

## REQUIEM FOR AN IDENTITY: ANALYZING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SELF IN *SONG OF MYSELF*

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**ABSTRACT.** *Requiem for an Identity: Analyzing Representations of the Self in Song of Myself.* The paper explores the introspection into the experience of selfhood by deconstructing the representation of identity into four stances – the poetic self, the self as other, the deistic/ heroic self and the bohemian self. The pairing into dual and opposing sets and their subsequent distribution in the framework of syzygial unity-in-duality is meant to render a more punctual picture of Whitman’s plethora of identifications in *Song of Myself*. The analysis sets into motion the identity of “I”, showing that the conundrum of identity is given by specific and independent identifications of the self with figures of the American society and imaginary. The validation of the multifaceted “I” embedded in the self-discovery is made by approaching the addressability of I-You autoscopies, in an attempt to restore identity through the filter of readership.

**Keywords:** *selfhood, identity, autoscopies, addressability, identification*

**REZUMAT.** *Requiem pentru o identitate: Analiza reprezentărilor sinelui în Song of Myself.* Această lucrare explorează introspecția în experiența sinelui, deconstruind reprezentările sinelui în patru ipostaze - sinele poetic, sinele ca celălalt, sinele deist/ erou și sinele boem. Asocierea acestor ipostaze în seturi duale și opozante și distribuția acestora în dualitatea unității sizigiale are rolul de a schița o imagine punctuală a multitudinii de identificări din *Song of Myself*. Analiza pune în mișcare identitatea “eu-lui”, indicând că enigma identității este schițată de identificări specifice și independente ale sinelui cu imagini ale societății americane și ale imaginarului. Validarea “Eu-lui” multilateral integrat în descoperirea sinelui se face prin referirea la adresabilitatea autoscopiilor Eu-tu, într-o încercare de a reface identitatea prin filtrul cititorului.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *sine, identitate, autocopii, adresabilitate, identificare*

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### Introductory Remarks: Foundations of the Self in *Song of Myself*

Walt Whitman's poetry stands out particularly due to its subliminal reading: as experimentation in form and style (notably analyzed by Carl Strauch), as a celebration of the mystical experience (according to James E. Miller), as a blend of spirituality and sensuality (Paul Zweig) and respectively as an exploration of the limits of human knowledge. *Song of Myself* was held as the centerpiece of *Leaves of Grass* throughout the entire revision process over the thirty-five years since its first publishing in 1855. It is an all-encompassing poem, encapsulating themes that vary from sexuality, to identity, to democracy and solitude, but, above all, *Song of Myself* is a declaration of freedom. Stemming from this premise of liberating energy, the current study aims to reflect on the conundrum of *self*-identity, broken into pieces of identification and then restored in plurifaceted autoscopies based on the dialogic addressability "you-I" in the poem. In doing so, Whitman's poem is to be read as a cathartic stimulus for a wandering audience that questions the boundaries between the stances of the self.

The paper will use the deconstructive framework of splitting the identity of the self to pursue the discovery process of deciphering the "myself" code that Whitman establishes in order to imagine his poetic laboratory. The motivation for this study considers two viewpoints regarding the way in which Whitman's *Song of Myself* triggers addressability and identification. On one hand, there is Harold Bloom's comparison of Whitman to "a prophet protesting in the name of the poor and the exploited voices of the interminable generations of slaves" (388). On the other hand, Edwin H. Miller, in his *Mosaic of Interpretations* (1989), refers to limits on the spectrum of accessibility, claiming the "*Song of Myself* has never spoken to a mass audience. Its originality, the absence of rime and conventional meter, the quirkiness of the lines and the sometimes obscure subject matters [...] limits access to an elite readership" (Miller 12).

In between the two viewpoints, if *Song of Myself* (referred to as *Song* from hereon) stands out as a polyphonic riddle that contains a cryptic identity; the reader needs to unlock it by reconstructing identity backwards, in such a way as to visualize the filters of identifications. The "self apparel" would represent the itinerary followed throughout the poem in search of any valid selves that can define the authorial identity.

Discussions of the multiple stages at which the identity of the "self" is projected start from the division of identity into four distinct stances of the self: 1. the poetic self, 2. the self as the random American "other" (read through the filters of Lacan's representation of *otherness*), 3. the self as a deistic representation of the hero and, respectively, 4. the self as a bohemian wanderer. Moreover, another particularity of the study uses Ray Benoit's concept of "syzygial unity-

in-duality" (Benoit 23) as a framework for pairing these particular four stances of the self in balance of opposing identifications. However, we understand the four identifications of the self as facets of the "self" apparel, or as opposing pairs of forces that tend to blend and juxtapose in the filter of the reader's response.

