

According to Whitman, a nation leads all other nations if it produces its own names and prefers them to all other names. In fact, a nation that "begs" names from other nations "has no identity, marches not in front but behind" (*Primer* 34). Americans must reclaim control of the land by renaming all of the places hastily named by Europeans. Some of the mountains in the West, for example, were inappropriately named for European explorers. Restoring the land to the people and to democracy, new names would replace the names born of the aristocracy and tyranny.

Place names must not be given arbitrarily, but must be considered deliberately with concern for aesthetics, the American experience, and the character of the place. Names, above all, should be appropriate. The names of American cities should reflect their physical features and life of their citizens—expressing the essence of the cities.

Some of the best names, he believed, were the ones given by Native Americans, as shown by his praise of their "sonorous beauty" (*Gathering* 2:137) in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* as early as 1846. In "Slang in America" (1885), he indicates his fascination with the sounds of many Northwestern Indian place names. America would reclaim its true history by absorbing into its language and landscape the powerful original names given by Native American tribes. Whitman particularly objected to replacing Indian place names with borrowed European names; in fact, not using the aboriginal names amounted to lost opportunities.

Whitman preferred the Native American name "Mannahatta" instead of "New York City" (honoring the Duke of York, an English tyrant), "Paumanok" instead of "Long Island," "Tacoma" rather than "Washington," and "Kanawtha" rather than "West Virginia." He frequently used "Mannahatta" (seventeen times) and "Paumanok" (eighteen), and centered some of his poems on names, such as "Mannahatta" (1860, a second poem 1888), "Yonnondio" (1887), and "Starting from Paumanok" (1860).

Native names were particularly suited for poetry that would be truly American. American Indian names and his poetry were "original," "not to be imitated—not to be manufactured . . . nothing . . . so significant—so individual—so of a class—as these names" (Traubel 488). Incorporating Indian place names into his poetry was essential, because his role as a poet involved his revealing, his expressing, the authentic American experience.

Even though Whitman wanted words to be magic, or at least to have an inherent relation with what they named, he came to realize that such a relationship did not exist. Simply listing or evoking the place names for physical entities would not create the same images for each reader and not even necessarily the same images as the ones he himself visualized. Whitman's poetry, however, was distinctly American, not merely transplanted English poetry, partially a result of his inclusion of American place names.

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See also AMERICAN PRIMER, AN; LANGUAGE; NATIVE AMERICANS (INDIANS); SLANG; "SLANG IN AMERICA"

Poe, Edgar Allan (1809–1849)

Whitman's appreciation of Edgar Allan Poe's work as author and editor is barely a footnote in the larger studies of Walt Whitman. Though scholars have argued that Whitman's early work was thematically and lyrically influenced by Poe and that Whitman was well aware of Poe and

his work, in his final discussion of Poe in *Specimen Days* (1882) he remains undecided and ambiguous about its quality.

An essay by Whitman entitled "Heart-Music and Art-Music" was reprinted as "Art-Singing and Heart-Singing" in the *Broadway Journal*, which was edited by Poe at the time, on 29 November 1845. The essay responded to the American music Whitman had heard in New York. Poe's editorial footnote acknowledged Whitman's lack of "scientific knowledge of music" yet noted that he agreed "with our correspondent throughout." Shortly after the article was published, Poe and Whitman met for the first and only time, during which meeting Whitman collected his fee for the article. In *Specimen Days* Whitman notes that he had "a distinct and pleasing remembrance" of Poe as a kind but jaded man (Whitman 17).

Several references to Poe and his work were included by Whitman in the *Daily Eagle*. Not only did he reprint Poe's "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" in the paper, but satires of Poe's work as well, including the unsigned "A Jig in Prose," a parody of "The Raven." Whitman also included notices on Poe's death, his wife's sickness, and her subsequent death.

Whitman attended Poe's reburial and monument dedication, the ceremony of which was held in Baltimore in 1875. Though Whitman sat on the platform during the ceremony, he refused to speak publicly on Poe's work or life. Later commenting in *Specimen Days*, Whitman expressed his divided sentiments on Poe, citing "an indescribable magnetism" about Poe, but concluding that while the excessive rhyming and "demonic undertone" of his work dazzled, they provided "no heat" (Whitman 231). However, in a 16 November 1875 *Washington Star* article, Whitman recognizes Poe's status in literary history.

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See also *BROADWAY JOURNAL*; *INFLUENCES ON WHITMAN, PRINCIPAL*; *POETIC THEORY*; *SPECIMEN DAYS*

Poetic Theory

To the question "What is Whitman's theory of poetry?" the best response probably would be the Buddha-like gesture of silently holding up a copy of *Leaves of Grass*. Next best is to be cautious when abstracting general principles from Whitman's many prose and verse pronouncements on what poetry should be and should do. Whitman is uncomfortable with system, and shares with his fellow cultural nationalists the reflex American suspicion of the word "theory," even as he uses it. "Who is satisfied with the theory, or a parade of the theory?" he blusters in "The Eighteenth Presidency!"; "I say, delay not, come quickly to its most courageous facts and illustrations" (Whitman 1307). General statements of principle and program play their part, but the part is strictly limited to introducing and framing the concrete particularities that matter.

This reversal of the relationship of the particular and the general marks Whitman's ineradicable point of departure from Emerson, to whom he was greatly indebted for language describing the poet's character and mission. Whitman's stridently "new" aesthetic, like others before and after, relies heavily on such reversals of precedent, gaining the specificity of what it is not. If the forms of the old poetry are pre-set and regular, those of the new will be spontaneous and organic, regular or irregular as the occasion demands. Poems will be divided into sections, though nothing so constrictive, repetitive, and numbingly familiar as the rhyming quatrain stanza. Size will vary with content, mood, and intent. To the rigid metrics of traditional verse, Whitman opposes a looser and more changeable rhythm. (William Carlos Williams credits Whitman with foreshadowing the "variable foot," though it is difficult to state precisely what the term means in the prosody of either poet, beyond a studied avoidance of tick-tock mechanics [Perlman, Folsom, and Campion 119].) The most appropriate organic analogue for Whitman's sense of rhythm may be the human heartbeat. Its rhythm changes