



International Conference; Meaning in Translation: Illusion of Precision, MTIP2016, 11-13 May 2016, Riga, Latvia

## Hermeneutic aspect in translation of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" into Russian: Biblical parallelism and coherent system of thought

Irina V. Nikitina\*

*Dobrolyubov State Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, 31 A Minin Street, Nizhny Novgorod, 603155, Russia*

---

### Abstract

The goal of this research paper is to outline a general approach to tackling the problem of conveying a coherent system of thought displayed by Walt Whitman in his poem "Leaves of Grass" in translation. Firstly, this approach is based on the principles of Biblical parallelism, which help to explain means of correlating the text of "Leaves of Grass" with the reality. Secondly, it centers around the territory of translation solutions based on the author's explanations and comments. The proposed study is aimed at assessing the efficiency of the above method when translating Whitman's formal contradictions, to get a better insight into which one needs to recourse to a phenomenon crucial for Whitman's works – a twofold nature of the Self (Soul and I).

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of MTIP2016

*Keywords:* Coherent system of thought; formal contradictions; "Leaves of Grass" by W. Whitman; hermeneutic aspect in translation.

---

### 1. Introduction

The problem introduced in the title of this paper is polemical in nature. Citation from John Symonds, a famous English literary critic will help to see only one of the possible viewpoints: "...it is useless to extract a coherent system of thought from his (Whitman's) voluminous writings... he is full of contradictions" (Symonds, 2002). A similar statement, though far more categorical, was made by Tatyana Venediktova, who denied the author of "Leaves of Grass" of any "competence" or "discipline of thought" (Venediktova, 1994).

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +79056614461.  
E-mail address: [irene.nikitina@gmail.com](mailto:irene.nikitina@gmail.com)

What options does the translator have in the given context? He may either provide a literal translation of those text fragments the content of which he fails to understand or those that contradict the content of other fragments without trying to labour the subject (since it may seem “senseless”). In this case, the translator somehow rejects hermeneutic tradition which treats comprehension as a universal psychological ability of a man. Or he may get into Whitman’s strategy of generating poetic sense, because the key pressure point that the translator who is bearing a great degree of responsibility faces is the author himself (as the supreme text authority). Trying to understand the original text through an insight into the author’s perception is the way to create a communicative situation in the process of translation and therefore a way to create a high-quality product.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The translator willing to cope with the problem of understanding shall in line with the methods of the hermeneutic tradition set a working task of creating the so-called ‘territory of translation solutions’ based on the author’s explanations and comments taken both from the poem and the accompanying prose to comply with the author’s strategy of generating poetic sense. Any polemic strategy is out of question since Whitman’s concept is rather clear and is summarized below:

- In one of his notebooks Whitman with his usual perspicacity writes that “a certain vagueness almost passing into chaos (it remains to be acknowledged) is in a few pieces and passages; but this is apparently by the deliberate intention of the author” (Rajasekharaiah, 1970). Similar confession finds endorsement in the poem:

Do I contradict myself?  
 Very well then I contradict myself,  
 (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (Whitman, 1970)

Scully Bradley and Harold Blodgett when commenting these lines from “Song of Myself” correlated them with the following words of R.W. Emerson: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines” (Emerson). This reference to Emerson has no intention to accuse Whitman of epigonism, rather it is a good proof that in Emerson the author of “Leaves of Grass” found approval to his own view of the problem.

- Whitman realized that he who chooses to become a great poet of America needs to revive the philosophy for the Americans. He deemed it his duty to “take each man and woman of you to the window <...> point you to the endless and beginningless road along whose sides are crowded the rich cities of all living philosophy...” (Allen, 1970). This messianism did not rule out Whitman’s diving into personal philosophical reflection, but at the same time the poet was well aware of his humble role: “I will not be a great philosopher, and found any school, and build it with iron pillars...” (Allen, 1970).
- Preface of 1872 runs: “...one deep purpose underlay the others, and has underlain it and its execution ever since – and that has been the Religious purpose” (Whitman, 1970). Time showed that “Leaves of Grass” were subjected to a severe test to check the solidity of the poem foundation – this is the direction (“But genius is religious” (Emerson)) in which one should extract Whitman’s coherent system of thought, which turns to be rather deep according to T.R. Rajasekharaiah (let us recall the polemical nature of the problem) (Rajasekharaiah, 1970). Thomas B. Harned is found to side with T.R. Rajasekharaiah: “I want no other God than Walt Whitman; I want no other Bible than “Leaves of Grass” (Rajasekharaiah, 1970).
- Uncertainty (as a “deliberate intention of the author”) was crucial for Whitman as it guaranteed that his poetry would be comprehensible only from a certain perspective: “It is addressed to the soul” (Metzger, 1961). Primarily Whitman acted not so much as a philosopher or artist but as a prophet whose goal is “to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion” (Whitman, 1970). In this context the translator needs to make up his mind so as to guarantee his readers sufficient comprehensibility of Whitman’s poetry.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5126310>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5126310>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)