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López Serrano, Maria; Gimeno Pahissa, Laura, dir. Sheltering nature : Walt Whitman's answer to the spatial contradiction in America. 2020. 51 pag. (801 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

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**Sheltering Nature: Walt Whitman's
Answer to the Spatial Contradiction in America**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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June 2020

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I feel more than obliged to Dr. Gimeno Pahissa for supervising this dissertation, helping me through all the process but most importantly, believing in this project and me. I still cannot quite believe that I got to have such an enthusiastic tutor with whom I could share all my love for literature and be a Walt Whitman nerd. I could not miss mentioning my parents, of course. They have always supported me and accompanied me in my learning both as a student and as a person. *De tot cor, gràcies.*

And to you, Walt Whitman. I have felt you placing your hand upon me. No verses have understood me like yours have. Whether you may be in the grass I now step on or the air I breath, know that your words have trespassed me and for that I am eternally grateful. I will religiously follow you and afoot and light-hearted, take the open road.

Finally, I would like to make a special mention to all those blackbirds and magpies that provided company and inspiration for a dissertation that was written in the most bizarre of circumstances.

Abstract

When studying what aspects build the character of America, one realizes that more than often, there is a certain tendency to self-contradiction. As the holder of the title of the father of American poetry, Whitman highlights the importance of contradicting one's self: he is more than happy to embrace the quirks of the American experience and reassure his readers that it is a quality to accept and compromise to.

Nineteenth-century America poses a challenge to Whitman when it comes to the urban versus the rural. Many scholars have discussed this affair in their research such as James L. Machor (1982) or William Pannapacker (2006) and usually refer to the same poem: "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun", which perfectly exemplifies the intricate nature of Whitman's poetry regarding this opposition. Overall, city and nature seem to force an inevitable scenario where Whitman must make a choice. Thus, in this study I contend that taking into consideration the contradictory scheme that city and nature pose to Whitman, his poetic and prose work refuse to make a choice and opt for finding a spatial dimension where both entities are integrated. Notwithstanding, the new understanding that Whitman proposes is unidirectional. Nature can be found in the urban space, but the city and its social components cannot be enjoyed in the natural. Although being in the poet's favour, there are still many challenges that the Whitmanian city has yet to defeat in order to fulfil the poet's expectations.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, America, contradiction, nature, city, democratic, human contact.

1. Introduction

Very few people will disagree when affirming that Walt Whitman encompasses the American spirit almost to perfection. His poetry, publicly recognized as celebratory and exulting, highlights the many values that are pivotal for the understanding of the American character. Therefore, Whitman could be considered as the founding father of America: not only on a literary level, but also on a cultural level. The unsinkable and lively character that his poetry builds has served many Americans to truly comprehend what being American really means. That is why Whitman's poetry is still very much relevant in America¹.

One of the fields that incessantly revives the figure of Whitman is ecocriticism. In an age where the climate emergency and its future consequences are starting to loom over, many find appropriate unburying Whitman's poetry in order to provide a different perspective in regards of the relation between the civilized and the wild, city and nature². These are two seemingly contradictory entities. On the one hand, nature holds a very significant position in the conceptualization of America. For centuries, the vastness of American nature has fed the aspirations of many Americans who believed in the bettering of their lives through the labouring of a limitless land and its domination. Nature is very much present in Whitman's poetry; in fact, his most acclaimed work, *Leaves of Grass* (1855) uses nature as the starting point to show his own take on life. At the same time, urban space is pivotal in the development of America as it is understood as the space where humans can thrive and progress. In a way, both entities seem to be primal for the American goal: to be free and successful. In the same dynamic, Whitman also dedicates many of his poems to the city, more specifically New York.

¹ An example of this could be the handful of articles published by American media, especially NYTimes, where the figure of Walt Whitman seems to be considered crucial for comprehending the environmental consequences that the 2020 COVID19-outbreak has on America's lifestyle.

² Mark Doty's *What Is the Grass: Walt Whitman in My Life* (2020) or Lucy Jones's *Losing Eden* (2020) are fine instances of the interest Walt Whitman's poetry seems to arouse at this moment.

As stated, city and nature are entities that collide in many aspects. They are entities in opposition, their existence in America paves the way for a specific kind of phenomenon: the American contradiction. In fact, this is not a mere coincidence. Contrariety lies at the very heart of Americanness. Many authors have talked about contrariety, but the general public will find it easy if asked to relate contradiction and literature: no hesitation, the answer will most surely be Whitman and his famous assertion on accepting one's contradictions. With these words, Whitman is acknowledging contradiction as a part of the American identity. America, just like it is seen in Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence* (1776), is made up of contradictions. In fact, America itself can be considered a walking contradiction. Therefore, contradicting oneself is an essentially American phenomenon.

Whitman, pushing forward the contradictory nature of America, poses in his work the confrontation that arises between American nature and the American city. Due to the passionate love Whitman professed to New York, some believe the poet clearly solves this one-way out contradiction by choosing the city over nature. However, what this paper intends to show is that Whitman is very far from choosing city over nature. Indeed, the poet is faced with a choice. Nevertheless, he is not willing to abandon one over the other; instead, Whitman proposes the creation of a space where the urban and the natural are integrated; not only physically, but also spiritually. Nevertheless, in the way to achieve so, Whitman encounters many an obstacle. The many aspirations the poet had for the city seem to be now all destined to fail.

Therefore, in this study I aim to investigate Whitman's resolution to the American city/nature contradiction. So as to avoid having to make a choice, the poet proposes the integration of one entity inside another. When this contradiction seems to be resolved, another obstacle is in Whitman's way towards the completion of the ideal city: its viability. Many difficulties are yet to be faced.

To that end, this paper will be organized in six different sections. Firstly, this investigation aims to consider how Whitman views contradiction as an essential part to the construction of America and its identity.

Having recognized Whitman's positive perception on contradiction, nature in Whitman's poetry will be considered. Whitman's observations on nature will be supported by a close reading of the poems "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" and "A Noiseless Patient Spider" and prose excerpts from *Specimen Days* which revolve around American nature and their impact on identity. Additionally, Whitman's relation to nature is going to be contrasted to the one contemporary writers to the poet, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, had.

The discussion is going to continue considering cosmopolitanism in Whitman's poetry. Through the reading of "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun", "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Mannahatta", "Broadway" and prose excerpts from *Specimen Days* that entirely focus on the urban, it is going to be seen how Whitman celebrates the city as the ideal place for social encounter and to be marveled at by the innumerable opportunities it has got to offer to America and the realization of its aspirations. Therefore, the city is seen as the place where America can really take off as a democratic project. The fourth section intends to solve the contradiction that Whitman's poetry poses to the reader: the choice between the urban or the rural. However, as it will be seen, the poet does not intend to subjugate one over another, but to cherish both spaces are essential to America. So as to solve the contradiction that has been built up until this point, Whitman resolves to integrate one entity inside of the other: nature is now inside the city. The final section is devoted to the obstacles that the Whitmanian city encounters after having settled the American contradiction between city and nature. At this point, what seemed to tangle Whitman in a never-ending paradox appears to be resolved. However, it is now when he

realizes that perhaps his effort will be in vain when coming to the realization that the aspirations of the American city may not be so plausible after all.

2. Contradiction in Walt Whitman's poetry

In general terms, the notion of “contradiction” is fairly easy to define by anyone. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “contradiction” is firstly defined as an “act or an instance of contradicting”. If we look further into the action “to contradict”, we come across the next definition: “to imply the opposite or a denial of”. If we focus on the first section of this definition, we should pay attention to the word “opposite”. It is a term that implies contrariety, difference, incompatibility between two or more concepts. It is indeed a very tangible scene: dissimilarity confronts two ideas, forcing them to collide. We could agree on saying that a contradiction is a phenomenon that exposes the multitude of directions that ideas can take and how these may cancel out one another. Generally, contradictions tend to be viewed as a threat to the stability of any state of affairs. It is a kind of phenomenon that invites the foundation of an entity to collapse and pose its validity as an issue to be questioned. Contradictions have gained such fame: they are a danger to the stability of conceptualization. Contrariety is usually present when two ideas spring from independent minds. Nevertheless, this phenomenon does not always have to necessarily face two different individuals. A mind on its own can have many a contradiction: this is called the contradiction of the self. Self-contradiction can lead the individual into a real state of discomfort and instability with the self. Furthermore, the self can feel so detached from its own self, inducing it into a complete ignorance of what is that it is.

