

of Whitman before and after the war, fully immersed in the politics and fads of his times, is a welcome and refreshing addition to Whitman scholarship. Reynolds has given us one of the best portraits of our best poet.

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MARTIN KLAMMER. *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 176 pp.

What delights most about this work is Martin Klammer's argument that Whitman's attitudes toward race and slavery changed throughout his lifetime. The Whitman that Klammer gives us continually adjusted his beliefs to fit his own particular response to the political mood of the times. Klammer fortunately avoids the revisionist approach to Whitman's attitudes toward race and slavery: he does not criticize Whitman in terms of twentieth-century American thinking, but presents his views in terms of nineteenth-century American thinking. This allows Klammer to reveal Whitman within the milieu of nineteenth-century American culture. Against the background of contemporary nineteenth-century American attitudes toward race and slavery, Klammer effectively explains how Whitman differs from his contemporaries and how his different attitudes develop in a way that precipitates the creation of *Leaves of Grass*.

Klammer chronicles support for his discussion from between 1842, with the publication of Whitman's *Franklin Evans, or The Inebriate*, and 1855, with the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Reminding readers that *Franklin Evans* represents Whitman's most popular work in the nineteenth-century, Klammer also identifies it as Whitman's most racist work. As such, Klammer uses *Franklin Evans* to establish Whitman's works in the nineteenth-century American milieu. The temperance novel also serves Klammer as the point of departure for Whitman as his attitudes toward race and slavery develop to a more radical acceptance and a more sympathetic treatment of African Americans, and to the eventual adoption of an anti-slavery posture. As Whitman's response to slavery and race develops more radically, so does his approach to literature, and particularly to poetry. The result is the radical poetry of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855.

During the late 1840s and the late 1850s in his various capacities as a journalist, Whitman engaged himself in the current slavery debates. His opposition to slavery at this time, however, was only secondary to his concerns about the effects of slavery upon the conditions of white labor. Careful not to make too much of Whitman's use of a catalog in an 1847 anti-slavery editorial, Klammer does suggest that Whitman's articulation of his new views toward slavery at least provoked him to new forms of expression. Indicative of his opposition to the extension of slavery, Whitman denounced slavery and promoted the Wilmot Proviso, a stand radical enough to get him fired from his

position as editor at *The Brooklyn Eagle*.

Whitman's first use of free verse in his notebooks in 1847 involves the subject of slavery. Klammer finds in W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) an important suggestion of how Whitman's reading of Emerson would lead him to take up slaves and slavery as the subject of his poetry. Klammer writes that Whitman does so because "one's sense of one's own divinity, an idea first promulgated in the nineteenth century, radically transforms one into being deeply compassionate for others" (54). While working for *The New Orleans Crescent* in 1848, Whitman found himself for the first time in daily contact with African Americans. In "Miss Dusky Grisette," Whitman composed his longest piece about an African American since *Franklin Evans*, and he would not write as much again until reporting on black Civil War troops in 1863. Furthermore, like *Franklin Evans*, "Miss Dusky Grisette" involves sexual fantasies about women of African-American descent.

Whitman's 1850 poem "Blood-Money" represents the poet's first public expression of sympathy for fugitive slaves. Against his newfound sympathy, the Compromise of 1850 provides a harsh relief that further hastens Whitman's changes in attitudes toward African Americans and slavery. Klammer argues that the poem "Pictures" follows in 1853 or 1854 with four "pictures" of African Americans. While these "pictures" represent contemporary stereotypical presentations of African Americans, their variety indicates Whitman's more inclusive use of them. Of the "hunted slave" fragment, which Edward F. Grier dates in 1854, and which also appears in the 1855 *Leaves*, Klammer notes again Whitman's joining of long-line free verse with the subject of slavery: "It is almost as if the radically sympathetic depiction of blacks compels Whitman toward an equally radical and new poetic form" (100). Furthermore, the only poems that Whitman published from 1850 to 1854 all are about slavery. With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Anthony Burns case, Whitman finally discovers an American audience that can relate to lines such as "I am the poet of the slave."

When it appeared in 1855, *Leaves of Grass* included three poems that Whitman later titled "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "The Sleepers." Here Whitman accomplishes what no other writer had before then: "Whitman repeatedly shows his white readers that to be a whole and fully realized human being in mid-nineteenth-century America is to participate in the experience of, and even identify with, black people" (115). Although Whitman may, of course, be inclusive and idealistic about African Americans in *Leaves of Grass*, Klammer reminds readers that "culturally racist notions occasionally intrude" (127).

When Whitman's speaker becomes the hounded slave in "Song of Myself," his "I" substituted for "he" not only projects sympathy from subject to object, but such "imaginative self-projection of the reader into the text" (135) allows Whitman's poem to function rhetorically as a slave narrative. As slave narrative, Whitman's "Song of Myself" also functions in a special way for Klammer: "For Whitman's whiteness allows a sympathetic reaction to his *imagined* black experience that would not be possible with a white audience's response to an actual black experience" (136). "Song of Myself" is generally about the liberation of the oppressed self, and specifically in some instances about slaves,

too. The poem allows writer and reader to identify with slaves as in all slave narratives, and through the poem Whitman himself escapes from slavery: "'Song of Myself' is not only the story but the *act* of [Whitman's] own liberation from nineteenth-century conventions of discourse and racial thinking" (140).

Klammer continues his book with discussions of "I Sing the Body Electric" and "The Sleepers." Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric" functions as a slave auction, and the speaker touts the value of all bodies—red, white, and black. Klammer notes: "It is a remarkable gesture, for in claiming space for all peoples Whitman rejects every expression of racial exclusivism that formed the earlier contexts of his racial thinking" (145). Whitman's use of the "Lucifer" figure in "The Sleepers" projects an angry slave who curses the entire system of slavery and the society whose indifference to slavery allows it to continue: "Whitman's challenge to slavery moves beyond the forced return of slaves" (153).

Readers cannot diminish the significance of Whitman's response to slaves and slavery in *Leaves of Grass* because he only deals with the subject in three of the twelve poems in the 1855 edition. "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "The Sleepers" represent only one-fourth of the number of poems in *Leaves of Grass*; however, these three poems make up more than three-fourths of the bulk of the entire volume. Furthermore, Klammer reminds readers that most critical attention has focused on these three poems. Readers may wonder about the relationship of the critical popularity of these poems and the previously unrecognized importance of their African-American subject matter. Unfortunately, Klammer does not venture to connect what he notes about Whitman in his book to the traditional interests of Whitman critics.

In his "Epilogue" Klammer reports that Whitman later retreats from the position he took toward African Americans and slavery in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. Klammer insists again: "[A]ny real understanding of Whitman's writing about blacks and slavery must be understood in light of a close reading of the particular historical context at any given moment in Whitman's career" (162). After 1855 Whitman often spoke and wrote with less sympathy for African Americans than he displayed in the first *Leaves of Grass*. Klammer accounts for this difference by noting that Whitman was never again lucky enough to create something as new as the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, that he never again applied his genius in similarly coalescing circumstances, and that, for Whitman, an inspirational historical and discursive milieu like that of 1842-1855 never again existed.

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JOHN E. SCHWIEBERT. *The Frailest Leaves: Whitman's Poetic Technique and Style in the Short Poem*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992. 158 pp.

In *The Frailest Leaves*, John Schwiebert argues that critics have neglected Whitman's short poetry in favor of his long verse and that this neglect is a consequence of the image we have of Whitman as "America's poet-colossus."