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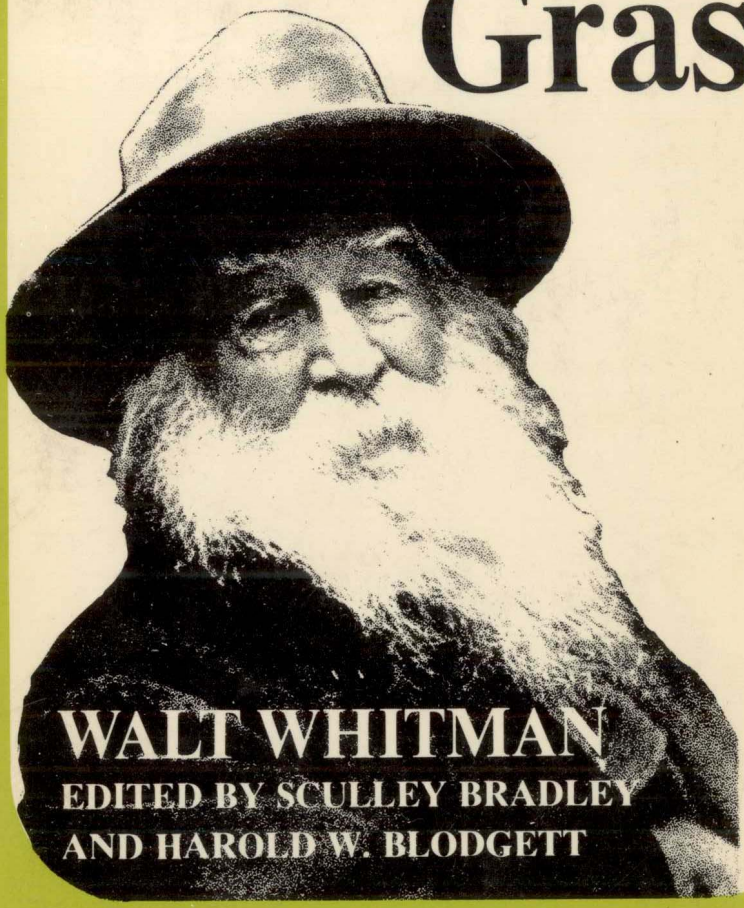
A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Leaves of Grass



WALT WHITMAN

EDITED BY SCULLEY BRADLEY
AND HAROLD W. BLODGETT

AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
WHITMAN ON HIS ART
CRITICISM

A NORTON CRITICAL

WALT WHITMAN

LEAVES OF GRASS

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PREFACES

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Edited by

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PROFESSOR EMERITUS

THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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LEAVES OF GRASS

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Preface

This edition of *Leaves of Grass* presents the whole body of Walt Whitman's poems, together with a wide selection from surviving fragments. The basic text is that of the last and ninth edition, over which Whitman himself presided, with the insistence that all future printings should be a "copy and facsimile" of his final arrangement, arrived at through almost incessant accretion, emendation, and manipulation from the first twelve poems, untitled and unsigned, of the 1855 edition to the authorized 1891–92 edition of three hundred and eighty-nine poems.

The editors have not only honored Whitman's injunction to preserve the authorized text as he left it, but they also present here the forty-five poems and twenty-eight passages from poems which he chose to exclude from his successive editions in the process of developing groups in an order that did not become fixed until he arrived at his seventh edition in 1881. Some of the poems are so impressive in originality and power that the poet may have regretted their exclusion. The editors also present twenty-two poems never before published, forty-three poems posthumously published and here collected for the first time, and sixty fragments of poems selected from manuscript, either intended as additions to poems now in *Leaves of Grass* or composed as parts of poems never to be completed.

In their preparation of the Variorum Edition, the editors verified the 1890–91 text by collation of the texts of all of Whitman's editions, and examined all extant poetic manuscripts. They are able therefore to include in the footnotes of this edition those textual and manuscript variants which throw light upon the interpretation of particular passages. They have also implemented the poet's own statements of intent by printing in this edition, not only the "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" in the position to which the poet first assigned it, but for the first time all of the prefaces, including the 1856 letter to Emerson—all these in their original texts, and showing later variants. The Introduction provides a full account of the growth of *Leaves of Grass*, of the authorized poems, the excluded poems and passages, the un-

collected poems and fragments, the unpublished poems, and the problems of text and manuscript attendant thereto.