Using the reader-response theory with regards to the "I-you" autoscopies allows us to restore the identifications of the self and shift the focus from a wanderer type of reader to an active comrade. Juan Santiago Navarro's article "Beyond the Myth of Narcissus: The Role of the Reader in Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself'" (1990) serves as one reference point with respect to the readership addressability in *Song*, where "the reader [...] is not the passive recipient of the traditional poetry, nor is he a voyeur who contemplates with pleasure the narcissistic display of egotist" (Navarro 114).

Another claim that the current study makes is that Whitman is by no means telling us how to interpret the tone of *Song*, but is rather sending an invitation to join the poetic self in a communion of discovery. Likewise, the issue of addressability refers to Cristian Moraru's "autospecular mimesis" (26), aimed to prove the functionality of the poetic self as a paradigm of an author/reader ideology that insists on reciprocal discovery. Paving the way for "I-you" autoscopies, such addressability issues are meant to verify whether the reader can rebuild the trajectory of the selves towards an identity that is all-encompassing, yet more articulate than the disparate identifications.

In coining the conundrum of identity, there is a significant threshold between the two terms that stands at the basis of this analysis, namely: *identity* and *identification*. The former – for which Paul Ricoeur offered an essential theoretical contribution to the topic in *Soi meme comme un autre* (1990), encompassing mainly the status of the self in the individual<sup>2</sup> – represents the definition of the individual with regards to the larger community (*others*) and respectively to the universal, what sets one apart from the rest. The latter identification implies a joint communion with others through which parallelisms up to the point of juxtaposition occur between two individuals or with the things that one may perceive. Whitman's use in the poems is a matter of identifications which altogether corroborate a larger scheme of identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur sees the cognitive interpretation of selfhood as a spiral made of two well-drawn elements that he named "l'identité *ipse* et l'identité *idem*." The pathway for an establishment of selfhood derives precisely from this settling of the two terms above, which can be translated by "other," respectively "alike/identical" as pillars of the foundation of an identity: "Je rappelle les termes de la confrontation: d'un côté l'identité comme *mêmeté* (anglais: sameness), de l'autre l'identité comme *ipséité* (anglais: selfhood)" (140). Ricoeur advocates the idea that the two categories are inseparable to such an extent that if a subject's identity is bereft of "ipse," the "idem" will never be completed and will transform evolution into stagnation.

### From the poetic “self” to “self” as voicing of the “other”

The first projection of the “self” construction – the author “self” – is primarily anchored in a pseudo-reality: it presents the “I” as the speaking “self” in the position of an unconventional author willing to dismay any patterns of lyric repetition. It is from the beginning of the poem that identifications of the “self” occur and continue to gain force throughout the process of the self quest: “I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself” (Whitman 29). Being the “companion” functions as a lowering of all virtual barriers that exist between author and others because the aim is to become the person that crosses through his visual filter.

There are two fundamental contexts in which the quest of the Whitmanesque “self” can be read: the autobiography and the epic poetry<sup>3</sup> frameworks, but for *Song* the tendency is towards a combination of the two, in which the author sets a poetic identity and presents his private self-gratulation myth. This consciousness of singing the private experience in an attempt to label the narrative is divided by the poet into three main components, according to Harold Bloom: “which he termed the soul, the self, and ‘the real ME’ or ‘me myself.’” By soul, Whitman meant character, as opposed to the self or personality. This is what Whitman regarded as his darker aspect, an estranged or alienated element in his nature, his soul, which comes out of the depths in most of his major poems. By “myself”, Whitman means what he calls “Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs.” Yet that more masculine or aggressive part of the self is split from “the real Me” or “me myself”, which ultimately is one with the world of night, death, the mother, and the sea. [...] the “real Me” is something like a knowing even as one is known, a kind of American Gnosis, of which Whitman is an authentic seer” (10).

The self is subsequently divided into instances of perception – of others, of the world and of the private emotions that transgress the human soul. It is with the soul that the “I/self” enters the realm in *Song of Myself*, through the sensory experimentation of the outer natural world:

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<sup>3</sup> Autobiography has received several definitions throughout ages, but generally it can be referred to Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as “[a] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality.” The mutability of authorial identity in the nineteenth century suggests that representative selfhood enabled writers to construct a self in accordance with pre-determined social categories, but it also enabled them to question the existing social, political and economic order by exposing the exclusions and hypocrisies of its universal claims of freedom. Epic poetry has been used by peoples of the world to transmit their traditions from one generation to another, without the aid of writing.

