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Images of the City

Poetry and Film, From Whitman to Lorca

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CHAPTER I

THE OPPOSITE EKPHRASIS: MANHATTAN, FROM POETRY TO CINEMA

The nine editions of *Leaves Of Grass* created a monumental body of poetry between 1855 and 1892, the year of Walt Whitman's death. In the first of its sections, entitled "Inscriptions", the poet of Paumanok, the native name of Long Island, included in the 1881 edition a poem previously published in the New York newspaper *Tribune* in 1876 that represents one more example of the powerful visionary impulse of that great poet of Modernity. Its title is a Greek word, "Eidolons", accurately translated into Spanish as "Imágenes" by Francisco Alexander (Whitman, 2006, 78 and ss.) the most hard-working translator of all of Whitman's poetry who also received the same attention, albeit partially, from León Felipe, Concha Zardoya or, very notably, from Jorge Luis Borges (Whitman, 1991).

After announcing in the first poem of that initial section that it was addressed to "The Modern Man" and that to achieve that, he would turn to "the word Democratic, the word En-Masse" (Whitman, 1973, 1), for us, "Eidolons" contains a special significance as a key to the new communication society that even then — not only now in the midst of the 21st century— was blossoming. Whitman starts by talking about his encounter with a prophet who was attempting to transcend "the nuances" and "world objects" to gather images: *To glean idolons*. From him

he receives advice: that he should place in all his verses the images *as light for all and entrance—song of all* (Whitman, 1973, 5 and ss.).

It was a matter of incorporating into the poem “the images of today”, inspired “by science and that which is modern”, because within these things lies reality. Whitman appears to propose an identity between that which is real and its imagined representation which today can't appear strange to those of us who live in the semiotic information, mass media and cyberspace society. Within his work, Whitman brings up old ontological debates when he writes *The true realities, eidolons* or, later, reaffirms the same idea of a distant platonic source when he refers to *the real I myself, / An image, an eidolon*. Above all, he makes a declaration of faith regarding what his profession as poet will be, comparable to that of the prophet in the democratic society (Whitman, 1973, 7):

The prophet and the bard,
Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,
Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, interpret yet to them,
God and eidolons.

Here is the task: to be a mediator, interpreting God and images (that is to say reality) to modernity. Because Walt Whitman is basically the great English–language romantic poet on the other side of the Atlantic. The confluences are well known between Romanticism and the political principles of the French Revolution that also originally inspired that of the British colonies in North America. The poet of Paumanok shares all the characteristic elements of romantic sensibility; in the first place, and most notably, the exultation of ego that we already saw in the initial text of “Inscriptions”, titled “One's–Self I Sing” that reaches its highest expression a little later with a section of loose poems that took up more than half of the 1855 edition. In 1856 they were titled separately as “Poem of Walt Whitman, an American” and after 1860 were grouped under a simplified heading “Walt Whitman”, acquiring in 1881 the final title *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
(...)
I, now thirty–seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease no till death.
(...)
(Whitman, 1973, 28–29).

Together with this intensely lyrical egocentrism (see Edwina Havilland Miller, 1989), Whitman also breaks with the models, with the tyranny of tradition, to embrace with full emphasis the creative freedom, the search for new poetic forms that intentionally abandon the constraints of the traditional meter, that well ordered system that computerizes syllabic quantity, accentual intensity, tone of enunciation, and the timber of the final vowels and/or consonants of the verse to produce rhyme. Repeated throughout the *Leaves of Grass* are his ambiguous

references towards “the genius of poets of old lands”, that is to say the classical Europeans who he admires but equally wishes to distance himself from. As we saw in the poem “Eidolons” he wishes to mediate with unusual images between the reading public and the new reality of American Democracy, the creator of a specific human condition. To achieve that, as James Perrin Warren (1990) has commented, he does not reject experimentation with a new poetic language, substantially “American”.

In being romantic, Whitman is profoundly nationalistic. His preface to the 1888 edition, in which he doesn't hesitate to affirm that the very Shakespeare “essentially belongs to the buried past”, ends by quoting the advice of Herder to the young Goethe regarding how great poetry has always been the result of *national spirit* (Whitman, 2006, 55, 63). It is understood that his nationalism, which for example permeates the prologue of 1872, starts from the assumption that the United States represents “the great ideal nationality of the future, the nation of the body and the soul, —no limit here to land, help, opportunities, mines, products, demands, supplies, &c.;—”. (Whitman, 1973, 743). The poet admires the possibilities of the new era of Humanity, lead by the Nation to which he belongs —“*The mighty present age!*”— and with his characteristically cumulative and paratactic capacity he makes his enthusiasm real by creating lists, some elements of which —for example, the city— are, for the purposes of our book, as interesting as the Whitmanesque theory of images that we have already seen:

To absorb, and express in poetry, anything of it —of its world —America —cities and States —the years, the events of our Nineteenth Century— the rapidity of movement —the violent contrasts, fluctuations of light and shade, of hope and fear —the entire revolution made by science in the poetic method— these great new underlying facts and new ideas rushing and spreading everywhere; —Truly a mighty age!
(Whitman, 1973, 742).

In his preface, the poet mentions the fluctuations of light and shadow and also cities, at the same time as he exalts a century, his own, in terms that would be perfectly appropriate for the next one. Because what Walt Whitman, dead in 1892, exalts is the pioneering lift-off of a scientific, analytic and sociological modernity that will continue to develop in the 20th century. His democratic optimism contains much that is a-ideological or pre-ideological. His rigorous contemporary is Karl Marx (1818-1883) with his criticism of industrial capitalism —*Wage-Labor and Capital* is from 1845 and the *Communist Manifesto* from three years later— that Europe had configured its own model mainly based on the English example, which also explains the different treatment of themes such as that of the city by other poets such as Baudelaire or Rimbaud. The difference in perspectives is inexorably related to the comparison of the Old and New Worlds. The North American poet perceives democracy as being a catalyst for social integration in the search for a “common ground” of stable unanimity, as unanimism, to use a concept that the French writer Jules Romains placed in circulation at the start of the 20th century but that Kerry C. Larson (1988) implicitly incorporated in his study of the Whitmanesque lyricism.

In this respect, the main factor for the writer is his identification with the masses, with the “common people” whose epic is told in a fundamental poem-section of *Leaves of Grass* titled “A Song for Occupations”, not only dedicated to manual and agricultural labor but above all to those who work “in the labor of engines”. Whitman is a fervent United States citizen, but also a type of “nationalist of global modernity”. It is notable that these sentiments find their first genuine fulfillment in that which is closest, in the city, in that very New York that already is the metropolis of the future but that still preserves the traces of indigenous enclaves such as *Paumanok* —Long Island— where the poet was born or the island of *Maniata* (so called by Whitman, following old usage). That is the privileged scene which embodies the new materialistic and humanistic culture and because of that it turns into a preferred theme for the bards of the new sensibility of which Whitman is merely the recognized pioneer. That is because his artistic lineage will be dutifully extended throughout the new century in which the prodigious 1920s, the only decade of peace, favored that continuous identification of all arts with the new times.

In this sense it is interesting to note the validity of the Whitmanesque assumptions through two coinciding testimonies in one century and another. The not always cordial relations between Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson and his proactive and optimistic transcendentalism are known and the link was studied by Betsy Erkkila (1989). In biographies of the poet (e.g. Jerome Loving, 2002, 461-462) striking attention is given to the visit to Harvard University that he made in 1888, invited by Professor William James and a young student, Charles T. Sempers, who admired him enormously. The extent of this devotion was detailed in an article in *Harvard Monthly* in which Sempers said of Whitman that he had “spiritualized trade, commerce, the toils of lowly men. The *city with its belching furnaces and foundries, its rattling factories, its noise and whir and roar* is the incarnation of a human energy which is divine. A lover of nature in all her moods, he loves *the city with its streaming multitudes...* Other poets have denounced the materialism of our age. He has found a soul in its materialism”.

I have stressed what is most interesting for the thesis that this book is developing but equally I would like to emphasize that in these words of 1888 are found the same arguments that would make Walt Whitman, 30 years later, a model recognized by European expressionists, surrealists, cubists or futurists. When in 1925 Guillermo de Torre (1925, 21 and ss.) dedicated the first chapter of his *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* (European Vanguard Literature) to the “cosmic and fraternal feeling within the poets of the five continents” based on the anthology of world poetry that Ivan Goll had just published, he used as a slogan a few verses from “Pioneers! Oh Pioneers!”, a text that is included in the “Birds of Passage” section, and immediately developed the most fiery praise of the author of *Leaves of Grass* that one could imagine. He defined him as “an undoubted precursor”, “poet of our times, citizen of the world, everyone’s brother”, “a shining lighthouse of Humanity” who “gallops across the night of his century and arrives to us. He overflows his time and his country” (Torre, 1935, 341).

In effect, this chapter, initially highlighting the American writer, later brings together Jules Romains and other representatives of the French school of

unanimism that “have a diaphanous Whitmanesque genealogy”, Anglo-Saxon imaginalists such as Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound or Edgar Lee Masters. Also German Expressionists —as appreciated as Whitman by Jorge Luis Borges, as we will detail further on— among whom he mentions Ludwig Rubiner, Franz Werfel, in whom, according to de Torre (1925, 355), “the Whitmanesque teaching is very visible”, Albert Ehrenstein, Alfred Wolfstein —equally “of pure Whitmanesque ancestry”—, Wilhelm Klemm and the Dutch poet Henriette Roland Holst and Slav poets such as Alexander Blok, Andrew Biely, Valery Brussov, Elias Ehrenburg and Anna Achmatova.

Three final notes bring together this new enthusiasm of Guillermo de Torre with that of the young Harvard student Charles T. Sempers a third of a century earlier. In the first place, the ecumenical impact that the voice of Whitman has is because in a “broad, fast flowing, outworldly tone, the son of Manhattan makes the entire cosmic rhythm file in front of us”. Equally, de Torre includes among the most staunchly dedicated Whitmanians, Jorge Luis Borges, who between 1960 and 1972 partially translated *Leaves of Grass* but who also incorporated it in his poetry based on the blinding emotion he felt when he read it, when —as he confessed in a conference at the University of Chicago in 1986— “I was a neurotic youngster in Geneva” and the American bard “left me blinded, amazed and speechless” (Racs, 2001, 25). The poem “Himno del Mar” (Hymn of the Sea) that the Argentinean published in the ultraist magazine *Grecia* and that later was not included in his *Obra poética* (Poetic work) is a sample of this emotion whose start already unmistakably shows this Whitmanesque influence: *I have yearned for a hymn of the Sea / with ample rhythms like the shouting waves (...)* (Yo he ansiado un himno del Mar / con ritmos amplios como las olas que gritan).

