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The apparent similarities between Blake and Whitman evident in early iterations of *Leaves of Grass* are to be accounted for through literary influences besides a direct influence of Blake on Whitman. Blake’s work had only a small readership in America prior to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*; the influence of Blake on Whitman must thus occur in, or after, the 1860s. Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of William Blake* (1863), featuring reproductions of Blake’s work, and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868), with its reproductions of Blake’s prophetic works, provide the first major disseminations of Blake’s work that would allow Whitman to engage with it. Swinburne’s *Blake* is doubly significant for its more sustained consideration of Blake’s prophetic works as well as the parallels he draws between Blake and Whitman.

Giles, in his work *Transatlantic Insurrections*, outlines many of the elements that went into the creation of an American cultural identity. The goal of this study is to discount misconceptions in this formation. Giles focusses primarily on the role of British writing as a catalyst against which American writers reacted to create an American literature. Giles writes “to describe the formation of an identifiably American culture as predicated upon indigenous conceptions of native ‘experience’ is, at best, misleading. Early American experience was a duplicitous and frequently paradoxical business” (11). And Giles is of course correct in this understanding: the “American experience was a duplicitous and frequently paradoxical business”. But it is this relative instability of the American experience which shaped the intellectual

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flexibility of Whitman and many writers of the nineteenth century American renaissance. It is through their need, and desire, to adapt that they came to create an American literature that is capable of standing on its own merits. However, the nature of the American cultural experience—duplicitous and paradoxical—is such that it is impossible to point to one set of circumstances as native experience.

The idea of literary influence brings to the fore questions of literary originality. Bloom, in a typically back-handed fashion, writes, “Poetic influence need not make poets less original; as often it makes them more original, though not therefore necessarily better” (7). This idea of the relative originality of Whitman’s work is one that must be confronted. Whitman makes use of the work, style, ideas, and even phrasing of other authors, but this does not undermine his value as a poet—it is in fact demonstrative of that which his compositional method is capable—, his great power of amalgamation. It is this power that enables Whitman to create an American poetry that can be original and yet resonate with echoes of the work of other authors.

What Weisbucb posits as the key element of America’s formation of identity, or cultural influence, is an intellectual flexibility. He writes, “The American’s secret, his recognition that what we call reality is exactly and only that, a named thing, thought’s marshalling choice of a set of possibilities amidst unthought others ...” (XVII). Weisbuch’s understanding of America’s great secret latches onto an ontological malleability that can be understood as the result of the great many cultures that were forced into contact in America. Meaning by this: the America we now know is the result of a series of defining choices, of appropriations, which the founders of what is now the monolith of American culture could not have realized they were making. The labels with which we so often define ourselves now were not as fixed then; it was a time of vast experiential experimentation. Weisbuch goes on to write:

The British romantic’s conversion of a factual world is private, inner, to an extent uncompetitive but grudgingly coexistent with the world out there. The American romantic wishes not only to convert the world of fact within himself but on its own external, historical ground. (216)
This is one among many ways that American Romanticism distinguishes itself from British, and one that points the way towards one of the similarities between Blake and Whitman. American Romanticism represents a development of the ideas of British Romanticism. The American Romantic seeks not only to accept the world as it is, but to use the means at their disposal to create change in the world as they deem necessary – to make the world more acceptable. This idea, this progression represents a transatlantic influence that is firmly in line with the ideas of Giles, Weisbuch and even Bloom. The American writer encounters the work of the British Romantic and in the process of assimilation moves through that work to something more useful to the American people.

To articulate this argument, I establish the tendency of scholars and critics to refer to the works of Blake and Whitman as having certain affinities. By “affinities”, I mean similarities based on their reactions to stimuli rather than Whitman’s direct engagement with the work of Blake. The apparent similarities will be accounted for through a variety of literary influences, key among these being a literary heritage shared by Blake and Whitman. As a result of Blake’s relative lack of publication, the cause of these affinities between his work and that of Whitman – evident even in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* – cannot be direct influence. Instead, the root of these affinities must be sought in a variety of influences, shared and mediating, which work to create the appearance of similarity between the works of Blake and Whitman. By “shared influence”, I mean works which both Blake and Whitman encountered, and by “mediating influences”, I mean authors who directly engaged with Blake’s work and then bore an influence on Whitman.

