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Poetic Intimacy: Poet and Reader.  
The Exploration of Prophetic Voice in Blake and Whitman

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## Introduction

The Romantic Movement produced itself like the Big Bang, projecting its singularities outside the boundaries of reason, creating worlds as it unveiled. The progenies of romanticism are the consequence of creative genius aroused and inspired by other geniuses of the past and of course influenced by social, political and intellectual events that took place in the Eighteenth Century Europe. The Enlightenment and its aftermath affected the subjectivity of human beings following the track of progress and reaching the territory of a very pretentious modernity.

Creativity, being one of the greatest Romantic notions, is the key to understand Poets and their relationship with Imagination, Poetic Genius and Poetry itself. While being immersed in the process of Creativity, the possibility of exploring and experiencing reality arises, including both: the experience of the created as well as the learning that comes back to the creator by means of the created. To talk about such relationship is mythical and raises ancient thoughts and questions regarding the true nature of human beings: Who created us? Who are we? Why are we here? Even if the purpose of this study is not intended to answer these questions, they underlie the main issue dealt with here, since the object of study is associated to the analysis of meaning in poetry as a prophetic experience.

In *Children of the Mire*, Octavio Paz discusses Modernity as a 'tradition' that stands 'against itself', in order to illustrate this, he states that there have been numerous artistic contributions that echo the sound of other "ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling" (6) which appear and re-appear on different stages throughout History. This proposal focuses on the way in which the Romantic sensibility sprouts in two different times, countries and voices, those of William Blake and Walt Whitman; two romantic souls that experienced themselves in the body of the modern man, on different lands and in different phases of Modernity.

They both have different ways of depicting this figure in their poetry, yet both share important qualities in their prophetic visions. This opens a crack through which we can see an interesting relationship raise, the one between poets and readers. This study attempts to explore such relationship, what type of readers do they envision for their poetry? Whatever the answer might be, it will provide new ways of looking at romanticism and the self.

William Blake was born in 1757 England, in the peak of “The Age of Reason” where Modernity had been by little, inviting herself into the consciousness of the people of the age. It would be a time where the mind was becoming the most important tool for human beings to realize and approach external and internal events, limiting and shaping their perception of the historical and social happenings going on at the time, but also mediating their own understanding and experience as regards their own selves.

The Enlightenment did not intend to limit human beings though, but instead it aimed at expanding and empowering human capabilities by appealing to self-government and the consistent exploration of rational faculties. On the other hand though, the slight overestimation of reason over feelings, emotions, and anything belonging to the realm of the soul or spirit, ended up in the consequent separation of man’s inner world as a complete unit. Society was submitted to a system institutionalized and rooted in education that would slowly begin to dispossess man from his holistic nature. Jean Jacques Rousseau, one of the most important philosophers of the age, in his famous *Emile* suggests the following:

(...) every child at its birth possesses a peculiar temperament, which determines its genius and character; and which it is improper either to pervert or restrain, the business of education being only to model and bring it to perfection. All the vices imputed to malignity of disposition are only the effect of the bad form it has received... there is not a villain upon earth, whose natural propensity, well directed, might not have been productive of great virtues; nor is there a wrong-head in being, that might not have been of use to himself and society, had his natural talents taken a certain bias; just as deformed and monstrous images are rendered beautiful and proportional, by placing them in a proper point of view. (41)

This idea regards education as the institution in charge of providing an opportunity for people to learn more about themselves, so that they can develop their fullest potential, to be happy and contribute to the development of society. But this never really happened systematically, education has never been directed to the study of the self, but to all the other side of the self: otherness. Thus, the appearance of Blake’s prophetic poetry in this context is going to emerge as a critique of reason and all its consequences upon people’s consciousness. Which is going to be reflected on the way in which he portrays his visions to his readers.

Walt Whitman, on the other hand, was born in 1819 United States of America in the context of a Modernity that was already consolidated in people's consciousness. He appeared in the poetic scene in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and grew up in a Modern context that promoted economic and social development, where cities had begun to grow and the first tall buildings being built. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the first four and five story buildings were beginning to be constructed; and where the kinds of cities where we live nowadays were beginning to appear all over the world, so he came of age during one of the first building expansions in New York. Walt Whitman was the son of a carpenter, so his experience as a poet in this modernity was first-hand. In fact one of his first jobs was helping his father build these constructions. This of course gave him a different relationship with Modernity and as readers become familiar with his poetry, they will be reading the work of a poet whose self-consciousness is not going to be constrained to the boundaries of his body, but including a self-consciousness about the city as well, enhanced by the changes he saw all around him and watching the city come into being.

But cities are not only made of buildings, and at the time the public space was starting to appear as a combination of leisure, work and commerce providing space for everything and everyone to fuse together. For Whitman the function of these elements was poetic in its form, and it was extremely stimulating to him. There were musicians in every corner of the city, people riding through the metropolitan parks for recreation where children played, at the same time that workmen were returning to their workplaces right next to them. That inner penetration of labor, commerce and leisure; that sense that there is no division between the workplace and the recreational space, and that the street is itself a zone where all of these activities go on at one time, provided this poet with insight and significance, turning any workday into an almost theatrical event. This merging that we are able to see in the city is only one of the many fusions this poet will provide for readers in the course of his poetry.

Whitman enjoyed the experience of democracy, as opposed to the long-standing monarchic tradition experienced by Blake. This democracy meant for America an opportunity to consolidate as a body politic, which promised an opportunity to install a new form of exercising authority and organisation, inclined towards self-government. This

atmosphere allowed for Whitman to explore his own ideas about democracy, the self and otherness, all of which are going to be present in his poetry.

This study focuses on the way in which both poets address the reader, providing hints to follow them on a journey, where they can find themselves reflected in the sounds of their songs, or in the images of their visions, or even in a more tactile experience since these poets appeal to all senses. This discussion also examines how these poets, through their prophetic voices, extend an invitation to their readers to join them into what Owen Barfield calls “poetic consciousness”. The object of study in this paper is the relationship the poet establishes between himself and readers. This study attempts to explore the way in which Blake and Whitman summon the reader to join them in a state of Imagination and Genius, to start a journey of exploration through poetry to get to a profound sense of self, others, and expansive experience.

The primary sources to be used in this investigation include poems and prose productions by William Blake found in: *The complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* edited by David Erdman and Harold Bloom. As well as a collection of prose and poems by Whitman found in *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose (Library of America)* Edited by Justin Kaplan.

The objectives in this study are related to the exploration of the concepts of Imagination and Genius as understood by William Blake and Walt Whitman to be able to analyse how these concepts take form in their poetic works. This will allow for elucidating an interpretation of and establish a connection between Blake and Whitman regarding their poetic diction. In turn, these conclusions will shed light on their prophecies and the way they offer them to readers. Moreover, the nature of such relationship will contribute to the way in which we understand romanticism, but more importantly what we understand about ourselves. To be able to explore this is imperative in the context of the Modernity that takes place in our century. Promoting reflection on the self is important to expand our self-consciousness and our knowledge on our own power for transformation.

## Theoretical Background

Throughout history, human beings have changed countless times, concerning a number of different customs. Cannibalism for example, can be dated as far back as 800.000 years, where *Homo antecessor*, considered to be one of the earliest human species in Europe, practiced it. The European *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* of today would think of such possibility not only a disgusting, but an extremely barbaric endeavor. Customs reveal the way in which we understand the world, if we think of each other as objects or food, our culture will mirror that understanding. When something changes in our consciousness, everything else in our lives change. In the act of observing the world around us, we become aware of the elements that shape reality, and in doing so, we also become aware of ourselves. One example of such idea is found in the discovery of the fact that the earth was round, as opposed to the previous misconception that it was flat. This discovery meant a world of difference for civilization, it was illuminating and it allowed for scientific advancement and therefore progress. Certainly what it meant at the time does not bear the same connotations that it holds for us today. But it shows that, whether big or small, that particular change in consciousness meant a huge change in society and its ways of understanding the world, affecting not only their particular time and space, but also the lives of future generations all around the world. The anxieties produced under these state of affairs are going to find different representations in the prophetic poetry of Blake and Whitman. But both are going to provide similar answers to the crisis of Modernity.

