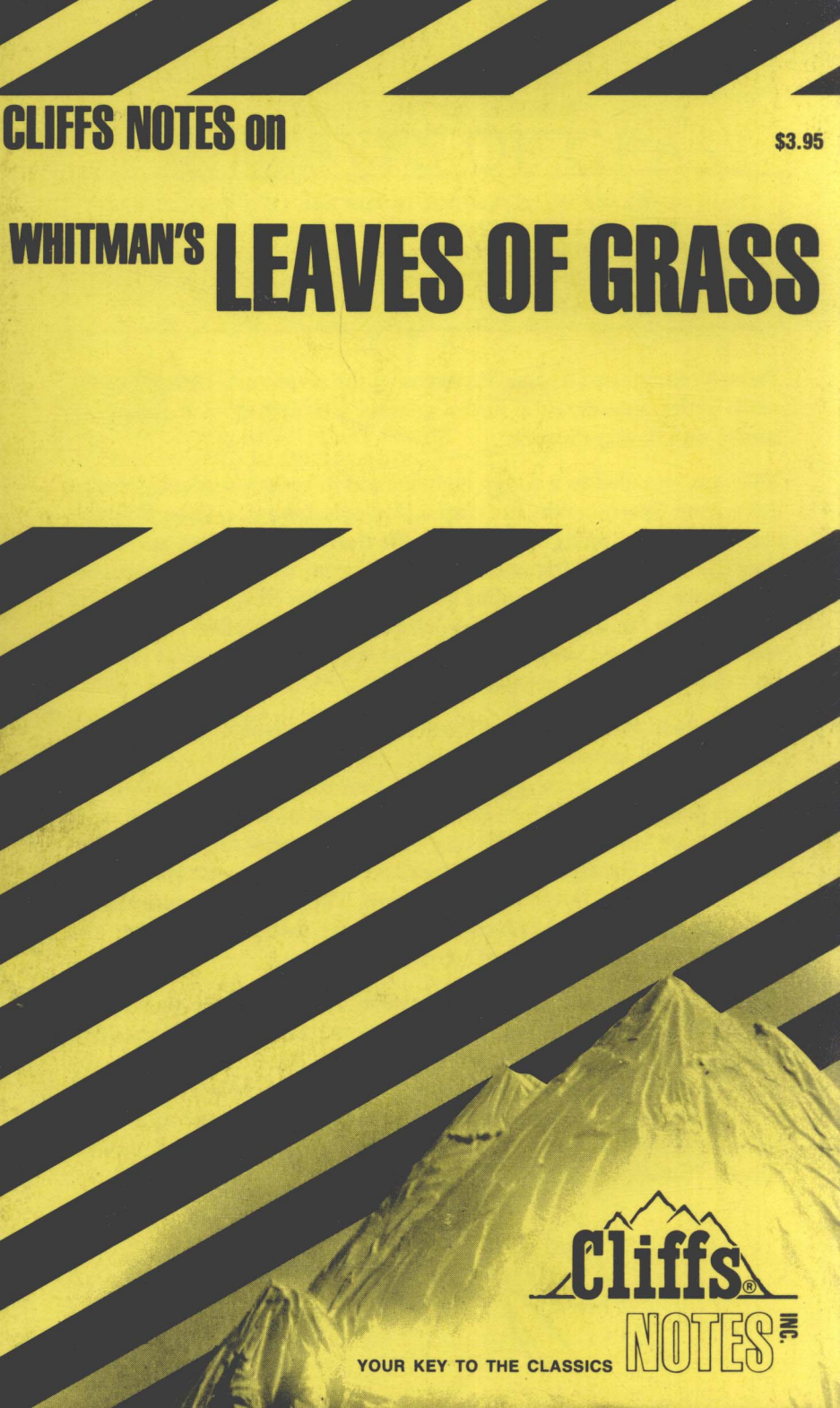


CLIFFS NOTES on

\$3.95

WHITMAN'S LEAVES OF GRASS



Cliffs®
NOTES INC.

YOUR KEY TO THE CLASSICS

A NOTE TO THE READER

THESE NOTES ARE NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE TEXT ITSELF OR FOR THE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT, AND STUDENTS WHO ATTEMPT TO USE THEM IN THIS WAY ARE DENYING THEMSELVES THE VERY EDUCATION THAT THEY ARE PRESUMABLY GIVING THEIR MOST VITAL YEARS TO ACHIEVE.