Anecdotal evidence, which serves to further verify the affinities between the works of Blake and Whitman, is presented in the following letter Whitman wrote to his friend William O’Connor, author of *The Good Gray Poet: A Vindication* (1866). This letter, dated September 27, 1868, runs, in part, as follows:

> [John] Swinton had lately been posting himself about William Blake in his poems, has the new London edition of W.B. in two vols. He, Swinton, gives me rather new information in one respect – says that the formal resemblance between several pieces of Blake & my pieces is so marked that he, S., has with
persons that partially know me, passed them off temporarily for mine, & read them aloud as such. He asked me pointedly whether I had not met with Blake’s productions in my youth, & c—said that Swinburne’s idea of resemblance & c was not so wild, after all. (qtd. in Allen 400).

Swinton’s success in deceiving his listeners is indicative of the plausibility of these two poets having more to connect them than the fact that they both write in English. There is something in their prosodies and ideologies that led them to create poetry with enough points of contact and sides of likeness to create this tendency to connect them that has lasted 145 years. Swinton was right to enquire as to Whitman’s familiarity with Blake’s work, though he must have known Whitman would deflect—or ignore—the question. Much of the scholarly criticism on this relationship has focused on the notion of “formal resemblance” in terms of prosody and line length. However, it is not merely this formal relationship which has led many critics to refer to these two as similar; it is, as it was with Swinburne, based on an understanding of these two poets’ ideologies as extrapolated through their works.

Through Emerson’s intercourse with Henry Crabb Robinson and John James Garth Wilkinson, both important figures in the nineteenth century cultural rejuvenation of Blake, it has been established that Emerson was among the first American writers to possess, or have first-hand knowledge of, Blake’s larger body of work. It is through Emerson that Blakean sentiments were first disseminated into American culture. Emerson met Robinson and Wilkinson during his 1847–48 pilgrimage to England. Robinson leaves a note of this meeting on April 16, 1848, as a party at the Fields’ in which Emerson, Wilkinson, Chapman, Fields, and himself “talked only abo’ Blake” (Bentley 245). Wilkinson’s account of the dinner accords with that of Robinson, except in the date (Wilkinson, C.J. 52). Emerson, in his own journal, has conspicuously left no note of this meeting (Journals 8: 423-4). In support of Emerson’s early knowledge of Blake’s work, there exists a copy of a Wilkinson edition of Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience inscribed in

(2) For a more sustained discussion of Emerson’s role in the dissemination of Blake’s work and furthering of his reputation, see Claire Frances Elliott’s thesis William Blake’s American Legacy: transcendentalism and visionary poetics in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman (2008).
Emerson’s hand reading, “R.W. Emerson from his friend E[izabeth] P[almer] P[eabody]” and dated what appears to be 1842 (Harding 33). Although these facts are only demonstrative of Emerson’s familiarity with Blake’s lyrical works, there also exists evidence which is indicative of Emerson’s knowledge of Blake’s prophetic works and his Descriptive Catalogue (1809).

The final example of Emerson’s familiarity with Blake’s work, for the purposes of this brief introduction, is found within the pages of his journals. In a journal known as “JK” covering the years 1843–47, Emerson collected ideas and quotations for his essays. Emerson excerpts a line from Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “One thought fills Immensity” (8.16), as a quotation which Emerson has grouped with other lines pertaining to books or knowledge (Emerson, *Journals* 8: 368). What is made evident through these quotations and anecdotal examples is that Emerson’s familiarity with Blake’s life and work was more profound than most acknowledge. What will be established, based on this familiarity, is Emerson’s role, through the first and second series of his *Essays*, as a point of dissemination for Blake’s work and ideas into the poetry of Whitman. Although this discussion is only a brief introduction to the significance of Emerson’s knowledge of Blake, what is established here is the grounds for a further discussion of the indirect influence of Blake on Whitman via Emerson’s mediating influence.

It is often argued that Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the most important influences on Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. The extent and significance of Emerson’s influence has been a subject of inquiry since the advent of Whitman scholarship; it has been measured by scholars such as Floyd Stovall, David Reynolds, Gay Wilson Allen, Paul Zweig, Roger Asselineau, Emory Holloway, and Francis Otto Matthiessen— in short almost every major scholar to engage with Whitman’s life and work. For this reason I will not dwell too long on the influence of Emerson on Whitman, except inasmuch as it is indicative of Emerson’s intercourse with Blake and the impact of this indirect influence on Whitman. There

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(3) For a thorough treatment of the significance of Emerson in the creation of *Leaves of Grass*, see William Sloane Kennedy’s article “Identities of Thought and Phrase in Emerson and Whitman”, from the August 1897 issue of the *Conservator* or Floyd Stovall’s *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass* (282–305).
is little to compare between Emerson’s poetry and the poetry of Blake or Whitman that furthers this argument; therefore I will focus on Emerson’s essays and lectures as the main influences on Whitman which can be read as providing the mediating influence for which I argue.

