

WALT WHITMAN AND THE CITY CULTURE: THE POET AS A FLÂNEUR AND A BOHEMIAN¹

The poetry of Walt Whitman, who continually sought to embrace a multitude of different and often contradictory subjects, can be approached from various perspectives, one of them being the analysis of urban features of his poems. As a native of Long Island who spent his boyhood and youth in Brooklyn and New York City Whitman was immersed in the urban culture, actively participated in the life of the developing cities and included his urban experiences both in his poetry and prose. Two features of the city life seem to have had a particularly significant role in shaping this urban poet – flânerie and bohemianism. The first is largely connected to his profession of a journalist, the second to his being a regular at the Pfaff's, a beer cellar in lower Manhattan, much frequented by unconventional, artistic New Yorkers. The paper explores the connection between Whitman the bohemian and flâneur and Whitman the poet, taking into consideration the poems that most conspicuously reflect this. In an attempt to elucidate the significance of city features in the creation of Whitman's poetic persona, the paper relies on the relevant urban culture studies by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, city literature, flâneur, bohemian

1. INTRODUCTION: WHITMAN IN THE CITY

In response to quite frequent 19th-century representations of cities as hellish products of the cruel industrialization, some literary voices of the time attempted to show a more favorable side of urban environments. Such voices could be heard on both sides of the Atlantic, creating not only a new kind of literary characters, but also new poetic forms. Partly influenced by the European tendencies but also responding to the changes of the urban environment at home, Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman, each in his own characteristic way, gave the city a prominent place in their works. In France, Charles Baudelaire made the modern city a focus of both his poetry and his essays, at the same time connecting urban art to the concept of modernity. Although such literary representations often depict the city as a dangerous place, these authors do not give precedence to the country life, like Wordsworth some decades before, but continue to explore the city themes. The

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present paper will focus on the urban aspects of Walt Whitman's poetry, specifically in relation to the roles of the flâneur and bohemian in the 19th-century city culture, and will examine how these city characters helped in shaping Whitman's curious poetic persona.

In his study *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* Dana Brand names Walt Whitman the only true urban poet of the 19th century in America and asserts that in this period "there is no better example of delighted urban spectatorship than the poetry of Walt Whitman". (Brand 2010: 11) Born in the rural region of Long Island in 1819, Whitman moved to an urban environment, more precisely to the city of Brooklyn, when he was about four years old. Both Brooklyn and New York (at the time two separate cities) were experiencing a rapid expansion, which would soon result in the latter becoming the major urban center of the United States. The growing population of the two cities and a multitude of different classes, nationalities, and professions offered invaluable stimuli for the young poet.

Whitman's life in the city was marked by his career of a journalist and magazine editor, which required a careful observation and an active interest in his surroundings and which shaped his understanding of the urban culture. Constantly roaming the city streets in search for the news, Whitman became a peripatetic spectator and recorder of the city life, which can be seen from the notes and sketches in the notebooks he carried on him and also from certain passages of his poetry. Aside from this, his profession of a journalist brought him in closer contact with the bohemian quarters in the growing metropolis, in particular with the beer cellar called the Vault at Pfaff's. As Karen Karbiener argues, working for the *Brooklyn Daily Times* may well have been what connected the poet with the New York bohemia in the first place, since "the location of its offices actually did bring Whitman physically closer to Pfaff's neighborhood in the heart of Manhattan". (Karbiener 2014: 8) In the Pfaff's, among the poet's numerous bohemian acquaintances was Henry Clapp Jr., the editor of *The Saturday Press*, also known as the King of Bohemia, who is now attributed with bringing the bohemian spirit, as well as the word "bohemia" itself, from Paris to New York. Clapp used his position of the editor to promote the work and art of his fellow bohemians, and owing to him Whitman got published in *The Saturday Press*. Clapp's favoritism provoked controversial reactions among the reading public and as Albert Parry notes, „Clapp and his journal brought upon themselves the ire and the admiration of the day for their insistence that Whitman was greater than Longfellow“. (Parry 2012: 39—40)