My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of  
blood and air through my lungs,  
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark  
color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn  
The sound of the belched words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the  
wind,  
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms, [...]  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed  
and meeting the sun.

(Whitman 25)

Openly declaring the sundering of the self from civilization, senses function as vehicle for establishing a virtual proximity to nature, by which touching, hearing, smelling, seeing or tasting work as instruments of coalescing the speaking "I" with other selves. The aim of surrounding the entrance of the "self" into a natural realm is to shift focus towards the actual status of the "I" who rejoices the ordinary, the old and the new altogether, without pushing aside any raw experience. Particularly, nature is filtered by the machinery of the five senses in an attempt to free the "self" of any biased and worldly preconceptions and to locate it in a realm of ecstatic accomplishment.

Later, section 26 tells of another sensory experimentation, one that takes the path of perceiving the mundane and the industrialized facets of the world, rather than the natural façade:

I hear the sounds I love, the sound of the human voice,  
I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following,  
Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night,  
Talkative young ones to those that like them, the loud laugh of work-  
people [...]  
And this indeed is music – this suits me.

(Whitman 44)

With a renewed accent on the senses, the "self" is on the verge of seizing the ecstatic poetic experience. The "I/self" switches the universal identification (with the sensory perception of nature) with the human identification (defined by the tangible and material locus), reaching the level of the *transcendental self*. If the "self" can be conceived of as a virtual/spiritual entity that exists eternally, the result is that the "self" becomes a moving force, comprising sequences of experiences and insights. And to obtain the essence of this *transcendental self* the poet is bound to create a fusion of the two counterparts that define the "I" in the poem, by merging the identification of the *poet's self* with mankind, represented by the figure of the *other*.

The identification that the “Self” takes with the random, ordinary American is a striking feature in the poem and it suggests that, in representing the odyssey of identity in *Song*, one should witness a series of refurbishments of the speaking “I.” To read the “self” as a voice of the random American it suffices to refer to Harold Bloom’s denominations of the identities that occur in the poem: “fighter for all causes, sympathetic observer of Americans and participant in their lives” (78).

The theoretical framework used by Jacques Lacan in *Ecrits*, who resorts to the referentiality of the “other” in order to seize the core of the self serves as resourceful reference for the juxtaposition of these two “selves” in *Song*. Lacan’s use of the term “self” is an identification always in terms with an apparent image. In this sense, otherness gains shape by the rejection of the binary opposition: “self, seen as ‘what is not other’ and other, seen as ‘what is not self’” (Lacan 29). Consequently, for Lacan, “the concept of self relies on one’s misidentification with the image of an other” (Klages 81) –other that can be engraved in two distinctive categories, named “Grand autre” – Other and “petit objet a” – other (Lacan 243). This way, other is precisely the “myself” in Whitman’s poem or the “self” (that Lacan develops in his theory concerning the mirror stage<sup>4</sup>), whereas Other stands for the items populating the numerous catalogues in *Song*. The manner in which the “self” as observer is formed is a strictly dependent equation of finding the unknown. But the unknown, in this case, is not the other/ the common American, as the poem gives a detailed depiction of the entire canvas of American life. In fact, the liminal position is occupied by the enigmatic “self” striving for a proper medium of development.

“When we use language, our relation with the other always plays on this ambiguity. In other words, language is as much there to found us in the Other as to drastically prevent us from understanding him. The subject doesn’t know what he is saying [...] because he doesn’t know what he is. But he sees himself. He sees himself from the other side, in an imperfect manner” (Lacan 245). Therefore, in the *Song* dialogue carried out between the “self” and the ordinary man/character in the poetic discourse the scope is a narcissistic one. The “I” doesn’t strive to satisfy the reader’s curiosity by representing the features of commonality, but rather the “I” indulges in a deterritorialization of the author into the realms of a self-quest. Also, Whitman’s “not knowing what he is saying” accounts exactly for the indecisive and fragmentary presentation of identity instance:

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<sup>4</sup> Lacan’s *The Mirror Stage as Formative for the I* introduced the starting point in theorizing otherness- the stage of childhood when a child first encounters his reflection in the mirror. This event led Lacan to a theory according to which human identity is decentered and that, even before the function of language is manifested, one apprehends its self as composed of multiple parts. The full recognition of the self as “I” appears only through the contact with the others, who function as mirrors for the self.

