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**BEYOND DUALITY: TRANSCENDENTALIST FEATURES IN WALT WHITMAN'S
POETRY**

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WHITMAN'S POETRY**

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Artigo)
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Orientador: Prof. Me. Joselito Porto de Lucena.

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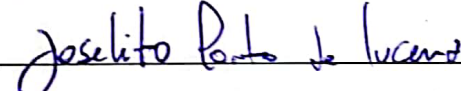
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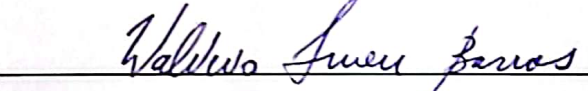
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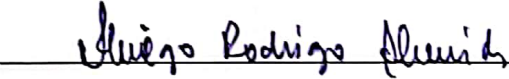
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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	5
2.THE DIVINE IN <i>LEAVES OF GRASS</i>: THE TRANSCENDENTAL INTEGRATION OF DUALISM	7
2.1 The Transcendental in Walt Whitman	7
2.2 The Duality in Whitman’s poems	10
3. THROUGH WORDS: EXPLORING TRANSCENDENTAL DUALITY IN WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY	12
3.1 Poem 1: Song of Myself	12
3.2 Poem 2: Who learns my lesson complete?	14
3.3 Poem 3: Great Are the Myths	14
3.4 Poem 4: A Song for Occupations	15
3.5 Poem 5: To Think of Time	15
3.6 Poem 6: The Sleepers	16
3.7 Poem 7: I Sing the Body Electric	16
4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	18
REFERENCES	18

BEYOND DUALITY: THE TRANSCENDENTALIST FEATURE IN WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY

Fernanda Santos Garcia de Medeiros

ABSTRACT

This work has the general purpose of analysing Walt Whitman's poetry in *Leaves of Grass* (1855) in search of elements of transcendentalist philosophy. We specifically seek to explore the patterns in his poetry that are related to the integration of opposites and the coexistence of dualities and (ii) understand the origin of the author's transcendental philosophy and its definition, which underlies the mystical line of thought revealed in the poems in the first edition of his book. Through qualitative and explanatory research, we will describe and analyze Walt Whitman's poetry, by identifying which pattern and approach of thought is present in his writings, based on studies by the following authors: Boller (1974), Kummings et al (1981), Loving (1999), Morris (1929), Assagioli (1972), Alisselineau (1999), Wihl (2001), Evan (2015) and George Hegel (1770-1830). In this study, we found that Walt Whitman follows a pattern in the content of the poems that refers to the condition of dual nature in the formation of a being. Also, how important it is to have knowledge of this dual condition so that it is integrated and complete in the individual for their own development and, consequently, a collective inner development.

Keywords: Walt Whitman; Leaves of Grass; Transcendentalism; Duality.

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem como propósito geral analisar a poesia de Walt Whitman em *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 (Folhas de Relva) em busca de elementos da filosofia transcendentalista, especificamente (i) busca explorar os padrões de sua poesia que estão relacionados à integração de opostos e à coexistência de dualidades e (ii) compreender a origem da filosofia transcendental do autor e a sua definição. Através de uma pesquisa qualitativa e explicativa, nós vamos descrever e analisar a poesia de Walt Whitman, identificando qual padrão e abordagem de pensamento está presente em seus escritos, tendo por base os estudos dos seguintes autores: Boller (1974), Kummings et al (1981), Loving (1999), Morris (1929), Assagioli (1972), Alisselineau (1999), Wihl (2001), Evan (2015) and George Hegel (1770-1830). Neste estudo, observamos que Walt Whitman possui uma abordagem transcendentalista que se reflete nos seus poemas. Além de encontrarmos um padrão no conteúdo dos poemas que se refere a condição da natureza dual na formação de um ser. E também como é importante ter o conhecimento desta condição dual para que ela seja integrada e completa no indivíduo para seu próprio desenvolvimento e por consequência, um desenvolvimento interior coletivo.

Palavras-chave: Walt Whitman; Folhas de Relva; Transcendentalismo; Dualidade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Considered the greatest modern American poet¹, born on May 31, 1819, in Long Island, New York, Walt Whitman was a writer, editor, journalist, and poet who brought forth a mild and spirited hope in the face of the humanitarian principles of democracy through his poetry – which revealed an innovation from the known and standardized poetic structures. His poetry did not conform to traditional poetic forms: it had more open/irregular structures; his poems feature long, free verses, with popular language. The content mainly addresses topics such as love, equality, democracy, soul, and the two sides (opposites) of nature: Good and evil, light and darkness, old and new, etc., as well as controversial and subversive subjects for the time, such as homoaffection, eroticism, mysticism, racism, and other social issues.

In a period of significant sociopolitical and ideological change in the United States, including events like the American Revolution (1776), Mexican-American War (1846), and the North-South political tensions that culminated in the Civil War (1861), Walt Whitman found an ideal backdrop for exploring humanistic themes in his poetry. In this scenario of civil changes in the USA, there was also an expectation among Americans of a new, independent, fertile, prosperous and democratic society. Whitman was a great enthusiast of a democratic, libertarian, and egalitarian society, which provided the necessary inspiration for the composition of his world-renowned book, which would later become a milestone in the literary field.