These Notes present a clear discussion of the action and thought of the work under consideration and a concise interpretation of its artistic merits and its significance.

They are intended as a supplementary aid to serious students, freeing them from interminable and distracting note-taking in class. Students may then listen intelligently to what the instructor is saying, and to the class discussion, making selective notes, secure in the knowledge that they have a basic understanding of the work. The Notes are also helpful in preparing for an examination, eliminating the burden of trying to reread the full text under pressure and sorting through class notes to find that which is of central importance.

These critical evaluations have been prepared by experts who have had many years of experience in teaching the works or who have special knowledge of the texts. They are not, however, incontrovertible. No literary judgments are. There are many interpretations of any great work of literature, and even conflicting views have value for students and teachers, since the aim is not for students to accept unquestioningly any one interpretation, but to make their own. The goal of education is not the unquestioning acceptance of any single interpretation, but the development of an individual's critical abilities.

The experience of millions of students over many years has shown that Notes such as these are a valuable educational tool and, properly used, can contribute materially to the great end of literature (to which, by the way, the teaching of literature is itself only a subsidiary) — that is, to the heightening of perception and awareness, the extending of sympathy, and the attainment of maturity by living, in Socrates' famous phrase, "the examined life."

Absalom, Absalom!
 The Aeneid
 Agamemnon
 Alice in Wonderland
 All the King's Men
 All Quiet on the
 Western Front
 All's Well That Ends
 Well & Merry
 Wives of Windsor
 The American
 American Tragedy
 Animal Farm
 Anna Karenina
 Antony and Cleopatra
 Aristotle's Ethics
 Arrowsmith
 As I Lay Dying
 As You Like It
 The Assistant
 Auto. of Ben Franklin
 Auto. of Malcolm X
 The Awakening
 Babbitt
 The Bear
 The Bell Jar
 Beowulf
 Billy Budd & Typee
 Black Boy
 Black Like Me
 Bleak House
 Brave New World &
 Brave New World
 Revisited
 Brothers Karamazov
 Call of the Wild &
 White Fang
 Candide
 Canterbury Tales
 Catch-22
 Catcher in the Rye
 The Color Purple
 Comedy of Errors,
 Love's Labour's
 Lost & Two
 Gentlemen of
 Verona
 Connecticut Yankee
 Coriolanus & Timon of
 Athens
 The Count of Monte
 Cristo
 Crime and Punishment
 The Crucible
 Cry, the Beloved
 Country
 Cymbeline & Pericles
 Cyrano de Bergerac
 Daisy Miller & Turn of
 the Screw
 David Copperfield
 Death of a Salesman
 The Deerslayer
 Demian
 Diary of Anne Frank

Divine Comedy—I.
 Inferno
 D.C.—II. Purgatorio
 D.C.—III. Paradiso
 Doctor Faustus
 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
 Don Juan
 Don Quixote
 Dracula
 Dune & Other Works
 Emerson's Essays
 Emily Dickinson:
 Selected Poems
 Emma
 Ethan Frome
 Euripides' Electra &
 Medea
 The Faerie Queene
 Far from the Madding
 Crowd
 A Farewell to Arms
 Fathers and Sons
 Faust Pt. 1 & Pt. 2
 The Federalist
 For Whom the Bell
 Tolls
 Frankenstein
 The French Lt.'s
 Woman
 Giants in the Earth
 Glass Menagerie &
 Streetcar
 Go Down, Moses
 The Good Earth
 Grapes of Wrath
 Great Expectations
 Great Gatsby
 Greek Classics
 Gulliver's Travels
 Hamlet
 Hard Times
 Heart of Darkness &
 Secret Sharer
 Henry IV Part 1
 Henry IV Part 2
 Henry V
 Henry VI Parts 1, 2, 3
 Henry VIII
 House of the Seven
 Gables
 Huckleberry Finn
 Ibsen's Plays I, A
 Doll's House &
 Hedda Gabler
 Ibsen's Plays II,
 Ghosts, An Enemy
 of the People &
 The Wild Duck
 The Idiot
 Idylls of the King
 The Iliad
 Invisible Man
 Ivanhoe
 Jane Eyre
 Joseph Andrews