Although rarely, contradictions are considered by some an art to be mastered and fascinated by. Obviously, while the admirers of contradiction may recognize the discomfort it may bring the individual, they do not agree on the negative judgments directed to contrariety since it is this unsympathetic interpretation of contradiction that forces this detrimental reception on the individual's side. In order to avoid such damaging impact on the self-contradicting mind, the admirers of contradiction suggest a complete

and new understanding of this phenomenon: the self should not allow to be puzzled and void of any sense of true self; instead, in front of its own inconsistency the self should commit to the contradiction and welcome it. Self-contradiction can truly bring out the best of the individual. Contradictions are part of the human existence and ultimately, they remind us that we are humans. Therefore, we should not frown our gazes upon self-contradiction since they allow us to be unapologetically real; instead, we should disapprove of those who frown upon them.

Walt Whitman truly encompasses this message and puts it into practice in his poetry: indeed, he is an admirer of contradiction and specifically, self-contradiction. As it is showed in his work, Walt Whitman is opposed to the antagonistic performance of contradictions. The poet believes that it is imperative that we focus all of our attention towards those ideas that clash in our minds and that more than often leave us in utter bewilderment. The collision should not leave us in a state of bafflement, but in awe. To Whitman, the inconsistency of the self is part of the human experience; we should not dismiss our contradictory nature because we cannot conceive both realities at the same moment. Quite the contrary, we should not try to escape them, but make them participants of our lives. Whitman believes in luxuriating in the experience of holding contrasting ideas in our beings, embracing our own nature; and encourages to recognize the benefits of this as an enlarging of our presence in the world: “Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself;/ I am large, I contain multitudes” (“Song of Myself” 1324-1326)³. Whitman is so attached to his contradictory nature that he even impatiently awaits them “on the door-slab” (1327). Thus, contradicting oneself is not a proof of our weakness, but an evidence that we are broad and wide.

Nevertheless, many are still convinced that contradictions are not to be embraced, but avoided: a problematic phenomenon that requires a relentless and final solution. Many

³ When citing “Song of Myself”, this dissertation will make use of the 1855 version.

of these non-believers have tried to give a solution to this conflict between opposing ideas, resourcing themselves in systems that try to prove the validity of one of the ideas over the other. Whitman, however, does not believe in such method. It would be a waste to disregard that which is part of ourselves and allows us to experience our time on earth more lightly, free of resolutions that only subdue our minds.

Therefore, a contradictory nature is part of Whitman and his poetics. We should also pay attention to the tangible examples that Whitman may have had of this contradiction during his lifetime. A clear example of this is nineteenth-century America. We could refer to “the Peculiar Institution”. While some referred to it as an abominable expression of the purest of evil on earth, others could only see the benefits of it. These contradictory visions on slavery led the country to a civil war that confronted the abolitionist North and the pro-slavery South. America, at that moment, was a contradiction: while the abolitionists invoked the first lines of the *Declaration of Independence*: “[t]hat all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Right, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”; pro-slavery preferred to question the terms in which Thomas Jefferson had defined “men”, that is to say, that slave states did not consider that Jefferson was making any reference to the black slave, but to the white man only. Therefore, America is a contradiction itself since her very conception.

Considered the most American of Americans, it was only logical that Whitman would also follow this fashion and embrace contradiction. Because, in fact, contradiction is part of the American identity: Whitman is the living proof of this. Ultimately, we could consider that anything that Whitman is, is also an essential component of the American identity.

Nevertheless, we should expand a bit more on what other aspects America contradicts herself in a more physical sense. America’s spatial contradictions focus on

the opposition between city and nature, the urban versus the natural. America is wide in extension, wild in diversity, a vast nation. The unfathomable of the American wilderness has nourished the notion that America's wilderness is key to decipher what Americanness is built upon. Leo Marx in his essay "The idea of nature in America" (2008) begins affirming that the first instance where white men and the American unaltered nature meet is "the defining American experience" (2008: 8). This could make us think that what Marx is implying is that the encounter between the wild and the civilized allows us to encounter a goal in it. This may also be applied when discussing what the relationship exists between America and its nature: the American nature being so wide, magnificent but mysterious and unknown invites the newcomers to plow the soil in order to provide something that has been neglected to them; we may think of happiness, wealth, but most importantly freedom. A further exploration on American nature will be given, but for now, we shall assume that American nature provides tangible freedom to Americans. Spiritually, American nature is believed to be a source of faith that allows the realization of the individual and its width possibilities in life. America is after all the land of opportunity.

On the opposite side of the American spatial dimension, we come across cosmopolitanism. For now, we have commented the immenseness of the American nature. It is a horizontal expansion. Even so, America also colonizes vertically. Skyscrapers choke the air, immigrants arrive in hopes of a better life, concrete is the new wood. The city is a chance for Americans to thrive, root their character in the spirit of progress and modernity. As Alex Krieger explains in his essay "The American City: Ideal and Mythic Aspects of a Reinvented Urbanism" (1987), "The American city is [...] admired for its size and boundless, for its energy, for its material, wealth, [...] for its ability to accommodate change, for its incompleteness and modernity" (1987: 40). Therefore, the American city is a place that allocates those that are thrilled to add

something to its development. The city's never-ceasing functioning allows all individuals to advance and accomplish their goals. Therefore, America is made of green wilderness, but also of industrial cities. Thoroughly, America is a contradiction in spatial terms.

The spatial contradiction of America is also contemplated in Whitman's poetry. If one has some knowledge of Whitman's poems, they could hurriedly conclude that Whitman is ultimately going to make a choice between city and nature and take the city as his final answer. Nevertheless, if we recover Whitman's attitude towards his contradictory nature and America's, we must assume that Whitman will not allow putting at risk neither city nor nature. Both spaces are equally important to the understanding of America, therefore it would be a complete betrayal to the poet's own persona if he chose one over the other. Whitman is compromised to America and himself, therefore both entities must be equally present in his poetry.

Perhaps, nowadays America is more focused on cosmopolitanism than pastoralism. Nevertheless, we must remind ourselves of what America looked like in the nineteenth century: each day new cultures docked in America, each day new traditions were rooted in America. But at the same time, each day flowers were blooming in America, each day grizzly bears were fishing salmon in America, each day sandstone buttes were playing hide-and-seek with the moon in America. America beheld a further naturalism in its soil. Whitman is compromised to himself, but also to America. Therefore, it is only obvious that both entities must be present in his poetry. Bearing in mind this premise, Whitman is set to conceive a poetic project where both entities equally grant Americans with a set of values found in each of the spaces that make America. Since Whitman must allow both city and nature inside of America, the poet has no choice but to solve the opposition by allowing both spaces to co-exist in the same territory. Postmodernism would find this almost impossible at the present time: the chimneys have invaded the land, there is no space for green to sprout. Perhaps, the cities Whitman saw

in his lifetime allowed for more physical nature as they were less-industrialized compared to how they are today.

