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# Whitman's Body and Soul Politic in *Leaves of Grass*: A scientific and sensory reinvigoration of the United States

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## Introduction

Grand is the seen, the light, to me—grand are the sky and stars,  
Grand is the earth, and grand are lasting time and space,  
And grand their laws, so multiform, puzzling, evolutionary;  
But grander far the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing all those,  
Lighting the light, the sky and stars, delving the earth, sailing the sea,  
(What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul? of what  
amount without thee?).  
Walt Whitman, Grand is the Seen, 1891

When Walt Whitman published his last edition of *Leaves of Grass* during the final part of the nineteenth century, he presented to the world a colossal compilation of poems that reflected many of the major ideological tensions of his time. For example, the poet was a prime spectator of how the American Civil War left a deep scar within the country that revealed the clash between democracy and monarchy, and also between liberty and slavery. Likewise, he lived in a period in which faith was in a state of deep crisis because the scientific urge of the time was constantly demolishing the long-time preserved supernatural axioms of religion. These tensions were at the core of his century, and, therefore, they were registered by the poet in the so called deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In order to attempt to interpret this cultural register under a new light, this work will be focusing on the concealed aspects forged by the power struggles of that time.

Although Whitman is an all-encompassing poet that can write about numerous subjects at the same time, this work will narrow down his topics and will be focusing specifically on democracy and astronomy within his poetry. Both topics are part of the cultural array of the nineteenth century, and both can be considered as part of the power struggle of ideologies of that period. On the one hand, democracy was in a process of reconstruction due to the failure of the states to rule themselves in unity; they were unable to sustain a healthy body politic that should have been the renewed counterpart for the old and corrupted monarchic body politic from Europe. On the other hand, astronomy was a recently emerged scientific field that was dealing with investigating the genesis of the world and our universe, therefore, its positivistic agenda was the counterpart for the established power of religion based on the supernatural world.

It is important to mention that both topics are also considered to be part of nineteenth century Modernity, which established a complex relation of opposition with Romanticism. According to Paz, this relation between Romanticism and Modernity was “both filial and contentious” (“Poetry and Modernity” 60), in the sense that the rebellious child of Romanticism was the critic of its father rational criticism. This fact sheds light on the critical character that is supposed to be present in Whitman’s poetry, a poet who was bold enough to merge within his work the Romantic Movement with major topics from Modernity. The poet borrows terms directly from the framework of Modernity and employs them to create his unique poetic vision that permeated the states in the form of the many editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

In order to inquire into the ideological tensions behind democracy and astronomy, various poems from the 1891-1892 edition of *Leaves of Grass* will be analysed; additionally, the preface of the 1855 edition and the one of the 1891-1892 edition will be examined. The deathbed edition is by far the most complete one, and it is crucial because includes poems that were not present in the previous editions, thus, there are more instances in which to investigate for the concealed aspects behind the tensions of its time. To achieve this purpose, the following selection of poems will be essential for the present study: “Come, Said my Soul”; “Eidolons”; “Song of Myself” poems 3, 5, 6, and 21; “Pioneers! O Pioneers!”; “I Sing the Body Electric” poems 1, 8, and 9; “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” poem 3, “Thou Mother with thy Equal Brood” poems 1, 3, and 6; “Grand is the Seen”; “Who Learns my Lesson Complete?”; and “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”. Moreover, it will be also crucial for this work the analysis of several texts borrowed from the nineteenth century context, and that will allow for establishing connections with the ideologies of that time and Whitman’s poems. These texts are: *The Mayflower Compact* (1620); *Survey of the Summe of Church-Disciple* (1648), *Vistas Democráticas* (1871), *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (1833), *The Relation of Christianity to Civil Government in the United States* (1833), and finally, a compilation of newspapers from the second half of the nineteenth century.

Many of the poems from *Leaves of Grass* and the ideas behind *Vistas Democráticas* illustrate the way in which Whitman overtly relates the astronomical imagery such as: the

sun, the moon, the stars, the planets of the solar system, and concepts such as the gravitational force and the orbit of a celestial body, with the organism of a democratic body politic. Nonetheless, in other poems from *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman does not present such a clear evidence, and it is the job of the reader to decipher the hidden relations found in several isolated lines or stanzas that are present within his clusters of poems. Due to the nature of Whitman's poetry, which can introduce and relate several themes with an apparently chaotic order, the isolated evidence collected from specific and at some times inconspicuous fragments of some poems will also be considered. This corpus will be the main source for inquiring into the deep layers of the modern tensions which are translated into poetic language in *Leaves of Grass*.

The analysis of texts borrowed from the immediate context in which *Leaves of Grass* was written will allow for a thorough inquiry into the main tropes of the nineteenth century and the way in which they are mobilized from their frameworks and adopted in Whitman's poetry. This work will be particularly interested in two tensions of that time: firstly, the clash between the democracy and monarchy, and finally, the encounter between science and religion. This work will propose that, within *Leaves of Grass*, these two spheres of ideological tensions will reveal a covert but deep criticism against the body politic of the United States during the nineteenth century: its complete and abysmal absence of the soul politic counterpart. A soul politic which is essential for the restoration of a democratic body that was decaying after the Civil War; a soul politic which also needs to be nurtured by a science-governed faith which stands as a renewed type of religion that can effectively and democratically effuse with men.

For the purpose of analysing these specific topics within their respective ideological tensions it is relevant to provide a definition of the concepts implied by them. Therefore, the following bibliographical discussion will be centred on the concepts of astronomical imagery and democracy. Moreover, concepts from the perspective of New Historicism will be borrowed because this will be the literary perspective employed for analysing the selection of poems from *Leaves of Grass*.

Firstly, to analyse an ideological tension from a specific context, it is suitable to resort to New Historicism because this type of perspective is directly related to the exercise

of analysing a particular context in which a text was written; New Historicism identifies the culture's main tropes as they move between its various discursive domains within a particular point in history (Ryan xiv).

From this perspective two concepts are going to be borrowed. The first one is ideology, which is not exclusive of New Historicism, but under this scope the concept acquires certain features that are essential for inquiring into a text and its context. According to Althusser, ideology is a double faceted concept, which on the one hand "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of the existence" (17), and on the other hand it has a material existence inside an apparatus with its own practices (19). For the author, this imaginary distortion of the real relations is schemed by a group of individuals with power that create this ideological mystification. Furthermore, he says that this type of representation is sustained not by ideas, but by its material existence in the form of practices. Hence, by analysing the imaginary relations of nineteenth century individuals, we can trace back the schemers of a specific ideology and we can also identify the practices that compose it.

Secondly, the term of culture will be pertinent for this study, as it was defined by Stephen Greenblatt. As stated by the author, the term is closely associated with ideology and even though is really complex to define, it can be understood in terms of constraint and mobility. Greenblatt states that culture is the ensemble of beliefs and practices, a set of limits within which contain social behaviour, and a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform (225). Additionally, he states that an awareness of culture as a complex whole can help to recover the reconstruct the boundaries of a particular context upon which a specific work was created.

Therefore, according to the authors, by employing the perspective of New Historicism for analysing a work of art, the particular context in which that work was published will be understood in terms of ideology and culture. This is to say, that in this work, the ideological tensions of the nineteenth century (in which *Leaves of Grass* was published) will be analysed by means of tracing back the schemers of a particular ideology, and unravel its material existence. This will allow to identify the main features of an ideology, and see how they are depicted in Whitman's work. After the identification of the

main components, the analysis of these elements will rapport on how the tensions of the century create a partial and synchronic picture of the nineteenth century culture. In turn, according to the concepts of mobility and constrain, these elements will allow to shape the boundaries of their culture, and we can compare this with the manner in which Whitman employs and translates these elements into the poetic texture of his work.

Having established the necessary concepts borrowed from New Historicism, the topic of astronomy in Whitman needs to be defined; this topic will be tackled by its imagery, which is recurrent throughout *Leaves of Grass*. Several authors have discussed Whitman's astronomical imagery and they arrive at similar conclusions. According to Green, the poet employs scientific notions which depict striking similarities with the work of Chambers entitled *Vestiges of Creation* (93), and she concludes that the poet uses "very similar images and phrases to integrate his scientific ideas into his poetry" (27). Therefore, the scientific imagery of the poet is not generated out of his imagination, instead it can find its root in the empirical work of scientists, which in this case is Chambers. Also, Scholnick relates Whitman's work with the scientific ideas proposed by Youman which supposedly inspired the poet to write eloquent passages on evolution ("The Password Primeval" 421). The implication that this inspiration had for the poet, was that "Whitman found a 'voice' which enabled him to establish the links uniting him with the unsuspected dimensions of the world, including the 'threads' connecting the stars" (Scholnick "The Password Primeval" 422). Finally, in Warren's "Reading Whitman's Postwar Poetry", the author also highlights the noticeable influence of Youman's theories of evolution, but he concludes that these ideas, as sources, are less important than the poet's strategy of corroborating these scientific theories (50). Nonetheless, he also states that "for many readers, the problem with Whitman's rhetorical of the debate over human origins is that it does not so much resolve the contradiction as evade it" (Warren 51).

In this manner, when addressing the concept of astronomical imagery, these authors have stated that there is enough evidence to link Whitman's poetry with the empirical work made by several scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, moreover, it is clear for them that this exercise gave a voice for Whitman that allowed the link between unsuspected dimensions of the world, however, this work will not dwell on the inspiration or the

accuracy of scientific truth of Whitman's astronomical imagery, conversely, it will be focused on unravelling the way in which the poet uses this imagery as a force of expression that stimulates within the reader a heightening of his senses in the form of a synaesthesia. It will be proposed that through this literary device the poet enables readers to feel and connect with the nineteenth century modern world.

On the other hand, when referring to Whitman's topic of democracy present in *Vistas Democráticas* and in *Leaves of Grass*, Scholnick also makes his contributions on the subject. According to the author, Whitman explored democracy and identified the fact that after the Civil War it was under constant attack, because of its failure and also because of the contrast with European monarchy. To be more precise, it was the spiritual side of democracy the one that was in a state of crisis; Scholnick states that:

Democracy is not merely a political concept, but an idea with an important spiritual dimension, an idea which, while encouraging full individual growth and development, also brings the individual back to identification with and concern for other human beings. ("Individual Identity" 19)

He elaborates his argument by stating that this spiritual crisis finds its root in the European cultures from which democracy was modelled, in other words, in the monarchical class structure and its heritage within American democracy.

This particular crisis of democracy is also explored by the author Nick Ford, who in his essay titled "Walt Whitman's Conception of Democracy" arrives at a conclusion that relates to the statements of the previous author: "For at bottom there was an eternal conflict between his belief in the necessity for complete freedom of the individual and his belief in the necessity for complete identification of the individual with the mass" (203). According to Ford, a key concept that defines democracy and balances this dichotomy of individual and mass is the equality of the former to submerge in the latter (205). Hence, the egalitarian character of democracy is the counterpart of the monarchical structure. Additionally, the author explains that:

Whitman's belief in equality of individuals depends to a large extent upon his belief that the evolutionary progress of the world is as dependent for its



present state of perfection upon the small performance of one individual as it is upon the large performance of another. (Ford 205)

This state of perfection comes from the previous states of society in which a single individual was the exclusive picture of the mass, and that this individual was not able to submerge into the mass.

As a result, it has been stated by the authors that democracy was in itself a concept that was in crisis due to its heritage form monarchical structure of government. And that this crisis had to be remedied by the principle of egalitarianism in which every individual submerges into the mass. Nevertheless, this work will be concerned mainly with the way in which the power struggle between the ideologies of democracy and monarchy allowed for the emergence of the soul politic, which was a key concept required to heal the mutilated body politic of democracy. Moreover, it will aim to demonstrate that this emergence was translated into Whitman's poetry in the form of a synecdoche, in which the body and soul established a symbiotic relation in which they are both part of a larger organism.