Francis Otto Matthiessen writes, in his work *American Renaissance*, “The most immediate force behind American Transcendentalism was Coleridge, who gained many ardent readers in New England following the edition of *Aids to Reflection ... brought out in 1829*” (6). I am not here seeking to contradict Matthiessen, but to extend his thesis to incorporate Emerson’s early possession of a Wilkinson edition of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* as well as his personal intercourse with Henry Crabb Robinson and John James Garth Wilkinson, as discussed earlier. Matthiessen himself draws parallels between Blake and Emerson; speaking of Emerson’s reverence for genius – or natural ability – and disdain of talent or developed proficiency. Matthiessen writes, “He carried it much farther, as far even as Blake had in his *Prophetic Books*” (26). It is through Emerson that Blake’s specific iteration of Romantic thought was disseminated into American culture prior to 1863. That Blake’s Romanticism is distinct from that of other British Romantics is evident particularly in his attitude toward the masses. While poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge celebrate the common people through their use of colloquial language and their presentation of such every day, or average, figures as the mariner or the leech gatherer in their works, Blake went further. He attempted to free the common people from their “mind-forg’d manacles” (Blake, *London*: 8). It is no surprise that Blake, the man who wrote, in *Jerusalem*, “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans ...” does not fit neatly with the ideologies of Romanticism (10.20). This revaluation of the importance of Blake’s writings in the transmission of Romantic ideas to the American Transcendental movement via Emerson is of great significance to the larger aim of understanding the relationship between the works of Blake and Whitman.

(4) For references to Blake’s illuminated poetry, I cite the plate number followed by the line number (p.l). In the case of Blake’s illuminated prose, I present only the plate number. References to Blake’s non-illuminated works follow the conventional format.
It is my assertion that, although there are clear lines of influence between Emerson and Whitman, what is to be found of Emerson in Whitman is assimilated influence: that which Whitman internalized, considered and found merit enough in to warrant reformulation and fresh expression. Whitman does not merely parrot Emersonian ideas. As Jason Stacy writes, “Whereas Emerson ... rejected the public sphere as a place for authentic identities, Whitman told his readers that in public they became whole” (98). Even in Whitman’s earliest edition there are enough facets of Whitman’s ideologies, as they are to be understood by his writings in *Leaves of Grass*, which differ from Emersonian ideas to make it clear that the similarities between Whitman’s and Emerson’s work are in no slavish spirit. Emerson’s attitude toward the public sphere as opposed to that of Whitman is indicative of those characteristics which serve to differentiate them. However, the interest of this section is in the role Emerson plays in the dissemination of Blakean ideas into American culture and the work of Whitman in particular, rather than a general consideration of Emerson’s influence.

Emerson, in his essay “Poetry and Imagination” (1844), gives voice to his estimation of Blake in the following terms:

As a power [poetry] is the perception of the symbolic character of things, and the treating them as representative ... and by the treatment demonstrating that this pigment of thought is as palpable and objective to the poet as is the ground on which he stands, or the walls of houses about him. And this power appears in Dante and Shakespeare. In some individuals this insight or second sight has an extraordinary reach which compels our wonder, as in Behmen, Swedenborg, and William Blake the painter. (303)

These are the first lines Emerson published regarding his valuation of Blake — as opposed to the journal entries and later works discussed in this project. Emerson recognizes in Blake, as he would in Whitman, this power of “perception of the symbolic character of things, and the treating them as representative”. As Emerson writes in his letter to Whitman in 1855, “I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delights us, & which large perception only can inspire” (*Letter* 39). The terms Emerson uses to laud these two are parallel, despite the more than ten years that separate these expressions; Emerson admires similar elements of their
works, the “treating” or “treatment” of minds with the capacity for large perception.

