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Cognitive Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Contemporary Persian and English Poetry

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 11 July 2025 Received in revised form: 19 August 2025 Accepted: 19 August 2025 Published online: Autumn 2025</p> <p>Keywords: <i>metaphor ecologies; embodied poetics; Walt Whitman; Sohrab Sepehri; image schemas; affective cognition; cultural embodiment; comparative metaphor studies</i></p>	<p>This essay undertakes a comparative study of metaphorical imagination in the poetry of Walt Whitman and Sohrab Sepehri, not to flatten their poetics into a single cognitive frame but to ask how differently embodied minds, inflected by culture, geography, and cosmology, render abstraction sensuous. Refusing the tidy predictability often associated with conceptual metaphor theory, the study reworks its premises through the friction of image schema theory, affective cognition, and the irreducibility of cultural embodiment. Metaphors here are not ornaments or mere vehicles of thought: they are perceptual infrastructures, felt vectors, spiritual gestures. In Whitman, metaphor dilates space and amplifies energy, crafting a porous, vibrating body politic immersed in the democratic weather of the cosmos. In Sepehri, the metaphoric pulse slows, roots downward, dissolves into vegetal time and translucent perception, a mysticism attuned not to ascension but to erosion, to the grain of sand and the drop of water. Each poet's figurative lexicon stages a different negotiation between self and world, body and spirit, opacity and clarity. Reading across these metaphorical archives, the study advances no universal theory but a comparative poetics of situated cognition, one attentive to how language thinks through the body, feels through the environment, and believes through its figures.</p>

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1. Introduction

The last half-century unspools as a series of interruptions and transformations in the study of metaphor, marked not by a steady progression but by fractures, intensifications, and arrivals that announce themselves belatedly, as if always already folded within the language that seeks to grasp them. Cognitive poetics, that restless discipline, emerges not as a sovereign field but as a recursive disturbance, turning metaphor inside out: not merely a flourish or embellishment, but the infrastructure of thought itself, the secret architect of literary meaning's fugitive economy.

Lakoff and Johnson, in their pivotal *Metaphors We Live By*, insist, "Metaphor pervades not just language, but thought and action" (3). It is less a device than a habitation, a way in which the world, the self, and the pulse of relation are constituted and unmade. This argument is less settled than unsettling, amplified in the work of Gibbs (2005) and Kövecses (2020), for whom metaphor does not arise from a singular source but swells out of the accumulated residues of the body: its affective textures, its sedimented worldviews, its restless orientations. The force of metaphor, then, is not abstract or external; it clings to experience, sometimes gently, sometimes like a wound.

Brône and Vandaele signal the shift in methodology and orientation: "Literature is no longer viewed as an autonomous realm of aesthetic play, but as a privileged site for exploring the embodied, imaginative, and cultural foundations of meaning" (2). The poem, then, is not a vessel but an errant archive, a volatile deposit where conceptual labor and cultural memory meet, sometimes clash, sometimes dissolve.

Within this framework, poetry's peculiar power is neither given nor granted but continually risked. Poetic language, with its trembling attention to image, rhythm, and affect, becomes both site and method: a

field in which the architectures of experience are exposed, transfigured, even undone. To read poems is to dwell within their labor, the recursive distillation, refraction, and conversion of bodily and cultural histories, an invitation to inhabit the aftermath of conceptual work.

A comparative, cross-cultural reading, tentative, wayward, and unfinished, finds new velocity in the proximity of Walt Whitman and Sohrab Sepehri. What occurs in the interstice between these poets? Their geographies diverge; their tongues are not the same. Yet in both, the metaphorical labor of the self emerges as improvisation, as intimacy, as risk. Whitman, the relentless chronicler of abundance, makes the body porous, a gathering-point for energies both familiar and strange:

**“Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity”
(Whitman 29).**

Here, movement and expansion are not stable metaphors but organizing surges—permeability and mutuality are not conditions but events, recurring, unfinished, resistant to closure.

In Sepehri, one finds no such exuberance. His poetics gather around the vegetal, the transparent, the nearly immaterial: humility as a kind of radical vision. In *The Oasis of Now*:

**“I must wash my eyes,
Look at things differently,
Words must be washed,
Words must be the wind themselves,
Words must be the rain themselves”
(Sepehri 63).**

Washing, seeing, becoming: these are not mere gestures toward transcendence but enactments of dissolution. Boundaries falter, the self ceases to stand as sovereign subject, and what remains is aperture, a threshold through which weather and transformation pass. One hears Persian mysticism, ecological intimacy, but also the peril of undoing, the radical wager of speaking otherwise.

Whitman hurries us forward in velocity, Sepehri clears us with transparency; between them metaphor is not reconciliation but interval. In that interval the labor is wayward, intimate, and unfinished: the experiment by which experience itself is structured, relation made possible or broken.

Two questions, twinned and restless, shape this inquiry. First, how do Whitman and Sepehri summon metaphor not as ornament but as principle, forceful and structuring, shaping perception, mediating between body and world, and tracing the outlines of spiritual apprehension? Second, what repeats, what diverges, what refuses translation across the Persian and American archives? What pulses endure, and what ruptures remain unhealed? The argument resists reduction, resists the rhetorical triviality of metaphor, and insists upon its material and collective charge. In Whitman and in Sepehri alike, metaphor is felt cognition, the recursive site where body, affect, and culture interpenetrate, sometimes in accord and sometimes in agon. Their work embodies what Kövecses names “the cultural embodiment of metaphor,” the ceaseless interplay of schema, resonance, and worldview (142–43).

