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**Butterflies in the Bards' Beard:
The Entanglement of Whitman's and
Lorca's Poetics of Masculinity**

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Abstract

The object of study of this end-of-degree project is to compare Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855-1892) and Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* (1929) through the perspective of masculinity studies. I intend to examine the connections between the two poets in relation to masculinity, as well as how these are reflected in the textual dimension. In doing so, I will demonstrate that Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* functions as a response to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, allowing for a poetic dialogue between the two authors through which the former partly manages to come to terms with his homosexuality. Throughout this paper, I will also study the concepts of "hegemonic and alternative masculinities" as well as "homoeroticism" and how they are reflected on the aforementioned poetic works.

Moreover, I will analyze the form and content of both *Leaves of Grass* and *Poeta en Nueva York* seeking to delve deeper into the poetic visions of Whitman and Lorca, exploring the ways in which their works intertwine and inform one another. By uncovering the similarities, differences, and hidden subtleties that characterize their poetics, I hope to gain a major understanding of the intricate and multifaceted nature of masculinity as conveyed through poetry.

Regarding the methodology I followed for the elaboration of this dissertation, I first conducted a close reading of both works, selecting the most relevant and appropriate texts for my study. To examine *Leaves of Grass*, I focused on the poems in the "Children of Adam" and "Calamus" clusters, as well as the poem "Song of Myself." From *Poeta en Nueva York*, I selected poems that complemented other works produced during Lorca's trip to New York, such as *El público* (1929). Through them, I will highlight the significant change that takes place in Lorca's writing, who, from his reading of Whitman and taking him as a referent, projects his homoerotic desire in entirely new directions.

Next, I gathered information on masculinity, gender, and queer studies as well as literary criticism from academic sources, such as *JSTOR* or *Dialnet* and books from the UDC's Faculty of Philology library. Having consulted studies by scholars like Josep M. Armengol, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, and Ángel Sahuquillo, I applied the theoretical framework to the works of Whitman and Lorca, establishing a comparison between them.

In terms of structure, this paper has two main parts: “Men of their Times: Modern Masculinities?” and “Beyond the Ode: Poetic Encounters among Leaves of Grass.” The first part examines the construction of hegemonic masculinity and how Whitman's and Lorca's writings relate to it. The second part focuses on the male body as a central theme in both authors' works and how they use their own individual selves to validate sexual identities that diverge from social norms. The paper compares the optimism in Whitman's poetry to the fatalism in Lorca's and how they interact and complement each other. I draw on various texts to illustrate these points and reach the conclusion that, as Whitman and Lorca explore masculinity and sexuality in their poetry, their poetics become intertwined, resulting in a deep and enduring lyrical conversation.

Introduction

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets
under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.
In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit
supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!
What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles
full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!
—and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?
(Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California”)

Two titans of poetry such as Walt Whitman and Federico García Lorca are separated by several decades and the Atlantic Ocean, yet they are united by something much more profound: the entanglement of their poetics that delve into masculinity and sexuality. In this study, I will address this particular connection that draws both of them to reflect on the complexity of masculine identity in modern society. To do so, I take as references Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855-1892) and Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* (1929) to analyze them through the lens of masculinity studies. In this introduction, I will first elaborate on the reasons that led me to select this poetry works as the objects of my dissertation. Subsequently, I will outline the objectives of this study and the methodology I employed. I will conclude by delineating the organization of this project.

As for the reasons that led me to approach the poetics of Whitman and Lorca, it is above all my interest in those authors who risk, with courage and mastery, to speak of the unspeakable. Although both poets are among the most celebrated literary figures of their respective cultures, on many occasions, some of the most beautiful and profound messages of their poems have been ignored for decades. Indeed, there has been an exercise—consciously or not—of forgetfulness with respect to both figures that has tried to obviate, if not erase, a marked vindication of their sexual identity in many of their works. Both Lorca and Whitman succeeded

in making their poetry an art with which to reconcile themselves and others with their own homosexuality, in order to challenge a masculine norm and tradition that oppresses and excludes them. Dissatisfied with their consideration as “others,” both are part of a decades-long struggle to find a new way of living, writing and being. As such, the aim of this project is to delve further into the poetic visions of Whitman and Lorca examining how their works intersect, blend together, and influence one another. My objective is to acquire—by identifying the similarities, distinctions, and subtle nuances that define their poetic styles—a profound comprehension of the complex and diverse portrayals of masculinity that are conveyed through poetry. Therefore, to corroborate my thesis that Lorca partially accepts his homosexuality through poetic dialogue with Whitman, in this dissertation I focus on exploring the relationships between the aforementioned poets in terms of masculinity and sexuality, and how these themes are reflected in their works. Through the study of their poetry, I seek to demonstrate how Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* functions as a response to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

As for the methodology used, the first step was the close reading of the works of both authors, as well as a selection of the most outstanding and appropriate texts for my study. During this reading process, I took notes of some topics or ideas that could be useful to me and highlighted the fragments that I could quote in order to analyze them. In the case of *Leaves of Grass*, I decided to treat in greater depth those poems where the homoerotic theme is more evident, in particular, those collected in the clusters “Children of Adam” and “Calamus.” Nevertheless, I also addressed some of Whitman's most significant compositions, such as “Song of Myself,” where he makes clear the intention and methods of his poetic endeavor. As far as *Poeta en Nueva York* is concerned, I wanted to focus my efforts beyond the obvious references to Whitman to highlight the significant change that takes place in Lorca's writing. I therefore decided to select those texts that complement the reading of other works produced during

Lorca's trip to New York, such as *El público* (1929), and offer a broader and more detailed analysis.

The next step was to gather information from scholarly sources on gender, masculinity, and queer studies. To do so, I resorted to academic websites such as *JSTOR* and *Dialnet* as well as to different books available in the library of the UDC's Faculty of Philology. I draw on studies by Raewyn Connell, Josep M. Armengol, Emilio Peral Vega, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, and Ángel Sahuquillo, among others. With all the necessary information gathered for my research, I set out to write a study that proves my thesis establishing a comparison between Whitman and Lorca.

In terms of structure, this paper is divided into two main parts, which are further subdivided into several sections. Part 1, titled “Men of their Times: Modern Masculinities?,” delves into the theoretical basis of the cultural construction of masculinity to examine Whitman's and Lorca's positioning of the male hegemony of their respective eras. In subsection 1.1 “What It Takes to Be a Man: The (Re)Construction of Masculinity,” I study the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a paradigm of the masculine ideal and its relation to alternative masculinities that differ from this norm. Next, subsection 1.2 “‘The Bard of Democracy’ and ‘*El maricón de la pajarita*’: The Poets in their Contexts” offers a more detailed explanation of the sociohistorical circumstances in which Whitman and Lorca write and how these shape their writing.

In the second part of this project “Beyond the Ode: Poetic Encounters among Leaves of Grass,” I concentrate on the literary analysis of Whitman's and Lorca's works. In it, I gather important considerations regarding the concept that both authors have of the male body, which is the axis around which their poetic production revolves. I also address the importance of Whitman and Lorca choosing to make themselves objects of their poetry as a method to validate

sexual identities that diverge from the established social norm. In 2.2 “Songs of Oneself: Male Voices and Bodies at the Center of the Poems,” my focus is on how Whitman's optimism and Lorca's fatalism interact. Thus, I use various texts to exemplify how while Whitman succeeds in transcending gender and sexuality binaries in his poetry, Lorca suffers due to his impossibility of achieving this ideal. Finally, I end this final year dissertation by providing a few conclusions, which reaffirm the accomplishment of my goals.

