

Anthem to the Unique Body and its Iterations in *Leaves of Grass*

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Received: June 28, 2026 Accepted: August 21, 2026 Published: August 24, 2026

doi:10.5296/ijch.v13i2.23993

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijch.v13i2.23993>

Abstract

The current study examines body and its iterations through the lens of New Criticism. Beside defeating the requirements of poetic metrication, *Leaves of Grass* (LoG) appears, through ten of the poems it contains, as a praise song to human body. Elements related to the author's biography have been overlooked at the expenses of the literary genius displayed in the artistic portrayal of the profoundness of the Ideal Man substantiating all the bodies. The narrator has assigned to any body characteristics amounting to perfection. Every living thing and body are testimonies of the greatness of the Creator whose creation is unmastered, perfect in some extent, and revealers of Him. The human body has been dealt with as a collection of wonders. Therefore, this work revisits *LoG* from a constant appeal to lust and sensuality as some criticism perceived it to a eulogy of human body beyond colors and sexes making this study a claim that practices like racism and sexism are negations of the divine wonders embedded in Colored people and in Women.

Keywords: body, perfection, plurality, race, sex, sameness

1. Introduction

My initial contact with *Leaves of Grass* (LoG) was quite accidental but noteworthy since the come-across passage filled me with self-questioning. The passage read:

I am the teacher of athletes/ He who by me spreads a wider breast than my own
proves the width of my own / He most honor my style who learns under it to destroy
the teacher. (LoG, p. 100).

Who can the teacher be? And the athletes? What does the destructive process imply?

The referred-to passage sends a dual message onto which the analysis of the book will linger. First, the numberless athletes compared to the uniqueness of the teacher parallels the relation between a creator and his/her creatures. Second, the passage implicitly mentions the theoretical revolution Whitman's poetry and that of all the writers of his period: Romanticism champions against Enlightenment and the subsequent critical works that would delineate from the oppositions against the artistic freedom initiated by romantic writers.

Writers and critics of Enlightenment agreed on different canons for literary assessment that Alister Fowler classified into three sub-classes among which the "critical canons" (1995, p. 215) that is the fruit of discussions among literary experts. Fowler put forward that a canon "has a vital positive influence by virtue of its variety and proportions" (ibid). This stand implies that the shaping of canons originates from the assessment of various views and is the outcome of approaches from different angles. Nevertheless, not all writers of the eighteenth century could assess the canons of Enlightenment as valuing for their artistic production. Romantic writers namely seek a break from the ongoing artistic norms for some reason other than reasoning.

The aim of romanticism is to make human emotions exist alongside reasoning. The publication of LoG is not part of a liberatory literary process but of an evolutionary one from an artistic demand for reasoning and literary sameness to a larger freedom to meet other people's inner selves through feelings. A conjugation of the heritage of Enlightenment and the burgeoning of Romanticism can shed light on the actual exploratory process of LoG. I do not aim at parting from the "puritanism" of Enlightenment but I look forward to mixing both literary movements given their inclusive aspects perceived by Peter Gay in *Enlightenment* and paraphrased as follow: "the relation between presentation and the unrepresentable and which is commonly identified with the Romantics – as an Enlightenment aesthetic" (Goulimari, 2015, p. 87). The presentable being the fruit of rationality and the unrepresentable, a rephrasing of feelings. That implies that humans initiate actions through reasoning as well as emotion.

Social bounds stem from the emotive love, from regret and hope. The regret could originate from the "representational violence" and "actual violence" (Harris, 2000, p. 30) which are portrayed as part of "the alternative models of social formation" (Ibid). The formation of the United States on that model of violence that took away President Lincoln (LoG, Book XXII) could give the way to another model that is perceptible in LoG. The inherent call for the transformation of the look cast on others.

The content of the transformation initiated by the writers of the romantic period display heterogeneity across subsets of the group. Hence, Alan Golding (1995) noticed that romanticism did not bring about the expected literary transformation: "the New Americanist canon remains mostly the same as the Old Americanist canon, except for the excision of Whitman, Dickinson, and the whole genre of poetry" (p. xvi). The exception laid in Whitman delineated in a negative welcoming of his art. Belasco et al. acknowledged that LoG: "... drew the attention of critics, but found no favor with the public, for the people suspect and

dislike those who nullify venerable laws, and trample upon old forms and usages.” (2007, p. 179).

