

Envelop'd in you sleep greater heroes and bards, . . .
I shall look for loving crops from the birth, life,
death, immortality, I plant so lovingly now.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti wrote in 1975, "'Where are Whitman's wild children?'" (318), referring to Whitman's prediction of "Poets to Come." Miller believes that the "vision and view lie not in a static achievement but in the quest itself" (331).

Miller is a knowledgeable writer who argues his views convincingly. *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction* is a valuable addition to the library of any Whitman scholar or any reader interested in the progress of the American personal epic poem. To the reader uninitiated into the world of the American poets, the book is an introduction that invites further exploration. Upon completion of the book the reader realizes the power that Whitman had through his poetry. He can be seen now, not only as a unique poet with an individual style, but as a presence that will continue as long as poets continue their search for a supreme fiction.

— Hazel L. Redman

Language and Style in Leaves of Grass. by C. Carroll Hollis. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.

In this stylistic examination of *Leaves of Grass*, Hollis attempts both to explain what Whitman was doing prior to 1860 and to show some of the changes that occurred afterwards. The new kind of poetry that Whitman was writing in the first three editions of *Leaves*, Hollis contends, was based on Whitman's aspiration—oratory—and his training—journalism. Through an examination of features of these two bases, Hollis proves that Whitman was able to blend them into a persona that, in the early poems, was central to the making of the programmatic and prophetic poetry of democracy.

The "barrels of lectures" that Whitman began in 1847 are notes for oratorical presentation. Already in a form suitable for utterance by a prophetic bard, these notes became poetry by being broken up into lines in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, according to Hollis. Directly addressing a "you," Whitman used such features of oratory as negation, rhetorical questions, parallelism and repetition, and lists and catalogs.

Dots and punctuation were used to indicate breathing pauses and maintain cadence in the early editions. These innovations kept the force of oratory when put down in writing.

Whitman habitually employed a feature of English oratorical style that is used to close a rhetorical unit. The *cursus* establishes a cadence by a series of falling stresses followed by the same number or fewer of unaccented syllables, all within the last ten syllables of a unit. Hollis's point is that the *cursus* is a metrical device, which aided Whitman in controlling his material. It is found chiefly in the personal sections of the poetry.

Partly responsible for the special hortatory tone of the poetry, the use of journalistic syntax is a characteristic of the early *Leaves*, Hollis writes. Examples in Whitman include the use of common speech, stative verbs (and nouns serving that purpose), complex noun phrases, adjectival compounds and the higher number of participle phrases. This syntactical style allows for a large amount of information to be conveyed within the confines of the sentence. In addition to syntax, Whitman employed familiar journalistic devices such as emphasizing the writer (in his case, the persona), challenging the addressee to adopt the writer's attitude, use of persuasive neologisms, use of outside texts, and modals directed to the writing.

The syntax and journalistic devices were clothed in the rhetorical garb of the orator to make a new kind of literature. Two aspects of these rhetorical garments are specifically examined: negation and speech acts. Hollis proves that Whitman used negation more often than any other 19th-century writer. Used to convey new information or correct a misguided belief and always in a context where the corresponding affirmative is known, negation had been used by writers chiefly to defend against personal attacks or for self-characterization of a speaker. Hollis finds that Whitman put it to a new and idiosyncratic use—to affirm.

Present time involvement and inclusion of an audience are two of the primary ends of Whitman's use of speech acts. Hollis's examination finds the language of the early *Leaves* to be highly illocutionary. Illocutionary language doesn't merely state facts, it performs an action; it can either commit a speaker or hearer to a course of action,

express a psychological state, or bring about a correspondence between propositional content and reality. The use of these types of speech acts greatly aids the prophetic and hortatory stance that Whitman developed.

All of the features discussed above, Hollis writes, disappeared after 1860. He wastes a good portion of the book conjuring up explanations as to what happened. The reasons range from failed powers, to squeamishness, to appealing a new audience, to (probably the most accurate) a new conception of the poet's role.

Hollis introduces a metaphorical/metonymical distinction to show the difference in Whitman's stance before and after the Civil War. Before the war, according to Hollis, Whitman was primarily metonymic in style. Metonymy is a rhetorical classification by which a thing is named by something adjacent to it, but Hollis treats it as a cognitive distinction by which an individual organizes the environment. A metonymical writer, according to Hollis, places distinction on surface details, highlights differences, uses conjunctions, directs comments to an audience, and stresses associations. Before 1860, Hollis contends, Whitman fits into the metonymical mold, after that he becomes increasingly metaphorical and lyrical.

The section on metonymy is useful in clarifying and categorizing Whitman's early style: his catalogs, his rejection of most "poetic" devices except rhythm and parallelism, and his leaning to sensory details and realism. What I found useless and distracting were Hollis's attempts to establish that by abandoning the metonymical characteristics, Whitman regressed as a poet. These efforts did more to establish Hollis's taste and philosophical background than to clarify Whitman's post-1860 style.

For the pre-1860's work, however, in the variety of sources it uses and the linguistic investigations it pursues, I found *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* an extremely valuable book. It lays bare Whitman's method of making poetry out of imagined prophetic utterances. These, combined with the foregrounding technique of parallelism and the semiotic framework of breaking the utterances into lines and calling them poetry, are what allowed Whitman to maintain his role of teacher, in the guise of bard, who extolled individual fulfillment through democratic participation.