

1987 Walt Whitman Association Poetry Contest Winners

FIRST PLACE

Joe Elder

THE WINDOW OF DEMOCRACY

I gaze through the window of democracy,  
at that supreme experiment in civilization,  
that became God's chosen, and Heaven's child on Earth,  
where millions have flocked, tired, ragged individuals,  
with grim hope burning in their eyes,  
coalescing in the shape of a uniform thought,  
extending its torch of freedom to the seven  
great islands.

I open the door of freedom,  
and I find a forest, a great ecology of difference,  
I see ebony birds perched among the branches  
of old, rotten pines,  
and birds of ivory can be seen,  
chirping, fluttering, and preening,  
as they bustle about the branches of sturdy oaks,  
and birds of a kind in between,  
on the ground, and in shrubs and bushes.

I see hawks flying with the silence of the setting sun,  
hunting, searching, seeking their prey,  
doves flutter sweetly, their benign intensity merging  
with the freshness and warmth of the rising sun.

I smell the bountiful, colorful flowers,  
the crisp white, the musky purple, the warm yellow,  
their diverse aromas fill my chest,  
each smell soothing, and all converging,  
to form a single scent, powerful and cleansing.

My eyes marvel at the numerous plants,  
tall, short, dense, thin,  
green and brown, with flowers of infinite variety.

As I gaze over the land, like the countless souls  
on their final journey,  
I see tall trees, short trees,  
I see the high mountains, and the gentle, rolling hills,  
the dry sunbaked deserts, the endless, tingling, grassy plains,  
the oven-like swamps, the lush, green flatlands,  
the crashing of waves on rocky beaches,  
and the soothing murmur of waves rolling against sandy shores,  
the high, barren, ice-capped crags,  
towering above deep, narrow canyons,  
the rivers clear and sweet, flowing east, west, and south,  
the great Northern lakes, deep, crystal and blue,  
and the salty Western lake,  
forests of tall pine-green conifers,  
and acres of emerald deciduous trees,  
the sun-kissed oranges, and the crisp, juicy apples,  
towering superstructures thrusting up, and becoming  
one with the endless blue,  
small cozy cottages nestled in the brown hillsides.

And at long last, when the essence of the thousands of departed  
return to their place in the timeless blackness of eternity,  
I see ebony and ivory melting into wood,  
hawks and doves come together in the quiet stillness of midday,  
the tall stoop and the short stretch,  
and all strive for the common essence that brings  
sweat and smiles.