As a third and final note, the author of *European Vanguard Literature* also highlights, as we have already done, the Whitmanesque assertion that “true realities are images” and includes the definitive valuation that in this way the American was “anticipating our contemporary events” (Torre, 1925, 348).

The *contemporary events* that Guillermo de Torre refers to has image as one of its crucial points, precisely as the Walt Whitman of “Eidolons” would have wished. Image, though, in a double sense. The first is appropriately literate: image, always the main feature of the best poetry, now, together with the *isms* of the avant-garde, acquire renewed protagonist status. Nevertheless, for the first time, cinematic images, icons of reality that are not static, as they were in paintings and photography, but dynamic —temporal fused with spatial as per Lessing’s dichotomy— in their diachronic and consecutive flow, emerge on the horizon of the aesthetic representation of life, of nature and of things. This happened thanks to a long incubated invention that, paralleling other pioneers, the Lumière brothers presented for the consideration of scientists and the general Parisian public in the last few months of 1895.

In the United States at exactly the same time, Thomas Alva Edison was enmeshed in his own inquiries. He was seeking to enter the fascinating universe of the capture and reproduction of dynamic images which he could not resist after having achieved the same with sound thanks to his invention of the phonograph

in 1877 which Whitman, an inhabitant of the world-capital of technical advances, might well have known about. In 1889, when the poet was still alive, he commercialized the celluloid film in 35mm format and disputed the corresponding patent with George Eastman just as from 1897 onwards he litigated with the brothers Lumière to decide which one should be recognized as the first film machine.

In fact, the public presentation of a prototype of Edison's *kinetoscope* took place on the 20th of May of 1891 in New Jersey at a convention of the National Federation of Women's Clubs of the United States. Whitman was still alive then but not so when on the 9th of May of 1893, Edison officially demonstrated his perfected machine at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. The following year he took it to Europe but aware of the weakness of his apparatus, only usable for a single viewing of very short films, he assumed Armat's *vitastroscope* as his own and once again showed its first projections at New York's Koster and Bial theater around 1896.

In strictly chronological terms, the author of *Leaves of Grass* was left with the taste of what very soon would become the most powerful medium to turn images into an expressive substance of a new "seventh art", a product of the development of science and technology. It was democratic, insofar as it was aimed at the general public, capable of expressing all the dynamism of modernist society and of being able to follow precisely the pulse of contemporaneous history. Fortunately it was also tightly linked to the city as inspiration, scenery and the field for the rollout of its first productions. In addition, a poet of Whitman's same lineage, although inferior, Vachel Lindsay (1916-2000) was the first American writer to lay claim to *The Art of the Moving Picture*, as the very title of his 1916 essay proves, shortly after Ricciotto Canudo did the same in Europe.

We can no longer delay explaining the enormous influence that, in our opinion, Whitman exercised over the pioneer of American cinema and one of the universal creators of the seventh art, David Llewelyn Wark Griffith. His first great film of 1915, *The Birth of a Nation* is based on Thomas Dixon's mediocre novel, *The Clansman*, and is free of the book's ideological pro-southern, pro-slavery burden that immediately generated considerable discussion. The film is a response to nationalist enthusiasm and to the epic/lyrical impulse that constitute *Leaves of Grass*.

The following year, Griffith, who as a cinematographic artist felt very close to literature, faced the creation of a film, *Intolerance*, of colossal dimensions, in the making of which he had no less an assistant than Erich von Stroheim. It was a veritable founding summit of the seventh art, characterized by an exuberance and an expressionist barroquism that in many ways was the precursor of what would appear very shortly in Germany. It was already technically very sophisticated thanks to the wealth of its shots and the perfect space-time programming of its montage and in the end only four hours were shown of the seventy-six filmed and eight loaded. The colorful nature that makes this super production unique is encapsulated in the four arguments or storylines that it contains.

There are three historical episodes enacted with a great wealth of media, namely “The Fall of Babylon”, “The Passion of Christ”, and “The Night of Saint Bartholomew” concerning the fierce repression of the French Huguenots in the 16th century. To these are added a contemporary melodrama set among the social conflicts that were taking place in the United States around 1914.

To alert the spectators of such a complex scenario in which the film evolves in acts, successive sequences jumping from one of the four stories mentioned to another—not all of them, by the way, detailed with the same level of attention—Griffith gives some signposts by means of title cards. For example, relating to the alternating stories he warns: “So you will see how our production switches from one story to another while the common theme is developed in each one of them”. Regarding the theme, already made explicit by the very title of the film, Griffith is totally clear: “Each story shows how hatred and intolerance have fought against love and charity throughout time”.

To us, the most interesting approach of the American filmmaker is the action that he resorts to so as to tie together the varied episodes and sequences of *Intolerance*. It is simply a matter of bridging shots that are repeated every time there is a significant jump in the sequence reinforced by means of text in the appropriate title card that illustrates, with images of a nurse lovingly rocking a cradle, the following verse of Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, where it acts as a refrain to the poem “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”:

The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to
my feet,
(Or like so me old crone rocking the cradle, swathed
in sweet garments, bending aside,)
The sea whisper'd me.
(Whitman, 1973, 253)

So nothing could have been more foreseeable than what occurred in 1920 when two renowned artists of photography and painting, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, members of Alfred Stieglitz' New York Circle (Various authors, 2004), filmed a movie that is universally recognized today as the first avant-garde American film. Newly released at the Rialto Theater in 1921, its title, *Manhatta*, sometimes appeared accompanied by one of two subtitles, “New York the Magnificent” or “La Fumée de New York”, which intended to clarify the somewhat obscure main reference taken from the native name of the island in the Hudson inlet that was initially colonized by the Dutch. In any case the filmmakers' inspiration the came from the poem that Whitman himself called “Mannahatta” that belongs to the section “From Noon to Starry Night” of *Leaves of Grass*.

The art gallery that Alfred Stieglitz opened around 1905 at 291, 5th Ave., together with other initiatives of his, such as the reviews *Camera Notes* and *Camera Work*, stand at the origins of the modernist art movement in the United States

which the founder led through two periods, one as interesting as the other though apparently both contradictory and complementary.

Before the first great war, Stieglitz was the flag carrier of the spread of European art in New York, the promoter of successive exhibitions of Cézanne, Picasso, Brancusi, Braque, Matisse and Picabia. The latter, when he was taken for the first time to Manhattan in 1913, declared that it was the Cubist city, the futurist city and that its architecture, its life, and its spirit, perfectly reflect modern sensibility (Cañas, 1994, 35). Such Eurocentrism did not impede the presentation in Gallery 291, in 1916 before it closed, of a great exhibition of Paul Strand, immediately considered the first purely photographic interpretation of modern aesthetics.

Then comes a second period, after the end of the war, in which Stieglitz, seconded by the extraordinary personality of Georgia O'Keeffe, took a new course that without any wish to be controversial we could call “nationalist American avant-gardism” and in that sense deeply Whitmanesque. This suggestion also has intellectual support of great standing such as that of Waldo Frank, author of *Our America*, published in 1919 and Lewis Mumford (1979), certainly a theoretician and chronicler of the city throughout history. Taking into account the objectives of our current investigation into images of the city in poetry and film from Whitman to Lorca, it's worth pointing out how, facing the enthusiasm and admiration towards the Big Apple shown equally by the poet of Paumanok as by Picabia, Waldo Frank does not withhold from contrasting the arrogance and power of the metropolis with the meanness, grayness and misery of its population while Strand defines New York as an inhospitable ants' nest where everyone crawls, one on top of the other.

Charles R. Sheeler, photographer and producer of a documentary on the Ford Motor Company, was at the same time a painter who took inspiration from Cubism for his architectural panoramas of New York and who practiced what is called *precisionism* in his hyperrealistic (and with a futuristic spirit) paintings of machines, such as the one titled “Steam turbine”, of factory buildings – “City interior” – or of skyscrapers (“Skyscrapers” from 1922). In 1931, Stieglitz himself filmed another urban movie, “A Bronx Morning”. In this context, it can't be considered strange that the impulse to translate a vision of Manhattan and New York in general with cinematic pictures might arise in such a circle. A vision that is the one that is given expression throughout *Leaves of Grass* in which Walt Whitman, with several decades of anticipation, makes the city on the Hudson emblematic of future modernity.

James Dougherty (1993) dedicates a chapter of his book on the poet of Paumanok to the artists previously mentioned and to Berenice Abbot, an entire tradition that would finally take us to Edward Hopper. Paul Strand, following the logic of elective affinities, published in 1955 a book reviewed as one of the most interesting of the Italian neo-realist movement, *Un Paese*, where he provides the photographs and Cesare Zavattini the text. According to Dougherty, Whitman's imagery is often disappointing because of his conventional patriotism and his predictable iconography which is not what occurs when his eyes focus on that which he knows and loves best, the life of the city, as happens in the extensive

poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” that the critic annotates extensively (Dougherty, 1993, 143-150).

The relevance of the above mentioned poem, provided on this occasion by literary hermeneutics, takes us once again to Strand and Sheeler’s film which is nothing other than a paraphrase in cinematographic images of twelve quotations from *Leaves of Grass*. Two of them come from the poem of the section “From Noon to Starry Night” that give the movie its title, even if Whitman preferred an archaic transcription of the native original place name as “Mannahatta” (as he also does with the name of his birthplace, “Paumanake”, “Paumanack” or “Paumanok”); others are taken from “A Broadway Pageant” and “Song of the Exposition” but there are also two, one of which that ends the reel, that come from that notable poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”.

In reality, the fortuitous encounter between New York and the cinema took place at the very origins of the seventh art even before it was recognized as such rather than “the wonderful hut at the fairs”, as Luis Buñuel wrote in a 1927 article titled “Del plano fotogénico” (“On the photogenic shot”) that appeared in *La Gaceta Literaria*. One can easily arrive at this conclusion through worthwhile collections such as the one edited in 2005 under the title *Unseen Cinema. Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894-1941*. Its compiler and intellectual author, Bruce Posner, considered Strand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta* as the first American avant-garde film but also pointed out that this short came to be the coda of an entire era of “New York City films” produced by Edison, American Mutoscope y Biograph Cameramen. With all this, the qualitative jump is considerable: the distance between short documentary tapes with greater or lesser artifice to a creation of evident literary inspiration.

