

ART-TYPE EDITION

LEAVES OF GRASS

By WALT WHITMAN



THE WORLD'S
POPULAR CLASSICS

BOOKS, INC.

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ARTIST EDITION

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BY WALT WHITMAN



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BOOKS, INC.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Broadway Pageant	311
A Child's Amaze	294
A Farm Picture	301
A Glimpse	106
A Hand-Mirror	195
A Leaf for Hand in Hand	108
A Leaf of Faces	154
A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Un- known	299
A Promise to California	106
A Sight in Camp in the Day-Break Grey and Dim	300
A Song	96
A Woman Waits for Me	82
A Word Out of the Sea	147
Ages and Ages, Returning at Intervals	89
Ah Poverties, Wincings, and Sulky Retreats	334
American Feuillage	188
Among the Multitude	109
An Army on the March	336
Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me?	99
As Adam, Early in the Morning	89
As If a Phantom Caress'd Me	264
As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap, Camerado	335
As I Sat Alone by Blue Ontario's Shore	340
As I Walk, Solitary, Unattended	359
As Nearing Departure	358
Assurances	362
As Toilsome I Wander'd Virginia's Woods	309
Bathed in War's Perfume	298
Beat! Beat! Drums!	294
Beginners	258
Beginning My Studies	279
Behold This Swarthy Face	102
Bivouac on a Mountain Side	319

	PAGE
Burial	222
By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame	278
Camps of Green	308
Cavalry Crossing a Ford	271
Chanting the Square Deific	331
City of Orgies	101
City of Ships	296
Come Up from the Fields, Father	295
Crossing Brooklyn Ferry	136
Debris	203
Despairing Cries	203
Did You Ask Dulcet Rhymes from Me?	304
Dirge for Two Veterans	336
Drum-Taps	269
Earth! My Likeness!	108
Elemental Drifts	246
Europe	158
Excelsior	90
Facing West from California's Shores	88
Fast Anchor'd, Eternal, O Love	108
Flag of Stars, Thick-Sprinkled Bunting	315
France	194
From Paumanok Starting I Fly Like a Bird	279
From Pent-Up Aching Rivers	72
Full of Life, Now	110
Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun	301
Great Are the Myths	216
Here, Sailor!	106
Here the Frailest Leaves of Me	106
How Solemn, As One by One	338
Hush'd Be the Camps To-Day	317
Hymn of Dead Soldiers	310
I am He That Aches With Love	89
I Dreamed in a Dream	107
I Hear America Singing	230
I Hear It Was Charged Against Me	104
I Heard You, Solemn-Sweet Pipes of the Organ	333
I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing	102
I Saw Old General at Bay	317
I Sing the Body Electric	74
I Was Looking a Long While	233
In Clouds Descending, in Midnight Sleep	335

	PAGE
In Paths Untrodden	91
Kosmos	201
Leaflets	215
Look Down Fair Moon	316
Long, Too Long, O Land	300
Longings for Home	166
Lo! Victress on the Peaks!	338
Mannahatta	193
Manhattan's Streets I Saunter'd, Pondering	231
Mediums	235
Me Imperturbe	267
Miracles	249
Mother and Babe	297
Native Moments	87
No Labor-Saving Machine	107
Not Heat Flames Up and Consumes	100
Not Heaving from My Ribb'd Breast Only	96
Not My Enemies Ever Invade Me	334
Not the Pilot	264
Not Youth Pertains to Me	320
Now Lift Me Close	268
Now List to My Morning's Romanza	218
Of Him I Love Day and Night	101
Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances	97
Old Ireland	315
O Captain! My Captain!	330
O Hastening Light!	259
O Hymen! O Hymenee	89
O Living Always—Always Dying	105
O Me, Man of Slack Faith So Long!	355
O Me! O Life!	334
O Tan-Faced Prairie-Boy	308
O You Whom I Often and Silently Come	110
Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City	88
One Hour to Madness and Joy	86
On the Beach at Night Alone	265
Others May Praise What They Like	317
Out of the Rolling Ocean, the Crowd	316
Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice	303
Pensive on Her Dead Gazing, I Heard the Mother of All	319
Perfections	258
Picture	203