Seemingly, when standing as an exception to the ongoing literary trend, Whitman embarked on a process of transformation similar to the following: “A desire for novelty, which should not be undervalued, has much to do with pleasure in literary form. ..., taste is more than fashion, and should never be sub-ordinated to trivial laws of circumstance (Fowler, 1982, p.213). The indicted laws are those of poetic metrication that would overshadow the beauty of body forms described in Whitman’s collection of poems. The artistic target in LoG is: “Allow the words to take their natural stresses and forget the theory altogether, and ... find far more interesting and varied rhythmic structure than any that could be derived from or fitted into the fancied pattern (Bunting, 1978, p. 31). The ongoing approach of LoG focuses on “the text itself” (Tyson, 2006, p. 136) according to the view of the branch of New Criticism attempting at breaking the literary rules. Amidst the array of existing symbols, this work will lay emphasis on the “literary language” (Tyson, 2006, p. 138) of LoG, shedding light on unseen aspects of LoG. One of the assumptions of New Criticism is the existence of a variety of interpretations of a literary text. As a collection of poems, LoG obeys that reality: “poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail” (Butler, 1989, p. 105). New criticism allows readers to adopt free vision angles and traduce their visions accordingly. No preset lenses for awaited visions can prevail when one wants to initiate an interpretative process of an artistic work. Hence, the body Whitman refers to in the selected poems of his collection would not call for immediate lust and sensuality. Instead, one would look at the body as an artistic reference enabling to uncover the esthetic in any of its fibers.

This work focuses therefore on the extent of pleasure the new lens of criticism helps detect in the physical forms of people – their body – and the implicit call for praising the “Perfect Body” (LoG, p. 107). Opposing the perception of LoG as a collection of “reckless and indecent” poems (Gaillard, 2017, p. 105), this work endeavors to bring out the artistic work embedded in the shaping of human body, the wonders perceivable through New Criticism, as “formal elements”: images, symbols, metaphors (Tyson, 2006, p. 154).

2. Lauds for the Ideal Man

This eulogy of LoG cannot overshadow the general attitude toward Whitman and Eakins’s art reported by Gaillard (2017):

If Eakins and Whitman had a vision of the flesh that dramatically differed from that of their contemporaries and shocked their audiences, they shared a common understanding of the body and together paved the way for a modern way of looking at physical appearances. The new perception they offered in their artworks also signaled a change in social terms: seen as the epitome of democracy, the flesh and how people thought of it became to them the symbol of equality. (p. 2)

Both romantic writers embarked in a self-affirmation process through the novelty and the complexity of their texts. Tyson (2006) asserts this literary freedom: “For New Criticism, the

complexity of a text is created by the multiple and often conflicting meanings woven through it. And these meanings are a product primarily of four kinds of linguistic devices: paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension” (p. 138). The irony in LoG could originate from the fact that first seen impudicity and lust in language could help uncover beauty and respect or could stand beside praise songs and eulogy. This very part serves at pinpointing these extracts of LoG that stand as eulogies.

Beginning the eulogy by the poem titled: ‘On the Beach At Night Alone’, one reads:

On the beach at night alone, / As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song, / As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future. / A vast similitude interlocks all.... (LoG, p. 288).

The intradiegetic narrator is involved in the course of human movements and activities. He starts a transcendental reflective action about the core entity that ignites every life and stands as the weaving thread that keeps the universe balanced and entities connected from the very first night that witnessed the start of everything. His emotion before the wonders of human diversity coupled with natural riches is perceptible in this extract:

For not the envoys nor the tann’d Japanee from his island only, / Lithe and silent the Hindoo appears, the Asiatic continent itself appears, the past, the dead, / The murky night-morning of wonder and fable inscrutable, / The envelop’d mysteries, the old and unknown hive-bees, / The north, the sweltering south, eastern Assyria, the Hebrews, the ancient of ancients. (LoG, p. 270).