For example “The Blizzard” from 1899 compiles two minutes of the expressiveness of a day of snow on the avenues that lead to Central Park. Even Posner, when commenting on “Lower Broadway” (1902) by Robert K. Bonine, summarizes as “sheer poetry” the composition that the producer has been able to give to the sequence of shots of the street, framed by skyscrapers and scored by harried walkers, trams, and horse and carts. It is exactly so: the accurate framing on film of a reality that is apparently non-permanent and random brings out in its spectators a feeling similar to that occasioned by “pure poetry” because of the strength of the images and the expressive nature of their linkage. This evaluation would be confirmed by critics, plastic artists, poets and movie buffs of the 1920s, for example Luis Buñuel in his aforementioned article or in “‘Découpage’ o segmentación cinegráfica” (“‘Découpage’ or cinegraphic segmentation”) that was included in the special edition that the same magazine, *La Gaceta Literaria*, dedicated to cinema in October 1928.

Skyscrapers, a relatively new architectural reality originating in Chicago but soon acclimatized to Manhattan, that Federico García Lorca considered the very emblem of America, turn into protagonists of some of these seminal tapes. The activities of construction workers and the photogenic quality of the machines they operate, express themes that are as dear to Whitman as they are to the Futurists. These themes are to be found in movies such as the 1902 “Beginning of

a Skyscraper” from Bonine, or in “Skyscrapers of New York from the North River” (1903) by J.B. Smith, shot from a boat as an extensive two minute travelogue, a procedure that Frederick S. Armitage had already imperfectly used the year before in “Seeing New York by Yacht”.

Nevertheless, technically we are facing work that in general is very well resolved with the addition in a few cases of various shots that are well conceived judgmentally and that have camera movements that are pertinent such as those already mentioned plus high and low angle and panoramic ones. For example in “Panorama from the Times Building” (1905) by Wallace McCutcheon, the skyscrapers not only “pose” for the camera but they also intervene to its advantage as tripods or cranes, thus allowing framing that would not be possible in any other way. Also collaborating is the beautiful bridge that Whitman saw inaugurated and from which Billy Bitzer made the film “Panorama from the Tower of the Brooklyn Bridge” in 1903. The architecture of the buildings, the skyscrapers, the theaters, the bridges and viaducts, is in itself the protagonist of the images, sometimes blatant, other times as support and as a place of encounter of people who arrive in ferries, climb on trams, go down steps, cross the streets or try out the subway. Thus “Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street” (1905), also by Bitzer, was greatly praised for being advanced relative to later futurist and expressionist European movies. Even the unlimited possibilities that Méliès discovered for the cinema, trick photography, was resorted to in an interesting tape, “Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theater” (1901) by Armitage, in which we see this building grow from nothing before our eyes only to collapse afterwards, all in a few short minutes.

The same American producers were the ones who simultaneously made Paris another cinematographic star, emulating New York, on the occasion of a singular event, the Universal Exposition of 1900, the first one that could be filmed. The idea that underlines this type of event is that of demonstrating curiosities from all over the world that under the circumstances of the time would not be able to transcend their immediate environment to reach a real and present public. Cinema contributed to the same effect, exposing the world’s novelties even more. Since it was held in Paris, the Eiffel Tower, that great icon of French modernity, inevitably played the same role that New York skyscrapers did and in this style James White produced five “Paris Exposition Films” for Edison: “Eiffel Tower from Trocadero Palace”, “Palace of Electricity”, “Champs de Mars”, “Panorama of Eiffel Tower” and “Scene from Elevator Ascending Eiffel Tower”.

At the start of the century, new celluloid photographic emulsions allowed filming at night and that made possible the production of an exquisite artistic documentary film under the eye of a director who has passed into the history of cinema as the first who dared enter the field of fiction, Edwin S Porter. In 1905, he created for Edison a three minute film called “Coney Island at Night”, a night vision of the already famous and massively attended New York attraction park that at the end of the 19th century so impressed the Cuban poet José Martí and Federico García Lorca 40 years later. The neon lights of Luna Park and Dreamland, first photographed panoramically and then with wide and medium shots at high and low angles, create in the midst of the night a canvas of light with

maximum visibility but also with an interior rhythm that produces a poetic and symphonic effect simultaneously on the spectator.

With what we previously described as the qualitative jump that the reel of Strand and Sheeler provided to these movies of the great city, there opens new artistic possibilities that in some cases are expressed in a synergistic key that we mentioned earlier: musical references for these sequences of cinematographic images. This happens, for example, with “Skyscraper Symphony” (1929) by Robert Florey, or “Manhattan Melody” (1931) by Bonny Powell. This last one is an authentic work of art in which New York is presented as a “city of modernity” under the very visible influence of Strand and Sheeler, recognized at the time as the fathers of the avant-garde vision of the city, and also of Walter Ruttmann’s great German production four years earlier *Berlin, die Symphonie der Großstadt* (Symphony of a Great City), that deserves a separate commentary in another chapter of our book.

Like Ruttmann, Powell starts filming the dawn of New York with the low light on its empty streets on which the first walkers timidly appear. Then the frenzy of the multitudes starts, moving the length and breadth of the city in trams, cars or subways, entering or leaving the city in trains or ferries. The bay is crisscrossed by all types of vessels and the smoke from their stacks draws great strokes of dynamic expressiveness. The labor of construction workers is also reflected with a futuristic emphasis to which the image of a Zeppelin crossing the New York skies also contributes. At noon comes the first interruption of the day. The camera takes delight in certain architectural personalities such as the Empire State Building that has just been inaugurated, just after Lorca stayed in the city, or the Brooklyn Bridge. The afternoon rhythm, broken by the urgency of the firemen going about their task, adapts itself to economic activities, buying and selling. Just as in the Berlin Symphony, with nightfall comes leisure time: dance, theater. On already wet streets, neon lights and headlights are reflected until night closes down. Poetry of a full day expressed in images. *In a day of man are the days / of time (...) / Between dawn and night is the universal / history (...)* wrote the poet Jorge Luis Borges on the subject of *Ulysses* that James Joyce published in Paris a year after Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler premiered *Manhatta* in New York. It is interesting to remember how the Irish author, promoter of one of the first projection salons in Dublin, succeeded in interviewing Sergei Eisenstein because he thought of him, and as a fallback Walter Ruttmann, as the directors who could take *Ulysses* to the cinema, the only “translation” that, according to Joyce, one could make of his work.

We can thus duly document the idyll that quickly developed, almost from the very start of cinema, between the city and the new art even when Lumière and Edison’s invention, among others, was not considered to be anything but a technical advance in the area of photographic reproduction of reality or a new instrument for the entertainment of the masses, one more element of “show business”. In some of the first documentary films about New York, for example “Lower Broadway” by L.K. Bonine which was made in 1902, critics of the time such as Bruce Posner nevertheless perceived the same quality of “pure poetry”. A little later, in 1911, Ricciotto Canudo launched his famous manifesto, announcing

the birth of a “seventh art” that would be none other than cinematography. It is precisely in this context that the project that Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, two artists of paint and photography linked to the New York avant-garde circle of Alfred Stieglitz, directed and launched in 1921 with the title *Manhatta* should be understood.

In principle, it could appear to be one more documentary on the evolution of the city of New York, along the lines of those produced by Edison, the Biograph or American Mutoscope that had been plentiful in previous years, some with barely hidden artistic pretensions. Nevertheless, in this case there are certain circumstances that make *Manhatta* a singular work destined to be a milestone not only in the representation of the city but also in the development of cinematographic art and —of special interest to us— in the possibilities and limitations of the relation between modern poetry and the cinema.

What is authentically original then, is that Strand and Sheeler implemented, as we have already noted, a visual paraphrase using cinematographic images from verses taken from various poems of *Leaves of Grass*. They were thus searching for the backing of a great poet to highlight the ambitious nature of their intent and, to this end, they chose a figure who was as identified with New York as he was identified with the spirit of modernity that the city on the Hudson represented. With that we have one more proof of the foresight and visionary nature of the bard of Paumanok; his poetic words included in a great work written over a forty year period, ending with his death in 1892, are totally appropriate to accompany images filmed in 1920, thirty years later. Obviously, some of the major background elements included in films (buildings, urban furnishings, vehicles, roadways, etc.) that Strand and Sheeler’s camera records, did not exist in Whitman’s time. Equally obviously, the island, the bay, the Brooklyn Bridge and the port were present but most relevant is the fact that his poetry resists and successfully overcomes the proof by fire of that authentic *inverted ekphrasis* (later we will see why) that filmmakers submit it to with their takes, frames and shots.

Together with this recognition and search for aesthetic cover, to call it that, under the powerful shadow of Walt Whitman, we cannot but notice a certain sign of pride by Sheeler and Strand who, while glossing the poet with their images appear to tell us: “This what we can do!”. We are at the start of the 1920’s when Canudo’s insistence that the seventh art should be recognized is starting to have effect. Through the next chapters of our book we will see how, during these next amazing years, an aesthetic exchange develops between city, cinema and poetry, providing amazing results. At the end of the decade a writer like Federico García Lorca will also see the city of New York from the point of view of his experience of living there. He will also write *Poet in New York*, aware of the lyrical ekphrasis of Walt Whitman and cinematic inverted ekphrasis, maybe including that of Strand and Sheeler. We can’t confirm that Federico got to see the *Manhatta* short, but without doubt he was influenced by the cinematic symphonies of the great city, created in Europe by Cavalcanti, Lang or Ruttmann.

We are talking about *inverted ekphrasis*, just as in his day Antonio Monegal (1998) very pertinently used the concept of elegiac *ekphrasis*, and it's appropriate to clarify the meaning that we give to the similar concept, not noted as such in the well received study by Murray Krieger (1992) on the subject.

At the time of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in classical rhetoric, ekphrasis was a mode of speech at the same level as hypotiposis and was understood to mean a vivid and intense description that attempts to relate almost visually to a reality that is presented and is thus concretized in the form of words in a discourse. Describing it this way immediately suggests that we must recognize a certain inferiority on the part of literature vis-à-vis the plastic arts since images that are transmitted with verbal signs may be seen as artificial or conventional when compared to the apparent "naturalness" of the icons with which, for example, a painter describes natural reality.