Because of the utmost importance of the soul politic has in order to heal the body politic of democracy, this concept will be the last one to be defined in this section. Two studies made by Jonathan Mendilow depict the way in which the soul politic acquired a relevant status. The author based his conclusions on the work by Thomas Carlyle, who made an emphasis on how the departure of the soul politic will have as a result the transformation of the body politic into an empty carcass ("Carlyle, Marx" 234). For the author, the crisis of democracy, as it was previously presented, was due to the rapid advance of industry and technology; it was this materialism the one who started the decay of the body politic ("Carlyle, Marx" 235). The second study of the same author deals with the crisis that this organic entity of polity had, and how it was strictly related to the deterioration or the internal and spiritual energy that animated the body politic ("Waiting for the Axe" 606).

One author that relates this crisis of the soul politic to the work of Whitman is Beatrice Marovich. In her work, Whitman is presented as the poet who created the ultimate song about the American body politic (Marovich 349). She also dwells into the spiritual aspects of democracy and states that in Whitman there is no sympathy for any ecclesial

bent due to the lack of flexibility of the church as a composer of the body politic. The author states that Whitman's song was one in which the body politic was liberated from ecclesial hierarchies (Marovich 354). In this fashion, the body politic was understood as an empty carcass also because of its liberation from the spiritual aspects of any religion.

Thus, these authors have claimed that the soul politic is an essential component of the body politic, and that if this soul politic is deteriorated, the imminent collapse of the body is the only possible outcome. Moreover, the authors understand that in Whitman's poetry, the body politic of democracy is the aspect of this duality that is more prominent, additionally; this body is presented by the poet without any bond with the worship from religion. This work will also considerate the soul as an important counterpart due to the symbiotic relation that has to the body, however, it will aim to promote a strong relation between the American body politic and a new type of faith invigorated by Whitman's use of astronomical imagery, in which the poet appeals to the enhancement and the communion of the reader's senses by means of synesthesia.

Consequently, this study will have two main purposes related to the analysis of the powerful discourses of the nineteenth century ideologies. The first one will be centred in demonstrating that behind the power struggle of American democracy versus European monarchy and the restoration of the decaying body politic of that era, the work of Whitman in *Leaves of Grass* is explicitly promoting the important role that the soul has for the body, because they establish a co-operative relation translated as a synecdoche within *Leaves of Grass*. And the second purpose will be to demonstrate that behind the power struggle of the positivistic science as the counterpart for the supernatural faith of religion, Whitman promotes the creation of a new faith invigorated by empirical images that will promote in the readers a yoking of their senses by means of synaesthesia.

## Theoretical Framework

Considering the objectives of this work, it is necessary to thoroughly define the concepts that are involved in the particular ideological tensions behind democracy and astronomy present in Whitman's work. The following section is a bibliographical discussion dealing with the definition of the concepts of astronomical imagery, democracy, and the body politic.

Before introducing the concepts related to this investigation, it is crucial to present the literary perspective which generates the scope under which this work will be centred: New Historicism. This movement is described by Kiernan Ryan as a movement driven by the compulsion to relate literature to history, and to treat texts as indivisible from contexts (xi). Moreover, he states that New Historicism insists on situating the text within the intertextuality of its initial context because this will expose the subtle and secret collusions found in the cultural struggle for power; it is a sort of campaign focused on identifying the chief tropes of a culture as they move within various discursive domains (xiv). In other words, the principal effort of this literary movement is focused on unveiling the power struggles and tropes of a specific culture in a specific time in which a text was created, and that this unveiling is done through the contrast of the latter with other texts written in that particular time. Ryan is really convinced that this perspective will be essential to "prove the classic texts of British and American culture to be more invaluable than anyone has yet suspected" (xviii).

In order to crack these aforementioned classical texts, New Historicism has been cultivated by various authors whose work have been a fertile ground to borrow concepts, such as the work done by Louis Althusser. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser promotes two theses related to the key concept of ideology. The first states that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (17). Therefore, an ideology is understood by the author as a world outlook in which men represent to themselves these real conditions in an imaginary form. Moreover, he proposes that this imaginary translation of existence is caused by "men who base their domination and exploitation of the 'people' on a false representation of the world

that they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations” (18). Therefore, it has to be clear that for Althusser, an ideology represents only an imaginary relation of the individuals, not the real system of relations that governs them. On the other hand, the second thesis proposed by the author is that ideology has a material existence and that it exists within an apparatus, and its practice or practices (19). This means that ideology will force a man to behave in a particular manner, according to the already established practices of it. Therefore, ideology forces, for example, a religious man to kneel, a soldier to give his life for his country, and a democrat to actively participate in elections.

It is important to mention that any ideology is immersed within a culture, therefore the latter concept is crucial to be defined. According to Stephen Greenblatt, culture is a term which seems to be incredibly vague and encompassing, however, there are ways to narrow down the concept in order to apply it for literary studies. First, the author identifies two important aspects of culture: constraint and mobility. This means that a culture which is formed by an ensemble of beliefs and practices are a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behaviour must be contained (Greenblatt 225). The author states that through the activity of praise and blame we can identify the cultural boundaries of a particular time, in other words, what is being attacked or celebrated will constitute an essential part of a particular culture. However, sometimes this exercise might not be enough and Greenblatt proposes to think of culture as a complex whole that can help us to recover that lost sense which was felt by individuals at a particular time. He states that by doing this we can reconstruct the boundaries of those times in which a particular text was created, moreover, we can stretch these boundaries and establish links between the text and values, institutions and practices which can be located elsewhere in the culture (Greenblatt 226). Essentially, for the author, culture seems to work as a structure of limits, but also as the regulator and guarantor of movement, because for Greenblatt, there is no use for limits if there is no movement. Moreover, this mobility and constraint are not passively reflected in the works of art, they are rather articulated and reproduced by the writers. In this manner, Greenblatt proposes that culture is a “particular network of negotiations for the exchange of material goods, ideas, and ... people” (229). In this way, great writers will be masters of this cultural exchange and they will employ the imagery of a particular culture in order to

construct stories and portray the collective sensitivities of a time (230). Like this, the writers take the symbolic materials from one part of the culture and mobilize them to another; this exercise allows for not only a reflection, but for a richer representation of any culture.

Therefore, it has been stated by the authors related to New Historicism that the movement relates one text with the intertextuality of its particular time of creation in order to uncover the power struggles and tropes of a culture; also, in order to understand these struggles it is important to define what ideology is, which according to Althusser is a symbolic representation of the real relation of men with their existence, and that this ideology has a material existence in the form of its practices. Both the symbolic representation and the practices are imposed by men who want to dominate and enslave the mind of the people; and finally, it has been stated that the culture in which this ideology is located can be understood in terms of constraint and mobility, which will help to establish the limits of a culture. These limits will help to represent the territory in which the writer can mobilize the imagery and represent the sensibilities of a particular culture.

As it was previously stated, the imagery of a culture is one of the symbolic items that a writer can mobilize within his work; in this present work, the particular imagery of astronomy will be highlighted in order to see how Whitman embraces these images in order to create his poetic vision. Therefore a thorough analysis of this concept will be required to understand how and why the author employed this particular type of symbolic material.

Before continuing with the bibliographical discussion of this concept, it is imperative to attempt a definition of it. According to Llorens, there is a fuzzy understanding of what imagery or image conceptually mean. He uses as a starting point the definition provided by *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, according to which: “imagery refers to images produced in the mind by language, whose words may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions, were the reader actually to have those experiences or to the sense impressions themselves” (qtd. in Llorens 2). The author then explains the main function of imagery is to recall or evoke instances of physical or sensual perception, and that imagery is related as a tool that creates a bridge between the external world and the human mind (2). As it was previously mentioned by introducing the

perspective of New Historicism, imagery seems to be a powerful device to reveal the ideology of a culture, which, according to Althusser aims to create a representation between the real conditions of men and their imagination (18). For Llorens, imagery fulfils a crucial role in literature because it helps the poet to use images in order to represent abstract ideas, which will allow a much easier understanding and retention of that image by the reader (3).

Having established a definition for the concept of imagery, now it remains to analyse it from the viewpoint of the relation between science and poetry according to two perspectives. The first one will come from the research of other poets and their usage of scientific imagery, being these poets Thomas Sprat and Sidney Lanier; the second point of view will come from the research of Whitman's own use of scientific imagery. This will create a contrast in order to understand the difference and similarities of the usage of scientific images in the poetry from the American Renaissance.

The importance of analysing the scientific imagery from the poetry of Sprat and Lanier, is that they created poetry at different times according to Whitman's chronology. On the one hand, Sprat created its first works during 1659, and on the other hand Lanier published his first book in 1867. These time spans can be insightful to comprehend how scientific knowledge was forging an imagery through time, and how this imagery was employed by these authors, having at the core of this comparison the central figure of Walt Whitman.

In terms of the usage of imagery, Sprat was a pioneer; according to Rosenberg, Sprat was so determined into looking for the resemblance between things that he analysed the sources of imagery in order to define which were obsolete and which were fertile (221). In doing so, Sprat found that certain areas such as mythology or religion were no longer ideal to look for imagery; conversely, he proposed that poetry could find a fertile ground in the scientific field. This was owing to the fact that for Sprat, "images should be concrete, based on direct sense experience" (Rosenberg 222). This requirement made science a suitable candidate for borrowing images, since empirical evidence is at the core of scientific research. Moreover, Sprat clearly identified the main advantages of images based on the results of scientific experiments, stating that these images:

Will be understandable to all men because they will be derived from objects that are perceived by men's senses ... [also they] will make a deep impression on men's 'fancies' because they are visible and are near to their nature ... [and the final advantage of science] is its infinite variety (Rosenberg 222)

In this fashion, Spratt opened a fertile ground for the rest of poets such as Whitman or Lanier which will also employ images from the scientific world.

The impulse for the relation between poetry and exact sciences were made clear by Whitman's preface to the 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass*, which is in agreement with Lanier's vision present in a fragment from "The Legend of St. Leonor". According to Lanier:

The scientific man is merely the minister of poetry. He is cutting down the Western Woods of time; presently poetry will come there and make a city and gardens ... Scientific facts have never reached their proper function until they merge into the new poetic relations established between man and man, between man and God, or between man and Nature. (qtd. in Beaver 521)

In this fragment it is possible to identify an echo for Whitman's celebration of positive science and exact demonstration that can be found in his preface. Both Lanier and Whitman are stating the importance of science as a field full of sources that are at the service of poetry.

Moreover, Beaver identifies how several sub-fields such as chemistry, geology, astronomy, and botany among others, had different impact on Lanier's and Whitman's poetry. For Beaver, astronomy was a fruitful branch for both poets, it was the source of numerous vivid and highly original lines, even though if at some instances, particularly in the case of Lanier, the use of astronomical imagery was at some times inaccurate or stereotyped (533). Owing to this, it can be concluded that according to Beaver, science was, overall, a suitable candidate for developing imagery in poetry, however, there is the need to differentiate between the various branches of the scientific field, since it is possible that not all of them were employed for similar purposes in poetry.