In this poem like in many others from this collection, one hears a song for a super Being that all people of all times know. Passing time has no influence on Him. He seems not to be under the influence of temporal decadence so that people as well as animals and planets, the living as well as the dead pay him some tribute. That being outlives decay imposed by death:

I will make the true poem of riches, / To earn for the body and the mind whatever adheres and goes forward / and is not dropt by death (p. 46)

As Whitman celebrates the body, he openly celebrates eternity and tells his inner mind which is to assimilate the perishable body of humans to the body that has been there since “The murky night-morning of wonder” (p. 270). He is so convinced that the human body deriving from the eternal body cannot perish that he dares ask: “How can the real body ever die and be buried? (p. 47). He goes on and answers: “Item for item it will elude the hands of the corpse-cleaners and pass to fitting spheres” (ibid). Death has no impact on the body that Whitman sings because it embeds a divine programme:

The divine list for myself or you or for any one making, / The face, the limbs, the index from head to foot, and what it arouses (LoG, p.107).

Whitman mentions “God” (p. 91), “Jehovah” “Allah” and the one “on the crucifix” (p. 92), referring to monolithic divinity, whose presence and action he feels and lauds:

Lover divine and perfect Comrade, / Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain, / Be thou

my God. / Thou, thou, the Ideal Man, / Fair, able, beautiful, content, and loving / Complete in body and dilate in spirit, / Be thou my God. (LoG, p. 297)

The divine creator is referred to as the “Ideal Man” whose beauty is perceptible though He is invisible. Whitman calls for a spiritual and symbolic reading of life and also of the forementioned passage. This reading can help discover this special being who is physically perfect and spiritually unmastered. In addition, through the title of the poem ‘Gods’, the reader can perceive the extension of this perfection to the beings deriving from the owner of physical beauty and spiritual purity. Going from this assumption, in the perfection of any individual and the glory of peoples, one has to detect the wonders of the Ideal Man:

All great ideas, the races’ aspirations, / All heroisms, deeds of rapt enthusiasts, / Be ye my Gods. (LoG, p. 297)

Each human body is a bit of the “complete in body” and each genius achievement in whatever sector is a particle of the “dilate in spirit”. Besides, in each human live the seeds of continuity, an embedded programme that aims at carrying on creation. From the Ideal Man comes any man and any woman from whom is supposed to come countless beings:

This is not only one man, this the father of those who shall be fathers in their turns, / In him the start of populous states and rich republics, / Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments. / How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries? (LoG, p. 114)

Limitless bodies would stem from a few. From a hint of perfection and completeness is supposed to come many other perfections that would traduce the sacredness of each existing body and the width of the One from whom all would derive. No body can claim whatever amount of autonomy from the original divine body since any fiber or substance from him or her delineates from the universal starting point that has transmitted its divinity to every body:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch’d from, / The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer, / This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds. (LoG, p. 73).

The sight of the human body is a permanent call for remembrance of a commonality among humans – a belief in the same origin – and for the practice of true religion through universal kinship. The belief that stands above all religious beliefs and other human creeds is the one that value people, the one that would transform flaws: “arm-pits aroma” into perfectible attitudes that would please God more than words of praise. Whatever humans embark on should be a process to uncover their divinity and a recall of their divine origin.

The poem titled ‘The base of all metaphysics’ (LoG, p. 141) sums up Whitman’s vision of the correlation between humanity and divinity. Whenever humans are mentioned, they recall the New Criticism assumption that they are symbols bearing: “connotation: ... implication, association, suggestion, and evocation of meanings and of shades of meaning.” (Tyson, 2006, p. 138). Hence, human beings connote created beings. Their existence also evokes their creator as long as their deeds and faith are triggered by love:

I see reminiscent to-day those Greek and Germanic systems, / See the philosophies all, Christian churches and tenets see, / Yet underneath Socrates clearly see, and underneath Christ the divine I see, / The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend, / Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parents, / Of city for city and land for land. (p. 141)