1. Men of their Times: Modern Masculinities?

Civilizations across the world, especially those with Western origins, have historically been structured around gender dynamics, which are traditionally divided into masculine and feminine. Said dynamics, which are both in external and internal, shape every aspect of life in society. While feminist and LGTBI+ movements, along with the emergence of gender and sexuality studies, have brought attention to and questioned these relationships, the cultural construction of masculinity and its literary representation has received less attention. As I argue, this lack of exploration has limited our ability to fully comprehend and reflect on the works of authors such as Walt Whitman and Federico García Lorca, resulting in the neglect, misrepresentation, or misunderstanding of some of their most profound messages. Although the study of women's and LGTBI+ people's history, roles, and challenges has expanded, the full scope of literature and art remains incomplete without examining the cultural construction of masculinity.¹

In this section, I will propose a theoretical basis built around crucial facts about masculinity and its condition of historical and social construction in order to examine the positioning of both authors regarding the male hegemony of their respective eras. Thus, a fundamental question must be raised: what does it mean to be a man (normative or not) in Whitman's and Lorca's times?²

1.1. What It Takes to Be a Man: The (Re)Construction of Masculinity

As gender studies have been demonstrating for decades, the construction and persistence of heteropatriarchal societies, such as Walt Whitman's America or Federico García Lorca's

¹ For the purpose of this paper, I will understand “modern” in its broad sense, as non-continuing projects of the previous tradition and reformulating pretensions of the pre-established codes. From this perspective, Whitman and Lorca can be considered modern poets insofar as their works reflect rejected and socially oppressed experiences of their times, which have gained—at least partial—acceptance today.

² In the appendix, I offer a brief summary of my own in the form of a timeline with some of the most outstanding aspects of the authors' lives.

Spain, is based on two fundamental and interconnected systems. On the one hand, the psychological, material, and moral domination of women through control of their bodies and identities in order to convert them into subordinate objects; on the other, the regard of man as the sole subject of History as the center of culture and civilization. Both mechanisms are indeed oppressive since they imply the creation of discourses that define what an individual normatively not only “is,” but “must be.” These discourses, by which masculinity and femininity are defined, are intrinsically historical³ insofar as they are shaped and represented by specific social, cultural, and political influences and circumstances, while also occurring in all spheres of life in society.

In order to perpetuate a system that privileges male-female identities and relationships, the dominant discourse often marginalizes and stigmatizes non-heteronormative identities and relationships. Hence, the oppressive framework of heteropatriarchal contexts imposed by gender norms also manifests itself in the suppression of homosexual persons and their experiences, as gay people are expected to adhere to social expectations rooted in a heterosexual orientation.

Consequently, considering the protagonist role that the patriarchal system has given to men, it is convenient to consider the implications of a “hegemonic masculinity” present in all ages (Connell 832). For Raewyn Connell “hegemonic masculinity” refers to the socially and culturally generalized idea of that which is representative of a man, not as the “statistical norm”, but as “the embodiment of the most honored way of being a man” (Connell 832) at a specific time. The very existence of this hegemony means that indifference to it is impossible. Namely, all men, in one way or another, are obliged to define and position themselves regarding hegemonic masculinity, whether to actively impose and vindicate it, to passively maintain it, or

³ This implies that they are direct products of the socio-historical context in which they are embedded and that, given their temporary and socially constructed nature, they can and will be continually challenged, revised, and changed.

to challenge it. Consequently, the dominant pattern generates not only “a set of role expectations or an identity” (Connell 832), but a certain way of acting: a determined way of being, living, loving and, of course, also of writing.

According to Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, the hegemonic male model appears “as an essentially white, Western, rational, calculating, individualistic, violent and heterosexual configuration of practices” (347). Said practices, when contested by “alternative or subordinate masculinities” (Demetriou 342), will result in important individual and collective frictions. The premise is clear: to be accepted in the prevailing social order, a man must behave in accordance with the established parameters of manhood. In this way, the idea of masculinity includes certain sexual, social and class behaviors, which are deemed indispensable and innate to men, as opposed to other traits. Demetriou will reassess Connell's ideas on the interplay between dominant and subordinate masculinities, transcending a binary perspective. For the scholar, the division can never be understood as total, since the hegemonic is defined in opposition to the rejected and vice versa. It is precisely from these tensions that intermediate spaces of synergy are created, vital for the transformation and dynamism of both.

Although all these considerations have originally sociological roots, I consider it opportune to recall them in the case of Whitman's and Lorca's poetics. In both poets, the interaction between the spheres of “the masculine” and “the feminine”, as well as their occasional antagonism and what “lies in between”, are recurrent aspects. Likewise, as I will explore below, considerations on virility, sex between men and so on, are often the subject of their poetics.

1.2. “The Bard of Democracy” and “*El maricón de la pajarita*”: The Poets in their Contexts

In 1855, when readers acquired the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, what they encountered in the book and the initial major impact, prior to the refreshing versification or the transgressive poetic voice, was the unusual picture of the author on the frontispiece. Far from the usual portraits of XIXth century authors, the image with which Walt Whitman presents himself to his readers is that of a working-class man in a firm yet unceremonious posture. His shirt is slightly unbuttoned, one hand is tucked in his trouser pocket, and his brimmed hat reclines on his head with a certain air of indifference. Not forgetting the most famous beard⁴ of American literature, which would become increasingly luxuriant throughout the years, transformed into an indispensable element in consolidating the poet's image as a wise prophetic bard.⁵

Both visually and poetically, what Whitman constructs for himself in *Leaves of Grass* is the testimony of a paradigm shift in the conception of man, in particular, of the American man. If the self-described “bard of democracy,” who pretends to set himself up as the poet of the people of a new nation, introduces himself in such a concrete way, it is due to his ability to grasp the zeitgeist of his time while successfully becoming its spokesman. During the XIXth century, after the United States gained its independence, the incipient American nation, seeking to distance itself from its historical past, gave birth to a new type of man. As Josep M. Armengol explains, the “new American hero embodied the specifically American ideological values of

⁴ The importance and significance of the beard should not be underestimated in any case since male facial hair has historically been a determining factor of virility. As Michael Kimmel points out, during the 1840s and 1850s, beards and mustaches proliferated in the United States as a means of enhancing masculinity (44). Indeed, Whitman himself sings of the virile virtues of facial hair in a few lines (which would be deleted in editions after 1871) of “Song of Myself”: “Washes and razors for fofoos—for me freckles and a bristling beard” (Ferry 46).

⁵ Probably, rather than the depiction of the young, working-class Whitman, it is his mature, aged, and canonized version that had the greatest impact on the cultural imaginary of later poets. As Ed Folsom argues, “Whitman enters Spanish poetry as an old man—not the brash, youthful comrade of 1855, but as a wizened prophet, and as such he falls naturally into the Hispanic tradition of the prophet/ bard” (47).

independence, autonomy, individualism, and self-sufficiency” (“Politics of Masculinity” 77). Indeed, the bourgeois, patriarchal and nationalist ideology that motivates the construction of nation-states (whose origin is also found at the time and of which America is arguably the first representative) will be rooted in the hegemonic masculinity of the moment. Therefore, the figure of the athletic and vibrant “Heroic Artisan,” which Kimmel defines as “the mythical ideal of the honest, hardworking man whose virtue stems from his commitment to industry” (91), becomes the predominant archetype of masculinity of the century.

New times and a new nation demand a new kind of men and it is precisely to them that Whitman addresses his chants. For the bard, the success and hope of the American “athletic democracy” (“To Foreign Lands” l. 2, 5) rests on the shoulders of “adhesiveness,” loving male comradeship based on homosexual intimacy and the physical and spiritual union between men, as it is manifest in the ensuing lines:

I will plant companionship thick as trees along the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.” (“For You O Democracy” l. 6-9: 150).