It is questionable whether Whitman himself could ever be called a real bohemian. Parry's observation that "Walt Whitman was indisputably a part of the scene, but he only sat, watched, and was worshipped; no one thought of designating him the chief of the Pfaffians" (Parry 2012: 38) suggests that the poet was a sort of a flâneur among the bohemians, not so much an active participant, but more

of an observer retaining his interested detachment. Karbiener notes that “Whitman was not the type to become a regular at a bar” adding that

Whitman never felt entirely comfortable with or accepted by the bohemians with whom he kept company at Pfaff’s. He was not considered a radical by the rest of the group; he was never a socialite; he was not even a ‘Manhattanese,’ though he gave himself this title in several poems. (Karbiener 2014: 2)

Although not a “radical” or a born “Manhattanese”, Whitman enjoyed the bohemian environment and city life in general and made the urban spirit and picturesque characters he met in the streets and in bars recurrent themes of his poetry.

2. FLÂNERIE AND BOHEMIANISM – TWO PHENOMENA OF THE MODERN CITY

The preceding biographical introduction is to point at the significance of Whitman’s life in the city for his development as a poet. In his poetry, Whitman embraced two essentially European urban phenomena (flânerie and bohemianism) at the time when these were making a decisive impact on the contemporary arts and literature, thus contributing to the newly developed concept of modernity. Although the characters of flâneur and bohemian appeared in literature prior to the 19th century, it was at this time that their roles became quite prominent owing to the rapid development of cities. Even more important than the flâneurs and bohemians as literary characters were the ones who created them, the authors, novelists, poets and journalists who considered the city a site of adventure and pleasure, experienced in sights and sounds, while strolling along the streets or carousing in local pubs.

Among the first authors who celebrated the city life was Charles Baudelaire, whose series of essays *The Painter of Modern Life* (first published in 1863) presents the city not as a threatening environment but as a source of various enjoyments and, more importantly, as the birthplace of modernity. Writing on fashion, arts and museums, festivities, dandies, women and their make-up, Baudelaire is presenting the *Zeitgeist* as reflected in various aspects of urban culture. The character of flâneur emerges in three of these essays, depicted as an observer standing in the middle, but also separate from the surrounding crowd. To Baudelaire, flâneur is a synonym for an artist capable of catching the spirit of modern life and producing sketches rather than “eternal, or at least more lasting things”, because a painter of “the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains” can provide the best representation of such an age. (Baudelaire 1964: 4—5) While describing the character of the painter Constantin Guys, to whom the essays are dedicated, Baudelaire evokes the image of a flâneur in the middle of the crowd and remarks that “[f]or the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an im-

mense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude [...] to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world". (Baudelaire 1964: 9) Even though Baudelaire later distinguishes his "painter of modern life" from the flâneur, giving the former an undisputed precedence, his description of this urban character remains a valuable starting point for future discussions.

Baudelaire's flâneur inspired Walter Benjamin to elaborate on the ideas of the French symbolist and produce some of the most influential essays on flânerie and urban culture. In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", while discussing the phenomenon of the urban crowd, Benjamin objects to Baudelaire's identification of flâneur with Poe's "man of the crowd", noting the difference between the common pedestrian, who "would let himself be jostled by the crowd", and the flâneur, "who demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure". (Benjamin 1969: 172) The chief precondition for being a flâneur is being "out of place", in the state of aloofness; he is simultaneously "in an atmosphere of complete leisure" and "in the feverish turmoil of the city". (Benjamin 1969: 172—3) Benjamin sees the flâneur as a specifically Parisian phenomenon, asserting that the architecture of that city, primarily its arcades, had a pivotal role in his development.² The flâneur, however, exists "on the threshold – of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd". (Benjamin 1999: 10)

In Benjamin's writings, the flâneur is closely connected to the bohemian, or the *bohème*, another city character "of leisure".³ The similarity is also noticed an anonymous columnist of the *Harper's Weekly*, who describes the bohemian as "a wanderer, with no particular attachment to any abiding place, or respect for conventionalities of forms, or of persons", which still "does not prevent him from being a gentleman". (Parry 2012: 58) Benjamin, however, adds another aspect to this urban figure when he mentions the link Marx establishes between the bohemian and "professional conspirators" among the proletarian class. (Benjamin 2006: 46) Thus connected to the revolutionary elements of the society, the bohemian assumes an important role in the emergence of the modernity. The *Metzler Lexicon of Avant-Garde* presents "Bohemianism" as a phenomenon of second half of the 19th century, developed as a lifestyle of artists and concerned with promoting the subcultural artistic practices, as opposed to the dominant patterns of the civic society. (Grisko 2013: 64—5) Although primarily seen as connected to the world