Jude the Obscure
 Julius Caesar
 The Jungle
 Kafka's Short Stories
 Keats & Shelley
 King Lear
 Last of the Mohicans
 Le Morte Darthur
 Leaves of Grass
 Les Miserables
 Light in August
 Lord Jim
 Lord of the Flies
 Lord of the Rings
 Lost Horizon
 Lysistrata & Other
 Comedies
 Macbeth
 Madame Bovary
 Main Street
 Manchild in the
 Promised Land
 Mayor of Casterbridge
 Measure for Measure
 Merchant of Venice
 Middlemarch
 Midsummer Night's
 Dream
 Mill on the Floss
 Miss Lonelyhearts &
 Day of the Locust
 Moby Dick
 Moll Flanders
 Mrs. Dalloway
 Much Ado About
 Nothing
 My Antonia
 Mythology
 Native Son
 New Testament
 Nineteen Eighty-four
 No Exit & The Flies
 Notes from
 Underground
 O'Connor's Short
 Stories
 The Odyssey
 Oedipus Trilogy
 Of Human Bondage
 Of Mice and Men
 Old Man and the Sea
 Old Testament
 Oliver Twist
 One Day in the Life of
 Ivan Denisovich
 One Flew Over the
 Cuckoo's Nest
 100 Years of Solitude
 O'Neill's Plays
 Othello
 Our Town
 Ox-Bow Incident
 Paradise Lost
 A Passage to India
 The Pearl

Pickwick Papers
 Pilgrim's Progress
 The Plague
 Plato's Euthyphro,
 Apology, Crito &
 Phaedo
 Plato's The Republic
 Poe's Short Stories
 Portrait of the Artist
 as a Young Man
 Portrait of a Lady
 Power and the Glory
 The Prelude
 Pride and Prejudice
 The Prince
 The Prince and the
 Pauper
 The Red and the
 Black
 Red Badge of Courage
 Red Pony
 Return of the Native
 Richard II
 Richard III
 Rise of Silas Lapham
 Robinson Crusoe
 Roman Classics
 Romeo and Juliet
 Scarlet Letter
 A Separate Peace
 Shakespeare's
 Sonnets
 Shane
 Shaw's Major Barbara
 & Saint Joan
 Shaw's Man and
 Superman & Caesar
 and Cleopatra
 Shaw's Pygmalion &
 Arms and the Man
 Silas Marner
 Sir Gawain and the
 Green Knight
 Sister Carrie
 Sons and Lovers
 The Sound and the
 Fury
 Steppenwolf &
 Siddhartha
 The Stranger
 The Sun Also Rises
 T. S. Eliot's Major
 Poems and Plays
 Tale of Two Cities
 Taming of the Shrew
 Tartuffe, Misanthrope
 & Bourgeois
 Gentleman
 Tempest
 Tender Is the Night
 Tess of the
 D'Urbervilles

TITLES CONTINUED
 ON BACK COVER

LEAVES OF GRASS

NOTES

including

- *Life and Background*
- *A Whitman Chronology*
- *Critical Commentaries of the Poems*
- *Critical Analysis of Whitman's
Style and Themes*
- *The Quintessential American Poet*
- *Whitman's Achievement*
- *Selected Bibliography*

by

V. A. Shahane, Ph D.

Chairman, Department of English

Osmania University

Hyderabad, India



INCORPORATED

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68501

Editor

*Gary Carey, M.A.
University of Colorado*

Consulting Editor

*James L. Roberts, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Nebraska*

ISBN 0-8220-0723-1

© Copyright 1972

by

Cliffs Notes, Inc.

All Rights Reserved

Printed in U.S.A.

1995 Printing

The Cliffs Notes logo, the names "Cliffs" and "Cliffs Notes," and the black and yellow diagonal-stripe cover design are all registered trademarks belonging to Cliffs Notes, Inc., and may not be used in whole or in part without written permission.

Cliffs Notes, Inc.