	PAGE
Picture	264
Pioneers! O Pioneers!	284
Poems of Joys	204
Quicksand Years That Whirl Me I Know Not Whither	289
Race of Veterans	329
Reconciliation	320
Recorders Ages Hence	98
Respondez!	211
Rise, O Days, from Your Fathomless Deepes	292
Roots and Leaves Themselves Alone	99
Salut Au Monde!	111
Savantism	135
Says	202
Scented Herbage of My Breast	91
Shut Not Your Doors to Me, Proud Libraries	271
Sleep-Chasings	236
Solid, Ironical, Rolling Orb	317
So Long!	363
Sometimes with One I Love	109
Song at Sunset	360
Song of the Banner at Day-Break	272
Song of the Broad-Axe	123
Song of the Open Road	169
Spirit Whose Work is Done	330
Spontaneous Me	84
Starting from Paumanok	I
Stronger Lessons	157
Tests	258
That Music Always Round Me	103
That Shadow, My Likeness	109
The Centenarian's Story	279
The City Dead-House	214
The Dresser	289
The Indications	233
The Prairie-Grass Dividing	104
There Was a Child Went Forth	251
The Runner	160
These I, Singing in Spring	95
The Ship	311
The Torch	305
The Veteran's Vision	307
Think of the Soul	260

CONTENTS

xi

	PAGE
This Compost!	228
This Day, O Soul	335
This Moment, Yearning and Thoughtful	104
Thought	159
Thoughts	196
Thoughts	357
To a Certain Cantatrice	179
To a Common Prostitute	145
To a Foil'd Revolter or Revoltress	142
To a Historian	362
To a President	167
To a Pupil	146
To a Stranger	103
To a Western Boy	109
To Get Betimes in Boston Town	143
To Him That Was Crucified	198
To Old Age	199
To One Shortly to Die	199
To Other Lands	168
To Rich Givers	146
To the East and to the West	107
To the Garden, the World	72
To the Leaven'd Soil They Trod	339
To the Sayers of Words	161
To the States	179
To Workingmen	180
To You	194
To You	199
Trickle, Drops	100
Turn, O Libertad	318
Unnamed Lands	200
Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night	297
Visor'd	264
Walt Whitman	14
Walt Whitman's Caution	168
Weave in, Weave in, My Hardy Life	318
We Two Boys Together Clinging	105
We Two—How Long We Were Fool'd	87
What Place is Besieged?	122
What Think You I Take My Pen in Hand?	107
When I Heard at the Close of the Day	98
When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer	291

	PAGE
When I Peruse the Conquer'd Fame	105
When I Read the Book	202
When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd	321
Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now in Hand	93
With Antecedents	133
World, Take Good Notice	317
Year of Meteors	304
Year that Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me	307
Years of the Unperform'd	305
You Felons on Trial in Courts	250
1861	278

STARTING FROM PAUMANOK

1

STARTING from fish-shape Paumanok, where I was born,
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother;
After roaming many lands—lover of populous pavements;
Dweller in Mannahatta, city of ships, my city—or on southern
savannas;
Or a soldier camp'd, or carrying my knapsack and gun—or
a miner in California;
Or rude in my home in Dakotah's woods, my diet meat, my
drink from the spring;
Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds, intervals passing, rapt and happy;
Aware of the fresh free giver, the flowing Missouri—aware of
mighty Niagara;
Aware of the buffalo herds, grazing the plains—the hirsute and
strong-breasted bull;
Of earths, rocks, Fifth-month flowers, experienced—stars, rain,
snow, my amaze;
Having studied the mocking-bird's tones, and the mountain
hawk's,
And heard at dusk the unrival'd one, the hermit thrush from the
swamp-cedars,
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

2

Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
Yourself, the present and future lands, the indissoluble compacts,
riches, mystery,
Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.

This, then, is life;
 Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes and
 convulsions.

How curious! how real!
 Under foot the divine soil—over head the sun.

See, revolving, the globe;
 The ancestor-continent, away, group'd together;
 The present and future continents, north and south, with the
 isthmus between.

See, vast, trackless spaces;
 As in a dream, they change, they swiftly fill;
 Countless masses debouch upon them;
 They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts, institu-
 tions, known.

See, projected, through time,
 For me, an audience interminable.