All we understand about human history is what we have been able to see, learn and grasp from what has been seen, learnt, recorded, thought and interpreted by other men and women that came here before us. History and education have contributed to “save” what Owen Barfield calls “appearances”. He discusses that in the history of the world our understanding of present phenomena lies on an assumption and an omission. (12) He begins by explaining the omission: “In the first place, undisputed though it remains, it is (...) always left out of account in our approach to any subject outside the sphere of physics—such subjects, for example, as the history of the earth, the history of language, the history of thought.” (12) For Barfield, our present interpretation of reality is mediated by and rooted in these elements: thoughts, language and the earth. As to the assumption Barfield states:



“In the second place, it is invariably assumed that, whatever the truth may be about the psychological nexus between man and nature, it is an unchanging one and is the same now as it was when men first appeared on earth” (12)

In terms of history, this statement reminds us that everything that holds meaning for human beings in the present has been shaped in the past, generation after generation, and all we consider as being tangible, thick matter is only a partial understanding of the whole that is. But at the same time, those visions and perceptions about reality are malleable, in that they are subjected to change.

Barfield suggests that the way we perceive the world shapes the way we behave in it. And if literature has the virtuosity of enlightening the reader, it certainly has the power of enlightening the world. This study proposes that Blake and Whitman were conscious of the impression they wanted to cause on readers. Both poets address their readers using a prophetic voice, but what is the reader Whitman and Blake had in mind when communicating their prophecies?

In order to answer this question, this study will follow the steps of Helen Vendler’s theory of analysis in *Poet’s Thinking*. She states that “poems often change their minds as they proceed” (2), implying that they are individual manifestations of thought, which minds change their course in tone, meaning, metric, etc. (2) She also declares that poems do not necessarily have a fixed, premeditated, and evident final destination; she believes that poems are living beings that can move on their own rhythm, and that “contain within themselves implicit instructions concerning how they should be read” (2). Wordsworth expresses that the words in a poem are not there because of chance, but because of choice or as he puts it, they carry a purpose (9).

The object in this paper is to present the study of thinking patterns in two poets of the Romantic Movement, trying to elucidate how these poets, through their prophetic voices, extend an invitation to their readers to become a prophet. In order to sustain the development of this investigation, reader oriented theories are going to be used, specifically the one developed by Georges Poulet in his *Phenomenology of Reading*. He puts forward in his proposal that in the act of reading, literary works allow for its own world to take part inside the reader’s consciousness (57): “It all happens, then, as though reading were the act by which a thought managed to bestow itself within me with a subject not myself. (...) “Je

est un autre.” said Rimbaud. Another I that would replace my own, and who will continue to do so as long as I read” (57) For the purposes of this study, this theory is going to be the one underlying the analysis of the poems by Blake and Whitman in the context of their Poetic Diction.

As it has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the ideas produced by eighteenth century thinkers offered scientific, mathematical and philosophical elements that would constitute this period’s most important developments.<sup>1</sup> The German philosopher Immanuel Kant summarized the enlightenment’s motto in the lines: “Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!” (6) Where he expresses his enthusiasm towards the celebration of reason and the capacity it has to make of people, emancipated beings. This statement implies two things, one that the human mind is able to take us to knowledge through the accumulation of experience, which encourages to live life in order to get a first hand impression about it. But everything taken to an extreme can be dangerous if taken without precaution. And that would be the second implied idea, the one that places the mind in a superior category, as the centre and starting point of all progress and all development, not only individual, but also collective, affecting a whole new way of understanding the self, society, politics, education, and religion. Thus the notion of the enlightened individual, complete, unified and ‘elevated’ is going to suffer a fragmentation in Modern times that Romantic Poets like Blake and Whitman include in the body of their poetry, allowing for a circulation of its meaning, through a ‘prophetic voice’.

In addition, the Romantic Movement addressed the opposing sides of the external world, but also the opposition taking part inside the poets’ intimate and personal awareness. Poets like Blake, Keats and Whitman, express that human experience comes into being by means of opposites: heaven and earth, day and night, men and women, rich and poor, ignorance and knowledge, childhood and old age, life and death, body and soul, innocence and experience, etc. The Romantic features we find in the poetry of Blake and Whitman is an expansive and inclusive one; where the fracture experienced by human beings, as a result of Modernity, is absolutely necessary for a wider understanding of human experiences as a whole. This assumption can be better understood as illustrated by John Keats’ “Negative Capability”. In a letter he wrote to his brothers he described, “Negative

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<sup>1</sup> And it would inspire a whole generation to expand its premises and forge a new world-order.

Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” (147) In these lines, Keats is articulating this concept as the ability to cope with the uncertainties of life, to be able to get over the negative condition of human experience, and instead of antagonizing both ends or trying to rationalize their existence, Keats saw a creative opportunity in them that is tightly associated to Poetic Imagination and Genius. In that, both concepts (Negative Capability and Imagination) attempt to subvert the prevailing rational “Logos”<sup>2</sup> imposed by the offspring of the enlightenment, standing as dissenters of the ruling canon.

In the development of this study the concept of “Negative Capability” will be useful to analyse the ways in which these poets experience uncertainties and examine to what extent, through their prophetic experience, they challenge the reader they imagine for their poems to develop or face this negative capability as well.

In order to carry out this analysis a few distinctions need to be established. In the process of artistic creation the first level of communication consists of an interaction between the artist and the world of imagination or genius. On a second level, communication rises between the artist and the work of art, in such relationship artists create, shape, give form, and embed with life their own creations. Third, there is a relationship between readers and any particular literary text, whether familiar or unfamiliar. Finally, there is an interaction between the reader and its own individual consciousness, the one that appears while or after being in contact with the literary text. It is important to make this distinction because this thesis proposal attempts to study the different ways in which Romanticism explores itself in the work of William Blake and Walt Whitman in relation to these spheres or levels of communication: artist, literary work, the reader, and the world in a realm of convergence where they all gather and transcend: consciousness.

Habermas in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* discusses the concept of subjectivity as an aesthetic category stating that it is a modern concept since it was established after the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Reformation. In this discussion he states:

In this context, the term “subjectivity” carries primarily four connotations: (a) *individualism*: in the modern world, singularity particularized without limit can

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<sup>2</sup> The discussion will return to this concept later.

make good its pretensions; (b) *the right to criticism*: the principle of the modern world requires that what anyone is to recognize shall reveal itself to him as something entitled to recognition; (c) *autonomy of action*: our responsibility for what we do is a characteristic of modern times; (d) finally, *idealistic philosophy* itself: Hegel considers it the work of modern times that philosophy grasps the self-conscious (or self knowing) Idea. (17)

Even if these concepts are not part of the historical context of the poets, they are an important part to understand the prophetic poetry of Blake and Whitman, especially self-consciousness. Moreover, its counterpart *otherness* as developed by Levinas in *Lo Otro que el Ser*: “Si la trascendencia tiene un sentido, no puede significar otra cosa (...) que el hecho de pasar a lo otro que el ser.” (45) The first distinction to be made is that the *other* is what the self is not. “Entre los cinco <<géneros>> del *Sofista* falta el género opuesto al ser” (45) What Levinas proposes in his work is the ability to become the other in an act of transcendence. In his discussion the concept of *subjectivity* also appears: “De otro modo que ser: se trata de enunciar el relampagueo de un destino que reina en la esencia y cuyos fragmentos y modalidades, a pesar de su diversidad, pertenecen unos a otros (...) la excepción, sea la negatividad, la aniquilación y, ya desde Platón, el no-ser –significa la subjetividad o la humanidad, el *sí-mismo* que repudia las anexiones de la esencia.” (51) He explains that subjectivity is not part of the essence of the self (62). On the other Hand he states that “sensibilidad es la exposición al otro” (133) where he discusses the passivity of feeling. These concepts are important in the light of the analysis because the exploration that the poets offer of these concepts are tightly linked with their prophetic experience and visions, as well as the sort of poetic scene the reader will have to face to become *the other*, in this case: the poet.

Owen Barfield in his book *Poetic Diction* refers to the quality of using language to promote “aesthetic imagination” in the reader stating the following: “When words are selected and arranged in such a way that their meaning, either arouses, or is obviously intended to arouse, aesthetic imagination, the result may be described as *poetic diction*.” (Barfield 41) The type of Poetic Diction this study proposes to have found in Blake and Whitman is a Prophetic one, Barfield continues:

When I try to describe in more detail than by the phrase ‘aesthetic imagination’ what experience it is to which at some time or other I have been led, and at any time may be led again, by all of these examples, I find myself obliged to define it as a ‘felt change of consciousness’, where ‘consciousness’ embraces all my awareness of my surroundings at any given moment, and ‘surroundings’ includes my own feelings. By ‘felt’ I mean to signify that the change itself is noticed, or attended to.