Leaves of Grass was first published in July 1855, and the choice of the title for his book is closely related to the poet's experiences with nature, with his rural upbringing in a land where the economy was based on agrarian activities and a strong connection with rural workers. According to Lopes (2005), the name "leaves" alludes to a set of paper sheets, and the name "grass" refers to a set of plants that can represent various manifestations of plant life, such as grass, shoots, and other plants, as depicted in the cover title designed by the poet himself for the first edition. This edition contains 12 poems that cover the depth of the referred themes and reveal to the reader their transcendental and mystical line of thought.

There is a pattern in Whitman's poems that becomes a very noticeable feature in the content of the poems: the dual nature of all beings and/or the integration of opposites. Duality is a condition present in the formation of the individual, being two aspects of opposite nature that complement each other to exist, such as right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, soul and body. In many traditions, ancient philosophies and religions the theme of duality emerges as a necessary condition of humanity: that of experience by contrast. According to this perennial philosophy², these two opposing poles are the fundamental

¹ Walt Whitman had acquired a universal esteem, and from this time on it was impossible to treat him with contempt. Some critics regarded him as the greatest poet or one of the greatest poets of the century (ALESSINEAU, 1999, p.211).

² The Perennial Philosophy is a metaphysical and philosophical concept that recognizes a divine Reality both transcendent and immanent in the world, connecting the spiritual and material realms. It suggests that this divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute that transcends ordinary human understanding but can be directly experienced and realized. This concept is not limited to a specific religious tradition but has universal and timeless elements, present in various forms across different cultures and religions. The Perennial Philosophy shares commonalities with mystical traditions in Hinduism and Christianity, highlighting a spiritual Absolute that defies simple description but is accessible through direct experience (HUXLEY, 1947).

elements to constitute the nature of the human being, who also has two coexisting facets: a spiritual and a material one. Although there are two different sides to each existing element, it does not imply that they are two separate and independent elements from each other, but rather two distinct dimensions that harmonize and need to be understood in their totality, as studied in religious traditions³ such as Hinduism⁴ and Taoism⁵, for example.

This research aims to analyse Walt Whitman's poetry in *Leaves of Grass* (1885) in search of elements of transcendentalist philosophy. From this study, two more specific objectives can be considered in this work:

- (i) To explore the patterns in his poetry that are related to the integration of opposites and the coexistence of dualities.
- (ii) To understand the origin of the author's transcendental philosophy and its definition, which underlies the mystical line of thought revealed in the first edition of his book.

This research can be classified as a Qualitative Research, as it brings a discussion that understands and interprets social and human phenomena, exploring subjective and complex issues such as the soul and the human psyche. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), it is a research approach that analyses human experiences and meanings in social contexts. This work can also be classified as explanatory research, as it seeks to explain the reasons behind Walt Whitman's (from now on, also referred as WW) concern with opposites, entering into a more in-depth perspective on the nature of opposites in human beings. According to Gil (2008), explanatory research is a type of research that aims to identify the factors and causes that influence a given phenomenon.

Walt Whitman made many editions of *Leaves of Grass* until his death. The work had six editions in the periods between 1855 and 1882, the last one, called Deathbed edition, only being released in 1892 with around 400 poems (GAILEY, 2006). In order to discuss the transcendentalist approach in his literature and the dual/opposite integrative pattern that permeates his poems, we chose, as methodology, to analyse the first published book (1855) containing 12 long poems, as they maintain the complexity of the themes in their original form before the changes of later editions. For this, we used the 2019 bilingual edition entitled "*Folhas de Relva: A Primeira Edição (1855) [Leaves of Grass: The First Edition (1855)]*".

First, we selected the poems that best show the coexisting opposites in human beings and divided the poems into excerpts to represent the study of this work – we indicate opposite words in bold to better situate the analysis. Then, we highlighted 10 excerpts from the 7 poems in which the transcendental perspective and the dual nature of its themes will be discussed based on the theories mentioned.

³ The belief in the unity of existence is one of the most prominent features of the eastern religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc. The idea of the unity of existence is clear in the Hindu religion in its recognition that God is the real existence, and that the entire universe is God, and what is in existence is only one thing, and God (Brahma) has all the attributes (AL-GHANANEEM, 2022).

⁴ Hindus believe in the eternal and uncreated nature of the soul (Atman), which, when detached from material phenomena, embarks on a path of return to the greater soul. While having an adventure in the material world, which the Hindus call Maya, or the Great Illusion of separateness, it is only through the duality of opposites that the soul can learn and evolve (AL-GHANANEEM, 2022).

⁵ The deity in Taoism is the Tao, and he can reveal himself in the forces of light and the forces of darkness, which were issued from one origin, the Great One, which is the more correct name for God. In Taoism, we find that the Holy Trinity is composed of the power (Tao, Yin, and Yang), i.e., the first source, from which the masculine and feminine emerged, and from which all creatures were formed (AL-GHANANEEM, 2022).