Inevitably, Whitman must unlock the contradiction between city/nature since this is a tangible contradiction. City and nature exist outside of Whitman; while the perception that Whitman has of them is only present in his mind, city and nature are entities that are also visible to others. His poetry must make an effort to bring the contradiction to its clarification; but again, never allowing one to dismiss the another because America is both. So as to achieve this, Whitman has at his disposal many philosophical and logic methods that discuss the resolution of contradictions. The one that Whitman seems to take is the dialectic system proposed by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel proposes a system where a premise, names as *thesis*, is confronted with an opposite premise, this time called *antithesis*. In their encounter, *thesis* and *antithesis* clash and give way to a resolution that integrates both of them, that is *synthesis*. This resolution will eventually become another *thesis* that will confront another *antithesis* and so on. In this case, Whitman resorts in the integration of a thesis inside the antithesis, creating a space where both entities are integrated. In his essay “Walt Whitman and German Thought” (1941), Robert P. Falk suggests that “Whitman saw in the Hegelian metaphysic [...] a logical rationalization of the vast, contradictory, democratic America” (1941: 323). The poet observes in the Hegelian thought the perfect “amalgamation of the individualism” (Falk, 1941: 323), where opposites reconcile into one. Whitman seems to have successfully avoided rejecting the contradiction, in favour of a synthesis where the opposite premises are integrated in. However, the poet is inevitably forced to create a unidirectional space: Whitman must decide whether it will be city that will inhabit nature, or nature that will inhabit the city.

3. Nature in America

A lake is [...] earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (Thoreau, 1854: 175)

Since her conceiving, America could not be understood without her majestic nature. Today, when dioxide carbon levels are constantly on the rise, the world is on the brink of a no-return cul-de-sac and those in control of power seem to continually dismiss the scientific warnings in the bluntest possible way, nature is on everybody's mouth. From the environmentalists in universities to the ordinary citizen, nature is in the spotlight.

Today's society tends to conceive nature as the ordinary citizen's getaway from the industrialized world. When contextualized, this notion can take further meanings. Beneath the postindustrial anxiety of any first-world country, we encounter that nature may embrace further connotations, for example, those concerned with the realm of the spiritual. An obvious instance is America. In American studies, nature does not only refer to the physical natural spaces found in the American soil, but also to that spiritual nature that is essentially American. In other words, nature, both physically and spiritually, is found at the very core of what America is. As Ralph Waldo Emerson poses, "nature [is] [...] a primary locus of meaning and value of Americans" (Marx, 2008: 12).

Whitman found his own personal understanding of what the spirit of nature was built upon. We must bear in mind, however, that many came before him. It would only be logical to acknowledge that his particular perception of nature is not of his own merit. Whitman gains his own distinct view on nature feeding his intellectual judgment with past notions that resonate with the poet during his time. Therefore, it is quite relevant to review the diverse interpretations that nature in America has been given since the conception of the country itself to the time when Whitman started to form his own view regarding natural spaces in his country.

3.1. Nature in American Intellectualism

An infinite number of American intellectuals have redefined the notion of nature and its spiritual sense throughout the history of America. We shall revise them now. Nevertheless, before commencing our revision, it is quite necessary to state that the notions of nature we are alluding to in this dissertation are those conceived by a society that is very much rooted in Western philosophy. While we understand that Native-American philosophy should ultimately be considered as the decisive key to define American nature, it is more convenient to leave aside the broad understanding of nature of Native-American thought. This decision is taken on the grounds that as a poet, Whitman mainly builds his intellectual criterion on the adoption of the ideals and values from Western thought.

Firstly, we shall consider the first white settlers of America. As already mentioned, Leo Marx claims that since the founding of Jamestown in 1607 American nature was primarily defined by the untainted state of nature, that is to say, American nature was understood as a space where wildness thrived uncontrollably. This encounter between the wild and the civilized was “the defining American experience” (Marx 2008: 8). At this moment, America seemed to be defined primarily on a physical dimension: it was the land where the wild and the savage roamed freely. Everything that lived in the unruly America was opposed to civilization and Christianity: obviously this also included the indigenous people that lived in that land. Native-Americans were understood the same way untamed nature was. This opposition between savage and civilized prompted a division within America: white settlers set a mental barrier where the purely American nature was believed to be profane, whereas the tamed American nature, that is white settlements, was considered to be sacred. At this point, nature did not seem to add anything positive to the spirit of America, on the contrary, it only seemed a source of evil and resistance to Christianity. This mentality seemed to continue to feed the ideals of

Americans until America herself became the rebellious one. No doubt, we are referring to the War of Independence. Regarding the relation between nature and America during the American Revolution, we shall look more closely on the transition from a country that shamelessly disregards nature to one that seems to initiate a reconciliation with it. On this topic, Marx comments on the introduction of Natural Laws as a fundamental element for the conceptualization of America as a land that now relies on herself solely. In his *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson displays a secular understanding of nature, being “the Laws of Nature” at the service of the new country. At this point, nature and humanity do not seem so far from each other as it had previously been thought: “Jefferson helped to narrow the gulf separating humanity and nature” (Marx, 2008: 11). Nature seems start to be more thought high of in America. It is not a source of evil, but a source of “Life, Liberty and [...] Happiness”.

After Jefferson, the most remarkable addition to the debate between society and nature in America is that one by Ralph Waldo Emerson. With his essay *Nature* (1836), Emerson initiated the final reconciliation between American nature and American society. An essayist and philosopher, Emerson suggested that nature and America cannot be conceived as two different beings, because in fact, they are both parts of a unique realm. The realm that Emerson is referring to is that one created by God. Indeed, Emerson was a firm believer of a pantheism that sustained the assimilation of God and nature as one unique being, and the existence of God in every part of his creation. Emerson’s own personal view was very influential in America, up to the point it incited the birth of America’s own Romantic movement, Transcendentalism. The works of authors such as Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson or Herman Melville found in Emerson’s view on nature a key element to develop a literature that was essentially American. Whitman also followed the precepts of Transcendentalism. Nevertheless, it should be noted that

while his understanding of nature is very much rooted in Emerson, he treads his own path as it will be seen in the next section.

It is worth mentioning that along with Emerson, the relations between America and nature were also influenced by the so-called Manifest Destiny and the Frontier. While Manifest Destiny observes nature as “marketable wealth” (Marx, 2008: 14) and promotes its conquest in favour of Progress; the Frontier is the agent of Manifest Destiny. This conception of nature as something to conquer and turn profitable echoes the first white settlers’ notion of America. Without doubt, religion and Western philosophy seem to be once-again intruders in the relations between nature and America. This could lead us to consider wilderness as a space that allows the American spirit to break free and head towards the civilization of untamed nature. Nature seems to be a two-sided coin: while it acts as a bait for “a steady growth of independence on American lines” (Turner 1894), it is also viewed as something that must be under the control of humanity, that is, something negative. Needless to say, Whitman does not consider nature as something negative, however, it is true that some of his poetry shows a certain inclination to the ideals of Manifest Destiny.

3.2. A Whitmanian Nature

As it has already been mentioned, Whitman’s poetics offer a new perspective regarding the relation between nature and humanity. Under the Emersonian precepts, Whitman believes that long enough “[have] foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face”, it is perhaps the time for America to finally “enjoy an original relation to the universe” (Emerson, 1836: 35). Hence why, Whitman conjures all his attention towards the funding of the pillars of this new communion between nature and humanity, exclusive to America. Notwithstanding, before focusing on the symbiosis between nature

and America, it is indispensable to address Whitman's portrayal of nature and study in what way physical nature can contribute to the poet and America.

