge about himself. The manifestations of the speaker in the text allow the profile of the narrator to be constructed. He appears in a structurally secondary plane and mediates between the event and the listener.

The degree of visibility of the narrator in Whitman's novel can be overwhelming for today's reader, and his voice too moralising. However, for Whitman it is a writing experiment in which he strives to express the cognitive value of the world and tries to establish his place as an author with specific attitudes and a concept of the world. He allows the narrator-protagonist to speak, who, in retrospect, has more to say because he filters the events he describes through the prism of his own experiences. For Whitman, the communication between the narrator, with whom he sympathises and who expresses his thoughts, and the reader, to whom he addresses the statement, becomes crucial. The code that marks the narrator and the reader becomes important. The narrator's signs seem to be more numerous than the reader's signs, and whenever he reports events that he knows himself and that the reader does not know, he creates a reading sign. The narrator is a person who represents 'personality' and the ability to write.

The choice of first-person narrator is individualised and specific. It carries the implicit intention of penetrating and reducing the distance to the reality being described. Whitman reduces the distance to the reader through the choice of first-person narrative. In a non-detached and subjective relationship to the presented world, his position as an author who strives to break the distance with the reader is expressed. Communication in which the narrator plays a central role becomes important. And although he is not identical with the author, he becomes a representative of the author's values. The narrator's relationship to the content presented is not equal throughout the story. He tells about events from a perspective of time, which gives him a primacy of superiority over the characters from the presented world. He comments on events in which he participated from a perspective of time. The time distance works in his favour because he gains experience and knowledge over time, which gives the story more cognitive weight. The narrator thus also becomes more credible, but also aware. The communication between the reader and the narrator in the text becomes visible, which is a conscious device used by Whitman. He creates a two-level narrative, where the foreground – the presented world – shines through the second level – the narrative situation. The narrative assumptions of the narrator boil down to the fact that the narrator is the protagonist, participant and witness of the events described. The purpose of the story is related to the definition of the addressee of the narrative - convincing them of the credibility of the story taking place in New York, sharing experiences and information, and the resulting instruction. The depicted world becomes important not by the fact of its existence, but because it is a reflection of a certain order in the narrator's total picture of reality. He believes in this order (it corresponds to the values held by Whitman himself) and strives towards it. The narrator's attitude towards the depicted world is expressed directly through interpretive and evaluative judgements, comments and apostrophes.

Whitman's narrator is a first-person narrator who reports in his limited knowledge, but enriched with additional knowledge resulting from experience and time perspective. The narrator's qualifications are applied in Whitman's novel rather intuitively and fluently, but not very clearly. Too little attention was paid to the mediatization of the narrator, which may have influenced Whitman's eventual withdrawal from this form of writing. The leap from first-person to third-person narration, the oscillation between the narrator's memory and writing process, although it could be part of Whitman's experiments, seem to be unnoticed. The narrative strategy throughout the piece seems to be constant, but we can find several attempts to deviate from it. The constant is the attitude of the protagonist and his moral views, which provide insight into what we later find in the poetry. The variable elements are the experiment with distance from the self and the sudden shifts from first to third person. This narrative convention was intended to help externalise the speaking voice. Genette's observation (Genette, 1972, p. 203), which distinguishes between narrative perspective and narrative voice, makes it possible to find a difference between the person whose point of view determines the narrative perspective and the narrator. It seems that it is Whitman who is watching, and the narrator who is putting it

into words. And although the narrator's modality is often unclear and undefined and does not show any identity with the author, it seems not separated from him. Although Whitman tries to follow the path of apparent mystification as he switches authorship within the text and removes his name as an external author from the novel, his opinions stay hidden behind the narrator's voice. The illocutionary character (Markiewicz, 1984, p. 73-96) of his statements is linked to the modality of the narrator. According to the principle that every story is a form of communication, Whitman's novel conceals certain intentions of the statement.