Love is the philosophy above all philosophies, the religion above all religions, and the belief above all beliefs. The suggested love is the one that aims at putting people together, at laying emphasis on belongingness and sameness. Everybody belongs to the unique creator, is made out of the same master for the sole purpose to carry on creation in the name of love, the supreme feeling that brings about perfection. This perfection that is at the core of this collection of poems, is the rationale of the song titled ‘I Sing the Body Electric’:

The love of the body of man or woman balks account, the body itself balks account, / That of the male is perfect, and that of the female is perfect. (109)

The love for the male or female body is due to its perfection. ‘I Sing the Body Electric’ is an ode to perfection, not as a theoretical concept but as the perception of a symbol. Every living body is a replication, an infinitesimal representation of perfection and eternity. Hence, loving the body of the male or the female should not have a mundane interpretation seeing that love as a fleshly attraction but as the enlightened spirit seeing through the existing bodies the hidden entity that called them into existence. In ‘Salut au Monde’, Whitman sends across a universal greeting in French coupled with a message. The message goes like this: “I see the place of the idea of the Deity incarnated by avatars in human forms” ((LoG, p. 174)). Human beings are incarnations of a divinity therefore they deserve all due respect and honor devoted to that deity.

In the forementioned poem, Whitman also mentions various wonderful places where nature testifies about the Creator whose craft is artistically displayed in the universe. Places like “the old empire of Assyria, ... of Persia, Of India, of Saukara” (p. 177) and ageless rivers:

the long river-stripes of the earth, ... the Amazon and the Paraguay, ... the four great rivers of China, the Amour, the Yellow River, the Yiang-tse, and the Pearl, the Seine..., ...the Danube, the Loire, the Rhone, and the Guadalquiver, ...the Volga, the Dnieper, the Oder, ... the Tuscan ...the Arno, ...the Venetian ... the Po (176)

are proofs of some genius. From the East to the West, the South to the North, a romantic soul like that of Whitman could infer the display of the work of an artist. The various deserts and the volcano-burned places all over the world stand as wonders in the body of the universe calling for reconsideration to see beauty where ugliness and commonness abound like Kristin:

I avoid looking in the mirror as much as I possibly can. When I do look, all I see are my imperfections—my long nose, my crooked teeth, my small breasts. Other people tell me I’m attractive, but I just don’t see it. (Engel, 2006, p. 9)

The poem ‘Facing West From California’s Shores’ (LoG, p. 130) is a report of a nameless

explorer who has enjoyed the wondrous parts of the world:

Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled; / For starting westward
from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere, / From Asia, from the north, from the God,
the sage, and the hero, / From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands,
/ Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd, / Now I face home again,
very pleas'd and joyous.

The exploration of the wonders is paired with a tribute to their author. The exploration of the whole earth is nothing compared to the creation process. Initiating all living things and beings and carrying them into their full existence is more noteworthy than visiting them all in every corner of the earth. Thus, the explorer of the entire world seems less heroic compared to the author from whom all these wonders derive. Obviously, the spectator would not be as outstanding as the performer of the main event. The tribute of the explorer to the author of all wondrous sites and things is endowed with more value since it stands as the testimony of a true witness. Nonetheless, a detail in the previous stanza reveals the fact that the creation is so varied that the exploration can only bring joy and happiness to the explorer given the wonders he has discovered.

The poem: "Song of the Open Road" adds on to the satisfaction of exploration by evoking the limitlessness of creation referred to as "inducements" (LoG, p. 188). Whoever embarks on exploring the earth shall get involved in an endless process. The tenth stanza of this poem:

Allons! the inducements shall be greater, / We will sail pathless and wild seas,
/ We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the Yankee clipper / speeds
by under full sail (LoG, p. 188)

involves the warning of the exploratory travel without ending. It is also a hint at the extent of the craft of the initiator of those things that motivate exploration. The warning goes on:

Allons! yet take warning! / He traveling with me needs the best blood, thews, endurance, /
None may come to the trial till he or she bring courage and health (ibid).

The qualities required from anyone indulged in exploring creation are openly stated in the passage. They are "threw", "endurance", and "courage". Therefore, the explorer shall show proof of vitality, strength, and determination to discover the numberless wonders in wilderness and virginal. The requirements from the potential explorer unveils the amount of energy or strength the creator made use of when displaying nature. Wonders are underseas, underground, hidden in deep forests, in water, in the air, in short in every ecosystem. It would require more than the extent of a life to see them all.

