

The swimming hole and song of myself

Literature



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The works of Thomas Eakins and Walt Whitman have certain elements in common, although some differences can be noted. Although Eakins was a painter and Whitman a poet, the works of these two great artists are comparable. In the painting *The Swimming Hole*, Eakins appears to celebrate the beauty of the male body. In this painting, six naked men are shown swimming in what appears to be a lake. It is clear that the Eakins wanted to celebrate the beauty of the male body and masculinity in general. The painting shows how Eakins adores nudity in open spaces, especially that of men. This theme is also evident in the section of the *Song of Myself* by Whitman. In the poem, the author writes of twenty-eight men bathing by the shore. Just like Eakins painting, the poem depicts an adoration of male nudity in open spaces. In addition, the love for the beauty of the male body is illustrated in this poem by the way the author describes the young men. For example, he says that "the beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair" (Whitman: 211). The two artists love the male body and use these pieces of art to glorify this beauty.

Both the *Swimming Hole* and the *Song of Myself* show a sense of friendliness and togetherness. In the painting by Eakins, the six men are close together at the lake. The swimmers appear to be at peace with each other and the natural surroundings. In this painting, one can see a sense of brotherly love and connectedness among the swimmers, and the manner in which they blend in the environment. The painting gives the idea of six comrades out enjoying themselves. This theme is also evident in the poem by Whitman. The writer shows that the twenty eight swimmers were enjoying themselves in a friendly manner. He writes that "Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly, (Whitman: 201)." Both Eakins and Whitman are keen to who the <https://assignbuster.com/the-swimming-hole-and-song-of-myself/>

audience the idea of perfect brotherly love and friendship.

Despite the above similarities, the two works also some differences as well.

In the poem, the author introduces the idea of feminine love for the male body. He writes of a woman watching the twenty eight swimmers from her window and admiring them. The woman in fact likes the “ homeliest” of the swimmers because he is beautiful to her. In the end, the woman joins them, although they did not see her but “ she saw them and loved them”

(Whitman: 210). This is contrary to what is shown in the painting. There is no hint of a woman in the vicinity in the painting. It appears that whereas Eakins shows the love of the male body by fellow men, Whitman on the other hand shows how women love men. In fact, at the start of the poem, Whitman states that the woman had been alone for twenty eight years and was so lonely. This loneliness, it appears, can only be taken away by male companionship.

The second difference come from the number of characters the two artists use in their works. In the poem by Whitman, the author uses many subjects compared to those used by Eakins; a total of twenty eight young men. In fact, he adds the twenty-ninth character- the young woman who joins the young swimmers. In contrast, the painting by Eakins has only six characters depicted. It may be argued that whereas Whitman enjoyed huge gatherings and masseuses, Eakins on the other hand only promoted small groups for friendships. The use of many figures in the poem could be explained by the idea that Whitman uses an environment that is seen and common to people. For this reason, Whitman’s environment is easily accessible to many and hence the high number of swimmers present. This is in contrast to the painting by Eakins in which the surrounding appears hidden from public view

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and only a few can access it.

Works Cited

Goodrich, Lloyd. Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work. New York: AMS Press, 1970.

Whitman, Walt. Song of Myself, sec 11 in Leaves of Grass bk ii (1855)