I do not know it-it is without name-it is a word unsaid,  
 It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol...  
 Perhaps I might tell more. (Whitman 68)

Otherness in the Lacanian vision is not an enclosed separateness, nor difference from the self, being, on the contrary, linked to the idealized image of the “I” as a single. The mirror recaptures the image of the whole otherness and offers it as a framework for the undefined self, functioning as a connection path for the two poles of identity. The reflection of the mirror in this case shows a pattern in which the “self” can mould, which means that the entire idea of the self, as apparent opponent to otherness and as the inner being designated by “I” is based on an image and consequently on an other. These boundaries between I and the other are blurred and eventually the two concepts are intermingled.

In treating the relation of the subject (“Me”) to others (“Not-Me”), Whitman envisions a radical multicultural self on the basis of the transcendental *jouissance*. Even if the “absolute Other within himself” allows such an adaptation of *jouissance*, it refuses its credit in the foundation of the self, which becomes melted in the larger identity scheme. If Lacan grounds the ethical relations of the subject to himself and the neighbor on the Thing-*jouissance*, Whitman dismantles the self by not separating it from all signifiers and by making the other a non-representational self, but rather a mirror version of my-self. The “self” that marks this category of identification (with the random other) is, therefore, a distinct expression of identity. It is actually in search of rendering the perceived reality as a world that is mutually shared with others- these being all from the poet, the readers, the members of a community.

### **The “self” between macroscopic and microscopic stances: from the heroic to the bohemian self**

Passing through instances of identification with mankind, poetic authority or supernatural entities, the quest of the “self” cannot be complete without an introspection into new terrains, defined by deity, on the one hand and by wandering impulses, on the other. To sketch the profile of this dual representation of the “self” the framework reference is the bipolar category that Zhang Yong-Lan applies to the interpretation of “myself”, where the foundation pillars are “microscopic and macroscopic” (Zhang 638). Zhang Yong-Lan approaches the matter of the “Self” by coining a double structure of the two terms that stand for microscopic – “the self as unification of body and soul” and respectively macroscopic – “self as embodiment in the eternal cycle of nature, without any time and space limit” (Zhang 640). But for the current analysis the intention is to reapply the two terms to a new set of identifications with the *macroscopic as heroic/deistic* and respectively with the *microscopic as the bohemian self*.

The heroic identification occurs at the level of the self as deity or messiah, not necessarily religious-dominated, but in terms of hegemony. The messiah self can be read as a pillar in the identity structure because it primarily affects the other selves, much in the same manner induced by the poetic self. Moreover, it is in this messianic projection of the self that the sense of authorship becomes an even more stringent element in the discourse, as the nomination is directly embedded and associated with the 'kosmos' dimension:

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,  
 Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,  
 No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from  
 them, ...  
 I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,  
 By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of  
 on the same terms. (Whitman 41)

The identification of the self with a messianic entity has essential effects for the reading of Whitman's religious lyric thought, disclaiming a punctually sacrilegious presence in the adoration exercise. Particularly, the self's adoration is redirected from God and pointed towards the common other by the corporeal channel or the love creed, in the desire to assign a tangible objective to the worshipping. Consequently, the self's identification with the messianic should be referred to as the *mystic self*, taken in a less conventional approach than the traditional mysticism and ethical doctrine.

J. Miller reads the sequence "as an inverted mystical experience", where the poet is quivered "to a new identity", "purified by a purgation not of the senses but of the illusion of the senses as vile" (20). Considering that purification involves an acceptance of the body and all its functions, this acceptance reflects the poet's goal to achieve mystical experience through physical reality. Nevertheless, this is in opposition to the puritanical view of purification through mortification of the flesh. In Whitman's philosophy, the self is purified not through purgation but through acceptance of the physical following the principle that man should free himself from his traditional sense of sin.