The situation of Federico García Lorca, in the Spain of the early XXth century, was—simultaneously—significantly different and dangerously similar from that of the poet from Paumanok. Coming from a wealthy family in the zealously Catholic rural Andalusia, Lorca suffered throughout his life from the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of what he called “the worst bourgeoisie in Spain” (qtd. in Gibson, *Vida* 256, my translation). Although the poet would live during one of the most progressive periods of the country during the Second Spanish Republic, the conception of hegemonic masculinity would be anchored in the traditional values of aggressiveness, stoicism, and heterosexuality.

While Whitman would celebrate intimacy and exalt the passion of his sexual desire, Lorca would live for years with the self-repression and suffering resulting from the impossibility of reconciling his homosexuality with the values of an intransigent society. The latter poet would be constantly attacked and judged because of his sexuality and mannerisms. At school, children would call him “Federica” (Gibson, *De Fuente Vaqueros* 95); right-wing magazines would call him “*Loca*” when referring to him, and even at the Residencia de Estudiantes, *alma mater* of the future Spanish intelligentsia, he would be nicknamed “*El maricón de la pajarita*” by his friends and classmates. All this without forgetting, of course, his murder at the hands of pro-Franco sympathizers shouting “¡*maricón!*” According to Gibson's writing: “Angel Saldaña was sitting in the bar Pasaje when Trescastro swaggered in and exclaimed for everyone to hear: “We have just killed Federico García Lorca. We left him in a ditch, and I fired two bullets into his arse for being a queer” (136, my translation). Though his homosexuality is probably only one of the many reasons why fascists would want to end his life, I consider it highly representative of the society of the time that it is the argument used by his murderers as a justifiable cause of his death.

García Lorca is affected by a “sexual and mental social repression” (José Ortega 354) that will lead him to internalize the hegemonic homophobia against the effeminate stereotype of the gay man (understood as unmasculine). Indeed, Ángel Sahuquillo collects unpublished texts of the poet himself in which he demonstrates the struggle within himself between his secret passions and the social norm: “*La carne de mi cuerpo tiene su gran amiga la fantasía, y entre las dos engendran mis penas y mis visiones de lo que no quisiera ser ... pero manda la carne. Los amores despreciados de mi corazón son los que amo... ¡Cuándo terminará mi calvario carnal!* (57).

To all this, we must add the profound personal and aesthetic crisis that the Granada-born artist underwent upon his arrival in New York in 1929, which would forever mark his artistic

and vital trajectory. The trip to America, which will also include a visit of several months to Havana, will be determined by a total ambivalence in the poet's feelings. On the one hand, Lorca is faced with the inhospitable landscape of the New York metropolis, which strikes and overwhelms him on equal terms, always haunted by the nostalgic shadow of his home. On the other hand, he experiences for the first time an air of true freedom that helps him redefine his own masculinity as he comes into contact with the emerging gay scene and the independent theater of the Harlem Renaissance (Peral Vega 108). As a result of the dual American experience, Lorca would produce such landmark works as *El público* or *Poeta en Nueva York* by finding not only a new way to write about his desire, but also to live it.

2. Beyond the Ode: Poetic Encounters among Leaves of Grass

The exploration of Whitman's and Lorca's poetic representations of the male body opens up a profound inquiry into issues of masculinity, sexuality, and self-expression. Any artistic expression that seeks to question, defy, and dismantle the oppressive systems that subjugate an individual becomes intrinsically revolutionary insofar as it questions the established social norm. Whitman and Lorca's deliberate decision to become objects of their poetry is of great significance, as it not only challenges the prevailing heteronormativity, but also becomes a powerful method of affirming and validating their non-conformist sexual identities.

This rebellious zeal involves linking the profoundly individual with the extensively collective. To this end, the role of the body, specifically of the male body, will be substantially important. Whitman's transcendentalist ideas, which will permeate the Hispanic avant-garde and modernity, reaching Lorca, will understand the human body (and all the materiality associated with it) as something essentially beautiful, cultural, and singable. In "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," the American author, reflecting on *Leaves of Grass*, delves into the consolidation of a poetic, historical and political identity (meant as an activity of the *polis*) on the basis of the incarnation of these ideals: "to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic Personality in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of current America" (qtd. in Killingsworth 13).

Ahead of their times in an unprecedented breakthrough, Whitman and Lorca realize that, following Armengol, "social existence is always material and therefore embodied" (*Embodying Masculinities* 2). As Todd Reeser argues, "the body remains the most visibly gendered social and cultural construction" as "some of the most obvious social divisions such as race and nationality, age and physical appearance, religion, or class are also written on the body" (91).

It is by no means a coincidence that the constitutive features of any type of masculinity (hegemonic, alternative, or in between) discussed in the previous section are mostly body oriented. Hence the importance it will acquire on in the poems of the authors studied, for if “the body is made, not born” (Orbach 171) the artistic ability to define it in one’s own terms will be fundamental. A large part of the identity of each individual, as well as that of the social and cultural group, rests on the body. It is, at the same time, deeply intimate and personal and constantly exposed to collective performativity. This is why the body can go beyond the merely physical to encompass artistic and political dimensions.

Most significantly, for both authors attention is paid specifically to one's own body, containing all the passions, needs, ambitions, and desires that traditional lyric poetry had usually expressed in a veiled form. From the individual experience, from the poetic matter created from oneself, Whitman and Lorca open themselves to the collective, to the universal, yet always turning their gaze on themselves, as shall be studied in the following sections. If we focus, for example, on the poetic production of the Andalusian author, we can detect a noteworthy turn à la Whitman, even if we simply look at the titles of the works. Contrary to *Canciones* (1927), *Poema del cante jondo* (1921) or *Romancero gitano* (1928), in which the poet hides himself behind literary masks, Lorca chooses to title the compendium of his American experience as *Poeta en Nueva York*, placing himself (increasingly less masked) at the center of his text. By identifying himself more and more directly with the poetic voice of his lyric, Lorca tries to manage and express through his writing the internal conflicts about his homosexuality that constantly unsettle him.

Since both Whitman and Lorca place their individual selves at the epicenter of their poetics and given the first one’s influence on the latter, it is possible to unravel a poetic dialogue between the two across time. In the following sections, via further analysis of the literary aspects of both works, I will demonstrate that *Poeta en Nueva York* can be read as a response

to *Leaves of Grass*. Understanding both as artistic responses to modernity that inexorably connect the individual with the collective, I will assess how the optimistic transcendentalism of Whitman and the violent fatalism of Lorca interact, collide, and complement each other.

2.1 Songs of Oneself: Male Voices and Bodies at the Center of the Poems

In this section, I will address how Whitman places the living, desiring, sexual body at the center of much of his poetry, offering an idea of love between equals beyond dichotomies of gender and sexuality. Moreover, I will address how Lorca sees in the American poet a virile figure where desire for other men converges with the will for social equality. Notwithstanding, if Lorca's trip to New York and Havana is marked by the internal tension of his repressed and hidden homosexuality, the echoes of Whitman's poetry will allow him, for the first time, to speak of his secret passions with renewed honesty.