Lincoln, Nebraska

CONTENTS

Life and Background	5
A Whitman Chronology	8
Critical Commentaries	
From <i>Inscriptions</i>	10
"One's-Self I Sing"	10
"As I Ponder'd in Silence"	11
"For Him I Sing"	12
"To the States"	12
"I Hear America Singing"	13
"Poets to Come"	13
"To You"	14
"Thou Reader"	14
"Song of Myself"	15
From <i>Children of Adam</i>	25
"To the Garden the World"	26
"Spontaneous Me"	27
"Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals"	28
"As Adam Early in the Morning"	29
From <i>Calamus</i>	29
"In Paths Untrodden"	30
"Scented Herbage of My Breast"	30
"Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand"	31
"When I Heard at the Close of the Day"	32
"Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me?"	33
"Not Heat Flames Up and Consumes"	33
"I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing"	33
"Full of Life Now"	34
"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"	34
"Song of the Broad-Axe"	39
"Pioneers! O Pioneers!"	45
"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"	46
"When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"	48

"Beat! Beat! Drums!"	48
"Cavalry Crossing a Ford"	49
"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"	49
"As Consequent, <i>Etc.</i> "	53
"There Was a Child Went Forth"	54
"Passage to India"	54
"The Sleepers"	59
"To a Locomotive in Winter"	64
"As the Time Draws Nigh"	64
"So Long"	65
"Queries to My Seventieth Year"	66
"America"	66
"Good-Bye My Fancy"	66

Critical Analysis

Form	67
Style	67
Themes	70

The Quintessential American Poet

74

Whitman's Achievement

74

Selected Bibliography

75

Leaves of Grass Notes

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Walt Whitman is both a major poet and an outstanding personality in the history of American literature. He rose from obscurity to monumental fame, coming to be recognized as a national figure. His achievement is great, although it has been sometimes obscured by unfair, hostile criticism—or, conversely, by extravagant praise. He is essentially a poet, though other aspects of his achievement—as philosopher, mystic, or critic—have also been stressed.

Walt Whitman was born in West Hills, Long Island, New York on May 31, 1819. His father, Walter, was a laborer, carpenter, and house builder. His mother, Louisa, was a devout Quaker. In 1823, the family moved to Brooklyn, where Walt had his schooling (1825-30). From 1830 to 1836 he held various jobs, some of them on newspapers in Brooklyn and Manhattan. From 1836 to 1841 he was a schoolteacher in Long Island, despite the paucity of his own education. The division of Whitman's early life between town and country later enabled him to depict both environments with equal understanding and sympathy. He also traveled extensively throughout America, and so could appreciate the various regions of the land.

Between 1841 and 1851 Whitman edited various periodicals and newspapers. It was, apparently, during this period that he began to compose the poems which were later published as *Leaves of Grass*.

In 1862 Walt's brother George was wounded in the Civil War. When Whitman traveled to Virginia to visit him, he saw large numbers of the wounded in hospitals. The Civil War was a major event in Whitman's career, stirring both his imagination

and his sensibility and making him a dresser of spiritual wounds as well as of physical ones as he worked as a volunteer in hospitals. Lincoln's assassination (1865) also moved Whitman deeply, and several poems bear testimony of his intense grief.

In 1865 Whitman was fired from his post in the Department of the Interior in Washington because of the alleged indecency of *Leaves of Grass*. He was hired by the Attorney General's office and remained there until 1873 when he suffered a mild paralytic stroke which left him a semi-invalid. In Whitman's last years (1888-92), he was mostly confined to his room in the house which he had bought in Camden, New Jersey. Two friends, Horace Traubel and Thomas B. Harned, attended him. He died on March 26, 1892. Thus ended the lifelong pilgrimage of the Good Gray Poet (as his contemporary, critic W. D. O'Connor, called him), an immortal in American literature.

Whitman grew into almost a legendary figure, due largely to the charm and magnetism of his personality. Contemporary critics described him as a "modern Christ." His face was called "serene, proud, cheerful, florid, grave; the features, massive and handsome, with firm blue eyes." His head was described as "magedic, large, Homeric, and set upon his strong shoulders with the grandeur of ancient sculpture." These descriptions tend to make Whitman appear almost a mythical personage. But he was very much alive.