The course of this essay interrupts and itinerates. Section 2 recalls the architectures: image schemas and the affective-cognitive models that move beneath metaphor. Section 3 turns to method, to errancy itself, to the principles and fractures of comparison. Section 4 sketches, imperfectly, the mapping of thresholds, borders, and invitations. Sections 5 and 6

descend to close encounter: Whitman, then Sepehri, each marked by divergence yet each proximate. Section 7 attempts synthesis, cross-cultural but never symmetrical, a constellation rather than a system. Section 8 opens outward, toward implications for global poetics, for the theory of metaphor, and for reading itself when it must take place across, alongside, and against.

2. Theoretical Framework: Cognitive Metaphor, Image Schemas, and Embodied Imagination

The late twentieth century is rupture, a pivot both unsteady and irreversible. Metaphor, long banished to ornament, returns as principle, trembling at the center of language and thought. Cognitive linguistics does not supplement; it interrupts, displaces, and strips away the complacency of older accounts. At the fulcrum stands *Metaphors We Live By* (2003), Lakoff and Johnson's text, origin and refrain. Its assertion, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (5), is so spare, so unadorned, it risks evanescence. Yet this sparseness reconfigures everything. Literary studies are torn from the decorative and thrust toward the infrastructural. Metaphor is no longer embellishment but cognition itself: condition, necessity, the ground upon which thought and perception stand.

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Recursive Architectures

Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) unfolds not as a taxonomy but as a recursive mapping. Metaphors are not mere figures or disembodied tropes; they are the scaffolding by which experience is made, sometimes forcibly, intelligible. Every abstraction finds its anchor in bodily experience, and every act of meaning-making is haunted by sensation, posture, gravity, and ache.

Three types of conceptual metaphor—structural, ontological, and orientational—function less as categories than as tensions, each a scene of negotiation. Structural metaphors enact a reciprocal shaping, a folding: LIFE IS A JOURNEY (“I’m at a crossroads in life”). Ontological metaphors give form to the formless, lending a body where none exists: THE SELF IS A CONTAINER (“She’s full of joy”). Orientational metaphors inscribe spatial relations: vertical, horizontal, directional; in this mode HAPPY IS UP (“Her spirits soared”). Yet these types are not discrete, each spills into the other, every mapping leaving traces, residues, even wounds.

The body always grounds metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson remind us that “our physical and cultural experience provides the basis for metaphorical concepts that are pervasive in our language” (14). But what is this “basis” if not a ceaseless negotiation of presence and absence? The journey, the path, the open road: Whitman’s exuberance dissolves into Sepehri’s ascent, his “eyes washed by light.” Each poet renders the self porous, each moment a threshold. SELF IS LANDSCAPE, where subjectivity becomes spatial, ecological, and interwoven—a field of relations, unfinished and trembling at its edges.

2.2 Image Schema Theory: Patterns and Interruptions

From CMT, a further dispersion into image schema theory offers a more granular texture. Image schemas are not abstract blueprints but the worn grooves of bodily experience: container, path, flow, up/down, rootedness, transparency. These patterns are not innocent; they arrive as inheritance and event, organizing perception, action, and understanding. They are what Kövecses calls the “cognitive building blocks” that enable metaphor’s recursive unfolding (84).

Whitman's lines thrum with the path and the flow: "The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose" (*Leaves of Grass* 93). Yet they also vibrate with the porous: "The smoke of my own breath, / Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers" (29). Here the self is node and passage, its boundary always threatened. Sepehri gathers rootedness and transparency: "My roots touch the depths of water's silence" (51), and "The world must be washed / in the clarity of rain" (63). Each gesture is both a holding and a letting go. Containment gives way to dissolution and attunement; self and world shimmer at the threshold of their difference.

Recent interventions, particularly Kövecses's extended theory, trouble the universalist promise of early CMT. Metaphors, he argues, are "dynamically activated in context" (93), structured hierarchically, always inflected by culture, and always already situated. Beneath the surface, more basic schemas pulse, ghosting the complex, the singular, and the untranslatable (104). Gibbs likewise insists that cognition is neither pure nor isolated but emerges in the flesh, in contact, in the "corporeal and affective nuances" of the body as it negotiates world, language, and other (1). These perspectives do not simply extend cognitive poetics; they render it restless, open to fracture, sensitive to difference, and haunted by what cannot be fully brought into relation.

2.3 Affective and Cultural Embodiment

Emotion and affect resist reduction. They are not simply conceptual domains awaiting metaphorical mapping; they are lived, trembling, transmitted, sometimes withheld, and always culturally marked. In cognitive poetics, metaphor is never merely semantic. It is an event: affective, perceptual, incomplete, arising where the body meets the world, where memory interrupts sensation, where imagination stutters. Brône and

Vandaele remind us that metaphor is not a container but an occurrence, a site where “bodily feeling, cultural memory, and imaginative practice converge” (5). The metaphorical imagination, then, becomes a zone of convergence and friction, where what is felt, what is possible, surges and recedes.

Sepehri’s language, as Rahmani and Iraj observe, does not simply render emotion as abstract mapping; it colors, saturates, and textures it, emotion as hue, residue, sensorial afterimage (45). Words themselves become a surface where bodily sensation and cultural context are sedimented, refracted, and sometimes nearly dissolved. In Whitman, affective metaphor does not remain bounded; it expands, gathers, and echoes into the communal: “I am large, I contain multitudes” (*Leaves of Grass* 56). The body is not a vessel to be filled but an open field—resonant, collective, a host for energies and others. Sepehri, by contrast, refuses the architecture of expansion. His metaphors gather around humility, dissolution, refusal: “I am the silence / of the courtyard after rain” (77). The self is porous, exposed, a vessel for world, weather, aftermath.

In both, the embodied, imaginative practice of poetic reading, as Brône and Vandaele describe it, is less a method than a mode of attention, an attunement to the point where the cognitive, the affective, and the aesthetic are entangled, indistinguishable, and mutually constitutive (5).