When considering the perspective of Whitman, he particularly employed several of these branches throughout his poetry. He gathered key concepts from his scientific contemporaries which were continually generating discoveries during the nineteenth century. One of the sources of Whitman's scientific imagery can be found in the figure of Robert Chambers. According to Judith Green, by doing a literature review, we can trace the link between Whitman's ideas of evolution with the ones that were written by Chambers in his *Vestiges of Creation* (23). Additionally, Green highlights the influence that the first chapter of *Vestiges*, which was titled "The Bodies of Space, Their Arrangements and Formation", had as a prime source for Whitman's astronomical imagery: "[s]ince he shared these attitudes with Robert Chambers and at times resorted to very similar images and phrases to integrate his scientific ideas into his poetry, one may well surmise that Whitman's ... curiosity found satisfaction in *Vestiges*" (27). Particularly, the account that Chambers gives for the formation of the orbs seems to have been central to Whitman's imagery. According to *Vestiges*, the formation of the planets portrays a particular design that is common in the universe: "our globe is a specimen of all the similarly-placed bodies of space.... It is strikingly – if I may use such an expression- a member of a democracy" (qtd. in Green 26). For Green, this was evidence that Chambers was the responsible for Whitman to have related science, the primitive worlds, and democracy in his poetry.

This collaborative vision between the man of science and the man of poetry was also not understood as an antagonism by Robert Scholnick. For him, the collaboration of these two facets of men allowed Whitman to develop a poetry that was fully nurtured by science, particularly by the branch of astronomy and the theories of evolution; moreover, Scholnick states that this extensive use of scientific imagery does not obtrude poetry, but it is essential for it ("The Password Primeval" 386). In this way, the author expands on Green's ideas in which science can be understood as a seed that found the ideal soil in Whitman's poetry in order to bloom and expand beyond its original nature.

In order to understand this expansion, Scholnick relates Whitman's scientific imagery with the knowledge produced by the scientists Edward Youmans and the aforementioned Robert Chambers, who were prominent figures in science during the eighteenth century. Youman's contribution was essential for developing one of the most



important scientific ideas in Whitman: evolution as a process at work throughout the cosmos (388). Having stated this, Scholnick puts at the core of the science-poetry relation the theory of evolution, from which Whitman collected various images.

Building also on Chambers' astronomical contribution, Sholnick states that it was exclusively this scientist the one that provided Whitman with a sort of missing link that could not have been found anywhere else: the integration of the separate fields of inquiry relating to the concept of evolution at the organic and cosmic level (394). This ongoing process, as Chambers defined it, presented for Whitman the images such as the solar system and its planets, and the movement of the heavenly bodies.

Besides the identification of these astronomical elements in Whitman's poetry, Scholnick adds a principle that seems to have been adopted from the astronomical theories of the era:

Even while looking ahead to the development of more complex forms of life, the poet is careful to insist on the principle of equality ... It may seem to the reader that Whitman is simply imposing his preference for political democracy and social equality on the material universe. But for Chambers took a similarly egalitarian approach to the physical universe in *Vestiges* (398)

In other words, according to Sholnick, the astronomical images from science were the fountain from which Whitman might have been derived from the principle of equality that is at the core of *Leaves of Grass*.

The notions that have been stated by the authors around the concept of astronomical imagery portray several common points, the main point is that imagery creates physical or sensual perceptions that enhance the understanding of the reader. Additionally, the authors highlight the fact that the realm of science is suitable enough for providing a vast array of images that were at the service of poetry during the past centuries. This was particularly true for poets such as Sprat and Lanier, which regularly employed astronomical imagery such as Whitman. It has also been said that in Whitman's case, the work of Chambers and Youman were essential in order to contribute for Whitman's astronomical imagery of a

cosmos that is constantly evolving in an egalitarian manner. However, this present work will be relating particularly interested in the role of astronomical imagery, which will prove to reveal the power struggle within the sphere of religion. Moreover, this work will aim to prove the method in which this type of imagery can invigorate religion by the establishment of a renewed and modern faith, and also it will try to elucidate on the democratic character that science has in Whitman's poetic vision.

In order to analyse the second instance of ideological tension of the nineteenth century, the concept of democracy will have to be introduced in this work since it was a main actor within the political power struggle against its counterpart the monarchy. During that period, the American democracy was in constant clash against the European monarchy, and a thorough analysis of Whitman's concept of democracy is needed in order to analyse how it is understood by the poet. Before delving into the core of the matter, it needs to be clarified that for Whitman, democracy was just not merely a concept, but it was rather a communal experience, one that even permeated the universe and every particle of it.

For Scholnick, Whitman was one of the poets who had most deeply explored the meaning of democracy and its spiritual potential. The author exposes that after the Civil War, democracy was under attack, particularly because it was the social order promoted by the Union which was the victor of that war. Owing to this, Whitman presented in the essays entitled *Vistas Democráticas*, a "condemn [for] the business, political, and social corruption which engulfed post-war America" ("Individual Identity" 18). Likewise, within this complaint, Whitman explored the conflict between the elements of democracy that promote the individual and those that promote social identity.

Furthermore, the author states that Whitman was aware of one particular aspect of democracy that was in crisis: the spiritual poverty of individuals. According to Scholnick, "democracy is not merely a political concept, but an idea with an important spiritual dimension" ("Individual Identity" 19). The author explains that Whitman was aware of the religious potential of American democracy and the solidarity that individuals needed to promote toward the rest of the people. However, this solidarity was threatened by the contemporary society of the nineteenth century. Scholnick explains that Whitman's arguments against his society were focused on the fact that their culture was modelled or

borrowed from earlier times and civilizations with already established class structures (“Individual Identities” 21). In this sense, the author depicts the conflict of a democracy that was in crisis because of a culture based on European standards. Moreover, Whitman presented a programme based on the attack of this cultural imposition; he recognized that the West was as capable as the East to create values of equal worth (Scholnick “Individual Identities” 22). Therefore, the author exposes the manner in which the poet presented a culture that was understood as a foreign institution that threatened to destroy the democratic values of the United States.

Another author who identified this spiritual crisis of the American democracy in Whitman’s work was Nick Ford. He states that the poet differentiates democracy in body and soul; the former being a materialistic product and, and the latter as the social, religious, and moral experiences. (201). Ford mentions that Whitman compared democracy to those failed attempts of European self-governments, however, American democracy in order to be strong it needed to abolish slavery. The author claims that the matter of slavery was a clash between the Federal and the state governments, and that Whitman was a strong supporter of the latter. The fact that the poet was opposed to federal authority was a clear sign, according to Ford, that, essentially, there was an eternal clash between the freedom of the individual and the necessity for this individual to completely identify with the mass (203).

Moreover, beyond this lack of morality in democracy, Ford states that Whitman highlighted the need for religiousness, since democracy must be unbound to feudal religion, to this monarchical God at the centre of the universe (204). In this sense, Whitman is departing from the feudal past of Europe by liberating democracy of its manacles. Ford understands this as a promotion for equality, for the will of the individual to submerge himself in the mass rather than the monarchical ambition of being a privileged and exclusive individual (205). This has to be understood as a direct attack to the political system of Europe, in which there were eternal monarchies that were ruled by a single individual, by a king or queen who above everyone else, and not part of this democratic and equal body or mass. The author concludes by saying that in the soul of democracy, the

loving comradeship must be placed as the cure to fight against the ancient individualism of the European heritage.

Therefore, according to the authors, Whitman's notion of democracy is one that is directly concerned with the spiritual crisis that democracy undergone after the Civil War, and also because of its European heritage. For the authors, Whitman conceives democracy a dual entity composed of a body and a soul, but that this soul needs to be ruled by the egalitarian values of comradeship, and not by the individualistic values of monarchy. This work will be also dealing with the notion of the body politic and soul politic, however, it will aim to demonstrate both of them are in a symbiotic relationship and that this feature can allow the decaying or healing of both. Additionally, it will promote that Whitman imbued his poetry with science as a constituent antiseptic element of democracy's soul, a vital element that will allow the healing of the rotten body. This relation of body and soul will be reflected in Whitman's poetry by the use of a synecdoche that will be linking both concepts as being part of one single organism.

Owing to the proposal of the previous authors that Whitman understood democracy as being composed by a material aspect (its body), and by a spiritual aspect (its soul), it will be of utmost importance to define the concept of soul politic as the counterpart of a body politic.

According to Jonathan Mendilow, the bond between society and man, and its evolution, was considered as vital to men such as Carlyle and Marx. However, it was the former the one who presented the metaphor of society as being composed by a body politic and a soul politic. Mendilow emphasises Carlyle's words related to how the departure of the soul politic will eventually leave the body politic as an empty carcass ("Carlyle, Marx" 234). This duality was explained by Carlyle's notion of society as the embodiment of an idea, and that this idea needed to stimulate further activity in order to avoid the transformation of a society into something hollow (Mendilow "Carlyle, Marx" 234). Moreover, the author explains that for Carlyle, the rapid advance of industry and technology resulted in the ultimate obsolescence of this idea and that, therefore, the soul politic departed and the body politic must be interred in order to avoid decaying (Mendilow "Carlyle, Marx" 235). In other words, the unstoppable progress and materialism created by

the industrial revolution, led to the eventual departure of society's soul politic and the decay of its counterpart the body politic.

In a second study of Mendilow, the author also deals with the concept of soul politic and its role in a crisis. Here, the author states that there is this traditional metaphor of society as an organic entity in which writers such as Carlyle have built the thesis of a soul politic and its relation to the body politic, and also how both of them relate to the environment ("Waiting for the Axe" 604). Likewise, Mendilow presents Coleridge's vision as one that promotes the understanding of every polity as a container for a spiritual principle, which is the proper soul of the State. Additionally, he mentions that Tocqueville also alluded to a secret source of energy that animated the body politic ("Waiting for the Axe" 606). For the author of this study, in times of crisis this soul politic, as it was understood, will be dispersed or dissipated, having the inevitable consequence of deteriorating the body politic ("Waiting for the Axe" 610). In other words, the author creates a compilation of several theories that aim to the fact that within the body politic of a government there is a vital link towards its soul politic.

Even though this vital importance of the soul politic, Whitman has been depicted as being the ultimate promoter of the body politic. For Beatrice Marovich, Whitman created the ultimate song about the American body politic; an American political subject which was connected to all other subjects in the collective body (349). The author praises *Song of Myself* as a work that gives insight into the spiritual, democratic, affective intensities present in the American democrat (349). However, Marovich remarks that this poem does not seem to bear a sympathy for the church or any ecclesial bent, because Whitman could not find enough flexibility within the institution of the church, therefore he "needed to sing of membership in a body politic that broke out of text, ecclesial hierarchies, or a building whose walls contained the heart of worship" (354). In other words, for the author, Whitman was establishing a political body which was separated from the body of the church.

Consequently, it has been stated by these authors that the concept of soul politic emerges as the spiritual aspect of society that is directly connected to the body politic; if the latter is displaced, the only inevitable consequence will be the decay or burial of the body politic. In other words, society's body politic can be an empty carcass without its spiritual

aspect. Moreover, the authors recognize that the body politic was highly acclaimed in Whitman's poetry, and they also define this body as an organism that is incompatible with the religious constraints of the church. Notwithstanding the clear prominence of the body politic in Whitman's poetry, this work will aim to demonstrate that, for the poet, the soul politic is the key element to allow for the revitalization of the body politic. Additionally, it will aim to prove that even though the latter is incompatible with the Christian religion, it does not reject religion, only transforms it and improves it by the incorporation of astronomical imagery. These images directly borrowed from Modernity will have a key role in Whitman's poetic vision, because they will be stimulating and promoting a synaesthesia that is essential for establishing links between the world and the reader.

## Body Politic and Soul Politic

The concepts and bibliographical discussions previously presented in the Theoretical Framework focus on the presence of two major spheres in which ideologies of the nineteenth century collide with each other. The first is related to the sphere of politics, in which the ideologies between democracy and monarchy allow for the emergence of the concepts of body politic and soul politic. The second is related to the sphere of the spiritual, in which religion and science engage in a heated debate about their roles within the culture of that century. These two spheres will be analysed in order to attempt to detect the way in which Whitman depicts these conflicts within his poetry. Owing to this, the analysis will be divided in two sections titled: Body politic and Soul Politic; and Soul and Astronomical Imagery. In order to start the first part of the analysis, it is crucial to identify the schemers and founders of the political ideology that gave birth to the duality of body and soul. Both democracy and monarchy share this duality as main elements of their composition, therefore it is compulsory to identify the starting point of this concept within the American territory.