Finally, this edition provides a selection of criticism. The editors have brought within the allowable space some thirty essays, selected both because they illustrate a remarkable range and because in themselves they possess excellence. For a history of Whitman's critical fortunes, see Harold Blodgett's essay, "The Critical Response." In addition the editors include, under the title "Whitman on His Art," the poet's own informal comment expressed in adjurations to himself on notebook pages, in letters to friends, in conversations, and in occasional newspaper pieces.

Unlike many poets, Whitman did not engage in formal literary analysis. In fact he was at pains to disavow the "literary," which he associated with the "genteel," and avoided shop talk. But actually he was profoundly engaged with a radical determination to express a new poetry which should be the vehicle of his overpowering vision; and his sense of aesthetic values, set forth so vividly in the 1855 preface, was always sensitive and operative. His manuscripts, of which an example appears in this edition, reveal how constantly he revised, how he tried to follow the severe standards he had proposed for himself—"no ornamental similes at all—not one: perfect transparent clearness sanity, and health. . . ." He was possessed by a vision, a state of mind and feeling that made the words possible, and it was out of the urgency of this vision and his desire to share it with the reader that there came the expressive power for his task. Aesthetics interested him only as the means to his purpose, and his purpose was to reveal the eligibility of his reader for the immortal and the good, not to make a poem for its own sake, although if he succeeded, the poem was worthy for its own sake. Elsewhere Whitman said (see "Starting from Paumanok," lines 131–33) that he shared three greatnesses—Love, Democracy, and Religion.

It is this visionary aspect of Whitman's poetry that survives all the diverse currents of interpretation that have flowed from more than a century of criticism. He himself emphasizes it, not only in the formal pronouncements but in the first anonymous review wherein he boasts that he does not satisfy the reader, but leaves him "the taste of the Paradisaic tree of the knowledge of good and evil, never to be erased again." We have no occasion to expatiate on the essays here printed, but it is notable that the intrinsic quality of Whitman most insisted upon in recent criticism is just this,—his visionary grasp of a world

that, without the redemptive power which he celebrates, is in exceeding peril.

Our indebtedness to others is immense, and we cannot hope to give its full measure. With Charles E. Feinberg and our colleagues on the editorial board we share the aid and strength of a mutual enterprise. We have enjoyed, too, the fullest cooperation and interest of the directors of libraries and the collectors who have Whitman manuscripts and rare editions in their charge. Specific identification of sources is, in each instance, acknowledged in the text, but we particularly wish here to record our appreciation to the following—Library of Congress: Roy P. Basler, Director, Reference Department; Henry J. Dubester, Chief, General Reference and Bibliographical Division; David C. Mearns, Curator of Manuscripts; and C. Carroll Hollis, Specialist in American Cultural History. Duke University Library: Thomas M. Simkins, Curator of Rare Books. University of Virginia: Clifton Waller Barrett, donor of the American Literature Collection; Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., Executive Assistant to the President; and Anne Freudenberg, Acting Curator of Manuscripts. Yale University Library: Donald C. Gallup, Curator, Collection of American Literature. New York Public Library: the late John D. Gordan, Curator, Berg Collection; and Lewis Stark, Chief of the Reserve Division. The late T. Edward Hanley, Bradford, Pennsylvania, whose Whitman MSS are now in the collection of the University of Texas. Henry E. Huntington Library: Herbert C. Schulz, Curator of Manuscripts. Boston Public Library: Zoltan Haraszti, Keeper of Rare Books. Pierpont Morgan Library: Herbert Cahoon, Curator of Autograph MSS. Rutgers University Library: Donald F. Cameron, Director. Brown University Library: Roger E. Stoddard, Assistant Librarian. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Ohio Wesleyan University: Dr. John H. Lancaster, Librarian and Custodian of the William D. Bayley Collection; Ernest F. Amy, Professor Emeritus. University of California: Livezey Collection. Mills College, Oakland, California. Rollins College, Florida.

Particularly, we are sensible of the generous assistance of our own institutions and collaborative agencies in providing financial support for our enterprise, and we wish to express our gratitude: to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for a fellowship to implement the search for manuscripts; to Union College for a succession of grants to assist manuscript collation; to the American Philosophical Society for assistance in the work of collation of texts for the Variorum; to the University of Pennsylvania for annual grants of the Faculty Research Committee and for the assignment of research

assistants during the progress of the entire *Leaves of Grass* editions; to the Rare Book Collection of the University of Pennsylvania for supplying us with first editions, duplicating services, and generous space allocations, and particularly to Dr. Neda M. Westlake, Director of the Rare Book Collection, for her continuous supervision of the research as a special project of the Rare Book Collection, and to Mrs. Susan Baldwin of her staff; to the staff of the Library of Union College, and particularly to the former Librarian, Helmer L. Webb, and the present Librarian, Edwin K. Tolan, for unstinted interest in providing materials and facilities for our project; to Arthur Golden, of City College, New York, for his generous cooperation in furnishing copies of his invaluable diplomatic transcript of Whitman's annotated "Blue Copy" of *Leaves of Grass* 1860.