In the mystical identity nexus of representations, Whitman's *superman self* becomes an epitome of the mystical identity. The immanent comparison between Nietzsche's "overman" and Whitman's "superman"<sup>5</sup> shows that the

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<sup>5</sup> In this respect, various critics, among which Eduard Bertz, Henry Bryan Binns, Frederik Schyberg or C. N. Stavrou, emphasized the similarities occurring in the representation of the overman/superman and identified some of the following: messianic aspirations, contempt for conventional morality, an attack of Christian-based hierarchies and respectively a need to found new religions. But, with respect to the perception of democracy, Nietzsche sees it as a sick morality of the herd, Whitman was a fervent proponent, excluding any other possibilities of identity for his superman.



construction of the ideal individual's identity is a matter of contextual mirroring of the self in others:

Nietzsche's hero is his own justification for being; his greatness derives not from his utility to history but from intrinsic worth. [...] Whitman's hero conforms closely to Emerson's fearless, self-reliant individualist who does not hesitate to place his trust in whim and who laughs to scorn the restraints of prudence. The principal difference is that Whitman's hero is free of all Emersonian prudishness, inhibitions and delicacy.

(Miller *apud* Brasas 59)

The superman self, consequently, is a daring self, willing to embrace mystical challenges, but, at the same time, prone to take such identifications with a mockery attitude if found unfit for the larger identity shell. The "perpetual journey" in which the "self" launches in section 46 is the other reference pole of the self-the bohemian one:

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and  
will never be measured  
I tramp a perpetual journey (come listen all!)- urging all to join him and  
uttering the warning,  
"Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,  
You must travel it for yourself (Whitman 48)

The *bohemian self* is Whitman's replica of Baudelaire's flâneur who takes passion in the streets and who detaches the artistic inspiration from the shifting crowd. Consequently, this "self" becomes engulfed in the reality of the reckless movement which will be subjected to a filtering and refining of the images seen on the streets in view of capturing a composite moment of the others. Such a process of marking other selves in a journey of discovery paints the speaking "I" in a new light: the "I" with an appetite for anything that is non-I that is for the entire mass of otherness that exists outside the inner world of the self. The search, therefore is not for something that can be an instance of similarity but, on the contrary, for all that presents disparities.

The identification with the street crowd is momentous in *Song*, a testimony for emphasizing the idea that the need to identify with the "selves" filling the streets comes from the necessity to set new realms of existence:

By the city's quadrangular houses-in log huts, camping with lumbermen,  
Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed, [...] Approach  
Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island [...] Pleas'd with the native and  
pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,

Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the hansome,  
Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher,  
impress'd seriously at the camp meeting,  
Looking in the shop windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flattening  
the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass

(Whitman 50)

In passing through the multifarious organism, the bohemian “self” creates and appropriates a structure for a private purpose of recreating an identity out of the individuals that add to the existence of the “I.” It is in fact a travelogue approach of the lyric “Self” that engages in two directions of analysis: on the one hand, the self-construction forges an American experience as patch-construction of different individualities. Accordingly, the incidental reunion with the population erring the virtual streets in Whitman’s poem is a strategy of enforcing the sense of identity: once the “self” pertains to a more global label – the American – the ground of development is hereby reshaped.

On the other hand, the travelogue approach that Whitman uses is a means of explorative quest in which writing and the virtual travel of the “Self” are leading actors. The epiphany born out of wanderings is therefore complete, because neither experience nor art requires coherence, consequently, one’s identity can easily be preserved in the middle of the shifting spectacle.

Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any, [...]  
We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass with still feet  
and caution,  
Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin’s city,  
The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities of the globe.

(Whitman 51)

Commonly, the flâneur “Self” reiterates the story of wandering the city in lyric terminology, turning the erring walk into an explorative journey of identity. However, it is a mere spectatorial enterprise, as the “self”’s interest is to record a panoramic view of the crowd: “to be able to recreate the world of experience the artist had to have identified himself so fully and intently with the world outside that he could reproduce objects in it from within himself” (Seigel 116). But there is a difference between Baudelaire’s flâneur and the bohemian “self” that *Song* introduces at the level of this urban epiphany. Namely, Whitman chooses to replace the limited spectatorship of the flâneur with an “undiscriminating gaze of a camera simply because he wouldn’t represent the city, but what can be done with it” (Brand 185).

In the encounter stage of the designated selves that occur throughout *Song*, the best means of rendering their cohabitation is by using Ray Benoit’s

“syzygial unity-in-duality”<sup>6</sup> (17) a concept borrowed from Jungian philosophy that seems to best comprise the complexity of the “I” identity. Benoit’s *syzygial unity-in-duality* is a combination between the concept of syzygy and the “quaternary archetype”, another Jungian term referring to the idea that complete systems were four-fold, such as the famous “Function Type” quaternary of Thinking, Feeling, Sensate, and Intuition. Moores explains the way the quaternary archetype functions as:

the quaternary archetype, believed to be a representation of the entire Self is the totality of psychic energies in a given person. The quaternary archetype has a numinous character in that it is beyond the conscious self, located in the collective unconscious among many such archetypes. Experience with this archetype can take the form of sexual conversions, illuminations, emotional shocks, blows of fate, religious and or mystical experiences.