Poetic ecstasy, epic vindication, identification, communion and, above all, a celebration of the self and the universal converge in the first verses of the revolutionary “Song of Myself”: “I celebrate myself and sing myself / And what I assume, you shall assume / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (ll. 1-3, 26). Taking as his starting point the classical scheme of the iambic pentameter, Whitman soon adopts long flowing verses of variable rhyme overflowing with boundless energy. Besides, whereas other poets would invoke the muses and other providences, Whitman elevates himself as his own muse. Walt (“I”) sings Whitman (“myself”) because he—I argue—discovers himself as beautiful and poetizable. The poet is not only the source and origin of the poem: he is the poem itself. The imposing poetic voice of the “I” that extends throughout the text, capable of “containing multitudes” (l.1326) experiencing everything and addressing both the whole world and the individual reader at the same time, is materialized in a concrete identity in section 24. In the lines following, “Song of Myself” becomes a glorification of Whitman as a whole, a celebration of his soul and his body: “Walt

Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding” (ll. 497-8, 45).

As the vast and ethereal “I” reveals himself to be Whitman, he offers us one of the keys to his poetry, defined by Karen Sanchez-Eppler as the “poetics of embodiment” (52). In the previous verses, the ineffable and the lyrical are personified in a purely carnal and mundane body. The unembraceable poetic voice that hitherto dominated the poem—traditionally associated with the idea of soul—does not simply need this corporeality to exist, but it is an indispensable part of it. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always presented a radical separation between soul and body. According to this division, the soul is pure and divine; therefore, aspiring to encounter the beautiful and the sublime, only to be weighed down by the earthly and sinful body. Whitman dismisses this opposition in his poems by claiming that both body and soul are beautiful because they are part of the same entity (St. David 34): “Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean / Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest” (“Song of Myself” l. 57-8, 28). Rejecting the mentioned division, the poet integrates both realities into one and reinterprets the body as something beautiful to celebrate in his poems, which entails a redefinition of poetry itself. Consequently, the exaltation Whitman sings of his own body in “Song of Myself” extends to all those he addresses in his poetry: to all men and women, to all readers. As demonstrated by the bard in “I Sing the Body Electric,” their exquisite qualities can be crafted into verse (see ll. 6-10, 81).

There is so much beauty in the body, especially in the male body, that flesh and poetry become interchangeable. In the following lines, the “ideal of poetry incarnate finds its maximum splendor” (Sanchez-Eppler 53) when the poet suggests that a beautiful body is more expressive and powerful than the best of poems: “But the expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face... / It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist

and knees, dress does not hide him... / To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more" ("Song of Myself" ll.12-5, 81).

In the hymn to the human body par excellence, Whitman gives men's body a redefined and innate beauty not even art can equate. His understanding of the poet's role, even more of a modern bard, is one of mediation between opposites and dissimilarities. A positive and healing attitude that seeks to bridge the apparent divisions between the individual and the social in a clear echo of the ideal of radical democracy. Because the poet can access a privileged middle ground from which he might bridge the vexing differences (Sanchez-Eppler 51), Whitman will speak from both sides: "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul / The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue" ("Song of Myself" l.222-4, 43). The poet's mission is not simply to sing one and the other but to overcome the differentiation and understand them as a unit. This is the fundamental strategy of the Whitmanian poetics of embodiment, always in search of "the perfect melding of opposites into a complete undifferentiated oneness" (Sanchez-Eppler 51). Whitman will explore this idea of reconciling union through sexual embrace. In section 5 of "Song of Myself," he commits the poetic audacity of portraying an erotic encounter between his body and soul in which gender remains undetermined by the absence of masculine or feminine pronouns (see ll. 87-90, 29).

The poetic endeavor to unite the unsimilar is not limited to reconciling body and soul. The bard speaks out to equalize the masculine and the feminine by proclaiming, in section 21 of "Song of Myself" that "I am the poet of the woman the same as the man" (l. 425, 43). Just as Whitman could position himself between the material and the evanescent to make them one due to poetry, he renders sexual union as the intermediate position where mediation between the different—the masculine and the feminine—is possible. As noted by Steven Herrmann: "Whitman saw sex as a combination of masculine and feminine polarities, active and passive,

supple and strong, receptive and interpenetrating in both men and women” (21). The bard uses the absolute potential of poetic expression to propose a redefined masculinity in which the masculine and the feminine conjugate in an intermediate state. If masculinity tends to be defined in opposition to the feminine, Whitman chooses for himself a “third potential standpoint” (Herrmann 22) where both converge. Thanks to his evocative language and constant poetic games, the poet will play throughout *Leaves of Grass* with the “fluidity, substitutability and indeterminacy of his masculine identity and sexuality” (Moon 38), remaining permanently undefined and unconstrained.

In multiple poems, Whitman manages to have a male poetic voice deeply attached to the poet (the famous “I” permeating all of *Leaves of Grass*) intermingled with a female point of view in the first or third person. Some critics have considered that the bard simply intends to execute an exercise in self-censorship that allows him to express a “homosexual attraction through a heterosexual medium” (St John 35). Yet, I argue Whitman's proposal is more radical, as most readers would not draw a heterosexual reading from *Leaves of Grass*. The theory that Whitman intends to “attenuate” or “disguise” his admiration for other men is incompatible with the exalting homoeroticism exuded by the clusters of “Children of Adam” or “Calamus.”⁶ What Whitman achieves, in my opinion, through a difficult and transgressive poetic game, is to adopt a fluid position between the masculine and the feminine that allows him to present himself beyond the gender and sexual dichotomy, and which—I believe—could be called queer (“I Sing the Body Electric,” see l. 121-4, 85).

⁶ I do not mean in any way to deny that Whitman ignored or disdained the danger that negative and homophobic reactions to his work would bring to his person. Indeed, as Justin Kaplan demonstrates, *Leaves of Grass* was described as a “joke or aberration” (11), an “obscene” (20) work “of the whorehouse order” (11), “indecent,” (26) “offensive and morbidly erotic” (41). I argue that the poet, rather than merely concealing his desires to evade censorship and societal disapproval, bravely endeavors to immerse himself in significantly profounder poetic realms by exploring his passions.

In the poem “The Sleepers,” Whitman's ethereal poetic voice merges with the night to penetrate into the slumber of the sleepers and become both dreamer and dreamed: “I wander all night in my vision / Stepping with light feet swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping / Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers” (ll. 1–5, 356). The “I” is in a constant state of contradiction, fluidity and movement reiterated by the constant gerunds so that nothing is permanently fixed and union is possible. Sheltered by the enveloping darkness of the night, the poetic voice mediates between opposites and dissolves their heterogeneity. This synergy becomes total in the erotic description of a sexual encounter between a man and a woman. As Sanchez-Eppler explains, Whitman's writing “offers the body not as an irreducible and irreconcilable sign of absolute difference—male versus female—but instead as the site where difference meets” (50).

Due to the poetic atmosphere, the scene features an “I” simultaneously male and female. Within it now coexist three identities and their desirous impulses: that of the woman, the lover, and the Whitmanian voice. Through the image of the night and the erotic union of amorous and sexual desire that, with their “elusive intangibility diffuse all differences” (Sanchez-Eppler 54), the three merge into one. In the following verses, readers are unable to specify to whom “the hands” that are “spread forth” and passing “in all directions” belong. The ambiguity of the night and the poetic language have converged to defy all distinction and create, through a revolutionary amalgamation, a new identity, neither masculine nor feminine, whose undifferentiation persists beyond the apothotic and ecstatic end of the section:

My hands are spread forth, I pass them in all directions,
I would sound up the shadowy shore to which you are journeying.
Be careful darkness! already what was it touch'd me?
I thought my lover had gone, else darkness and he are one,
I hear the heart-beat, I follow, I fade away. (ll. 55–59, 368).