In the next section, we will present the theoretical references that support this study about the transcendentalist origin of Whitman's poems in *Leaves of Grass* (1855). For this, we will use the research of the following authors: Boller (1974), Kummings et al (1981), Loving (1999), Morris (1929), Assagioli (1972), Alisselineau (1999), Wihl (2001), Evan (2015) and George Hegel (1770-1830).

2.THE DIVINE IN *LEAVES OF GRASS*: THE TRANSCENDENTAL INTEGRATION OF DUALISM

2.1 The Transcendental in Walt Whitman

Transcendentalism is a line of philosophical and literary thought that originated in the United States in the 19th century, in the 1830s. Transcendentalists emphasized the importance of intuition, individual spirituality, and direct connection with nature. They believed that truth could be found in personal experience and communion with nature, not just organized religion or reason, contrary to the old Puritan belief in force at the time. Some great figures associated with transcendentalism include Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862).

As Boller (1974, p. 1) clearly explains:

AMERICAN Transcendentalism began as a revolt against historical Christianity. It developed as a protest movement within the Unitarian Church in New England (particularly in the Boston area) during the 1830's and its most prominent spokesmen were Unitarian clergymen, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had studied at the Harvard Divinity School. In its deepest reaches Transcendentalism was a quest for authentic religious experience. It rejected forms, creeds, rites, and verbal explanations and sought to penetrate to the heart of things by a direct, immediate encounter with reality. Its objective, Emerson announced, was an original relation with the universe. (BOLLER, 1974, p. 1).

Thus, it is notable that transcendentalism can be seen as an independent, intuitive and universalist form of religion⁶ in which its adherents needed contact with nature to have a deep connection with all things. Emerson, in *Self-Reliance* (1841), encourages the individual to follow their originality as a form of divine creativity, making the subject become authentic and knowledgeable about their own depths, rejecting imitations, standards and dogmas; in other words, whoever wants to live with confidence, free from institutionalized social beliefs, must first become a nonconformist.

As mentioned in the introduction, the American transcendentalist philosophy represented by Whitman also received influence from other philosophies and religious doctrines, specifically from the East, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, since the poems in his book reflect well that the poet found himself in a "meditative state" and therefore dealt with the situations of each poem, with a sublime and absolute perspective - which characterizes one of the principles of Eastern philosophy.

Boller (1974, p. 22) will say that:

⁶ In the popular etymology among the later ancients (Servius, Lactantius, Augustine) and the interpretation of many modern writers connects it with *religare* "to bind fast" (see rely), via the notion of "place an obligation on," or "bond between humans and gods" (RELIGION, 2017).

In the 1970's, American astronauts, viewing planet earth from lunar perspectives, experienced the deep underlying sense of awe and wonder that the Transcendentalists had regarded as essential to the full life. "I completely lost my identity as an American astronaut," reported one astronaut of his experience in outer space. "I felt a part of everyone and everything sweeping past me below." You don't look down at the world as an American said another astronaut, "but as a human being".

But the Transcendentalists didn't need to go to the moon to experience the wonder of things. They saw it everywhere about them. Transcendentalism meant rising a little above conventional use and wont; it meant breaking out of habitual ways of conceiving things to some degree and trying to view reality with what has been called an innocent eye. (Boller, 1974, p. 22).

Thus, one can see precepts from Eastern religions interceding and building on the inspiration of transcendentalist poets, since at that time, American poets sought to follow other lines of thought to base themselves on and develop American transcendentalism itself. Kummings *et al* (1981, p. 459) rightly quotes: "in the nineteenth century lots and lots of poets and philosophers in America were interested in transcendentalism, oriental wisdom, Brahma, the Hindus and the romantic, glamorous wisdom of the East".

Unlike standard transcendentalism at that time, Walt Whitman's book brings a new aspect to this philosophy, a more comprehensive, modern and universalist aspect, which would later improve the American transcendentalism initially presented by Emerson.

Leaves of Grass came out of the Ryerson Streets and the Myrtle Avenues of Brooklyn, which was then a fairly reliable microcosm of the United States. It also originated in Transcendentalism, the American filter for English and German romanticism and orientalism, which suggested the mysticism in religious and poetic acts. Whitman's adaptation essentially rerouted the path of Emerson's spiritual amelioration with its journey motif and its image of an impeded return to Ithaca. In Whitman there is only an "open road," where the scenes passed are more important than the destination. Likewise, there is no crossing over, or movement from A to Z. in the soul's migration. (Loving, 1999, p. 207).

This excerpt suggests that Walt Whitman's adaptation of transcendentalism had a significant impact on the approach to spiritual improvement previously outlined by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The reference to "Ithaca" evokes the famous poem "*Ithaca*" (1911) by Constantino Cavafy (1863-1933), which, in turn, alludes to Homer's *Odyssey*. In Greek mythology, Ithaca is the island of Odysseus, and Cavafy's poem talks about the journey, the quest, and the wisdom gained during the process, emphasizing that the journey is as valuable as the destination.