The editors are fully aware that this listing is inadequate to the proper recognition of the support and encouragement they have received from a host of friends, colleagues, and lovers of poetry, both within and without the professional world of scholarship. It may be accounted as a tribute to America's great poet and as an instance of the largeness of spirit on which he himself relied.

Harold W. Blodgett
Sculley Bradley

The Text of
Leaves of Grass
1891–1892

Leaves of Grass

Including

SANDS AT SEVENTY... *1st Annex*,
GOOD-BYE MY FANCY... *2d Annex*,
A BACKWARD GLANCE O'ER TRAVEL'D ROADS,
and Portrait from Life.

COME, said my Soul,
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)
That should I after death invisibly return,
Or, long, long hence, in other spheres,
There to some group of mates the chants resuming,
(Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,)
Ever with pleas'd smile I may keep on,
Ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here and now,
Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,

Walt Whitman

PHILADELPHIA
DAVID McKAY, PUBLISHER
23 SOUTH NINTH STREET
1891-'2

Soul] First printed in the Christmas number of the New York *Daily Graphic*, Dec., 1874, then in the New York *Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1876, this poem, signed by WW, became the title-page epigraph of LG 1876, LG 1882 (Camden), CPP 1888, and finally LG 1891–2 where it was restored after having disappeared from the title-pages of LG 1881 and 1883–84. Numerous MSS (Barrett, Berg, BPL, Huntington) show elaborate revision. See CW,X,131–4 for earlier versions, originally transcribed by W. S. Kennedy in *The Conservator*, June, 1896.

Introduction

THE GROWTH OF "LEAVES OF GRASS"

In the Variorum Edition, which presents for the first time all the poems of *Leaves of Grass* in chronological order, a full analysis is made of the almost incessant revision, reordering, and augmentation that culminated in the final 1881 arrangement. It is pertinent here briefly to characterize and outline this process, which has often been described by mutually exclusive images—a cathedral constructed from a blueprint in the poet's mind, or a tree growing from year to year, its rings marking the successive editions. A better image is one the poet used in a postcard to his friend William Douglas O'Connor, March 5, 1889, upon sending him the 1888 one-volume *Complete Poems & Prose:* "I can hardly tell why, but feel very positively that if anything can justify my revolutionary attempts & utterances, it is such *ensemble*—like a great city to modern civilization & a whole combined clustering paradoxical identity a man, a woman . . . "

Actually the successive nine editions of the poet's lifetime grew out of his vivid sense of endless materials, a creative pressure welling from profound depths, and a boundless acceptance which expressed itself in an urgent inclusiveness rather than in the artful limits of deliberate design. In franker moments the poet recognized this. In a very late note, December 6, 1891, he speaks of "hackling" at *Leaves of Grass* for *thirty-six* years, of its "cumulous" character, even its "jaggedness." And more than once he testified to his intuitive approach. "I do not suppose," he said, "that I shall ever again have the *afflatus* I had in writing the first *Leaves of Grass*," and he spoke of his experiment as a radical utterance out of the abysms of the Soul. In such phrases Whitman was describing the workings of the creative mind, which plans and constructs indeed with the impassioned power of discovery.

The poet was receptive to its promptings. He had to wait upon the event, and in his case, the event was the whole life of his nation. So Whitman was surely justified in insisting upon identifying the growth of his *Leaves* with the growth of his country. He had new things to say, new approaches, shifts of insight and mood as he and his land developed: "as I have lived in fresh lands, inchoate, and in a revolutionary age, future-founding," he wrote in his 1876 Preface, "I have felt to identify the points of that age, these lands, in my recitatives . . . Within my time the United States have emerg'd from nebu-

lous vagueness and suspense, to full orbic, (though varied) decision . . . Out of that stretch of time . . . my Poems too have found genesis."

