AN ANALYSIS OF PANTHEISM CONCEPT IN SELECTED WALT WHITMAN’S POEMS

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Abstract

This study analyzes pantheism concept in selected Walt Whitman’s poems. Walt Whitman maintained an optimistic outlook on the future condition of the world throughout his lifetime. He was confident that only goodness would prevail as the world progressed. The poet passionately exudes this optimism in his poems, accepting and celebrating all beings and conditions and transforming the world’s imperfections and evils into positive realities. While Whitman may have gained the majority of these pantheistic ideas from his own life experiences, he also was greatly influenced by other philosophers and writers during the nineteenth century. The approach of this study was qualitative. The researcher used three poems as the object of the study. The analysis was interpretive. The findings of this study indicated that pantheism concept exist on the three poems, entitled A Noiseless Patient Spider, I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing, and On the Beach at Night Alone that explore Whitman’s pantheism. The pantheism concept found are God is fully expressed in nature or material world, the view that the universe (nature) and God are identical, the idea that ‘God’ is best seen as a process of relating to the Universe. God is everything and everything is God, the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature. Pantheism, however, be the best term for Whitman’s belief system in pantheism concept. This belief in the immanence of God leads pantheists to believe also in oneness, unity, and equality on all levels. Everything is related to or a part of everything else. As a pantheist, Whitman believed that “the universe is a vast communion of spirits, souls of men, of animals, of plants, of earth and other planets, of the sun, all embraced as different members of the soul of the world.

Key Words: pantheism, poems, Walt Whitman
INTRODUCTION

Pantheism is the belief that everything is God, and God is everything. The universe, “Nature,” and God are thus interchangeable terms. William L. Reese, Professor of Philosophy, State University of New York at Albany, author of Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought stated that pantheism, the doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe.

The poetic sense of the divine within and around human beings, which is widely expressed in religious life, is frequently treated in literature. It is presented in the many poems written by famous poets, as one of them is manifested in Walt Whitman's poems. Pantheism is a kind of nature-worship, but in a very special sense. To pantheists, Nature doesn't just mean wild mountains, lakes, and trees. Nature includes everything that exists—human beings, cities, computers, asteroids, songs, nuclear waste, and supernovas. In pantheism, God is the sum total of all these things, not just the pretty or unpolluted parts.

John in Walt Whitman Handbook, Gay Wilson Allen refers to Whitman as "ambitious to be the poetical rather than the political spokesman of his time and people... . The literary role which he assumed in Leaves of Grass was that of 'the caresser of life' embracing all forms, good and evil alike, with a democracy that made no distinctions between persons or fractions... he attained an almost Brahman serenity" (354). The "caressing" and "embracing" that Allen refers to derives from Whitman's main ideology, pantheism. Pantheism was the driving force behind Whitman's persona, and there are many examples of his pantheistic persona throughout Leaves of Grass.

Based on some of the literary works have been mentioned, it impressed me how pantheism concept could be revealed in some different ways in some literary works, and it encourages me to think of doing research into the concept with some modifications from a poetry. Furthermore, Walt Whitman, the author of the poetry entitled As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life, was a great and influential author. There have been a lot his works which were influential in America, especially his great poem “Leaves of Grass” which has been discussed in the previous paragraph. This work was controversial in its time since it described about sensuality. In addition, there are plenty of elements in his poem which can be revealed by the researcher,
especially the literary aspects. By analyzing the literary aspects, it is hoped that the readers can understand more about the literary aspect deeper and a specific concept about pantheism. This concept of pantheism is still rare concept for literature students. Therefore, it is hoped that the readers, especially students could understand more about this topic.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Pantheism**

Toland (1705) stated pantheism may be understood positively as the view that God is identical with the cosmos, the view that there exists nothing which is outside of God, or else negatively as the rejection of any view that considers God as distinct from the universe. Another vital source of pantheistic ideas is to be found in literature, for example, in such writers as Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Emerson, Walt Whitman, D.H. Lawrence, and Robinson Jeffers. Most typically pantheism is characterized by deep love and reverence for the natural world insofar as it exists independently of human culture or civilization.