Whitman pursues a similar approach in section 11 of “Song of Myself,” known as “The Twenty-Ninth Bather.” In this passage, Whitman's poetic voice describes a mature twenty-eight-year-old woman who, from the window of her house, desirously observes twenty-eight⁷ boys nude-bathing in the nearby river: “Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore / Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly / Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome” (ll. 199-203, 34). In the opening lines, the narrator merely mimics the woman's voyeuristic behavior and introduces readers to two distinct spheres. The verse distribution places male and female in a “strong and direct appositional relationship” (Moon 39). On the one hand, there is the very spatial separation between the house and the river, the age difference between characters (mature women v. young men) and even a “class and economic restriction” (Moon 40) marked by the limitations of a bourgeois woman's life (“She owns the fine house” l. 202, 34). Whitman performs a sharp rhetorical maneuver here inverting the gender-stereotyped images of the mature man spying on the young woman bathing (like the infamous biblical scene of Susanna and the Elders). By doing so, the poet reaffirms his contention that desire, like love, is common to all human beings regardless of their nature.

In the previous lines, the masculine appears defined in positive terms (“so friendly”) with young men in total freedom and enjoyment while the feminine concentrates the negative charge (“so lonesome”) as the woman is constrained by both privilege and deprivation (“hides and richly drest” l. 203, 34). The seemingly irreconcilable opposition introduced in the poem is bridged only by an irresistible and dominating eagerness that renders her capable of breaking through the threshold of her window—and along it, the restrictions of class and gender—to join the bathers. At least spiritually, or rather, poetically, by simultaneously managing to stay at home and splash in the water among the men:

⁷ The reiteration of the number twenty-eight has been a cause of regular debate among Whitman scholars (Pollak 115). I would opt for the hypothesis of the menstrual cycle, which establishes direct connections with core elements of the poem: sexual desire, the presence of fluids and a cycle of rebirth.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room
Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them. (ll. 204-9, 34).

At this juncture, the section's pivotal moment occurs, wherein the central idea of the poem is focused and concentrated as Whitman's poetic voice acquires here powers beyond the descriptive. Through the woman's position of desire and observation, the narrator assumes an active role in the poem itself, so that he becomes, together with the woman, the twenty-ninth bather in what Moon defines as a “grammatically transvestite moment” (53). The fusion of the male speaker and the female observer is a perfect example of the poetically attainable middle ground, which Whitman exposes through the image of the sexual encounter. Most significantly, the female identity and pronouns disappear altogether from the rest of the poem: “An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies, / It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs” (ll. 210-2, 34).

As if it were a secular and fluvial baptism, the masculine Whitmanian voice and the woman in the house are reborn in the waters of the river as the figure of the twenty-ninth bather, both male and female (or even queer). In this section, Whitman demonstrates to be a pioneer of Queer Theory by claiming the androgynous in every person. It is no coincidence that this composite image of a utopian representation of masculinity emerges in a natural environment marked by fluidity. Just as the night of “The Sleepers” auspices the power of poetry to merge the different, the constant movement of the river conveys the sensation of fluidity and immobility that erases the barriers between male and female. In an in-between fluid space, the erotic union of all the bathers occurs. Whitman has blurred all differences to the point that gender and sexual borders vanish before a presence that makes the men's bellies “bulge” as pregnant and upon which “they souse with spray” (“Song of Myself” l. 213-5, 34). By making the men—and the readers—unaware and indifferent of who bathes with them, Whitman

“destabilizes the genders of both the source and object(s) of the erotic gaze” (Moon 45). This results in “projecting a space in which both women and men are free not only to direct such a gaze at (other) men but also to fulfill the desires that impel the gaze” (Moon 46). In a puritanical American society that condemns the expression of sexual desire and the feelings for other's bodies, Whitman claims for his poetry the power to channel the repressed voices of the so-called others. As such, he sings in “Song of Myself”: “Through me forbidden voices / Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil / Voices indecent by me clarified and transigur'd” (ll. 516-8, 46).

Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, the poet argues that sexual desire for each other's bodies is ordinary and intrinsically human. Thus, as St John points out, when Whitman sings “Copulation is no more rank to me than death is” (l. 521, 46), he advocates defending “not only his homosexual attachments to the body, but heterosexuality as well” (St John 37). Just as the bard does not separate the body and the soul, so does he not separate love into categories like heterosexual and homosexual. As Herrmann explains, “the physical attraction that one man feels towards another is homoerotic in the deepest sense of the term: of the body, soul and spirit of one man towards another” (31). By openly accepting the union of individuals who share similar desires, Whitman aspires to an ideal conception of a love born out of intimacy and freedom. To this end, the bard releases in *Leaves of Grass* the repressed yearnings of all individuals and of himself—whether homosexuals, bisexuals, or heterosexuals—to depict them as the everyday beauty of human nature. Whitman defiantly asks his readers, “What think you I take my pen in hand to record?” in order to assert that he does not write to talk about the beauty of a ship or the glory of the city. When Whitman sings, more than of himself, he chants of regular men who love each other (l. 1, 114).

In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman devises for himself an evocative and paradoxical figure who freely escapes beyond social and poetic convention. Through his poetry, he

reinterprets his own and others' bodies and redefines his masculinity to, at least poetically, bridge the division between body and soul and between homosexual practice and spiritual love. The echoes of the passionate Whitmanian hymn to intimate manly love will reverberate for decades until reaching Lorca. The Spanish poet, drawn to Whitman's idyllic notion of manhood, will venture into the leaves of grass to answer the challenge posed by the bard: "What is a man anyhow? What am I?" ("Song of Myself" l. 391 41).

By the time Federico García Lorca arrived in New York on June 25, 1929, Whitman had been dead for nearly 40 years and yet the American was experiencing a rebirth at the height of avant-garde and modernism. Transformed into an ethical and aesthetic symbol, if not already a myth, Whitman is for many Spanish-speaking poets such as Rubén Darío, León Felipe or Lorca himself, a mirror where to discover their own and universal identity. The experience in the American metropolis is, for the Spaniard, a profound experiential, literary and sexual catharsis that transforms him. At the epicenter of this radical transformation is Whitman, whose *Leaves of Grass* seems to point directly to Lorca's heart, torn apart by the repressions and longings the bard had set out to liberate.

Poeta en Nueva York and *El público* are the most evident proof of Whitman's influence in Lorca's literary projection of his homoerotic desire. Both are, as Antonio Llera defines them, works fundamentally about the male body and its representations (xi) in which the mysteries of desire and subdued bodies are sung. Lorca, as an individual, understands the body as the reality from which irresistible needs and appetites arise producing an attraction to the other person, in this case, another man (Cañas 92). Yet, as a poet, the body presents itself to him as a lyrical source of images. In Lorca's writing, the body emerges through metaphorical expression by means of a cluster of images and semi-opaque allusions that refer to a hidden desire. Given the aesthetic-existential crisis that shakes the poet in New York, his anxieties will manifest revealingly in his works given their imperious need for corporeality (Cañas 93). Although Lorca

will always be far from openly externalizing his stagnant distress, he will progressively come to terms with his own nature and accept his identity as a homosexual man partly thanks to reading Whitman. As a result, both he and his homoerotic desire will gain more prominence, nuanced by surrealistic aesthetic codes.