To Emerson, perception indicates what is observed by more than the eye, by what Emerson calls the “Over-Soul”. Emerson writes:

The act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith. Every man’s words, who speaks from that life, must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part. (Over-Soul 164)

This notion is reminiscent of Blake’s assertion: “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite” (Marriage 14). Blake is asserting that there is a manner of perceiving the world in its entirety, that each part is more than a symbol of the whole; each part is, in fact, the whole. This is much like Emerson’s assertion that “we see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul”. For Whitman this notion is expressed, in the poem he would come to title “There was a Child Went Forth”, in the following terms: “There was a child went forth every day, / And the first object he looked upon and received with wonder or pity or love or dread, that object he became, / And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day ... or for many years or stretching cycles of years” (1–3). Perception, for Blake, Emerson, and Whitman, goes beyond the physical act of perceiving and into the metaphysical connection of one person, or thing, to every other. Emerson’s acknowledgement, perhaps unintended, of this affinity between Blake and Whitman is fundamental inasmuch as it provides grounds for their poetic affinities in the very way they understand the world.

In “Poetry and Imagination”, Emerson proceeds to quote, or paraphrase, the following from Blake:

He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. The
painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organized than anything seen by his mortal eye ... I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it would be a hindrance, and not action. I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it and not with it. (303)

The original, from Blake’s *Descriptive Catalogue*, runs as follows:

He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organized than any thing seen by his mortal eye. (*Descriptive* 541–2)

The remainder of this excerpt from Blake is to be found much later in the same work. In the original, Blake writes:

I assert for My self that I do not behold that Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me. What it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it. (*Descriptive* 565–6)

I present the original for two reasons: one is to demonstrate the fact that Emerson’s familiarity with Blake’s work extends beyond his lyrical poetry, the other is to illustrate the tendency of those, like Swinburne and Gilchrist, who when choosing to publish Blake do so only after no small amount of expurgation. That Emerson saw fit to excise Blake’s description of the sun as an “Innumerable company of the Heavenly host” is indicative of the editorial practice of eliminating the more visionary, or more difficult, moments in Blake’s writing. This work, Blake’s *Descriptive Catalogue*, has never enjoyed the readership of many of his other works, but its importance as Blake’s strangely located *ars poetica* is paramount. Emerson’s familiarity with this work and use of it in his essays, editing Blake’s ideas to fit his own purposes, is indicative of the process of assimilation in which Emerson is engaging.
As an example of the intercourse between Blake, Emerson, and Whitman, consider this line, from “I celebrate myself”, “To elaborate is no avail ... Learned and unlearned feel that it is so” (40). Whitman is asserting that truths exist which, upon hearing them, we know to be right. This is an idea that Blake shared, as evinced by this line from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: “Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ’d” (10.69). Along similar lines to this last, Blake writes, also in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: “What is now proved was once, only imagined” (8.33). Blake is here commenting on the progression of thought, science, and society in the course of his life. Living, as Blake did, in an age of revolution—political, social, and economic—this progression was profound. For Blake to try to incorporate his reactions to all of these changing cultural facets into his work—as he does even with his early Songs of Innocence and of Experience—is likewise profound. Whitman writes in “I celebrate myself”: “Lack one lacks both ... and the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn” (45–6). In this excerpt Whitman is continuing and developing the notions expressed in the above quotation from his work. Whitman seems to be asserting that the world which we can see proves the unseen—human physiology, for example, proves the evolutionary theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (Tanner 347). In Emerson’s essay “Circles” (1841), he expresses the following: “The result of to-day, which haunts the mind and cannot be escaped, will presently be abridged into a word, and the principle that seemed to explain nature will itself be included as one example of a bolder generalization” (228). In what is emblematically Transcendental phrasing, Emerson is expressing a notion in line with that of Blake before him, and of Whitman after (Matthiessen 3). Blake, Emerson, and Whitman are voicing the idea that the world exists to present truths and that through the proper expression of these truths they will be understood and embraced by society. These sentiments have their roots in the belief that humanity is capable of realizing perfection and that, by extension, society too has the potential to become perfect.