The pantheist finds God more in the waterfall or the rainforest than in the car park or the gasworks. From the romantic period onwards this is a very strong drive in both literary and popular pantheism, with urban and technological life regarded as at best a kind of self-interested anthropocentric distortion of true value and at worst even a kind of loss or separation from divinity. If uncultivated nature is divine then the pantheist may legitimately conclude that it should be treated with respect, even as sacred. Such is the import of Aldo Leopold's 'land ethic' (1949) or the 'deep ecology' of Arne Naess, (1973) and many modern pantheists have developed close connections with environmentalism. But neither the import nor the justification of such ideas is straightforward. It might be suggested that as no one person ought to put their own interests before another, neither ought any species to put itself ahead of another, nor the sentient ahead of the insentient, nor the living ahead of the non-living. But with each further step this argument becomes harder to press, due to the extreme difficulty of identifying—and weighing—such potentially conflicting interests. For example, unless the pantheist is some sort of panpsychist, he will not regard natural objects such as rivers or mountains as possessing
sentience, purpose or interests of its own; which mean that treating them with respect
cannot be modeled on what it means to treat people or animals with respect.

A second and very different model for understanding the relationship between
divinity and value maintains that God is most revealed in human culture and history. For
the Stoics, Reason or logos—the essence of the world—though it underlies all things, is
more strongly manifest in some (such as human life) than in others, while the virtues of
stoic detachment and self-sufficiency preclude our true good being held hostage to the
state of anything external to ourselves, such as nature. This pair of attitudes is summed up
in Cicero’s notorious assertion that all things were made for either Gods or men. (Holland
1997, Baltzly 2003) But probably the best illustration of this more anthropocentric way of
thinking about value is the Hegelian system, in which Geist—the spirit whose
manifestation is the universe—articulates itself in a developmental sequence of
increasingly adequate expressions (which may or may not also be temporal) up from the
most basic abstractions of merely physical nature, through the organic realm, up to its
apex in the concrete details of social and cultural life. The beauties of nature are valued as
an approximation to those of art, and the development of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) is
literally “the march of God in the world” (Hegel 1821, 247).

Readers might confuse about pantheism and panentheism. Pantheism sees that
everything is god, whereas according to panentheism, everything is in God, which believes
that god is the regulator of existing matter. Furthermore, panentheists believe that God
have two poles as human body is analogized as nature (first pole) which is immanent and
impermanent and reason is analogized as the ‘non nature’ (second pole) which is
transcendent and eternal. Thus, god and nature depend on each other.

There have been some studies related to the pantheism, especially the concept of
pantheism in poetry. Azizul Hoque wrote a study entitled ‘Pantheism in Worldworth: A
study from the Islamic Perspective”. He tried to analyse the concept of romantic poet along
with the related concepts of some sufis in the light of Islam with the support of some
Quranic Verses. Based on the discussion, he found that the concept of pantheism is
contrary to Islamic monotheism (Tawhid). Furthermore, he added that although there are
divergences within pantheism, the central ideas found in almost all versions are the
Cosmos are all encompassing unity, and the sacredness of nature, representing God. This
belief, he added, has hardly any place in Islam and is completely contrary to Monotheism.
Golkhosravi conducted a study entitled “Panentheistic View of Divine Love in Man and Nature: A Comparative Study in Whitman’s Leaves of Grass and Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Mathnavi” which has strong relation with the topic in this study. In his study he tried to investigate the common mystical and transcendent tenets of Walt Whitman and Rumi despite their geographical distance, language differences, and historical divisions. He took Rumi’s Mathnavi and Leaves of grass by Walt Whitman as his major works. He found that Rumi and Whitman describe God’s relation to nature and the material world both in a ‘transcendent’—ontologically as well as epistemologically—and ‘immanent’ sense. Both poets establish some equilibrium between the two poles of transcendence and immanence in such a way that they never emphasize one pole more than the other.

