modern society. They may not, like revitalization movements in traditional societies, lead to a new "steady state." But they very well may initiate new patterns of interaction between religious and other social institutions. Environmental problems and economic dilemmas are two kinds of "problem areas" where such interaction might begin. It is too early to prognosticate. But we can say that some new synthesis will be necessary if religion is to be a vital force in contemporary America. Some creative movement outward -- from inward spiritual renewal to new significant relations between religious and other social institutions -- will be the measure of whether what we are witnessing is indeed a Great Awakening.

NOTES


INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: THE PROBLEM OF WHITMAN'S DEMOCRATIC VISTAS

Robert J. Scholnick*

As part of its examination of the question of "the institutionalized American," this conference is concerned with identifying and exploring two opposed forces in the national life, the centrifugal and the centripetal. We think of the centripetal force as pulling the individual into the center of American life and possible identification with its institutions, toward becoming an "institutionalized American." On the other hand, we perceive of the centrifugal as exerting its force in the opposite direction, moving the individual away from the center and allowing him to cultivate and develop an independent, separate identity.

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No American poet has more sensitively explored the drama of the self's search for identity and expression than Whitman and none has more deeply explored the inner meaning of democracy, revealing the spiritual potential beneath its political forms. In his long post-war essay, Democratic Vistas, Whitman directly treats the question of the competing demands of self and society, a theme implicit in much of his work. Because his exploration of this question remains useful for our inquiry into "the institutionalized American," I want to examine this aspect of Democratic Vistas within its immediate historical context.

In the North the period immediately following the Civil War was one in which centrifugal forces were particularly strong. The demands of fighting the first modern war had led to unparalleled centralization. Even more important, the Union victory seemed to lend a particular authenticity to the institutions of society as embodiments of a highly moral national purpose.

On August 16, 1867, Horace Greeley printed in the Tribune the full text of Carlyle's Shooting Niagara, a savage attack on democratic tendencies in England and America, so that he could denounce Carlyle and other critics of American democracy in an editorial published the same day. Greeley's editorial was followed by many other articles defending democracy in American newspapers and magazines. The most significant of these was Whitman's uncompromising essay, "Democracy," which appeared in the Galaxy of December, 1867. In May, 1868, Whitman published a sequel, "Personalism," in the same magazine. However, the editors declined to publish the third and concluding essay in the series, entitled "Literature" or Orbic-Literature, possibly because of its great length. 1 Whitman combined these three essays and, with some significant additions and deletions, published them as Democratic Vistas.

Whitman's most important additions were the passages in which he bitterly condemned the business, political, and social corruption which engulfed post-war America. "What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask?" he asked rhetorically, and proceeded to answer his own question: "The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout... The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than we are supposed, but infinitely greater... The great cities of modern times reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism." 2 Ironically, Democratic Vistas is best known today for this jeremiad, a judgment which received little contemporary attention. Whitman did not include the condemnation passages in the Galaxy essays, which were commented upon in the Nation, Round Table, and elsewhere. And when the complex text of Democratic Vistas appeared in an edition published by James Redpath, it was met by what Gay Wilson Allen has called "almost a conspiracy of silence" from the critics. 3

Throughout Democratic Vistas Whitman explored the underlying conflict between those elements in democracy which encourage the development of the unique and autonomous self and those which emphasize man's social identity. The opposition between the two, he admits, "form a serious problem and paradox in the United States." Whitman's anti-individualism is not the same as an exposition of the primacy of individualism, "Personalism," is the more eloquent because it is set against the backdrop of the mass civilization which Whitman saw emerging after the Civil War. It is particularly significant, then, that he should seek to balance his commitment to individualism with a recognition of the prior claims of the social organism:

We shall, it is true, quickly and continually find the origin idea of the singleness of man, individualism, asserting itself, and cropping forth, even from the opposite ideas. But the mass, or lump character, for imperative reasons, is to be ever carefully weighed, born, and provided for. Only from it, and from its proper regulation and potency, comes the other, comes the change of individualism. The two are contradictory, but our task is to reconcile them (373).

While presciently warning of the dangers of mass institutions which threaten to "ossify" man, Democratic Vistas also considers the danger of spiritual poverty implicit in an autonomous individualism which has no social reference. Whitman insists that at its most basic, democracy is not merely a political concept, but an idea with an important spiritual dimension, an idea which, while encouraging full individual growth and development, also brings the individual back to identification with the concern for other human beings. For in affirming the equal worth of all men, democracy elevates all, allowing for the realization of the ancient idea of brotherhood.
From this perspective, democracy has two important purposes which, while seemingly inconsistent, are actually complements. It seeks not only to individualize but to universalize. The great word solidarity has arisen. Of all the dangers to a nation... there can be no greater one than having certain portions of the people set off from the rest by a line drawn... To work in... and justify God, his divine aggregate, the People... is what democracy is for (382).