Following once again the maxims of Transcendentalism, Whitman tends to introduce nature as the open-air. In "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun", the poet asks for days where the "splendid silent sun" shines "with all his beams full-dazzling" (1), and "nights [that are] perfectly quiet" (6). Whitman elevates natural spaces as areas where one can endlessly roam "aside from the noise of the world" (9). It would be quite logical to interpret this "noise of the world" as that one that is found in the city streets, flooded with mumbling voices, submerged in a continual mechanical buzz: it is his wish to find a place far from the madding crowd as one author once said. Whitman aims for a soundless space where "[he] can walk undisturb'd" (7). It is quite remarkable how many Transcendentalist authors stress the importance of solitude as the key element for the optimal and complete experience of nature. Thoreau is the clearest example of this belief: "What do we want most to dwell near to? Not too many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room" (*Walden* 1854: 125). In his portrait of nature, Whitman adheres his poetics to these words, stating that nature and its sounds may be "for [his] own ears only" (10). The poet is cautious and lest anyone has not entirely understood what his demands are, Whitman concludes on a simple and concise claim: "Give me solitude, give me Nature" (11). Nevertheless, as we shall see later in this paper, it is when solitude and human contact come into the picture where the first inconsistencies in Whitman's poetry arise, and more specifically in this poem.

Furthermore, the outdoors seems to supply Whitman with a wide array of sensations. In the aforementioned poem, the poet characterizes natural spaces as an entity that is uncontrollable with its "unmow'd grass"(3); colorful with its "autumnal [...] ripe and red"(2) fruit; majestic with its "serene-moving animals"(5) from which we can learn as they pace "teaching content"(5); and aromatic with its "garden of beautiful flowers"

(7). Nature is a conglomerate of elements that appeal to the senses. The stimuli Whitman talks about in “Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun” are those that we can observe: we can see how the reddish pomegranate is mature enough to be picked, we can also identify the tender and sweet smell of jasmine and lavender; but at the same time, Whitman is posing before us another side of nature, that one we cannot see but feel: we feel how wildly and uncontrollably the grass grows, we feel how animals roam elegantly through the fields, we feel how there is improvement in learning from them. At this point, Whitman is not a mere observer of nature, but one that goes underneath its surface.

Digging into the spirit of nature, Whitman brings to light the uncanny closeness that brings nature and humanity together. In “A Noiseless Patient Spider”, the resemblance between the natural and the human is clearly palpable when Whitman uses “a noiseless patient spider” (1) as the reflection of “[his] soul” (6). The silent and gentle arachnid is “ever unreeling [...] tirelessly speeding” a never-ending “filament, filament, filament” (4). This action is very solitary for the doer, it stands “isolated” (2) in a “vacant vast surrounding” (3), that could be compared to the vastness of America. Whitman mirrors the image of litany and solitude into the second stanza of the poem, where the soul is now “surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space” (7). Nevertheless, just like the spider, the human soul is still on motion “mussing, venturing, throwing, seeking” (8), attempting to speed enough filament that will allow “the bridge [...] [to] be forme’d”, “the ductile anchor [to] hold” (9). Whitman aims for the soul to be recomforted in the spider’s action, this allows the soul to come to realization that both spider and soul share the same experience since they both belong to the same realm: nature. Essentially, spider and soul are natural creatures, they are bound to assimilate the same solitude. In his essay “(De)composing Whitman” (2005), Paul Outka affirms that it is not solely himself, his work or nature what Whitman finds poetically beautiful, but “the cycling between them” (2005: 50). It is only when soul, body and nature come into discussion

that nature truly becomes rightfully the poem's central theme, because ultimately "our perception of outer natural beauty is a perception of the same thing inside us" (Outka, 2005: 50). Nature poems are for Whitman devices to talk of ourselves.

Withal, the affinity between nature and mankind is also directly contemplated in the essay "A Sun-Bath -Nakedness". Compiled in *Specimen Days* (1882), in this piece of prose Whitman seems "to get identity with each and every thing around [him]" (53-54); in contact with nature, he finally finds his own self. Nature "begin[s] to make a new man of [him]" (12). His contact with nature allows Whitman to encounter that self he never thought he was, he now gathers "the sure virtues of creek-shore, and wood and field" (10-11) and to them he "attribute[s] [his] already much-restored health" (15-16). Therefore, not only is nature what we essentially are, but also a source of recovery for our body and soul. Exposing his message on prose, Whitman is allowing enabling the embracing of such philosophy to a wider audience as prose may be preferred by other readers.

Notwithstanding, the poem that epitomizes the Whitmanian communion of humanity and nature is "Song of Myself". Due to its length, it is out of the scope of this dissertation to deal with Whitman's most known poem; nevertheless, we shall try to further prove this communion that Whitman poses to his readers in this poem. As Diane Kepner argues in "From Spears to Leaves: Walt Whitman's Theory of Nature in 'Song of Myself'" (1979), Whitman intends to portray the body of nature in its changeable particularity; nevertheless, Whitman challenges us to take a deeper look and ponder about its unchangeable universality, that is the soul of nature (1979: 195). The poetic persona is different to the spider in physical terms, but the poetic persona and the spider are equal as they endure the same universal experience: solitude. Whitman is "the poet of the body" (Kepner, 1979: 181) as he writes of that that "is palpable [and] in its place" (Kepner, 1979: 181); but he also is "the poet of the soul" (Kepner, 1979: 181) as he intonates "the impalpable [that] is in its place" (Kepner, 1979: 181). The Whitmanian understanding of

nature entirely answers Emerson's anxieties as to "why he feels so overwhelming a sense of unity when he looks upon the diversity around him" (Kepner, 1979: 182-183).

At this point, we may question what is that nature brings to America in specific, when each and every single one of us who roam freely in the earth are part of the same organic structure. Leaving aside the universality of nature, it is important to focus on the relationship between America and nature and the possibilities of the addition. In another piece of prose-writing called "Nature and Democracy-Morality" (1882), Whitman affirms that "Democracy [...] is sunny and hardy and sane only with Nature". Therefore, for a democracy to sprout, the presence of natural spaces is a necessity, without it a democracy will never be fully realizable. The poet bears in mind "the dense streets and houses of cities", but notwithstanding this, American Democracy demands "regular contact with out-door light and air and growths, farm-scenes, animals, fields, trees, birds, sun-warmth, and free skies". Should the natural not be present in the democratic project, "it will certainly dwindle and pale". Whitman cannot comprehend a "flourishing and heroic" democracy in America without nature, since the "element forming a main part" of the American soil must drive every single aspect of life: from "the whole politics, sanity, religion [to] art of the New World".

4. A City Upon a Hill

Having taken a look at the thesis of this spatial contradiction, it is now time to turn our attention to the antithesis. It is quite hard to imagine another antithesis to nature but the city. Cities are found around the globe. It is not hard for anyone to imagine what a city looks like. More than often, every country's centre of power is gathered in a city. This municipality tends to be the most advanced, the most diverse of the country. Cities seem to infuse a sensation of moving forward, that is to say, progress. Nevertheless, it must be noted that not all cities answer to this character. One can establish different classifications of cities because not all cities are the same. One of the main factors that can help to distinguish the different types of urban spaces are the people that helped built it and what ideals were behind them.

As Alex Krieger points out, cities in America are built upon a series of pursuits that Americans aspire to fulfill in the urban space. The search "of reason and science [...] of personal liberty and social egalitarianism [...] of property as a source of wealth and independence [...] of pursuit of individualism and self-sufficiency" (Krieger, 1987: 40-41). Furthermore, Krieger also mentions "the belief in progress as providing continuing opportunities for social and geographical mobility" (1987: 41). Here, Krieger is alluding to one of the many pursuits that Americans seek in the city: move from one place to another in order to jump from a social class to another. Therefore, the city in America is a source of hope for the citizen as their aspirations only seem achievable in the urban. Then, one may question the hatred the city has aroused in America by afore mentioned naturalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau.

Even when following to some extension the Transcendentalist precepts, as, it will be seen in this section, Whitman refuses to share this hatred towards the city. In fact, he would be much horrified by anyone denying the City its rightful place in America. To the poet, the city is the epitome of what America is: progress.