(48)

Harold Bloom in his book *Genius* shows his appreciations towards this concept and what it really means for him, in it he states that readers when facing a literary text must ask about the writer: “does she or he augment our consciousness, and how is it done? I find this a rough but effectual test: however I have been entertained, has my awareness been intensified, my consciousness widened and clarified? If not, then I have encountered talent, not genius. What is best and oldest in myself has not been activated.” (12) This is the basis for an understanding of Poetic Genius, Blake said we all have it, and therefore it lives in everyone, the trigger of consciousness is feeling. Moreover Bloom states: “Our recognition of genius is always retroactive, but how does genius recognize itself? The ancient answer is that there is a god within us, and the god speaks. (...) Genius, by necessity, invokes the transcendental and the extraordinary, because it is fully conscious of them. Consciousness is what defines genius...” (12) For Blake and Whitman, literature has the virtuosity of enlightening the reader, who in turn, has the power of enlightening the world; and their poetry is full of traces that lead to believe that they longed to be read, discovered, and reached.

## Imagination & Prophetic Voice

The experience of Prophecy in Whitman and Blake is convergent and divergent. They both share ideas about the nature of *genius* and *imagination*, the two of them stress the importance and pay equal attention to these concepts in the development of their poems, but their ways of writing and communicating those visions are completely different. On the one hand Blake is

In *All Religions are One*, Blake states: “That the Poetic Genius is the true Man. and that the body of outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius.” (1) For Blake Genius stands as a source of creativity, not only intellectual, but also organic, human and all kinds, prophesizing that man and genius are one and the same, creating and re-creating themselves endlessly. Moreover, he continues: “The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the poetic genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy.” (1) This is an interesting statement that suggests several ideas. On the one hand, Prophecy in the same way that imagination, has to do with the self-exploration of creativity, Blake suggests that Religions are man-made since they depend on man’s interpretation of that poetic genius. And on the other, it suggests that poetic Genius is the Spirit of Prophecy itself. In which case every man (since all possess the same poetic genius/spirit of prophecy) has the potential of becoming a prophet. Including the readers of his poetry. In fact, his prophecy is tightly connected to the communication of such discovery.

From a philosophical point of view, Levinas in *De Otro Modo que Ser* states: “Puede llamarse profetismo este retorno en el que la percepción del *orden* coincide con esta significación de esta orden realizada por el que obedece a ella. De este modo, el profetismo sería el propio psiquismo del alma, lo *otro* en lo *mismo*<sup>3</sup>; toda la espiritualidad del hombre sería profética.” (227) Levinas proposes that the basis for prophetic experience is an analogical relationship between what the (in this context) poet feels as aligned with his own inspiration and genius, and *otherness*. There is a correspondence in such relationship, where the observer (self) finds itself reflected in the other. From this perspective, the

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<sup>3</sup> Italics are not part of the original text of Levinas, but have been included to highlight these concepts.

concept of Prophecy in Whitman's experience has to do with a personal need of communicating others.

In the same way Whitman's prophetic experience is rooted in the self, even though more than a root it is like a fountain, constantly flowing and reaching further and further stretches of experience. Those experiences are found in an inward relationship with the self, and in the outward relationship with the self of others and the *otherness*<sup>4</sup> of the world. For Whitman, others and otherness are different manifestations of the self. In many of his poems he declares a vast self, a self that contains multitudes, and even if at times this declaration might be taken as some sort of narcissistic bragger trying to take over the world, he performs a service for us readers in providing from very early in his poetry, the consciousness of others and *otherness*. To talk about *otherness* in Whitman's work is almost symbolic because, as it has been stated before, he asserts an extremely expansive self, where everything starts in it, everything is contained in it, and it never really ends.

In the opening of "Song of Myself" he states "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / and what I assume you shall assume, / for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." (188) Whitman's has an extremely vast imagination where all things find a place, he has a very big attitude regarding the experience of the self, absorbing in him all that is. And this poem is the evidence of that, the first verse asserts a celebration, a joyful chanting of the self, later the lyric speaker is telling us that everything that he is, all that he entails, readers also do. This puts the reader in a very unusual situation; from the very beginning in his poetry Whitman makes the reader face himself in the pages of his book. There is constant dialogue between the *self* and *otherness* in his poetry, Whitman insists on this in section 25 of "Song of Myself":

My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,  
With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds.  
Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,  
It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,  
*Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?* (213)

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<sup>4</sup> Such term belongs to post-structuralist theories that attempt to account for cultural and social experiences that are not part of Whitman's poetic experience as such, but that shed light on our understanding of his work today.

Wherever his vision is not able to stretch, his voice will reach. His voice even speaks to him inviting him to overflow his fountain within. Saying he contains enough to share with the world. These verses compared to Blake's share similarities in that he asserts an expansion that encompasses everything, just like the ancient poets of Blake. Both address the expansion of the senses necessary to communicate their visions.

For Blake "Knowledge of Ideal Beauty. is Not to be acquired It is Born with us Innate Ideas. are in Every Man Born with him. they are truly Himself." Blake wrote this message in the margins of Reynolds' *Discourses on Painting* and it affirms that man is born with the ability to think, feel, imagine and create, but "The Man who says that we have No Innate Ideas must be a Fool & Knave. Having No Con-Science or Innate Science" (648) In order to experience Ideal Beauty within ourselves, Blake is suggesting that it is necessary to develop self-consciousness.

Where does this place the reader then? In the act of writing there is no discrimination really; he wanted to be read. The more readers he had the likelier he was to find someone who would be affected by his words and therefore, who would understand his ideas. Apparently, the 'ideal reader' for Blake is one who would be able to be affected by his words in either feelings or thoughts. And the purpose of this prophetic voice was to arouse readers' genius so that they 'awaken' their 'innate senses' and perceive the world and themselves by means of their genius and nothing else.

By means of poetic expression, poets open a gate of entrance to their consciousness that readers can access. And in this reading the possibility of expanding the reader's consciousness hovers between the book and the reader. Emile Benveniste in "El Aparato Formal de la Enunciación", discusses the appropriation of language arguing:

El acto individual de apropiación de la lengua introduce al que habla en su habla. (...) La presencia del locutor en su enunciación hace que cada instancia de discurso constituya un centro de referencia interna. Esta situación se manifestará por un juego de formas específicas cuya function es poner al locutor en relación constante y necesaria con su enunciación. (Benveniste 84-85)

Blake and Whitman's lyric speaker appropriates the language, where the style in the use of words becomes a way of transforming emotions in the reader's consciousness. Barfield's proposal on reception is analogous to Benveniste's theory: "the selection and arrangement



of words is due to a consciously creative effort ('art') on the part of some one human being ('poet')" (50) This idea alludes that "internal reference" discussed by Benveniste. Moreover, Poulet states "Words have attained a veritable power of recreation; they are a sort of material entity, solid and three-dimensional, thanks to which a certain life of the senses is reborn, finding in a network of verbal connotations the very conditions necessary for its replication." (61) And just as Owen Barfield states in *Saving the Appearances*: "the phenomenon itself only achieves full reality (actus) in the moment of being 'named' by man; that is, when that in nature which it represents is united with that in man which the name represents." (85) Vocalization and enunciation allow us to access the world and interact with reality and therefore the possibility of "changing" its previous meaning in our consciousness is born. Poetry in itself entails music; therefore the figure of the poet acts as an interpreter of the music of the spheres. That is the reason Wordsworth thought of Poetry as being "the first and last of all knowledge" (107), for it allowed for infinite expression and therefore infinite creation. This invites readers to an appropriation of language in the act of reading. If readers fuse with the language of the book (which is the poet's), then a second appropriation of language occurs, and by means of that fusion the invitation from poet to reader, to become a subject of poetic imagination or prophet rises.

Blake, through many of his poems offers a new reading on the history of thought and language, diverting religious, social, and moral paradigms to create his own world of meaning. He will provide a completely different outlook towards reality and the self. The same happens with Whitman; nonetheless he places the 'self' at the core of his experience and prophetic voice. In "Song of Myself" he sings: "Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at, / What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass, / What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed, / And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning. / My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps, / I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents, / I am afoot with my vision." (219) His vision confirms what he had already figured; it allows him to see what his experience allowed him to feel. In this context vision would be associated to illuminating experience and the corresponding knowledge that comes with it.

The whole poem is in first person, referring to himself and allowing the reader to have a first person experience of the poem as well. Which makes readers ask: what is the self? what are selves made of? how many selves are there in the world? what type of self am I? are selves static? can they change? Even if readers are not highly educated people, or if they are not curious at all, in reading both Blake and Whitman, they will get confused and at least ask themselves: “what is he talking about?” This questioning already means their consciousness has been affected, even if readers are not entirely able to acknowledge that process consciously.