Contemplating humans in their diverse origins and genders, being enthralled by the many wonders in nature, and hearing different languages are testimonies for Whitman of the greatness of the Body who created them all. Diversity and intricateness of creation reveal the wit of that body and trigger the eulogy made in *LoG*. Meanwhile, each element of the creation deserves equal honor and respect in order to testify sameness in origin and substance.

3. Rejoicing in the Name of Sameness and Plurality

Whitman mentions many people and things as well as places that he considers as proofs of the greatness of their Creator. Besides, the reader of LoG can notice the call for equally valuing every created thing and body. On the basis of the divinity embedded in them since they are of divine origin, things and people should receive an equal amount of respect and consideration. This section aims at bringing out the literary aspects of *LoG* that go along with the call for equality which the author inherited from Enlightenment (Oates, 1998). If the first writings of Whitman could make seem a political disruptor and a sexual transgressor, he tries to amend that impression with the poem, "I hear It Was Charged Against Me". It reads:

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions, / But really I am neither for nor against institutions, / (What indeed have I in common with them? or what with the destruction of them?) / Only I will establish in the Manhattan and in every city of these States inland and seaboard, / And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the water, / Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument, / The institution of the dear love of comrades. (*LoG*, p. 153)

Whitman would like his reader to join him in exploring the wonderful institution of brotherly love leading to human experience. The conviction that people are equal and need one another for the balancing of the real institution that is human society stands above any selfish consideration. All people should come together to form a single human body. The project of *LoG* is summarized as follow:

What Whitman is seeking, poetically as well as politically, is an answer to the problematicity of unity. His project, which his language presents as a continuation of the federal project, is the unification of disparates, the forging of compositional, political, and social unities that manage to preserve the identities and autonomies of their constituents. (Harris, 2000, p. 30)

Indeed, before loving the inner self one should love the outer self or at least feel some attraction for it.

Also, all the parts of the human body are poems. They are sources of bewilderment so that they deserve a hymn like the collection *LoG*. Whitman lays emphasis on the beauty that comes from the unification of the different parts that form the human body:

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,) / I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that / they are my poems (*LoG*, p. 114-15)

Whitman lingers on the so many parts of the human body. He names them all over two pages. The reader is therefore aware of the variety of the parts of human body and could be amazed at their number and the talent of Whitman in being able to identify them all. In succeeding to name them, Whitman testifies that he is really interested in what he identifies as the topic or inspiration of his poems. This inspiration is colorblind and borderless. Despite the variety of

nations and states in the world, the love for the human body cannot be limited to any of them:

Have you ever loved the body of a woman? / Have you ever loved the body of a man? /
Do you not see that these are exactly the same to all in all nations and times all over the
earth? (LoG, p. 114)

A woman as well as a man can sing a love song for the opposite sex or even for the same sex in the name of the wonders that are displayed in the bodies. There is a suggested call to take part in a love procession that overlook ethnic and religious lines.

The first characteristic of this procession is the celebration of equality between races. In 'Salut au Monde', beside enumerating the wonders of the world, Whitman writes "And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth" (LoG, p. 179). These words of respect and courtesy meant for all races reveal a genuine equality. They are all from the same descent and deserve consideration and respect like the people of Whitman's race. This particular comparison between Blacks and Whites (the two dominant races at the period of Whitman) can back up the idea developed in 'Salut au Monde': "You dim-descended, black, divine-soul'd African, large, fine-headed, nobly-form'd, superbly destin'd, on equal terms with me!" (LoG, p. 180). The 'me' represents the entire white race. Whitman can see the beauty in body blackness as well as in a blacks' soul. Race prejudices pervading America as a slave nation cannot overshadow the artistic sensitivity of the author. As he proclaims himself: "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (LoG, p. 69), he warns the reader about his equal passion for what can be seen with the eyes and what can be felt with the artistic sensitivity.

The poem 'Song of Myself' is a mine of racial and sexual wonders. It is a move away from racism as well as sexism. In it, Whitman initiates a move from any hatred for Blacks in America and elsewhere in the world and he also makes a recognition of the genius embedded in women.