Nevertheless, in the 18th century this meaning was significantly constrained and *ekphrasis* changed to mean a literary description of an artistic work of malleable nature, such as a sculpture, a piece of architecture, a drawing, an engraving or, most interestingly, a painting; that is to say, as James A. W. Hefferman points out, a verbal representation of the visual. In the Anglo-Saxon arena, John Keats' ekphrastic poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn", discussed by Leo Spitzer, stands out as does William Carlos Williams' *Pictures from Brueghel*". Among the latest contributions in Spanish to this genre we can mention, for example, "*Botines con lazos, de Vincent van Gogh*" by the Argentinean writer Olga Orozco. This constraint in meaning was influenced by the modern edition of *Eikones* or "Images" that Philostratus of Lemnos wrote in the third century AC; descriptions of paintings based on the theoretical existence of an imaginary common base for plastic and poetic creative works (Equipo Glifo, 1998, 10-13). It is apparent, as Antonio Monegal (1998, 41-42) argues, that "if a work describes nothing but another work that in its turn represents something else, that interaction opens the way to a discussion regarding the very process of representation. In this way ekphrasis could become an instrument to access that illusory natural essence of the sign or equally to demonstrate its artificiality". As happened with *Manhatta*, as soon as some photographers making avant-garde films take on the ekphrasis of the descriptive poems of the New York Island, written the previous century by Walt Whitman, the game of mirrors between natural/artificial becomes uniquely rich in all types of possibilities.

The contribution of the German neo-classicist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1977) was fundamental to this subject with the 1766 Berlin publication of *Laocoön* or *An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Lessing attempts to correct the "interpretation abuse" –to use the felicitous coinage of Antonio García Berrio and Teresa Hernandez Fernandez (1988, 16 and ss.)– that made a few verses of Horatian poetry (l. 361 and subsequent: *ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes / te capiat magis et quaedam, si longius abstes.*) a proclamation of the inferiority of poetry to painting, taken to its extreme in the work of Count Caylus titled *Tableaux tirés de l' Iliade, de l'Odyssee d'Homère et de l'Enéide de Virgile* (1757), where the excellence of those poems capable of inspiring visual artists with figures and motifs is advocated.

On the other hand, Lessing takes an approach that is comparable to what we currently call “Aesthetics of reception” because it recognizes the similarity of effects that a painting or sculpture and a piece of literary material can produce in a “person of refined taste”, but it defends the absolute autonomy of the means by which each one of these artistic orders achieve their ends. Painting and sculpture have a notable static dimension since they work with figures and colors distributed in space and the signs that they use are “natural” —in semiotic terms, icons— while literature is the art of articulated sounds that succeed each other in time and group to form words, that is to say arbitrary and conventional signs. For the latter it is easy to represent action while painters only managed to achieve this distantly through the natural object of its representation, the body.

Resuming a discussion led by Johann Joachim Winckelmann about the Alexandrian sculpture attributed to Hagesandros, Polydodos and Athenodoros that represents the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons at the moment of their death, crushed by two monstrous serpents sent by the goddess Minerva, and taking into account its relationship with the fragment of the second book of Virgil’s Aeneid which describes this terrible scene, Lessing defends the aesthetic autonomy with which the sculptures translated Virgil’s scene into stone. Nothing offends him more than the confusion between both art forms, that poetry should fall into a “descriptive mania” and painting into “the obsession of allegory” and the attempt to force the creation of a monster of a “talking painting” and a “dumb poem” (Lessing, 1977, 38).

It is superfluous to consider here the transcendence of this subject from a theoretical or semiotic point of view, such as that from Comparative Literature, alert since the summons, issued by Oskar Walzel in the previously mentioned conference of 1917, to the “mutual illumination of the arts” —*wechselseitige erhellung der künste*— in whose vast field of work, the existence of contributions that are as relevant as *Manhatta* force cinema to be included.

Specifically referring to *ekphrasis*, Michel Riffaterre (Monegal [compiler], 2000, 161) talks of a *double mimesis* insofar as “the ekphrastic text expounds in words a plastic representation”. Nevertheless Strand and Sheeler’s film proposes a new potential for *inverse ekphrasis* since in it, the expressiveness of its cinematic images attempts to translate the verbal images of the poetry of Walt Whitman: *Ut poesis, pictura*.

We are not unaware of the fact that at the base of this exercise of double mimesis that we specifically intend to call inverse ekphrasis, to distinguish it from the one traditionally described by rhetoric, there is a common reality that is shared by the moviemakers and the poet: the isle of Manhattan. Whitman’s Manhattan did not entirely coincide with the one that Strand and Sheeler filmed in 1920 —on the other hand, the second was very close to the one that Lorca would know at the end of the decade— since the writer died almost 30 years before the filming of the movie, but nevertheless his vision ensured that his mediation did not make the ekphrasis attempted by the cinematographic directors non-viable. New York is in the source of the poems of Whitman; selected verses of *Leaves of Grass* inspired the film *Manhatta* that illustrates them very relevantly with images of the reality

of Manhattan in 1920. More precisely, this is the special nature of this film: it is not a documentary of New York but an intent to turn around traditional ekphrasis in which poetry glossed painting, placing the cinematic expressiveness of the seventh art, that allows a synthesis of space and time, at the service of Whitmanesque writing.

To sum up: *Manhatta* is an ekphrastic visual poem based not only on the poem of the same title —Whitman literally writes it as “Mannahatta”— but on various verses of other compositions of *Leaves of Grass* that, with their texts reproduced in discrete title cards at the start of each one of the film sequences, enable the rhythm of the movie and give it its proper sense of meaning. For this purpose, the selection of the texts, and above all their placement, is very relevant. In a certain way we could suggest that this is the script of a film whose action is dominated by the succession of twelve periods of time, from dawn to dusk, within which other spaces or ellipses are opened. It is a pattern, that has its source in the theatrical principal of unity of time that later will be repeated in city movies directed by Cavalcanti, Ruttman, Ivens or Dziga Vertov.

The first title card of *Manhatta* shows some verses of the poem “City of ships” that belong to the *Drum-Taps* section (Whitman, 2006, 640-643): *City of the world! / (for all races are here .. .) / city of tall façades of marble and iron! / Proud and passionate city.* The images are taken from the river just as they are in the short documentaries “Skyscrapers of New York City from the North River” and “Seeing New York by Yacht” that we have already mentioned. With the background of skyscrapers at the first light of day the piers of the port await the arrival of the vessels, and at one end of the frame the Brooklyn Bridge is just visible.

The syntactic continuity between sequences is obvious because in a reverse angle shot the camera places itself on the landing stage where the ferry is arriving, crowded with travelers. The vessel docks successfully with the platform and the multitudes step confidently onto firm ground. The day starts. In a high angle shot the screen shows the human river that scales the steps and pours onto the streets. A few shots of a Jewish cemetery that people are walking past gives way to images of the monumental urban architecture. The framing plays with the contrast between the enormous windows of the skyscrapers and the tiny figures of the pedestrians who teem like ants. It is the meaning of Whitman’s words (2006, 542-543) in the first poem of *A Broadway Pageant: When million-footed Manhattan unpent descends to her pavements.*

The third title card is the first that corresponds to the poem “Mannahatta” *From noon to starry night* (Whitman, 2006, 980-981): *... high growths of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly uprising towards clear skies.* A very short scene shows us the skyscrapers in a descending panorama in one single low angle shot. It is probably the cinematic ekphrasis that is most literally tied to the Whitmanesque verse in all the film.

The futurist theme of human work and the beauty of the machines that bring it about appear at this point in a short but very dynamic sequence of various shots that show the activity of construction workers in a large ditch next to an

excavator or climbing on the high metallic beams of a structure that cranes are helping to erect. The text of the title card, *The building of cities, the shovel, the great derrick, the wall scaffold, the work of walls and ceilings* comes from the 1860 version of “Chants Democratic” that will finally produce *A song for occupations*, where these words no longer appear as such but we can read: “... the shovel ... the building of cities ...the wall-scaffold, the work of walls and ceilings...”

In the fifth sequence, the architectural subject suggested by the second poem of *A Broadway pageant* (Whitman, 2006, 544-545) returns: *Where our tall-topt marble and iron beauties range on opposites sides*. Once again the skyscrapers are given expression with high and low angle camera movements. The enormous façades are like canvasses adorned with balustrades and take advantage of all the immense possibilities of the cinema for dynamic expressiveness, Sheeler and Strand make use of a resource that they will repeat in later sequences: the smoke from chimneys, a chromatic stain of various hues that moves around the static decoration of the construction and the frame of urbanized nature.

The effect that we have just referred to appears in the very short sequence that follows, that bestows the ekphrastic lead-actor status to the bay, once again in keeping with the “Mannahatta” verses (Whitman, 2006, 980-981): *City of hurried and sparkling waters! City of spires and masts! / City nested in bays!*
... .

The seventh sequence is the one that ekphrastically responds in the most sumptuous way to Whitman’s futuristic implications in regard to machinism and the development of the industrial city. From poem number eight of *Song of the exposition* (Whitman, 2006, 458) come these words: *This earth all spann'd with iron rails*. They are now illustrated with images of a train, that great icon of modernity, whose photogenic nature Strand and Sheeler take full advantage of, in the same way that shortly afterwards Walter Ruttmann would do. They also play with the previously mentioned effect of the smoke released by train engines that bring to the screen an interesting fusion of spatial and temporal moving contours of its stain on the sky.

Those plumes of vapor move in the next scene to the ekphrasis of the bay, taking up the thread of the sixth sequence. Using a montage of various shots, the film makers reflect what in the second part of the previously quoted verse (Whitman, 2006, 458) was a mere suggestion: *with lines of steamships threading every sea*. Various tugs maneuver around a great liner to dock with it while at the same time a ferry crosses the frame of view. Once again we see the expressive protagonist nature of the chimneys and the various chromatic hues of the smoke that they release, varying between white and black.

Whitman got to know the neo-Gothic Brooklyn Bridge which was inaugurated in May, 1883 and represented at its time a great technical advance. As José Martí reported fully in one of his chronicles, it was the first to be suspended from steel cables. The ninth scene of *Manhatta* has only one shot and it is very short. It is pure ekphrasis: the bridge, its steel braces, and people crossing it, as is suggested

by poem number nine (Whitman, 2006, 438) of *Song of the broad-ax: Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches*.