Whitman was a being of paradoxes. His dual nature, a profound spirituality combined with an equally profound animality, puzzled even his admirers. John A. Symonds, an English writer, was puzzled by undercurrents of emotional and sexual abnormality in the *Calamus* poems and questioned Whitman on this issue. Whitman's reply (August 19, 1890) is interesting: "My life, young manhood, mid-age, times South, etc., have been jolly bodily, and doubtless open to criticism. Though unmarried I have had six children—two are dead—one living Southern grandchild—fine boy, writes to me occasionally—circumstances... have separated me from intimate relations." But no trace of any children of Whitman's has been found, and it is not unlikely that he merely invented them to stave off further questions.

Whitman was truly a representative of his age and reflected its varied crosscurrents. His poetry shows the impact of the romantic idealism which reached its zenith in the years before the Civil War and also shows something of the scientific realism which dominated the literary scene after 1865. Whitman harmonizes this romanticism and realism to achieve a true representation of the spirit of America. The growth of science and technology in his time affected Whitman deeply, and he responded positively to the idea of progress and evolution. American patriotism in the nineteenth century projected the idea of history in relation to cosmic philosophy: it was thought that change and progress form part of God's design. The historical process of America's great growth was therefore part of the divine design, and social and scientific developments were outward facets of real spiritual progress. Whitman shared in this idea of mystic evolution. *Leaves of Grass* symbolizes the fulfillment of American romanticism as well as of the sense of realistic revolt against it.

Whitman visualized the role of a poet as a seer, as a prophetic genius who could perceive and interpret his own times and also see beyond time. The ideal poet, thought Whitman, portrays the true reality of nature and comprehends and expresses his genuine self. He holds a mirror to his self and to nature; he also illuminates the meaning and significance of the universe and man's relation to it. An ideal poet, he believed, is the poet of man first, then of nature, and finally of God; these elements are united by the poet's harmonious visionary power. Though the poet is concerned primarily with the world of the spirit, he accepts science and democracy within his artistic fold, since these are the basic realities of the modern world, especially that of nineteenth-century America. Recognition of the values of science and democracy is indirectly an acknowledgement of the reality of modern life. Whitman's ideal poet is a singer of the self; he also understands the relation between self and the larger realities of the social and political world and of the spiritual universe. He intuitively comprehends the great mysteries of life—birth, death, and resurrection—and plays the part of a priest and a prophet for mankind.

Leaves of Grass, ever since its first publication in 1855, has been a puzzling collection of poems. It inspires, it enthralls, and it tantalizes—and yet, the problems it poses are numerous and varied. Whitman so completely identified himself with *Leaves* (“This is no book,/Who touches this touches a man”) that critics have tried to find reflections of Whitman’s own life in all the imagery and symbolism of the poems. Whitman did explore and express many aspects of his personality in *Leaves*. It was he himself who created the illusion that he and his poems were identical. Through these works, he found full expression as a poet—and as a man.

The first edition (1855) of *Leaves of Grass* consisted of ninety-five pages. The author’s name did not appear, but his picture was included. By the time the second edition was published in 1856, the volume consisted of 384 pages, with a favorable review by Emerson printed on the back cover. For this edition, Whitman not only added to the text, he also altered the poems which had previously been published. The third edition appeared in 1860 and contained 124 new poems. The fourth edition, published in 1867, was called the “workshop” edition because so much revision had gone into it. It contained eight new poems. The fifth edition (1871) included the new poem “Passage to India.” The sixth edition, in two volumes, appeared in 1876. The seventh edition was published in 1881 and is widely accepted as an authoritative edition today, although the eighth and ninth editions are equally important. The last, which is also called the “deathbed” edition because it was completed in the year of Whitman’s death (1892), represents Whitman’s final thoughts. The text used here will be that of the last, or “deathbed,” edition of 1892. Only the most significant poems of each section of *Leaves of Grass* will be discussed.

