

= Walt Whitman =

Walter " Walt " Whitman (/ ˈhwʔtm?n / ; May 31 , 1819 ? March 26 , 1892) was an American poet , essayist , and journalist . A humanist , he was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism , incorporating both views in his works . Whitman is among the most influential poets in the American canon , often called the father of free verse . His work was very controversial in its time , particularly his poetry collection Leaves of Grass , which was described as obscene for its overt sexuality .

Born in Huntington on Long Island , Whitman worked as a journalist , a teacher , a government clerk , and ? in addition to publishing his poetry ? was a volunteer nurse during the American Civil War . Early in his career , he also produced a temperance novel , Franklin Evans (1842) . Whitman 's major work , Leaves of Grass , was first published in 1855 with his own money . The work was an attempt at reaching out to the common person with an American epic . He continued expanding and revising it until his death in 1892 . After a stroke towards the end of his life , he moved to Camden , New Jersey , where his health further declined . When he died at age 72 , his funeral became a public spectacle .

= = Life and work = =

= = = Early life = = =

Walter Whitman was born on May 31 , 1819 , in West Hills , Town of Huntington , Long Island , to parents with interests in Quaker thought , Walter and Louisa Van Velsor Whitman . The second of nine children , he was immediately nicknamed " Walt " to distinguish him from his father . Walter Whitman , Sr. named three of his seven sons after American leaders : Andrew Jackson , George Washington , and Thomas Jefferson . The oldest was named Jesse and another boy died unnamed at the age of six months . The couple 's sixth son , the youngest , was named Edward . At age four , Whitman moved with his family from West Hills to Brooklyn , living in a series of homes , in part due to bad investments . Whitman looked back on his childhood as generally restless and unhappy , given his family 's difficult economic status . One happy moment that he later recalled was when he was lifted in the air and kissed on the cheek by the Marquis de Lafayette during a celebration in Brooklyn on July 4 , 1825 .

At age eleven Whitman concluded formal schooling . He then sought employment for further income for his family ; he was an office boy for two lawyers and later was an apprentice and printer 's devil for the weekly Long Island newspaper the Patriot , edited by Samuel E. Clements . There , Whitman learned about the printing press and typesetting . He may have written " sentimental bits " of filler material for occasional issues . Clements aroused controversy when he and two friends attempted to dig up the corpse of Elias Hicks to create a plaster mold of his head . Clements left the Patriot shortly afterward , possibly as a result of the controversy .

= = = Early career = = =

The following summer Whitman worked for another printer , Erastus Worthington , in Brooklyn . His family moved back to West Hills in the spring , but Whitman remained and took a job at the shop of Alden Spooner , editor of the leading Whig weekly newspaper the Long @-@ Island Star . While at the Star , Whitman became a regular patron of the local library , joined a town debating society , began attending theater performances , and anonymously published some of his earliest poetry in the New York Mirror . At age 16 in May 1835 , Whitman left the Star and Brooklyn . He moved to New York City to work as a compositor though , in later years , Whitman could not remember where . He attempted to find further work but had difficulty , in part due to a severe fire in the printing and publishing district , and in part due to a general collapse in the economy leading up to the Panic of 1837 . In May 1836 , he rejoined his family , now living in Hempstead , Long Island . Whitman taught

intermittently at various schools until the spring of 1838 , though he was not satisfied as a teacher .

After his teaching attempts , Whitman went back to Huntington , New York to found his own newspaper , the Long Islander . Whitman served as publisher , editor , pressman , and distributor and even provided home delivery . After ten months , he sold the publication to E. O. Crowell , whose first issue appeared on July 12 , 1839 . There are no known surviving copies of the Long Islander published under Whitman . By the summer of 1839 , he found a job as a typesetter in Jamaica , Queens with the Long Island Democrat , edited by James J. Brenton . He left shortly thereafter , and made another attempt at teaching from the winter of 1840 to the spring of 1841 . One story , possibly apocryphal , tells of Whitman 's being chased away from a teaching job in Southold , New York in 1840 . After a local preacher called him a " Sodomite " , Whitman was allegedly tarred and feathered . Biographer Justin Kaplan notes that the story is likely untrue , because Whitman regularly vacationed in the town thereafter . Biographer Jerome Loving calls the incident a " myth " . During this time , Whitman published a series of ten editorials , called " Sun Down Papers ? From the Desk of a Schoolmaster " , in three newspapers between the winter of 1840 and July 1841 . In these essays , he adopted a constructed persona , a technique he would employ throughout his career .

Whitman moved to New York City in May , initially working a low level job at the New World , working under Park Benjamin , Sr. and Rufus Wilmot Griswold . He continued working for short periods of time for various newspapers ; in 1842 he was editor of the Aurora and from 1846 to 1848 he was editor of the Brooklyn Eagle .

He also contributed freelance fiction and poetry throughout the 1840s . Whitman lost his position at the Brooklyn Eagle in 1848 after siding with the free soil " Barnburner " wing of the Democratic party against the newspaper 's owner , Isaac Van Anden , who belonged to the conservative , or " Hunker " , wing of the party . Whitman was a delegate to the 1848 founding convention of the Free Soil Party .

In 1858 , Whitman published a 47 ,000 word series called Manly Health and Training under the pen name Mose Velsor . Apparently he drew the name Velsor from Van Velsor , his mother 's family name . This self help guide recommends beards , nude sunbathing , comfortable shoes , bathing daily in cold water , eating meat almost exclusively , plenty of fresh air , and getting up early each morning . Present day writers have called Manly Health and Training " quirky " , " so over the top " , " a pseudoscientific tract " , and " wacky " .