² Benjamin's remarks on this subject are scattered and appear both in „On Some Motifs in Baudelaire“ (Benjamin 1969: 155—200) and in his notes on „The Flâneur“ (Benjamin 1999: 416—455). However, this is the point over which Dana Brand disagrees with Benjamin, insisting that the flâneur appeared as a result of a long cultural development, that it existed in both England and America and cannot be considered a local Parisian phenomenon. (Brand 2010: 12—13)

³ Benjamin even includes a definition of the bohemian (quoted from Adolphe d'Ennery and Grangé, *Les Bohémiens de Paris*) in his notes on „The Flâneur“, in *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 1999: 428).

of entertainment and places such as theaters, bars, pubs and beer cellars, bohemianism has always had its political aspect, defying the prevailing profit-oriented model of society and aiming for a revolution conducted through art. In the United States, bohemianism, like flânerie, was imported from France, together with its social radicalism. The gathering point of the 19th-century New York bohemians was the Vault at Pfaff's, flourishing at the time when Whitman was its regular. The political side of bohemianism was present among the Pfaffians, as well: "Whitman, Republicans, and bohemians were united in their belief that a new political era was necessary and imminent". (Karbiener 2014: 8)

The flâneur and the bohemian share a number of common features – both are usually perceived as "gentlemen of leisure", originating in the city and defining modernity from its early days, but mostly existing on the margins. These two urban characters, however, show some opposed characteristics, too. The main contrast can be spotted in the degree of their involvement in the society. Although both exist in the midst of a crowd, only the bohemian enters into some sort of social interaction, while the flâneur remains a detached observer of the people around him, preferably not addressed or even noticed by them. Whereas a flâneur is mostly a passive spectator of events, a bohemian takes an active and emotionally involved part in them. As regards the current affairs, flânerie is mostly a politically neutral activity, while bohemianism asks for political and social engagement.

3. WHITMAN'S URBAN POETRY

Before considering how Whitman reconciled the contrasting features of the flâneur and the bohemian in his poetic persona, we will take a look at what could be another contradiction in Whitman's poetry. In a number of poems images of urban and rural environments are placed side by side, not to demonstrate the superiority of the one or the other, but to reassert the poet's wish to encompass all and give everybody an equal treatment. Therefore, it is practically impossible to decide whether Whitman is the poet of the city or the poet of the country. Observing that Whitman was the only renown American Romantic author who chronicled and celebrated the city life, William Pannacker adds that Whitman sees "the city as complementary with the country rather than in opposition to it". (Pannacker 2006: 42) In Section 2 of "Song of Myself", after rejoicing in the natural world and declaring: "I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for it to be in contact with me" (Whitman 1996: 189), the poet briefly turns to "the delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hill-sides" (189). Later in the poem the city scenes are counterbalanced with poetic vignettes depicting the countryside or nature. Whereas in some sections of his poems and in some prose essays from *Specimen Days* the poet celebrates the

nature and the country life almost in a Romantic fashion, Section 42 clearly shows that he feels himself completely at home in a city:

This is the city and I am one of the citizens,
 Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets, newspapers, schools,
 The mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores,
 real estate and personal estate. (Whitman 1996: 235)

In Whitman's poetry the city is the place of a great hustle and bustle, where the crowd composed of various professions, classes, and castes engage in all kinds of activities, honest and dishonest, where people are rushing by or leisurely strolling, making different sounds and, all in all, playing a part in a very picturesque scene. Whereas the city is not represented as a threatening environment, it is far from an idealistic utopian place.