4.1. A Transcendentalist misunderstanding

Before tackling how the urban is portrayed in Walt Whitman's work, it is quite worth focusing all of our attention towards the Transcendentalist disapproval regarding the city and on what judgments it is built upon. Bearing in mind the high esteem Transcendentalism had for nature, it comes as no surprise that Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau should completely dismiss the urban space. As Krieger points out, Emerson realized that the "uncorrupted behavior we admire in animals, and in young children belongs to...the man who lives in presence of Nature", therefore one should question the reason that should lie behind the inhabiting of a place that "make[s] [men] artificial" (1987: 54). Having considered this, Transcendentalism could be accused of being too destructively critical with the city, which is not such a mistaken accusation when one realises that this pro-nature movement "did not look for ways to improve urban life" (Pannacker, 2006: 49), but rather preferred preaching, "escaping alone to the woods, the sea, or the frontier" (Pannacker, 2006: 49).

Nevertheless, this reproach on Transcendentalism cannot be proclaimed too loudly since Transcendentalists were denouncing the cities in America, not the cities that were essentially American. Up until that point in time, cities had been built on American ideals such as freedom or democracy, nevertheless, they never fully successfully portrayed them. Being truthful to America's "original relation to the universe", Emerson refused the European model for urban spaces, and resorted its frustration in the adoption of a space that was fundamentally American, that is, nature. Therefore, it is not that Transcendentalist disliked the urban, but that they did not know any other urban space that did not echo the European urban model, thus justifying their urban aversion.

Transcendentalists were not the only ones that realized that the urban in America demanded to be detached from the European cities; American urbanism had higher expectations of itself. During his U.S. tour in 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote an article for

the French newspaper *Le Figaro* titled “American Cities”. In that article, the French philosopher stated that the American city diverges entirely from its European counterpart. Echoing Alex Krieger’s use of Sartre’s text in his essay “The American City: Ideal and Mythic Aspect of a Reinvented Urbanism” (1987), we shall also refer to this piece of writing as a device to demonstrate that the city that Sartre records in his writing is that one that is essentially American.

As a result of this Transcendentalist misunderstanding, America is now left with a short-term solution to the urban problem: disappearing into nature. Someone must answer the call of the Transcendentalists in finding a new urban for America, one that successfully answers the long array pursuits of the American citizen. No one better than Walt Whitman to take such errand. The poet must find a new format of city, one that allows Transcendentalists to see a different kind of urbanism, one that does not corrupt the soul of men and enables the construct of the self, free from any constrictions of past ideals.

4.2. A moving landscape

In his essay “Americans Cities”, Sartre states that for Europeans a city is, ultimately, “a past [,] for them [Americans] it is mainly a future; what they like in the city is everything it has not yet become and everything it can be” (1945: 119). The American urban space, in the eyes of the philosopher, is that ground where Americans sow their hopes for the future in hopes of finally realising their wishes and aspirations into the tangible world. For Whitman, the city is the place where the ultimate American ideal will be fulfilled: democracy.

At first sight, the democratic city seems to enchant the poet with the common trait of any city: human contact. In Whitman’s poetry, interpersonal relationships are as necessary as oxygen is for breathing. This wish for constant human contact is easily

granted in the city. Taking a further look at the already-tackled poem “Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun”, we observe Whitman stating that he needs no nature; nature can “keep [her] splendid silent sun [...] [her] woods” (20-21). Effusively, the first thing that he demands now is nothing else but “faces and streets” (24) and “interminable eyes” (25) only on Whitman’s own eyes. Alluding to the “phantoms incessant and endless [...] interminable eyes” (25), Whitman seems to portray “a moving landscape” (Sartre, 1945: 117).

Moreover, for the poet, human contact is not necessarily established between two people that interact with each other directly; rather, any action in which humanity is perceived already suffices his desire. Furthermore, he yearns to be in the space where people gather and interact with each other: “[t]he life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel, for me!” (33). Whitman’s crave for human contact can be founded on the basis that “[t]he rich diversity and excitement of the urban scene [was] an essential component of [the] American experience” (Machor, 1982: 329). In his essay “Walt Whitman and ‘Mannahatta-New York’” (1982), M. Wynn Thomas further focuses on the directness of human contact in “Mannahatta”. In this poem, Whitman reinforces the image of citizens “looking [at him] straight in the eyes” (16). These eyes are of “a million people”, whose “manners [are] free and superb” (18). The city approaches the individual to such a great medley of faces that it becomes “the place in which this natural equality of men in their ‘abundance of diversity’ most torrentially and therefore irresistibly displayed itself” (Thomas 1982: 364). This natural equality of men that Thomas refers to is undoubtedly the democratic character of the city. The urban seems to achieve one of the main qualities of Democracy by which “all men are created equal” (DOI. 1776).

As well as considering the enormous and diverse crowds of individuals that Whitman comes across in the urban space, it is also remarkable how the city supplies Whitman on a personal level with all that he cannot enjoy in the rural space. When we

allude to the “personal level”, we are referring to those aspects that apply to Walt Whitman specifically. An instance of the particular aspects in Whitman is his sexuality. Although never publicly confirmed, many critics believed that Whitman was indeed homosexual. Such sexual identity is source of disapproval within many rural communities, meaning that the poet would find it arduous to satiate his sexual desire in such a constraining environment. Nevertheless, the city seems to be the antidote to his sexual yearning. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, the city calls Whitman “by [his] highest name” (79); nevertheless, it is not the city itself addressing to Whitman, but the “clear loud voices of young men as they saw [him] approaching or passing” (79). It seems as if Whitman is not seeking these encounters, but sees himself marveled by such gazes that he cannot refuse feeling “their arms on [his] neck [...] or their negligent leaning of their flesh against his” (80). Such acts would probably be less likely to occur in a rural space, not only because of the narrowness with which the rural tends to observe homosexuality, but also because of the reduced social communities rural nucleus tend to be characterized by. This mutual sentiment of contentment that only the city seems to provide homosexual lovers with encompasses democracy; although it could also be argued that any type of lover could find sexual contentment in the city since it also allows sexual encounters within a larger community. William Pannapacker continues to suggest that rural life “was devoid of the sexual energies [...] that Whitman believed were the essence of the democratic spirit” (Pannapacker, 2006: 54). Not only did the city facilitate sexual encounters, but also allowed these rendezvous to be completely unknown to others. Anonymity is one of the most prized traits of the urban: to act in whichever way the citizen pleases without few to none judgmental eyes on them. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, Whitman appreciates the obscurity that the city grants to him. Now, he can “[see] many [he] loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly” (81), enjoy his gazes as much as he pleases and “yet never [tell] them a word” (81) or wish for a word from them.

The poet desires human contact at no cost: he may want to converse with the citizen, but as long as he is free to observe and muse in those gazes, he is content. Pannapacker continues to argue that Whitman, as “a man with homoerotic inclinations” is bound to be seduced by the city, a land where the anonymity, the relative tolerance and the scale of population are bound to create distinct sexual subcultures (2006: 54).

Needless to say, human contact is the main factor that seems to draw Whitman to the city. The constant current of faces takes Whitman on an urban ecstasy that has nothing to do with the solitary rural. Whitman’s dependence on the human contact found in the city brings to light that Whitman did not entirely comply to Transcendentalism. Thoreau’s desire to walk alone in nature completely clashes with Whitman’s desire to trip over thousands of faces. Nevertheless, as we shall remember, the previous section analyses “Give me the Splendid Silent Sun” where Whitman also adheres to a solitary retreat in nature. The first contradiction seems to surface. It will be dealt in depth in the next section how Whitman tries to find a middle ground between his contradictory wishes regarding natural and urban spaces.