Attending to Lorca's pre-American production enables us to explain this significant literary shift. The author's early writings, such as his first play *El maleficio de la mariposa* (1920), function as “veiled fables” (Peral Vega 95, my translation) using aesthetic and fictional distancing to conceal their homoerotic undertones. The poet draws the *dramatis personae* as insects to clothe with a fabled atmosphere, almost like a fairytale, the profound human drama the author announces to the audience before the performance (see “Prólogo” 87-8). The protagonist of the play, the Cockroach Curianito, inspired by “*algún libro de versos que dejó abandonado sobre el musgo un poeta de los pocos que van al campo*” (*El maleficio* 87)—who could well be Whitman—commits the audacity of falling in love with the Butterfly. As Emilio Peral Vega remarks, this act of love is a gesture of rebellion as it infringes the natural law and the established norm by loving someone he should not, defying as well the complementarity of the masculine and feminine genders (96).⁸

The disguises behind which Lorca hid himself and what was concealed in the ideological charge of his writings will, however, take their toll on the author. The mask will become a fundamental and paradigmatic symbol in all of Lorca's work rooted in New York. The vizard represents the facade people build to give existence an illusory and fictional aspect, to stop being what one is and become what one wants to be. Nonetheless, as the mask is nothing more than appearance, it can only create a superficial modification that, incapable of transmuting the

⁸A queer reading of the work holds considering that cockroaches and butterflies belong to different species incapable of reproducing with each other. The love between Curianito and Mariposa is deemed a “crime against nature” as it cannot fulfill a reproductive function, an argument that has always been used against homosexual love. Thus, the “*maleficio*” means an “irresistible charm” that draws the cockroach to someone it should not be attracted to. The concept of “*maleficio*,” linked to butterflies, later relates to the “*Oda*,” which I will discuss later.

essence of the individual, hides it. Therefore, the vizard is a symbol loaded with negative connotations due to its asphyxiating condition of one's true nature, as I discuss below.

In *El público*, Lorca portrays the identity conflict of the stage director of a theater who, out of fear of accepting his homosexuality, will seek to hide and carry out a theatrical life of feigned existence to deny his secret passions and hide his true self. To safeguard appearances and for fear of being discovered (“*Me ha de ver el público. Se hundirá mi teatro*” 114), the Director resorts to deception.⁹ The social norm has forced the character to drown his true identity behind the mask and *bajo la arena*¹⁰, just as the poetic voice of “*Tu infancia en Menton*” did before: “*Tu soledad esquiva en los hoteles / y tu máscara pura de otro signo*” (ll. 1-4, 70). The veil is omnipresent in the play (“*no hay más que máscara*” 158), in whatever form it takes, and, Lorca suggests, it is also in the lives of its spectators and his own, eternally implanted (“*nadie olvida su máscara*” 158) and penetrating even the most intimate situations: “*DIRECTOR.—En medio de la calle la máscara nos abrocha los botones y evita el rubor imprudente que a veces surge en las mejillas. En la alcoba, cuando nos metemos los dedos en las narices, o nos exploramos delicadamente el trasero, el yeso de la máscara oprime de tal forma nuestra carne que apenas si podemos tendernos en el lecho*” (158).

“Gender performance” (Buchbinder 126) is at the core of this compelled need for the concealment of homosexuality and the pretense of normative heterosexual masculinity. It is crucial to remember that the current heterosexual/homosexual binarism is not consolidated until the 1940s (Caparrós Esperante 384). In the Spanish and American societies of the 1920s,

⁹ The simulation that shrouds the true self appears entwined with the false and outdated theater of bourgeois convention against which Lorca denounces, as the following lines of “*Ciudad sin sueño (Nocturno del Brooklyn Bridge)*” demonstrate: “*Pero si alguien tiene por la noche exceso de musgo en las sienas, / abrid los escotillones para que vea bajo la luna / las copas falsas, el veneno y la calavera de los teatros*” (ll. 46-50, 205).

¹⁰ In *El público*, there are two deeply interconnected thematic strands. On the one hand, the accidentality of love and the restoration of the true identity of the stage Director; on the other, the inauguration of a theater “*bajo la arena*” based on the truth of human feeling that opposes the “*teatro al aire libre*” of bourgeois taste and is respectful of the dominant border. Both themes converge in the figure of the Director who, to inaugurate the theater of freedom, will first have to accept the truth about himself.

according to George Chauncey, the mentioned hierarchy functions, linked to appearance and external signs of gender, to distinguish men with effeminate traits from others with typically masculine attitudes (21). Lorca's anxiety is therefore related not so much to sexual identity per se but to the performance of a homosexuality whose features and gestures must be aligned with the representation demanded by heteronormative patriarchy, according to the hegemonic model prevailing at the time (Badenes 99). The poet, as the lyrical and dramatic subjects of the aforementioned works, is forced by his contemporary homophobic and reactionary society to remain in the closet.

Thus, Lorca dresses his characters in the same fabric as his own disguise because he is aware his audience does not want to know anything about the "*ignorada otra mitad*" ("*New York: Oficina y denuncia*" l. 39, 252). Lorca himself contends in "*Panorama ciego de Nueva York*" that if "*todos comprenden el dolor que se relaciona con la muerte*" (*Poeta* l. 11, 206), then to address homosexual issues effectively, he must conceal any uniqueness and depict a universal pain that can be accepted. As Whitman did before him, the forbidden, dormant, and hidden voices will resound through the Spanish poet. In *El público*, a version of "*Romeo y Julieta bajo la arena*" is performed in which both characters are played by men.¹¹ Although the conservative and bourgeois audience revolt against it, Lorca's optimism rests with the young students, representatives of the future to come, who accept the arbitrariness of the forms and understand the deep and true meaning of the performance.¹² In an explicit fashion, Lorca reiterates that the truly pivotal point is that Romeo loves that Juliet "*con pies de hombre*" (174) and in this genuine fervor the students see their own feelings: "*ESTUDIANTE 2.—En último*

¹¹ Once again this recalls the opposition between the theater of falsehood "*al aire libre*" and that of the hidden passions "*bajo la arena*." The representation "*bajo la arena*" of *Romeo and Juliet* appears in the drama as the most truthful because—although both characters are played by men—what is important is that they truly love each other. In the "*al aire libre*" representation, on the contrary, this love is pure farce and serves only to entertain the audience.

¹² *El público*, a drama that Lorca could never see performed during his lifetime, is one of the so-called "*comedias irrepresentables*" of the author since, in his words, its "*tema francamente homosexual*" made its premiere impossible for decades (García Lorca, *Obra completa* 1104).

caso, ¿es que Romeo y Julieta tienen que ser necesariamente un hombre y una mujer para que la escena del sepulcro se produzca de manera viva y desgarradora?” (193-4).

The authentic and most profound revolution occurring in Lorca's art has to do, taking Whitman as mirror and referent, with the visceral need to legitimize male homosexual love. Apart from the taste for long rhythms, enumerations and natural images, the Spaniard takes from Whitman the manifest determination to sing in the light of all his passions. If everything is “*cuestión de forma, de máscara*” (García Lorca, *El público* 175) that hides deep emotions behind appearances, it will be crucial to tear off the masks to reveal the truth. As a direct consequence of Lorca's rediscovery of himself, he eventually forces all his poetic and dramatic *alter egos* to shed the disguises cloaking their true selves. In *El público*, Gonzalo, the lover of the Director, obliges the protagonist to unveil himself in order to find the latter's ultimate “I” (see III.3, 158). Stripped of the imposed burden of the mask of falsehood, a reborn Enrique (the true name of the Director) loves Gonzalo “*delante de los otros*” (179), to live fully the passion he had hidden for so long. His rebellion against the imposed norm turns the character's development into a particular anagnorisis in which the Director finds Enrique's true identity and feelings or, in other words, finds himself again, now free.

For the first time, Lorca turns the poetic focus on himself with a nude gaze of existential and erotic dimensions (Sahuquillo 125) diametrically opposed to the gaze of the social self of everyday life as seen in “*Paisaje de la multitud que vomita*” (see ll. 29-39, 198). In any case, we must consider that the poet writes in the middle of a profound existential crisis that plunges him into a continuous contradiction. In New York's great avenues, Lorca, a lyrical subject entangled in a troubled *eros*, does not find windmills, but only giants. Yet, it shall be in the bard of the Big Apple where he will find a glimmer of hope, albeit not without paradoxes. It seems no coincidence that it is precisely in “*Oda a Walt Whitman*” where Lorca condenses the totality

of his American experience. “*Oda*” reflects Lorca's ambivalent attitude towards his journey, which makes it a text as uniquely complex and obscure, as well as powerfully expressive.