The cornerstone for the development of the American body politic was established by the pilgrims in the Mayflower Compact, this document helps to identify the emergence and the developers of this particular concept. Owing to this, the body politic can be understood as a founding idea of the United States, and one that it was impregnated by the Puritan faith. Moreover, this concept was in itself a revolution against its European counterpart, in which the head of the body was the king, and the rest of the people were at the bottom (Herzogenrath 3). In opposition to this notion, the Mayflower Compact established that:

We ... solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue thereof to enacte, constitute, and frame such just and equall laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be

thought most meete and convenient for the general good of the Colonie unto which we promise all due submission and obedience (Bailey 3)

It is in this manner that the notion of the body politic was transferred from Europe into the new lands of America, and with this separation from the king it came the inevitable transformation and replacement of the head of the body. This was one of the first steps towards the development of the early stage of the American democracy.

Due to the fact that the first colonial settlements in America were in charge of puritan leaders, the planning of the colonies was designed in agreement for a specific religious system, in which the concept of the body politic was immersed. According to Herbert Osgood, so important was this system that the founding pilgrims made all interests, both social and political, to contribute to the maintenance and advancement of it (1). This means that any social and political development in the colonies had to consider the puritan religious beliefs in order to be put into practice.

In a *Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline*, written in 1648, the authors gave a detailed account of how it was supposed to be structured the Church within the new colonial territory. This organization transformed the European concept of the body politic into a religious one in which the head was represented by God and the body by the Church; moreover, the latter was divided into a mythical body and a political body:

The mysticall Body is the Church of true Beleevers, who ... by faith yielding to the call, are spiritually united unto Christ ... and this takes up the Invisible Church, because the union, and so the relation ... is inward, and not to be seen by sense ... The Politicall body or Church visible results out of that relation ... when by voluntary consent they yield outward subjection to that government of Christ, which in his word he hath prescribed, and as an externall head excerciseth by his word, Spirit, and discipline, by his ordinances and officers over them, who have yielded themselves subjects to his headship and Supream Authority (Hooker et al. 3)



This colonial understanding of how the church is structured was a seed in which democracy was sustained during its early stages. The puritan duality of body and soul was essential for the organizing the believers in a new and unknown territory.

For the Puritans, the man was a creature composed of a reasonable soul and a body well organized which are in constant communication in order to achieve an equilibrium. Whitman seems to support this view in *Leaves of Grass* when he introduces the deathbed edition with the poem “Come, said my soul”, a poem that deals with this puritan duality:

Come, said my soul,  
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)
  
That I should after death invisible return,  
Or, long, long hence, in other spheres  
.....  
Singing for Body and Soul, set them to my name (1-4, 9)

In the aforementioned lines, the persona poetica clearly identifies the addressee of his verses: the body; and, by means of an apostrophe, the soul of this lyric speaker invites himself to write verses for their own body, because they are one. It is a sort of trinity explained by the following puritan statement: “As *a man* is neither *body* nor *Soule*, but an *integrum*, a *third* rising out of them *both*” (Hooker et al. 244). It seems that this third rising is the entity that is being addressed by the soul in order to be a companion to write for the body; this sheds light on Whitman’s most recognizable compilation of poems entitled “Song of Myself”, in which *myself* seems to encompass body, soul, and the combination of both; additionally, this definition of *myself* seems to be gathering in one single concept both man and democracy as interchangeable entities. This reasoning is based on the fact that all men have a soul and a body, and that the American democracy is also composed of a body politic and a soul politic.

In “Come, said my soul”, the soul appears as an agent that moves the poet to write his verses; it is the soul the one that says let us write for our muse, which is the body, and in doing so they are writing for the complete organism. In spite of agreeing that soul, body,

and their combination are one single entity, the order in which the verses are arranged is of highest importance. The persona poetica in this particular poem wants to sing for body and soul, but if we consider the line that states: “Such verses for my Body let us write” (2), the lyric speaker is clearly implying that there is a sense of agency in the soul that it is not being shared by the body. The soul will write along with the speaker for the body; the body is the addressee to which the poems in *Leaves of Grass* were written.

In order to examine the reason for this decision, it is important to resort to the texts written in the particular context of the nineteenth century that deal with the concept of the body as one that is experiencing a situation of crisis. This body in crisis during the publication of *Leaves of Grass* was the body politic of a democracy in a state of turmoil that was swiftly mutating.

First, it is significant to mention that in newspapers from that time (more specifically the ones published in the latter half of the century) it was repeatedly mentioned the fact that each state had its own type of democracy. In this fashion, there are scores of references to democracy, but in the form of: “Pennsylvania Democracy”, “Democracy of New York”; “Democracy in Virginia”; and “Democracy of the South” for example. (Weekly North Carolina Standard, 28 July 1869). Likewise, in another newspaper it is referred to as: “The Democracy of Blount”, “Jacksonian Democracy”, “Democracy of Tennessee”, “The Democracy of the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District”, and “The Democracy of the Tenth Tennessee District” (Blount County Democrat, 5 October 1882). These references portray a clear fragmentation of the Democratic Party within the American territory. Then, it can be understood that the evolution that democracy had as a political ideology was not as it was desired by the founding fathers; it can be seen that democracy was absorbed and transformed by each state as separate entities that took democracy and shaped it according to their specific requirements. This volatile character is depicted in *Leaves of Grass* and found its counterpart within the all-encompassing voice of the persona poetica. Whitman recognizes the multiplicity of the states, but he speaks in a universal manner. He sings for the complete body, not only for its arm, head or any other specific member. Additionally, more compelling evidence, which indicates another feature of the democratic ideology in the nineteenth century, can be found in statements from the

newspapers of that time, such as: “there is a ‘fungus’ upon the body of the Democracy of Louisiana which is destroying its healthy action”, or “[s]uch then is the ‘party within a party’ –the ‘fungus’ as well as its trunk-” (Southern Sentinel, 28 November 1857); also that “[i]t is a Northern sectional party that is kept in power by keeping alive that feeling of hate ... Let the issue be, Monarchy against Democracy” (Spirit of Jefferson, 8 July 1884 1); likewise, there other statements indicate that: “they have divided the political sentiments of the people and will naturally divide them so long as the constitution of the country remains the supreme law”, or “there is an irrepressible conflict between the principles of Federalism and Democracy that must continue as long as our form of government lasts”, and finally that “Federalism, arrogating to itself unlimited powers of legislation, in imitation of monarchy” (Lancaster Daily Intelligencer, 14 July 1882). This is only a handful of examples found in journals from the epoch that serve as a tangible proof of the ideological tensions present in the century due to the monarchical tradition in the form of federalism, and the rotten body politic of a democracy that is being divided into several shards. According to Greenblatt’s understanding, these ideologies that were clashing can be considered as a faithful representation of the specific American culture of the nineteenth century; by analysing the elements that compose these ideologies and by examining how they mobilize within the limits of its culture, it will be possible to identify how Whitman translated this elements in his work.

The first clue to unravel this translation in *Leaves of Grass* is found in the poem “Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood”; the very name of the poem is a clear indicator that the poet is referring to America. In the first poem of this collection, Whitman translates this fragmented country as the image of a nurturing mother which has had an equal brood consisting of a “various chain of different states” (2). Moreover, in poem 6 the lyric speaker states that:

In a many smiling mask death shall approach beguiling

thee, thou in disease shalt swelter,

The livid cancer spread its hideous claws, clinging upon

thy breasts, seeking to strike thee deep within,

Consumption of the worst, moral consumption, shall

rouge thy face with hectic (22-27)

This image of a mother that has a cancer within her breast is a powerful interpretation that the poet has for the consequences of a nation sunken in fragmentation and corruption. The moral consumption that shall rouge the face of the mother can be interpreted as a stain of blood left after the Civil War, in which the very sons of the country bleed within America. According to the persona poetica, this consumption is one of the worst, because it strikes deep within, directly to the soul.

In this manner, it seems that in Whitman's poetry, the persona poetica has identified that the democratic body politic has got a disease that is consuming its soul. The disease acquires a way of expression through the figure of the body, but it seems to be that this does not necessarily imply that every aspect of democracy must be conquered by infirmity. A hint for this claim lies within the poem "Eidoloins", in which the lyric speaker states that "thy body permanent, / The body lurking there within thy body, / The only purport of the form thou art..." (86-88). These lines exemplify the fragmentation of several bodies lurking within a body, however, for the persona poetica the body is not the ultimate or complete representative of an organism, since it is only the form. This 'body within a body' is a powerful and dual image that relates to the politic conflict previously mentioned, in which the democratic body politic is decaying due to fragmentation and its tension against the monarchy, and also it can refer to the fact that after the Civil War there were thousands of bodies lying within the American body. During the nineteenth century there is a potent sense of bodily illness whose root can be traced back to a moral consumption in which the spiritual side is the one that has affected the body, owing to this, it is imperative to heal the spiritual side in order to revert the illness within the body. If one takes into consideration the fact that authors such as Marovich consider Whitman as the poet that created the ultimate song about the American body politic, this should be reformulated due to the evidence that the body, by itself, is a carcass that stands for the form, but that the main element concealed within the body is actually its soul. Consequently, it is more accurate to say that Whitman made also the ultimate song about the American soul politic (without decreasing the importance of the body politic due to the fact that in essence they are one).

To delve into the complex relation between body and soul according to Whitman, it is crucial to analyse key verses written in “Song of Myself” poem 3; these verses are introduced by stating that “Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that / is not my soul” (21-21). Here Whitman presents the duality of soul/body but he does not explicitly mention the body. The following verses give the hint for understanding this omission: “Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn” (23-24). The parallelism found in line 23 is the formula that the lyric speaker has for relating his soul with that which is not his soul, ergo, the body. The fact that the unseen can be proved by the seen, allows to create a connection through juxtaposition between two concepts that are defined by perception. The body, due to its physicality is visible, however, the soul, which is spiritual, must be accessed through the former.

This relation is extremely similar to that presented in *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* which states that “this takes up the Invisible Church, because the union, and so the relation ... is inward, and not to be seen by sense ... The Politicall body or Church visible results out of that relation” (Hooker et al. 3). In other words, American democracy has acquired the puritan heritage in which there is an invisible soul politic and a visible body politic that are essential to compose this form of government. Even though that the visible has the advantage over that which cannot be seen, the persona poetica in “Song of Myself” poem 5 says that he believes in the soul inasmuch as he believes in the body: “I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase / itself to you, / and you must not be abased to the other” (1-3). Therefore, the duality of body and soul must not be understood in terms of a hierarchical relation, due to the fact that none of them is above the other. Moreover, in poem 21, the lyric speaker identifies himself by saying: “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul” (1), so these lines seem to point out the fact that in Whitman poetry, soul and body are indivisible and furthermore, that they require each other in a kind of co-operative relation.