Two sections of "Song of Myself" seem to be particularly inspired by the urban environment. The first is included in Section 8, beginning with "The blab of the pave", the phrase which nicely summarizes this catalog-passage. (See Whitman 1996: 195) The "blabbing" pavement reveals the daily habits of the citizens and the poet catalogs the sounds heard in the streets, thus describing the atmosphere of an urban environment. The sounds of people walking on the pavement, of carts, omnibuses, shod horses, snow-sleighs invoke the hectic movements of the crowd; the "promenaders" who talk, shout jokes and hurrahs, but also oaths leading to blows and police intervention, the over-fed and the half-starved and the women in labor altogether compose a vivid picture of the everyday life. Although not explicitly beginning as the description of a city, the Section 42 invokes the urban environment with the mention of the crowd, but here the poet focuses on the commercial aspects of the city:

Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,
 To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,
 Tickets buying, taking, selling, but in to the feast never once going. (Whitman 1996: 235)

This is far from depicting the city as a source of pleasures, and yet in the following passage the poet declares himself as "one of the citizens". He uses the reference to "the mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores" to acknowledge "the weakest and shallowest" and to embrace them, as well (Whitman 1996: 235-6).

When singing about New York, Whitman frequently reverts to its native name "Mannahatta", from the language of the Lenape people, which translates as "an island of many hills". The poem of the same title offers brief but all-encompassing celebration of Whitman's city. In the characteristic form of a catalog, the poet lists different New York scenes – he starts from the sea, the currents, islands and all kinds of ships, continues along the busy downtown streets, mingles in the

crowd of immigrants, sailors, mechanics, and finally reaches the fashionable trottoirs of Broadway with a display of diverse shops and shows. Whitman's poetic flânerie thus surpasses conventional descriptions of the city as a place of industrial development and by introducing some features of the natural landscape shows that it is not completely cut off from the nature.

One of Whitman's poems specifically related to New York City is "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". Ferries used to be significant city features, crossing the East River and connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan in the decades before Brooklyn Bridge was constructed. As the poet himself indicates in his essay "My Passion for Ferries", ever since he moved to Brooklyn and New York, his life "was curiously identified with Fulton ferry" (Whitman 1996: 724), the major steamship ferry route connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan. As Whitman remarks later in this essay, "I have always had a passion for ferries; to me they afford inimitable, streaming, never-failing, living poems". (Whitman 1996: 725) Standing in the pilothouses he could conveniently observe and absorb the cityscape and his fellow-passengers and the crowd he met daily on the ferry provoked his curiosity. This crowd, however, gets multiplied by the generations to come so that the poet addresses the "others", the future passengers of the ferry, as if they were riding together with him. By saying "Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd" (Whitman 1996: 309), the poet creates an urban community encompassing the past, present and future and transcending the boundaries of time. While creating this large union of people, Whitman again places himself within that crowd, emphasizing that he too is, or rather was, one of the citizens:

I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,
I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around
it,
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,
In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me.
(Whitman 1996: 310)

A somewhat different, more intimate perspective of the city is presented in the poems "Once I Passed through a Populous City" and "City of Orgies". Included in two clusters, *Children of Adam* and *Calamus* respectively, whose main theme is love, both hetero- and homosexual, these poems quite expectedly take a more personal approach and focus on particular people. Both poems follow approximately the same pattern: the poet starts by acknowledging the sights of a vibrant city, the shows, pageants, spectacles, processions, architecture, rows of houses and shop-windows. However, none of these, not even the encounter with the learned, the soirees and feasts, is what offers him the greatest enjoyment, which he ultimately finds in the people offering him love – the woman from "Once I Passed through a Populous City" and "lovers, continual lovers" from "City of Orgies".

The poet sees the city as the site of great possibilities at the same time adding a bohemian note in his interaction with the people.

The political and social turmoil on the eve of the Civil War reveals a new face of the city in the poem “City of Ships”, included in the *Drum-Taps* collection. The “white shore-steamers” from “Mannahatta” here become “black” and “fierce ships” prepared for the war. As if addressing a living person, the poet implores his city to engage in the war, which he believes is fought for a truly just cause. Once again emphasizing his close connection to New York – “I have rejected nothing you offer’d me – whom you adopted I have adopted, / Good or bad I never question you – I love all – I do not condemn anything (Whitman 1996: 430), the poet now walks the streets chanting a war song.

4. A FLÂNEUR AND A BOHEMIAN, CELEBRATING HIS CITY

In his poetry Whitman presents diverse facets of the city, showing not only its vibrancy but also its changeability. The images of the city in the abovementioned poems display some common features, in that the urban space is portrayed as crowded and bursting with activity, and each of the poems focuses on an element of urban life characteristic of a specific situation or of a particular historical moment. This emphasizes the changing character of urban environments, but also shows how observant the eye of the poet is.