2.4 Toward a Global Poetics: Negotiation and Errantry

CMT and image schema theory do not merely supply a toolkit; they open a threshold, enabling a comparative poetics that is cognitive, affective, pluritopic, and errant. Bodily experience and cultural context move to the foreground, and metaphor, both as theory and as practice, becomes a way of tracing convergence and divergence, resemblance and difference. To analyze the poetry of distant traditions is not to distill

universals but to witness the restless play of similarity and inflection, to risk encountering what does not translate.

As Vakili Robati observes, cognitive metaphor theory applied cross-culturally illuminates the uncanny recurrence of certain image schemas: journey, transparency, containment, while also insisting on their divergent inflections and their irreducible emotional registers in Persian and English poetics alike (77). Metaphor is not universal, nor merely particular; it is, as Kövecses proposes, always “a site of negotiation between the universal and the particular” (112). Whitman and Sepehri, restless and unaligned, become exemplary not by fulfilling the promise of global poetics but by troubling it, exposing both its reach and its limits.

This approach, integrating the cognitive with the cultural, models a form of reading that treats poetic form itself as “an archive of conceptual, perceptual, and spiritual labor,” to borrow from Sepehri’s lexicon of washing, seeing, dissolving (63). To read in this way is to engage in a labor of recovery, of attunement, of opening: the poem as a site where the ecological, the embodied, the wayward, and the collective converge, only to scatter again. In this sense, the project exceeds the disciplinary boundaries of cognitive poetics or comparative literature; it becomes a meditation on the ecology of metaphor, the insurgency of embodied imagination, and the unruly afterlife of form.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus Selection

The corpus is always provisional: its boundaries porous, its center shifting. The poems gathered here were not merely selected but encountered, drawn by a resonance that exceeds method, an attunement to the questions animating this inquiry, an ear for the recurrent pulse of each

poet's language, and a deliberate wandering among metaphorical structures. From *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's vast and uncontainable text, a handful of passages were approached not as representatives but as sites of excess and experiment. "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", each becomes a field where absorption, flow, dilation, and the porous body are staged and restaged, troubling the categories of self, nature, and the American democratic imaginary (Whitman 28–143, 255–62, 307–13).

Sepehri arrives, or perhaps withdraws, through *The Oasis of Now* (2013), in Ali and Mahallati's translations yet always shadowed by what translation cannot carry. Here are "Water's Footfall," "The Oasis of Now," and "The Address," poems that cultivate metaphors of transparency, rootedness, vegetal temporality, and dissolution; poems that model, even as they elude, the contours of a mystical-ecological poetics (Sepehri 23–109). Selection, then, is less a narrowing than a mapping of possibility and interruption, a balance, precarious, between breadth and depth, mapping and immersion.

3.2 Recursive Methods, Errant Analytics

The analytic labor proceeds by doubling: systematic coding entwined with close reading, recursion with interruption. Each poem is sifted for the presence of conceptual metaphors, following Lakoff and Johnson's typology: structural, ontological, orientational. Beneath these, image schemas surface: container, path, flow, up/down, transparency, rootedness. These are not only cognitive patterns, but poetic energies, emerging at the juncture of language and sensation.

The procedure is not linear, but iterative, spiraling:

- Source and target domains are specified for each metaphor, but remain unsettled, at times inverted.

- Core image schemas are tracked, mapped across poems, poets, languages, yet always risked to discontinuity, silence, surplus.
- Metaphors are not only coded but read, narratively, affectively, aesthetically, foregrounding their labor and their limits.

Comparison becomes a negotiation: convergence and divergence tracked, but never fully reconciled. The landscape of self, for instance, recurs across both poets, yet in Whitman it dilates, pulses, expands toward the cosmic; in Sepehri it dissipates, roots, dissolves. These are not opposites but adjacent modalities, errant paths within the archive of metaphor.

3.3 Interruptions and Remainders (Limitations)

The method remains exposed, interrupted by what it cannot fully contain. First, translation: Sepehri arrives through Ali and Mahallati's English, careful and attentive yet haunted by the partial loss or transformation of Persian metaphor, rhythm, and mystic residue. Wherever possible, reference to the Persian original informs interpretation, but mediation is not erased; it is acknowledged and held in tension.

Second, selection is always a form of exclusion. Both Whitman and Sepehri left behind sprawling, heterogeneous bodies of work, yet this reading is necessarily partial. It favors density over exhaustiveness, constellation over archive.

Finally, the identification of metaphor is never neutral. Cognitive poetics provides a framework, but interpretation remains entangled with the reader's cultural, affective, and linguistic position, a subjectivity both admitted and worked through. Transparency of method is offered not as guarantee but as invitation: to further reading, to dissent, to errancy.

In this sense, the analytic process itself becomes an enactment of the article's concerns: a labor of mapping, translation, and selection, a perpetual negotiation never complete, always returning.

4. Mapping Metaphoric Worlds: Core Image Schemas and Poetic Domains

Metaphorical thought resists accident. As conceptual metaphor theory and image schema research insist, it is structured, recursive, embodied: shaped by those "image schemas" that sediment in the body and ripple outward into language (Johnson). Whitman and Sepehri, distant in tongue, epoch, and geography, inhabit metaphorical worlds at once coherent and restless; worlds shaped by fundamental schemas but continually inflected, bent, and complicated by culture. Recent studies trace Sepehri's mystical poems to the ground of bodily and environmental interaction: what might seem otherworldly returns to the pulse of the hand, the footfall, the movement of water, extending Lakoff and Johnson's claim that even the most inventive poetry emerges from universal experience, realized through a dense weave of cultural imagery (Jaberi, Abdullah, and Vengadasamy). Whitman, too, renders the world through systematic mapping: his body is not metaphor but method, an image schema realized in the grain of the line and the cadence of his "I" (Linyan).

