

## ABSTRACT

### THE DECAY OF THE DEMOCRATIC RELATIONSHIP: A CONTRAST OF “SONG OF MYSELF” AND “THE CITY IN WHICH I LOVE YOU”

This thesis is an analysis of Walt Whitman’s poem “Song of Myself,” published for the first time in 1855, and Li-Young Lee’s poem “The City in Which I Love You,” published in 1990. The ultimate difference between the two poems is the individual’s ability to connect with the community. The contrast between the two poems reveals a shift in the relationship between the individual self and the community in contemporary America due to the decay of civic engagement and social capital. Whitman celebrates the self, but he also celebrates the relationship the self can form with the community. This relationship was possible during Whitman’s life and his poetry promotes that relationship. Lee yearns for the kind of relationship Whitman portrayed, but is continually disappointed by the various obstacles to its achievement. The contrast between the two poems illustrates the decay of the democratic relationship between self and community.

Jason Walker  
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