(Moores 9)

Consequently, the *syzygial unity-in-duality* refers to the representation of oppositions in quaternal entities in such a way as to render an identity consisting of opposing, yet reconciliatory selves.

In *Song* the *syzygial unity-in-duality* mirrors the structural pattern, consisting of four representations of the self, posed in oppositional interaction: the random other split between the woman self and the man self, the bohemian self and its counterpart as heroic/mystic self, the addressed self consisting of the reader “you” and the collective self “you” and eventually, the poetic self, built out of Me and the Not-Me. Each of these quaternal pairs, previously discussed, constitute the foundation and solid structure of the consciousness level of identity, being also the vehicle for Whitman’s all-inclusive scheme of representation. Whether these four stances of representation manage to fully recreate a framework of opposing and juxtaposing identification for the speaking “I” is an issue that moves the debate onto the realm of addressability.

### **Reader addressability and autoscopies of I-you in *Song of Myself***

Escaping the limitations of the authorial tone, Whitman accomplishes a foundation of new identities that correlate to build the “I/self” feature of the

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<sup>6</sup> Syzygy refers to the term Carl Jung used to describe deep psychological relationships: “It is usually the anima/animus pair, but also reflects other ‘opposites,’ like male paired with female. The parental pair, which arises only when the ego develops enough, stands behind it and is molded by it, like a base carries the lightbulb. The syzygy has three components: a man’s femininity and woman’s masculinity; the experience man has of woman and vice versa; and the masculine and feminine archetypal image” (Psychology Dictionary. <<http://www.psychology-lexicon.com/cms/glossary/glossary-s/syzygy.html>>).

poem. The altering of the identifications display can be seen as the game the author plays with the readers' perception of who is the "me" to whom all the atoms belong. But there cannot be a complete hypostasis of the "I" until the reader has seen all of the identifications and has compared or merged them all into one all-encompassing story.

The "you and I" dialogue that Whitman inserts in the lyric discourse stands as a cornerstone for determining the status of identity in relationship to others. "You" becomes an active listener: "All mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,/Else it were time lost listening to me" (Whitman 68). But "you" is first and foremost the advised reader, who delivers from the isolation of "I", and who is a channeled force capable of passing the "I" through "you" into a desired "we." Identifications made with "you" function therefore at pluralistic levels: of setting the route of the quest for an identity, of following a rite of passage to a joint "en masse" identity and finally of building a solid reference wall onto which the speaking "I" can mold its selves. The poetic self, therefore, engulfs all other representations of the "I" and functions as a Trojan horse for the self's odyssey.

The rite of passing from one "self" to the other is made by use of an external mechanism, namely, by using the direct reference to the reader – "you":

What I assume you shall assume [...]  
 You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through  
 the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books,  
 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,  
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.  
 (Whitman 25)

The use of the pronouns "I" and "you" in this poetic sequence is in fact the version of a challenge by which the poetic "self" dares to reevaluate the standard relationship that commonly occurs between these two entities. The relevance of lyric addressability in the construction of identity refers to the occurrence of another self – the reader self, intertwining sequentially with the poetic self and responsible with the authentication of identity: "Whitman imagines readers' minds gaining ever more "energy" and "precision" as they struggle. The goal of this struggle is to produce minds supple enough to navigate the gulf between democracy's convictions, aspirations and the people's crudeness, vice, caprices" (Doty 153).

Furthermore, the status of authorship in poetry also has implications upon the equality between selves. Particularly, based on Northrop Frye's idea that the "poet turns his back on his listeners" (249), the function of authorship becomes an exercise of power in which the addressee is present conceptually

but not necessarily invited in the receptive process. The lyric discourse is oriented from a monologic poetic self towards a present, but unidentified reader self. Likewise, the poetic self calls upon beings/ entities that are inaudible, rendering a type of lyric discourse that is the “embodiment of poetic pretension” (Culler 143). Participation then becomes an open act to which the reader self may adhere, without being subject to discrimination.