4.1 Key Image Schemas

There is no neutral ground. Each poet's metaphoric gestures are recursive, folded, doubled back on themselves, emerging from and returning to the body.

Whitman: Flow, Openness, Absorption, Dilation, Vastness

Whitman's poetics are anchored in the schemas of flow and dilation, energies that resist containment. "I am large, I contain multitudes" (*Leaves of Grass* 56): the container schema appears only to be unraveled, its

boundaries rendered provisional, subject to expansion and overflow. In “Song of Myself,” the self is staged as porous, “permeable to all that approaches,” the boundary not an enclosure but a site of negotiation: “My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs” (29). This is not metaphor as substitution but as enactment. This is what Kövecses terms “energetic dilation,” where the body extends, opens, and becomes a conduit for the world. Scholarship confirms the ubiquity of such schemas—containment, movement, flow—through which poets reimagine self, world, and experience as embodied and historically resonant (Aksan and Kantar).

Vastness and absorption: Whitman’s recurring tropes. Not just spatial, but atmospheric, ecological, social:

“I inhale great draughts of space;

The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine” (p. 29).

The self, here, is neither sovereign nor discrete: it is a locus of passage, the world moving through it, boundaries trembling in a democratic, cosmological drama.

Sepehri: Transparency, Rootedness, Dissolution, Vegetal Temporality, Permeability

Sepehri turns elsewhere—toward schemas of transparency, humility, vegetal time. In “Water’s Footfall”:

“I must wash my eyes,

Look at things differently,

Words must be the wind themselves,

Words must be the rain themselves” (Sepehri 63).

Read in conversation with work on “death” across Sepehri, Ghada al-Saman, and John Keats framed through Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, this transparency can be understood as a way of living with finitude rather than denying it (Keshavarz and Jalali). Transparency here is not mere clarity; it is a poetics of permeability, of spiritual and perceptual openness—a refusal of mastery, a vulnerability to world.

Rootedness and dissolution surface as motifs and as method:

“My roots touch the depths of water’s silence” (51),

“I will dissolve in the garden’s green patience” (77).

Read alongside Persian criticism that foregrounds Sepehri’s everyday metaphors of “washing” and ordinary life (e.g., “Life means washing a dish”), this transparency coheres with a broader poetic ethic of seeing-again and unlearning (Foroughi and Rezaei 160–62). Vegetal temporality: time measured by the slowness of growth, the patience of water and plant. Human arrogance recedes. Humility, attunement, are foregrounded, the self stretched thin between presence and absence, world and word (Brône & Vandaele).

Between Whitman and Sepehri, image schemas do not simply structure metaphor—they become the very scene of relation, of differentiation, of becoming-with and becoming-other. The labor of metaphor, then, is never only cognitive: it is affective, ecological, wayward, unfinished.

4.2 Orientational and Structural Metaphors

Both poets mobilize orientational metaphors (UP/DOWN, IN/OUT, CENTER/PERIPHERY) and structural metaphors (JOURNEY, HOME/EXILE, BODY/LANDSCAPE) as recursive gestures, never wholly stabilized, always in excess of philosophical vision.

Whitman: boundary, threshold, cosmos. The oscillation of IN/OUT, UP/DOWN dissolves borders, erases the solitude of the self:

**“I depart as air—I shake my white locks at the runaway sun;
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags” (*Leaves of Grass* 57).**

The JOURNEY, open and horizontal, frames existence as movement, refusal of arrival: “Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road” (91). HOME is the world, and exile becomes wayward communion, a roving togetherness that refuses fixity.

Sepehri: fragility, transparency, displacement. CENTER/PERIPHERY and IN/OUT appear as sites of uncertainty, exposure:

“In this house, I am a guest of the window” (Sepehri 54).

His JOURNEY turns inward and downward—toward roots, toward dissolution, toward the slow vanishing of edge: exile here is not heroic but vulnerable, a letting go, a willingness to be elsewhere: “I am from Kashan, but my home is the tenderness of petals” (97).

BODY/LANDSCAPE:

In Whitman, the body expands, absorbs, becomes cosmic; in Sepehri, it is vegetal, hushed, receiving the world as one might receive water—patient, porous.

4.3 Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors, those that confer entity and agency upon emotion, nature, or spirit, mutate across the poets’ lines. Whitman’s world is alive, every object endowed and animated: “the beautiful uncut hair of graves” (*Leaves of Grass* 46). Matter pulses with spirit, as if every fragment of the world were charged with will. Sepehri, too, personifies, yet his garden, river, and wind do not clamor for attention; they prompt, invite, remain ambiguous: “The river calls my name in the dusk” (*The Oasis of Now* 81). Nature, here, is not backdrop but guide, an agent not of

mastery but of questioning, an interlocutor whose response is never assured.

4.4 Comparative Mapping: Overlap and Divergence

Overlap is real, but never complete; divergence, pronounced, is also always porous. Both poets stage the self as a boundary breached, a site of negotiation:

- Whitman: “I am large, I contain multitudes” (56) openness as democratic, cosmological charge.
- Sepehri: “I will dissolve in the garden’s green patience” (77) openness as humility, as self-effacement, as mystical quietude.

Divergence, though, is not simply a matter of scale or ambition, but of affective and ecological orientation:

- Whitman expands, absorbs, embraces an energetic dilation that seeks the cosmic in the personal, the personal in the cosmic.
- Sepehri roots, dissolves, attends, a transparency that favors quiet observation, patient being, and humility over conquest, over absorption.

