A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Walt Whitman
LEAVES OF GRASS
AND OTHER WRITINGS

AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
OTHER POETRY AND PROSE
CRITICISM

Edited by
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An expanded and revised edition based on the
Norton Critical Edition of Leaves of Grass, edited by

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Whoever you are, come forth! or man or woman come forth!
You must not stay sleeping and dallying there in the house,
though you built it, or though it has been built for you.

Out of the dark confinement! out from behind the screen!
It is useless to protest, I know all and expose it.

Behold through you as bad as the rest,
Through the laughter, dancing, dining, supping, of people,
Inside of dresses and ornaments, inside of those wash'd and
trimm'd faces,
Behold a secret silent loathing and despair.

No husband, no wife, no friend, trusted to hear the confession,
Another self, a duplicate of every one, skulking and hiding it
goes,
Formless and wordless through the streets of the cities, polite
and bland in the parlors,
In the cars of railroads, in steamboats, in the public assembly,
Home to the houses of men and women, at the table, in the
bedroom, everywhere,
Smartly attired, countenance smiling, form upright, death
under the breast-bones, hell under the skull-bones,
Under the broadcloth and gloves, under the ribbons and
artificial flowers,
Keeping fair with the customs, speaking not a syllable of itself,
Speaking of any thing else but never of itself.

Allons! through struggles and wars!
The goal that was named cannot be countermanded.

Have the past struggles succeeded?
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of
things that from any fruition of success, no matter what,
shall come forth something to make a greater struggle
necessary.

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry
enemies, desertions.

Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe—I have tried it—my own feet have tried it well—be
not detained!

Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on
the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain
unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in
the court, and the judge expound the law.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

1

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you
also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how
curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross,
returning home, are more curious to me than you
suppose,
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are
more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might
suppose.

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours
of the day,

1. This was the "Sun-Down Poem" of the second edition, the most distinguished of the new
poems of 1856, taking its present title in 1860. It is possible that WV began its composition
even before the first edition went to press, for many of its lines are entered into one of his
notebooks of the period. See An 1855—56 Notebook Toward the Second Edition of Leaves of
The revisions through the various editions—some fourteen lines were dropped and quite a
number of phrases amended—reveal the constant improvement in a composition whose first
version evidenced mastery of artful power. With exalted and sustained inspiration the poet
presents a transcendent reality unlimited by the tyranny of time or person or space, a poetic
demonstration of the power of appearances—"dumb, beautiful ministers"—to affirm the
soul. Philosophical in theme, the poem is yet profoundly personal—his own daily experience
made illustrious—and its strength lies in its aesthetic vision. For a detailed analysis, see
Stanley K. Coffman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry: A Note on the Catalogue Technique in
Whitman's Poetry." MP 51: 225—32. Also helpful are M. Wynn Thomas, The Lunar Light
of Whitman's Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 92—123; and James
Dougherty, Whittier Whitman and the Citizen's Eye (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
Press, 1995), 143—54.
The simple, compact, well-join’d scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
The similitudes of the past and those of the future,
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and
hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over
the river,
The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far
away,
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,
The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to
shore.
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and
the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,
Others will see the islands large and small;
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun
half an hour high,
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence,
others will see them,
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the
falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

3
It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so
many generations hence,
Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the
bright flow, I was refresh’d,
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift
current, I stood yet was hurried,
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the
thick-stem’d pipes of steamboats, I look’d.

I too many and many a time cross’d the river of old,
Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the
air floating with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,
Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and
left the rest in strong shadow,
Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward
the south,
Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,

Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape
of my head in the sunlit water,
Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,
Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,
Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at
anchor,
The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender
serpentine pennants,
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their
pilot-houses,
The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl
of the wheels,
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the laded cups, the
frolicsome crests and glistening,
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls
of the granite storehouses by the docks,
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely
flank’d on each side by the barges, the hay-boat, the
belated lighter,
On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys
burning high and glaringly into the night,
Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and
yellow light over the tops of houses, and down into the
clefts of streets.

4
These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,
I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,
The men and women I saw were all near to me,
Others the same—others who look back on me because I
look’d forward to them,
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

5
What is it then between us?
What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between
us?

Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place
avails not,
I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,
I too walk’d the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the
waters around it,
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,

2. W.W.’s use of the Quaker designation for the days and months often produced a more musical
phrase.

3. An aureole available to anyone.
In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,
In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me,
I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,
I too had receiv'd identity by my body,
That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my body.

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
The dark threw its patches down upon me also,
The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious,
My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?
Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting,
Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,
Was call'd by my highest name by clear loud voices of young men as they saw me approaching or passing,
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly, yet never told them a word,
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping.
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,
Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

Closer yet I approach you,
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance,
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Who was to know what should come home to me?
Who knows but I am enjoying this?

Who knows for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than masts-hem'm'd Manhattan?
River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?
What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me promptly and loudly by my highest name as I approach?
What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?
Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?

We understand then do we not?
What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplish'd, is it not?

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me,
or the men and women generations after me!
Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!
Stand up, tall masts of Manhattan! stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!
Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!
Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my highest name!
Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!
Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;
Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with the hastening current;
Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;

4. For lines 89-91, cf. endings of "Song of Myself" and "So Long."
Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till
all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!
Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or
any one’s head, in the sunlit water!
Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-
sail’d schooners, sloops, lighters!
Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower’d at sunset!
Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at
nightfall! cast red and yellow light over the tops of the
houses!
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,
You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our
divinest aromas,
Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and
sufficient rivers,
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,
Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.
You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful
ministers,
We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate hence-
forward,
Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold
yourselves from us,
We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you
permanently within us,
We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you
also,
You furnish your parts toward eternity,
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

1856

1881

1. For the 1881 edition this poem was created from what had been two separate poems, the
first section having originally been one of the twelve untitled poems of the first edition,
becoming "Poem of the Poet" in the second edition, "Leaves of Grass" No. 3 in the third,
and in the fourth "Now List to My Morning Romanza," a title taken from the then added
two-line opening passage, and retained until the second section and present title were added
in 1881. The second section began in 1856 as "Poem of The Singers and of The Words of
Poems" became "Leaves of Grass" No. 6 in the third edition, and "The Indications" in the
fourth, fifth, and sixth editions, until in 1881 it took its present position. The joining of the
two poems is obviously appropriate, for the Poet of the second section is the Answerer of
the first; and in fact the two were consecutive in the editions of 1871 and 1876. As it now
stands, the composition is the result of not a little revision. From the first section the last
four lines were dropped in 1867, and some lines of the second section were adapted from
the 1855 Preface.
2. Italian: ballad or air.