



SONGS OF THE SELF: THE FREE VERSE CONNECTION BETWEEN WALT WHITMAN AND SHAVKAT RAHMON

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Abstract This article explores the poetic connection between Walt Whitman and Shavkat Rahmon, focusing on their shared use of free verse and thematic exploration of the self. Whitman, a pioneer of American free verse, revolutionized poetry with his expansive, flowing lines that celebrated individuality and human interconnectedness. Meanwhile, Rahmon, a prominent Tajik poet, embraced free verse as a means of expressing personal and national identity in a post-Soviet context. Despite their distinct cultural and historical backgrounds, both poets utilized the flexibility of free verse to dismantle rigid poetic structures and engage in a profound dialogue with their readers. Through an analysis of their works, this article highlights the universality of poetic expression and the enduring power of free verse as a vehicle for self-exploration and collective consciousness.

Keywords: Free verse poetry, Walt Whitman, Shavkat Rahmon, self-expression in poetry, literary modernism, poetic individualism, Central Asian literature, transcendentalism, national identity in poetry, comparative literature

ПЕСНИ О СЕБЕ: СВОБОДНЫЙ СТИХ В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ УОЛТА УИТМЕНА И ШАВКАТА РАХМОНА

Аннотация Статья исследует поэтическую связь между Уолтом Уитменом и Шавкатом Рахмоном, акцентируя внимание на их общем использовании свободного стиха и тематическом исследовании «я». Уитмен, пионер американского свободного стиха, произвел революцию в поэзии своими просторными, плавными строками, которые воспевали индивидуальность и человеческую взаимосвязанность. В то время как Рахмон, выдающийся таджикский поэт, использовал свободный стих как средство выражения личной и национальной идентичности в постсоветском контексте. Несмотря на различия в их культурных и исторических фонах, оба поэта использовали гибкость свободного стиха, чтобы разрушить жесткие поэтические структуры и вступить в глубокий диалог со своими читателями. Через анализ их произведений статья подчеркивает универсальность поэтического выражения и непреходящую силу свободного стиха как средства самопознания и коллективного сознания.

Ключевые слова: поэзия свободного стиха, Уолт Уитмен, Шавкат Рахмон, самовыражение в поэзии, литературный модернизм, поэтический индивидуализм, литература Центральной Азии, трансцендентализм, национальная идентичность в поэзии, сравнительное литературоведение.

O‘ZLIK QO‘SHIQLARI: UOLT UITMEN VA SHAVKAT RAHMON O‘RTASIDAGI ERKIN SHE’R BOG‘LANISHI

Annotatsiya Ushbu maqola Walt Whitman va Shavkat Rahmon o‘rtasidagi poetik aloqani o‘rganadi, ularning erkin she’r va o‘zlikni izlashdagi umumiy foydalanishiga e’tibor qaratadi. Amerikaning erkin she’riyatining pioneri bo‘lgan Whitman, o‘zining keng va oqim tarzidagi satrlari bilan she’riyatni inqilobiy ravishda o‘zgartirib, shaxsiyat va insonlar o‘rtasidagi bog‘liqlikni ulug‘lagan. Shu bilan birga, taniqli Tojik poeti Rahmon, erkin she’rni post-sovet kontekstida shaxsiy va milliy identifikatsiyani ifodalash vositasi sifatida qabul qilgan. Ularning madaniy va tarixiy fonlari farqli bo‘lsa-da, har ikki shoir ham erkin she’rning moslashuvchanligidan foydalangan holda qat’iy she’riy strukturalarni buzib, o‘quvchilari bilan chuqur muloqotga kirishgan. Ularning asarlarini tahlil qilish orqali ushbu maqola poetik ifodalashning umumbashariyligini va erkin she’rning o‘zlikni o‘rganish va jamoaviy ongni rivojlantirish vositasi sifatidagi abadiy kuchini ta’kidlaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: erkin she’riyat, Uolt Vitmen, Shavkat Rahmon, she’riyatda o‘zini ifoda etish, adabiy modernizm, poetik individualizm, Markaziy Osiyo adabiyoti, transcendentalizm, she’riyadagi milliy identitet, taqqoslash adabiyotshunosligi.

