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WALT WHITMAN

1819 - 1892

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Born on Long Island in New York, became office boy age 11, then a printer, teacher, journalist and editor. Reads "SELF-RELIANCE" by Emerson -- "I was simmering, simmering, and Emerson brought me to a boil." Publishes first edition of his LEAVES OF GRASS, 1855, continues to enlarge and expand the book for the rest of his life, "Sands at Seventy", "Old Age Echoes". Serves as clerk in Washington D.C. during Civil War, volunteer hospital visitor for wounded. Elegy on death of Abraham Lincoln 1865, "When Lilacs Last In the Dooryard Bloom'd". Paralytic stroke 1873, left Washington to live in Camden, New Jersey until the end. "DEMOCRATIC VISTAS" and "SPECIMEN DAYS", two prose works.



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On 1855 edition of LEAVES OF GRASS:

Dear Sir:

I am not blind to the worth of the wonder gift of "LEAVES OF GRASS." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit & wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy...

I give you joy of your free & brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delighted us, & which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying & encouraging.

R. W. EMERSON

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Whitman himself wrote 3 anonymous reviews of LEAVES OF GRASS at end of 1855: "An American bard at last!" in UNITED STATES REVIEW -- "Politeness this man has none, and regulation he has none. A rude child of the people! - No imitation - no foreigner - but a growth and idiom of America" in BROOKLYN DAILY TIMES. "The most glorious of triumphs, in the known history of literature" in AMERICAN PHRENOLOGICAL JOURNAL.

*Wm. T. Barham*