Thus, their metaphorical domains—flow, openness, journey, rootedness—repeat and interrupt, overlap and resist. The shared cognitive scaffolding (Kövecses) gives way, under pressure, to difference: affective tone, spiritual aspiration, ecological relation. What remains is not synthesis, but constellation—a mapping of proximity and distance, a structure of feeling that is always becoming, never resolved (Brône & Vandaele).

5. Whitman’s Metaphoric Imagination: Democratic Embodiment and Spiritual Atmospheres

Whitman’s poetry unfolds as a meditation on porosity, of body, self, and world. Boundaries blur; energies migrate. The body is not simply present but implicated, extended, entangled with cosmos, democracy, and

the collective breath. For Whitman, metaphor refuses the decorative; it becomes method, generative law, the movement by which perception and affect are structured, undone, reconfigured. In *Leaves of Grass*, the poetic voice, always both “I” and more than “I,” enacts the body as atmosphere, the self as node, the world as invitation. Radical inclusion is not a theme but an ongoing experiment in permeability.

This section traces Whitman’s metaphors of flow, dilation, and absorption, how they structure not only democratic vision and spiritual openness, but also the rhythm of affect itself. Through close reading, especially of “Song of Myself,” “I Sing the Body Electric,” and adjacent passages, we encounter not only a metaphoric world but the labor of becoming porous, the discipline of remaining open.

Scholarly accounts reinforce this emphasis. As McCown notes, Whitman’s project is one of strategic embodiment: the body functions as subject and metaphor, but also as medium, the site where identity and unity, difference and belonging, are renegotiated and unsettled (xx–xx).

5.1 Expansive Metaphoric Schemata

Expansion is Whitman’s persistent gesture. The body does not merely occupy space; it dilates, absorbs, radiates, resonates with the cosmos. From “Song of Myself”:

**“I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (Whitman 28).**

Here, the self is always already a dispersal, its boundary fugitive, plural, recursive. The container schema, “every atom belonging to me,” is immediately undone, opened to collective passage. Experience is

democratized, not as abstract ideal, but as energetic exchange, as shared air, as rhythm.

Mancelos observes that Whitman vegetalizes, personifies, dissolves the self into the other, the body into the world, insisting on unity and permeability as the ground of poetic vision.

The dilation recurs, becomes incantatory, atmospheric:

“I inhale great draughts of space;

The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine” (29).

Space is not exterior; the self does not simply contain it, but is animated by it: air, breath, energy circulate, diffusing the difference between inside and outside. Here, the boundaries of the self become atmospheric, mobile, continuous with the world. “Our understanding of the self is based on bodily experience and interaction with the environment” (Lakoff & Johnson 267), and Whitman’s lines perform this, breathing the world in.

In “I Sing the Body Electric,” the body is rendered anatomical and cosmic at once:

**“The lung-sponges, the stomach-sac, the bowels sweet and clean,
The joints of the hips and wrists...**

**How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his
offspring through the centuries?**

**Who might you find you have come from yourself, if you could
trace back through the centuries?” (254).**

Anatomy becomes lineage, the body mapped as archive, as potential—flesh dilated into futurity, kinship, historical connection. The self is not merely a moment, but a passage, a relay, a site of what Riley calls the “living archive” of connection, possibility, and collective memory.

Whitman's poetics is thus never static. It is a poetics of dilation, a refusal of enclosure. Every body is more than itself; every boundary is a point of energetic transfer, a staging ground for mutuality, for the unfinished work of democracy and world.

5.2 Sensory and Spatial Metaphors

Whitman's metaphoric terrain is insistently sensorial. Touch, sound, vision: each is an aperture, a route by which the self opens to expansion, connection, dissolution. The "transparent eyeball," Emerson's image, yes, but in Whitman's hands it becomes not merely a symbol, but a recursive act of perception: the body unbounded, the world permeating.

"I am not contained between my hat and my boots,
I peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,
The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good"
(Whitman 32).

Here, vision is not surveillance, but permeability: the self dissolves into sight, into a rhythm of encounter where boundaries tremble. Perception becomes a spiritual act, a labor of unmaking and remaking the relation between body and world. Whitman's imagination operates through "photographic logic," sensory immersion as both method and metaphysics, rendering the subject permeable, open, indistinguishable from the world's multiplicity. The poem becomes an event of dissolution, of radical unity.

Auditory and tactile metaphors recur, materializing democracy in shared atmospheres:

"Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it" (29).

Breath and fragrance move through bodies, commingling individuality and collectivity. Spiritual experience, here, is not ascent, but saturation—community built through air, atmosphere, bodily exchange. The “democratic ethos” is rendered palpable, intimate, participatory.

5.3 Affect and Energetics

Whitman’s metaphors do not merely describe feeling; they enact it, bodying forth affect—joy, sorrow, desire—as movement, flow, contagion. In “Song of Myself,” the body’s pleasure and pain dissolve the boundaries of self and other, of soul and flesh:

“Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?

And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?

And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?

And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?” (56).

No dualism survives here: body and soul fold into each other, mutual energetic completion. Metaphor is the engine of this integration, not content to merely signify, but to enact, always restless, unfinished.

Eroticism, too, moves as current, as mutuality, as undoing of separateness:

“I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;

You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,

And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,

And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet” (55).

Desire here is not contained, not private; it is energetic movement, absorption, dissolution of all boundaries. Bootle notes: Whitman's eroticism is embodied, sensory, world-making; the dissolution of the body's edge is a metaphor for the possibility of spiritual and communal union. The flow schema returns: pleasure and openness, the permeability of skin, soul, language.

Sorrow, too, circulates—energy depleted, atmosphere weighted:

“I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame” (254).

Suffering is not only individual but circulatory, diffused through the body politic, thickening the air, linking the singular to the collective through the rhythm of breath, gaze, attention.