Whitman writes in “I celebrate myself”: “Unscrew the locks from the doors! / Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!” (502-3). These lines are reminiscent of one of Blake’s most famous lines already
cited in this section from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite” (14). When compared, these lines show an affinity, mostly based on the mutual choice of “doors”, as the object which impedes progress or proper perception. Now consider these lines from Emerson’s essay “The Over-Soul” (1841):

In past oracles of the soul, the understanding seeks to find answers to sensual questions, and undertakes to tell from God how long men shall exist, what their hands shall do, and who shall be their company, adding names, and dates, and places. But we must pick no lock. We must check this low curiosity. (215)

Of particular note for the purposes of this argument is Emerson’s “we must pick no lock”. Whitman’s “Unscrew the locks ...” becomes more significant than his secondary clause “Unscrew the doors...” considered in the light of this excerpt from Emerson, as well as the common consensus regarding Emerson’s importance to Whitman’s creation of Leaves of Grass. The doors are an inference, on Whitman’s part, from Emerson’s “lock”. Emerson asserts that there is no use forcing revelation. Whitman’s contrary position is that there should be no need. Blake and Whitman agree that there need not be any barrier between an author and his or her reader, between a God and his or her faithful, or between a person and society. Blake’s iteration of this notion is that he seeks the cleansing of “the doors of perception” to allow direct intercourse with the infinite; this “infinite” I take as the source of revelation or inspiration. This connection is indicative of the relationship for which I am arguing: Emerson reacts to Blake and Whitman is reacting to Emerson. Emerson’s assimilation of Blake’s writings and the ideologies expressed therein find expression in his essays. Emerson reformulates Blake’s ideologies, which then have a direct influence on Whitman.

As a further example of this relationship, take this excerpt from Emerson’s essay “Poetry and Imagination”: “A deep insight will always, like Nature, ultimate its thought in a thing. As soon as a man masters a principle and sees his facts in relation to it, fields, waters, skies, offer to clothe his thoughts in images” (300). This notion, indicative of Emerson’s ontology that once a thing is sufficiently understood all of the natural world will stand as evidence of it, is fundamental
to Transcendentalism. In the works of Blake and Whitman are to be found examples of this notion. However, where Emerson writes of this idea, both Whitman and Blake write with it. Blake, in "Auguries of Innocence", writes:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour  
A Robin Red breast in a Cage  
Puts all Heaven in a Rage [...] (1–6)

Blake’s insight – the result of his cleansed, or altered, perception – in this case, appears to be that no being should be subservient to another, and this principle is clothed in the image of a bird confined to a cage. Blake then, in “Auguries of Innocence”, provides a litany of examples in support of this point. In “I celebrate myself”, Whitman writes:

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,  
Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation;  
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen closer,  
I find its purpose and place up there toward the November sky.

The sharphoofed moose of the north, the cat on the housesill, the chickadee,  
the prairie-dog,  
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,  
The brood of the turkeyhen, and she with her halfspread wings,  
I see in them and myself the same old law. (Celebrate 238–45)

Whitman does not share with his readers the insight which this "Ya-honk" is evidence of, but he realizes its purpose and then proceeds into a catalogue of all the other evidence the world presents to him of this "old law". For Whitman, then, this is an example of a "deep insight" expressing itself in the natural world, clothing his thoughts in images. Blake uses the natural world as evidence in support of these things he knows without drawing particular attention to this use. With Emerson’s demonstrated familiarity with Blake’s work and well-established impact on Whitman, a line of heredity can be traced through these excerpts. Emerson is codifying that which Blake achieves, and Whitman then
goes on to make use of these guidelines Emerson has set out. These excerpts provide a clear example of the generative potential of this transatlantic relationship.

One of the elements which is most often used to correlate the works of Blake and Whitman is that of prosody. Blake’s literary philosophy is most clearly expressed—as alluded to earlier—in his *Descriptive Catalogue*, particularly where he discusses his illustrations based on Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Blake writes: “All that is not action is not worth reading. Tell me the What; I do not want you to tell me the Why, and the How; I can find that out myself, as well as you can ...” (*Descriptive 544*). This “Tell me the What” is where the similarity is to be found. As is indicated by the last excerpt from Whitman’s work, he would often not even go so far as “the What” in his writing. Whitman writes:

> The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains [...] What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me. (Preface 14)

While Blake says he can find out the why and how as well as any author can, Whitman moves a step further. “What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You [the reader] shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me” is a clear statement of the minimally invasive role of the author Whitman aspires to in his work. Emerson, as a mediating force between these writers, provides the following sentiments: “Write, that I may know you. Style betrays you. In proportion always to [an author’s] possession of his thought is his defiance of his readers. There is no choice of words for him who clearly sees the truth. That provides him with the best word” (*Poetry 305*). Emerson and Whitman both call for the writer to present their works clearly, without the affectation of style. Emerson transliterates the ideas of Blake and incorporates them into his own work; Whitman then takes these sentiments from Emerson and formulates them in a third and distinct fashion. But all three, at their core, are asserting that
an author must present his or her work clearly and without an excess of authorial meddling if they wish it to be understood and appreciated by the reading public. Emerson’s “There is no choice of words” and Whitman’s “without a shred of my composition” are statements of their shared minimalist view of the role of author. Blake’s earlier iteration of this notion, as excerpted above, provides something of a starting point for the ideas of Emerson and Whitman. Through Emerson’s familiarity with Blake’s Descriptive Catalogue, he came to reformulate Blake’s ideas into that which he expresses in essays like “Poetry and Imagination”. It is these essays which bear a direct influence on the work of Whitman.