With firm and regular step they wend—they never stop,
Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions;
One generation playing its part, and passing on,
Another generation playing its part, and passing on in its turn,
With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards me, to listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me.

3

Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian;
 Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
 For you a programme of chants.

Chants of the prairies;
 Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican
 sea;
 Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and
 Minnesota;
 Chants going forth from the centre, from Kansas, and thence,
 equi-distant,
 Shooting in pulses of fire, ceaseless, to vivify all.

4

In the Year 80 of The States,
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this
air,
Born here of parents born here, from parents the same, and
their parents the same,
I, now thirty-six years old, in perfect health, begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
(Retiring back a while, sufficed at what they are, but never for-
gotten,)
I harbor, for good or bad—I permit to speak, at every hazard,
Nature now without check, with original energy.

5

Take my leaves, America! take them South, and take them
North!
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own
offspring;
Surround them, East and West! for they would surround you;
And you precedents! connect lovingly with them, for they con-
nect lovingly with you.

I conn'd old times;
I sat studying at the feet of the great masters:
Now, if eligible, O that great masters might return and study
me!

In the name of These States, shall I scorn the antique?
Why these are the children of the antique, to justify it.

6

Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language-shapers, on other shores,
Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or desolate,
I dare not proceed till I respectfully credit what you have left,
wafted hither:

I have perused it—own it is admirable, (moving awhile among it;)

Think nothing can ever be greater—nothing can ever deserve more than it deserves;

Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it,
I stand in my place, with my own day, here.

Here lands female and male;

Here the heirship and heiress-ship of the world—here the flame of materials;

Here Spirituality, the translatress, the openly-avow'd,

The ever-tending, the finale of visible forms;

The satisfier, after due long-waiting, now advancing,

Yes, here comes my mistress, the Soul.

7

The SOUL!

Forever and forever—longer than soil is brown and solid—
longer than water ebbs and flows.

I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems;

And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality,

For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of my Soul, and of immortality.

I will make a song for These States, that no one State may under any circumstances be subjected to another State; ~~3~~ ~~4~~ ~~5~~

And I will make a song that there shall be comity by day and by night between all The States, and between any two of them;

And I will make a song for the ears of the President, full of weapons with menacing points,

And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces:

And a song make I, of the One form'd out of all;

The fang'd and glittering One whose head is over all;

Resolute, warlike One, including and over all;

(However high the head of any else, that head is over all.)

I will acknowledge contemporary lands;

I will trail the whole geography of the globe, and salute courteously every city large and small;

And employments! I will put in my poems, that with you is
 heroism, upon land and sea—And I will report all heroism
 from an American point of view;
 And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me—for I
 am determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice, to
 prove you illustrious.

I will sing the song of companionship;
 I will show what alone must finally compact These;
 I believe These are to found their own ideal of manly love, indi-
 cating it in me;
 I will therefore let flame from me the burning fires that were
 threatening to consume me;
 I will lift what has too long kept down those smouldering fires;
 I will give them complete abandonment;
 I will write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love;
 (For who but I should understand love, with all its sorrow and
 joy?
 And who but I should be the poet of comrades?)

8

I am the credulous man of qualities, ages, races;
 I advance from the people en-masse in their own spirit;
 Here is what sings unrestricted faith.

Omnes! Omnes! let others ignore what they may;
 I make the poem of evil also—I commemorate that part also;
 I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—And
 I say there is in fact no evil,
 (Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the land,
 or to me, as anything else.)

I too, following many, and follow'd by many, inaugurate a
 Religion—I too go to the wars;
 (It may be I am destin'd to utter the loudest cries thereof, the
 winner's pealing shouts;
 Who knows? they may rise from me yet, and soar above every
 thing.)

Each is not for its own sake;
 I say the whole earth, and all the stars in the sky, are for
 Religion's sake.

I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
 None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough;
 None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how
 certain the future is.

I say that the real and permanent grandeur of These States must
 be their religion;
 Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur;
 (Nor character, nor life worthy the name, without Religion;
 Nor land, nor man or woman, without Religion.)

9

What are you doing, young man?
 Are you so earnest—so given up to literature, science, art, amours?
 These ostensible realities, politics, points?
 Your ambition or business, whatever it may be?