4.3. Epitomizing progress

So far, we have observed the reason why Whitman “still adhere[s] to [his] city” (GMTSSS, 14): the never-ceasing chance he has of running into people and wallowing in the experience of human contact. Nevertheless, it is time now to focus on the tangible reality of the city. In terms of how the body of the city is, we must refer to the modernity that seems to impregnate the urban space. When highlighting modernity in the city, Whitman always seems to refer to the means of transports of the metropolis. In more detail, he focuses on water conveyance and all that goes with it: “The countless masts, the white shore-steamers, the lighters, the ferry-boats, the black sea-steamers well-model’d” (“Mannahatta” 10). We observe that all these means of transportation that

Whitman sees in the city are somehow related to progress. Steamers and ferry-boats in Whitman's urban portrait work as witnesses of the incessant transformation the American city is part of. This constant transfiguration of the city proves that the urban is part of a cultural project where cities "are not constructed in order to grow old" and become souvenirs of a past, "but move forward", and foreshadow what is to come: "The cities are open, open to the world, and to the future" (Sartre, 1945: 125).

As Sartre mentions, the city is "open to the world" (1945: 125), so indicates Whitman as "[i]mmigrants [start] arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week" ("Mannahatta", 12). It is now time to address whether the poet is referring to any specific American city. Whitman associates the city with sea conveyance, therefore the city he sketches in his poetry must be one bathed by water currents. We should also take into account the floods of immigrants that Whitman mentions. Our range of options has drastically and significantly been narrowed down. Doubtlessly, Whitman is referring to the "[c]ity of hurried and sparkling waters", the "[c]ity nested in bays! [his] city" ("Mannahatta", 20): New York. In Whitman's eyes, New York "is the directest proof yet of successful Democracy" ("Human and Heroic New York", 167). Not only because it satiates his thirst for human contact and anticipates the modern world, but also because it acknowledges that "[it is] not oppressive, [it does] not close [one] in [...but creates a space where] everyone is free" (Sartre 1945: 124). All sorts of feelings are allowed in the city, from "[l]eer, envy [and] scorn [to] contempt, hope [and] aspiration" ("Broadway", 5). New York is majestic not only in appearance with "[its] windows, rich and huge hotels- [its] side-walks wide" ("Broadway", 8), but it is also wide in the scope of emotions that the city can foster. This diversity of emotions is easily applied to the openness of the city, and as indicated before, to the millions of immigrants that arrived at New York and America, with hopes of a better life, a more democratic future. It comes as no surprise

now to the reader why all the poems we have used so far in this section either talk of New York, or are, in fact, named after the city that Whitman so bluntly admires.

5. A spatial resolution for America

Having now seen the thesis and the antithesis of the urban/nature contradiction, it is time for Whitman to try and solve it, even if he had previously assumed that contradictory nature must be cherished. In this case, as previously mentioned, both city and nature have so much to offer to America and to their spirit, that it would even be more beneficial for America to find a way by which both entities cooperate with each other. It is time then to fully devote our efforts to try and unveil Whitman's particular resolution to this spatial contradiction. In addition, it is quite relevant to remind ourselves the reason why the poet chooses this specific method. Whitman refuses to choose one space over the other, since the contribution of the urban is as important as that of nature's in the construction of a better America. A resolution that would only allow to fit one of the spaces would be unsuitable for America. Therefore, Whitman resorts to the Hegelian synthesis, which approves the poet's wish to foster both entities in one wide space that embraces the particularities of both realms.

Nevertheless, Whitman must make a choice at some point: the poet must either create a completely new space that reinterprets both the city and nature, or adopt either city or nature as the new emplacement where the opposite space will be sheltered. Contrary to his own will, Whitman inevitably makes a choice and carried away by his particular, but not secret preference for cosmopolitanism, believes that it may be a better option for America to reinterpret the city as the new American metaphor that will foster nature.

5.1. Natural contact

To begin with, it is quite relevant to notice those natural elements that Whitman points at in the city, because it is with no other intention that we have omitted their presence in the city section but to present them in this section. By no means we are

oblivious to the fact that Whitman does indeed point at the presence of nature in some of the selected city poems; but we have preferred to reserve these fragments for this section so as to show what tangible nature exists in the urban space and what impact it has on the poet.

Firstly, Whitman intends to prove wrong the assumption that the urban space is completely deprived of natural elements. In his city poetry, Whitman sets out on a mission to take into account those elements that the commuter may have left go unnoticed:

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
[...] Others will see the islands large and small
[...] [Others] will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide. (13-16)

As it is seen in this excerpt from “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, Whitman realizes that urbanites will notice some scattered elements of the natural realm, but they will rarely fully appreciate them as part of a natural ecosystem. Thus, Whitman poses himself as the example to follow regarding the acceptance that the urban space does not contain scattered and solitary reminiscences of the natural space, but that all these relate to each other and are, in fact, part of the same natural ecosystem. The urban elements give space for nature to blend in and portray a fully functional environment:

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm’d Manhattan?
River and sunset and scallo-edg’d waves of flood-tide?
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?
(92-94)

Furthermore, we could also perhaps argue that with this, Whitman is also trying to encourage citizens to leave aside the belief that only wild nature is worthy of veneration. After all, the nature found in the city is the same nature found in the wilderness and therefore, it deserves the same attention and value.

In his book of nature essays *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), the Beat figure and naturalist Gary Snyder, in sync with Whitman, further encourages to observe nature in everything that we see in the city because, in fact, “all the land about us, agricultural,

suburban, urban [is] part of the same territory- never totally ruined, never completely unnatural” (1990: 101). The notion that everything around the city is part of nature allows us to imagine that even “Great Brown Bear is walking with us, Salmon swimming upstream with us”(Snyder 1990: 101), and all of these scenes that we thought we would only get to experience in the wild woods are ridiculously close to us when “we stroll a city street” (Snyder, 1990: 101). The question of the wild is something we shall discuss later; nevertheless, it is quite remarkable to bear in mind the data that Snyder signals at in his essay “The Etiquette of Freedom”: only two percent of the land of the United States make up what Snyder calls “the last little places where intrinsic nature totally wails, blooms, nests, glints away” (Snyder, 1990: 15). It should also be noted that these data answers to the research done up until *The Practice of the Wild* publication date. However, bearing in mind the frenetic assaults on natural shrines that are carried out these days, it should come as no surprise to no one if these figures had decreased. Notwithstanding these figures, Snyder continues to insist that Nature, or *wildness*,

is not limited to the 2 percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere: ineradicable populations of fungi, moss, mold, yeasts and such that surround and inhabit us. Deer mice on the back porch, deer bounding across the freeway, pigeons in the park, spiders in the corners. (15-16)

To Snyder, *wildness* can be identified everywhere. This exact same approach can be applied to Whitman’s poetry. In the eyes of the poet, nature is not exclusive to that space that “is often associated with unruliness, disorder, and violence” (Snyder, 1990: 5); to him, nature can be appreciated anywhere because nature is also the sunset, the flowing tides, the seagulls that Whitman is witness of in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”. The direct contact nature in the city, while reduced, can occur everywhere, it is only us that need to realise about its existence.

5.2. Intangible nature

In his essay “American Cities”, Sartre further argues that some urban elements “[do] not seem like man-made [...] but rather like rocks and hills” (1945: 114); in fact, the city is a “rocky chaos” (1945: 122). In these lines, it seems as if Sartre were identifying the city with nature, as if the spirits of rocks and hills inhabited the foundations of the concrete jungle. It could be perhaps that each element of the city owes its essence to the natural habitat. This idea is what Whitman indeed intends to portray in his poetry, since he does not seem to be satisfied with observing physical nature only. He is conscious that to truly experience nature in the urban space, he must acknowledge that what does not seem nature, spiritually belongs in the natural space. Doubtlessly, Whitman is applying his poetic device of identification of the human in the natural, the same way he did in his poem “A Noiseless Patient Spider”.

