

**WHITE, ANDREW
DICKSON (1832-1918)**

American university president, historian of ideas, and diplomat. Educated at Yale in the famous "class of 1853," he early conceived the ideal of a university on the European model, with a scientific spirit and a breadth of learning in contrast to the narrow denominational instruction that had been the rule in the American college of the antebellum period. Together with Senator Ezra Cornell of Ithaca, New York, he drew up the charter of a new university that marked a major step toward the secularization and modernization of American higher education. Cornell University, founded in 1865, was novel in that it placed the natural sciences and engineering and the modern languages and their literatures on a par with the classics, and that its board of trustees was never to have a majority of any religious denomination; it was in all respects a modern institution comparable to those that already existed in Europe. White became President of the new university when it opened its doors in 1868.

In 1892 President Harrison appointed him American minister to St. Petersburg, where the minor rank and scanty means of the American legation prevented him from achieving anything of note at the corrupt court of Alexander III. But there he worked on his two-volume *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, which he completed after his resignation in 1894. Published two years later, the work contained two chapters in which he exposed the the story of the destruction of **Sodom** and the pillar of salt into which Lot's wife had been transformed as a geographical legend inspired by the peculiarly barren and salinized terrain on the shores of the Dead Sea. Relying on the investigations of the French geologist Edouard Lartet published in the five-volume work of the Duc de Luynes, *Voyage d'exploration à la mer Morte, à Petra et sur la rive gauche du*

Jourdain (1871-75), he explained that the site of these legends had been submerged by the Dead Sea in prehistoric time, and that the fall of the water level exposed the surfaces whose sterility and desolation had been ascribed to an act of divine retribution for the depravity of the former inhabitants. Ignored as the work has been by the official scholarship of the divinity schools, it remains his legacy to critical scholarship on homosexuality.

Named Ambassador to Germany by President McKinley in 1897, he succeeded within a few months after his arrival in Berlin in winning the confidence of the homosexual Emperor Wilhelm II, whose favorite, the later Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, was the center of a gay clique that influenced German foreign policy. He succeeded in keeping Germany neutral during the War of 1898, when the expanding American presence in the Western Pacific threatened to clash with German interests in the region.

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Warren Johansson

**WHITMAN, WALT
(1819-1892)**

American poet and prose writer. Often acclaimed as America's greatest poet, Whitman, of working-class background, was self-taught, but as a printer, school teacher, journalist, and editor he contributed fiction and verse in the worst modes of the day to the best literary journals. There is no evidence of his genius until he suddenly began to write scraps of what was to become *Leaves of Grass* in his notebooks.

The earliest of these are full of philosophical or religious speculations in prose and poetry; those after 1857 are full of names of men he had met in his strolls through Brooklyn and Manhattan, and after

1862 the names of wounded soldiers he met in the military hospitals around **Washington**. These (at least the civilians) seem to be compulsive. The names are rarely repeated, and little information is given: where they met, the man's occupation, place of origin and any peculiarity of appearance or behavior. Aside from the fact that all the names are of **working-class** men, the lists are less informative than a telephone book. The soldier lists are frequently more detailed memoranda.

Life and Works. Probably in June 1847, he had a mystical experience in which he and his soul lay on the grass and his soul "plunged . . . [its] tongue to my bare-stript heart." This experience, whether actual or invented, richly erotic like so many mystical experiences, was the discovery of his true Self which freed his tongue. It has in fact been argued that *Leaves* is an inverted mystical experience. This work, which encompassed his complete poetic opus, was first published in 1855 with twelve poems ("Song of Myself" being rather lengthy); the second edition (1857) had thirty-two, the third (1860) 156, and so on through various printings and editions until 1881. Beginning in 1860, Whitman not only added poems (including the homoerotic "**Calamus**" collection), but dropped them, changed them, and rearranged the order. He has often been criticized for making changes, but he clearly did not do so for purposes of concealment.