The narrator's position is further defined by the time perspective. An important aspect of the narrator is his self-orientation. When talking about the narrator's attitude, it is hard not to mention the credibility of his statements. And here the narrator appears as the guarantor of this credibility, which is to arouse the reader's justified trust. And although the reality presented is fictional, it is important to focus on the idea that the facts, their interpretations and evaluations should be accepted. The narrator is not mistaken about the facts; he interprets and evaluates them as if the author would have done so. On the other hand, the relationship between the conscious application of rules and the spontaneous expression of personality is difficult to investigate, which could lead to methodological inconsistency (Markiewicz, 1984, p. 73-96). According to Howells, truth and beauty are identified with human experience. The reader tests a novel's truth through confronting it with his own knowledge of life: "I think the novelist is rarely the victim of such a possession, or obsession, that he does not know when he is representing and when he is misrepresenting life. (...)if he is at all an artist, when he will know it, and will see that the work he has done is ugly because of it. That is the time for him to tear up his work, and to begin anew." (Howells, 1994, p. 235).

Although for the novelist himself could be difficult throughout the whole making of the book to stay entirely aware of the reliability of his own book, the review of his own work will always unveil the truth. It is a moment of confrontation between an author and his own work. It's possible to conclude that this is what Whitman does with his works, after he writes it. He realizes that his work is not authentic enough to represent him as an author and his too complex self.

Whitman chooses the first person narration that allows not only to describe the speaking voice's own life and to become a part of the whole picture, but also when necessarily to distance himself from scenery he is describing. His relations with the other characters, inhabitants of New York become the central point of the novel and allow him to create a social panorama. The narrator and the main character interact with each other at different time levels which leads to the self-aware inhabitant of the American city. The changeable perspective in the self-approach serves as narrator's self-reveal. Sometimes Jack speaks about his own life in the first person: "What passed in the conference between the three worthies who were left, I never learned. That they were, to a great extent, implicated together in plans of villany [sic], there is no doubt; and thus were bound to afford each other mutual help [sic] in time of need." (p.351) and then suddenly the author pivots to the third person perspective: "Jack, indeed, was very free in his demonstrations." (p.277). Moreover, he enters the minds of the characters and takes on the attitude of an omniscient narrator: "Sick before, and now doubly sick with alarm, he instinctively hobbled to what he supposed the safe repository of his valuable plunder—supposed, and yet had an indefinite sort of fear." (p.348)

In Whitman's novel, the relationship and presentation dominate, with timid reflective passages that attempt to enter into the speaker's own self. However, Whitman's prose lacks the complexity of style of expression so characteristic of his poetry.

Whitman's fascination with the concept of a multi-faced "self" is evident. When approached as an autobiographical work, the novel centres the self, but the genre imposes limitations on the narrative's voice. While the narrative shifts perspectives- expanding and contracting its focus-it remains filtered through the narrator's consciousness. Comparing Whitman's poetry to his prose highlights the novel's defining characteristics. The novel, through realism in tone, imposes structural and thematic constraints on both the author and the reader. In his poetry, Whitman explores the self with greater freedom, attaining a prophetic role and presenting himself as the voice of the divine. Conversely, the novel's singular narrative perspective restricts his exploration of the self. Nevertheless, Whitman experiments with language and narrative complexity, blending modest and expansive depictions of his own speaking in his own voice and representing the voices of many, all while maintaining the overarching authority of the prophet and the poet-priest.

Central to that approach is his fascination with the concept of the self, particularly the notion of a multi-faced self, which drives his experimentation with the narration. Despite these efforts, his attempts to

transcend the limitations of conventional narrative structures fall short. The genre of the novel constrains Whitman's ability to fully express his democratic ideas as the poet that Emerson characterises in his essay. The narrator's voice remains conventional and leans towards moralism, lacking the flexibility required to convey the innovative and subjective perspectives that Whitman sought to explore. This failure to break the literary conventions connected to a novelistic form, particularly in terms of voice, extends to the plot and action, which also adhere to conventional patterns.

And although we observe some attempts towards the sphere of internal phenomena, external phenomena still dominate here. As an author, Whitman tries to give the narrator self-reflection. However, psychological complexity is lacking. What supports the process is the way the narrative is conducted. Introspective narration, (retrospective) narrative of recollection is enriched with reflection and information about oneself. It helps the narrator to place their own thoughts and attitudes at the centre. The selection of what is presented and what is not by the narrator seems to have its own significance. The emerging inner monologue consists of reflections, questions, predictions, resolutions, and loose connotations relating to the current environment. All of this is an attempt to externalise Whitman's own attitudes and views. Although it is difficult to speak of a complex analysis of internal states here, the way the narrative is conducted brings us closer to the egocentricity present in Whitman's poetry. The autotrophic retrospective narrative method, conducted from a long-term perspective, shows that the narrator identifies with his former personality, but develops through experience. Nevertheless, the complexity of the personality is shown here as voices speaking at different points in time. Narrative competence is realised through the selection of different narrative forms.

