

Chapter 1 : Editions of Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman

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Problems playing these files? The first edition was very small, collecting only twelve unnamed poems in 95 pages. I am nearly always successful with the reader in the open air", he explained. The title Leaves of Grass was a pun. In a letter to Whitman, Emerson wrote, "I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed. There have been held to be either six or nine editions of Leaves of Grass, the count depending on how they are distinguished. Scholars who hold that an edition is an entirely new set of type will count the , , , , 1872, and printings. Others add in the , 1889, and 1892 the "deathbed edition" [14] releases. In fact, the butterfly was made of cloth and was attached to his finger with wire. When it was finally printed, it was a simple edition and the first to omit a picture of the poet. The eighth edition of was little changed from the version, although it was more embellished and featured several portraits of Whitman. The biggest change was the addition of an "Annex" of miscellaneous additional poems. Walt Whitman wishes respectfully to notify the public that the book Leaves of Grass, which he has been working on at great intervals and partially issued for the past thirty-five or forty years, is now completed, so to call it, and he would like this new edition to absolutely supersede all previous ones. Faulty as it is, he decides it as by far his special and entire self-chosen poetic utterance. The editions were of varying length, each one larger and augmented from the previous version, until the final edition reached over poems. The edition is particularly notable for the inclusion of the two poems "Song of Myself" and "The Sleepers". The edition included the notable Whitman poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". Particularly in " Song of Myself ", Whitman emphasized an all-powerful "I" who serves as narrator. The "I" tries to relieve both social and private problems by using powerful affirmative cultural images. Whitman was a believer in phrenology in the preface to Leaves of Grass he includes the phrenologist among those he describes as "the lawgivers of poets" , and borrowed its term "adhesiveness", which referred to the propensity for friendship and camaraderie. One critic has identified three major "thematic drifts" in Leaves of Grass: In the first period, to , his major work is "Song of Myself" and it exemplifies his prevailing love for freedom. From to his death, the ideas Whitman presented in his second period had experienced an evolution. His focus on death had grown to a focus on immortality, the major theme of this period. Whitman became more conservative in his old age, and had come to believe that the importance of law exceeded the importance of freedom. He, for instance, lifted phrases from popular newspapers dealing with Civil War battles for his Drum-Taps [33] and condensed a chapter from a popular science book into his poem "The World Below the Brine". Osgood , that Leaves of Grass constituted "obscene literature". Its banning in Boston, for example, became a major scandal and it generated much publicity for Whitman and his work. Years later, he would regret not having toured the country to deliver his poetry directly by lecturing. In a preface to the anthology I Hear the People Singing: The volume, which was presented for an international audience, attempted to present Whitman as representative of an America that accepts people of all groups. A Choral Symphony was composed by Robert Strassburg in

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Leaves of Grass (Bantam Classics) and hopeful words in the face of impending death. And I think that is the best occasion for Whitman's leaves: when one needs.

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