Whitman’s poetic persona closely resembles the figure of the flâneur as depicted in Baudelaire and later in Benjamin. The flâneur’s detachment from the surrounding scenery is invoked in the lines from “Song of Myself”:

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary
[...]
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it. (Whitman 1996: 191)

Standing in the midst of a crowd, feeling amusement, complacency, and curiosity, idling the day away and leisurely observing the scene – what a perfectly Baudelairean description of the flâneur in just a few lines! That Baudelaire’s notes on the flâneur can serve as a theoretical basis for Whitman’s poetic persona is further affirmed by the observation Baudelaire makes about the flâneur being “an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’” (Baudelaire 1964: 9), which points to the pleasure the urban spectator gets absorbing the people around him. Such relation between the I and the non-I is one of the key features of Whitman’s poetry – Whitman’s I is the unnamed poetic persona, vague, undefined, ungendered, and yet all-encompassing, commonly taken as the main character of Whitman’s poems, who voraciously and yet democratically takes in everyone in sight.

Apart from his poetic persona acting like a flâneur, certain structural features confirm that flânerie crucially influenced Whitman's poetry. As noted by Ed Folsom and Ken Price, the early years Whitman spent living on his own in Brooklyn and New York "remained a formative influence on his writing, for it was during this time that he developed the habit of close observation of the ever-shifting panorama of the city, and a great deal of his future poetry and prose came to focus on catalogs of urban life and the history of New York City, Brooklyn, and Long Island". (Folsom and Price 2005: 5) Whitman's cataloging is a poetic technique which directly corresponds to and very likely originates from the poet's experience of a journalist and a flâneur. The long observed similarity between his famous catalog passages and the numerous notes he made while walking the streets or riding on carriages suggests that the flâneurist lifestyle inspired one of the most characteristic formal aspects of his poetry. Whitman's long catalogs (some of them spreading on several pages) have come to be regarded as typical of his poetry and, although this technique was employed by a number of 20th-century poets, it is still recognized as a distinctly Whitmanesque feature. In his catalogs Whitman often makes quite random lists of people, professions, places, activities, so that the unrelated, even opposite characters can be found side by side. In Section 15, for instance, one after another the poet mentions the opium-eater, the prostitute, the President, and three matrons.⁴ It appears that these poetic passages were literally jotted down while the poet was wandering about the city and trying to record only the basic fragments of a scene. This is, again, in line with Baudelaire's vision of a modernist artist / flâneur, who paints sketches rather than "eternal, [...] heroic or religious subjects". (Baudelaire 1964: 4) A series of sketches from Section 8 of "Song of Myself" concludes with the lines "I mind them or the show or resonance of them – I come and I depart" (Whitman 1996: 195), illustrating what Dana Brand has termed "a posture of detached and delighted omnipresence". (Brand 2010: 12)

Whitman's long catalogs do not depict the city scenes only; the longest of them in "Song of Myself" (in Section 33) spans the whole American continent. However, even if the scenery is not urban, these catalogs can be read as a kind of flânerie, since the poet makes an imaginary journey over the land and the sea, enumerating the things he sees as if he encountered them on the streets of New York. Whether the scenery is urban or rural, to achieve the expansiveness of the catalogs it is not sufficient to be just a static spectator, watching the crowd through a coffee-shop window; one needs to take a walk, to move about and thus become not only a poetic, but a

⁴ This reveals both flâneurist and bohemian aspects of his poetry: he often lists unrelated characters one after the other, just the way he encounters them in the street, without trying to group them according to some criteria (class, profession, gender). However, with Whitman, there is also a political dimension to this. For instance, regarding the abovementioned Section 15, it is highly unlikely that he would encounter the President right after the opium-eater and prostitute, and so, rather than recording the city characters in the order in which he meets them, he deliberately places the opposite social classes side by side to emphasize that he gives an equal treatment to everybody.

peripatetic persona. The speaker's flânerie enters into the deeper layers of Whitman's poetry, broadening the thematic scope and influencing the very structure of poems.