It has been stated that when considering body, soul, and the combination of them, it arises a trinity of subjects that are the main actors in *Leaves of Grass*; if they are taken all together the result will be a single organism. In the poem “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” Whitman

addresses this trinity and explains that: “I too with my soul and body, / We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way, / through these shores amid the shadows ...” (97-99). This curious trio, this trinity, this organism, found its precedent within the puritan religion that was formed by the invisible (soul) and the visible (body politic). In Whitman’s poems this trio stands for man, and at the same time, for American democracy. It is difficult to clearly identify when the poet is referring to man, democracy, or both, because in *Leaves of Grass* the poet tackles a multifarious variety of topics within his poems; however, there is a noticeable feature of the soul and body relation, and this feature is that this relation can be understood in the form of a synecdoche. This figure of speech appears to be defined by the parallelism of “the unseen is proved by the seen” (“Song of Myself” 3. 23), due to the fact that synecdoche works similarly to proving something unseen through a part of it that it can be seen. When referring to the body or the soul, according to the way in which synecdoche works, there is a clear reference to the whole organism; a part that stands for the whole or vice versa.

In this manner, the ideological tensions within the sphere of politics in the nineteenth century are expressed by Whitman in the form of a synecdoche that permeates the relations between the democratic soul politic and the body politic in *Leaves of Grass*. The consequences of considering this body and soul as parts of a whole are various and they must be taken into account in order to relate Whitman’s work with the crisis of democracy during his time.

Firstly, it is important to define the role that the soul has in *Leaves of Grass*, and to do so, the definition given in *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* seems to be appropriate. According to the Hooker et al., the Puritan faith indicates that the mystical and invisible body of the Church, which is the equivalent of the soul politic, is the one that unites the believers spiritually unto Christ, and that by this relation the formers receive directly from Christ the spiritual life and motion (3). On the other hand, the body politic stands as the visible part of this relation, in other words, as the visible Church with its authorities that exercise the ordinances and discipline of God as the supreme authority for the believers (3). If we extrapolate these puritan concepts borrowed from the text, the soul

stands as the values or moral fibre, and the body will be the physical representation of the organism.

One specific collection of poems from *Leaves of Grass* that explicitly deals with trying to define the soul is “I Sing the Body Electric”. In poem 1, the persona poetica addresses the body and its corrupt state:

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 discurrup them, and charge them full with the  
charge of the soul (1-6)

The armies that the persona poetica seems to be depicting are his countrymen, the citizens of the United States. Once again, the figure of synecdoche is employed to refer to a larger whole; if the lyric speaker refers to the armies that were engaged in the American Civil War, then, he is referring to the whole population of the country, which in turn compose the democratic body politic. According to line 3, this body of people is in an urgent need of answers and healing, due to the state of corruption; moreover, this body, which is defined as being electric, needs as a remedy the full “charge of the soul” (6). In other words, the body politic that is bleeding to death after the Civil War needs to be renewed with the electric charge of the soul that runs through its veins. This seems to be a hint that exposes the role of the soul for Whitman, nonetheless, the lyric speaker in this poem acknowledges that grasping a clear definition of the soul is something quite difficult: “And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul? / And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?” (11-12). These lines call into question the relation of body and soul, asking what would happen when the body cannot match the soul, and it even considers the fact that the body might not belong to the soul. If the relation between them is broken and they are no longer part of an organism, what will be the result of that equation? How can we define the soul without the body or vice versa? These rhetorical questions emerge due to

the fact that the democratic body politic in the nineteenth century was so injured that perhaps it could not match the quality of the democratic soul politic and their relation might have broken completely. To consider that the body does not do as much as the soul implies that there is a malfunction in this part of an organism. If Whitman puts into question the idea that the democratic body politic of the United States could match its soul, it indicates a state of sickness that must have its root somewhere within the organism. A sickness that is pervading and dissociating body and soul; obstructing the healthy functioning of democracy in the States. According to the etymology of democracy, the word comes from two Greek words; *demos*, which means ‘the common people’, and *kratos*, that means ‘rule, strength’ (Etymonline.com). Therefore, to state that the body politic of democracy is sick, it would imply that one of these properties is out of order. In this sense, Whitman indicates that the rule of the common people has been corrupted by a disease, and that, according to “I Sing the Body Electric”, this army of citizens is claiming for a dis-corruption based on the charge of the soul.

The topic of corruption is addressed in “I Sing the Body Electric”, particularly the final lines of poem 8, in which the persona poetica asks: “Have you seen the fool that corrupted his own live body? Or the fool / that corrupted her own live body? / For they do not conceal themselves, and cannot conceal themselves” (12-14). There is a clear reference within these lines to the state of affairs during that particular century in the United States, where the political sphere of the country was rotten due to the corruption of some parties or politicians. Whitman himself describes the dramatic situation of his time in *Vistas Democráticas*, where he states that:

[S]on esos salvajes, voraces partidos lo que me alarma. Sin otra ley que su propia voluntad, cada vez más combativos, cada vez menos tolerantes a la idea de conjunto y a la igualdad fraternal, a la perfecta igualdad de estos Estados, de las siempre sobrepujantes ideas norteamericanas. Es ... asunto vuestro no entregaros implícitamente a ningún partido, ni someteros ciegamente a sus dictadores, sino erigiros firmemente en amos y señores de todos ellos (104)



This is an indicator that the fragmentation, which was previously mentioned in the analysis of the newspapers, found its schemers in the leaders of the parties that acted as dictators in order to fulfil their individual goals rather than those of the whole country. According to this poem, they are the “fool[s] / that corrupted [their] own live body” (13), and the decay of the body politic is so compelling that it is impossible for them to conceal themselves.

By means of understanding the leaders of political parties as fools that corrupted the body, the poem gives a clear reading of its context in which the European monarchical tradition was able to permeate the body of the American democracy. The head of the European monarchical body politic was the king, and owing to his hierarchical position he can be understood as a dictator; Whitman, in his poetry, related these dictators with the fools that corrupt their own body, and in doing so he was able to identify and expose the subtle and secret collusions found in the cultural struggle for power during the nineteenth century. In “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” poem 3, the persona poetica asks the following rhetorical question: “Have you thought there could be but a single supreme? (1), to which there is an immediate response in the following line: “there can be any number of supremes ...” (2). In a healthy democratic body, there is no room for only one supreme, because each member of the body is a supreme by itself. Likewise, there is no room for the old European understanding of a single man at the head of the body; in order for the democratic body to be healthy it has to be deprived of any train of thought that is not based on egalitarianism. In the following lines of the same poem, Whitman writes that “All is eligible to all, / All is for individuals, all is for you” (5-6); these lines promote the spirit of democracy, in which individuals are at the head of the body politic, unlike monarchism in which one supreme individual is eligible to all. The concluding verse of this poem sheds light on the importance that recovering the health of the body has: “All comes by the body, only health puts you rapport with / the universe. / Produce great Persons, the rest follows” (8-10). In order for the American citizens to achieve greatness, they need to constitute a healthy body politic; therefore, as the persona poetica stated in “I Sing the Body Electric”, there is a necessity to charge the body electric, and the way of doing this is by charging the body with a reinvigorated soul politic.

In this manner, Whitman appears to portray the relationship between body and soul as one based on a symbiosis; not only each one is part of an organism, but they seem to be dependent, if one is deteriorated, the other will suffer a similar fate due to their bond. It is important to notice that this reflection, which underlies *Leaves of Grass*, is a clear representation of one of the consequences of the clash between democracy and monarchy. The fact that the United States were mainly concerned with their geographical expansion can be identified as one of the main causes that allowed the development of a feeble soul politic. In *Vistas Democráticas*, Whitman exposes a reflection about this issue, stating that: “En vano nos hemos anexionado Texas, California, Alaska, y llegado, al norte, hasta Canadá, y al sur hasta Cuba. Es como si ... estuviéramos dotándonos de un cuerpo vasto y cada vez, más perfectamente organizado, para dejarlo sin alma, o casi” (69). This tradition of a desire for geographical expansion can be understood as a heritage that came directly from the first colonies which believed that it was their divine duty to conquer the indomitable West. Perhaps this desire was so fervent that the United States focused mainly in developing the body, leaving aside and neglecting the importance of nurturing its soul.

According to the body and soul relation portrayed in some of the poems from *Leaves of Grass*, if the American body wants to find its fitness it will be imperative to cultivate its soul with the specific seeds that are required. But even before attempting to identify the missing ingredients of the American soul, it is extremely important to try to establish a characterization of this elusive concept in the first place. In “I Sing the Body Electric” poem 9, the poet attempts to give his definition:

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men  
and women, nor the 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,) (1-4)

In the beginning of verse 1, the lyric speaker, once again, overtly addresses the body by means of an apostrophe; this poem can be understood as the most direct response to the call made in “Come, said my soul”, in which there is an invitation to the soul to write for the body. In this sense, “I Sing the body Electric” is the culmination of that combined effort in

which the very soul is writing for its muse which is the body. According to the persona poetica, the soul itself is addressing the body by reflecting on their relationship, which was previously defined as a symbiotic one. In line 3 the speaker states that the parts of the body are to stand or fall with the soul; this means that due to their relationship, if one decays the other will follow. Moreover, this symbiotic relationship is redefined, because in line 4, in the parenthesis, the speaker, which seems to be the poet himself addressing the reader, clarifies that the parts or the body are indeed the soul itself. As poem 9 from "I Sing the Body Electric" progresses, there is a detailed use of a catalogue that depicts a type of cosmology composed of the parts of the body. In this catalogue, the poet achieves to gather myriads of body parts that are described by him, such as: "Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above, / Leg-fibres, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg, / Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel" (29-31). In a detailed anatomical description, Whitman provides an accurate image of the body that is composed by the likes of its parts; from head to toe the poet encompasses almost every part of the anatomy of the human body and he finish his poem by stating that: "O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body / only, but of the soul, / O I say now these are the soul!" (61-63). These are the concluding and glorious lines which end the most bodily-themed poem from *Leaves of Grass*. The fact that the most bodily centred poem is, actually, strongly related to the soul, is a conclusive proof that the body and soul relation is completely defined as a synecdoche. This implies that in order to identify what the soul is, the persona poetica suggest that within the anatomy of the body itself lies the answer. According to the democratic understanding, the body politic is composed of all of its citizens in an egalitarian manner, from head to toe, the American body is represented by their individuals that compose a mass of equal countrymen. In them lies the key to nurture the soul and restore the body politic, they are the final answer to this rhetorical question. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to identify how the poet proposes this invigoration.