The bay now returns to be the foreground of the movie with the fundamental intent of presenting, with all its visual expressiveness, the arrival of dusk that will close the temporal arc of the New York day that the filmmakers wanted to give expression to, inspired by the Whitman verses (2006, 372) in poem number three of *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. The western light defines the profile of vessels smaller than the great packet boat, unstable because of the shape of the crests of water at their bows, and together with the effect of smoke there is another no less spectacular effect, that of shadows: *On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug, closely flank'd on each side by the barges*.

Counterpoint is provided in the next scene—the eleventh—the return to urban space and to the monumental architecture of its skyscrapers. From one of them, an sharply high angle shot shows us the streets, scored by cars, and the elevated subway that José Martí had also described in one of his chronicles from New York as a threatening animal. The mass of individuals swarms and just like the previous scene, the sunset projects its shadows: *Where the city's ceaseless crowd moves on the livelong day*. It's the first verse of the poem “Sparkles from the wheel” (Whitman, 2006: 814), from *Autumn Rivulets*.

Manhattan concludes with an extensive exclamatory verse of the ninth poem of *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry: Gorgeous clouds of the sunset 1 drench with your splendor me, or the men and women generations after me!*. It's worth noting here how Strand and Sheeler pay homage to Whitman, closing their cinematographic ekphrasis of *Leaves of Grass* with a painting in images of a verse in which the proverbial romantic egocentrism of the poet (Whitman, 2006, 376) is shown by the inclusion of his ego, together with that of multitudes, present and future, as an additional display of that innate unanimity of opinion with Whitmanesque inspiration that the European avant-garde made their own from the start of the 20th century. The reel thus closes “Phoebus' diurnal cycle” as the theatrical unit of time was called by the neo-classic instructors.

In Whitman's words, the citizenry, who the poet extols and with whom he democratically identifies, occupy a preeminent position. It is a fertile and powerful humanity, especially visible in all its power in the vast expanse of the great city. In *Leaves of Grass*, which in its own way presents us with a *Salutation of the optimist*, another “song of life and hope”, the unanimous multitude owns a future in which everything is possible and all the advances that science, skill and economics make especially patent in the privileged sphere of the industrial metropolis will contribute to its splendor.

Strand and Sheeler want to be loyal to this Whitmanesque spirit which is the same one that encourages artistic productions of futurism. To do that they reserve for the final climax of the film a verse that accurately contains and reflects this spirit, even if in the images that have been presented to us in the eleven previous sequences, the common person, the citizens of New York, have a limited presence in the role of extras in a production whose protagonist is without doubt Manhattan as a metonymy of the entire city. In the production we don't find even

one short shot that accidentally might show us the face or the entire body of a New Yorker, nor even a situation where a dialogue, communication let alone a diatribe between people might occur, as it certainly does in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, die Symphonie der Großstadt*. Nevertheless, the message that they send us is unequivocally positive, even euphoric. In Manhattan —an island in the center of a large bay— the splendid natural beauty is added to the no less beautiful vigor of human creation in the form of svelte buildings, open avenues, powerful transport machines and the progress of the common people to whom Whitman sang.

With this underpinning, the echoes of his poetic vision also reached the unmistakably Whitmanesque work of the Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) in so many verses of his literary heteronym, Alvaro de Campos. The biography that Pessoa gave the latter is very significant in this respect, as we read in the famous letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro published in *Presença* in 1937. Campos was born in Tavira in 1890, studied mechanical and naval engineering in Glasgow, the most industrial and populous Scottish city, and with his travels to the East he was a citizen of the world. Walt Whitman appears unacknowledged behind the poems attributed to this heteronym, such as the one that starts *Acordar da cidade de Lisboa, mais tarde do que as outras*. Here Alvaro de Campos takes part in the unanimist egocentricity of *Leaves of Grass* which leads him to identify himself with everything that surrounds him (Pessoa, 100):

Eu adoro todas as coisas
E o meu coração é um albergue aberto toda a noite.
Tenho pela vida um interesse ávido
Que busca compreendê-la sentindo-a muito.
Amo tudo, animo tudo, empresto humanidade a tudo,
Aos homens e às pedras, às almas e às máquinas,
Para aumentar com isso a minha personalidade.
Pertença a tudo para pertencer cada vez mais a mim
próprio.

I adore all things,
And my heart is an inn that's open all night.
I have an insatiable interest in life,
Which I try to fathom by feeling it intensely.
I love everything, I enliven everything, I lend humanity to everything,
To men and stones, to souls and machines,
Thereby enlarging my personality.
I belong to everything so as to belong ever more to myself
(Translated by Richard Zenith).

That mystical nature of unanimism reappears in later poems that have the same unmistakable Whitmanesque tendencies, such as the one that opens with the verse “A final, a melhor maneira de viajar é sentir” (Pessoa, 104):

Quanto mais eu sinta, quanto mais eu sinta como várias pessoas,
Quanto mais personalidades eu tiver,
Quanto mais intensamente, estridentemente as tiver,
Quanto mais simultâneamente sentir com todas elas,

Quanto mais unificadamente diverso, dispersamente atento,
Estiver, sentir, viver, for,
Mais possuirei a existência total do universo
Mais completo serei pelo espaço inteiro fora.

More I feel, the more I feel as various people feeling,
The more personalities I have,
The more keenly and acutely I have them,
The more I feel with all of them at once,
And the more I feel, live, act and am
Unitedly diverse and scatteredly attentive,
That much more will I possess the sum total of the universe,
That much more complete will I be in all of space,
That much more will I be analogous to God, whoever he is,
Since, whoever he is, surely he's Everything,
And besides Him there's just Him, and Everything's a trifle to Him.
(Translated by Richard Zenith).

Lisbon, a colonial metropolis, is the specific site in which the poet experiments with that unanimism. He dedicates to the city two poems from 1923 and 1926, both with the same title, “Lisbon revisited”. In the first of these, the deliberative praise of his city “*O mágoa revisitada, Lisboa de outrora e de hoje!*” is joined by a crystal-clear invocation *das ciências, das artes, da civilização moderna!* (Pessoa, 247-248).

Nevertheless, in the days of the bard of Paumanok, just as in those of the avant-garde circle of Stieglitz, there was another less pleasant view of New York and, in general terms, of the great industrial city. For example, around 1926, three years before Federico García Lorca went to the city on the Hudson and there wrote *Poeta en Nueva York* (A Poet in New York), José Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish intellectual who was most influential on the new literary generations of the time, was starting to express in his articles the ideas that would coalesce in 1930 in one of his most recognized books internationally, *La rebelión de las masas* (The revolt of the masses). In it, as is well known, facing the praise of the common man, the great protagonist of modernity and progress according to Whitman, Ortega counters with a disagreeable vision of human beings that he defines as a “mass man”, a pliable individual, run-of-the-mill, beneficiary of the immense material progress that society has reached but neglectful of all demands and effort, with a childish and self-complacent attitude that also occurs with those that fall into the “barbarism of specialization”.

The earlier reference we made to Rubén Darío’s “Salutation of the Optimist” to describe Whitman’s talent in *Leaves of Grass* that Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler made their own, would certainly not be valid with respect to the vision of New York City expressed by the Nicaraguan author in his poem written in 1919, “La Gran Cosmópolis” (The Great Cosmopolis). It is also a selective but precise ekphrasis, including detailed topographical references —Fifth Avenue, the Waldorf Astoria— which he accompanies with a recurring passage referring to the *pain* prelude to the *anguish* that two decades later Lorca will also invoke repeatedly in *Poet in New York*.

Casas de cincuenta pisos,
servidumbre de color,
millones de circuncisos,
máquinas, diarios, avisos,
¡y dolor, dolor, dolor!
(...)
Irá la suprema villa,
como ingente maravilla
donde todo suena y brilla
en un ambiente opresor,
con sus conquistas de acero,
con sus luchas de dinero,
sin saber que allí está entero
todo el germen del dolor.
(...)
(Darío, 2007, 1241-1242)

Homes in a 50 story high-rise,
a serving class of color,
millions of people circumcised,
and grief, layer upon layer!
(...)
The mansion that is so fine
with its grand design
goes where everything will shine
in an ambience each person suffers,
with its conquests of steel,
its money struggles, the major deal,
without knowing what's real—
the grief that grows in layers.
(...)
(Selected Writings: Rubén Darío. Penguin 2005. Illan Stevens, Andrew Hurley,
Greg Simon, Steven F. White)

In his book on the subject of New York and Hispanic writers, Dionisio Cañas (1994, 11) discusses the fact that “the poetic myth” of the city on the Hudson “has been built based on a conglomeration of images that are either apocalyptic or come from a fascination for the Metropolis” but we must admit that among Hispanic writers, the first set of images have predominated. Equally, (Cañas, 1994, 35) at the same time that he credits Walt Whitman for “New York entering Western poetic discourse”, he attributes the same achievement in the Spanish language to the Cuban writer José Martí who lived in the megalopolis between 1880 and 1895.

Martí sent many articles from New York to daily newspapers such as Montevideo’s *La Opinión Pública* or Buenos Aires’ *La Nación*, among others. Articles that were descriptive and full of news that reflect, in counterpoint, a cosmopolitan Manhattan already plunged into a machinist euphoria though still tinged with old rural habits, and a Coney Island where it is impossible not to feel the oppression of the de-spiritualized consumer masses. Thus we read in an 1884

article called “Verano” (“Summer”) the following not very pleasant description (Martí, 1991-1992, v.13, pp. 488-489):

Already in this month of June, New York suffers. It is a blazing summer. The tall buildings that raise their tens of floors on one side and another halt the warm air coming from the rivers, that emissions from the factories and from an enormous conglomeration of workers load with impure germs. (...) In the poor neighborhoods it's enough to make you cry. During the day in the neighborhood houses full of miserable people, drunken husbands quarrel with their desperate wives who vainly attempt to silence their little children devoured by *cholera infantum*. The pitiful children appear as if an enormous insect, settled in their entrails, were sucking their flesh. They look out from caverns. They hold out their little hands as if pleading for help. Through the skin, the tips of their bones are visible.