Among Blake’s earliest works there is a prosaic poem called “Contemplation”, the prophetic voice of an angelic female character who holds a dialogue to a man, the second voice of the poem that represents mortal men. “Vain foolish man, that roams on lofty rocks! where, ‘cause his garments are swoln with wind, he fancies he is grown into a giant! Lo then, Humility, take it, and wear it in thine heart; lord of thyself, thou then art lord of all.” (442) These lines in the context of the Enlightenment could be regarded as addressing the fact that men have not been able to understand their own place on earth, that the more they seem to advance and stand at the top of science and knowledge, the less they understand about their own nature and the possibilities they have to change themselves, and therefore the world around them, to become artists of life. The lyric speaker in the voice of Contemplation suggests the man to embrace Humility, to direct his concern to himself and to make of him a new man so that he can make all things new. This is very prophetic and enticing. It places man at the top of his own supremacy, meaning he can and has the power to change his consciousness.

“Great Poetry is the progressive incarnation of life in consciousness.” (Barfield 181) Both poets see and experience the relationship between consciousness and poetry as rooted in Imagination. Blake and Whitman are not prophets in the conventional sense, predicting the future or something of the sort; but in a poetic sense, always translating the ‘Word of God’, which never ceases to create. But for both of them Imagination resides in every human being, the experience of being in connection with our own Poetic genius it is not restricted to a specific kind of reader, these poets are the bards and they address all readers as equals, as their own reflection, their own consciousness.

The relationship between the word and creativity will be discussed in the next chapter; the important point to be made under the light of prophetic Vision is that it entails a growing up, certain maturity, a change to become wiser. In this sense, does that prophetic vision of the poets place them in a position of teachers? Instructors? Or wiser people showing the way towards greater knowledge?

Both poets share the idea that Genius inhabits every man; “Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.” (38) Blake is suggesting that we all carry it in our hearts and that all human beings can do as good gardeners of the soul, is to provide the proper conditions for the senses to expand, and watch nature take its course. It is not a restricted experience for those who listen to them only “a Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator. It is mans fault if God is not able to do him good. for he gives to the just & to the unjust but the unjust rejects his gift” (617) for Blake it is always and only in the ‘eyes’ of each man the key to become more and more self-aware.

In *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* Whitman gives account of his experience towards Poetic Genius, as well as his relationship with Poetry itself.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,

Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle, (388)

These first verses comprise images and symbols related to the act of being born, as well as the realm of creativity. The first verse evokes eternity and movement that somehow anticipates the other movements that the poem will bring as it progresses. This image is like the universe, quiet and endlessly moving. The second verse brings the presence of sound, its vessel being a bird, which provides a second sense to the reader’s experience. Moreover he continues with the images of birth and creativity: “Out of the Ninth-month midnight,” (388) here we encounter a symbol of pregnancy or conception that is present in the nine months of gestation. The use of the number nine connected to the concept of creativity also is reminiscent of the nine Muses or inspiration goddesses from Greek mythology. They would stand as a symbol for imagination and poetic genius, suggesting readers that Whitman’s song comes from that sphere of consciousness. And so he continues: “Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,” (388) These lines remind us that we come from childhood, which in turn comes from the cradle, where the baby sleeps, which in turn comes from the womb;

human beings are born into life and into the future constantly because of time, they remind us that we come from the past and head to the future. Just as they remind readers that Whitman's poetic experience comes from the origins of the universe, through imagination, bursting in the song of a bird.

From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,  
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I heard,  
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears,  
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,  
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,  
From the myriad thence-arous'd words, (388)

Taking a look at the grammatical body of these lines and from a rather structural point of view, Whitman creates a lot of prepositional phrases that invite the reader to a new positioning regarding the self, such as: out of, over, beyond, down from, up from, out from... all those prepositional phrases move the reader from the regular *subject + verb + object* type of declarative sentence to a prepositional phrase that reminds them that the world does not begin with us and our individual consciousness, but instead there is something before that, out of which we come from. Now, in relation to the images provided in the poem Whitman states "from the memories", taking the reader to a point in the past, reminding them that they come from somewhere in the past, that the present moment starts somewhere else.

Moreover, Whitman brings to his song the presence of "the word": "From the word stronger and more delicious than any, / From such as now they start the scene revisiting" (388) this word allows for a "revisit" of past experiences, suggesting a second reading, that takes the lyric speaker to a self-conscious state where he moves, making the reader move with him. As Whitman continues: "I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter" (388) He offers himself as a hero of the self, he overflows the limits of the text, time and space to reach the self of the reader and enter his consciousness. The invitation Whitman poses onto the reader is to join him in the experience of oneness and rejoice in its pleasure. Whitman's use of language in these verses denotes a certain malleability that words lend to poetic experience. "Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them, / A reminiscence sing." (388) How dynamic this movement "swiftly leaping", that

makes time look very liquid, and matter very liquid, this transformation of state, the motion, the change from solid, static, towards a moveable, liquid and lighter experience towards the physicality of the self.

### The Body of the Self

Words are the body of language; their meaning rest upon both their structure and syntactic arrangement, and their sounds. Poetry is the body of the poets' visions, materialized by means of Imagination and Genius. The physical body of man is the vehicle of the soul, which stands as both: a threshold to access a vision of the invisible, and as the tool that will allow man to materialize those visions in the world through the exploration and expansion of the senses. The presence of the body in these poets' works includes a wide range of bodies, from constellations to atoms.

In the opening of section 21 of *Song of Myself* Whitman sings: "I am the Poet of the Body and I am the Poet of the Soul, / The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue." (207) One more time the lyric speaker of *Leaves of Grass* tells us that he contains pleasures and pains the same. The first is like a seed he "grafts" inside himself to let it grow, providing a very organic image that stands for the cultivation and embrace of all good things of heaven that make life pleasurable; and the second experience, that of pains and misery he integrates them by translating it "into a new tongue". This translation is done by means of Imagination and memory.

Imagination, in Whitman's eyes, is the womb containing all creation, and the relationship between Poet and Prophet lies in his relationship with the Word in its creative aspect. Blake's poetry for example, is full of images of words and the act of writing. In his poem "Contemplation" he states: " 'Tis Contemplation, daughter of the grey Morning!

Majestical she steppeth, and with her pure quill on every flower writeth Wisdom's name." (442) This figure of Contemplation could stand as an allegory of the creative process of composing poetry since she's carrying a quill to write on flowers "Wisdom's name". In such case, this female character embodies the Prophetic and Poetic energy where the poet's mind dwells.

Since imagination creates, words in turn, allow for the materialization of the world. Let us go back to the Greek word *λόγος* (logos) for example, which contains the seed for the rising of prophetic experience in both Blake and Whitman. In the King James Bible, the gospel according to Saint John starts as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) In some translations the term 'Word' appears as 'Logos', which in its earliest uses stood for "the divine wisdom manifest in the creation, government, and redemption of the world and often identified with the second person of the Trinity"<sup>5</sup>. According to Saint John then, God not only "spoke" the world into being, but He created the world out of this word contained inside him. Therefore, man, granted with this creative power, can as well speak the whole creation spoken by God in the first place.

In the "Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom" Blake wrote: "He who Loves feels love descend into him & if he has wisdom may perceive it is from the Poetic Genius which is the Lord." Moreover, and going back to the King James Bible: "For Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things" (Romans 11:36). The basis for this prophetic voice is in fact the power contained in the word, not just the word as a linguistic system of symbolic referents, but as an embodiment of the primordial sound. The Mind, Logos, or the Word, seems to be the way in which the universe comes into existence, how creativity in its most primeval form works. If spoken word is the creative projection of the mind, words and sound become important creative means that shape reality and the bodies in it.

If words create reality, poetry is the highest, finest music, and its instrument, the human body. Song and singing in both Blake and Whitman are very important and both very salient traits in their poetry. Whitman for example, in his poem "What Am I After All" he sings: "What am I after all but a child, pleas'd with the sound of my own name?"

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<sup>5</sup> "Logos." Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 21 Dec. 2015.

repeating it over and over; / I stand apart to hear—it never tires me. / To you your name also; / Did you think there was nothing but two or three pronunciations in the sound of your name?” (516) In the act of repetition of sounds the lyric speaker finds pleasure revealing the intensity of feeling he is able to perceive through the senses. Then he turns to readers reminding them that they also are part of that sound and that pleasure. The image of the child happy to hear his name, just like the one in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” reminds the readers of the pleasure our speaker finds in sound; it reminds us how sound excites and stimulates the lyric speaker’s soul.