Whitman went to Washington in December 1862, to look for his brother, who had been reported wounded, and stayed there for ten years as a volunteer visitor in the military hospitals and supported himself as a government clerk. In 1865 he met and fell in love with a young streetcar conductor, Peter Doyle. His affection was returned, at least emotionally, and the two remained intimate for a number of years, even after Whitman's stroke of 1873 forced his removal to the protection of his brother in Camden, New Jersey. They almost lost touch, but twelve

years after Whitman's death (1892) Doyle remembered him as a beloved guide and counselor and confessed that in moments of depression he comforted himself by lying down wrapped in Whitman's old overcoat. In the late 1870s Whitman had a very intense relationship with an eighteen-year-old boy, Harry Stafford, on whose father's farm Whitman took curative mud baths. (It is worth noting that he became a friend of the whole Stafford family.) There were also a number of brief affairs with similarly half-educated, lonely young men. His relationship with Horace Traubel, his secretary and "Boswell" in the last years of his life, was probably of a somewhat different character, for Traubel was older and better educated while Whitman was aging and very ill.

Erotic Nature. It is impossible to determine the nature of Whitman's homosexuality. Some naive critics thought that he was merely talking about the brotherhood of man; others, naive in a different direction, have thought that he was bedding every man mentioned in his notebooks. Oral report from Edward **Carpenter** to Gavin Arthur to Allen Ginsberg stands or falls on the reliability of Gavin Arthur, which is unproved. It seems likely that, beyond the embraces and kisses, he had some experience before his 1873 stroke of man-to-man genital sex, possibly also experience with women. The notebooks and letters give evidence that Whitman had some sort of intimate relationship with two women, one probably an actress, the other a French "artiste," ostensibly an entertainer. Passages in the "Children of Adam" poems (which are heterosexual) seem as "sincere" as any in "Calamus." In his more programmatic poems, Whitman was always careful to say "he and she," "him and her." Women are permitted to have sexual lives, and he sympathizes with a prostitute, but they are generally thought of and idealized as perfect mothers for the new race of Americans.

It was his explicitness about male-female sex that shocked his early

readers. Only a few homosexuals in England and some readers in Germany caught what is now obvious to any reader who can admit what he sees on the page. The second and third sections of "Song of Myself" are homosexual in their imagery, as is the subsequent discussion of the body and soul, which climaxes in the intercourse between body and soul in the fifth section. One might also cite the tremendous sweep of eroticism from section 24 to the climax of fulfillment in male intercourse in section 29. Another 1855 poem of interest is "The Sleepers," with its surrealistic imagery.

In contrast to the philosophical and psychological passages of "Song of Myself" and the passionate sexuality without a referent in "Children of Adam," "Calamus" reveals not only Whitman's mastery of the short lyric as against the longer ode or rhapsody (an underappreciated aspect of his art after 1860), but also differ in their obviously personal nature. The object has never been identified, and the poems lack the physicality of the passages referred to above, yet they convey poignantly many of the experiences of being a lover. In "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (also 1860), the loss of a lover is imaged through the disappearance of the female of a pair of nesting mocking birds. Again one suspects a personal involvement.

Whitman's poetry changed after the Civil War. He himself considered the 1860 edition to be final and expected that later poems would form a new, more spiritual, book. For various reasons Whitman did not attempt a new book, but wove his new poems into a loose autobiographical cycle centering on the Civil War. Homosexuality appears (actually as early as 1856) as "adhesiveness," a term taken from phrenology and meaning for Whitman not only friendship but the capacity for "manly love" as a governing principle of society. He was not merely the poet of an idealized Jacksonian democracy nor of a new political structure, but of a culture bound to-

gether by love and religious faith in which each person could fulfill his or her own sexual nature. Representative statements are in "I hear it was charged against me" (1860), "Democratic Vistas" (1871), and in the Preface to "Two Rivulets" (1876).

Whitman, who was disappointed at his contemporary reception, would have been gratified by his reputation in the twentieth century, which is too widespread to more than mention. He is *the* democratic poet and a progenitor of the development of poetry beyond traditional metrical practice in the United States and foreign countries. A remarkable number of modern poets have paid him tribute in prose or verse, among the most notable being Ezra Pound, Pablo Neruda, Federico García Lorca, Fernando Pessoa, and Allen Ginsberg.

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Edward F. Grier

WILDE, OSCAR F. O. W. (1856-1900)

Irish wit, poet, dramatist, novelist, writer of fairy tales, and convicted criminal. His wealthy and eminent parents sent him to Trinity College and to Oxford, where he began to be notorious for his effeminate pose as an aesthete under the influence of Walter Pater. This pose culminated in his trip to America and his identification with the effeminate poet in