In *Song* the poet is neither the puppeteer nor the peaceful story-teller, but a hybrid that approaches the reader in a fairytale and induces new states of consciousness surpassing the ordinary. In fact, there is a process of reinventing the lyric “I” that interferes with the speech because Whitman seems to claim that “you are not merely listening to me, overhearing me- you are to be taken into my poem with me in a way no poem has done” (Williams 54). And such a form of inter-relatedness between the poet and the reader shows that the created “self” cannot reach completeness unless it gains the experience of any adjacent forces, be that reader, nature or divine intervention. Selfhood is then seen as political individualism where “the individual is founding site and calls to each reader to become a poet himself” (Bercovitch 151).

The use of “you” in a multifarious voicing of “I” might make the reader prone to interpret the lyric discourse as an open monologue destined to anyone interested. But the use of “you” also bears resonance in the identification area, in the sense that it is, like the self, a moving construct that might find finality of addressability in either the reader or any of the other selves. The reader self is then the ultimate projection allowed to modify the discourse, creating therefore a participative identity in the text. Navarro voices the interconnected dialogues between “you” and “I” by restoring the reader as instrument of validation for the identity knit based on “the assertion of the poetic self as expressed in the text, the series of commons and cues offered in the text to allow and provoke reader response, and the final merging of the self and the other as a consequence of the text-reader interaction” (111).

The “self” in *Song* is a mechanism prone to change, simply because alterity and changeability represent a form of consciousness incapable of suppression. But the play of “you” and “I” that occurs in the poem is perhaps something more related to a teaching lesson of the poet directed towards uninitiated readers. The relation of the “self” to “you” becomes even more interesting since the “I” must be regarded as an identity that reaches prophetic features: Whitman engages readers in a quest whose destination is the source of any poetic experience:

Have you practiced so long to learn to read?  
 Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?  
 Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems  
 (Whitman 25)

The teaching lesson granted to the “you” self stands for a “pedagogical relation; the reader becomes a kind of apprentice to the poet – we’re being instructed on arriving at a condition of consciousness like the one the poem demonstrates and proposes” (Williams 65). This becomes a process of *teaching the reading* in which:

Myself can then be understood as existing in what structuralists would call a ‘vertical’ or ‘associative’ relationship with the word ‘mine,’ which had in contemporary life effectively usurped its place at the center of people’s conception and definition of themselves. The word ‘mine’ has a kind of absent presence in the context. “You”, assumes two different meanings: it tells us that ‘your atoms are every bit as good as my atoms,’ but at the same time Whitman is making us an extraordinary offer: to share every atom of himself with us. The two meanings, brought like a single pair of eyes to bear upon the opening phrase, give a stereoscopic prominence to its hitherto concealed meaning.

(Miller 48)

But the “teaching” lesson enters other realms as well, departing from the identification of “you” as the reader self in the deciphering context and moving towards the territory of experience. The other form of teaching introduced by the poetic self is then a *teaching of the living*:

I am the teacher of athletes,  
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of  
my own,  
[...]  
I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?  
I follow you whoever you are from the present hour,  
My words itch at your ears till you understand them.

(Whitman 66)

The “you” here is a random address form, an open invitation to embark on the identity quest, but not without limitations. Namely, though the poetic self functions as universal teacher, the reader self cannot reach the same path without private experimentation and building of his own identity. The invitation is not lacking a warning, nonetheless: “Not I, not any one else can travel the road for you/You must travel it for yourself” (Whitman 66), emphasizing therefore the fact that, despite the equality among selves, each must compel a private construction of identity. Whitman’s open claim that *Song* sings the “average identity” also implied that the reader needed to synthesize the self and the other in order to accompany Whitman and his average man on the flight.

Cristian Moraru's syntagm "autospecular mimesis"<sup>7</sup> used in the framework of reading *Song* as a deconstruction of the selves indicates the functionality of the poetic "self" as paradigm of an author/reader ideology that allows the bipolar and mutual rediscovery and not on one party's development in the reading process.

The mimesis that I shall call 'autospecular' [...] is characterized by a metaphysical signification that we still have to specify: acting in a mimetic way, the poet creates (*poiei*) while creating himself (*poieitai*). Mimetic poiesis appears as self-poiesis because the work of art leads to no "empiric" reality. Similarly, the *mimetes* becomes another as soon as his memory of the superior world is activated and he recognizes in his fictional forms the Form above all, and in this life, a previous one led on a very different ontological level; in other words, he recognizes his *metaphysical past*. Mimema determines, so to say, a specular identification: the onlooker detects his deeper self and, excited by that, throws himself toward it. Perceiving his former nature, the subject rises in time and ontological position to that identity previously acquired. (Moraru 26)

With this specular identification the passage from the poetic "self" to the "self" that stands as voice of the common individual is much facilitated, because the reader (who impersonates exactly the random man) can find in the poem a means to coalesce with the speaker's sensed identity and therefore aims at a mutual recognition. Accordingly, the lyric "I" gradually transforms into autoscopies for the reader, with the "self" passing as author, American, hero, God or nature-visions that add up to the conundrum of the "I"- identity.