While the flâneuristic features of Whitman's poetry are introduced already in the first edition of *Leaves*, the poems reflecting the poet's bohemianism dominate the third edition, published in 1860. The period between the second and third editions (1856—1860) was particularly productive for Whitman, yielding over a hundred new poems. This is often related to the fact that in these years Whitman intensified his visits to the Pfaff's beer cellar, where he expanded his circle of friends and his worldview. Justin Martin even asserts that "[t]ime spent among the Bohemians was crucial to the evolution of his masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*" since "Pfaff's – permissive place that it was – gave Whitman the opportunity to explore his sexuality in both art and life". (Martin 2014: 3) This led to the new clusters of poems, *Enfans d'Adam* and *Calamus*, openly addressing sexuality and carnal love.⁵ A few of these poems deal specifically with the city themes but the poet's approach is more personal and intimate. The poetic persona is not an interested but detached flâneur, sketching down random characters in his notebook. This is a sensual man, who wants to make a personal contact and engage in carousal and love-making with the person(s) he meets. The lines "Passing stranger! You do not know how longingly I look upon you, / You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me as of a dream,)" (Whitman 1996: 280) do not come from an unconcerned flâneur; the speaker yearns for an interaction with others, even with the strangers.

With the bohemian element particularly emphasized in 1860 edition, Whitman's poetic persona becomes more complex. He is now both a meticulous observer sketching random city scenes and a bohemian interacting with other citizens, seeking pleasures, but also worrying about certain social issues and showing interest in marginalized groups. Whitman adopting somewhat opposed perspectives of the flâneur and the bohemian is in line with his general tendency to unite contradictions. The opposition between these two city characters is quite well illustrated in Whitman's unfinished and unpublished poem "The Two Vaults", which not only presents the poet's vision of the Pfaff's, but also indicates the relation between the two roles he played in the city – the flâneur, the walker of the streets, and the bohemian in a beer cellar.

The vault at Pfaffs where the drinkers and laughers meet to eat and drink
and carouse

While on the walk immediately overhead pass the myriad feet of Broadway
As the dead in their graves are underfoot hidden

And the living pass over them, recking not of them (Whitman 1861)

The merry company of people drinking and laughing is contrasted to the hectic world of Broadway walkers. Interestingly, Whitman compares them to the

⁵ These clusters remained controversial years after their first publication and were even the reason why the poet lost his employment at one point.

worlds of the dead and the living respectively, thus pointing to the implied symbolism of the Pfaff's being underground and separated from the everyday and the usual. On the level of the streets exists the crowd, "thick", "well-dressed", and "continual", but the poet regards its members as phantoms:

You phantoms! Oft I pause, yearning, to arrest some of you
Oft I doubt your reality – whether you are real – I suspect all is but a pageant
(Whitman 1861).

Although these verses might indicate that he favors bohemians, Whitman does not abandon his perspective of a flâneur. In this poem, as in the major corpus of his city poetry, Whitman reconciles the contradictions between the flâneur and the bohemian by placing them side by side and presenting their views through the voice of his ever-changing poetic persona. Oscillating between the postures of an unconcerned flâneur and a merry bohemian, the poet reconciles his journalist's duty to remain an objective observer and his Pfaffian wish to meet the strangers and socialize with them on more intimate terms and this eventually provides a richer and more complete picture of the 19th-century city life.

5. CONCLUSION

I see the cities of the earth, and make myself a part of them.
(Whitman, "Salut au monde")

The flâneur and the bohemian are two figures who appeared on the margins of the 19th-century Western society, but still significantly influenced the development of modernity, especially when it comes to the development of modern cities. Walt Whitman experienced both the life of a flâneur and of a bohemian, which enriched his poetic perspective. This is seen not only in his city poems. Flânerie and bohemianism influenced Whitman's poetic technique, inspired him to broaden his thematic scope, fostered his poetic output and decisively shaped his poetic persona. Among the numerous facets of his complex poetic "I" are features related to both the flâneur and the bohemian. On the one hand, he is a keen observer and an objective recorder of the people he encounters, on the other, he yearns for an intimate relationship with them. This can sometimes be deemed contradictory, but this again is typical of a poet who felt it his duty to embrace contradictions. As hinted by the lines quoted above, Whitman did not only "see" the cities of the world, he integrated himself in the city life producing urban poems from the perspective of an insider.

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