Whitman's poetry, then, is not merely about feeling, but feeling as movement, as energy, as shared medium—each metaphor a site of mutual transformation, porous, intimate, infinite in its reach.

5.4 Spiritual and Political Cosmology

Whitman's most ambitious metaphors refuse scale. The individual body is mapped onto the cosmos, the soul radiates through flesh, democracy pulses as a field of energetic relation. In these lines, metaphor is not a bridge but an event—body and world folded together, soul and nation made partners in the labor of becoming.

“I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,

And you must not be abased to the other” (36).

Here, body and soul are equals, neither sovereign nor subordinate; democracy is enacted first as spiritual mutuality, then as metaphorical contagion. The journey, openness, and inclusion, the political metaphors

that sustain Whitman's vision, are never only figurative. They are invitations, rehearsals for a world to come.

"Not I, not anyone else can travel that road for you,

You must travel it for yourself.

It is not far...it is within reach,

**Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know,
Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land" (91).**

The JOURNEY here is not solitary, not heroic, but cosmic, democratic. The open road is both path and field, a topology of mutuality, possibility, risk. Paryž notes: Whitman's poetry is fundamentally political, blending the metaphors of body and nation, openness and journey, to envision democracy as lived, collective, cosmic experience.

5.5 Close Reading: Tracing Metaphoric Networks

Song of Myself

The core metaphorical network is permeability, dilation, exchange. The poem's opening gesture—celebration, cosmic absorption—positions the self as singular and multiple, energetic, receptive, always in passage:

"For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (28).

Breath, air, absorption recur: metaphor as the means by which democracy and spirituality become experience, not doctrine.

I Sing the Body Electric

The body is rendered as detail and mystery—a field, a node, a charge. Electricity, conduction, magnetism: the flesh becomes a conduit for spiritual energy, not only sacred but generative, transmissive, alive:

"If anything is sacred the human body is sacred" (255).

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

Here, dilation is spatial, permeability is temporal. The poem structures relation—self to world, present to future—through the metaphors of river, crowd, sky:

“I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence;

**Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt;
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd” (307).**

Flow becomes communion; the metaphor is not static, but resonant, what Kövecses calls “energetic resonance...across bodies and times” (142). The poem is not memory but echo, not presence but return.

Whitman’s metaphoric imagination constructs the body as cosmos, the self as a democratic node, the world as a field of inclusion, never finished, always opening. These metaphors do not simply illustrate cognitive theory; they enact it, embody it, become its archive. *Leaves of Grass* remains a living document, a record of conceptual, affective, and social labor, where poetics, politics, and mystical unity unfold, always becoming.

6. Sepehri’s Metaphoric Imagination: Mysticism, Ecology, and Perceptual Humility

Whitman enlarges endlessly. His cosmos dilates, absorbs, and turns body into world, energy without boundary. Sepehri does not expand but dissolves. His poetics move toward transparency, rootedness, attenuation. Here metaphor is no longer cognitive frame but gesture, spiritual, ethical, an art of attunement. The self yields its fantasy of centrality, accepts the vessel, porous and patient, surrendered to intervals of waiting, to the discipline of fading.

This is humility, but not passivity. It is the inheritance of Persian mysticism, the Sufi tradition, where dissolution is not erasure but

manifestation: the sacred given as immanence, diffused as light within the ordinary. Comparative reading uncovers the lexicon: the unity of existence, the self rendered translucent, ray or reflection, the sacred embodied in water, plant, and silence (Dorniani et al.).

6.1 Vegetal and Transparent Schemas

Sepehri's metaphoric texture is vegetal, aqueous: a poetics of roots, water, leaf, light. In "Water's Footfall":

**"I must wash my eyes,
Look at things differently,
Words must be the wind themselves,
Words must be the rain themselves"
(Sepehri 63).**

Washing the eyes, purification, yes, but also a recalibration, a labor of vision's undoing. To see otherwise is to become otherwise: to render perception itself transparent, receptive, tentative. Words are not vessels but weather, not carriers but circulation: wind, rain, dissolution, renewal. The schema of transparency mediates: the self no longer commands, but opens; clarity is not conquest, but humility, a readiness to receive what exceeds. Rootedness recurs, a counterweight to expansion, an ethic of immersion:

**"My roots touch the depths of water's silence,
I grow quietly in the patience of trees"
(Sepehri 51).**

Here the self neither seeks transcendence nor asserts fixity. Growth is not ascension but patience, not ambition but listening, a temporality drawn from the slow, inward rhythms of plants. Whitman rises; Sepehri grounds. One dilates, the other waits. Stillness is its own poetics, its own experiment in relation.

Between transparency and rootedness, Sepehri's metaphoric self becomes less an actor than a witness, immersed, entangled, quietly transformed. The work is never conquest or revelation, but the ongoing experiment of attunement: humility, depth, patience.

6.2 Metaphors of Attunement and Dissolution

Attunement, in Sepehri, is not mastery but dissolution. The hard boundaries between self and world are rendered porous, uncertain. The poet does not act, possess, or dominate; instead, he listens, he watches, he blends, his stance is that of quiet permeability. In *The Oasis of Now*:

**“Let us open the window,
To a new morning,
To the freshness of the old trees”
(73).**

The window is not a threshold but an invitation, a gentle rupture in the habit of seeing. To open the window is to allow perception to become receptivity, to welcome the world's renewal, not with conquest, but with humility. The gesture is spiritual: to open is to become vulnerable, available, to be entered by the morning, the trees, the light.

Elsewhere, dissolution is the final humility. In “A Journey”:

**“I will dissolve in the garden's green patience,
In the endless listening of water,
In the slow breathing of the earth”
(77).**

Here the self yields; permeability replaces agency, and the boundary dissolves into the more-than-human world. Attunement is not assertion but surrender—what Brône and Vandaele describe as “ecological humility,” a

belonging that requires relinquishing control and embracing vulnerability as both price and gift of relation (2).