It is well—Against such I say not a word—I am their poet also;
 But behold! such swiftly subside—burnt up for Religion's sake;
 For not all matter is fuel to heat, impalpable flame, the essential
 life of the earth,
 Any more than such are to Religion.

10

What do you seek, so pensive and silent?
 What do you need, Camerado?
 Dear son! do you think it is love?

Listen, dear son—listen, America, daughter or son!
 It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess—and yet
 it satisfies—it is great;
 But there is something else very great—it makes the whole
 coincide;
 It, magnificent, beyond materials, with continuous hands, sweeps
 and provides for all.

11

Know you! to drop in the earth the germs of a greater Religion,
 The following chants, each for its kind, I sing.

My comrade!

For you, to share with me, two greatneses—and a third one,
rising inclusive and more resplendent,

The greatness of Love and Democracy—and the greatness of
Religion.

Melange mine own! the unseen and the seen;

Mysterious ocean where the streams empty;

Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering around me;

Living beings, identities, now doubtless near us, in the air, that
we know not of;

Contact daily and hourly that will not release me;

These selecting—these, in hints, demanded of me.

Not he, with a daily kiss, onward from childhood kissing me,
Has winded and twisted around me that which holds me to him,
Any more than I am held to the heavens, to the spiritual
world,

And to the identities of the Gods, my lovers, faithful and true,
After what they have done to me, suggesting themes.

O such themes! Equalities!

O amazement of things! O divine average!

O warblings under the sun—usher'd, as now, or at noon, or
setting!

O strain, musical, flowing through ages—now reaching hither,
I take to your reckless and composite chords—I add to them,
and cheerfully pass them forward.

12

As I have walk'd in Alabama my morning walk,
I have seen where the she-bird, the mocking-bird, sat on her nest
in the briers, hatching her brood.

I have seen the he-bird also;

I have paused to hear him, near at hand, inflating his throat,
and joyfully singing.

And while I paused; it came to me that what he really sang
for was not there only,

Nor for his mate nor himself only, nor all sent back by the
echoes;

But subtle, clandestine, away beyond,
A charge transmitted, and gift occult, for those being born.

13

Democracy!
Near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and joyfully
singing.

Ma femme!
For the brood beyond us and of us,
For those who belong here, and those to come,
I, exultant, to be ready for them, will now shake out carols
stronger and haughtier than have ever yet been heard upon
earth.

I will make the songs of passion, to give them their way,
And your songs, outlaw'd offenders—for I scan you with kindred
eyes, and carry you with me the same as any.

I will make the true poem of riches,
To earn for the body and the mind, whatever adheres, and goes
forward, and is not dropt by death.

I will effuse egotism, and show it underlying all—and I will be the
bard of personality;
And I will show of male and female that either is but the equal
of the other;
And I will show that there is no imperfection in the present—
and can be none in the future;
And I will show that whatever happens to anybody, it may be
turn'd to beautiful results—and I will show that nothing
can happen more beautiful than death;
And I will thread a thread through my poems that time and
events are compact,
And that all the things of the universe are perfect miracles, each
as profound as any.

I will not make poems with reference to parts;
But I will make leaves, poems, poemets, songs, says, thoughts,
with reference to ensemble:

And I will not sing with reference to a day, but with reference to
all days;
And I will not make a poem, nor the least part of a poem,
but has reference to the Soul;
(Because, having look'd at the objects of the universe, I find
there is no one, nor any particle of one, but has reference
to the Soul.)

14

Was somebody asking to see the Soul?
See! your own shape and countenance—persons, substances,
beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands.

All hold spiritual joys, and afterwards loosen them:
How can the real body ever die, and be buried?

Of your real body, and any man's or woman's real body,
Item for item, it will elude the hands of the corpse-cleaners,
and pass to fitting spheres,
Carrying what has accrued to it from the moment of birth to the
moment of death.

Not the types set up by the printer return their impression,
the meaning, the main concern,
Any more than a man's substance and life, or a woman's sub-
stance and life, return in the body and the Soul,
Indifferently before death and after death.

Behold! the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern
—and includes and is the Soul;
Whoever you are! how superb and how divine is your body, or
any part of it.

15

Whoever you are! to you endless announcements.

Daughter of the lands, did you wait for your poet?
Did you wait for one with a flowing mouth and indicative hand?