

or great engineers who work for their well-being. In opposition to Carlyle's hero worship he offered in 1871 a "worship new" of "captains, voyagers, explorers . . . engineers . . . architects, [and] machinists" ("Passage to India," section 2). He thus considered that even in a democratic society of equal men, spiritual and intellectual elites are necessary. He re-affirmed it in *Democratic Vistas*: "[I]t is strictly true, that a few first-class poets, philosophers, and authors, have substantially settled and given status to the entire religion, education, law, sociology, &c., of the hitherto civilized world . . . and more than ever stamp, the interior and real democratic construction of this American continent, to-day, and days to come" (*Prose Works* 2:366-367). For if, as a utopian poet, he unreservedly sang the "divine average," he was quite lucid and illusionless in the prose of *Democratic Vistas* concerning the darker side of human nature. There he admits that "general humanity . . . has always, in every department, been full of perverse maleficence, and is so yet" (2:379). Nonetheless, the Civil War revealed to him the heroism of the average American and confirmed his faith in man "en-masse." When the war was over, he proclaimed the grandeur of the average man: "Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God . . ." ("Years of the Modern"). He thus wavered between an idealistic and a realistic conception of man, yet firmly concluded that, all men being fundamentally equal, the universal suffrage must guarantee the rights of all and that democracy is the only regime that can ensure the development of a just society: "[G]ood or bad, rights or no rights, the democratic formula is the only safe and preservative one for coming times. We endow the masses with the suffrage for their own sake, . . . perhaps still more . . . for community's sake" (*Prose Works* 2:380-381). Even if democracy is imperfect and only a lesser evil, it respects what Whitman calls "equal brotherhood." Alexis de Tocqueville, though an aristocrat and a conservative, had to acknowledge that the system worked. He admired the social equality he observed in the United States when he visited it in Whitman's time.

Whitman believed in equality because he was an individualist, an upholder of "personalism," who wanted above all to safeguard the rights of the individual, i.e., himself, but he failed to realize that there is an incompatibility between liberty and equality. As Plato pointed out in the *Republic*, in a given society individu-

als are born intelligent or stupid, good-looking or ugly, dexterous or crippled, strong or weak. Equality is contrary to facts and unnatural. If you want nonetheless to enforce it, you must impose a general leveling down and deny personal liberty, as was done in totalitarian countries. Equality as conceived by the thinkers of the age of enlightenment was equality of opportunity, equality of rights, not complete equality on all planes, as demagogues claim and pretend to believe. Men can be equal only in rights; they can never be totally equal physically and intellectually. If a government wants to impose equality, it will have to impose it by force at the expense of liberty. So the three elements which make up democracy, the three values on which it is based, must be carefully measured. A delicate balance between liberty and equality must be maintained. It is very precarious and rarely obtained. Perfect democracy exists only in *Leaves of Grass*—thanks to Whitman's emphasis on brotherhood.

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See also COMRADESHIP; DEMOCRACY; FREEDOM; INDIVIDUALISM

"Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (1871)

Originally written and accepted for publication (but never published) by the *Galaxy* magazine in 1867 as "Ethiopia Commenting," Whitman first placed this poem in *Leaves of Grass* in 1871 and revised it in the 1876 edition with the subtitle "A Reminiscence of 1864." It was placed in the "Drum-Taps" cluster in 1881.

In its final form, the poem recounts an old black woman's watching General Sherman's troops march through her Carolina town on their way to the sea. The woman wears a turban of African colors—yellow, red, and green—as she rises to greet the colors of the army. As Betsy Erkkila notes, the woman's exoticism and exclusion from the dominant American culture is stressed as well as the racial hierarchy accepted by nineteenth-century society.

The speaker contemplates the “hardly human” woman as the colors go by and questions what “strange and marvelous” things she has experienced. The notation of the woman as “hardly human” suggests that the exotic woman remains for Whitman as the Other, the feared. In a brief stanza we are given a glance at what the speaker believes she is thinking; in Whitman's awkward attempt at dialect, she remembers her capture from Africa and the middle passage. The horrors of the middle passage and slavery's abuses are understated as the strangeness of her experiences are emphasized.

By placing the poem in “Drum-Taps” in 1881, Whitman secures the connection between slavery and the Civil War which he first alludes to in the initial poem. The conventional form which Whitman uses—the standard three-line stanzas, internal and terminal rhyme, and alliteration—indicates the difficulty of coming to terms with the black body and suggests a desire for containment.

As one of the few comments on black liberation, the poem offers insight into Whitman's perception of blacks in the United States, suggesting that Whitman had not come to terms with a free black population.

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See also “DRUM-TAPS”; RACIAL ATTITUDES; SLAVERY AND ABOLITIONISM

“Europe, The 72d and 73d Years of These States” (1850)

This poem was the first published (New York *Daily Tribune*, 21 June 1850) of those later to become a part of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Called “Resurgemus,” in the 1856 edition its title was changed to “Poem of the Dead Young Men of Europe, The 72d and 73d Years of These States.”

Both its early date and its two titles reflect Whitman's broad involvement with political matters in his role as editor of and contributor to various newspapers and journals during the 1840s. That he is concerned here with issues in Europe, a region he never visited, suggests that the scope of his vision for humanity was already in place when he was only thirty-one. “Europe” passionately champions the young men who died in the abortive uprisings of 1848 in several European nations, uprisings protesting against arbitrary authority and entrenched royal prerogatives.

Composed of thirty-eight lines, the poem foreshadows dramatic techniques Whitman was to use again and again. It begins with a fresh, immediate image of the rise of the revolutionary impulse, personified with “its hands tight to the throats of kings,” opening out to a wail of grief at the failed effort: “O aching close of exiled patriots' lives / O many a sicken'd heart.” Using direct address, the poet then speaks to those in power: “And you, paid to defile the People—you liars, mark!” Idealizing the revolutionaries, who scorned to use “the ferocity of kings,” the poet records the “bitter destruction” that followed from this mildness, which more likely sprang from a lack of military power.

Out of Whitman's rich visionary imagination appears a phantom, “vague as the night,” probably meant to prophesy, in the shape of a fearful death, the ultimate fate of the kings and their retinue. Blunt imagery of the dead young men is followed by a strong message that other young men will carry on the fight. A tone of hope and encouragement dominates the rest of the lyric, most dramatically in line 35: “Liberty, let others despair of you—I never despair of you,” the repeating phrase, for emphasis, to become a signature of Whitman's style. Also the loose, trochaic rhythm evident throughout is already a sure sign of Whitman's voice. Still another is the putting of a rhetorical question near the close, followed by a soothing reassurance. In this instance the question is contained