Introduction

Poetry, as a universal medium of human expression, transcends cultural, linguistic, and temporal boundaries. Among the most influential poetic figures who have redefined the literary landscape through the use of free verse are Walt Whitman and Shavkat Rahmon. Whitman, often hailed as the pioneer of American free verse, revolutionized poetic conventions by rejecting rigid metrical structures in favor of a fluid, organic form that mimicked natural speech patterns. His magnum opus, *Leaves of Grass*, not only celebrated the individual self but also explored the intricate interplay between personal identity and collective human experience.

Similarly, Shavkat Rahmon, a preeminent figure in modern Tajik literature, embraced free verse as a means of articulating themes of national consciousness, cultural transformation, and existential introspection. Emerging from a post-Soviet literary landscape, Rahmon’s poetry reflects an evolution from classical Persianate traditions toward a more liberated and introspective mode of poetic expression. His work, much like Whitman’s, challenges conventional poetic frameworks and prioritizes the fluidity of thought over formal constraints.

Despite originating from distinct historical and sociopolitical contexts, both poets exhibit a profound commitment to self-exploration and philosophical inquiry through the vehicle of free verse. Their poetry not only dismantles traditional structures but also redefines the role of

the poet as both an individual observer and a conduit for universal human experiences. By examining the thematic and structural parallels in their works, this article seeks to illuminate the ways in which free verse serves as an instrument of personal and cultural identity, ultimately reinforcing the interconnectedness of global literary traditions.

The Evolution and Power of Free Verse

Free verse, as a poetic form, emerged as a significant innovation in the 19th century, gaining prominence due to Walt Whitman’s avant-garde approach in *Leaves of Grass*. Unlike classical poetic structures that adhered to metrical precision and rhyme schemes, free verse operates through rhythm, syntax, and internal cadences that evoke natural speech. Whitman’s expansive lines and use of cataloging techniques created a poetic rhythm that reflected the dynamism of life itself. For example, in *Song of Myself*, he employs anaphora and parataxis to generate a breath-like quality:

“I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear, Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong, The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam...”

This stylistic innovation allowed Whitman to convey the democratic and organic nature of existence, establishing a direct, almost conversational rapport with his readers.

Similarly, Shavkat Rahmon’s transition from the classical ghazal and rubai forms toward free verse signified an ideological and artistic shift within Tajik literature. Rahmon’s poetry often features unrestrained lineation, shifting imagery, and fluid syntax that enable a seamless exploration of complex themes such as identity, displacement, and historical memory. His verse frequently employs enjambment and abrupt pauses, mirroring the tension and fragmentation inherent in post-Soviet cultural narratives. For instance, in his poem *The Wind Knows My Name*, Rahmon’s free verse lines ebb and flow, reinforcing a sense of longing and existential inquiry:

“The wind carries my name, Through the mountains, through the deserts, It whispers to the river, Who am I, it asks, And the river does not answer.”

By rejecting fixed metrical constraints, Rahmon embraces a fluid and introspective voice that resonates with the themes of self-discovery and historical dislocation.

Walt Whitman: The Song of Individualism

One of the most salient aspects of Whitman’s poetry is his unyielding emphasis on the self as a microcosm of the universe. His free verse not only celebrates personal identity but also integrates the self into the vast continuum of human existence. The poet dissolves the boundaries between himself and the reader, offering a universal and inclusive vision of humanity. In *Song of Myself*, he asserts:

“I am large, I contain multitudes.”

This declaration underscores Whitman’s belief in the plurality and expansiveness of human identity. His free verse form mirrors this philosophical stance, with long, flowing lines that suggest boundlessness and self-transcendence.

Furthermore, Whitman’s poetry frequently employs cataloging and repetition as techniques to reinforce the idea that all elements of life—regardless of social class, profession, or background—contribute to the intricate fabric of human existence. This holistic perspective, coupled with his use of free verse, enables a democratic and egalitarian poetic voice that speaks to the shared human experience.