Years later and with a very different ekphrastic expressivity, Lorca would point out in his verses that *through the suburbs sleepless people stagger / as though just delivered from a shipwreck of blood* and that *occasionally coins in furious swarms / penetrate and devour abandoned children* (The Selected Poems of García Lorca, 1955 2005, New Directions Publishing Co.).

Neither must we forget the long article, dated 19 April 1887, that Martí sent to the Mexican newspaper *El Partido Liberal* that records the news of the censorship of *Leaves of Grass* because of its homosexual theme. The Cuban defines it as an “amazing book” whose “prophetic language and robust poetry” can only be compared to “the sacred books of antiquity” (Martí, 1991-1992, v. 13, 131).

His evaluation regarding the work of “this old poet (...) seventy years old”, “the most intrepid, all-embracing and liberated of his time” could not be more devoted. He doesn't avoid commentaries on style, such as when he says that for Whitman “to accumulate appears to him to be the best way to describe”, but above all, Martí knows how to identify the singularity and the transcendence of his work as an example of a poem synchronized with the new world:

The language of Walt Whitman, entirely different from that which poets before him have used, corresponds in its strangeness and power to his cyclical poetry and to the new humanity which is congregated upon this fecund continent with such portents that truly neither lies nor dainty quatrains could contain them (José Martí: Selected Writings, Penguin Books, 2002, Edited and Translated by Esther Allen).

As well as making incidental references to other Hispanic poets that wrote on the subject of New York, Dionisio Cañas focused on Federico García Lorca and the Puerto Rican writer Manuel Ramos Otero (1948-1990) who is outside our chronologic span. Together with Roberto González Echevarría he considers that José Martí's *Versos libres* (*Free verses*) inaugurated, within our tradition, “the contemporary poetry of the city”. Nevertheless, Cañas (Cañas, 1994, 66) defines this anthology of poems as “an intimate, spiritual and aesthetic poetic diary set in the city”. Maybe because of the contemporary writing style of his newspaper articles, to which we have already referred, *Free verses* lacks the ekphrastic intent that is there in *Leaves of Grass* and that the moviemakers of Stieglitz' circle

developed in dynamic and visual images, not in purely verbal ones. Nevertheless, regarding *Poet in New York* as we will duly explain, one can also affirm that it coincides with *Free Verses* in one key concept, that of the megalopolis that –as Cañas (1994, 70) writes– is “associated with a lack of freedom, slavery, prostitution, the sale of the soul of the citizens, and the city as a jail”. On very singular occasions, the poet leaves the comfort of his surroundings to point at the urban scenery, as occurs in the poem “Amor de ciudad grande” (Love in the City) dated New York, April 1882 when he exclaims:

¡Me espanta la ciudad! ¡Toda está llena
De copas por vaciar, o huecas copas!
¡Tengo miedo, ay de mí, de que este vino
Tósigose, y en mis venas luego
Cual duende vengador los dientes clave!
(Martí, 1991-1992: t.16, p. 172).

The city appalls me! Full
of cups to be emptied, and empty cups!
I fear, ah me! That this wine
may be poison, and sink its teeth,
vengeful imp, in my veins!
(The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry, 2009, Oxford University Press, Ed
Cecilia Vicuña, Ernesto Livon-Grossman)

It is significant in this respect that what Cañas himself (1994, 72) defines as “an expressionist vision of the Manhattan crowds” does not strictly belong to the body of work *Free verses* but relates to the poem, titled “Envilece, devora...” that forms part of the four notebooks that Martí christened *Flores del destierro* (Flowers of exile):

Envilece, devora, enferma, embriaga
La vida de ciudad: se come el ruido,
Como un corcel la yerba, la poesía.
Estréchanse en las casas la apretada
Gente, como un cadáver en su nicho:

Y con penoso paso por las calles
Pardas, se arrastran hombres y mujeres
Tal como sobre el fango los insectos,
Secos, airados, pálidos, canijos.
(Martí, 1991-1992: t. 16, p. 270).

Debasing, devouring, sickening, inebriating
City life: it feeds on noise,
Like a stallion the grass, poetry
Huddled in their houses, constricted
People, like cadavers in tombs:
And with labored gait through
Grey streets men and women creep
Like insects in mud
Gaunt, irate, pale, puny.

When the eyes, of the astral palace,

From its interior, the heroic soul transforms the city not into great battles
It ponders neither concave temples nor jousts
From the luminous word: it ponders
Embracing, like a sheaf, the poor
And to where the air is pure and the sun bright
And the heart not wicked flying with them.
(Translated by Hope Doyle).

Something similar must be said regarding the presence of New York in the poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez. In it he writes his poem inspired by the death of Rubén Darío “the travelling nightingale” of America, another New York visitor. On the 2nd of May of 1916, three months after his arrival at the port of Manhattan, he married Zenobia Camprubi in New York and on June 7 he returned to Spain. From this experience emerged a book titled *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (Diary of a Recently Married Poet) which in the 1948 edition was called *Diario de poeta y mar* (Diary of Poet and Sea).

There are some ekphrastic references in this lyrical diary but they are not frequent, neither do they constitute the core of the book. The point of reference of the poem “New Sky” is “at the top of the Woolworth” and the prose piece “The Colonial House” is an elegy inspired by a small wooden house on Riverside Drive “placed between the enormous pretentious and ugly houses which have enclosed it”, “the terrible masses of iron and stone that suffocate it” (J.R. Jiménez, 2005, v2, 113). In several cases, the charm of the cemeteries spread out on the edges of the cities attract the attention of the poet who perceives them as the “real poetic city of each city” (Cemeteries”). He bestows the title of “Happy Cemetery” on one of them at which “one feels like renting a tomb, without servants! to spend the spring here” (J.R. Jiménez, 2005, v2, 145), a season that is described in the words of the text “Spring Afternoon in Washington Square” or in another piece dedicated to the enjoyment of spring on Fifth Avenue where “The peaceful tree” grows, which the poet writes about in his other compositions.

The prose poem that is focused on the “Broadway Cemetery” is magnificent. “This small holy place in the commercial city is walled in by four rapid and constant junctions of the elevated, the streetcar, the taxi and the subway, that never are missing from its obstinate and diminutive silence.” (J.R. Jiménez, 2005, v2, 131 tr: Hugh A. Harter). In the middle of Broadway, in the theater district, is where Juan Ramón asks himself whether the moon “is a moon, or an advertisement for the moon?” (J.R. Jiménez, 2005, v2, 131).

The attention that the Nobel prize winner gives to the moon is not the only precursor that makes us think of Lorca’s book that appeared 10 years later. Juan Ramón Jiménez, in his cosmic contemplation of a city that appears like a universe, draws attention to the repetitive rhythm of the hours and the light, just as Strand and Sheeler would do some time later in their movie. Together with writings such as “Dusk”, “Late Night” or the two “Nocturnes” (poems CXXXI and CXXLI), the ones dedicated to the start of the day, to “the dawn” as “a gap of cold light” in “Smoke and Gold” are particularly noticeable. The penultimate chapter of the book, also called “Dawn”, is where the dawn rises over an elevated train

“with no one in it” and a “little bird” as the only witness. Much more expressive is the prose of “Long live Spring!” where “New York, the virago with dirty nails, wakes up”. It’s here where the attentive reader can find clear precedents for some of the most successful compositions of *Poet in New York*:

Springtime comes, with the desire for purity reinforced by the dawn, swimming through the sky and water to the city. All night she has been awake beautifying herself, bathing in the light of the full moon. For the moment her roses, still warm, reflect the beauty of the dawn which is struggling with the trust, “Smoke, Shadow, Mud and Co.” which receives her with its pilot. But alas the dawn falls back into the water almost defeated. Armies of gold come in the sun to aid her. They draw her out dripping and naked and give her artificial respiration in the Statue of Liberty. The poor thing! how delighted she is, still timid though conquering!

(J.R.Jimenez, 2005, v2, 134 tr: H. R. Hayes)

Another poem from this book, “Late Night”, represents very well the notably egocentric and solipsistic tone of this diary in which the writer maintains a one-to-one dialogue with the city in which other human beings that live, take pleasure and die in the metropolis don't appear to matter at all. He only walks on Fifth Avenue and he registers only one fleeting encounter with an “old black man, crippled with a shrunken overcoat and a faded top hat” who says hello to him. This phantasmagoric though cordial appearance is reminiscent of Lorca’s “The King of Harlem”, a suggestion that is reinforced by the words with which the poem of Juan Ramón ends: “The echo of the crippled black man, king of the city, makes a turn around the night in the sky, now towards the West” (Lorca & Jiménez, *Selected Poems* Beacon Press, 1997, tr: Robert Bly).

The almost complete absence of the human factor impedes the obligatory development of rejection of the cruelty of the great city. Juan Ramón is no stranger to the seductive nature of Manhattan whose advertisements “multi-formed, multicolored and at multiple speeds” appear to him “as if given birth by spring with the flowers” (J.R. Jiménez, 2005, v2, 151). However neither does he hide unpleasant intimate sensations, such as the claustrophobia that he feels because of the officious measures taken in New York against fires, that he rails against in the poem “Fire!”. The brief prose of poem XCVIII of 14 April intensely reflects his unease:

What anguish! Always down below! It seems to me that I am in a great broken down elevator that can not –that will not be able!– to ascend to the sky. (tr: Predmore, Harter)

Certainly his “Farewell without Goodbye” of June 7 is exceedingly grim, as if the New York experience had finally become irrelevant to him:

New York as an unseen reality or as an unreal vision slowly disappears, immense and sad in the drizzle. Everything is –the day, the city, the boat– so covered and so closed that no goodbyes come from the heart at the departure.

(J. R. Jimenez, 2005, v2, 162)

The self-absorption of the poet —only him and a slight presence of his loved one— stops him feeling the powerful and terrible pulse of the city in the way that Federico García Lorca did at the end of the twenties. So, very far away from that cry for hurting humanity in the solitude of the urban multitude that would make Dámaso Alonso (1940), in the wake of Federico, write the verses of “Insomnio” (Insomnia), soon after Madrid, once the war was over, exceeded for the first time the number of inhabitants that would give it a certain metropolitan character:

Madrid is a city of more than 1 million cadavers (according to the latest statistics).
Sometimes at night I toss and turn and I incorporate into this niche in which I have
been decaying for 45 years,
And I spend many an hour listening to the hurricane groan or the dogs bark, or the
light of the moon softly flow.
And I spend many an hour moaning like the hurricane, barking like a furious dog,
flowing like the milk from the warm teat of a great yellow cow.