Here, in outline summary, is the record: The twelve poems of *LG* 1855, in which the introductory poem, to be called "Song of Myself," is longer than the other eleven poems taken together, boldly eschew all distinction of title, and indeed the whole design seems to emphasize the singleness of the poet's song—variations upon one utterance. In the second edition, *LG* 1856, Whitman began to count his poems. He added twenty—among them some of his best—and in his exuberant letter to Emerson, really his 1856 Preface, he boasts that he will keep on until he has made a hundred and then several hundred, perhaps a thousand! He also fashioned titles, some absurdly long, some reduced to a syllable—"Clef Poem," or "Bunch Poem." It was an odd and yet arresting table of contents from a writer uncommitted to a pattern.

Within the next four years his now intense creative energy produced no less than 124 poems for his third edition, *LG* 1860, making 156 in all; and yet at the same time he was hopefully pondering, as a kind of "wander-teacher," a program of lectures corresponding with his *Leaves*, to reach his countrymen if his poems should not. *LG* 1860 was the first to display a group arrangement of sorts, emphasized by eccentric typography; and yet an examination of his manuscripts shows (*vide* Bowers) that probably as late as 1859 Whitman had had no decisive intention whatever of dividing his poems into groups. The compelling factor was his sudden focusing upon two special themes, and later a third: the celebration of comradeship in "Calamus," of procreation in "Children of Adam," and of the nation at war in *Drum-Taps*. Such new demands led the poet to observe (in the *Saturday Press*, January 7, 1860) that *Leaves of Grass* had not yet really been published at all—he was slowly trying his hand at the structure he had undertaken. And these three groups did possess a homogeneity so vital that through all succeeding editions they remained essentially undisturbed by the considerable shifting to which the poet subjected them—so considerable, indeed, that only thirty-eight of the seventy-one pieces in the 1865–1866 *Drum-Taps* and "Sequel to Drum-Taps" were held in place, thirty-three poems being eventually dispersed into no less than nine other groups. To return to the third edition, its remaining clusters—the remarkable "Chants Democratic," the numbered "Leaves of Grass," and the "Messenger Leaves" demonstrated no survival value *as groups*, and so disappeared. The poet had no certain structural plan, and this uncertainty, deepening under the perturbation of a personal crisis, even led him, in three of the 1860 poems, to question whether he should go on.

But of course he was bound to go on, and plans multiplied. Late in 1860 his Boston publisher announced a separate volume, *Banner at Daybreak*, but it never appeared. In an MS draft of an unpublished preface originally dated May 31, 1861, the poet complained, "the paths to the house are made, but where is the house itself?" But when presently the poems of *Drum-Taps* began to form under the immediate stress of war, the poet grew in confidence. "I

must be continually bringing out poems—now is the hey day," he wrote on November 17, 1863, to his publisher, Eldridge, and much of his creative concentration may be sensed from the annotations that crowd the pages of his third edition toward his next. Fortunately these annotations are extant in the *LG* 1860 "Blue Copy," now in the Lion Collection—the very volume, WW averred, (Traubel, III, 474) which James Harlan, secretary of the Interior, had surreptitiously examined before he dismissed the poet from his Washington clerkship. "Transfer to Drum-Taps?" the poet questions at the top of a page, or "Out—out altogether" he scrawls in the margin of others, and some annotations indicate that he was pondering still other volumes or groupings under such titles as "Leaves-Droppings" or "Pioneers."

The book *Drum-Taps* (1865), turning upon the pivotal issue of the Civil War, was very important to the poet both as document and as art, and with its "Sequel" (1865–1866), he began the practice of developing supplements with their own pagination, to be bound up with the parent volume or issued separately. In August, 1866, he wrote to Abby Price of going to New York to bring out a new and much better edition of *Leaves of Grass*—"that unkillable work." This was to be the fourth edition of 1867, which he designated in the Bucke biography as beginning the order and classification eventually settled upon. Yet this order, more flexible than in *LG* 1860, is notably casual, and not so much an advance in thematic sequence as in variety of content. The supplements—now augmented by "Songs Before Parting"—were so variously combined with the major text that *LG* 1867 exists in four different forms. Of the various groupings, only "Calamus" and "Children of Adam" were "clusters" in Whitman's sense of that word: only these fifty-six poems, exclusive of the supplements, possessed an unmistakable consistency of theme. Seventy-six of the other poems were distributed among untitled groups, and the remaining twenty-six were arranged in a series of four "Leaves of Grass" groups and one group of "Thoughts," carried over intact from the "Thoughts" of 1860. No patent unity of theme distinguished the "Leaves of Grass" groups—the title being a mere convenience—and in later editions the poems comprising them were thoroughly scattered.