Thus, by mentioning the "prevented return to Ithaca," the excerpt may be indicating that, while Emerson highlighted the importance of the spiritual journey, Whitman, by adapting transcendentalism, redirected this trajectory, possibly proposing a different or expanded approach to the spiritual quest. The concept of "prevented return" suggests that the completion of the spiritual journey may not be linear or that understanding transcends conventional notions of arrival or completion. This adaptation may reflect a unique and personalized interpretation of transcendentalism on Whitman's part.

Whitman was and is considered one of the great names in the American transcendentalist community, because in addition to admiring the well-known writers of this philosophy (Emerson and Thoreau), his poetry carries a transcendental influence, as it expresses a naturalistic character and speaks in a witty and spiritual way about the

contents of his poems, denoting a universalism that goes beyond, transcends the stereotypical view of man, his relationships, life and everything that happens and surrounds him. According to Loving (1999, p. 180): "The first *Leaves* was a blend of dream-vision and autobiography. Its "Yankee transcendentalism came right out of Concord, and its "New York rowdyism had the brag of Brooklyn."

So, due to rich local experiences (as a teacher, editor, bookseller and hospital orderly⁷ in the Civil War) where not only Whitman worked and developed his keenest perception as a poet, but other writers on the streets of Concord and Brooklyn (where he lived his childhood and worked as a newspaper editor at the time), he revives in his book the transcendental approach in the recognized way of an American citizen.

Moreover, it is very noticeable that the poet brings with him a "divine" perspective on existence; he manages to show mystical/supernatural interference through the poems, including the name of his masterpiece *Leaves of Grass*; brings out the importance of the esoteric side in life situations, in addition to being "guided" by his own life experiences and his authentic personality.

A boy with the soul of a poet; will find out those things in Nature which best feed his appetite for beauty and truth. Even if he is imprisoned in city streets his feet will turn, when free, toward the open landscape, as did those of Keats and Coleridge and Leigh Hunt. But when the heart that assimilates the meaning and loveliness of the country and of the sea is born amongst them, and uses them as playmates in childhood, as Walt Whitman did — like Wordsworth in his beloved mountains and lakes, and Tennyson in his Surrey downs, then the association grows with life and is never separable from the character of the poet. (Morris, 1929, p. 13).

So, since he was little, Whitman already had a strong appreciation for nature and the inspiration he enjoyed from it, also showing his poetic talent for insightfully interpreting the sensations and experiences he had.

Furthermore, when it was released, the book *Leaves of Grass* in itself was already seen as a legacy of transcendentalism, due to its spiritual universalist approach and its philanthropy⁸ expressed in the contents of its poems. In this way, many theorists and adherents of this philosophy saw in Whitman the person who would rescue transcendentalism for the USA, breaking the standards of traditional faith, offering a good and spirited expectation for a society that was undergoing many changes, regaining the metaphysical dimension in the worldview of society. Added to this, Whitman managed to go even further than this philosophy in its limitation for the time, the poet brought voice to the equality of all individuals, explored human sexuality and placed all people men, women, children, the elderly, the rich or poor at the same level, all with the same importance in society and existence.

According to Loving (1999, p.185-6):

⁷ He was immediately overcome by a great pity for all these young soldiers who were suffering so atrociously and some of whom seized on him convulsively and constrained him to stay beside them for hours. By his own testimony, on one occasion, he even helped the stretcher-bearers to remove the dead from the battle-field and to give first-aid to the wounded during a truce (ALESSINEAU, 1999, p. 144).

⁸ The term we wish to propose for this field is philanthropy, which we define more broadly than most others do. The term comes from the Greek *philanthropia*, meaning "love of mankind." In some of its modern uses, philanthropy still retains its ancient meaning of general benevolence, of kindness, of generosity toward humanity (PAYTON; MOODY, 2008, p. 35).

Despite its unprecedented mention of the body, *Leaves of Grass* was decidedly a spiritual-or "transcendental"-poem. The original transcendentalists had shocked their elders by demanding that Unitarianism, or Christianity with its social emphasis, recover the spiritual balance lost in the eighteenth-century retreat from the hellfire- and-brimstone harshness of Puritanism. This movement of mainly Unitarian clergymen wanted to inject more "life," or emotion, into the dry bones of latter-day deism. (Loving, 1999, p. 185).

So, Whitman's book was like a transcendentalist legacy in literature that would soon bring an updated look to the movement, marking a new era:

Obviously, when Emerson wrote his famous letter on July 21, greeting Whitman "at the beginning of a great career," he viewed *Leaves of Grass* as a means of reviving Transcendentalism. Yet Whitman's brand of Transcendentalism with its equality of Soul and Body, violated the decency standards of the "evening lamp," which wrote "women and children" as one word. Natural facts were evidence of a spiritual fact, or God's love, Emerson had written in Nature, but Whitman's natural facts emphasized the human body and even its private parts. Whitman's attention to nature and sexuality has perhaps been overemphasized itself in the twentieth century, first with its existential focus on nature as the only spirit in the age of modernism and then with its collapse of meaning, or "truth," altogether in the era of postmodernism. (Loving, 1999, p. 186).