Within *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman depicts a multifaceted picture of the American citizens and their costumes, this description allows to envision the common man from the nineteenth century; owing to this, it will be possible to attempt to locate the particular feature of the American citizens that is related to the invigoration of the body politic. In *Leaves of Grass*, a particular feature is portrayed which seems to be critical to elucidate the

way in which Whitman proposes this process of invigoration; this feature is related to the recurrent employment of rhetorical questions by the persona poetica in many of the poems. By considering Whitman's poetry as one which is prone to ask these questions, it is possible to establish a relation with the positivistic craving that was at the core of the century. People from that period had the possibility to access their world in new ways supported by the empirical method; this was an instance of discovery and amazement in which it was common to question every aspect of reality. Therefore, Whitman translates this craving into his poetry by means of this particular literary device which seek to establish new connections between men and their new modern world. This mechanism of presenting rhetorical questions in order to attempt an answer later on is a common feature in *Leaves of Grass*, therefore, a comparison and contrast between some of the instances in which the literary device appears could help to elucidate their role within Whitman's poetic vision. It is interesting to notice that "I Sing the Body Electric" begins in poem 1 with the rhetorical question of "what is the soul?" (12), and that it ends in poem 9 by having answered this question. Similarly, in "Song of Myself" poem 6, the persona poetica states that a child asks him what the grass is, to which he replies: "How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is / any more than he" (3-4). In this poem the lyric speaker is unable to give a definition of grass, conversely, the speaker in "I Sing the Body Electric" is finally able to define the soul. Continuing the analysis of poem 6, the lyric speaker which is engaged in attempting to guess the very concise definition of grass, starts describing the properties of grass and the various meanings that it could possess. For example, he states that: "Or I guess is the handkerchief of the Lord" (7); and also he says "Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of / the vegetation. / Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic" (11-13). The verb guess dominates most of the first half of the poem, however, as it progresses, the verb is replaced by others, such as: "And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of / graves" (19-20), and "O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues, / And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths / for nothing" (31-33). This group of answers is strikingly similar to the ones present in "I Sing the Body Electric" but with a major difference. This difference is that in "I sing the body Electric" the persona poetica presents answers that are precise, therefore, the poem can end with the thunderous exclamation of what the soul is. Contrariwise, in poem 6 of "Song of Myself", the lyric

speaker cannot configure such specific answer, and he rather gives vague suggestions based on his intuition and perception. He is lost within the multifaceted definitions of something that should be fairly easy to explain as the grass. Furthermore, the persona poetica gave plenty of examples related to the use of rhetorical questions, for instance, just in “Song of Myself” the poet offers a wide array of questions such as in poem 2, when the lyric speaker asks: “Have you reckon’d a thousand acres much? have you / reckon’d the earth much?” (29-30); also in poem 20 he wants to know: “What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?” (3); likewise, in poem 39 he wants to know: “The friendly and flowing savage, who is he?” (1); and finally, in poem 42 the speaker asks: And what is reason? And what is love? And what is life? (65). These examples allow to state that the poet has crafted many of his rhetorical questions with the specific purpose of discovering the world. It seems to be crucial the role that relating to the world and comprehending reality have in *Leaves of Grass*, otherwise, the persona poetica would not insist on presenting these questions to the readers. In other words, the process of healing the American body is related to promoting a stronger connection between its citizens and the world. There is a sense of agency within this because the poet is encouraging active readers who could effuse completely with their reality.

The pivotal role that individuals have is explained by their active duty of comprehending their world. Within them lies the responsibility of unifying the fragmented states. As it was previously stated, Whitman is concerned with the futility of exclusively nurturing the body of the United States by means of a geographical expansion; the real nourishment lies within the soul of the country which are its citizens. In the poem “Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood”, the persona poetica wants to directly tackle this issue. In the first lines of poem 1, the lyric speaker states to his addressee: “Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity / only, / A special song before I go I’d sing o’er all the rest” (2-4); in these lines, there is a clear reference to the body politic of the United States, and that there is a special song that the lyric speaker wants to sing over the rest. This song has one specific purpose, according to the following lines:

I’d sow a seed for thee of endless Nationality,

I’d fashion thy ensemble including body and soul,

I'd show away ahead thy real Union, and how it may be

Accomplish'd (6-9)

The persona poetica is prepared to give America the seed for its real union; it seems that the political fragmentation of the nineteenth century had as a consequence the liquidation of the adjective 'united'. Whitman realized that these states were not united anymore, the 'non-united' States of America were even able to fervently oppose each other as it was demonstrated by the bloody conflict of the Civil War. Owing to this the key to restore the soul lies within the individuals, they must be re-united in order to heal the body of the country. Additionally, in poem 3 of "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood", there is a clear indication of one of the main components which is necessary for the accomplishment the real union of citizens of the States: "To formulate the Modern—out of the peerless grandeur / of the modern, / out of thyself, comprising science, to recast poems" (2-4). The seed and real union that the persona poetica wants to show in poem 1 of this collection, is defined in line 2 by saying that this will be a formulation of the modern. The fact that the Whitman had chosen the word 'formulation' is extremely revealing; the character of the word is strongly related to the scientific world, it literally means to express something precise, a formula. This conclusion is reinforced in line 4 where the persona poetica says that the formulation will require to comprise science in order to recast poems. In this sense, the poet will integrate the modern through one of its main components which is science, and this facet of modernity will have to be related to the individuals who are the agents in charge of restoring America to its finest form. Moreover, this facet of modernity will play a major role in the relation between the individuals and their new modern world.

The inclusion of science in poetry is indeed a feature that was considered to be part of Modernity in the nineteenth century; it was not something new to the world of literature, but in Whitman there is a specific purpose of rehabilitation for the soul and the body of the American democracy, and this purpose can be considered as an avant-garde technique for his time. As it is shown in poem 5 of "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood", science will allow for the creation of a new world:

"Ready, collected here, a freer, vast, electric world, to be

constructed here,

(The true New World, the world of orbic science, morals,

literatures to come,) (17-20)

The persona poetica, in line 19, describes this science with the adjective ‘orbic’, an adjective that immediately relates to a specific type of science, which will be that of the universe; a science that, in the nineteenth century, was used for describing the orbs discovered by the increasingly powerful telescopes and by the various improvements made in the astronomical field which started to appear during that time. It was a time of scientific revolutions, in which Modernity was strongly related to the advances of the early stages of a new type of science based on empiric evidence. Whitman, could have been chosen to avoid or even reject this facet of Modernity, however, the poet embraced these new discoveries and languages, and, as it was previously mentioned, he decided to formulate his poetry under a new shape. Scientific data are strongly present in *Leaves of Grass*, and it can be understood as the fuel that charges the body electric, therefore, it is also related to the charge of the soul and to the charge of the individuals. Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that Whitman employed a wide array of images from different fields related to the scientific world; in this way he seems to have created an all-encompassing catalogue of images that are at the service of the reader. The purpose of this compendium can be related to that of an encyclopaedia, which offers a vast amount of knowledge compiled into one body. Hence, it could be proposed that *Leaves of Grass* was designed to resemble an encyclopaedia intended for the body and the soul, in which the reader, by means of establishing relations with the images depicted, could generate a type of knowledge and the wisdom required to apply it. This surely can be considered as a major contribution of Whitman towards the development of the new literatures of the nineteenth century. In poem 6 of “Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood”, the concluding lines give insight to support this reflection: “In thee America, the soul, its destinies, / Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!” (43-44); this wonder nebulous and globe of globes is referring to the world of orbic science, morals, and literatures to come. This is the new world that was introduced in that particular century, a world of physical laws, of predictable formulas that unravelled the mysteries of the universe and nature; a world of wonder nebulous that was only starting to

being discovered by men. Moreover, in the last lines, the persona poetica states: “Thou mental, moral orb—thou New, indeed new, Spiri- / tual World!” (47-48); these lines are a clear indication that the newly discovered world of science is related to the spiritual world and, also, to the mental and moral world. This is how the purpose of invigorating the body with the charge of the soul could be achieved, by inoculating the new poetries with Modernity in the form of scientific knowledge. In this manner the reader can attempt to answer any of the rhetorical questions that Whitman has presented, from defining the grass to defining the very soul itself; this powerful mechanism must permeate every individual in order to allow an equal understanding of their world. Therefore, it seems possible to affirm that in order to start the de-corruption of the American body, their citizens, which are part of the soul, must be invigorated by scientific images borrowed directly from Modernity, because this type of imagery is extremely suitable to relate with the new modern world that was being forged during a century that reshaped many of the established concepts of reality.



## Soul Politic and Astronomical Imagery

The following section of the analysis will be related to the second sphere previously mentioned, which is the one related to spiritual ideologies within the nineteenth century. The most prominent ideologies analysed will be those of the supernatural and mythological realm of religion, and the natural and the positivistic realm of science. Specifically, the facet of astronomy will be analysed in terms of its imagery present in *Leaves of Grass*; this imagery will be proposed as a literary device that is employed in Whitman's vision in order to stimulate the readers' senses and to establish more vivid relations between their modern world and souls. In order to unravel the main features of the ideologies, it will be compulsory to resort to texts from the time to shed light on the development, structure and main features of these ideologies. Therefore, these texts will allow to give an insight about the particular configuration of the spiritual sphere during the aforementioned century.

Throughout the nineteenth century culture, there was a national dispute related to the soul politic of the United States, this argument questioned which of the moral elements were the more suitable to be considered by the American government in order to be promoted among its citizens. Owing to this, the very relation between state and church was questioned; also there was a religious revival called the Second Great Awakening, in which there was an effort to evangelize people in order to be ready for the second coming of Jesus. This debate and events permeated the culture of that time in the form of a powerful clash of ideologies. An example of this can be found in Joseph Story, a lawyer and American jurist who wrote the book *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* in 1833. In this book, he made several comments in relation to the role of the state towards religion. According to Story, "piety, religion, and morality are intimately connected with the well-being of the state, and indispensable to the administration of civil justice" (699). The author aware that since the arrival of the early pilgrims to America, the government of men has always had a strong connection with religion. Moreover, he felt that it was compulsory for the government to maintain and promote this relation:

The promulgation of the great doctrines of religion ... the responsibilities to [Almighty God] for all our actions, founded upon moral freedom and

accountability; a future state of rewards and punishments ... these can never be a matter of indifference in any well ordered community ... it is the especial duty of government to foster, and encourage [Christianity] among all the citizens and subjects (Story 699)

It is clear that Story supported a solid rapport between the American government and religion. He even questioned the very possibility of existence for a different context: "It yet remains a problem to be solved ... whether any free government can be permanent, where ... God, and ... religion, constitute no part of the ... state" (700). This position was one side of the fervent debate that emerged in the context of the century and the fact that it was being sponsored by many figures indicated that there was a crisis between church and state; additionally, it portrayed that the privileged position which religion had as the companion of a government that was being questioned. This relation was also a heritage that the pilgrims brought with them to the States; but the American context allowed for a revision of this relation. According to reverend J. Adams, who gave a sermon that was compiled in the book *The Relation of Christianity to Civil Government in the United States*, the natural relation of Church and State (that was an ancient European heritage) was also replicated during the early stages of the Commonwealth; however, he also notices that there was a turning point in which the constant corruption of bishops and men of religion created a sense of distrust among citizens:

[B]y the time of the Revolution, a conviction of the impolicy of a further union of Church and State according to the ancient mode, had so far prevailed, that nearly all the States in framing their new constitutions of government, either silently or by direct enactment, discontinued the ancient connexion (6)

According to Adams, the citizens of America had after its Independence the unique possibility to challenge the established order by means of forging and developing a new form of government based on the freedoms that their constitution promoted, which allowed them to introduce changes in the way that their institutions worked. This particular feature of America was the seed that questioned the necessity for a religion-based form of government, and the dramatic bloodshed of the Civil War was the catalyst required to

completely re-evaluate the moral fibre of the American soul. Whitman recognized this ideological crisis and used it as a basis to promote a new healing literature, one that would reformulate the charge of the soul, and that will heal the body electric of the States.

In the preface of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman introduces the reader towards his vision of what a great poet should be, and in doing so he reveals his formula. He starts by saying that “[f]aith is the antiseptic of the soul—it pervades the common people and preserves them” (4). This clearly indicates that faith has a healing purpose within the soul, and that it is the first component of his formula. However, there is no single indication that this faith is one sustained by any specific ecclesiastical religion or creed, on the contrary, he seems to imbue this faith with a language borrowed from Modernity. According to Whitman: “Exact sciences and its practical movements are [the] encouragement and support [of the greatest poet]” and he continues this train of thought by saying that: “the astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician ... are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem” (14). Therefore, the poet intends to forge a new faith based on the language of science which belongs to nineteenth century Modernity; in this way, Whitman proposes to mobilize elements from all of the scientific fields in order to ensemble them under the flag of a new type of American literature. This mechanism proposed by the poet can be understood in terms of a prism, in which a single beam of white light is divided into the spectral colours; in this sense, Whitman seems to act as a reversed prism that encompasses all of the existing colours and unifies them into one single beam of light. In this analogy, the colours represent the diverse scientific knowledge of the nineteenth century, from which astronomy was one of them.