Another study reviewed pantheism found in the study entitled Pantheism and Science in Victorian Britain written by Jincheng Si. Unlike monotheism, deism, spiritualism, She thought that pantheism had a little portion in the relationship between science and religion. Therefore She tried to involve pantheism concept in dealing with science, especially in Victorian Britain. She found that pantheism was more widely accepted in Victorian Britain than has been previously recognised and that pantheistic thinkers drew extensively on science.

Characteristics of Pantheism

To understand pantheism in more detail, we may see it from characteristics of pantheism which include

a. God is immanent. This means that god is close to nature, cares for and regulates nature.

b. All are god. Pantheists believe in the general unity between God and his creatures. For instance pantheists feel hungry so they need food. In this case, they have perception that food is God, so this world is God.

c. God is impersonal. This means that god does not have a special essence because He is one with nature.

d. The five senses can perceive as part of God because basically what five senses can perceive is something that changes everything.
METHOD
This research uses a qualitative approach because it focuses on the analysis or interpretation of the written material in context. The writer uses design of descriptive method which means it describes and interprets the objects in accordance with reality. The material in this research is selected poems of Walt Whitman.

In this research, the writer tries to analyze the pantheism concept in selected Walt Whitman's poems. Therefore, the data of this research are words in each stanza of those poems by Walt Whitman which contains imagery of pantheism. In qualitative research, data analysis technique was directed to answer research question (Sugiyono, 2006).

To analyze the data, the writer uses the concept of data analyses suggested by Miles and Huberman. They divided the process of analysis into three phases, consisting of Data Reduction, Data Displays, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings
The definition and historical background of pantheism is a doctrine of religious philosophy that is widely used by a group of poets and literary figures who think that God is everywhere naturally. Pantheism is the view that the Universe (God) and God are identical. Pantheists therefore do not believe in personal, anthropomorphic or creator deities. This word comes from Ancient Greek: pan means 'all' and theos which means 'God'. Thus, pantheism demonstrates the idea that 'God' is best seen as a process of relating to the Universe. Despite differences in pantheism, the central idea found in almost all versions is the Cosmos as a holistic and holistic unity of Nature (Mander 2012). From the classical to modern periods, it has been used in strong literature by many literary scholars. Eagle (1970) defines it as 'the doctrine that God and the universe are identical' and according to him 'God is everything, and everything is God' (implying denial of the personality and transcendence of God) (p. 435). This concept began to spread more widely in the 18th and early 19th centuries, in Germany with Goethe and Hegel, and in England with romantic poets - Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, and transcendentalists in the US - especially Emerson and Thoreau. During the 19th century he became the dominant literary art in glorifying nature. The concept of
pantheism appears in various languages and expressions by scholars and poets from various eras and phases. Some of them are analyzed below.

**Research Interpretations**

**Scope of Pantheism in Whitman’s poems**

Based on some characteristics stated in chapter two, the poems in this chapter are analyzed by the three concept of pantheism which can be shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of Pantheism</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God is fully expressed in nature or material world</td>
<td>A Noiseless Patient Spider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the view that the Universe (Nature) and God are identical</td>
<td>I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denotes the idea that ‘God’ is best seen as a process of relating to the Universe</td>
<td>On the Beach at Night Alone</td>
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**Poems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Noiseless Patient Spider</strong></td>
<td>&quot;A Noiseless Patient Spider&quot; explores the relationship between the individual self and the greater world. This poem depicts an isolated spider in space but actively sends the filament &quot;out of itself,&quot; looking for connections as he builds his web. The spider becomes an extended metaphor for the soul of the speaker, who is also isolated and works to find a sense of connection. In the end, the poem shows that despite the loneliness that people might experience as individuals, the work of the soul is to keep on seeking and making</td>
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<tr>
<td>A noiseless patient spider,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It launch’d forth filament, filament, out of itself,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>And you O my soul where you stand,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surrounded, detached, in measureless</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,
seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form’d,
till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch
somewhere, O my soul.

connections - no matter how daunting
the task is.