Therefore, Whitman, in publishing *Leaves of Grass*, revived transcendentalism, but his egalitarian approach to soul and body, women and children, and his willingness to discuss issues of sexuality challenged the norms of that period. While Emerson saw natural facts as evidence of a spiritual fact or God's love, Whitman highlighted the human body, including its private parts. His dedication to talking about nature and sexuality was highlighted in the interpretations of that time, standing out in the eras of modernism and postmodernism.

2.2 The Duality in Whitman's poems

As stated in the introduction of this work, duality is a concept that concerns the existence of two opposing poles that form the totality of a being, it is a conception present in ancient philosophies and sciences. None of these poles can be dispensed with or more accepted than the other, in relation to the nature of beings, as both complement each other and constitute the completeness of an individual. The importance of integrating these two opposing sides is described in several studies such as: philosophy, psychology, religion, natural sciences and is also highlighted in Walt Whitman's poems, becoming a standard in the content of his poetics.

According to Assagioli (1972, p. 1):

Polarity is a universal fact; it is inherent in cosmic manifestation. It is true that the Ultimate and Supreme Reality is the One, the Absolute, the Transcendent; but it can only be defined by what it is not. From the very moment that cosmic manifestation begins to unfold, duality is born. The first fundamental duality is precisely that between manifestation and the Unmanifest. In the Bhagavad Gita this is expressed in the words: "Having pervaded the whole Universe with a fragment of myself, I remain." In the process of manifestation the fundamental polarity is that of Spirit and Matter. (ASSAGIOLI, 1972, p. 1).

Therefore, for something to be created or manifested, there must be contrasts in its constituent nature, taking into account the conditionality of this relationship between polarities:

It is at once necessary to state that all polarity is a relationship between two elements, and that, as such, it is never absolute, but relative even to a particular pair of opposites: the same element can be positive in its relation to a certain "pole" and negative in its relation to another. An instance of the relativity of the "polar relationships" exists in the fundamental polarity between Spirit and Matter. (Assagioli, 1972, p. 1).

In this way, we can say that duality is an inherent characteristic of the creation process. And all existing forms and lives have this duality, whether in their physical, chemical, structural or symbolic composition and, therefore, we must consider these two sides, two opposites but which integrate and enable the balance of life.

Researchers and Whitman scholars such as Alisselineau (1999), Wihl (2001), Evan (2015), describe that the poet also received influence from the German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770-1830), who defended a dialectic⁹ that involves the conflict of opposing ideas, thesis and antithesis, which leads to synthesis, a new stage or understanding that transcends the initial contradictions.

This Hegelian basis that Whitman demonstrated in his writings is also related to the importance of integrating opposites and viewing duality as parts of a whole that, although distinct, complete the being.

Whitman's poems reflect well the dual issue of people, their social positions, their genders, including natural events and phenomena to highlight the duality in each thing and each being, representing transcendental wisdom in the universal perspective of seeing oneself in each opposite, accepting all possibilities and adopting a unifying/integrating stance in all situations. Kummings (2006, p. 331) says that Whitman "appears to stress the unitary relationship, rather than the antagonism between the binaries experienced in life."

In relation to Whitman's first poem "Song of Myself" present in the first edition (1885) of *Leaves of Grass*, the author Kummings (2006, p. 80) still states that:

The great lyrics and many sections from "Song of Myself" refer to a soul, a real me, an infinite multiplicity of selves, what could be fairly called a democratic genius. About the time that Whitman composed *Democratic Vistas* he was immersed in reading German idealist philosophy. More of his writings on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are coming to light even today. (Kummings, 2006, p. 80).

With this passage, we understand that the poet emphasizes a spiritualist idea of being in all individuals, of representing all human diversity in its totality, as if he were showing a divine connection that permeates all life:

The problem is that Whitman's real me, like the Hegelian spirit, never settles on one type of individual but rather hovers over or enters into the laborer, farmer, sailor, husband, wife, the lover's physical body, or the crowd on the

⁹ As far as the word 'dialect' is concerned, the Dictionary states that it derives from mid-16th century French *dialecte* or via Latin from Greek *dialektos* 'discourse, way of speaking', from *dialegesthai* 'converse with'. "A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group (GARCÍA, 2015, p. 204).

streets of Brooklyn or Manhattan. It has no real shape but is rather best seen in the pattern of its development (Kummings, 2006, p. 80).

So, we can say that duality is a standard aspect present in Whitman's poetics, but that it is not only the demonstration of two different facets that the author is concerned with showing, but also their incorporation, integrating a whole being. In line with this, Whitman presents in his poems the ability to see in others, to be in opposites, at the same time, of something or someone, making this a practice that transcends duality itself and thus, causes there to be a greater development in the individual's ego.

3. THROUGH WORDS: EXPLORING TRANSCENDENTAL DUALITY IN WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY

The first publication of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), made Walt Whitman a poet recognized and admired by other great names in poetry such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ezra Pound, among others. Whitman's deep connection with nature and his rural education, deeply intertwined with agrarian activities, played a fundamental role in the formation of his transcendental perspective, as represented by the title of his work.