In fact, Whitman starts his praise for Blacks in 'Song of Myself'. A longer passage than that extracted from 'Salut au Monde' gives a detailed view of Whitman's opinion of Blacks, a valuing opinion perceptible in adjectives, adverbs and emphases:

The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags / underneath on its tied-over chain, / The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he / stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece, / His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-band, / His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat / away from his forehead, / The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his / polish'd and perfect limbs. (LoG, p. 61)

The negro who is described here is not idle and the work he does is not a slave work. Actually, the Black is not bending as a slave but he stands in the position of the manager, the initiator of action: "His glance is calm and commanding". And the text includes "his hat" as a commanding device that confirms that the author has operated a revolution as far as the social position of Blacks in America is concerned. Blackness does not amount to slavery in Whitman's view but to freedom and authority. First, the authority is perceptible in the look of the black character and it is paired with the majesty of his body and his actions. Nothing

falters in his body architecture. From the raw mud, the divinity has produced a black body that testifies perfection in its parts. Therefore, there is no shame in being black since black body is a display of divine perfection. Divinity has sown itself in the wonderful black body that, like a tinsel, reflects the electric flow that runs in it. Indeed, Whitman is a practical artist who “cannot answer the question of appearances or that of identity beyond the grave” (LoG, p. 140). But he is able to testify the wonders of a living human body, of black body. He would rather celebrate life instead of death. He is colorblind since color does not prevent him from uncovering the beauty in those that are not of his race.

Furthermore, the procession to which Whitman invites the reader of LoG in ‘I Sing the Body Electric’ takes him or her to the borders of gender relationships. With LoG, sex is not a determining item in assigning an individual his or her position in society. Both men and women deserve the praise song since they embed riches and are unique in their essence. The stand of this study is a rupture from the misogynistic approach most male writers are accused of:

In academic circles, as elsewhere, there is a kind of name-calling increasingly being used to keep young Black women in line. Often as soon as any young Black woman begins to recognize that she is oppressed as a woman as well as a Black, she is called a lesbian no matter how she identifies herself sexually (Lorde, 2007, p. 144).

The observation made by Audre Lorde does not refer to a state of fact proper to her generation; instead, it deals with a longstanding social practice one can date back to Whitman’s era or even before. Nevertheless, Whitman seems not to adhere to it as he proclaims:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man, / And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man, / And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men. (LoG, p. 69)

The author’s position towards women is two-folded and has a gradational trend. Whereas the two first verses proclaim the equality of men and women, the third one sets supreme greatness in the female that bore all men, be it the common majority or the outstanding few. Femaleness means more than a prejudice, rather a reason for feeling proud and an inspirational entity for the poet. Wonders dwell both in the male body as well as in the female one. Whitman affirms this for the man:

This man was a wonderful vigor, calmness, beauty of person, / The shape of his head, the pale yellow and white of his hair and beard, / the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes, the richness and breadth of his manners (LoG, p. 110).

And that for the woman:

This is the female form, / A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot, / It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction (LoG, p. 110).

The body of the man is not that of the woman. Each body entails distinct characteristics identifiable in the above passages. They revoke any possible confusion that could be at the

origin of any possible gender condescendence. In the nimbus enveloping female body lies the glory proper to her. She is more than a human being as she is assigned a divine artistic symbol, the nimbus, that inscribes her in the hall of fame of All Saints. Any woman deserves exaltation from what she is in essence and in flesh. She has a transcendental dimension that bestows upon her divine purity. In addition, her physical aspect confers her a form of magnetic influence onto men. The female human is therefore a compilation of sanctity and physical beauty.