Whitman not only introduces the concept of self, but also relationships with other people. The unique features which become so visible in his poetry are also apparent in *Life and Adventures*.... Jack feels sympathy for certain members of American society represented in the novel. Sympathy here reflects Whitman's attempt to induce in his reader emotional involvement in the democratic issues of the new created culture of America: "He seems to be pursuing an alchemy (physical, psychological, literary) through which public hostility, anxiety, and vulnerability (connected to slavery, civil war, and their persistent aftermaths) could be transformed into a mood of egalitarian sympathy." (Benett, 2016, p.608).

In *Life and Adventures*...we observe the moralized and interpersonal notion of sympathy as a moral statement. The narrator "(...) sympathizes in a social superiority, as an active subject facing the passive object of her pity" (Benett, 2016, p.610) and acts as a moralist:

"Old Wigglesworth! I must drop a word of praise and regret upon you here; for the Lord gave you a good soul, ridiculous old codger that you were. (...) Old Wigglesworth had been well off once. The key to his losses, and his old age of penury, was nothing more nor less than intemperance. He did not get drunk, out and out, but he was never perfectly sober. Covert now employed him at a salary of four dollars a week." – p.263 -234

Sympathy is for Jack a vital force coming from the outside. Initially, it is more deliberate and moralized, but it always has a positive connotation. It varies and sometimes it becomes a moral sentiment of Christian pity:

"When I waited upon her back, I told her I hoped she would not be discouraged, nor fail me, at the appointed time, which we purposely put at midnight for greater security. The stout-hearted girl assured me that if she were living it should be as we planned it out, unless our plans failed by means other than any that depended on her." – p.321-322

However, Jack's sympathy changes its character over the plot and becomes a current not only from inside but also from outside. It is a kind of vital force operating bodies from everywhere. Sometimes, it receives more spiritual character:

"Human souls are as the dove, which went forth from the ark, and wandered far, and would repose herself at last on no spot save that whence she started. To what purpose has nature given men this instinct to die where they were born? Exists there some subtle sympathy between the thousand mental and physical essences which make up a human being, and the sources where from they are derived?" – p.333

Sympathy operates in *Life and Adventures...* through different expressions. Whitman portrays it as an ontological force, transcending physical or material boundaries at times and manifesting as a natural energy that flows on all directions. While sympathy is always interactive, it is not always confined to human relationships, highlighting its broader, universal dimension.

The novel can be classified as distinctly American due to the themes it explores. Love, urban life, optimism, and nature are interwoven throughout the narrative, reflecting the American experience of the middle of the 19th century. These themes also signal Whitman's evolving approach to American reality, with love, optimism, and nature serving as markers of his innovative literary vision. They become indicators of Whitman's new approach towards American reality. Leslie A. Fiedler (Fiedler, 1960) makes an attempt to distinguish American novelistic tradition from European one through a thematic approach. He states that the themes of love and death underline what is peculiarly American in these novels, and Whitman seems to fit into this framework.

The main protagonists and the narrator epitomize love, optimism and hope. They both represent moral values and goodness. As Richard Chase argues (Chase, 1957, p.2) the American novel is merely an exploration of history and moral lessons that the characters deal with in all their contradictory experiences. His concept of the American novel focuses on exploring the possibilities and realities of specific situations. Jack is immersed in his own thoughts and reflections about his life, the city and its inhabitants, and becomes less interested in wresting order out of the chaos of the events.