The beginning of “*Oda a Walt Whitman*” is reminiscent of section 11 of “*Song of Myself*,” likely an inspiration, although already in the first lines the differences are notable: “*Por el East River y el Bronx / los muchachos cantaban enseñando sus cinturas / con la rueda, el aceite, el cuero y el martillo*” (ll. 1-3, 266). Although both poetic voices display a voyeuristic attitude of admiration for the bodies—their virility reinforced by the phallic imagery of tools, oil, and leather (Tobias 87)—the circumstances described differ substantially. Whitman's young men bathed luxuriantly in the river in shared joy and complicity, while Lorca's men are engaged in the utilitarian work of the capitalist industry in an environment devoid of beauty. Despite being immersed in a process of creation, it is a dehumanized and materialistic genesis far from life and poetry (“*Noventa mil mineros sacaban la plata de las rocas*” l. 4, 266). Lorca establishes the first of two antagonistic realms, opposed throughout “*Oda*.” It is a decadent reality where the city has devastated all nature leaving only ruin and death, a world of hegemonic and dominating heterosexual masculinity where there is no room for diversity: “*ninguno quería ser el río / ninguno amaba las hojas grandes / ninguno la lengua azul de la playa*” (ll. 16-9, 266).

In the bleak wasteland (“*Nueva York de cieno / Nueva York de alambres y de muerte*” l. 24-5), a poetic reflection of the New York of 1929 at the beginning of the Great Depression, the poetic voice cries out for a savior. The following stanza stands out for being formulated as interrogations; evocations reminiscent of an almost liturgical rite that seem to refer to a poetic myth rather than to a man: “*¿Qué ángel llevas oculto en la mejilla? / ¿Qué voz perfecta dirá las verdades del trigo?*” (ll. 25-6, 267).

The only answer is Whitman. The arrival of the honoree waits until the eighth stanza to burst in with force, completely changing the tone and imagery and marking the entire composition with his presence. The figure of the poet is redemptive and with his appearance, he inaugurates a new world radically opposed to the previous one. A natural sphere of a utopian Arcadia ruled by pure love where there is equality among comrades and not the dominance of the outdated heteronormative social norm. In this ideal world, the dreams of the American bard, whom Lorca depicts as a natural and mythical force, have been fulfilled. The admiration emerging from the verses is undeniable, to the extent that, when the lyrical voice addresses Whitman directly, he does so in perfect Alexandrines, with precise hiatus and measure, to let “the voice turn stately and enamored” (Walsh 269):

*Ni un solo momento, viejo hermoso Walt Whitman,
he dejado de ver tu barba llena de mariposas,
ni tus hombros de pana gastados por la luna,
ni tus muslos de Apolo virginal* (ll. 29-31, 267).

Lorca takes from Whitman's iconic photomontage the image of the butterflies, which perched on the bard's beard act as ambassadors of the ideal world that Whitman reigns over. Yet, from the rotten and grotesque abyss emerge the “*maricas de las ciudades*” (l. 101, 269), whose homosexual practices Lorca describes with precision even though denying them in radical litotes (Peral Vega 113). Whitman's homosexuality is made explicit (“*amante de los cuerpos bajo la burda tela*” l. 39, 267), and to him, the “*maricas asesinos de palomas*” (l. 116, 269) claim (“*¡También ese! ¡También!*”) as one of their own, homosexual like them (see ll. 52-60, 269). Nevertheless, the American remains—in his Apollonian masculinity—distanced from the cries: “*enemigo del sátiro, / de la vid*” (ll. 29-39, 267). The bard is called “*Adán de sangre*” (l. 54, 267), a clear allusion not only to his role as the father of American poetry and his physical appearance, but also to his status as pioneer believer in the acceptance of homosexuality. Significantly, Whitman is referred to as “*macho*” and “*solo*” (l. 55, 267), an authentic Adamic

guardian of the utopic garden that has not “fallen” (Binding 137) to vice and perversion like the “*maricas*.” It is precisely against the *marica*, understood as the effeminate and promiscuous homosexual, that Lorca's poetic voice is implacable: “*¡Contra vosotros siempre!*” (ll. 115, 269). The environments they frequent, their gestures, their insatiable lust, features, fluids, and feminine bodies are criticized and abhorred; that is to say, the poet's inner conflict revolves not around sexual orientation but around the performance of a certain type of masculinity (ll. 67-72, 268).

Lorca's lyric persona goes so far as to list the cruel nicknames homosexuals receive around the world: “*Faeries de Norteamérica / Pájaros de la Habana / Jotos de Méjico*” (ll. 115-7, 269). He insists on raising his voice against the “*¡Maricas de todo el mundo, asesinos de palomas!*” (ll. 115-7, 269), the disinhibited “*enemigos sin sueño / del Amor que reparte coronas de alegría*” (ll. 103-4, 269). Nevertheless, the poet sympathizes with and exhorts from scorn all those men forced to hide in the closet:

*Por eso no levanto mi voz, viejo Walt Whitman,
contra el niño que escribe
nombre de niña en su almohada,
ni contra el muchacho que se viste de novia
en la oscuridad del ropero...
ni contra los hombres de mirada verde
que aman al hombre y queman sus labios en silencio.* (ll. 88-100, 269).

The situation is overwhelmingly bewildering. The same Lorca who in other poems fights a relentless battle against the ostracism of the mask now places himself, partially, within a world that marginalizes others for being different.

“*Oda*” has traditionally been analyzed as a poem with a moralizing perspective in which Lorca intends to change the course of society; yet, given the ambiguity that permeates it, this approach has given rise to interpretations as diverse as incompatible. I argue the text benefits

much more from an intimist reading that presumes a visceral and choleric writing. In many ways, Lorca's experience in New York is similar to that of the woman in section 11 of "Song of Myself," watching anxiously from the window. Like her, the poet is constrained by a heteronormative system that binds him and prevents him from living his desire freely. Looking out the window, he sees the kind of homosexual he wishes to be, the masculine and virile archetype of Walt Whitman, in whose poetry Lorca discovered a compelling defense of homosexual love as something that is both beautiful and free. Lorca observes with an ambivalent feeling of rejection and attraction because, cowed, he feels closer to those "*maricas*" from whom he tries to dissociate himself.

In all, I put forth to understand "*Oda*" both as an attempt at expiation before Whitman's Apollonian model of unattainable homosexuality and as the poetic channeling of an irreconcilable frustration, an invocation of what Lorca wants to be. The resolution to the confrontation between the opposing worlds never appears in the poem because the poet remains trapped between the two, belonging to neither. He is the butterflies¹³ fluttering in Whitman's beard, longing to be associated with an Apollonian masculine homosexuality to which he will never belong. In spite of his strong conviction that "*la vida no es noble, ni buena, ni sagrada*" (ll. 87, 268), Lorca masterfully manages to champion his pain and transform his personal anguish into a profound and unique artistic expression, which serves as a testament to the power of literature, as it proves decisive in the poet's journey towards reconciling with his own identity.