We shall consider what urban elements are bearers of this natural spirit in Whitman’s poetry. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, we hear Whitman sing that the American citizen “stand[s] and lean[s] on the rail, yet hurr[ies] with the swift current” (25). In this instance, Whitman is identifying the frenetic tendency that is usually seen in the streets of any city with the currents of waters that flow down a stream. It is as if the city emulates the ways of nature. Critics such as James L. Machor agree with this assumption saying that “the poet can validate the linkage of community and nature by presenting both in the same manner” (1982: 337). Therefore, Whitman is convinced that if we pay attention to the city’s behavior, we will be able to corroborate that the natural does indeed inhabit the urban. We should look at the “hurrying human tides” (“Broadway”, 1) that go up and down in wide avenues, we should stare at the “passions, winnings, losses, ardors, [that] swim [the city’s] waters” but also remember the “whirls of evil, bliss and sorrow stem” (“Broadway”, 2-3) from its soil. Whitman’s “anthropomorphism of natural phenomena” in “Broadway” allows him to create a space

where “two of nature’s prime elements, earth and water, thus seem inextricably fused with the activities of the city” (Machor, 1982: 336), and its citizens we may add.

Whitman’s effort to encourage the communion of city and nature through the naturalization of the urban space is what Snyder would call the “spirit of the place”: “To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole” (Snyder, 1990: 41). Whitman is conscious that nature is part of the city and that recognizing the natural spirit that resides in each part of the city, from its inhabitants to its skyscrapers, Whitman is getting to know the true spirit of the city, each of the parts that belongs to the whole. In a way, we could say that he is *wildening* his vision on the city: Whitman acknowledges that in fact we are also creatures of nature, “exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of wild systems” (Snyder 1990: 16). We are essentially wild and so is the city, we only need to make the same step Whitman does in his poetry: *wild* our minds.

Whitman is not the only author who defends the idea of *wilding* oneself in order to introduce nature in the urban space. In his essay “Thoreau and urbanature: from Walden to ecocriticism” (2009), Ashton Nichols takes the lead on Whitman’s argument assuming that “nature and urban life are not as distinct as we have long supposed” (2009: 347). Nichols decides to take Thoreau’s lead and suppose that Walden was not only a physical place, but a “state of mind” (2009: 349), that helps us to “turn away from our emphasis on society towards the wildness that is within us” (2009: 350). If we recognize and embrace our forgotten wildness, we will enjoy of a “closer link between the human and the nonhuman worlds” (Nichols, 2009: 350). Nichols acknowledges the city as a human space and nature as a nonhuman world. Whitman would very much disagree with this assumption since his beliefs are entrusted in the existence of a whole, where nature and city belong to the same realm. Notwithstanding this, it is important to remark that

Nichols' idea can be applied to Whitman in the sense that the poet believes that we must *wild* the city in order to recognize the nature that is part of it too.

5.3. A new nature

At this stage, Whitman has now acknowledged that both physical and spiritual nature have their own space in the urban. Recognising this co-existence, Whitman is establishing the grounds for a new interpretation of Nature, in this case, a Whitmanian reading of nature, one that is exclusive to the American city. Aside from perceiving tangible and intangible nature, Whitman confers new qualities to nature that are only found in her when it blooms in the city.

At first sight, the first aspect of this new nature that Whitman proposes is its capacity to bring all citizens under one cohesive community. A poem that discloses to perfection the cohesiveness that nature is capable of sprouting within the city community is "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". In this poem, Whitman uses different manifestations of nature in the city as a bridging experience between the poet's own personal experience and the city readers' encounter with them:

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd.
(22-24)

The poetic voice is building a bridge first between himself and the reader. The sensations that one feels as they cross the river are not exclusive to them, Whitman takes hold of the reader's experience as his own too. The natural experience has now become a collective experience amongst all of those who live in the urban space. Whitman "watched the Twelfth month sea-gulls", but he too "saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies [...] the reflection of the summer sky in the water", "had [his] eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams", "[l]ook'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water [...] look'd on the haze on the hills southward and

south-westward” (28-34). Moreover, not only does Whitman believe that the experience of the natural can unite those living in the same time as him, he also considers that this experience does not understand of historic time. The “gorgeous clouds of the sunset” can also “drench with [their] splendor” the poet himself or “the men and women generations after [him]” (102). Consequently, nature is capable of establishing a connection between the present and future citizens. It is a cross-generational cohesive experience in the city.

The reason as to why Whitman believes that nature holds the city and its inhabitants connected to each other as a tightly-knot ecosystem is the fact that the natural experience underlines the evidence that all citizens are part of the same cosmical organic structure, that is, nature. Having seen that nature is “a source of foundational, even prelapsarian knowledge and a means of spiritual rejuvenation” (Pannapacker, 2006: 50), it comes as no surprise that Whitman considers its presence in the city compulsory. The city with its democratic and modern prospects seems to be crucial for the future of America. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that which once was part of this new space and that is still part of it, indeed, nature. This idea can be seen in the very first lines that introduce the poem titled “Mannahatta”:

I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,
Whereupon lo! Upsprang the aboriginal name.
[...] I see that the word of my city is that word from of old,
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb. (1-5)

This excerpt firstly sees Whitman acknowledging that the city has a past that resides in its “aboriginal name”, which is the title of the poem. Here, we need to take into consideration the strong link that the Native-American culture has with nature. Just like Thomas suggests, “[f]or Whitman the aboriginal name of New York-Mannahatta- was a reassuring guarantee of the naturalness and appropriateness of the life of the modern city” (1982: 365). What Thomas is trying to imply here is that by acknowledging the natural past of the city, the poet has the rightful power to claim modernity in the urban space. Whitman is conscious that nature is the past of the cities of the future, therefore it is

pivotal to recognize this natural past and realize that while allowing modernity to fuse with the past, this is still present in the urban space by looking at “the word [that is still] nested in nest of water-bays, superb” (5).

Moreover, Gary Snyder dares to suggest that while “wilderness may temporarily dwindle” (1990: 16), that is the physical natural space, “wildness won’t go away” (1990: 16), because we are indeed part of this system, and so is the city. The grounds where the city was built on was the place where wilderness once resided, and while this wilderness is now reduced, the city is still wild. Therefore, there must be a recognition between “the similitudes of the past and those of the future” (“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, 8). The natural transition for American progress forces the city to epitomize Nature as “[an] evolutionary process” (Thomas, 1982: 366).

Consequently, we reach a stage where we realise that even if Whitman believes the city to be superior than the natural space, he recognizes that nature deserves an equal praising to the one the city enjoys. In his journey crossing the Brooklyn Ferry, Whitman points at those “glories strung like beads on [his] smallest sights and hearings” (9). The glories Whitman speaks of are found “on the walk in the street” (9), but also on “the passage over the river” (9). Therefore, nature and city offer glories of the same quality. Whitman affirms that these glories must be praised equally since nature is as glorious as the city is.

6. A City of the Mind

Whitman paints hitherto a city that meets his democratic ideals, allows the communion between urban citizen and nature, and promises to become the model for the rest of the cities around the globe. Seemingly, the poetic city is a flawless space that Whitman yields his pen to entirely, free from any elements that may hinder the configuration of this new space exclusive to America. Even so, it remains unknown whether the American city is truly faultless, or Whitman regards the urban partly blinded by his specific personal circumstances and by an exaggerated patriotism. This issue could be easily tackled affirming that Whitman is indeed conscious of what the city is and is not, but prefers dismissing this so as to encourage the adoption of a similar appreciation towards the city. While Whitman may not directly address this issue in his work⁴, he shyly acknowledges that the city may only be plausible in a specific realm, exclusive to each one of us: the world of dreams.

In his poem “I Dream’d in a Dream”, the poet describes a vision he has had while dreaming. In his dream, Whitman sees a city that is “invincible” (1), that is characterized by the presence of comradeship and “robust love” (3) in “every hour in the actions of the men of that city” (4). Regarding this poem, we should first address that Whitman is not merely dreaming this ideal city as if the realm of dream were too superficial for this space. The poet highlights that the existence of this city can only be considered when the dream is inside another dream. The possibilities of this new city existing in the tangible reality are very much reduced. Apart from its unfeasibility, the city that Whitman describes in this work is one he does not have seen before: he claims it is “the new city of Friends” (2). This assertion leads us to reaffirm the assumption we previously argued in this paper, that Whitman’s poetic aim is to construct a new understanding of the American city.