In this section, we will explore the corpus of this research regarding the elements of the transcendentalist movement in literature and also the dual pattern that permeates the verses of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* (2019). First, 3 subsections titled with the name of each poem will be presented in the following order: Song of Myself; Who learned my lesson complete?; Great Are the Myths, referring to transcendentalism and each with its commented analyses from the point of view of the theories already discussed. Afterwards, the analysis of poems that contain the dualistic pattern in their themes will be shown, they are: Song of Myself (same poem, different perspective); (A Song for Occupations;: To Think of Time; The Sleepers; I Sing the Body Electric.

3.1 Poem 1: Song of Myself

We can say that Whitman presented all the qualities of transcendentalist thought in the verses of his poems, expressing the spiritual/mystical character in his stories. Below we take the first lines of the opening poem of *Leaves of Grass*, in which he makes reference to the unity of humanity and the implications of seeing in each individual a face of the same transcendental experience:

Excerpt 1:

*“In all people I see myself, none more and
not one a barleycorn less, And the good or
bad I say of myself I say of them.”*

(Song of Myself - Whitman, 2019, p. 70)

In this excerpt, a universalist aspect is shown that unites and is present in all things; a passage in which the author has a transcendentalist vision of seeing himself in all people, a form of interpersonal connection beyond pro-humanitarian, fraternal, philanthropic and social discussions. As it the proposal of the poem and its title "Song of Myself", although it represents a celebration of oneself, throughout the text the author paradoxically celebrates and reveres all human diversity. Whitman shows that when he

sees his brother or sister (the other in general), he sees himself, for they are the same expression of a spirit having an adventure. This implies a form of anamnesis, which is, in this case, remembering he is God implies that the other is also God.

Excerpt 2:

*“I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by after all.”*
(Song of Myself - Whitman, 2019, p. 70)

In this excerpt, the author shows the appreciation of himself in the first verse when the narrator claims to know that he is "august", which means respected and impressive, that is, a sublime being, something greater than any label or stereotype, as being a part of a cycle and a mystery of nature. Another characteristic that demonstrates the value of his personality is in the second verse in which the author says that he does not need to hurt his soul for it to be understood, he will be and accept himself the way he is without external approval. This stance is well defended in transcendentalism, which says that the individual must embrace their individuality/particularity and thus express the authenticity of their being, without resorting to pre-conceived and conventional concepts, but listening to their own intuitive nature: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius (...) A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within” (Emerson, 1841, p.1)

Excerpt 3:

*“I am of **old and young**, of the **foolish** as much as the **wise**,
Regardless of others, ever **regardful** of others,
Maternal as well as **paternal**, a **child** as well as a **man**”*
(Song of Myself - Whitman, 2019, p.64)

In this excerpt, we can say that though the body might get older, the spirit remains young; though we have been in this planet for decades, our atoms and spirits have existed for millennia; “We are fools”, meaning we know nothing of the mysteries of existence, but we are wise, since our body contains the information and the history of the universe itself. In the third verse: “We are maternal”, meaning that we have a feminine side and we are parts of our mothers, but we are paternal too. A child, still discovering the world, but a man, experienced.

*“I have said that the **soul** is not more than the **body**,
And I have said that the body **is not** more than the soul,
And nothing, not **God**, is greater to one than **one’s-self** is,”*
(Song of Myself - Whitman, 2019, p.124)

In this excerpt, the body-spirit duality is shown, denoting the same relevance in both in an individual, as well as the duality between God and the self. The poet places all

conditions of being on the same level, in contrast to Christian religions that villainize our body, to the point of punishing the body and matter as a way of valuing the spirit. In the poem, the author also contradicts the Christian belief that the body corrupts the soul. The transcendentalist view values, in the body, the visible aspect of the spirit, a corresponding aspect, possessing beauty, knowledge and divinity.

3.2 Poem 2: Who learns my lesson complete?

Another poem that shows the transcendental aspect in Whitman's poetry is the eleventh poem called: Who Learns My Lesson Complete?

Excerpt 4:

*“I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman,
Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man or woman,
Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me or any one else.*

*Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? as every one is immortal,
I know it is wonderful but my eyesight is equally wonderful ”*

(Who Learns My Lesson Complete? - Whitman, 2019, p.202)

This excerpt highlights the condition of immortality, which is a factor present in many religious traditions, in which it is believed in the possibility of existing or living eternally. In these verses, the poet affirms the "wonder" that it is to be immortal and that we are all immortal, reminding us of a great quality of being that surpasses death and space-time, remaining forever in existence, as consciousnesses, souls and personalities that survive all contexts. Since he sees each individual as being an important part of the universe that constitutes a living and transforming cosmos, and as it is infinite, it is constantly changing and improving itself. Also highlighting that the human being is not only the body and made of palpable matter, but is also made of a non-physical, spiritual and consciencial aspect. The poem itself manifests the infinity that resides in the beauty of the existence of each event, each being, their roles and functions and everything that surrounds them, this being the "lesson to be learned".