With all its supplements, *LG* 1867 included 236 poems, only fifty-seven short of the 293 which were to compose the final arrangement of 1881. And very soon—as early as May, 1869—Whitman began to hint of his final edition, and of turning to religious themes. These speculations occupied his thoughts in both the 1872 and 1876 Prefaces: *Leaves of Grass* he felt to be as complete as he could make it, and its "surplusage" might become a supplementary volume, the voice—as he wrote in 1872—of "a composite, electric, democratic personality," or—as he put it in 1876—"of those convictions which make the unseen Soul govern absolutely at last."

These aims, really explicit from the first, were purposefully stressed in later poems—superbly so in "Passage to India"—but the structural problem was not solved. Indeed it could not be. Instead there was the improvising of an arrange-

ment for a body of work already largely complete. The 1871 *Leaves of Grass*, with only nine new poems, was formed into twenty-two groups, sixteen of them titled—some simply as "Leaves of Grass"—and the other six untitled. The 1871 pamphlet *Passage to India*, with only twenty-two of its seventy-four poems new, was formed into six titled groups and three untitled, the poet at once binding it in as a supplement in LG 1872.

Five years after the 1871 edition appeared LG 1876, identical except for a few intercalations. Its companion volume, *Two Rivulets*, was a medley of prose, fourteen new poems under the "Two Rivulets" title, four "Centennial Songs," seven poems under the title piece, "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free," and the 1871 collection, *Passage to India*. Undoubtedly Whitman had made a practical solution of the problem of arranging a two-volume edition to signalize the centennial year, but his perplexity had been pressing. A notebook belonging to the mid-1870's addresses questions to himself: "Qu—whether to make a new Vol of these pieces including *Whispers of Heavenly Death?*—qu—whether to finish up *Leaves of Grass* in one Vol—*Drum-Taps* in another . . . —*Whispers* etc in another."

The questions ended in mid-air, but the poet now resolved to end his problem by a thorough reshuffling of all his poems into the final arrangement of 1881, a process in which several group titles (some very good, for Whitman had a gift for titles) disappear, their contents absorbed into the surviving groups. The cluster "Inscriptions," first faintly suggested in 1867, is an appropriate introduction, although certain announcement poems elsewhere are quite as inscriptive as these. Such groups as "Birds of Passage," "By the Roadside," "Autumn Rivulets," and "From Noon to Starry Night" do possess a casual consonance of theme, but attempts to demonstrate a rule of logical continuity in them are embarrassed by too many exceptions. On the other hand, two of the groups carrying over from *Passage to India*—"Sea-Drift" (formerly "Sea-Shore Memories") and "Whispers of Heavenly Death" are very closely knit, and so is the final group "Songs of Parting," sounding a farewell with poems that had appeared over a period of more than twenty years. The sense of departure had haunted Whitman's pages ever since "So Long!" had closed the 1860 edition. For the rest, there are the three stalwarts—"Children of Adam," "Calamus," and "Drum-Taps," together with the twenty-five major poems to which the poet gave the importance of standing by themselves. Perhaps it should be noted that in this whole process not only have groups constantly shifted, but also the poems within the groups, so that a given poem may have appeared in three or four different groups from 1860 to 1881. There was to be no more shifting, but there would be addition: the sixty-five poems of "Sands at Seventy," first separately published in *November Boughs* (1888), and the thirty-one poems of "Goodbye My Fancy," first separately published in 1891. Both "annexes" were to round out the 1891–1892 edition, the poet's sole authorized text.

This is the poet's structure—neither the "Leaves" in the order of their

growth nor the cathedral of prefigured design. These figures were ideals which gave solace and strength to a task which had often to face a bleak reality of contingency and crisis. Certain comment, arguing from the 1881 arrangement, has attributed to Whitman a prescience which robs him of his true stature. It is just as erroneous to argue, as some critics have, that the poet's constant revisions, shiftings, and insertions betray indecisiveness or uncertainty. There is never any doubt of a purpose kept consciously in view, an aim never deviated from; nor is there doubt that Whitman intended and achieved structure. Still, it was a structure that grew as the poet grew, that was adapted to the necessities he met and molded by the pressures his own life felt—its materials altered, added to, subtracted from, transposed as time and need required. And so it was alive. The construction of *Leaves of Grass* is best to be regarded, not as a hierarchic system of themes, but as resourceful editing by a man who was obliged to be his own publisher for most of his life, who serenely confronted a hostile literary market, who enjoyed little benefit of professional advice, and who nevertheless essentially achieved what he had set out to do. It took resolution—the resolution of the poet who told himself, "Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find."