Following the pattern of passage, "I" also accomplishes the function of shifting between personas, without emphasizing the category of otherness. If the designation of "I" as community landmark accounts for a specular identification with the democratic in Whitman's poetry, the self manages to complete the task of rewriting history and thus reassigning a metaphysical past. This reassignment is made possible through the shifting of "I" and the implicit borrowing of history to each of the "possessed" persona, adapting therefore community in terms of private history. Whitman's use of autospecular mimesis facilitates a circular passage, accounting both for the lyric "I" to be heard and for the reader "you" to be absorbed in the identity vortex.

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<sup>7</sup> The phrase was coined in Moraru's book *Poetica reflectării. Încercare în arheologia mimizei* [*Poetics of Reflection. Essay in the Archeology of Mimesis*] and refers to the idea that the opposition between the simple mimetic (or imitative) *logoi* and autospecular (or "narcissistic," but without any negative psychoanalytic connotation); *logoi* represent precisely the projection of the Western literary and philosophical discourse -as an interplay of these original terms.

Lastly, the interplay “you”-“I/myself” is in fact a rite of passage that involves a performative alteration of the poetic “self”, which needs to experience bits of other selves so as to gain a complete authority of “lyric teaching.” But “to pass is to enact a narrative or an identity dependent on fabrication” (Price 90) and this requires that the auctorial strategy should pass via two roads: *identity*-the “self” and to pass via *writing* – that is by simulation of any alternative identity.

The *passing* via writing is the direct vehicle that allows for the expansion and the drawing of the “self”, because identifications thus become credible and maintain a genuine author/reader communion. The writing passage as a means of disclosing poetic identity is one that is not restricted by formal structures, nor is it limiting the expression of the speaker. It compels the development of the reader’s identity, projecting the addressed self in different identifications formulas.

But this exercise of writing is like a mirror projection of the art work as mimesis, in which the auctorial tool is to call the soul’s avatars of the “self” and to carry reference not on the exterior facade of the lyric work, but on the interiority of the poet. The mimetic interplay in *Song* accomplishes the precise function of searching and revealing the contents of “myself” up to a hectic self-assertiveness of the poet throughout the lyric discourse. By writing, the poet is revealing himself to the readers and self-growing in his own poetic scheme by means of acquiring new cognitive structures of the self’s identity.

## Conclusion

The series of identifications that Whitman creates in order to create the conundrum of identity validate the reader’s sensed experiences of the poem. The lyrical discourse becomes a necessarily conventional medium in which the process of passing is facilitated: the self must “pass”, from a state of inner and possibly solipsistic consciousness, to a state of otherness and outer consciousness.

Moreover, the dissolving of “I” into “you” verifies the construct of the “self” identity, and refers to the sequence of the selves’ appearance. The acknowledgement with which Whitman confronts the problem of multiplicity is an illusion endemic to absolute selfhood, because he is aware of alterity and the changing of one’s identity. Indeed, the necessity to pass from one self to another and the experience of latent or active selves translates into an exploration of the world of relations through a vocabulary of relationships. Accordingly, the identity of “myself” is not only a juxtaposition of these selves but an agglomeration of experiences bound to reconstruct the “I.”

In reading the self oppositions as such, the *self apparel* accounts for the occurrence of the *syzygial unity-in-duality*, made to better reflect the quaternary structure of identity, as made of opposing, yet conciliatory selves that cannot



exist independently. Despite the premise that Whitman allows for an all-inclusive identification, the pairing of selves in a *syzygial unity-in-duality* proves that the all-encompassing permission is firstly based on a duality that verifies in the you-I dialogue. Particularly, the self cannot establish an identity in the absence of its necessary other.

Whitman's poetry is, above anything else, transformative for the individual, primarily because it manages to reconcile the disparities of iconic identity for any random American other. Bearing such relevance in the identity conundrum, Whitman's lyric discourse is nonetheless a pseudo-transparent speech, as the "you" and "I" dialogue spans far beyond the duality of addressability, because Whitman conducts a vortex movement in drawing the baselines of identity, with the core always focused on the self unit.

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