⁴ Some critics address this issue by means of quoting several verses from section 22 of “Song of Myself”, where Whitman seems to embrace the “evilness” that inhabits the city: “Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent” (465).

Furthermore, this proves the central place that sociability and comradeship should take in the city. It is understandable then, that nature seems to be completely dismissed, as there is “[n]othing [...] greater there than the quality of robust love- it led the rest” (3). While perhaps inspired by Manhattan or Brooklyn, Whitman is not talking with a specific referent in mind, as he knows that “ideal and actuality could meet only in theory, only in imagination.” (Machor, 1982: 335).

Nevertheless, it is important to try and identify the obstacles that deny the existence of this dreamy space in tangible reality. The identification of these obstacles can be rather difficult since as we have previously said, Whitman seems rather reluctant to depicting the weaknesses of the urban, at least in his poetic work. Despite Whitman’s unwillingness to showcase the urban defects in his poetry, we are witnesses of certain criticism on Whitman’s behalf in his prose writing. M. Wynn Thomas suggests that this duality regarding the city demands the re-interpretation of Walt Whitman as a writer. Walt Whitman is not one, but two; while the first one “is a hack journalist from New York [...] reporting the social ephemera of his own particular period” (Thomas, 1994: 634), the second is a “suprahistorical poet of an imaginary Mannahatta [...] whose best work was inspired by private, rather than public affairs” (Thomas, 1994: 634). Therefore, Whitman addresses the entirety of the city in his journalistic and prose work, his poetry becomes almost orphan of it. This could lead us to ponder on Whitman’s understanding of the different literary genres: prose could be reserved for more serious matters, while idealism would be the master of poetics. Notwithstanding, this discussion is out of the scope of this investigation.

One of the instances where Whitman dares to be critical with the American city, in this case, the city he so much loved, New York, is the one that Jill Wacker deals with in her essay “Sacred Panoramas: Walt Whitman and New York City Parks” (1994). Along the argument of this paper, and just like Wacker suggests, Whitman is very much

concerned about the relationship people have with the land, since it is from there where a large part of national identity springs from (1994: 90). In some of Whitman's editorials that Wacker analyses in her essay, she studies a journalist Whitman that poses into question the democratization of tangible nature in New York. Whitman suggests the creation of more green spaces, because while nature can still be appreciated in spirit, not everybody may be that easily to *wild*.

The problematic that this situation supposes could easily be solved by establishing inside the city wide and democratic green spaces, such as public parks so people could establish an easy and direct bond with nature. Furthermore, "urban parks prove a medium for Whitman's exploration of democratic vistas and for the empowering possibilities of the unfettered, uninhibited gaze in a rapidly urbanizing city" (Wacker 1996: 87). Nature, masked in the shape of urban parks, can also approach the citizen to the *wildening* of the mind.

Wacker notes that Whitman constructs in his editorials an "urban vista [that] no longer offers light or redemption, only a homogenous sample of the city's least deserving park visitors, those of great wealth, encased in coaches that prove only foreshortened vistas and myopic views" (1994: 100). Consequently, while parks seem to establish a framework for the strengthening bonds between nature and citizens, this situation forces Whitman to admit that "his city has unsettled problems and tensions" (Wacker 1994: 100), in this case, regarding the interrelation of social classes. America needs "accessible, visible icons of both freedom and unity" (Wacker, 1994:101); the city is the best space to achieve those goals. So as to achieve them, Whitman believes in the efficacy of parks concerning the relationship between the ancient American land, that is Nature, and the inhabitant of that land which has now suffered a modernization but aims to still foster its corporal and ethereal primitive state. Nevertheless, the inequalities that Whitman discloses in his editorials may shed some light onto the question as to whether the

Whitmanian city should only remain for now as “an organic city of the mind” (Machor 1982: 335).

7. Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on the effect of contradictory nature in Walt Whitman's poetry regarding the apparent opposition between the urban and the natural spaces in American studies. In order to deal with this discussion, a variety of poetry and prose works by Whitman have been analysed to prove that the poet accepts the co-existence of both entities in one single space.

As seen in the first section, Whitman's specific view towards contradictions is one that encourages to embrace this particular nature. The type of contradictions that Whitman is interested on is that one that the own individual manufactures. Self-contradiction is usually frowned upon. It is understood as something that does not allow co-existence and thus, must be resolved. However, the poet views this phenomenon as a reminder of our humanity. Contradictions are bound to appear, and thus we must accept them as part of who we are as individuals. The spatial confrontation that Whitman suggests in his poetry is one that is resolved by means of Hegel's logic: a thesis and an antithesis will result in a synthesis.

Conveniently, Whitman firstly proposes a thesis: a nature. Nature, as a concept, has been pivotal in American intellectualism. Authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson rejected the mere observation of nature, opting for a direct identification with the natural space. While Whitman tended to follow the Transcendentalist precepts, his view on nature deviates in some aspects. Whitman suggests a merging with nature, not only physically but also spiritually. As humans, our behavior is not exclusive to us, but shared with other species of the natural world. Consequently, we all belong to the same realm. Nature and humanity are one single entity.

Nevertheless, Whitman cannot obviate the city and his devotion to the urban space. Firstly, however, it is important to remark the aversity that cities usually arouse amongst Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, who seemed to despise the

city crowds in favour of the solitude of the woods. In contrast to Thoreau, the poet considers the city to be a provider of entertainment, a space for social thriving, modernity and most importantly, human contact. The sociability that the city provides to its inhabitants is vital for Whitman's existence. Furthermore, the openness that seems to emanate from the city proves to be a space for anonymity and sexual encounters of all kinds, free from judgment.

Having exposed thesis and antithesis, the synthesis is imminent. Whitman aims to create a space where both city and nature are equally appreciated. The poet has good intentions, but realizes that he must make a choice: nature will inhabit the city, or the city will foster nature. Since nature seems to be void of the only element that Whitman needs to survive, the city will shelter nature. Whitman highlights that cities were the grounds where the greatest nature resided. This nature has not been lost, but we need to wild that nature in the city we may obviate. Therefore, there is nature in the urban space. The problem seems to reside in the common citizen that more than often overlooks this direct contact with nature. At the same time, Whitman makes use of previous assumptions dealt with in this discussion, nature is present in the city through our own existence as natural creatures. The city is a living organism that emulates the ways of nature. All and all, Whitman proposes a new concept of American city, that has a debt with its natural past but that aims towards progress and democracy with its fraternal spirit.

Now that Whitman seemed to have resolved the contradiction, the poet realizes that the expectations that he set for the city are perhaps out of the tangible realm. The democratic, ideal city that is connected to nature seems to be only plausible in mind. Inequalities arouse everywhere, specifically when it comes to the democratization of natural spaces in the city.

As further research, it would certainly be enriching to investigate in what ways Whitmanian thought has influenced other aspects of American culture. Due to the apparent annihilation of wilderness, architecture and urbanism have tried to palliate these effects in various ways. Therefore, it comes as no surprise when we realise that many architects and urbanists embody in their projects the Whitmanian spirit, making an effort to create a space inside the city where nature is clearly seen and felt, and the inequalities that the city seems to be witness of are solved. An instance of this is American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. If Whitman is considered to be the father of American poetry, Wright is the father of American architecture. With his concept of organic architecture and projects such as *Broadacre City*, Wright could be perhaps intending to emulate the Whitmanian precepts regarding the dichotomy nature-city, in the hopes of integrating nature in constructions usually found in urban spaces. Furthermore, the possible resonating of Wright's architecture with modern concepts such as *bioregionalism* would enable us to reaffirm Walt Whitman's position in the current environmental discussion at the same time environmental anxieties seem to repeatedly find comfort in Walt Whitman's poetry.

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