Whitman's reader needs to observe and make his own conclusion about the place and the people. The readers may have the feeling that the narrator's story reveals something meaningful. Of great importance seems to be a scene at the cemetery when Jack is walking around the place and thinking about the past. The plot suddenly stops and the main focus is shifted into the narrator's mind. There is a moment when the reader's expectations increase as well. There are allusions to history and to the inhabitants of the city who being in their 20s lost their life fighting for the higher causes. They are called by names and located in a real places of America. The narrator starts thinking about the past and invites to this act the reader:

"Could it be that coffins, six feet below where I stood, enclosed the ashes of like young men, whose vestments, during life, had engrossed the same anxious care—and schoolboys and beautiful women; for they too were buried here, as well as the aged and infirm. But onward rolled the broad, bright current, and troubled themselves not yet with gloomy thoughts; and that showed more philosophy in them perhaps than such sentimental meditations as any the reader has been perusing." – p.337

In the picturesque and intimate scene at the cemetery Jack's idealistic visions about history lose their reliability as he uses his own imagination to bring to life certain dialogues and situations he couldn't be part of. Thereupon, not every scene from the novel can be treated representatively. Although the novel seems to be written in such a convention, it opens a new field of allegorical interpretation. It can be claimed that the cemetery scene is the one which announces the birth of the great poet, because it partakes of the poetical character of Whitman's poems. Jack represents the positive way of thinking:

"For I felt that life, matter of fact as it was and is in reality—I felt that to me it opened enjoyment and pleasure on every side. I was happy in my friends—happy in having Ephraim and Violet and Tom and Martha and Inez—every one of them! I was happy that I lived in this glorious New York, where, if one goes without activity and enjoyment, it must be his own fault in the main. Truly, life is sweet to the young man." – p.332

Life and Adventures... reveals its lyrical character in Chapter 19, where the plot comes to an unexpected break as Jack immerses himself in his own thoughts. In this excerpt, the narrator pauses and reflects on mortality, creating a poetic moment and offering a glimpse of the poet that would define *Leaves of Grass*. The passage suggests that Whitman begins to recognize why conventional plots will no longer serve for the kind of writing he desires as well as discovers the limitations of conventional narrative structures for the type of expression he seeks to achieve. Whitman realises that he needs to delve deep into his inner self, discover his own self-expression and unique linguistic diversity.

When analysing Whitman's novel on a linguistic level, it can be seen that the narrator uses a literary language devoid of metaphors. Unlike poetry, there are no metaphors here, nor any content hidden between

the lines or ambiguous in nature. It is difficult to find genre-specific features here that differ from novels of the mid-19th century. In addition, the language of the individual characters in the novel lacks distinctive features.

On the other hand, Jack expresses a sense of nostalgic optimism, recognizing the unique charm of New York's bustling population. The spiritual and physical remnants of the past inspire him to contemplate the present and look towards the future. This passage marks the onset of Whitman's self-transformation from prose writer to poet. The poetic language employed in the scene, imbued with optimism and joy, anticipates the themes and tone of *Leaves of Grass*. It serves as an early declaration of Whitman's poetic vision, bridging his prose and the groundbreaking work that define his legacy. The description of the moment in the novel may signal the beginning of Whitman's self-transformation from a writer to a poet. He uses poetic language full of optimism and joy. That fragment becomes his announcement of *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman introduces thus a new kind of character, a New Yorker who closely observes the city and the life of the residents. Although the speaking voice depicted in *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* is not yet the confident, visionary creator we associate with *Leaves of Grass*, he introduces a self-aware protagonist who embodies the hope of the new Adam, liberated from the burden of inherited sin and symbolizing a reimagined American identity. Through the novel Whitman begins to redefine the American character, presenting Jack as a figure distinct in his attitude towards the past and his biological roots. Jack is self-confident and self-aware, refusing to dwell on the past and instead embracing a forward-looking, optimistic perspective. He represents a new state of mind, one rooted in intellectual power, moral integrity, and a profound sense of hope. Jack epitomizes values such as love, optimism and hope, and his inner harmony is mirrored in the natural world around him. This connection between nature and the protagonist's state of mind expands on R.W.B. Lewis's concept of the new Adam, suggesting that such a figure, characterized by innocence, solidarity, and liberation, was emerging even before the publication of Whitman's opus magnum.