In *Leaves of Grass* there is a constant process of fusion, in which Whitman does not only unites languages borrowed from several fields from science, he also unifies the States, contexts, ideologies, individuals, etc., in this way readers are immersed in a text that promotes union, and in doing so they become part of this exercise and effuse within the poems. This particular process of Whitman’s poetry can be analysed in his use of astronomical imagery, in which the poet appeals to the reader’s senses by the use of images borrowed from astronomy. Additionally, the fact that Whitman appropriated these scientific

terms and employed them under a radically different poetic framework, can be related to Greenblatt's concept of mobility, in which the boundaries of a specific culture are exposed by the rearrangement of the symbolic materials from a particular area into another.

In the first section of the analysis (Body Politic and Soul Politic) it was indicated that Whitman offered a type of encyclopaedia of images that allow to establish connections between individuals and their reality, however, it is compulsory to establish the manner in which the poet employs this imagery and actually conceives this connection. The first poem to be analysed in terms of its astronomical imagery is "Grand is the Seen", whose title is directly related to the realm of the senses, particularly to the eye perception. In the first lines the persona poetica states that "Grand is the seen, the light, to me—grand are the sky and stars, / Grand is the earth, and grand are lasting time and space, / And grand their laws, so multiform, puzzling, evolutionary" (1-3). These introductory lines relate images borrowed from astronomy such as sky, stars, time and space; the function of this imagery seems to be directly connected to a mental type of perception. The poet is stimulating the reader's senses by presenting images that immediately relate to a gargantuan size; even though the reader cannot actually perceive the specific size through sight. It is crucial to mention that these images are all ancient concepts that have been used by many literatures, however, in the nineteenth century, they were clarified due to the advances in the astronomical field. In this particular poem, Whitman seems to borrow these concepts to create a spatial perception that directly enhances the reader's comprehension of the word 'grand'. This sensation based on the imagery will complement the following lines of the poem:

But grander far the unseen soul of me, comprehending, endowing all those,  
Lighting the light, the sky and stars, delving the earth, sailing the sea,  
(What were all those, indeed, without thee, unseen soul?  
of what amount without thee?) (4-7)

The beginning of line 4 indicates the starting point of a comparison in which the vastness perceived by the reader by means of the astronomical imagery is compared with the unseen soul of the persona poetica. In other words, the lyric speaker is inviting the reader to see the

unseen, which is, in terms of sensations, an invitation to generate a synaesthesia. In spite of the fact that the poet does not overtly employ the literary device of synaesthesia, he is expecting the reader to do so, in other words, Whitman is inviting to transfer the sense of vision into the realm of the unseen. The use of this particular device is in perfect agreement with the unifying purpose present in Whitman's work, and it is clearly related to the analogy of the prism because, basically, synaesthesia blends the senses in a similar manner to that of the prism. Moreover, synaesthesia seems to be an extremely suitable literary device to be used by the poet due to the fact that he is an all-encompassing entity, therefore, it would be rare that he would have focussed on generating images for only one sense or for all the senses in a separate manner. Hence, this mechanism could be understood as one that promotes a yoking of feelings; on the one hand the poet presents images related to astronomy that could generate vivid sensations on an individual, on the other hand, the poet invites to merge with all these sensations and effuse with the poem.

The manner in which Whitman employs astronomical imagery promotes a sense of unification of feelings based on the vivid sensations enhanced with images borrowed from the scientific field. The images that are mobilized from the framework of science have a potent positivistic charge; it is true that poetry had used since ancient times images such as stars, planets, and the cosmos in order to arouse the senses, however, the nineteenth century has tinged these images with a modern semantic charge that has changed the way in which man relates to them. Humans have cracked the hidden mechanisms of nature by means of reason, and in doing so, they have generated a vast amount of knowledge that is at their service. Owing to this, the charge of the soul present in "I Sing the Body Electric" can be clarified; it can be understood as a charge of meaning based on reason. In this manner, the poet is able to take advantage of this extra semantic charge in order to establish relations between his images and the souls of the readers, and in turn these images allow to establish connections with the world. As the persona poetica states in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" poem 8:

What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman  
or man that looks in my face?

Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning

into you? (9-12)

This verse highlights the importance that has the ability to create ties between men, an ability which allows them to fuse with each other by pouring new meaning into themselves.

By considering Whitman as a poet that invites his readers to engage in synaesthesia while reading his poems, a main feature of the poet is established; this feature reveals that Whitman expects an active reader which is ready to be participative agent and not merely a passive receiver. This is clearly exemplified in the poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” in which Whitman portrays a very common situation of the nineteenth century which is that of a scientific lecture. This poem can be understood as a reflection of how the poet embraces science and the way in which he employs astronomical imagery for generating a fusion of the senses in the reader. The first lines of the poem present the persona poetica which is hearing a lecture on astronomy:

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns  
before me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add,  
divide, and measure them (1-5)

These past lines depict a worldview based entirely on the scientific method; it is a highly dense and modern form of language used to explain and describe the world or any part of the cosmos to the persona poetica. Notwithstanding the accuracy that the empirical method has to unravel the cosmos, the lyric speaker states that “How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick” (8). In spite of the fact that the charts, figures, and diagrams could portray an undeniable truth about our universe and its laws, it seems that the lyric speaker considers that by themselves they are not enough. In this sense, the raw empirical data require a transformation in order to connect with the persona poetica, and this is portrayed in the concluding lines: “Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself, / In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time, / Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars. (9-11). These lines depict a particular action made by the speaker in which he rises and glides out;

these are two actions that strongly relate to the act of effusing. Therefore, the tiredness and sickness are ended by means of the powerful image of the star, without this image and without the actual relation made through the senses, the empirical data remains partially untranslatable and cannot connect with the soul of the persona poetica. The modern language of science is not enough to allow in the speaker a connection with the world; it seems that the empirical knowledge requires to be processed by the senses also, not only by merely relying on cognition. This is a perfect description of the *modus operandi* that the astronomical imagery has in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman has adopted and invigorated his poetry with the modern language of science, however, he doesn't simply borrow these images in order to promote their logical value and meaning. The poet is using these empirical truths in the form of images in order to promote a poetic vision which could enable his readers to create relations between the modern nineteenth century world and their souls. It is in the human nature to create relations with the world; during that century, scientific discoveries reshaped the understanding of the world and in doing so, there were required new literatures that could relate this world with the souls of men. This necessity is explained by Whitman in the preface of *Leaves of Grass* when he states that: "folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects—they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls" (5). In other words, the greatest poet is a connecting entity, one that establishes relations between the soul and reality. Moreover, in *Vistas Democráticas* Whitman starts defining the type of literature required to pave this path: "Norteamérica exige una poesía que sea audaz, moderna, y omniabarcante y cósmica, y auténtica. No debe ... hacer caso omiso de la ciencia o la modernidad, al contrario: ha de inspirarse en la ciencia y en lo moderno" (112). Consequently, science can be understood as a fountain of inspiration for poetry, and that by merging these two fields there is a positive outcome for developing a better understanding between men and reality. This merging of fields can be related to Greenblatt's notion of mobility, in which the tropes that have been mobilized within the nineteenth century culture are science and the modern; both can be considered as rich frameworks from which images can be borrowed and introduced within Whitman's poetic vision.

The new poetry that Whitman envisions found its expressive force within a modern form of language that stimulates the senses of the reader. The use of images borrowed from

the field of science allows the poet to communicate in a universal manner with men, because he displaces the complexity which is proper scientific language and he employs a primeval form of language based on the power of images. In “Song of Myself” poem 24 the lyric speaker claims: “I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy / By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their / counterpart of on the same terms” (12-14). This sign of democracy is another feature of the primeval language (poetic vision) spoken in Whitman’s poetry, which can be understood in terms of its egalitarianism of understanding. Because by absorbing scientific images, the poetic vision of Whitman is enhanced and can reach all men; it is not a poetry based on a complexity of language or on far-fetched images that only the cleverest minds could comprehend. Whitman has crafted a poetry that can be understood by the common and literate men equally. This is the reason why the lyric speaker states that he will not accept nothing that cannot have its counterpart, since due to the password primeval men will be able to relate to any element of reality, in other words, anything will have its counterpart within man’s soul. This egalitarian effect is based on the power of science, which can be understood as the counterpart of democracy, because as Whitman states in *Vistas Democráticas*:

La ciencia (gemela, en sus campos, de la democracia en el suyo), ...  
poniendo a prueba absolutamente todos los pensamientos, todas las obras, ya  
ha caído sobre el mundo: un sol, ascendente, sumamente iluminador,  
gloriosísimo, y que, sin duda alguna, nunca se pondrá (112)

This pass-word primeval, which is a form of language, acts as the sun that enlightens all men without distinction. This is the main reason why it stands as the counterpart of democracy. Absolutely all men are equal to this form of language; because as the persona poetica states in the poem “Who Learns my Lesson Complete?”, the lesson can be understood by: “Boss, journeyman, apprentice, churchman and atheist, / The stupid and the wise thinker, parents and offspring, / merchant, clerk, porter and customer” (2-4). This line depicts the egalitarianism of understanding, in which it does not matter your profession or intellect, the lesson will be learned whatsoever. Moreover, the lyric speaker rectifies his first lines and states that: “It is no lesson—it lets down the bars to a good lesson” (7). If we compare this to the poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” we can realize the



charts, figures, and diagrams are actually obsolete when compared to the power of an invigorated poetry, because as the lyric speaker in “Who learns My Lesson Complete” concludes: “The great laws take and effuse without argument” (9). This effusion of the laws can be understood as the effusion that takes place when the astronomical imagery stimulates the senses of the reader. Just as it occurred after the lyric speaker rose and glided out during the lesson of the astronomer in order to contemplate the stars. This effusion allows for a better and more complete type of comprehension; men are able to once again rediscover the world owing to this new type of poetic vision. In the second half of “Who Learns my Lesson Complete”, Whitman starts employing astronomical imagery in order to achieve the comprehension of the great laws of the universe. The persona poetica states that: “It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe mov- / ing so exactly in its orbit for ever and ever, without / one jolt or the untruth of a single second” (18-20). In this case, the images appeal to various senses, employing once again the literary device of synaesthesia. Specifically, in line 18, the poet employs the image of an orb (which stands for the Earth) and he stimulates the tactile perception by means of the adjective ‘round’; then, he appeals to the taste by continuing the description with the adjective ‘delicious’, and finally, he concludes with the moving capability that the earth has, hence, depicting an spatial type of perception. Within this line there are three senses being yoked together and they promote a complete arousal of the reader’s senses in a way that no chart, diagram, or figure could attempt to do. By the employment of this imagery which stimulates a synaesthesia, the reader is able to merge his feelings in order to feel the roundness of the Earth, additionally, he can also rejoice with the deliciousness of it, and finally the reader is able to feel its movement. It is a symphony of feelings in order to describe a particular natural phenomenon: the exact movement of an orb. In this way, Whitman is transforming scientific language into one that is far richer and more expressive, additionally, in doing so he appropriates concepts from Modernity and disentangle them from their original framework. This method renders the scientific world as one that is malleable enough to be able to lend concepts to other fields; moreover, it also renders the poetic world as one that is extremely integrative.