Sepehri's ecological metaphors move at vegetal speed: slowness, cycles, patience. "The world is the patience of a seed in the earth" (Sepehri 64). This is not simply ecological consciousness but its modeling: slowness as method, cycle as ethics, patience as poetics. Nature, for Sepehri, is spiritually alive, a teacher of observation and recurrence, where growth is slow and flourishing is not arrival but becoming-with (Isfahani et al.).

6.3 Mystical and Affective Metaphors

Sepehri's metaphoric repertoire draws from Sufi motifs: exile, homecoming, search, gentle sorrow, quiet joy. Home and exile are not endpoints but thresholds within the schema of journey. The path is neither linear nor goal-oriented; it is wandering, openness, perpetual searching:

**"I am from Kashan,
But my home is the tenderness of petals"
(97).**

Shoaliyeva notes: Sepehri's poetry reinterprets classical Sufi journeys as open-ended, cyclical, marked by continual renewal and spiritual receptivity. There is no dramatic arrival; fulfillment resides in the unfolding, the never-arriving, the quiet embrace of not-yet.

Affective resonance is muted, slow, patient. Sorrow is not agony, but gentle rain; joy is the unobtrusive blossoming of a tree, patience the slow unfurling of green:

**"Sorrow,
A rain on the face of the garden,
Joy,
The first leaf of a poplar in the wind"**

(78).

Emotion, here, is cyclical, subtle, vegetal. Searching and patience echo Sufi longing; not a quest for possession, but a willingness to remain open, to wait, to abide in the interval. In Sepehri's world, spiritual fulfillment is never arrival; it is the gentle, ongoing work of attunement, dissolution, and return.

6.4 Cultural Context

Sepehri's metaphoric imagination unfurls not as a discrete aesthetic operation but as a dispersed echo across the turbulent syntax of Persian poetics, Sufi tracework, and the unresolved dissonances of Iran's twentieth-century becoming. Figures of mirror, drop, sea, and vessel do not stand as stable allegories but recur as errant returns, fractured refractions of Rumi's theosophical grammar and Hafez's ecstatic concealments. What Sepehri inherits he also deforms: the garden is no longer paradisiacal elsewhere but breathing remainder, a site of vegetal temporality that mourns without monument. His metaphors do not signify; they sediment. They gather the tremors of postwar melancholia, a historicity that resists full speech. As Pirooz and Sadegi observe, his poetics negotiate no resolution but interweave Persian metaphysical motifs with ecological and existential intensities precisely by withholding ideological legibility (21–23). Silence here is not absence but practiced refusal, an ontological skepticism, a mystic critique of self-sameness. Waiting becomes a mode of care, of deferral, of ethical indiscipline. The vegetal, the patient, the nearly imperceptible are not signs of transcendence but resonant ground of a time broken open by historical trauma. Nature is not retreat but remainder, the afterlife of violence rendered in tones of dew, wind, root, and withdrawal. These metaphors dwell not in the ideal but in

the tension between contemplation and exhaustion. Like the postwar body, they are tender, fragmented, breathing. They enact an ethics of presence that neither resolves nor redeems but endures, sidelong and unsettled, in the shade of history's scorched gardens.

6.5 Close Reading: Three Poems

Water's Footfall

The poem unfolds as meditation—perception, transparency, attunement. It begins quietly: “I must wash my eyes, / Look at things differently” (Sepehri 63). Water is more than element; it becomes metaphor for consciousness, for cleansing, for surrender: “The world must be washed / in the clarity of rain” (63). Seeing here is not assertion but relinquishing—the self no longer central, but a vessel, emptied for light, patience, openness. As Shahnazari observes, water and nature recur as metaphors of renewal, blending the insights of cognitive metaphor theory with the spiritual imperative of receptivity (142).

The Oasis of Now

Here, the metaphors of window, morning, tree are expanded—entry points for perception's reawakening, world's slow renewal:

**“Let us open the window,
To a new morning,
To the freshness of the old trees”
(73).**

Morning, trees: metaphors of spiritual and ecological renewal. The window: not mere threshold, but cognitive act—opening, awakening, attunement to the slow, cyclical time of nature.

To open is to risk being changed by what enters.

A Journey

The journey in Sepehri is not conquest or heroic achievement, but dissolution, humility:

**“I will dissolve in the garden’s green patience,
In the endless listening of water”
(77).**

This is not a journey toward arrival but toward openness, a surrender of the self into wider ecology—patience, listening, growth without closure. Life as journey persists, yet its horizon is perpetual return, quiet permeability. Sepehri’s metaphoric imagination gathers and disperses through schemas of transparency, rootedness, dissolution, vegetal temporality. His poetics enact humility both cognitive and spiritual: selfhood as attunement, endurance, an unfinished opening rather than heroic assertion. Saturated with Persian mystical tradition yet inflected by modern ecological consciousness, this vision is not nostalgia but a quiet experiment in living otherwise—with the world, in time.

7. Comparative Discussion: Metaphor Ecologies and Cross-Cultural Embodiment

7.1 Synthesis of Findings

The cross-cultural cognitive analysis of Whitman and Sepehri’s poetry unfolds as simultaneity, deep convergence and meaningful divergence, an overlap that never resolves. At the level of image schema, certain figures recur, spectral and insistent: journey, transparency, the body as porous field, home and exile as not only spatial but existential orientation. Both poets mobilize the metaphor of journey: “Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road” (Whitman 91); “A journey / To dissolve in the garden’s green patience” (Sepehri 77). Transparency, too, becomes a crossing: Whitman’s “transparent eyeball,” refracted as Sepehri’s injunction, “I

must wash my eyes... Words must be the wind themselves” (63). The body reappears as threshold: a boundary to be opened, a field of exchange, a site of receiving and dissolution.

