# Rousseau’s “Life” Compared To Whitman’s “Song Of Self”

Posted on October 8, 2018

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Literature is one of the most interesting subjects, especially when it involves the analysis, comparison, and contrast of popular publications that are believed to have a similar theme but differing opinions and perceptions. Some of the authors are known for writing out of uniqueness rather than their greatness. Some have further written about the uniqueness of all people but use their personal experiences to narrate. In this essay, we will compare and contrast the works of Rousseau titled Life and Whitman’s Song of Self.

## Subjectivity With Different Purposes

One of the most conspicuous similarities between the two writings is the emphasis they make on the personal. While Rousseau’s work is apparently nothing but subjective, Whitman is unabashed and unmoved by his application of the subjective. Yet, one may think that on the outside of this, there are more important notes of divergence. In-depth, the explorations by Rousseau of the subjective are not executed to instantly forego a part of the social link or connect a social issue with others. Instead, Rousseau just tries to explain himself with totality and confidence to everyone. On the other hand, Whitman’s use of the subjective is more socially attributed. Apparently, he appears to be applying the subjective as an attribute by which a feeling of universality is likely to be embraced and brought out. It is through this that a person can perceive the evaluation of the subjective as a way of embracing the more significant social democratic issues that act as a guide to human beings and also facilitate them to perceive themselves as an important entity rather than just the subjective. In an attempt to project the experience of the subjective into a liberal one, a definite difference is seen from Rousseau. While Whitman and Rousseau view their respective subjectives as crucially significant, they do this for differing objectives (KANNAN).

## Personal Experience as a Measure of Reality

Consequently, another strong point worth making comparisons between the two pieces is how the writers are at ease employing the subjective in describing reality. Rousseau has an absolute resolution in his use of the personal in the comprehension of truth. He goes ahead and uses his own life as a basis for making confessions. In so doing, he goes further and tries to broaden his personal experiences to each and every one. Consequently, Whitman also takes on the persona. Simply, he

avoids limiting himself to this concept since he desires to explore his own identity and person with the audience as well as with the idea of America. Probably, this is where one may think and see some of the differences (KANNAN, What are some comparisons and differences of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Rousseau's Confessions).

## Whitman's Social and National Self

Whitman is persistent in transforming his "I" into one of the social embraces as well as universal expressions. Conspicuously, this is crucial in his writing. It is his desire to make sure that people can come to terms and comprehend that his personal perception of self is typical in that it can be embraced and woven into his vision of America. Apparently, this is the point at which Rousseau disagrees with Whitman. In his work, he does not seek to establish and develop a perfect and universal perception of national identity on the basis of his own subjective personality. Instead, it is a desire to only merge the experiences into the concept of the external. Whitman, on the other hand, can see a broader vision as evident in his discourse (KANNAN, What are some comparisons and differences of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Rousseau's Confessions).

## General Will Nature and Collective Identity

According to Rousseau, sovereign authority is attributed to what he famously terms as general will. He further claims that in place of personal character, the act of association leads to a collective entity, a common identity through which it obtains life as well as will. However, most critics disagree with this assertion, claiming that one of its major problems is that it is not included in the real desires and interests of the individuals it would claim to empower. Some further term it as more of a tyranny than a collective will, as Rousseau referred to it. Rousseau's coercive potential of the general will is more apparent after writing about the legislator's role in establishing stability and perfecting the new facilities he develops by reducing the natural resources that facilitate individuality. Whitman, on the other hand, precisely desires these natural endowments as the necessary resources for the formation of a collective identity. Therefore, it is not a surprise that he would perceive and imagine the sociality of humans as a function of nature but not its exclusion or alienation. This is more evident in his work "Democratic Vistas," where he does not make any effort to theorize the social institutions. According to him, the objective behind stabilizing institutions is to obtain changes, and he goes further in regarding the changes as a creative force of nature and life (Cummings).

## Shared Methods and Divergent Visions

Conclusively, the two writers have some common aspects. The major one is evidently their subjective applications in their writings. They both use personal attributes to deliver. Their personal experiences have also played a crucial role in their works. However, it is evident that the two have some

differences. Most of these are in their desires and their view as to what should be done. While Whitman perceives natural resources as a way of building and enhancing a common identity, it is in the view of Rousseau that they should be reduced to remove individuality. Their desires are apparently different, which stands as one of the major differences.

# Works Cited

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