The contradictions inherent in genetic legacy are filtered through Jack's experience and perspective. After all, they are challenged and rejected by him. We read about Jack's belief that the truth lies in simplicity and varies from person to person. Simplicity and morality guarantee selflessness and honesty, what put in mind the Founding Fathers' values. These centralized and cultivated morals lay the foundations for eulogized optimism or love in the novel and direct the novel towards the American characteristics presented by Chase:

"(...) the American imagination, even when it wishes to assuage and reconcile the contradictions of life, has not been stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incarnation, by the tragic or Christian possibility. It has been stirred, rather, by the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradictions, and disorder." (Chase, 1957, p.2).

Jack represents the kind of conflict between spirituality and practical experimentation throughout the plot of the novel which leads finally to Jack's self-awareness and his individual reconciliation of opposites:

"As for me, what little I had picked up of law, was not of much account. The lapse of time had never reconciled me to the profession; although incidents and acquaintance and excitement, such as we in New York can easily meet with, diverted my attention from the despondency that had begun to come upon me when I had been a student for the first few weeks." – p.308

Whitman presents the new American society as a collective character, having an entirely different attitude towards life and representing entirely new social hierarchy. The author not only depicts it through multicultural descriptions but also reveals the new way of thinking of his main protagonist. Throughout the development of the plot Jack is not tormented by despair or any kind of dilemma. He is thinking and analysing every aspect of life and faces every conflict with inner peace and quiet. He epitomizes maturity of thought: "And here is a consideration, that the theorist on the evils of society might build a big structure upon; but as I am only jotting down a story of incidents, I will leave whoever sees these paragraphs, to carry out the train of thought for himself." (p.271)

The concept of security makes Jack feel connected to American society and creates a specific kind of unity that is so representative of *Leaves of Grass*. He extracts whatever positive aspect he can from the social experience and becomes a better individual. He overcomes his weaknesses because of his strong moral values,

love and people he is surrounded by. Biological roots don't play a significant role but rather stand in opposition to the fossilized European ideas limiting any kind of development.

Live and Adventure... reflects its engagement with pastoral themes. Leo Marx defines the pastoral as a mode of consciousness, and this concept aligns closely with Whitman's approach in the novel (Marx, 1967). The author of *Leaves of Grass* blends urban and rural life, drawing on the tradition of pastoral literature while reflecting the complexities of the American experience. However, Whitman moves beyond conventional pastoralism, exploring a more imaginative and nuanced mode of perception.

This "higher" mode of perception is exemplified in one of the novel's final scenes, where the protagonists row out in the river and contemplate nature. In this moment, Whitman intertwines the characters' reflections on nature with the sound of bells, merging the natural and human worlds. The narrative shifts seamlessly from the description of the external environment to an exploration of the human condition. This interaction between the contemplation of nature and the awakening of an "inner Arcadian vision" symbolizes a heightened awareness of reality. Here, Whitman employs metaphor to illustrate the profound interplay between the external world and the character's internal transformation, offering the compelling synthesis of the pastoral tradition with the American pursuit of self-discovery.

Verbal shaping, narration, statements, allow us to get closer to Whitman's style as a novelist. Central to this transformation seems to be his experimentation with language, which becomes a site of tension and discovery. Whitman attempts to find new modes of expression visible in the interplay between fiction and poetry, where he explores the potential to convey the invisible. Onomastics, in particular, creates an independent source of meaning within the novel, while the narrator sways from formal language into the representation of the spoken language. Ultimately, the novel reflects Whitman's effort to expand boundaries of literary expression, paving his poetic way for poetic innovations.

Writing about the development of the American novel, Chase (Chase, 1957) states that language plays a significant role. The values of the characters are closely related to the language they use. As an author and a namer, Whitman chooses meaningful names for his protagonists in order to connect it with their representations of themselves. The villains receive suitable names for their characters, e.g. Rye, Fox or Leech. The author names a few things in the novel repeating the narrator's name. *Jack* contains certain features and becomes a name of hope. Language carries additional meaning and plays a significant role. The uneducated representatives of the lower social ranks who managed to achieve a high government post are chastised by Whitman through linguistic expressions.