The situation can be read in this poem
give complete concept of pantheism as
human can see and learn any value of
life from any object in the nature.
Building web is not simple. This is kind
of blessing from God. So, the point that
God is fully expressed in nature or
material world is completed in this
poem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,</td>
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<tr>
<td>All alone stood it and the moss hung</td>
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<tr>
<td>down from the branches,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Without any companion it grew there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uttering joyous leaves of dark green,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And its look, rude, unbending, lusty,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made me think of myself,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But I wonder’d how it could utter joyous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leaves standing alone there without its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend near, for I knew I could not,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I broke off a twig with a certain</td>
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<tr>
<td>number of leaves upon it, and twined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around it a little moss,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And brought it away, and I have placed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in sight in my room,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not needed to remind me as of my</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"I See It in Louisiana Live-Oak Growing" is a poem written by Walt Whitman. This poem is about friendship and love, which those are the interpretation of God, especially in the term of love. As definition of god is so closed to the concept of love. The author talks about an oak tree that grows by itself without anyone else around it. It has no friends. However, the tree, although healthy and rough, still has green leaves and supports a good life. Whitman talked about how he could not live like this. He tried to be happy, but he could not help but accept friends and agree with them. He said that he could not live like that tree. These situations which take any learn and understandings from object of nature also complete the concept of
own dear friends,  
(For I believe lately I think of little else  
than of them,)  
Yet it remains to me a curious token, it  
makes me think of manly love;  
For all that, and though the live-oak  
glistens there in Louisiana solitary in a  
wide flat space,  
Uttering joyous leaves all its life without  
a friend a lover near,  
I know very well I could not.  

**On the Beach at Night Alone**  

On the beach at night alone,  
As the old mother sways her to and fro  
singing her husky song,  
As I watch the bright stars shining, I  
think a thought of the clef of the  
universes and of the future.  

A vast similitude interlocks all,  
All spheres, grown, ungrown, small,  
large, suns, moons, planets,  
All distances of place however wide,  
All distances of time, all inanimate forms,  
All souls, all living bodies though they be  
ever so different, or in different worlds,  
All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral  
processes, the fishes, the brutes,  
All nations, colors, barbarisms,  

pantheism in this poem. That is denotes  
the idea that ‘God’ is best seen as a  
process of relating to the Universe.  

In the poem, it is the sound of the sea,  
'singing a hoarse song' that reminds  
Whitman of universal harmony that  
exists at the atomic and ecstatic level.  
'Clef' - music notation that shows the  
tone, and also the French for 'key' - from  
the 'universe' (plural) brings everything  
into sonic harmony through the  
vibration of his voice.  
In this poem we can see Whitman's use  
of the catalog, with more than half the  
sentence starting with 'All' - his  
compilation brings everything that was  
in the past relationship through  
repeated parity of each line that  
downloads nature in many words and  
this is match to the concept of God is  
fully expressed in nature or material
CONCLUSION

From the data analysis and data interpretations presented in the previous chapter, I can draw some conclusions and suggestions. There are three poems which are analyzed based on pantheism concept; *A Noiseless Patient Spider, I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing, and On the Beach at Night Alone*. Those poems have been analyzed based on the three concepts of pantheism;

- God is fully expressed in nature or material world
- The view that the universe (nature) and God are identical
- The idea that ‘God’ is best seen as a process of relating to the Universe.

It can be concluded that those three poems contain several concepts of pantheism stated in specific words in that has been discussed in chapter four.

REFERENCES


Toland, J., 1705. Socinianism truly stated; being an example of fair dealing in all theological controversies. To which is prefixed, indifference in disputes: recommended by a pantheist to an orthodox friend. London.