Both poets turn to metaphors of journey and time to traverse mystical and philosophical terrain, grounded in shared experiential schemas yet inflected by the singular pressures of their cultures, histories, and afterlives. The schema is common; its realization irreducibly particular.

On this ground, divergence gathers its force. Whitman’s metaphors lean outward: expansion, absorption, energetic flow. The self is voraciously inclusive, a “node” within a democratic cosmos, where crossing boundaries is both spiritual and political labor. The journey is exuberant, expansive, a rushing forward, animated by kinetic energy, erotic joy, and spiritual optimism: “I am large, I contain multitudes” (56). Sepehri privileges another kind of opening: quiet attunement, rootedness, vegetal temporality. His metaphors model permeability as humility and patience, an ethics of receiving rather than possessing. The journey becomes slow passage, not conquest; waiting, listening, dissolving, not arrival. The affective register is subdued, melancholic, persistent: “I will dissolve in the garden’s green patience” (77).

These divergences index deeper inheritances: Whitman’s from American transcendentalism, democratic idealism, and the optimism of becoming; Sepehri’s from Persian Sufi traditions, postwar humility, and the philosophical labor of endurance. Each works within a metaphorical architecture at once common and irreducible, constellations that touch but never fuse. In their crossings, what emerges is not synthesis but arrangement, a wayward map of relation, where shared schemas and singular inflections reveal the unfinished work of translation and difference.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

The comparative cognitive model unsettles, and rightly, the reduction of metaphor to ornament. It restores metaphor as felt cognition, where meaning is enacted, not merely signified. Lakoff and Johnson and Kövecses opened the terrain, but the analysis here exceeds them. Metaphor is grounded in the body, certainly, yet never only that. It is bent and saturated by culture, colored by history, shaped by affect, by the residues of singular and collective life. Metaphor is not code. It is choreography, a performance of sense-making, dynamic, provisional, embodied.

For comparative poetics, this refusal of fixity matters. Metaphor bridges as much as it separates, carrying schemas such as journey, container, and transparency into divergent worlds, each inflected by distinct spiritual and existential projects.

Thus metaphor cannot remain conceptual mapping alone. It is performance, a way of feeling, of seeing, of inhabiting otherwise. Whitman makes it pulse with participation—energetic, cosmological, democratic. Sepehri turns it toward humility—ecological attunement, patient dissolution. In both, metaphor becomes existential, the site where poetics touches the spiritual, unfinished, errant labor (Brône & Vandaele).

What emerges, finally, is a comparative poetics attuned not to synthesis but to constellation: metaphors that travel yet fracture, that recur yet refuse closure. To read across Whitman and Sepehri is to glimpse the work of metaphor as both connective and resistant, a choreography of relation without guarantee. It is here—in the unfinished, in the errant—that metaphor discloses its most radical promise for global poetics.

7.3 Global Poetics: Toward an Ecology of Imagination

What emerges is not simply a method but an ecology, a way of reading, translating, dwelling among the living, recalcitrant forms of poetic imagination. Cross-cultural cognitive metaphor theory enables a global poetics attentive both to universality and singularity, to how metaphors move, migrate, resist, and root. Translation here is philosophical as much as technical: not the flattening of resonance but the labor of carrying across difference, of wrestling with the impossibility of full equivalence. Sepehri's metaphors of dissolution and transparency remain resistant to domestication; Whitman's exuberance strains every container, always spilling over. The ecology of metaphor is thus double: poetry is always partially translatable, yet always locally, affectively, and bodily embedded.

More broadly, such a comparative cognitive approach invites world literature into an ethics of reading: not only what metaphors mean, but how they feel, how they make possible new modes of seeing, waiting, listening, becoming. The ecology of metaphor becomes a model for the living, cross-pollinating, and unfinished possibilities of poetic form. It is not closure but invitation, an opening into the recursive labor of imagination across languages, landscapes, and worlds.

8. Conclusion

This study has traced, in recursive motion, the metaphorical imagination of Whitman and Sepehri through the lens of cognitive poetics. It has sought less a symmetry than a meditation: on how embodied schemas such as journey, transparency, body, and home generate poetic meaning, shape affect, disclose spiritual worldviews. Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) remains the origin, but what follows exceeds it. For Whitman and Sepehri alike, metaphor is never

ornament. It is foundation, choreography, the force by which bodily, affective, cultural energies are refracted, converging here, resisting there, across traditions.

No simple correspondence emerges. Both poets draw on the same elemental schemas, yet their metaphorical ecologies diverge. Whitman enacts dilation, absorption, expansion: his cosmos democratic, his body a conduit, a field, endlessly permeable. Sepehri turns elsewhere: transparency, rootedness, dissolution. His poetics are humble, ecological, mystical, patient. Each stance echoes an inheritance: Whitman's American transcendentalism and democratic optimism; Sepehri's Persian Sufism, an ecological humility that waits and dissolves.

The claim is clear. Metaphor is not static mapping. It is event, field, experiment. It is felt cognition, where knowing and feeling converge, where relation is enacted rather than posited. Metaphor opens poetry as archive, living, restless, unfinished. Comparative poetics, if it is to matter, must attend to both the universal and the irreducible, to shared image-schemas and untranslatable differences. The aim is not equivalence but relation.

Future work must press further: into non-Western philosophies, indigenous imaginaries, ecological poetics. Into discontinuity as much as overlap. Into metaphor's role in mediating contemporary crises and entanglements. For metaphor remains urgent, generative. To trace it is to follow the shifting boundaries of human experience itself, porous, recursive, always in motion.

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