Whitman's opinion about women forces the public to revise its position, its view of women. That revision is similar to that of the river in which Narcissus looked at his face in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*: "I weep for Narcissus, but I never noticed that Narcissus was beautiful. I weep because, each time he knelt beside my banks, I could see, in the depths of his eyes, my own beauty reflected" (1993, p. 11). The whole world has long been selfish in the way that it has always overlooked the deeds of women. Great men throughout history receive homage and national as well as international recognition but no one is able to guess the tribute they have paid their mothers. Henceforth, women should perceive their inner beauty in the eyes of the men and children they bear. The qualities of the offsprings are the testimonies of the potentialities of the mothers. This makes the first citation of this work true: "He who by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own" (LoG, p. 100)

This recognition stems from a desire to value female's contribution to life. Butler (2004) asserts that will as follow: "The Hegelian tradition links desire with recognition, claiming that desire is always a desire for recognition and that it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings" (p. 2). Nonetheless, the desire for female recognition does not originates from a woman nor from a female character but it is openly expressed by a male author who confirms another assumption: "one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another" (Ibid., p. 1). Whitman is doing the other gender not as the opposite gender but as a complementary one thanks to which creation is complete and rich. Helping to formalize this gender that stands as a bed of riches for the perfection of humankind uncovers the splendidity of creation.

Whitman's approach of the female gender for the celebration of plurality in creation is inscribed in the second category of gender definers, the one which aims at laying emphasis on the positiveness of the coexistence of female and male genders:

Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim. (Ibid)

And before all the possible bitterness that could originate from the frustration of sexism, 'I Sing the Body Electric' delivers encouraging words to women in the name of the set of their contributions to human welfare:

Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest, / You

are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul. / The female contains all qualities and tempers them, / She is in her place and moves with perfect balance, / She is all things duly veil'd, she is both passive and active, / She is to conceive daughters as well as sons, and sons as well as daughters. (LoG, p. 112)

The woman is the duct through which life moves from where it originates to become men or women. She is the entrance gate into any society and she is the bed of every moral, intellectual or any inherent attribute that helps accomplish outstanding things or contribute to the social welfare. One can dare say that every quality in every human being is an inheritance from his or her mother.

When studying Whitman's collection of poems, we remain in the vision of New Criticism. We "treat literature as a means for conveying normative moral and ethical ideals" (Castle, 2007, p. 122). The ethical ideals portrayed here are the one that make women perfect beings showing how encompassing they are among the whole creation.

All in all, whether the human is a man or a woman, they are of a unique origin openly revealed in the title of book V of LoG: 'Children of Adam' (p. 106). Adam is said to be the ancestor of all human beings according to the theory of creation. The reference to this ancestry compels a reflection on the sameness in origin and in mission. Ethnicity and sexual belongingness cannot overshadow the ancestral community of every human being invited to take part in the praise for himself and for the creator:

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear, ... / The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing, / Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else, / The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, / Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs. (p. 33)

4. Conclusion

Numberless works have portrayed *Leave of Grass* as an academically and artistically subversive work that goes against prior theoretical norms and literary movements. Those works inscribed in the Enlightenment literary movement stand on its literary norms to foster their criticism of LoG. They have seen the literary failure of Whitman to abide by the literary expectations of Enlightenment for he relied on his feelings instead of his ability for reasoning to reassess social life as required by romanticism.

Nevertheless, New Criticism has allowed the analysis of LoG through other literary lenses that help us view the collection of poems as an evolutionary work, a groundbreaking one that comprises anti-racist and anti-sexist poems. LoG is mostly a celebration of life, going from the igniting divine will to all the deriving creatures that are visible elements of the profoundness of the Ideal Man. Every living thing and people is a minimal amount of the wit of the Creator in whom perfection and eternity prevail. Through the diverse and rich creation portrayed in many poems of the collection, Whitman has displayed the limitless genius of the Creator. The work is not the continuum of a religious campaign but a homage to the Origin of everything. It is also a celebration of human equality whatever the ethnic or the sexual group.

The uniqueness of origin compels the reassessment of every human being. It also makes compulsory the respect of love as a unique institution viable for social life.

Femaleness is widely celebrated as its qualities are uncommon, far beyond those of maleness. Though outstanding male names are cited in the poems, one has to bear in mind the noteworthy passage: “And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.” (LoG, p. 69). We can therefore perceive a social layout that places women just below the Creator and above men.

Whitman has long defeated sexism and racism and has suggested the true religion that is love between humans as a solution to social tensions and a call for acknowledgement for those who endeavor for our existence and happiness.

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Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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