Romanticism is a sensibility that interprets opposites, irony or fragmentation as an opportunity to observe reality under a new perspective. Wordsworth in the preface of *Lyrical Ballads* states that thought mediates feeling and that in its space we can also find past feelings, suggesting that whenever we acknowledge the meaning of such relationship, we discover what is really important to us (10):

so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated.<sup>6</sup> (10)

Concepts such as *reminiscence* and *remembrance* are part of the Romantic elements that shape the body of its compositions and provide important insights to understand its spirit and sensibility. In that the poet brings to life an experience from the past, recreating it in his consciousness. In the poem “I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud” The lyric speaker’s capacity for ‘re-membering’<sup>7</sup> provides a more vivid and sheer image than the original one with which the reader came into contact the first time. Perceptual experience is recreated through

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<sup>6</sup> William Wordsworth. “Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems, 1800, Volume 1.” iBooks. <https://itun.es/cl/7MXkE.1>

<sup>7</sup> " 11c., from Latin *membrum* "limb, member of the body, part," probably from PIE *\*mems-ro*, from root *\*mems-* "flesh, meat"

memory, and it allows for the positioning of a new experience through the process of reminiscence and Imagination.

On plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he insists on this idea: “The ancient poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses,” (38) Blake starts with the figure of “ancient poets” placing them in a position of creators, “calling them by the names” (38) These poets, by means of language (poetry) re-create the world into being, by naming it, they define it to exist, “and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive.” (38) Blake’s poetry is full of striking images, and this one presents the image of poets with expanded senses –not limited, but “enlarged” and “numerous” senses– that connect with everything they can perceive, and therefore create everything in the acknowledgement of that perception. According to the Romantics, Imagination was the most important tool human beings have, in *All Religions are One* for example, Blake argued that everybody shares the same physical appearance (with infinite variety) and in that same way everybody shares the same capacity for ‘Poetic Genius’ (1). For him, all things generate themselves, just as man creates himself by means of the universal Imagination or Poetic Genius. All of which are part of a never-ending cycle of Creativity.

Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* states:

The progression sought by Blake’s dialectic is to make the sensuous given of our everyday experience into the “Human Form Divine”; to unite the human perceiver with the object he creates, or, as Blake’s myth would put it, to restore the primal unity of perception. Blake’s image for this unity is the giant figure of a man who includes the cosmos, and whose perceptive activity is the constant re-creation of himself. (21-22)

Blake’s idea that every man creates himself according to his own genius, allows for a condition of plasticity in consciousness and the world. Owen Barfield in *Poetic Diction* states: “When individual man, having achieved self-consciousness, returns to the making of poetry, the secondary imagination is at work on the making of meaning.” (31) This implies several ideas, or arises several thoughts. First, there is the idea of repetition and recreation of meaning. Poets such as Whitman, Coleridge and Wordsworth propose that in the act of remembering, the possibility of re-creation arises, allowing for the opening of a certain



experience to be looked at in perspective and under a different light, transforming it into something completely new. Octavio Paz states: “The author is the poem’s first reader, and with his reading a series of interpretations and recreations begin. Each reading produces a different poem. No reading is definitive, and in this sense each reading, not excluding that of the author, is an accident of the text.” (162) But in this act of creation, it is not only the poet the one who re-creates imaginatively his former experience, since the reader is going to be in contact with the text after, he too will have the possibility of re-creation. In *Poetic Diction* Barfield discusses the following:

Science deals with the world which it perceives but, seeking more and more to penetrate the veil of naïve perception, progresses only towards the goal of nothing, because it still does not accept in practice (whatever it may admit theoretically) that the mind first creates what it perceives as objects, including the instruments which Science uses for that very penetration. It insists on dealing with ‘data’, but there shall no data be given, save the bare percept. (28)

Thought and thing are not detached as two different entities being separated by inner and outer participation, but instead, they are part of the same realm of experience: Imagination. And so he continues, “The rest is imagination. Only by imagination can the world be known. And what is needed is, not only that larger and larger telescopes and more and more sensitive calipers should be constructed, but that the human mind should become increasingly aware of its own creative activity.” (28) That means again an act of directing our vision towards the self to promote self-awareness.

Foster Damon in *A Blake’s Dictionary* states: “Blake always insisted that Vision and Memory are entirely different; yet it is obvious that Memory furnished all the raw materials for his visions. But something happened in these materials in his subconscious; they altered, combined into new forms, in accordance with the thought which Blake was expressing.” (436) These changes occurred in the subconscious realm, allowed for a renewal and expansion of his consciousness.

Regarding the place of the body in this invitation for a change in consciousness is interesting because all experience takes place in it and the prophetic voice of these poets will remind readers about their own relationship with their bodies. Blake in “The Divine Image” for example, depicts the human form as inherent in human nature where we can see

that “Mercy has a human heart / Pity, a human face: / And Love, the human form divine, / And Peace, the human dress.” (12-13) From these verses it can be drawn that human beings are all equal and perfect, a mirror image of God. Moreover, on plate 10 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he states: “The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion.” (37) This celebration of the body reminds us of Whitman’s prophetic voice when “singing” about the body.

For Whitman, any experience is only possible through the experience of the body. Whitman firmly believed that all experience is, and his poetry is full of bodily expression; there is a physicality in his work that stands almost as a tribute to the body; and not only to the human body, but to the body of the world. In fact, and in Whitman’s words, the very exercise of reading implicates a physical experience, where the whole body participates in it, the eyes softly navigating through the pages of the book, the joints of the legs framing the posture as we sit, the hands holding a book, the back comfortably resting on the seat, and where the soul would find its way towards the words, bringing together two realms of experience, the physical and spiritual ones, and with it the poet and the reader also become one. The opening lines of leaves of grass are very revealing regarding this point:

Come, said my soul,  
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)  
That should I, after return,  
Or long, long, long hence, in other spheres,  
There to some group of mates the chants resuming,  
(Tallying Earth’s soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,)  
Ever with pleas’d smile I may keep on,  
Ever and ever yet the verses owning-as, first, I there and now  
Singing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,  
Walt Whitman. (4)

He offers a tribute to the body by placing it as the vessel towards the unseen, but at the same time the body as having value in itself. In the poem “I Sing The Body Electric”, the depiction of the body raises ethical, spiritual, philosophical issues that put the reader in a ‘curious’ position. The very title of this poem suggests a mood of appreciation for the body, since the title does not say I talk about, or I describe, or I utter the body electric, but I

sing it. So in singing the “body electric”, there comes a sense of devotion, as a lover would sing a serenade to the beloved.

Moreover, this body electric, is interesting because the notion of electricity that people had in Whitman’s time was different than the one we know today, and electricity seems to denote vibration and life, mystery and power to pose a kind of conductivity or a current that brings us together as a body and also as a people or a nation. At the same time the word electric seems to suggest that there is something pure to human beings as well, not only slaughter and war, but also a pure and healthy vigour, beauty and light in human beings, suggesting something elemental about the body that is also connected to the soul. In section 1 he states: “I sing the body electric, / The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them, / They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them, / And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.” (250) “I sing the body electric” that opening sentence invites the reader to a celebration of the body, and it brings up the concept of electricity as the electric charge the soul possesses and the one that charges the body, bringing it together. Then, the lyric speaker addresses a fusion between the self and the others and “charge them full with the charge of the soul” suggesting that the speaker is going to be singing the body into a kind of electric state, almost as if he sings the body into existence, fully charged, powerful, awakened, and active.

In section 7 the lyric speaker sings: “A man’s body at auction, (For before the war I often go to the slave-mart and watch the sale,) I help the auctioneer, the sloven does not half know his business.” (255) The lyric speaker is going to place himself as an observer where he can narrate what is going on, he will speak to the reader how this “auctioneer” does not know what he is doing. The business of this man has to do with putting a value to the human body and in telling us that is as if he does not know the value of the body and since our lyric speaker knows better, he will help him know how they are all related and where to place what. “Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for it, / For it the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one animal or plant, / For it the revolving cycles truly and steadily roll’d.” (255) In putting a value to the body the speaker is saying that it takes a lot of energy from the universe to have created human beings, that there is an immeasurable value to it that nobody will ever be able to pay with money.