We should deal separately with Jorge Luis Borges’ relationship with the poetic theme of the great city. His origins in the city of Buenos Aires, his well known admiration for Walt Whitman, his connection with the European avant-garde, specifically Expressionism, during his stay in Switzerland between 1914 and the end of the Great War, and his strong yet ephemeral links with the Spanish Ultras —we have already seen how his openly Whitmanesque first poem “Himno al Mar” (Hymn to the Sea) was published in one of their magazines, *Grecia*— during his stay in Spain until the entire family’s return to Argentina in March of 1921, all these connections would make one expect that the exaltation of Buenos Aires that was present in his first poetic books would continue in the same pattern. Nevertheless, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Fervor of Buenos Aires) (1923), *Luna de enfrente* (Moon Across the Way) (1929) and *Cuaderno San Martín* (1929) (San Martín Notebook), took a different course. Borges returned to Europe where he had practically spent his entire adolescence and early youth and where he had acquired an amazingly cosmopolitan literary culture and he reconciled with his genuine roots via the city. The city is the axis of the three books mentioned but there is no cubist, surrealist or ultraist contamination in them. It’s not the unanimous, cinematic and simultaneous metropolis of futurism or expressionism, but the ancestral site in which the poet finds his most intimate self and poses the greater questions: the meaning of life, of death and of time.

In 1969, the preface to *Fervor de Buenos Aires* included in the collection of his *Obra poética* (Poetic work) reiterates that the Jorge Luis who was writing then, just like the Jorge Luis who wrote in 1923, “were both devotees of Schopenhauer, of Stevenson and of Whitman” but that in any case, among the excessive aims that the total Borges had proposed for himself was “to be a 17th century Spanish writer” (Borges, 1999, 17) and “to extol a Buenos Aires of low level houses and of estates with fences to the West or to the South”.

So it was more the city of his memory, rather than the modernist major city, that was already coalescing in his mind as the great southern metropolis. From their very titles, many of the poems in the book show an ekphrastic intention: “Carnicería”, “Arrabal”, “Un Patio”, “Plaza San Martín”, “La Recoleta”. The

funereal atmosphere of this last text fits in with the one titled “Inscription on any Sepulcher” and both are metaphysical poems with some adornments but otherwise Unamunian (not *unanimist*). The walk “La Caminata” of the poet is, like that of Juan Ramón on Fifth Avenue, nocturnal and solitary —*the night brings near distant wildness / and clears the streets*— and in “La noche de San Juan” (The night of San Juan) *today the streets remember / that one day they were fields*. To summarize, there is a dialogue between the poet and the urban enclave as a space for a transcendental reflection of the self and for remembering. In the magnificent text of “Amanecer” (Dawn) Borges (1999, 43), just like the Lorca who we will find in “La aurora” (The Dawn) of *Poet in New York*, is *intimidated by the wait for daybreak*, but not because with it once again comes the ruthless fight for life but because he fears that *tremendous conjecture / of Schopenhauer and Berkeley / which declares the world / an activity of the mind, / a dream of souls, / without foundation or purpose or volume*. (tr: di Giovanni). In the last of his compositions, “Lines that I could have written and lost around 1922”, he mentions *Walt Whitman, whose name is the universe*, but the Buenos Aires of the disciple has nothing to do with the Mannahata of the master.

In 1925, the Buenos Aires series of poems is extended with *Luna de Enfrente* (Moon Across the Way) which gives the earth’s satellite the same role generally given to it by avant-garde poets (and also by moviemakers; I’m reminded of the cubist film *Ballet Mekanique* (Mechanical Ballet) by Fernand Léger in 1924). In his 1969 preface, Borges explains that with this second book he had planned to complement the intimacy of *Fervor* with the introduction to a city that “has something of the ostentatious and public”. There is no doubt that the pulse of his verses such as *The unrecognizable high city grows stronger against the field* “Jactancia de quietud” (Boast of tranquility) or *I have commemorated with verse, the city that surrounds me / and the vile neighborhoods that rip me apart* of “Casi juicio final” (Almost Final Judgment) is fully Whitmanesque. The poet also turns his attention to “Montevideo” *a city that is heard like a verse* or “Dakar” where he never had been to but the closing poem is once again unmistakable and of a smaller individualism than that of the common Whitmanesque ego:

A mi ciudad de patios cóncavos como cántaros
 (...)
 a mi ciudad que se abre clara como una pampa,
 yo volví de las viejas tierras antiguas del Occidente
 y recobré sus casas y la luz de sus casas
 (...)
 y canté la aceptada costumbre de estar solo.
 (Borges, 1999: 82).

To my city of courtyards concave like pitchers
 (...)
 to my city that dawns clear like a field of grass,
 I came back from the old ancient lands of the East
 and I took back its houses and their lights
 (...)

and I sang the accepted habit of aloneness

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), a French contemporary of Walt Whitman, who also represented the leap from poetic romanticism to modernity (Raymond, Marcel, 1978; Rincé, Dominique, 1984; Ward, Patricia A, 2001), was very knowledgeable about American literature having translated Edgar Allan Poe to French. With him, as Walter Benjamin (1972, 84) pointed out, “for the first time, Paris has become a theme of lyrical poetry”.

According to Benjamin (1972, 138), it was in Poe’s work that the most conspicuous precedent of a theme that Baudelaire would make his own is to be found: the masses, the multitude that it contains “that is always that of the great city; his Paris is always overpopulated”. In fact the North American writer had already published in 1840 a story set in London about man within a multitude, “The Man of the Crowd” (Poe, 1965, 475-481) that Baudelaire translated. This Whitmanesque association between the city and the masses is present in the section of *Les fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil) that is titled “Tableaux Parisiens”. One of his most celebrated poems “A une passante” presents the poet in the middle of the masses and introduces a pained female figure:

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d’une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet;
(Baudelaire, 1991 : 139).

The street about me roared with a deafening sound.
Tall, slender, in heavy mourning, majestic grief,
A woman passed, with a glittering hand
Raising, swinging the hem and flounces of her skirt;
(Trans. C. F. MacIntyre)

The origins of the phenomenon of urban growth associated with the new industrial economy is fundamentally European and more from London than from Paris. Moreover, regarding the comparison between New York and the British capital, it should be said that the former would shortly be tagged with a label of futuristic modernity that would make it stand out compared to any other great city. In this regard, the demographic figures fluctuate; the ones that Leonardo Benevolo (1993, 167) provides regarding London and Manchester in his chapter dedicated to the industrial city don't match with the ones that we will finally use as reference, those that Le Corbusier gives in his 1924 book then titled *Urbanisme* (Urbanism) and later republished as *The City of the Tomorrow*. According to his figures, the growth of New York is spectacular: from 60,000 inhabitants in 1800, it grew to 2,800,000 in 1880 and to 4,500,000 in 1910. In that same period, Paris started at 647,000, grew to 2,200,000 and ended at 3 million. But simultaneously, London started the 19th century with 800,000 inhabitants growing to 3 million in 1882 and doubled its population by 1910, reaching 7,200,000.

This type of growth of urban centers had a lot to do with the massive production of manufactured goods which generated unprecedented wealth but at a high cost from the point of view of human values (J.Kotkin, 2006, 170 and ss.). Thus in 1845, Friedrich Engels described the terrible conditions in the working class districts of Manchester in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and in 1848 he wrote the *Communist Party Manifesto* together with Karl Marx who he met in Paris. In 1845 Marx had already published *Wage-Labor and Capital*, in 1850 *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* and once in London, where he would live until his death in 1883, his major work *Das Kapital* started to appear in 1864. There is, therefore, a powerful ideological and philosophical development that appears foreign to the thoughts of Walt Whitman and that even transcends the politics of warfare. It is inspired by the process of industrial conurbation, mostly in London, and its terrible consequences for the very existence of workers. However this line of thought is not foreign to other European poets such as William Blake, Heine or Shelley.

We are aware that starting from literature of the 16th and 17th century a particular subject developed that is associated with the Horatian “*beatus ille*” and that the Bishop of Mondoñedo targeted as “contempt of court and praise for the village”. But the fact is that in the 19th century, this subject related to the work of machines and the “powerful satanic factories” which are first referenced in London at the time. Thus one of the greatest exponents of the English romantic lyric, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who died in 1802, actually affirmed that hell was “a city exactly like London” and at the end of the same decade Heinrich Heine denounced the “excessively appalling London”, so alienating that it “defies imagination and breaks the heart” (E. Jones, 1990, 122). William Blake, who died in 1809, also denounced machinism, the “tyrannical teeth” of cogs turned by the “hydraulic wheels of Newton” in the textile factories (J. Kotkin, 2006, 174).

In this sense Baudelaire's Paris is not comparable to the city on the Thames. In the first half of the 19th century it was still a city of small businesses but when Baudelaire started writing his poems and his prose, it already counted more than two million inhabitants and one transcendental figure in the history of modern urbanism, the prefect Georges-Eugène Haussmann who, in 1850, commissioned by Napoleon III, undertook the task of construction of the great modern Paris at the expense of a medieval city and its walls, barriers against progress, sixty percent of which disappeared according to reliable estimates. In this way the great avenues appeared, conceived just as railways were, to facilitate the movement of the population and marking the individuality of the city on the Seine as “*urbe posliberal*” (Benevolo, 1993, 178 and ss.).

In any case, this process, known as “*haussmannization*”, represented a traumatic process achieved in a very short period of time, only three decades. It had an enormous social cost and very soon diverse authoritative voices spoke of the loss of roots, of reference, and of a new form of alienation that the Parisian people were suffering from as laboratory specimens of the urban experiment. To this was added as a catalyst, the demographic growth that was experienced (less than a million inhabitants in 1880, more than three million at the end of the century). The idea of a city as an area for individual existence and coexistence changed, and

the perception of unanims, that Jules Romain would give expression to, started to emerge as a literary theory at the start of the century —the “Rassemblement” or “Le Bourg régénéré”— but never in such a monolithic or unequivocal fashion as in the urbanist enthusiasm of Walt Whitman.

In this regard, the architect Leonardo Benevolo (1993, 91) and before him Walter Benjamin (1972, 104-105) in his essay “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire”, both quote a very interesting text in the *Souvenirs littéraires* of Maxime du Camp, who in 1865 observed from the “pont Neuf” the spectacle of the city and experienced a form of epiphany: suddenly, and for the first time, Paris appeared to him like an immense body where each function was implemented by specific, controlled and precise organs. A great gear arrangement, of which each wheel contributed to give body and life to the reality of Paris.

