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English 120

Professor McDonald

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Thesis Statement: Walt Whitman presents his writing with references to the Civil War and the nineteenth-century America in addition to praising nature, individuality and unity.

 I. Early Life

1. The paper will begin with his date of birth, birthplace, and family life.
2. Next, Whitman’s early jobs will be evaluated including the positions in the newspaper business, carpentry, and teaching position.
3. Lastly, the years Whitman spent in the Civil War including his position as a male nurse will end the paper.

 II. Professional Accomplishments

1. Throughout his lifetime, Whitman self-published his extensive book of poem called *Leaves of Grass*, which consisted of several revised editions.

B. Whitman presented his poems with a noticeable, musical style to them.

C. Whitman was regarded as the national poet of America.

 III. First Poem: “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”

A. Summary: Whitman describes the main character sitting in a lecture room being shown different charts and diagrams, however he then decides to leave the room and venture off to the outdoors.

B. Critics feel the speaker realizes the failings of science in the classroom, therefore he or she leaves the classroom to learn from the stars.

1. The stars help lead the speaker into the spiritual world to gain spiritual significance: something the reader cannot gain from the classroom or science.

2. The theme of individuality is expressed by the individual stars shining bright but in unison.

C. Whitman was a supporter “of the Union of States, an idea that he connected to the unity of the self.” He supported individuality and unity.

 IV. Second Poem: “I Hear America Singing”

A. Summary: Whitman describes many different laborers at work in America singing to their own individual tunes and enjoying their night lives once the hard-working day is done.

B. Every worker has his or her own song, freedom, and every individual is singing as one regardless of race or gender. This poem focuses on the identity that Whitman wanted America to achieve.

C. Whitman was a firm believer of democracy, especially when considering the working class.

 V. Third Poem: “O Captain! My Captain!”

A. Summary: Whitman describes a ship that has come home safely with a victory; however, the captain has died and the speaker mourns his captain’s death.

B. Critics stated that Lincoln had done what Whitman always wanted to do through his poetry: maintain the Union.

1. Whitman wanted to become one with Lincoln but failed to do so and envied his death in addition to the nonexistent merge with Lincoln himself.

2. The strong admiration with Lincoln leads critics to suggest that Whitman failed to follow his footsteps in unifying the country, therefore he must demote himself to a lower status.

C. Whitman focused this poem around Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and sadly right before his assassination. Whitman admired Lincoln for they were both Unionists.

 VI. Fourth Poem: “Cavalry Crossing a Ford”

A. Summary: A group of soldiers form around a river and the horses stop to drink from it. On the opposite side of the river, an army of soldiers appear with their flags hanging high.

B. Critics say Whitman continues to express the idea of unifying the Union through the description of the flags.

1. The flags stand as a symbol for unity.

2. He continues to focus on tranquility, beauty, and the American people even though the poem was originated after the Civil War.

 C. Whitman is influenced by the aftermath of the Civil War and the horrors that followed it.

 VII. Conclusion:

A. Summary of all of the poems and how Whitman’s personal experience added to the poems.