As significant as Emerson is to the work of Whitman, what is more interesting is what is indicated in regard to the intellectual exchange between the authors of British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. As Matthiessen says, speaking of the Transcendental view of language, but in a manner equally applicable to Transcendentalism as a system: “Several writers thus share in the general transcendental conception of language, though there are naturally many shades of difference between them”. (32) This comprehensive view of the implications of Transcendentalism has equally uneven implications for the writers considered in this paper; although many authors fit within the rubric of Transcendentalism or of Romanticism, this does not indicate that they are ideologically identical.

This idea of literary influence – direct, indirect, transatlantic, or otherwise – is not to discount the works of individual authors. As Bloom, whose theories often seem to undermine the merit of the individual author, states, “No poem has sources, and no poem merely alludes to another. Poems are written by men, and not by anonymous Splendors” (43). This “poems are written by men” is integral to the idea of indirect influence as I posit it. I take this in the Emersonian sense of Man-Thinking. We are not, none of us, decanters for knowledge. We consider that which is presented to us, and dismiss that which offends our soul. Neither Emerson nor Whitman were mere parrots – if I’m allowed the metaphor – they were mockingbirds. Emerson heard the songs of Blake and made use of that which was useful to him. And it is these reverberations of Blakean thought, expressed by Emerson, that we
detect in Whitman. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* has sources, and makes allusions, but it is his amalgamation of these often unacknowledged influences that allows me to outline these interconnections between his work and the works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century authors I read, as providing the influences that work to connect his writing to that of Blake. To Whitman, and to American writers of this period in general, there was a sort of turning away from the past and written history; in place of this there is a reliance on personal experience of time and the world. This turning away also includes works of literature, particularly in Whitman’s case. As Weisbuch writes:

> What history can provide, this moment provides as well, to the seer of large vision and perfect empathy. Indeed, it is better to look about and within than back, for written history contains inaccuracies as no true knowing of the present will; and the past includes irrelevancies, dross, while the past that matters to the present self is that which is in the self now. (Weisbuch 171)

It is in precisely this manner that Whitman creates. He has read and amalgamated the works of others so that his “present self” contains his experience of these other works and thus his expression is both original to himself and deeply influenced by others.
References


“Preface, 1855”. Bloom. 5-27.


Abstract

Whitman quoted no one in his poetry, at least not directly, as Matt Miller convincingly argues in Collage of Myself. However, Whitman was not above making use of the work of other writers in his poetry. It is through Whitman’s early reading in conjunction with his collage approach to composition that he came to create Leaves of Grass as something which appears wholly original, but which resonates with so many echoes. It is often argued that Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the most important influences on Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. The extent and significance of Emerson’s influence has been a subject of inquiry since the advent of Whitman scholarship. This text will focus on Emerson’s essays and lectures as the main influences on Whitman which can be read as providing a mediating influence between Blake and Whitman.

ملخص
لم يستشهد ويتمان بأحد ما في أشعاره، ألاّ أن هذا يظهر من خلال نصوصه. ومع ذلك، لم يتردد الشاعر الأميركي في الاستفادة من أعمال كتاب آخرين. فمن خلال قراءاته الأولية وأسلوب الفن والتركيب الذي اتباعه في التأليف، نجح ويتمان في "أوراق الوردة" في خلق مؤلف يبدو مبتكرًا بالكامل. وقد لقي عند صورته أصداً متعددة. وكثيرًا ما يقال إن ولف والدو إمدرسون هو من أهم الذين أثروا في "أوراق الوردة" التي ألفها ويتمان. وكانت أهمية تأثير إمدرسون موضوع بحث وتحقيق منذ ظهور كتابات ويتمان. تركز هذه الدراسة على مقالات ومحاضرات إمدرسون من خلال تأثيرها الرئيسي على ويتمان بوصفها وسيطًا بين بليك وويليام.