

“Song of Myself” Walt Whitman

Summary and Form

This most famous of Whitman’s works was one of the original twelve pieces in the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Like most of the other poems, it too was revised extensively, reaching its final permutation in 1881. “Song of Myself” is a sprawling combination of biography, sermon, and poetic meditation. It is not nearly as heavy-handed in its pronouncements as [“Starting at Paumanok”](#); rather, Whitman uses symbols and sly commentary to get at important issues. “Song of Myself” is composed more of vignettes than lists: Whitman uses small, precisely drawn scenes to do his work here.

This poem did not take on the title “Song of Myself” until the 1881 edition. Previous to that it had been titled “Poem of Walt Whitman, an American” and, in the 1860, 1867, and 1871 editions, simply “Walt Whitman.” The poem’s shifting title suggests something of what Whitman was about in this piece. As Walt Whitman, the specific individual, melts away into the abstract “Myself,” the poem explores the possibilities for communion between individuals. Starting from the premise that “what I assume you shall assume” Whitman tries to prove that he both encompasses and is indistinguishable from the universe.