To return to the terms we have been using, implicit in this formulation is the existence in democracy of a centripetal force which leads the individual toward an identification with and commitment to other beings. The concept of "solidarity" carries with it an active commitment to social justice. This is a positive, self-generated force and must be distinguished from the potentially destructive centripetal forces exerted by the institutions of the mass society, of "aggregate America." Whitman, of course, did not confuse the actual society which he saw around him and the potential or ideal democracy which, he hypothesized, would emerge in the future. Reflecting on the dialectical cast of his thought, he saw such an ideal emerging in a third stage following the securing of political liberty and material prosperity. On the ideal level, democracy is both a political and spiritual concept and it possesses two opposing but complementary forces: on the one hand, it encourages individual self-affirmation and growth and on the other it moves the individual toward an active concern for, and affirmation of solidarity with, other human beings.

We know that Whitman entertained doubts about the wisdom of immediately giving the vote to the freed slaves. Early in Democratic Vistas he speaks of his desire not to gloss over "the appalling dangers of universal suffrage" (383). Later, however, he clearly commits himself to this principle of the transforming, humanizing power of democracy. In its glowing depiction of the "adhesive" or religious potential of American democracy, Whitman's "Democracy" reflects the ennobling quality of his experiences as a nurse in the Washington hospitals during the war.

Whitman's starting point for his philosophy of "personallism" is the mystery of individual identity, which he refers to as the "miracle of miracles." His philosophy holds that the primary source of value, the ultimate good, results from the growth and development of each individual in fulfilling the inherent potential of his unique being: "The quality of BEING, in the object's self, according to its own central idea and purpose, and of growing therefrom and thereto -- not criticism by other's standards, and adjustments thereto -- is the lesson of Nature" (394).

Contemporary society, Whitman argues, instead of encouraging this growth, threatens increasingly to overwhelm the individual and thwart his development: "Social and moral simplicity and separation, amid this more and more complex, more and more artificialized state of society -- how pensively we yearn for them! How we would welcome their return" (394). He gives only passing mention to the problem of social complexity but mount an effective and original attack on the "artificial" through an extended treatment of the concept of culture.

The word "culture," Whitman observes, has come into wide circulation, and virtually every contemporary writer insists upon the importance for Americans of its acquisition. "To prune, gather, trim, conform, and ever cram and stuff, and be genteel and proper, is the pressure of our days," Whitman argues that, as presently used, the concept is not merely empty, but positively destructive: With the very mention of the word "culture," he warns, "we find ourselves in close quarters with the enemy" (395). Whitman raises three objections to current notions of culture. First, the models held up for emulation are drawn or borrowed from earlier times and civilizations -- civilizations with established class structure. He rejects any attempt to impose aristocratic values upon a democratic people. Second, since the acquisition of this type of culture necessarily requires money -- to afford a higher education or the leisure with which to learn -- current concepts of culture necessarily exclude the working classes. "Culture" in this sense becomes a means of class control. Finally, and most basically, Whitman objects to any notion which defines culture as something foreign or apart from the actual life of the people themselves.

Whitman's own theory or "programme" of culture represented, as he correctly recognized, a "radical" revision of the accepted categories. A people's culture should not be understood as something foreign and apart, something which can be obtained only by a narrow class through hard labor. Whitman widened the concept to assert that a people's culture is in fact the values,
beliefs, and social practices which they already hold and recognize. It must be broadly based and available to all:

I should demand a programme of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture rooms, but with an eye to practical life, the West, the working men, the facts of farms and jack-planes and engineers, and the broad range of the women also of the middle and working strata. I should demand of this programme or theory a scope generous enough to include the widest human area. It must have for its spinal meaning the formation of a typical personality of character, eligible to the uses of the high average of men — and not restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses. The best culture will always be that of the manly and courageous instincts, and loving perceptions, and of self-respect — aiming to form, over this continent, an idiocracy of universalism, which, true child of America, will... (demonstrate) why and for what she has arisen

Whitman's "programme" is inherently centrifugal. It is an attack on the imposition of a single cultural standard by which all people must be measured and more specifically it is an attack on what we might call the contemporary "culture industry" represented by the Eastern magazines, publishing houses and literary establishment. Through his recognition of the West as a source of values of equal worth with the East, Whitman insists upon a recognition of the diversity of American life. He treats the "cultural establishment" very much as a foreign institution which threatens to destroy the vitality, openness, and democratic values of the people themselves.