3.3 Poem 3: Great Are the Myths

Excerpt 5:

*“The **eternal equilibrium of things** is great, and the eternal overthrow of things is great,
And there is another paradox.*

*Great is life. . . . and real and **mystical**, wherever and whoever;
Great is Death. . . . Sure as life holds all parts together;
Sure as the **stars** return again after they margin in the light, death is great as life.”*

(Great Are the Myths - Whitman, 2019, p.208)

These are the final verses of the poem in which the central idea is to unveil the true greatness of everything that exists, that we see, know and face them in a superficial

way. In this first verse it talks about the relevance of the balance between things, including the relevance of subversion, which is also something “great”, as it is necessary to subvert paradigms and social conventions so that there is development and improvement in society. The following verses also describe the greatness of the cycle of life and death, revealing its mystical/spiritual part in the cause of both, relating it to the duration of the life of the stars, as a form of proof by comparison, which together come together to form the brilliance of light.

Excerpt 6:

*“Great are **yourself** and **myself**,
We are just as **good** and **bad** as the **oldest** and **youngest** or any,
What the **best** and **worst** did we could do,
What **they** felt . . . do not **we** feel it in ourselves?
What **they** wished . . . do **we** not wish the same?”*
(Great Are the Myths - Whitman, 2019, p.204)

In this excerpt, the personal pronouns “I”, “you”, “we”, “they” are complemented by opposite adjectives, representing the duality of their qualities. When the poet states that both he and you are “good” and “bad”, just like “older” and “younger” people, doing what is “worse” or “better”. And at the end of the stanza, all these circumstances that highlight the dual nature, demonstrate that good and evil reside in all of us. So, when we see evil in the world, we don't see someone who is fundamentally evil, we see someone who is under the control of ignorance and consequently under the control of "evil", of what brings harm to themselves and others. It is as if the individual is on a stage of illusions where "evil" is only seen outside of the being and not in it either, he is under the condition of Maya (illusion in Sanskrit) mentioned in the sacred book Bhagavad Gita.

3.4 Poem 4: A Song for Occupations

Excerpt 7:

*“The **light** and **shade** — the curious sense of body and identity — the greed that with perfect complaisance devours all things — the endless pride and outstretching of man — unspeakable **joys** and **sorrows**,”*
(A Song for Occupations - Whitman, 2019, p.136)

In this passage, we highlight the nouns that denote the natural phenomena “**light and shadow**” that are opposites, relating their identity with the desire to stand or differentiate themselves in front of all things. This excerpt shows the individual's self-valuation and exaltation, considering all parties, pleasures or sadness, as also highlighted by the opposite nouns "joys" and "sorrows", once again placing two polarities at the same level of relevance. It also refers to the importance of contrast, both in relation to the pleasure of having a unique identity and body and in relation to the nature of opposites, as we would not know what is “right” if we did not see what is “wrong”, and we would not be able to experience all the benefits that this brings us.

3.5 Poem 5: To Think of Time

Excerpt 8:

*“The **vulgar** and the **refined**. . . what you call **sin** and what you call **goodness**. . . to think how wide a difference;*

*To think the difference will still continue to others, yet we lie **beyond the difference**.”*

(To Think of Time - Whitman, 2019, p.152)

In this poem, the author brings the message of the brevity of our lives, how quickly it develops and we have to accompany it in its transience and its ephemeral aspect through things that are not so important but that we value so much, forgetting that situations and circumstances are momentary factors. Combined with this passage, we can note that it shows the irrelevance of what we consider "vulgar" and "refined", "sin" and "goodness", which are opposite adjectives, but which occupy the same "credit" in life in its totality. Also revealing a deep and transcendent perspective on the real value of man's life. Since, in the poem, the author shows that when we “lie down” this “great difference” no longer counts, it doesn't matter if it is one or the other, the final destination is the same for both or we are also whatever, we are beyond our differences.

3.6 Poem 6: The Sleepers

Excerpt 9:

*“The call of the **slave** is one with the **master's** call . . and the master salutes the slave, The felon steps forth from the prison the **insane** becomes **sane** the suffering of sick persons is relieved,”*

(The Sleepers - Whitman, 2019, p.170)

In this passage, although the opposites of layer and social condition are described, the content of the poem will refer to the meditative and appreciative capacity of a navigator when being in contact with the different people on the ship, as he begins to see the beauty and the uniqueness of each one there to the point of feeling as if they were each of them and feeling how each of them feel, think and live. Denoting a contemplative feeling that transcends the mere look and makes the narrator "incarnate" in the people who were sleeping there, placing them all on the same scale of importance in existence, equalizing without distinctions of class, ethnicity and religion.