What happens with Whitman's prophetic voice in this section of the poem is that this poet who "sings the body electric" is not judging the business of the auctioneer, he is observing it and thinking about the nature of such act, he contemplates the situation, takes part of its happening, he gets involved in the trading of slaves and he uses his prophetic voice to remind us about the value that we put to our selves, the uncomfortable situation of watching another person, that is just like you, being undervalued puts the speaker in a position where he can shed some light upon the kind of economy we are living in, and the kind of economy the universe and nature lives in and look at ourselves and ask ourselves: where does that leave me? Where do I fit in that situation, as a reader? Where do we solve this puzzle? In *Poetic Diction* Barfield states: "On the basis of past perceptions, using language as a storehouse, we gradually build up our ideas, and it is only these which enable us to become 'conscious' as human beings, of the world around us. (57) And these poets are going to be reminding readers that they speaker is going to move towards the self again:

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor t  
he likes of the parts of you,

I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (and that they  
are the soul,)

I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that they are  
my poems,

Man's, woman's, child's, youth's, wife's, husband's, mother's, father's,  
young man's, young woman's poems (257)

What Whitman means with this is "I" is the I in everybody. He invites readers to regard him as their own reflection: "What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me." (13) These lines take readers back to our own re-evaluation of the self as a whole unit: mind, body, and soul. "In this head the all-baffling brain, / In it and below it the makings of heroes." the speaker is saying that the mind of his body, played by the brain, begets heroes in his Imagination (Prophecy) and from there they are born; as well as the heroes that the body produces and begets. It reminds readers as well that human beings are not just heads with a mean of transport, the mind is the artist's tool (52) as Robert Henri in his wonderful book *The Art Spirit* states: "Art when really understood is the province of

every human being. (...) The mind is a tool, it is either clogged, bound, rusty, or it is a clear way to and from the soul. An artist should not be afraid of his tools. He should not be afraid to know.” (52) Whitman holds very similar ideas about the act of reading and interpretation: “You may read in many languages, yet read nothing about it, /You may read the President’s message and read nothing about it there, /Nothing in the reports from the State department of Treasury department, or in the daily papers or weekly papers, Or in the census or revenue returns, prices current, or any account of stock.” (357) Like Blake, Whitman also refers here to the interpretative faculties of man and how they shape the observed. Moreover he sings: “We consider bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine, /I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still, / It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life, Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed out of you.” (359) Once again, we are facing a similarity between our two Poets, but the difference appears in their styles.

This is a romantic notion that reminds us that our senses provide infinite experience, when we are open to that possibility. Art has the capacity to act as a bridge between internal consciousness and the external collective sensibility. In that case, Artists are the interpreters of life, they are in contact with their imagination and Genius.

## The Prophet's Dwelling

Prophetic voice is rooted in Imagination. The power of Imagination is mediated by the capacity of self-consciousness. The way in which human beings build a relationship with their own self, will resemble the way in which they see the world and how they regard others. This discussion is based on the assumption that the process of understanding, as well as the process of interpretation and thought, is always going to be mediated by the experience of the observer; the observed would resemble the observer no matter what.

Blake in "There is no Natural Religion" states: "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only." (702) These lines place the observer and the observed in an unusual perspective. Blake is suggesting that the one who perceives partially, will be looking at the world with restricted senses, that will be limited by the inability to see past the self in restricted terms. That is to say, perceiving the world within the boundaries of my own vision of the self. "Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (3) By saying that "God becomes as we are" he means God is in relation to the eyes of he who sees him, and in the words "that we may become as he is" Blake is suggesting (and almost wishing) that the eye with which god observes man, may be the eye with which man sees God. "Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself." These uncertainties are the ones readers are going to be facing throughout their readings. For Blake All man are capable of vision, but they all see according to what their eyes allow them to see: "As a man is so he sees. As the eye is formed such are its Powers" (702). What man is, shapes the way he sees, and therefore what he is able to experience. "I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint in this World, but Every body does not see alike. (...) (702) Where does that statement leave the reader of his poetry? Is the reader he imagines for his poems a conventional one? In the same letter he wrote to Trusler he states: "you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which is Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care." (702) The social background in which Blake's poetry appeared is one that overestimated the intellect, and most of his poetry stands as a critique of reason and what it entailed for that particular context. Therefore his prophetic

voice is raising for readers to have a different view on Art, God, Religion, the Self, the Other.

William Blake in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” stated: “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.” (34) Showing that the world of opposites inhabits everywhere and is as old as human existence itself and before even further back in history, when the Big Bang really occurred (for when was Energy born?). Blake continues: “From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.” (34) Hell, is being described here by Blake as Energy in action, there is a ‘neutralization’ of the Cartesian vision of Heaven and Hell or Good and Evil in that it does not hold negative connotations.

In the previous chapter it was discussed the value of the body, the lyric speaker as a mediator of such understanding, behaving like an “enlightener” of his brothers or camerados. “The light and shade, the curious sense of body and identity, the greed that with perfect complaisance devours all things, / The endless pride and outstretching of man, unspeakable joys and sorrows, / The wonder every one sees in every one else he sees, and the wonders that fill each minute of time for ever, What have you reckon’d them for, camerado?” (358) This question places the reader in the oddest position regarding the self. First, the lyric speaker addresses the light and shade mirrored in Blake’s notions of Heaven and Hell; “the curious sense of body and identity” (358) The self’s true identity is too vast to be encompassed by reason and its corresponding senses. Blake states in *Jerusalem* (plate 5) “I rest not from my great task! / To open the Eternal Worlds of Thought: Into Eternity / Ever Expanding in the Bosom of God.” (147) His prophecy needs to be realized, his job is to communicate. “The Human Imagination / O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love: / Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!” (147) As in the poem “Contemplation” what is needed from man is to be humble and recognize others and otherness as the self. Michael Ferber states: “Blake’s idea of the truly human is far from the noble savage or proud aristocrat who achieves his full potential only by isolating himself from the common herd. On the contrary, only by removing everything that separates him from his fellow beings can the Blakean man truly become an individual.” (72) Whitman’s

fusing and merging. For these poets there is no distinction between, self and other, they have merged, already fused and effused.

Whitman uses the verb *effuse* to refer to the act of communion between himself and the world. The earliest use, on record, of the word *effuse* has been found to come from the Latin '*effundo*' 'e-' short form of ex-, which means 'out' and '-fundo' which means 'pour'<sup>8</sup>. In this context, the word *effuse* entails a twofold assumption, on the one hand there is one consciousness who wants to give itself to an other or others, or the otherness; and on the other there is another consciousness, open to receive what comes out of the first one. And in the end of this process there are not two consciousness anymore, but one universal consciousness containing all. Blake's effusing qualities are not entirely alien, on plate 5 of *Jerusalem* he states: "To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the Immortal Eyes/ Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity; Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination" (147) The perceptual disposition of the lyric speaker towards the prophetic 'self' invites readers to melt away with him and experience these effusing qualities that appear to be so effortless in nature. Through the lyric speaker Whitman invites readers to *effuse* into the world and to experience a "spontaneous overflow of feeling"<sup>9</sup> in communion with the world and everything in it.

In Jerusalem's "To the Public" for example Blake states: "I also hope the Reader will be with me, wholly One in Jesus our Lord" (145) pointing out it is his wish to be 'followed' or 'participated' in oneness.<sup>10</sup> Not in many opportunities Blake's voice addresses the reader directly, Whitman on the other hand is constantly speaking to them. The opening poem of *Leaves of Grass* "One's-Self I Sing" provides the first welcoming to readers, an introduction to the essentials of his leaves. "One's Self I sing, a simple separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." (165) Whitman explains what readers will encounter as they read his Leaves. He will pay attention to the individual self as well as the group, micro and macro. "Of physiology from top to toe I sing, / Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far, / The female equally with the Male I sing." (165) Physicality will be important

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<sup>8</sup> Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879.

<sup>9</sup> Belonging as well to the Romantic tradition, introduced by William Wordsworth in his preface of *Lyrical Ballads*.

<sup>10</sup> Blake's Oneness and Whitman's have different ... but both are rooted in the soul.



in the development of this poem, and according to the lyric speaker Female and Male stand as equal. "Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power, / Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine, / The Modern Man I Sing." The fact that the word Modern to denote our latest present is being used draws readers closer to the text in an invitation to see their own reflection in it.

Whitman gives account for different physical manifestations, human bodies, grass, water, decomposing matter, trains, buildings, cities, etc.; filling his poetry with moving images. This sort of picturesque description allows for the reader to have a very tactile experience with his poetry, where bodies are always in contact, either to each other or to other physical manifestations. We need to remember that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century cities were increasingly growing to become so large that modes of mass transportation had to be developed. Until the 19th century, no one took a ferry daily in order to get to work. Whitman would mingle with citizens of all kinds, all the time. His poetry is full of images of means of transport; ferries, trains and omnibuses.