To a great extent, the work of Baudelaire, from *Les fleurs du mal* (1857) to the *Petits poèmes en prose* (1869) that *Le Figaro* had already partially published five years earlier with a title as expressive as *Le Spleen de Paris* is inspired by that process of “haussmannization” and it provides a vision of the great modern city that is totally opposed to Whitman's. Walter Benjamin does not confirm with certainty that Baudelaire had read a particular book that was very appreciated by Marx, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et des classes bourgeoises* by Garnier de Cassagnac, but what he can and does say is that the poet identifies with the alienated and with those removed from their social class, partly because of nostalgia and partly because of ideology. Agreeing with that approach is the John Paul Sartre's interpretation of the figure of a poet as a dandy, and thus bourgeois, who nevertheless “réalise une rupture mythique avec sa classe” (Sartre, 1975, 129). His look is that of a Bohemian, an urban vagabond “whose way of life is still bathed in a conciliatory sparkle, that of the imminent and inconsolable man of the great city. The *flâneur* is on the threshold not only of the great city but also on the threshold of the bourgeoisie class. Neither of the two has dominated him. In neither of the two does he find himself at home. He seeks asylum within the multitude”, Benjamin (1972, 184) concludes.

The lyrical perception of reality that led Walt Whitman to surrender to the image of New York as an enclave for the full realization of people in fraternal solidarity, makes Charles Baudelaire, to the contrary, see in modern Paris the threatening shadow of the alienation of the poet and of the most destitute, that is to say the downwardly mobile. He makes their presence real in various poems from the “Tableaux parisiens” such as “A une mendicante rousse”, dedicated to a red-haired beggar woman as an example of the pained humanity that struggles to make ends meet in the city or “Les petites vieilles”, who are according to Benjamin (1972, 101) “its only spiritualized inhabitants” who *traversant de Paris le fourmillant tableau (...) ils trottent, tout pareils a des marionnettes; / se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés*, and their eyes are *des puits faits d'un million de larmes*.

The image of the city as an ants' nest was already in the first verse of a another better known Baudelaire poem “Les sept vieillards” that reads:

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where specters in broad day accost the passer-by! (tr: William Aggeler).

It does not appear to me to be arbitrary to relate the final image of the same poem with the epiphonema that closes an element of *Poet in New York*, “Dawn”, to which we will return. There, in the neighborhoods of New York *crowds stagger sleeplessly through the boroughs / as if they had just escaped a shipwreck of blood*, while Baudelaire, concludes “Les sept vieillards” this way:

Et mon ame dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mats, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords!

And my soul, old sailing barge without masts,
Kept dancing, dancing, on a monstrous, shoreless sea!
(tr: William Aggeler)

The cosmic circle from sunrise to sunset also occupies two of the poems from the “Tableaux parisiens”. In “Le crépuscule du soir”, the night arrives and wraps the city in a mysterious halo, that expressionist films such as Ruttman’s *Berlin* later exploited in its full expressive and visual dimensions, and with it also awakens prostitution, degrading work –the “sweat without results” referred to by Lorca– that stirs *au sein de la cité de fange* imitating in this manner the dawn held up by *four columns of mud* accompanied by *a hurricane of black doves that paddle in putrescent waters* in *Poeta en Nueva York* (tr: Stephen Spender and J. L. Gili). The Parisian dawn is also described by Baudelaire (1991, 400) in the less visionary and expressionist images of “Le crépuscule du matin”:

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avancait lentement sur la Seine dserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.

The dawn, shivering in her green and rose garment,
Was moving slowly along the deserted Seine,
And somber Paris, the industrious old man,
Was rubbing his eyes and gathering up his tools.
(tr: William Aggeler)

Dawn also arrives the city on the Seine in the poem “Le cygne” that the author dedicates to Victor Hugo which metaphorically represents the neglect of the human spirit, particularly that of the poet, in the merciless arena of the new city. Echoes of “haussmannization” are present in these verses:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mlancolie
N'a boug! palais neufs, chafaudages, blocs,
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allgorie
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.
(Baudelaire, 1991, 342)

Paris changes! but naught in my melancholy
Has stirred! New palaces, scaffolding, blocks of stone,

Old quarters, all become for me an allegory,
And my dear memories are heavier than rocks.
(tr: William Aggeler)

Le vieux Paris n'est plus, the poet laments, because *la forme d'une ville / change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel*. Everything turns into an allegory when the swan that has escaped its pen requests protection, lost as it is within the light of a dawn that is tormented in a Lorca way by *un sombre ouragan*. Commenting on this same poem in relation to the *Les fleurs du mal* collection, Walter Benjamin (1972, 101) concludes: "The common trait is the duel between what was and despair for what will be". On the other hand, Walt Whitman has nothing to miss from that native village where the Dutch first arrived, because what is awaiting him is a promising future of supportive modernity.

In Arthur Rimbaud, the Baudelairean perception of the great city acquires new echoes. In his 1871 poem "L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple", the *putain Paris* is upbraided as *ô cité douloureuse, ô cité quasi morte* and in many parts of *Illuminations* he tackles, not only architecture —"Les Ponts— but also the humanity —"Ouvriers"— of the Metropolis, the best example "among the most colossal conceptions of modern barbarity" (Rimbaud, 1998, 401).

Whitman, also a contemporary of Rimbaud, would never have subscribed to a similar affirmation as exists in one of the two texts of *Illuminations*, titled "Villes". In a third one, which is headed with the same word in singular, the poet describes perfectly his London citizen's *spleen*:

I am a transitory and not too dissatisfied citizen of a metropolis deemed modern because all recognized taste has been avoided in the furnishings and the exterior of the houses as well as in the plan of the city. Here you would not mark the traces of a single monument to superstition. In short, morality and language are reduced to the simplest expression! These millions of people who have no need to know one another conduct their education, occupation and old age so similarly that the course of life must be several times shorter than that which an insane statistics establishes for the people of the continent.
(tr: Enid Rhodes Peschel)

Another contemporary of Rimbaud and Baudelaire is the Russian writer Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1877), comparable in so many ways to Whitman. He identified intimately with the common country people, the *mujiks*, so present in Russia literature, but also with the urban throngs who became lead characters in the major Russian cities. His style finds expression in his vocabulary, his rhythms and his images with that great theme of communal solidarity that he developed in successively more voluminous editions of his poems published between 1856 and 1874. His political commitment against tyranny and his constant problems as a journalist and editor of, among other Russian writers, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, Tolstoy and Turgenev, made him a precursor of the revolution that he never saw. He died in 1877 giving rise to general consternation for the loss of someone who was described at the time by Dostoyevsky as the greatest Russian poet since Pushkin and Lermontov.

As we will soon see, the great city also turns into a preferred subject for the art form that is most identified with the Soviet revolution and which treats it similarly, though with a different ideology, to the enthusiastic approach of Whitman. Because of this it is very interesting that to illustrate the cinematographic concept of a shot in terms of a literary text, Yuri M. Lotman (1978: 316-319) turned to the poem “Morning” by Nekrasov.

The composition starts by describing rural reality very negatively:

All is ever dreary and dismal,
Pastures, fields, and meadows,
Wet and drowsy jackdaws
Resting on the peaked haystacks.

Here's a drunken peasant driving
His collapsing nag
Into far-off blueish mists,
Such a gloomy sky . . . It makes one weep!
(tr: Unknown)

But then the poem turns to an urban environment:

The rich city is no better, though:
The same storm clouds race across the sky;
It's hard on the nerves-steel shovels
Scraping, screeching as they clean the streets

Work's beginning everywhere;
From the fire tower an alarm goes up;
A condemned man's brought outside
Where the executioners already wait.

At the break of day a prostitute is hurrying
Home from someone's bed;
Officers inside a hired carriage
Leave the city-there will be a duel.

Shopkeepers have roused themselves
And they rush to sit behind their counters:
All day long they need to swindle
If they want to eat their fill at night.

Listen! Cannon fire from the fortress!
There's a flood endangering the capital . . .
Someone's died: Upon a scarlet cushion
Lies a first-class Anna decoration.

Now a yardman beats a thief-he got him!
Geese are driven out to slaughter;
From an upper floor the crackle
Of a shot-another suicide.
(tr: Unknown)

Yuri Lotman (1978, 320) sees situations that have been given ekphrastic expression in these verses as cinematographic shots and the entire poem “Morning” as a type of script. According to him this uncovers “the double role played by its syntactical connections: each scene forms part of a more general scene of life in the capital (and more broadly of Russian life) during Nekrasov’s time and from this everything is perceived as a result of the fusion of constituent parts”. It aims at a possible formal convergence that will allow us to appreciate in future chapters to what point urban images of poetry and avant-garde cinema came to be mutually supportive, as first demonstrated obviously by Strand and Sheeler.

As we've been able to prove up to this point, the great city bursts in as a theme of poetic modernity in the second half of the 19th century and it does so by following two ideological guidelines and two manifestly opposite significances.

Walt Whitman speaks to the great city, the center of which is Manhattan, with the enthusiasm of someone who feels to be a citizen of the nation which not only personifies the new world but which allows one to discern a new world of Democratic solidarity, of full personal development for the common man, of material wealth, and of amazing fundamental technical advances in the unceasing achievements of science without noticeable limitations. In 1920-1921, with their film, *Manhatta*, two artists of the New York avant-garde placed images on the Whitmanesque verbal description of the great city.

Simultaneously in old Europe, considered so —though not disrespectfully as Rumsfeld did— by the author of *Leaves of Grass*, a classless poet, Charles Baudelaire, similarly places Paris at the nucleus of his poetry, but his vision is closer to the awareness of the class war and how the fierce machine of capitalism was using the great urban concentrations to alienate the individual, the common man and woman. With all that, his positioning is more aesthetic and experiential and not strictly ideological but he still bequeaths a position, contradictory to the Whitmanesque one, which is later echoed even among the Hispanic poets that we have referred to, among them Federico García Lorca who we will study further.

At this point let us leave for the next chapter the answer to the question: is there any cinematographic representation of the city that corresponds to Baudelairean pessimism just like the filmed ekphrasis of Strand and Sheeler did in reference to *Leaves of Grass*?