3.7 Poem 7: I Sing the Body Electric

Excerpt 10:

*“The female contains **all qualities** and tempers them she is in her place she moves with **perfect balance**,*

*She is all things duly veiled she is both **passive** and **active** she is to conceive daughters as well as sons and **sons** as well as **daughters**.”*

(I Sing the Body Electric - Whitman, 2019, p.178)

The message of the entire poem is always recognizing that there is perfection in all bodies, shapes and genders and how the author feels about the beauty and biological nature that he appreciates in individuals. Likewise, in this excerpt, the poet emphasizes

the different qualities of the female individual, because, in these verses, the woman is described as a being who possesses all skills and abilities in a discreet way (“she is all things veiled”). It also shows her as an active and passive agent and generator of daughters and sons - which well represents the integrity of opposites in the feminine, since in this poem the author focuses on human equality, mainly in the corporeal/apparent aspect, further stating that the body It does not corrupt the soul and is not less valuable than it.

This pattern of demonstrating the relationship of duality, its nature and its complementation, is well explained in the words of Cristo (2007, p.44):

Chief among the dichotomies Whitman explores is the opposition posed between the competing philosophical and scientific paradigms of reductionism and holism. While the former view holds that the universe can only be explained in terms of its constituent parts, the latter finds the universe only able to be elaborated in terms of the greater relationships which exist between these constituent parts. Rather than adopting either approach to the universe exclusively, Whitman's perspective can be seen as oscillating, at different times, between both modes of thought in *Leaves of Grass*. At times within the same poem or passage, he makes use of the binary opposition posed by the principles of reductionism and holism to illustrate his broader, transcendental beliefs regarding the universe. As we will see, Whitman rejects neither perspective, as both necessarily inform and are entailed by the transcendentalist beliefs to which he adhered. (CRISTO, 2007, p.44).

Thus, it is understandable that, to emphasize his transcendentalist vision, Whitman uses a binary opposition in the poems, also encompassing a holistic¹⁰ conception that opposes reductionism¹¹, in the same way that he also applies the second conception to his poetry, to exemplify his own duality, with the aim of exposing a wisdom of life that transcends any philosophical current. And this transcendental thought is what will shape the construction of his poems and also the shape of the poet's own personality.

All of these poems carry the concept of duality as a condition of existence, whether in people, feelings, events and any other qualities of being, always presenting their two (different) sides. Psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1969 p.235) says that: "In terms of energy, polarity means a potential, and wherever a potential exists there is the possibility of a current, a flow of events, for the tension of opposites strives for balance".

So, the purpose of recognizing dual nature is precisely to accept that we have these two facets that already make up our being and all of nature and, therefore, we must see them as something natural and not something to divide ourselves between. Mistakenly, we think that we are just a single quality, a single path, when in fact, we possess all the possibilities within ourselves and the more our duality is complemented, the more we can develop, reaching our full potential.

Also, integrating our dualities means removing human differences whether in the social, economic and, mainly, personal/existential fields, ensuring that all people are

¹⁰ Holism underlies the synthetic tendency in the universe, and it is the principle which makes for the origin and progress of wholes in the universe – the gradual development and stratification of a progressive series of wholes stretching from the inorganic beginnings to the higher levels of spiritual creation (WYK, 2016, p.1).

¹¹ Reductionism, in turn, is defined as the analysis of complex things, data, etc., into less complex constituents, and is also a term often employed in a disparaging tone as any theory or method that holds that a complex idea, system, etc., can be completely understood in terms of its simpler parts or components (WYK, 2016, p.3).

valued and their singularities respected, without distinction of sex, race, color, gender, socioeconomic position - is to place an equivalence between everyone, unifying all human qualities and transcending all common senses. As the poet says in the following verse: "I swear they are averaged now....one is no better than other, The night and sleep have likened them and restored them", (Whitman, 2019, p.168).

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leaves of Grass is a book of poems that brought a modernist look to American literature due to the irregular structure of poems, the use of free verse and its new themes that follow the social changes that were happening in the 19th century in the USA, in addition to rescuing transcendentalist and unifying thought in the literary field and also, it is the book that made Walt Whitman a recognized poet, innovator and precursor of literary modernism. Thus, carrying out a study on the characteristics of his poetry and his approach to transcendental thought is an important analysis that can contribute to other research aimed at understanding Walt Whitman's poetics and the particular aspects that constitute it.

It is in this transcendental conception that we chose to study what would be the source of this literary approach that marked Walt Whitman's poetry and what would be the poetic pattern present in his poems that characterizes his writings. Thus, through this qualitative study, we demonstrate that the writer Walt Whitman was a supporter of transcendentalism. The author sympathized with this philosophy and incorporated it into his own way of life in which he reflected a lot on the poems in *Leaves of Grass* (1855). What made his book become a legacy of this movement and innovated in the literary area. Furthermore, our research allowed us to show that the dual nature present in each being would define a pattern in Whitman's poems, but, being a duality that complements its opposite, for a deeper and more complete existence.

In a historical context of great changes in American society and along with that, a social expectation for a new independent and promising America, the poet WW also saw hope in contributing to this "new American soil", with progressive ideals he aspired for a conscious and truly democratic society, which drove the necessary inspiration for the creation of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). His book of poems also became an artifact of transcendentalist rebirth that, at the same time, highlighted American society and brought a new position to people: the individual needs to recognize the existence of duality in themselves, as this way, there would not be so much distance and prejudices between people, in addition to becoming a complete and potential being.

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