In the poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" gives readers a meditation that goes from the physical, the body of the water and the body of the ship, to a meditation and a journey. The very title already suggests movement; the word crossing in initial position invites the reader to move with the poem and to move with Whitman as well in this crossing. The crossing though, has several levels of experience; on the one hand the poem starts with an act of location, where the lyric speaker places himself in a specific time and space: "Flood-tide bellow me! I see you face to face! / Clouds of the west-sun there half an hour high-I see you also face to face." (307) This couplet invites the reader to a crossing in the perceptual, physical consciousness, and also to the existential sense of presence that comes with it. "Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me! / On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose, / And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose." (308) It is through sensual perception that the lyric speaker is able to access a deeper sense of consciousness. And he is addressing yet another crossing, making contact with those who came before him and those who will eventually come. It is through the simplest act of observation, watching the body of the river and the body of the ships, that the lyric speaker finds the point where

past, present and future meet. “What is it then between us? / What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us? / Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not” (310) These lines address the connection Whitman draws between human beings, the concrete world around them, and through the interaction of both comes conscious experience. Moreover, this same act of perception allows for the physical sphere of consciousness to move to deeper non-physical ones. “I too knitted the old knot of contrariety Blabb’d, blush’d, resented, lied, stole, grudg’d / Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not to speak, / Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,” These lines remind us that human beings are not perfect, and that imperfection is also part of the speaker’s experience: “The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me. / The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting, / Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting” (311) The speaker is placing himself face to face to the reader, in recognizing his flaws, he presents the reader with his own reflection, “ I too knitted the knot of contrariety”. Whitman’s relational self takes on different realms of experience, there is a textual level, and the relationship he builds with words and the language of his poetry; the relationship between himself and the world; and the relationship he builds with readers. In this setting, the type of reader he imagines for his poems is just the common people, everyone who has faced such imperfections will find in this poem a mirror.

The relationship between Poetry and Reader is not merely intellectual, but encompasses all the senses and beyond, it is not a process of deconstruction of linguistic signs but a process of effusion and fusion with the text. There is a certain intimacy in Whitman that is so appealing, like a magnetic field. In the poem “To You” from the section “Birds of Passage” he sings:

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem,  
I whisper with my lips close to your ear.  
I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you.  
O I have been dilatory and dumb,  
I should have made my way straight to you long ago,  
I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you. (375)

Being addressed by a poem is quite an experience; even if it was not intended for the reader, the first and second person used by the lyric speaker help build up an atmosphere between reader and poem so haunting, Blake and Whitman are poets of the soul; they project a visionary voice that sings a world that exists as a whole, where the sound of the waves, the wind, the voice, the city, the body and the soul belong to each other. This makes the boundaries between poet and reader seem very fuzzy.

Now, it is a matter of perception and what the individual experience allows us to understand about the world, what we'll understand in a given moment of interaction with poetry. Individual perception can be described as something that happens inside of us when a fragment of external reality finds its way towards us. This fragment can reach us through different gates; sometimes it can be through an emotional opening, or a more mental, rational door, sometimes captivating our senses' attention, or even through meditation, and sometimes all of the above just in different moments. Readings are always different, always changing, because readers also are. Moreover, in his preface of *Leaves of Grass* Whitman states:

(...) the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons some more and some less to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow time. (Whitman 12)

These words address the condition of his poetry regarding interpretation. Whitman longed to be read, but also interpreted and as he states, he left enough hints inside his poems to draw a line of 'meditation'. Helen Vendler in her introduction to *Poets Thinking* discusses that "Poetry has often been considered an irrational genre, more expressive than logical, more given to meditation than to coherent or defensible argument." (1) Nevertheless, "even when a poem seems to be a spontaneous outburst of feeling, it is being directed, as a feat of ordered language, by something one can only call thought." (3) The relationship between poets and their poetry is extremely romantic in the same way that readers' relationship with poetry is. Poets have to think deeply about the way in which they want to arrange language, to manipulate meaning and experience, but also do readers in interpretation. In the act of reading our imagination and genius decodes the linguistic signs, but our brains are not the only organs involved in reading, our whole being is. Georges Poulet discusses in his

*Phenomenology of Reading* an interesting point regarding the idea of *effusing*<sup>11</sup> one's consciousness as a reader with the consciousness of the work of literature and in it, with the consciousness of the author, stating the following:

I realize that what I hold in my hands is no longer just an object, or even simply a living thing. I am aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of licence, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels. (Poulet 54)

Similarly to Vendler, Poulet suggests that the process of imagination and creativity entails conscious participation, which is always related to mental activity.

(...) the question which imposes itself, which I am absolutely obliged to ask myself, is this: "Who is the usurper who occupies the forefront? What is this mind who all alone by himself fills my consciousness and who, when I say I is indeed that I?" There is immediately an answer to this question, perhaps too easy an answer. The I who thinks in me when I read a book, is the I of the one who writes the book. (Poulet 57-8)

This addresses the most radical and intimate kind of contact with the other. For what could be more intimate than entering somebody else's consciousness? Under this light we can no longer consider the act of reading as a decoding of linguistic elements like hieroglyphs, but an experience where the reader walks through and fuses with the text, it is even physical, it starts in physicality and moves to deeper spheres of experience, where the limits of that initial physicality seem to disappear. Intimacy becomes as intimate as can be. When Whitman makes the promise of revealing the whole truth about the mysteries of the world, this is what it entails. The interesting thing rises when asking ourselves about the reader Whitman had in mind when writing these verses.

For this encounter to happen the reader needs to be willing to do this,

In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake states: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up,

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<sup>11</sup> The author Georges Poulet does not employ this particular word, but Whitman does countless times in his writings, this is the reason I decided to include it in this context.

till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.” (...) Our senses would provide infinite experience only if we leave our doors of perception open. Blake and Whitman connect with everybody, they are the bards, the singers, the prophets, the givers of hope, light, which is knowledge, knowledge about the self or selves, for we are vast, we contain multitudes. Whitman in his preface of *Leaves of Grass* states:

The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another... and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them. (13)

Our own creativity and capacity for pattern recognition is the link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the timeless world of poetry and the apparently solid world of language. “Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet... he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson... he places himself where the future becomes present.” (12) Whitman describes a poet that gathers past, present and future together, and in doing this he brings to life what was considered dead. In the fusion of time he sees wholeness in everything, nurturing the essential nature present in everything, and helping readers to conceive their future in the present. Readers are the key to activate their consciousness and read and create meaning, for the work itself and also for their own selves, out of the work of art.

There are moments when Whitman seems to have a very clear image of his reader when singing his poetry, where the lyric speaker seems to consider himself a wiser companion, available for the reader. Harold Bloom in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Walt Whitman* asserts the following: “The largest puzzle about the continuing reception of Whitman's poetry is the still prevalent notion that we ought to take him at his word, whether about his self (or selves) or about his art. No other poet insists so vehemently and so continuously that he will tell us all, and tell us all without artifice, and yet tells us so

little, and so cunningly.” (4) Whitman’s reception is as vast as the self he declares to have. The point in this study ventures to the recognition of the self of the reader on the self of the lyric speaker. Whitman promises an interesting experience to the reader through poetry: “Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,” (91) In this invitation, Whitman is offering knowledge on the condition to spend with him a whole day and night. The question rises then: What does it mean to spend with him a day and a night? May be he wants us to read without pause, not to quit our reading. May be he took a whole day and night writing his leaves of grass and he wants us to spend with him that time to participate of the experience contained in one day. “You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (There are millions of suns left,) / You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed from the spectres of books, / You shall not look through my eyes either, not take things from me, / You shall<sup>12</sup> listen to all sides and filter them from yourself. (91) To possess the good of nature is to fully grasp the experience of oneness within it. There is an invitation to spend a day and night with him to become emancipated, he is not promising to teach, or to show, he is promising an experience that is nothing but individual, not to take as our own the visions of others, but to look and develop our own vision.

These lines echo the words of William Blake when in his “Jerusalem the Emanation of the great Albion” he states, “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s; I will not reason and compare; my business is to create.” (...) Similarly, Whitman suggests readers to filter things from themselves, through the lyric speaker, he invites readers to emancipate themselves from all external inputs that may have crossed their ways in the discovery of meaning, including the poet himself. The prophet in this case is a bridge that connects reader and poem, not an end in itself. What Blake and Whitman propose in their poetry is that to attempt to comprehend the universe with the senses is to limit that experience to restricted terms; it is like trying to encompass the water of the oceans in different recipients. But at the same time it is the mind and its reflective capabilities the ones that allow for imagination to take its course.

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<sup>12</sup> The way in which Whitman uses anaphora, “You shall” gives the feeling of prophetic repetition, very similar to the Ten Christian Commandments.