In *Semantics of Narrative Utterance*, Sławiński (Sławiński, 1974) emphasises that narrative utterance is based on a different linguistic function than poetic communication, in which verbal signs refer to experiences or things and interpret their position in the linguistic macrosystem and microsystem of an individual communication. The relationship of designation (language sign – referent) is based on the mutual relationship of the elements of the utterance and their reference to the language system. In poetry, the cognitive function of language is weakened and the world communicated by the work is poorly visible. It is obscured by inter-sign and inter-significance relationships. The language of novels and poetry will therefore differ in terms of their degree of transparency. The transparency of realistic narrative and the opacity of poetic text will be the distinguishing features. Consequently, the opacity of poetic communication will influence the more courageous selection of topics, because poetic language will favour the encoding of socially unacceptable topics and will allow a message to be sent into the world under the cover of ambiguity. In addition, what seems to speak in favour of choosing by Whitman poetry is language. From this point of view, poetry becomes a more attractive form of art for Whitman, one that gives him creative freedom.

Regarding the second narrative layer mentioned by Sławiński in his work, specifically the linguistic layer, narration, or statements, one cannot help but feel that Whitman strove to pay special attention to the medium of the narrative in the creative process. In the novel, especially in the mid-19th century, the medium is secondary and subservient to what is to be conveyed. Its task is to communicate a certain order that is segmented differently than itself. The focus is primarily on the subject of epic narration. There is a visible division between the narrative word and the reality it depicts, a boundary that separates the stylistic domain of the work from the domain of the objects presented in it outside the work in systemic relationships. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish elements of different types: linguistic and thematic. They represent two different planes of semiotic-literary reality.

A novel is made up of scenes, actions and literary characters; a narrative statement has a different linguistic function than a poetic message. In poetry, meaning is subdued by the relationships between the elements of the statement and their reference to the linguistic system. In prose, the cognitive function of the word takes pride of place. As a result, the language of a novel is more literal and less ambiguous. In prose, the cognitive function of language is sharpened and the world that the work communicates is more visible. And what is visible in the novel is the place and the attitudes of the characters. We see New York and the character who has adopted certain attitudes.

The narrative in Whitman's novel is not a monologue running parallel to the characters' statements, but a speech oriented towards these statements, creating various connections with them, which is significant. It expresses the author's tendencies towards engagement, moralising and communication with the reader. The world revealed in the narrative changes slightly, but its understanding as a 'form of presentation' is rather conventional. So we have America with its bustling New York, a self-confident and optimistic protagonist whose inner struggles and emerging self-awareness are expressed through his descriptions of nature, and on the other hand, we have the narrator who, taking on the role of a creator, tries to experiment with language as a mean of expression. In spite of those artistic attempts, the world presented in Whitman's novel is still uncomplicated, and the narrative is too conventional. As Sławiński points out, words in a novel have a different meaning than in poetry. The theory of poetry has been dominated by linguistic and semantic issues, and the structure of the poetic world, its content and the lyrical subject are approached through the study of lexical material and the analysis of syntax and sentence intonation. The poetic world is treated as a reality between the words. On the other hand, research into narrative prose shows a tendency to perceive what is presented in the work as reality outside the words.

This approach therefore might lead Whitman towards poetry, with which it could be easier for him to construct added meanings and hide the message, avoiding the requirement of literality. Consequently, the discovery of *Life and Adventures...* could be significant not only for its rarity but also for its implications regarding Whitman's early literary experimentation. Prior to this finding, the full extent of Whitman's prose fiction was largely unknown. Due to the discovery, the novel demonstrates Whitman's engagement with various genres and modes of writing, reflecting his efforts to explore and refine his creative approach. Additionally, it leads to his self-awareness as a writer and sheds light on his struggle with form, providing valuable insights into the transitional period that ultimately led to his shift towards poetry. Moreover it unveils previously unknown aspects of his writing process and offers a glimpse into his evolving self-awareness as an author. This discovery enriches our understanding of Whitman's literary development and the foundations of his later achievements.

It is very likely that Whitman treated his novel as a creative experiment and was looking for a new way of expressing himself. He published the novel anonymously, just as he published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The difference was that the first edition of poetry, although not a success, brought recognition from the great authorities of that time. The anonymously published novel has been lost and forgotten until now.

Nevertheless, *Life and Adventures...* holds significant literary value as it provides insight into Whitman's evolution from a prose writer to a poet. Examining the novel within the context of 19th-century American history allows us to uncover the importance of its hidden clues and expressions, revealing Whitman's attempts to forge a new literary form that reflected the distinct American experience.

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