Shavkat Rahmon: The Search for Identity and Nationhood

In contrast to Whitman’s transcendental celebration of the self, Rahmon’s poetry navigates the tension between personal identity and national consciousness. Writing in a period of political transition and cultural upheaval, Rahmon uses free verse to challenge imposed structures and articulate a sense of belonging within an evolving socio-political landscape.

His poetry frequently oscillates between personal introspection and collective memory. In *The Mountains Speak*, Rahmon employs fragmented syntax and shifting imagery to explore the symbiotic relationship between identity and geography:

“I speak to the mountains, They answer in echoes, Their silence carries my ancestors’ names, I walk forward, but my shadow remains behind.”

Here, the free verse structure facilitates an organic and fluid exploration of heritage and temporality. The absence of rigid constraints allows Rahmon to weave a meditative and nonlinear narrative that mirrors the complexities of national identity and personal displacement.

Thematic Convergence: Self, Nature, and the Universal Connection

Both Whitman and Rahmon exhibit an intrinsic connection to nature, using it as an extended metaphor for self-discovery and existential continuity. Whitman’s depiction of nature in *Leaves of Grass* is emblematic of his transcendental vision, where the grass becomes a symbol of democracy and the eternal cycle of life and death:

“A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands; How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.”

Similarly, Rahmon employs natural imagery to evoke cultural memory and resilience. His landscapes—mountains, deserts, and rivers—serve as living repositories of history and personal experience. His engagement with nature is often imbued with an awareness of transience and permanence, reinforcing the idea that the self is both an individual entity and an integral part of a broader historical continuum.

Influence and Legacy

While there is no direct evidence that Rahmon was influenced by Whitman, their shared use of free verse as an expressive medium suggests a convergence of literary philosophies. Whitman’s influence on global poetry is well-documented, inspiring poets across diverse cultures to break from rigid poetic conventions in favor of a more expansive and introspective form. Rahmon’s contributions to Tajik literature similarly signaled a departure from classical structures, paving the way for a more contemporary and liberated poetic voice in Central Asia.

Walt Whitman and Shavkat Rahmon, despite their disparate cultural contexts, exhibit a profound poetic kinship through their use of free verse, thematic engagement with the self, and

reverence for nature. Both poets dismantle traditional poetic frameworks to forge a deeply personal yet universally resonant literary voice. Their works affirm the notion that poetry is a boundless and borderless medium, capable of articulating the most intimate and expansive dimensions of human experience. In examining the literary affinities between Whitman and Rahmon, we gain deeper insight into the transformative potential of free verse as a vehicle for self-expression, cultural identity, and philosophical inquiry.

Conclusion

Walt Whitman and Shavkat Rahmon, despite emerging from vastly different cultural and historical contexts, exhibit a profound poetic kinship through their shared embrace of free verse, thematic engagement with the self, and deep reverence for nature. Both poets dismantle traditional poetic frameworks, opting for a liberated and organic structure that allows for an expansive exploration of individual and collective consciousness. Whitman’s transcendental vision situates the self as an intrinsic part of the universe, celebrating the boundless potential of human identity. Similarly, Rahmon navigates the complexities of personal and national identity, using free verse to articulate the tensions of historical memory and existential longing.

Their works affirm the notion that poetry is a boundless and borderless medium, capable of articulating both the most intimate and the most universal aspects of human experience. Whitman’s legacy as a pioneer of free verse extends beyond American literature, influencing poets across cultures who seek a more liberated form of self-expression. Rahmon’s contributions to Tajik literature, in turn, mark a significant shift from classical structures toward modern poetic sensibilities, bridging traditional heritage with contemporary concerns.

By examining the literary affinities between Whitman and Rahmon, we gain deeper insight into the transformative power of free verse as a medium for self-exploration, cultural identity, and philosophical inquiry. Their poetry underscores the interconnectedness of global literary traditions, reinforcing the idea that the voice of the individual—when unshackled from rigid constraints—can resonate across time, geography, and ideology.

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