The undaunted influence of Whitman's vision finds its response in Lorca's exploration of masculinity and its complexities. The Spaniard, captivated by the poetic concept presented by the American, embarks on a profound journey into the depths of his own identity and, through his poetic endeavors, attempts to discover the multifaceted nature of his own self. It is

¹³ I would like to emphasize here that, in colloquial Spanish, the term "*mariposa*" and its derivatives allude to the effeminate traits or gestures of certain gay men; nonetheless, I do not employ the term here with any animalizing or homophobic intention.

within this exploration that their works intertwine, as Lorca faces the challenge posed by Whitman, delving into the complexities and fluidity of male homoerotic identity.

Conclusion

After analyzing a selection of poems and relying on the secondary sources used in this undergraduate project, I have come to several conclusions regarding the study of Walt Whitman and Federico García Lorca's works on the basis of masculinity studies. First, it is evident to me Whitman's and Lorca's preoccupation and interest in the construction of masculinity and the predominant role that sexuality plays in this process. As homosexual men living in heteropatriarchal societies dominated by hegemonic models of masculinity that exclude them, they explore in their writings new ways of defining what it means to be a man and to express a desire that was unpronounceable in their times. Hence, both authors examine in their poetry the intricacies of tensions arising from the interaction between predominant and alternative masculinities, besides between the masculine and the feminine, seeking intermediate synergic spaces for new ways of living and writing.

Furthermore, for Whitman and Lorca, given their particular socio-historical contexts, the expression of their homoerotic desire is not merely a lyrical exercise but rather an imperative necessity. Whitman pursues the definition of a new type of man for a modern nation. The bard seeks to introduce himself as an example of a new paradigm for the American man and, full of optimism, addresses his readers to foster a democratic society based on male camaraderie and the physical and spiritual union between men. Whitman's idea of America is the aspiration for an egalitarian and tolerant nation, a utopian commonwealth free of any form of otherness by overcoming discrepancies of sexual and class normativity. Nevertheless, Lorca's vision is considerably less positive. In the midst of an acute existential crisis, the writings of his stay in New York reflect the convulsive state of mind of a man beginning to accept and poeticize his homosexuality in a society that condemns it.

Whitman places the male body at the center of his poetry and rejects traditional gender roles, to create a new image of masculinity, making his poetry the place where the borders between masculine and feminine blur. As I have argued, the poet thus adopts a fluid and intermediate position between the two in order to place himself beyond the hierarchical limitations of sex and gender. The self-portrait Whitman crafts in *Leaves of Grass* deliberately seeks to escape from social and poetic conventions to redefine his own masculinity. As for Lorca, he depicts a more conflicted vision of masculinity and especially of homosexuality in which social and internal oppression are intertwined. As I have explored, the figure of Whitman appears to the Spanish poet in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, the American's poetry helps Lorca to progressively shed the masks that conceal the expression of his homoerotic desire, which begins to appear more explicitly in his writings. As the poet's acceptance of his homosexuality grows, so does his denunciation of a hypocritical society that forces him to conceal himself. On the other hand, Whitman is also the representation of an unattainable gay ideal for Lorca, painfully incapable of incorporating himself into the hegemonic virile male model. For the Spanish poet, the American embodies the Apollonian masculinity that can be sung, yet not lived by him.

Both poets understand their social and sexual existence is materialized in their bodies, so they claim for themselves, in a transgressive way, the artistic ability to define it in their own terms. Therefore, despite Whitman writing from hope and Lorca from pain, it is feasible to unveil a poetic dialogue between the two, thanks to their shared position at the center of their respective poetics. Therefore, as I have demonstrated, it is possible to understand *Poeta en Nueva York* as a response to *Leaves of Grass*. Undoubtedly, Whitman and Lorca are vastly different poets; yet in their exploration of masculinity and sexuality, their poetics become entangled, giving rise to a profound and timeless lyrical dialogue through which a myriad of once-concealed voices resonate even today.

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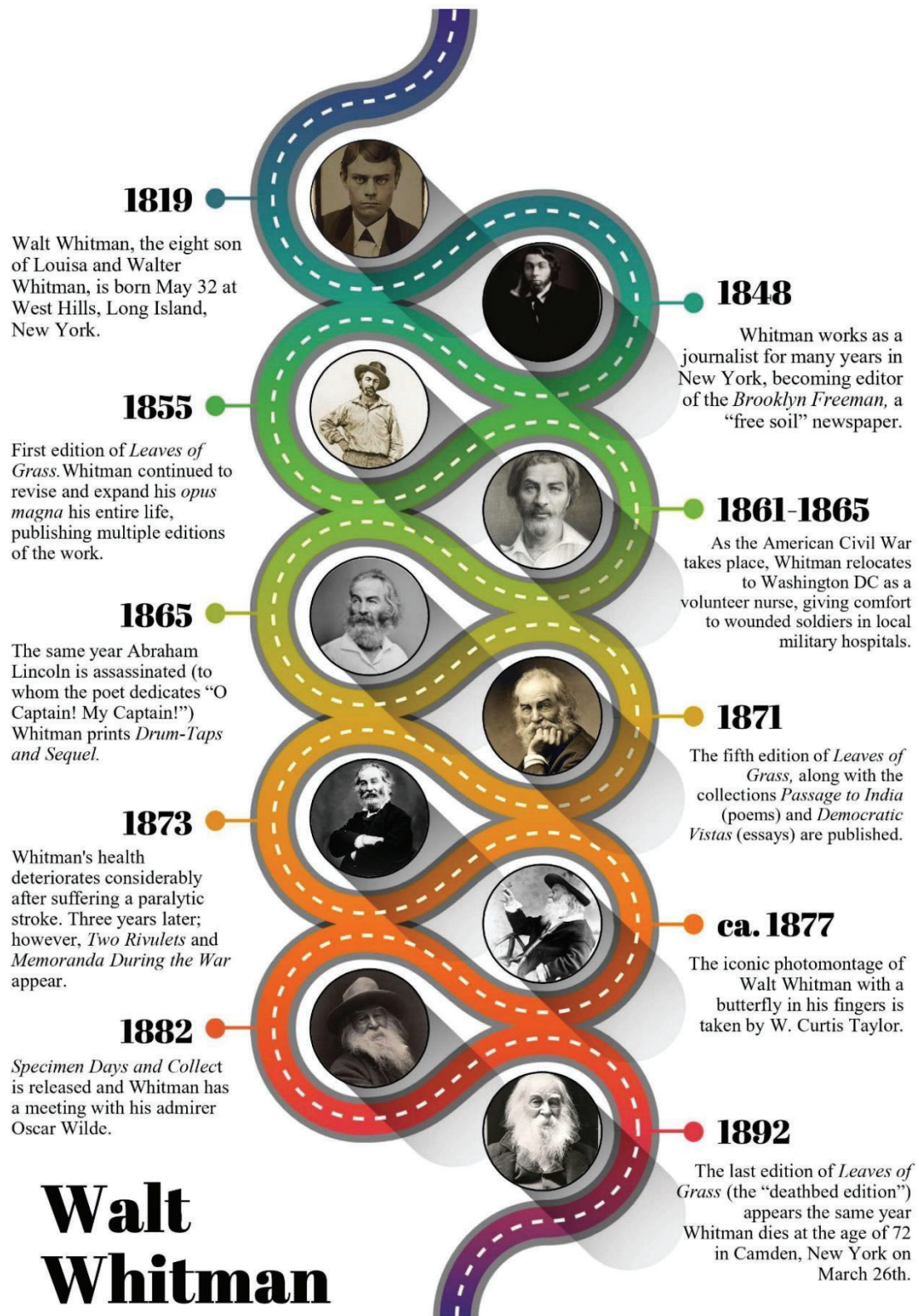
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Appendix

Walt Whitman's Chronology (Fig. 1)



Federico García Lorca's Chronology (Fig. 2)

