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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Walt Whitman
LEAVES OF GRASS
AND OTHER WRITINGS



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
OTHER POETRY AND PROSE
CRITICISM

Edited by

MICHAEL MOON

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

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

SCULLEY BRADLEY and HAROLD W. BLODGETT
LATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LATE OF UNION COLLEGE



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Perennial roots, tall leaves, O the winter shall not freeze you
 delicate leaves,
 Every year shall you bloom again, out from where you retired
 you shall emerge again;
 O I do not know whether many passing by will discover you or
 inhale your faint odor, but I believe a few will;
 O slender leaves! O blossoms of my blood! I permit you to tell
 in your own way of the heart that is under you,
 O I do not know what you mean there underneath yourselves,
 you are not happiness,
 You are often more bitter than I can bear, you burn and sting
 me,
 Yet you are beautiful to me you faint tinged roots, you make
 me think of death,
 Death is beautiful from you, (what indeed is finally beautiful
 except death and love?)
 O I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of
 lovers, I think it must be for death,
 For how calm, how solemn it grows to ascend to the
 atmosphere of lovers,
 Death or life I am then indifferent, my soul declines to prefer,
 (I am not sure but the high soul of lovers welcomes death
 most,)
 Indeed O death, I think now these leaves mean precisely the
 same as you mean,
 Grow up taller sweet leaves that I may see! grow up out of my
 breast!
 Spring away from the conceal'd heart there!
 Do not fold yourself so in your pink-tinged roots timid leaves!
 Do not remain down there so ashamed, herbage of my breast!
 Come I am determin'd to unbare this broad breast of mine, I
 have long enough stifled and choked;
 Emblematic and capricious blades I leave you, now you serve
 me not,
 I will say what I have to say by itself,
 I will sound myself and comrades only, I will never again utter
 a call only their call,
 I will raise with it immortal reverberations through the States,
 I will give an example to lovers to take permanent shape and
 will through the States,
 Through me shall the words be said to make death
 exhilarating,
 Give me your tone therefore O death, that I may accord with it,
 Give me yourself, for I see that you belong to me now above
 all, and are folded inseparably together, you love and
 death are,
 Nor will I allow you to balk me any more with what I was
 calling life,
 For now it is convey'd to me that you are the purports
 essential,

That you hide in these shifting forms of life, for reasons, and
 that they are mainly for you,
 That you beyond them come forth to remain, the real reality,
 That behind the mask of materials you patiently wait, no
 matter how long,
 That you will one day perhaps take control of all,
 That you will perhaps dissipate this entire show of appearance,
 That may-be you are what it is all for, but it does not last so
 very long,
 But you will last very long.
 1860 1881

Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand⁴

Whoever you are holding me now in hand,
 Without one thing all will be useless,
 I give you fair warning before you attempt me further,
 I am not what you supposed, but far different.

Who is he that would become my follower?
 Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?

The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,
 You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be
 your sole and exclusive standard,
 Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
 The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the
 lives around you would have to be abandon'd,
 Therefore release me now before troubling yourself any
 further, let go your hand from my shoulders,
 Put me down and depart on your way.

Or else by stealth in some wood for trial,
 Or back of a rock in the open air,
 (For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in
 company,
 And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead,)
 But just possibly with you on a high hill, first watching lest
 any person for miles around approach unawares,
 Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on the beach of the sea
 or some quiet island,

4. This poem, the third of the 1860 "Calamus" group, underwent no substantial change after taking its present title in 1867, although in his 1860 ms revisions the poet had considered the title "These leaves conning, you con at peril." In the role of prophet or redeemer, the poet makes his absolute demands upon his followers, offering challenges rather than assurances. For more on this poem, see Allen Grossman, "Whitman's 'Whoever You Are, Holding Me Now in Hand': Remarks on the Endlessly Repeated Rediscovery of the Incommensurability of the Person," in Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman, eds., *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 112–22.

Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,
 With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss or the new husband's
 kiss, 20
 For I am the new husband and I am the comrade.

Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,⁵
 Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip,
 Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
 For thus merely touching you is enough, is best, 25
 And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried
 eternally.

But these leaves conning you con at peril,
 For these leaves and me you will not understand,
 They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will
 certainly elude you,
 Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught
 me, behold! 30
 Already you see I have escaped from you.

For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book,
 Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it,
 Nor do those know me best who admire me and vauntingly
 praise me,
 Nor will the candidates for my love (unless at most a very few)
 prove victorious, 35
 Nor will my poems do good only, they will do just as much
 evil, perhaps more,
 For all is useless without that which you may guess at many
 times and not hit, that which I hinted at;
 Therefore release me and depart on your way.
 1860 1881

For You O Democracy⁶

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
 I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
 I will make divine magnetic lands,
 With the love of comrades,
 With the life-long love of comrades. 5

5. The poet identifies himself with his book in the first 26 lines; however, in lines 27–38 he becomes the commentator.

6. In 1860 this poem was part of "Calamus" No. 5, a fifteen-stanza poem of forty-two lines. In 1865 lines from the first twelve stanzas were rearranged, with additions, to make the *Drum-Taps* poem "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice"; in 1867 the present poem was made from the last three stanzas, with the repetend added, and entitled "A Song." Under this title it again appeared in 1871 and 1876, and with the present title in 1881. In 1902 the first twelve stanzas in their original form were reprinted among the "Rejected Poems" under the title, "[States]," *q.v.* below: "Poems Excluded from *Leaves of Grass*."

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of
 America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all
 over the prairies,
 I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each
 other's necks,
 By the love of comrades,
 By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme! 10
 For you, for you I am trilling these songs.
 1860 1881

These I Singing in Spring⁷

These I singing in spring collect for lovers,
 (For who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow
 and joy?
 And who but I should be the poet of comrades?)
 Collecting I traverse the garden the world, but soon I pass the
 gates,
 Now along the pond-side, now wading in a little, fearing not
 the wet, 5
 Now by the post-and-rail fences where the old stones thrown
 there, pick'd from the fields, have accumulated,
 (Wild-flowers and vines and weeds come up through the
 stones and partly cover them, beyond these I pass,)
 Far, far in the forest, or sauntering later in summer, before I
 think where I go,
 Solitary, smelling the earthy smell, stopping now and then in
 the silence,
 Alone I had thought, yet soon a troop gathers around me, 10
 Some walk by my side and some behind, and some embrace
 my arms or neck,
 They the spirits of dear friends dead or alive, thicker they
 come, a great crowd, and I in the middle,
 Collecting, dispensing, singing, there I wander with them,
 Plucking something for tokens, tossing toward whoever is near
 me,
 Here, lilac, with a branch of pine, 15
 Here, out of my pocket, some moss which I pull'd off a live-
 oak in Florida as it hung trailing down,
 Here, some pinks and laurel leaves, and a handful of sage,
 And here what I now draw from the water, wading in the
 pond-side,

7. The antecedent of "These" is apparently the "tokens" (line 14) that the poet collects for lovers, but of them all only the calamus root, drawn from the water by the pond-side, possesses a special significance for those who "love as I myself am capable of loving." In his 1860 mis emendations, WW considered, but fortunately abandoned, the sentimental title, "As I walk alone at candlelight." The poem took its present title in 1867 and remained unchanged thereafter.