This integrative power of poetry is grounded in the employment of images as sources for crafting synaesthesia. According to Cretien Van Campen, author of *The Hidden*

*Sense of Synesthesia* (2008), poets have dealt with the employment of this literary device since ancient times, and that they are constantly trying to find the best synesthetic combinations in order to create a better expression of the sensory experiences; moreover, he concludes that “[p]oets like to use synesthetic metaphors because they provide a precise, concise, and pleasant way to express physical and sensory feelings” (96). In this way, Campen defines the key role that synaesthesia has in poetry which is understood as an augmented perception of a physical and sensory feeling; it is an enhancement in the understanding of poetry that will allow for a democratic comprehension of it. Both the sage and the ignorant men will be equal in the eyes of Whitman’s poetry, he reaches both of them and affects their soul notwithstanding their differences. The poet promotes this idea in *Vistas Democráticas* by stating that science has an illuminating role for all men:

Las consideraciones locales, como puedan ser el pecado, la deformidad, la ignorancia ... habrán de ser esclarecidas por la ciencia, que acepta y promulga audazmente esta fe y planta las semillas de leyes más soberbias — exploratorias del universo físico a través del universo espiritual—, despejando el camino para una religión, igualmente dulce e inimpugnable para el niño y el gran sabio (122)

In other words, the seeds of science, which can be understood as the images borrowed from it, are planted in the spiritual universe and they can allow to explore and understand the physical universe. This process of illumination paves the road for a democratic religion that blesses the little boy and the great sage in the same manner. It is a way of creating relations between man and the world in which synaesthesia acquires a key role. By means of this ensemble of senses the readers will be able to answer the questions formulated by Whitman, and they will grasp any topic, from the inconspicuous grass to the colossal stars and more. In *The Hidden Sense of Synaesthesia*, the author employs the poem “Braille” which was written by the poet Simon Vinkenoog; the particular highlighted section has a strong intertextuality with Whitman’s poetry and allows for an interesting reflection to the role of synaesthesia: “How green the grass is, one never learns by solely looking at it; its lushness, freshness, its floundering lust for life that permeates that greenness, should be felt by the fingers, as a whole and touched so deeply that the fingers become part of it” (qtd. in

Campan 98). In this manner synaesthesia acts as if the complete array of senses were concentrated within our fingers, and, owing to this, humans can completely appreciate the world.

The analysis of Whitman's poetic vision demonstrates that its force resides in the employment of images as catalysts for synaesthesia. It is indeed an extension of his all-encompassing character, and a gateway to create a synchronic picture of the nineteenth century culture. According to the items that were being mobilized, the culture of that century is depicted as one in which there was a required spirituality for the understanding of a newly re-discovered world. Positivism allowed men to be child-like once again in terms of establishing relations with their reality; scientific revolutions created a paradigm shift that affected a modern society. The ecclesial worldview was indeed in a clash with the world depicted by empiric evidence, and therefore nineteenth century spirituality needed to be invigorated. Whitman acknowledged this necessity of his century and he promoted a new American literature that celebrated science as a source for inspiration. This celebration is reflected within his work in various instances, one of them is found in poem 23 of "Song of Myself" when there is a line dedicated to praising exact science: "Hurrah for positive science! Long live exact demonstration!" (10). Moreover, in the preface of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman states that: "In the beauty of poems are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science" (14). There is a tone of rejoicing which permeates *Leaves of Grass* and that is a reflection of the ideological value that science had during the century; it is a trope which is being exalted by the poet because is a field filled with powerful images that are at the service of poetry. According to *Vistas Democráticas*, while the poet encouraged the invigoration of the soul and the continuous advancement of the spiritual side of America, he also considered that it was necessary to:

[H]acer avanzar con el mismo ímpetu a la ciencia, la razón absoluta, y el desarrollo general y proporcionado del hombre considerado como un todo. Estas deducciones y datos científicos, son también divinos, preciosas partes deducidas de la civilización moral, y, con la salud física, indispensables para ella, si se quiere salir al paso del fanatismo. (119).

Whitman established the need for an expansion in the development of scientific knowledge and data, because they are essential for crafting the new American literatures. Moreover, he states that it is extremely desired: “Un fervor animoso y religioso, empapado en las modificaciones, siempre presentes, de las emociones humanas, la amistad, la benevolencia, con un amplio campo abierto a la investigación científica (120). In this manner, the poet is proposing to merge two realms that were in opposition during the century: the spiritual, and the scientific. Likewise, Whitman acknowledges that the place of human emotion within this union is of paramount importance, because, as this work has proved by analysing the use of synaesthesia in his poems, the senses are the key mechanism for enhancing men’s ability to relate to the world. In the poem “I am he that Aches with Love”, the persona poetica reflects on this ability:

I am he that aches with amorous love;  
Does the earth gravitate? Does not all matter, aching,  
attract all matter?  
So the body of me to all I meet or know (1-4)

This concise poem seems to be promoting that within men’s body there is a natural law as potent as earth’s gravitation, which in a similar manner attracts towards the persona poetica everything the he meets or knows. It is a simple, natural law that explains men’s curiosity and their constant urgency to comprehend the world. Due to this law, the senses are a unique and fundamental medium to understand everything that the body attracts. In a way, *Leaves of Grass* is an invitation to explore our senses, and it is also an invitation to ask questions similar to the ones present in the collection of poems titled “Salute Au Monde!” in which in poem 3 the persona poetica asks: “What do you hear Walt Whitman?” (1); likewise, in poem 4 the speaker asks: “What do you see Walt Whitman? (2). These questions are an open invitation that Whitman made to humanity, in which he is promoting men to ask what they see, hear, and feel, in order to be able to have the most encompassing picture of our world, and finally be able to say to it: I salute you World!

## Conclusions

Discovering and relating to the world has always been a paramount innate feature of human nature; from time to time history presents ideologies that allow for paradigm shifts that change forever our relation with the world. Owing to this, since many centuries ago, it has been the work of poets to establish the path between elements from reality with the soul of men. This particular vocation that poets have had, and continues to have, makes them prime spectators and seers that could guide men through the course of history. Owing to this, Whitman was one of the most important seers of its century because of his ultimate passion to encompass every aspect of the nineteenth century reality. He crafted a cosmos in which there is an indelible mark left by its culture, from where we can see reflected that century in the form of: country, individuals, landscapes, professions, hopes, failures, achievements, etc. This wide array of elements allows for a synchronic image of Whitman's time, and also it is possible to grasp how he was able to translate some of the culture's main tropes in his poetic vision. This work has analysed two major spheres from that time, which are the political sphere and the spiritual sphere. From them, several ideologies appeared as pivotal elements that define the American culture, such as: democracy, monarchy, religion, and science. These tropes allow to unravel Whitman's poetry in terms of how he configured his poetry by translating the aforementioned tropes from his time.

On the one hand, the analysis of the first sphere in which the duality body politic and soul politic is based, shows that these concepts establish within Whitman's poetry a cooperative and symbiotic relation, that is particularly translated in the literary device of synecdoche. Owing to this device, the poet is able to relate body and soul as parts that compose a single organism, and that by means of the structure of the body there is access to the conformation of the soul. The possibility to access the soul through the body is based by Whitman's notion that the unseen is proved by the seen. This mechanism that strongly relates to the mechanism in which a synecdoche is based, allows for the identification of a pivotal agent that is required in order to heal the fragmented and damaged body politic of the United States: the common men. Within *Leaves of Grass* there is a call for action for the

individual, who is understood as the very soul of the American body. The analysis of the poems shows that this call for action is related to a constant questioning of the world, in which the American citizens need to rediscover and reconnect with their reality. In Whitman's poetic vision, this need is translated in the employment of rhetorical questions. Owing to this literary device, the persona poetica from *Leaves of Grass* establish the necessity to question every concept, from the abstract soul, to the concrete grass, in order to re-discover and re-connect with them. The ability that the lyric speaker has to answer these questions reveals the fact that within the nineteenth century, individuals needed to invigorate their senses in order to establish more vivid and encompassing relations with their reality.

In order to achieve this invigoration, Whitman imbues his poetry with Modernity in the form of images. These images, borrowed from the framework of science, are a critical ingredient to enhance the senses of men, through which they will be able to establish a deeper connection with the modern world of the nineteenth century. In Whitman's poetic vision, Modernity provides a form of language that is based on a scientific method that was designed to unravel the world, in this way, the poet permeates his work with a powerful instrument designed to enhance man's comprehension. This allows for the configuration of a new American literature that embraces the modern, and promotes empirical data because this field is most suitable to generate images that are at the service of poetry. By means of inoculating his poetry with Modernity in the form of scientific images, Whitman configures the charge of the soul that is necessary to revitalize the American body politic.

On the other hand, the analysis of the second sphere related to the spiritual world, shows that within Whitman's poetry the astronomical imagery will be proposed as a literary device that is employed in his poetic vision in order to stimulate the readers' senses by promoting in them the emergence of a synaesthesia. Due to the spiritual crisis that the States had in the nineteenth century, the poet acknowledges that it was a time that required a new faith that could heal its nation. This relates to the charge of the soul which had to be invigorated by Modernity in order to allow for a new spirituality based in the merging of the senses.

In the first part of the analysis, it was stated that Whitman promoted the access to the American soul by means of proving the unseen by the seen; in the second part of the analysis, this mechanism is re-interpreted by means of the senses, in which transferring the sense of sight to the realm of that which cannot be seen is strongly related to the function of the literary device of synaesthesia. By means of the mechanism promoted by this device, the new American literature forged by Whitman can relate the images borrowed from the scientific field in a more enhanced manner. Because empirical raw data by itself cannot be understood by all men, Whitman realized this and consequently he promoted the senses as a key filter which allowed to establish an egalitarian comprehension of the world. By means employing astronomical imagery, and associate it with a yoking of the senses, Whitman formulates a mechanism in which all men could comprehend the world. The connections between the men and their reality are improved by synaesthesia because perceiving the world with a blending of the senses allows for a pervasive and lasting comprehension. The individual is able to achieve a heightened sense of its world and he can effuse with it; consequently man is able to once again rediscover the world that was re-defined by Modernity. This is the reason why Whitman stated that he spoke the password primeval, because he forged a language so primitive that it was universal and democratic. This is the key to unify the corrupted body by the charge of the soul, a positivistic charge imbued with a powerful imagery that acted simultaneously with a heightened perception of the world.

My analysis has attempted to unravel a poetic mechanism in which Whitman formulates a process of healing the American body through the employment of Modernity in the form of astronomical imagery, and by promoting a blending of the senses. It could be possible to establish more relations between other types of imagery borrowed from further fields rooted within nineteenth century Modernity. Additionally, I have only analysed the rhetorical questions related to establishing connections between men and their reality; the sample of rhetorical questions that I have selected is quite small when compared with the enormous number of questions present within *Leaves of Grass*. A further analysis of how the poet employs other types of question could prove insightful to unravel more mechanisms in which the poet translates the craving for discovering the world.

My work can find a projection in studies that continue the trend to analyse the relation of science and the arts. It may prove to shed light on several unsuspected manners in which Modernity, in the form of empirical data, was used by Whitman. I have only tried to suggest a possible formulation employed by the poet to encompass Modernity within his poetry, but there could be many others that I have failed to grasp. Owing to this, it is important to mention the possible shortcomings that my work could present. I can surely imagine that due to the multifarious and all-encompassing nature of Whitman's poetry, at times, my analysis could have proved to be thematically and/or topically unorganized and exceedingly ramified. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the fact that due to the gargantuan amount of poems written by Whitman, it might have been possible that I have chosen a poem that does not so clearly portray the arguments that I wanted to express. Nonetheless, I believe that through the recommendation of a thorough and complete reading of the poems that I have selected, some clarification may be acquired.

Finally, I would suggest to relate my work not only with other contextual studies of the nineteenth century, but also with works based on the literary perspective of new criticism or reader based response for example; the latter literary perspective is extremely interesting owing to the effect that synaesthesia has on the reader. In this manner, my work could be utmost enhanced by understanding Whitman's poetic vision in terms of complementary literary perspectives. The perspective of new criticism could possibly advance the concepts that I have mobilized such as the role that imagery has in Whitman's poetry; since imagery is also a wide rhetorical device that is related with metaphor, analogy, and symbol; and it will be extremely interesting to understand their work without considering the context and taking into the account the text in isolation.



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