A WHITMAN CHRONOLOGY

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1819 | Born May 31 at West Hills, Huntington Township, Long Island, New York. |
| 1823 | Family moved to Brooklyn, New York. |

- 1825-30 Attended public school in Brooklyn.
- 1830-31 Office boy in lawyer's office, then doctor's; then printer's apprentice.
- 1832-36 Various jobs: printer's devil, handyman.
- 1836-41 Schoolteacher in Long Island.
- 1841-47 Reporter and editor for various newspapers. Editor (1846) of *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. Published (1842) *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*, a tract.
- 1848 Discharged from the *Eagle*. Visited New Orleans (worked on New Orleans newspaper) and traveled on the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes.
- 1849 Editor of the *Brooklyn Freeman*, a journal.
- 1850-54 Part-time journalist. Carpenter and house builder in Brooklyn (with father).
- 1855 First edition of *Leaves of Grass* published in July. It contained twelve poems and a prose preface.
- 1856 Second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, containing twenty additional poems.
- 1860 Third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Traveled to Boston to discuss the preparation of this edition with Emerson.
- 1862-63 Went to Virginia to attend brother George, who had been wounded in Civil War. Did volunteer work in government hospitals.
- 1863-73 Lived most of the time in Washington, D.C. Worked for the government.
- 1864 *Drum-Taps* published.
- 1867 Fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1871 Fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Also published *Democratic Vistas* (a prose pamphlet).
- 1873 Suffered mild paralytic stroke. Moved to Camden, New Jersey. Mother died.
- 1876 Sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1879 Traveled to St. Louis to visit his brother Jeff.
- 1881 Visited Boston to prepare the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published that same year.
- 1882 *Specimen Days* published.
- 1884 Bought house in Camden, where he lived the rest of his life.
- 1888 *November Boughs* published.

- 1889 Pocket-size edition of *Leaves of Grass* published for his seventieth birthday.
- 1891-92 Final ("deathbed") edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
- 1892 Died March 26. Buried in Harleigh Cemetery, Camden.

CRITICAL COMMENTARIES

INSCRIPTIONS

The 1871 edition of *Leaves of Grass* contained nine poems classified as *Inscriptions*; the 1881 edition contained twenty-four such poems, including two long ones, "Starting from Pausanias" and "Song of Myself."

The *Inscriptions* are dedicatory poems and form a preface to the main body of *Leaves of Grass*. This group of poems does not, however, indicate any well-thought-out plan or organization — it seems, rather, an improvised prologue. The themes are diverse, the symbolism is varied, and the only thing which really holds the group together is the poet's clear intention to provide a prologue. The lack of unity in theme and the general lack of close-knit organization is partly due to Whitman's continual reclassification of his poems. Some of the poems in *Inscriptions* were at first included with other sections of *Leaves*.

The arrangement of the poems in *Inscriptions* does, however, suggest the general arrangement of *Leaves of Grass*, a natural biographical sequence in which the early poems deal with youth and the later ones with old age and approaching death.

"One's-Self I Sing"

Although the poet sings of the self as "a simple separate person," he also sees it as part of "the word Democratic," which represents the mass of people. He sings of "the Form complete,"

the female as well as the male, of "Life immense in passion, pulse, and power," and the "Modern Man."

This small (nine-line) poem is really a preface to all the others in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman says he will sing of all physiology (the branch of biology dealing with the functions and processes of living organisms), for neither the physiognomy (outward appearance) nor the brain is worthy of being celebrated independently. He lists the subjects and themes he will deal with: "One's-self" (the unit of self or individuality), "physiology . . . the Form complete" (the kinship of the body and the spirit which he will emphasize throughout *Leaves*), and "Life"—in short, the "Modern Man," who, according to Whitman, is conscious of "self" but at the same time is aware of being part of the large mass of democracy.

"As I Ponder'd in Silence"

As the poet meditated on his poetry, a phantom, beautiful but terrible, the muse of ancient poets, appeared before him. The spirit asked him about the themes of his poetry and asserted that it is "the theme of War, the fortune of battles,/The making of perfect soldiers," which are the proper themes for poets. Whitman proudly answered that he, too, dealt with war and victory. But in Whitman's universe, war is waged for "life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul." And so he, too, promotes the cause of "brave soldiers."

Whitman here attempts to establish a correlation between his poetry and traditional poetry. The subjects of Whitman's poetry are not the established themes of traditional poetry, specifically the epic. An epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of a historical, traditional, or legendary hero, with a background of warfare or the supernatural, written in a highly dignified style and following other formal conventions of structure. Whitman's answer to the muse's query makes clear his position. He feels that his poems do satisfy the criteria of the epic, for they deal with the basic and universal problems of man. An epic reflects the main quality of an age, and in this sense Whitman's

Leaves of Grass is an epic poem. Traditional epics deal with war and heroism; Whitman writes about them, but Whitman's wars are eternal and his battlefield is life; the "soldiers" are all of humanity, and their victory is the triumph of the spirit over matter.