THE POEMS OF THE CANON

Yet in one's absorption with the tortuous process by which the poet arrived at his final structure—the preferred and authorized text of 1891–1892—one should not fail to acknowledge the impressive and, on the whole, triumphal advance of the poet's genius in its hard-won path.

To begin in 1855 with "Song of Myself," untitled and in no signal way distinguished from its accompanying eleven poems, was directly to assert without skirmish or equivocation the basic theme of this poet's creative intent: to improve and transform life (the poet as maker and reformer), to discern and set forth its miraculousness (the poet as celebrator), and to sing the transcendence of human love, envisioned as divine (the poet as lover). The companion poems of the first edition were—as in a sense were also the future poems of *Leaves of Grass*—an extension of the prime purpose, celebration of the individual, of the nation, and of spiritual possibility. So, for example, we have (employing the final titles) "A Song for Occupations," the poem of daily work which in later editions was to undergo severe revision; "To Think of Time," also to be much revised but even now strongly anticipating "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" in its poignant concern with time and death; "The Sleepers," powerfully original in imaginative grasp—a twentieth century poem in its penetration into subconscious states; "I Sing the Body Electric," an announcement poem, really, for what was to be one of the great groups of the third edition; "Faces," of audacious imagery, limning both the victorious and the broken; "Song of the Answerer," to be fused later with a kindred poem largely derived from the 1855 Preface; and "There was a Child Went Forth," simple and profound in its

Lockean grasp of the relation of experience to knowledge.

His ambition undaunted by massive indifference toward his first edition, the poet prefaced his second by the brash exuberance of his "Dear Master" letter to Emerson—a kind of *Democratic Vistas* in embryo, calling for identity, for national character, and individuality. He now had twenty new poems to strengthen his poetic evangelism, and remarkable poems some of them were, including the strange "Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness" (later "Respondez!"), which he was to exclude, retaining two passages as mementos of a passionate deviation into irony. Four of the poems derive much of their being from the poetic storehouse of the 1855 Preface—notably the somewhat confused "Poem of Many in One" ("By Blue Ontario's Shore"), which elaborates the thesis of the American Bard for America, an outburst to be greatly modified in later editions; and "Poem of the Last Explanations of Prudence" ("Song of Prudence"), an Emersonian meditation on value.

Other salient—and successful—compositions are "Poem of Salutation" ("Salut au Monde!"), a vigorously expressive recognition of the peoples of the earth, their cultures and religions; the assuring and intimate "To You"; the buoyant "Poem of the Road" ("Song of the Open Road"), the most famous of the invitation poems; and "Broad-Axe Poem" ("Song of the Broad-Axe"), with its flawless opening lines and its evocation of the shapes of America, among which the poet at first included himself. Two of the bold new poems, "A Woman Waits for Me" and "Spontaneous Me," were to find their fitting place in the "Enfans d'Adam" of the third edition. But the most beautiful poem of the second edition was "Sun-Down Poem" ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"), with its descriptions of the "glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings," and its vision, penetrating beyond time and appearance to an eternal and changeless reality.

The thirty-two poems of the first two editions were a prelude to an extraordinary burst of creative energy in the next three years. Indeed by June, 1857 (the date is surmised by Dr. Bucke), WW made a cryptic reference to "the three hundred and sixty-five" as the goal he had set himself for the "Great Construction of the New Bible" (*N and F*, p. 57). Whether the figure refers to poems or days, we do not know, but in a letter of the following July 20 he speaks of wanting to bring out a third edition, for which he already has a hundred poems. We know, too, from manuscript evidence that even before this date he was working on poems that were to appear in *LG* 1860. His failure to publish his third edition in 1857 may be attributed to a number of reasons —perhaps his absorption in the editorship of the *Brooklyn Times*, perhaps the difficulty of finding a publisher in a year of business depression, perhaps his own financial straits. At any rate it seems fortunate, in retrospect, that Thayer and Eldridge were not to make the enthusiastic offer that eventuated in the third edition until February 10, 1860, for early in 1859 the poet experienced another access of poetic energy whose source seems to be a profound need that changed the current of his important opening poem, "Proto-Leaf" ("Starting