The relationship between *Poet* and *Prophecy* according to the analysis carried out so far has revealed that a strong relationship with the self is needed, in order to access Imagination. This is important because Creativity, Genius, Imagination, and Prophecy are inherently within every man. William Blake's prophetic voice provides a secular alternative against religion, founded and rooted in Imagination. The modern man is domesticated or in Whitman's words "translated" by cultural codes and education, which has contributed to the perpetuation of culture and understanding of reality, and directing our energies to achieve not the fullest development of our abilities, but to serve progress and the type of development rooted in materialism and economic growth. But blaming the whole responsibility of human "evil" is rested on Modernity and its artifice is childish and prevents human beings from taking full responsibility of their drives, impulses, passions and outcomes of their actions. All of which according to the romantic sensibility are there to be explored, experienced and elevated to their highest moral and ethical manifestation. Such learning has to come from internal awareness sparkled in consciousness. External events can only arouse such movement in consciousness, or inspire and affect its 'state'. But it can never be taught or instructed from outside and by means of reason, or inferred out of our pure senses as Blake puts it: "From a perception of only 3 senses or 3 elements none could deduce a fourth or fifth" (2) It is not something that can be fully taught in rational terms or instructed by anybody unless it is accompanied by a significant sense of belonging to oneself and the feeling that entails it.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the exploration of the poets' prophetic voices, it can be drawn a connection between the expression of their Genius, the creation of reality through that expression, and the type of readers they have in mind when bringing their prophecies to light. In this setting both poets share a lot of ground ideas in common.

Both envision the poet as a creator of work that re-creates him. Experience and pass on to the reader the vision of Oneness and unity. As this analysis has discussed over the different chapters, Blake asserts in a number of poems, letters and annotations (marginalia) that God is Imagination itself.

This premise offers a change in paradigm of thinking of the people of the age because at the time the experience imparted by religion was that God is separated from Man, and Blake's Vision offers a different interpretation for this relationship. His prophetic poems evidence his Negative Capabilities to cope with the uncertainties projected by modernity and religion. He dissents from the canon in offering a view on Good and Evil as neutral energies necessary for the development of Man's consciousness. Blake is absolutely not judgmental, open, receptive, extremely creative, diverting the antagonism found in religion in the history of thought. He will provide a completely different outlook towards reality and the self.

His proposal is interesting because it places art at the core of this mediation. Poetry for him is the only medium he sees to communicate such truths as man and god are one, innocence and experience are necessary to increase awareness, good and evil are nothing but energy (passive and active) present in nature, man can become an artist of himself, constantly directing his look towards himself, promoting self-awareness for the development of a re-creation of himself. Under the premise of this relationship arises the interesting idea of poet and reader. Blake wanted to provide an alternative interpretation of religion, so that man can become an independent man and filter things for themselves regarding the deepest understanding regarding the soul and the body so deeply tinted and veiled by the religious canon at the time.

Through an appropriation of language, the prophetic voice of the poet re-creates reality, providing visions to his readers. Readers in turn create themselves as they create the



world of meaning around the work of art. As they create themselves with these new visions, they see the world changing before their eyes. This sort of magic happens because the eyes of the observer (first the poet, then the reader) are the ones who mediate the seen, and if the eyes of consciousness change or are opened to new perspectives, then the observed also changes and opens itself for new subjectivities.

Whitman on the other hand is a poet who chooses to fuse with everything and everybody, offering new perspectives regarding the nature of the self, time and space. The Oneness experienced or realized through his poetry knows no limits, it is expansive and inclusive, it rejects nothing, it accepts all and gives a place for all. In the recognition of this acceptance the boundaries that separate entities diffuse and the merging into oneness occurs.

Whitman offers this to his readers from the very beginning of his book. His contribution to the understanding of the self takes even further than Romanticism ever went. His Visions also include a change in paradigms of thinking because they provide a fresh interpretation on the self, both physically and spiritually. Whitman offers an invitation to become as expansive as he is to be able to experience expansively as well. The senses and the body are going to be a physical gate through which man can enter higher or deeper realms of sensitivity or experience. He insists that the unseen is proven by the seen, so spirituality is rooted and only accessible through physicality and what appears to be material, which is the same as the soul and they are not separated really.

This poet directs our attention towards the self by elevating the body and the soul, the nature of human beings to create awareness on people, to contribute to the construction of something new and different where all can be equal. Whitman sings the love for himself and all creation, quite a revolutionary thought at the moment, but in this radical idea there is an invitation towards emancipation. Both poets experience the tensions of modernity and the anxiety that comes with it. As prophets, both provide alternatives to this regime promoting emancipation, freedom and equality.

Under this perspective an interesting 'problem' appears. In the promotion of these 'values' the reader's role must be active, it cannot be passive, the reader must be able to move from one point in consciousness to the other. And, having said that, is it then that

anybody can become a prophetic reader? a reader that is willing and able to move his consciousness?

The relationship between *Poet* and *Prophecy* according to the analysis carried out so far has revealed that a strong relationship with the self is needed, in order to access Imagination. This is important because Creativity, Genius, Imagination, and Prophecy are inherently within every man. William Blake's prophetic voice provides a secular alternative against religion, founded and rooted in Imagination. The modern man is domesticated or in Whitman's words "translated" by cultural codes and education, which has contributed to the perpetuation of culture and understanding of reality, and directing our energies to achieve not the fullest development of our abilities, but to serve progress and the type of development rooted in materialism and economic growth. But blaming the whole responsibility of human "evil" is rested on Modernity and its artifice is childish and prevents human beings from taking full responsibility of their drives, impulses, passions and outcomes of their actions. All of which according to the romantic sensibility are there to be explored, experienced and elevated to their highest moral and ethical manifestation. Such learning has to come from internal awareness sparkled in consciousness. External events can only arouse such movement in consciousness, or inspire and affect its 'state'. But it can never be taught or instructed from outside and by means of reason, or inferred out of our pure senses as Blake puts it: "From a perception of only 3 senses or 3 elements none could deduce a fourth or fifth" (2) It is not something that can be fully taught in rational terms or instructed by anybody unless it is accompanied by a significant sense of belonging to oneself and the feeling that entails it.

What we have seen through the eyes of these prophetic poets is that there is nothing we can do to forcibly learn how to change our consciousness and increase our awareness, but one thing. Listen. The senses are truly important in the poetry of Blake and Whitman. They are gates to access reality and both poets are aware of that fact. Whitman said: I stop somewhere waiting for you. He appealed to everybody, not only a few, the reader might feel tempted to think that in spite of Whitman's democratic view of the world, he didn't appeal to all readers because reading it and following his steps requires a complex self-knowledge... But he did. The only requisite is listening and stretch out the senses. If the audience does not open themselves for this experience, they have no chance of encounter

the prophet. Let alone become one, but there is the value of literature, that is the gift of poetry, it's everywhere, the fact that Blake and Whitman wrote it, doesn't mean they own it... he is just a translator. Stop this day and night with me, spend one kin, and you shall possess the meaning of all poems, what is poetry? everything says Whitman, everything is poetry, everyone is poetry. Everything that has come from us human beings is poetry.

Even though the need to rescue the subjective realm of man was born with Modernity in the XVIII Century as a product of the Enlightenment, we are still at present times dealing with romantic subjectivities in our own lives, we are still undergoing the tensions of Modernity and its consequences, we are experiencing a reminiscence of Romanticism in the decline of Modernity. And what these poets are offering in their works is valuable in that it makes readers face opposition, confusion. They do not provide answers, they provide questions that can only be answered in experience. They promote experience as the gate through which we can meet them, but it is a door that nobody can walk through for us, not books, not them, just us.

In his Preface to *Leaves of Grass* Whitman states: "A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning." (22) He continues with a remark on the quality of a great reader: "The companion of him (the poet)<sup>13</sup> beholds the birth and progress of stars and learns one of the meanings. Now there shall be a man cohered out of tumult and chaos..." (22) This reader will be there, it's his conviction and almost hope... "the elder encourages the younger and shows him how... they two shall launch off fearlessly together till the new world fits an orbit for itself and looks unabashed on the lesser orbits of the stars and sweeps through the ceaseless rings and shall never be quiet again." (22) Through the process of composing poetry Whitman is able to explore his own consciousness, his own self, it is not an end, but a beginning of knowledge, changing the consciousness of his 'companion' forever, and his self as well. Though these words sound like the voice of a god, creating a son, a work of art, a world with that genius shared with more people, illuminate readers, in fact creating his reader, and both re-creating the world. His poetry becomes sacred, because he creates reality he created a future populated by 'eidolons'.

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<sup>13</sup> Parenthesis are included to provide context.

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