"For Him I Sing"

The "him" for whom the poet sings is his ideal man of imagination and vision. "I raise the present on the past," Whitman says, comparing this process to the growth of a tree from its roots. He also depicts, he says, the ideal man's movement in space and in time. He is a "law unto himself."

This poem is cryptic and vague. "Him" is an ambivalent pronoun—no antecedent noun is stated for it. We must infer for whom the poet sings. The person for whom Whitman has greatest admiration is the embodiment of his ideal of personality. He is the thinking man, the man of vision. Whitman believes that the poet is able to unite the past with the present. Past and present are inseparable because they are part of the flow of time. Poetry, like a tree, grows organically and inwardly. The growth of personality is also organic and unified.

This short poem has a symbolic quality, though the poetic utterance is oblique and cryptic. The poet's function in uniting past and present is one of the basic ideas of Whitman's concept of poetry.

"To the States"

The poet calls upon the cities and the states to "*resist much, obey little.*" Unquestioning obedience will lead to slavery, and if a nation is enslaved, it may never regain its freedom.

This is one of the small, though significant, dedicatory poems in *Inscriptions*. Whitman feels that one of the essential features of a free, democratic society is its diversity of opinions. Blind obedience must be resisted, or the state risks losing all its

freedom. Implicit in the concept of obedience is the concept of totalitarianism. The poem suggests the democratic vistas of Whitman's poetic cosmos. The concept of democracy is one of the significant themes of *Leaves of Grass*.

"I Hear America Singing"

The poet hears the "varied carols" of all the people who contribute to the life and culture of America. The mechanic, the carpenter, the mason, the boatman, the shoemaker, and the wood-cutter all join in the chorus of the nation. The singing of the mother, the wife, and the girl at work expresses their joy and their feeling of fruition. These are highly individualistic men and women. Each person sings "what belongs to him or her and to none else."

This poem underscores Whitman's basic attitude toward America, which is part of his ideal of human life. The American nation has based its faith on the creativeness of labor, which Whitman glorifies in this poem. The catalog of craftsmen covers not only the length and breadth of the American continent but also the large and varied field of American achievement. This poem expresses Whitman's love of America—its vitality, variety, and the massive achievement which is the outcome of the creative endeavor of all its people. It also illustrates Whitman's technique of using catalogs consisting of a list of people.

"Poets to Come"

Whitman, addressing poets of the future, declares that this great "new brood" should awake and "justify" him. Conscious of his philosophical limitations, he says that he can "but write one or two indicative words for the future." Since he can turn only "a casual look" upon these artists of the future, he leaves to them the interpretation of his thoughts.

Whitman's consciousness of the inadequacy of language to express the full extent of his thought is revealed in this poem. He says that he can "advance a moment only to wheel and hurry

back in the darkness.” He is aware of the philosophical and metaphysical imperfections of his poetic self. His expectation that future poets will interpret his work for posterity clearly shows that he views the poet as a seer and a builder of the bridge spanning time.

“To You”

Whitman tells the stranger that if their paths cross they should communicate with each other: “Why should you not speak to me? And why should I not speak to you?”

This poem is only two lines long but it is significant in the way it deals with the relationship between the poet and the reader. A late (1881) addition to *Leaves of Grass*, it deals with the problems of communication and understanding between the artist and his audience, the author and the reading public—and between people in general. Whitman believes that all men are related—if strangers want to communicate, they should not let artificial barriers stop them.

“Thou Reader”

Whitman says that the reader “throbbest life and pride and love” in the same way as the poet does; therefore, he offers “the following chants” (*Leaves of Grass*) to him.

This poem was added to *Leaves of Grass* in 1881. Even though, like “To You,” it is only two lines long, it is important because it conveys Whitman’s basic attitude toward his reader. The poet identifies himself with the reader. He emphasizes their common humanity.

“Thou Reader” marks the culmination of the *Inscription* poems. It is notable for its ardor and intensity which, being expressed with such meaningful brevity, make it a fitting prelude to *Leaves of Grass*.