Whitman recognized that Democratic Vistas was necessarily tentative, "an exploration, as of new ground, wherein, like other primitive surveyors, I must do the best I can, leaving it to those who come after me to do much better" (393). Still, Democratic Vistas suggests ways for the individual to resist the dangers of institutionalization, of "aggregate America" and its "artificial culture," by developing and affirming his individual selfhood, his "personalism," while at the same time discovering the spiritual potential, the vital human solidarity, inherent in democracy.

NOTES


COMMENTARY

Ruth A. Banes*

The possibility that institutionalized literary forms free their characters, and hence their audience, by revealing the limitations inherent in stereotyped plot and role is important — an idea which is often ignored in American culture. Too often, we criticize the institution's limitations upon the individual, decrying the restrictions it imposes. Professor Deer** demonstrated that contemporary films and novels provide a context for alternative responses while utilizing traditional forms. By changing the point of view from which a story is told, an author determines that an institutionalized literary form takes on new life. Further, this unique interpretation presents unique characters, rather than stereotypes, aiding the audience in redefining the self against the dictates of institutions. By presenting an old myth from a unique point of view, contemporary films and novels show their readers possibilities for freedom within institutionalized forms. In this respect, art can demonstrate that institutions are necessary prerequisites for the creation of meaning and values. In light of this assumption, I would like to comment on Professor Schoenick's paper.

Professor Schoenick presented an excellent reading

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**Irving Deer (University of South Florida, English) was unable to make available his paper, "Freedom Within Institutionalized Forms in Recent American Fiction."
of a difficult essay, discerning the essential elements of Whitman's argument concerning the relationship between the individual and the institution. I wish to relate this interpretation of Democratic Vistas to other works on individualism, particularly within the contemporary social context. I agree that the contradictions Whitman explored are still relevant today, but suggest that Whitman places too much emphasis upon the individual's struggle against the institution.

It is significant that Whitman's Democratic Vistas explores the contradictions inherent in the individualism/conformity debate, a central theme addressed by scholars who have tried to define the American character. The paper raises issues similar to those confronted by Alexis de Tocqueville who observed in 1831 that individualism and conformity resulted from democratic institutions. Yet, at the same time, he claimed that individualism, a condition which forced Americans to seek opinions within themselves, was also common. Anticipating the critiques of contemporary sociologist Philip Rieff and historian Christopher Lasch, Tocqueville predicted that individualism in America would eventually become egotism, "a passionate and exaggerated love of self which leads a man to think of all things in terms of himself and to prefer himself to all." Such critiques, contrasting with the claims of William H. Whyte that Americans are dominated by their organizations, fail to address the inherent conformity which Lasch's narcissistic personality and Rieff's therapeutic personality require. In contrast, Professor Scholnick's analysis of Democratic Vistas implies that Whitman, like Tocqueville, recognizes that individualism and conformity can complement each other.

My comments involve several questions about the relevance of Democratic Vistas to contemporary Americans. First, I would ask whether Democratic Vistas is an analysis of the American character. More significantly, does Whitman's form of individualism differ from the "new narcissism" or not? I am also curious about the relationship between Whitman's proposed solution and Quentin Anderson's thesis in The Imperial Self. Anderson claims that Whitman, as an "imperial self," rejected the conditions for action presented by society, denied that socially prescribed identity is fatal, and advised his audience to incorporate the social whole within consciousness. If this be the case, Whitman avoids the problems caused by institutionaliza-

tion by ignoring them. Consciousness, rather than social context, was primary in Whitman's work.

Professor Scholnick concludes that Democratic Vistas "suggests ways for the individual to resist the dangers of institutionalization, of 'aggregate America,' and its 'artificial culture' by developing and affirming its individual selfhood, while at the same time discovering the spiritual potential, the vital human solidarity, inherent in democracy." However, I fear that although Whitman suggests ways of avoiding dangers inherent in institutionalization, he does not aid us in avoiding the dangers inherent in forms of absolute individualism ("the imperial self," "the narcissist," "the egoist," for example). All of these represent what might become "institutionalized individualism," placing too much authority upon the self, at the expense of morality.

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO WORLD WAR II NOVELS

Charles E. Conway

World War II has been a persistent subject of American novels since the first one was published less than five months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. During the war years so many novels appeared that by 1944 reviewers began predicting wholesale neglect for any further narratives on the subject. They, of course, were wrong. But the extent of their miscalculation is alarming. Not only were many World War II novels published, several with wide sales, between 1944 and 1948, but public interest in the war novel seemed to have intensified after the war was concluded. The