= = = Leaves of Grass = = =

Whitman claimed that after years of competing for " the usual rewards " , he determined to become a poet . He first experimented with a variety of popular literary genres which appealed to the cultural tastes of the period . As early as 1850 , he began writing what would become Leaves of Grass , a collection of poetry which he would continue editing and revising until his death . Whitman intended to write a distinctly American epic and used free verse with a cadence based on the Bible . At the end of June 1855 , Whitman surprised his brothers with the already printed first edition of Leaves of Grass . George " didn 't think it worth reading " .

Whitman paid for the publication of the first edition of Leaves of Grass himself and had it printed at a local print shop during their breaks from commercial jobs . A total of 795 copies were printed . No name is given as author ; instead , facing the title page was an engraved portrait done by Samuel Hollyer , but 500 lines into the body of the text he calls himself " Walt Whitman , an American , one of the roughs , a kosmos , disorderly , fleshly , and sensual , no sentimentalist , no stander above men or women or apart from them , no more modest than immodest " . The inaugural volume of poetry was preceded by a prose preface of 827 lines . The succeeding untitled twelve poems totaled 2315 lines ? 1336 lines belonging to the first untitled poem , later called " Song of Myself " . The book received its strongest praise from Ralph Waldo Emerson , who wrote a flattering five page letter to Whitman and spoke highly of the book to friends . The first edition of Leaves of Grass was widely distributed and stirred up significant interest , in part due to Emerson 's approval , but was occasionally criticized for the seemingly " obscene " nature of the poetry . Geologist John Peter

Lesley wrote to Emerson , calling the book " trashy , profane & obscene " and the author " a pretentious ass " . On July 11 , 1855 , a few days after *Leaves of Grass* was published , Whitman 's father died at the age of 65 .

In the months following the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* , critical responses began focusing more on the potentially offensive sexual themes . Though the second edition was already printed and bound , the publisher almost did not release it . In the end , the edition went to retail , with 20 additional poems , in August 1856 . *Leaves of Grass* was revised and re @-@ released in 1860 again in 1867 , and several more times throughout the remainder of Whitman 's life . Several well @-@ known writers admired the work enough to visit Whitman , including Bronson Alcott and Henry David Thoreau .

During the first publications of *Leaves of Grass* , Whitman had financial difficulties and was forced to work as a journalist again , specifically with Brooklyn 's *Daily Times* starting in May 1857 . As an editor , he oversaw the paper 's contents , contributed book reviews , and wrote editorials . He left the job in 1859 , though it is unclear if he was fired or chose to leave . Whitman , who typically kept detailed notebooks and journals , left very little information about himself in the late 1850s .

= = = Civil War years = = =

As the American Civil War was beginning , Whitman published his poem " Beat ! Beat ! Drums ! " as a patriotic rally call for the North . Whitman 's brother George had joined the Union army and began sending Whitman several vividly detailed letters of the battle front . On December 16 , 1862 , a listing of fallen and wounded soldiers in the *New York Tribune* included " First Lieutenant G. W. Whitmore " , which Whitman worried was a reference to his brother George . He made his way south immediately to find him , though his wallet was stolen on the way . " Walking all day and night , unable to ride , trying to get information , trying to get access to big people " , Whitman later wrote , he eventually found George alive , with only a superficial wound on his cheek . Whitman , profoundly affected by seeing the wounded soldiers and the heaps of their amputated limbs , left for Washington on December 28 , 1862 with the intention of never returning to New York .

In Washington , D.C. , Whitman 's friend Charley Eldridge helped him obtain part @-@ time work in the army paymaster 's office , leaving time for Whitman to volunteer as a nurse in the army hospitals . He would write of this experience in " *The Great Army of the Sick* " , published in a *New York* newspaper in 1863 and , 12 years later , in a book called *Memoranda During the War* . He then contacted Emerson , this time to ask for help in obtaining a government post . Another friend , John Trowbridge , passed on a letter of recommendation from Emerson to Salmon P. Chase , Secretary of the Treasury , hoping he would grant Whitman a position in that department . Chase , however , did not want to hire the author of such a disreputable book as *Leaves of Grass* .

The Whitman family had a difficult end to 1864 . On September 30 , 1864 , Whitman 's brother George was captured by Confederates in Virginia , and another brother , Andrew Jackson , died of tuberculosis compounded by alcoholism on December 3 . That month , Whitman committed his brother Jesse to the Kings County Lunatic Asylum . Whitman 's spirits were raised , however , when he finally got a better @-@ paying government post as a low @-@ grade clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior , thanks to his friend William Douglas O 'Connor . O 'Connor , a poet , daguerreotypist and an editor at the *Saturday Evening Post* , had written to William Tod Otto , Assistant Secretary of the Interior , on Whitman 's behalf . Whitman began the new appointment on January 24 , 1865 , with a yearly salary of \$ 1 @,@ 200 . A month later , on February 24 , 1865 , George was released from capture and granted a furlough because of his poor health . By May 1 , Whitman received a promotion to a slightly higher clerkship and published *Drum @-@ Taps* .

Effective June 30 , 1865 , however , Whitman was fired from his job . His dismissal came from the new Secretary of the Interior , former Iowa Senator James Harlan . Though Harlan dismissed several clerks who " were seldom at their respective desks " , he may have fired Whitman on moral grounds after finding an 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* . O 'Connor protested until J. Hubley Ashton had Whitman transferred to the Attorney General 's office on July 1 . O 'Connor , though ,

was still upset and vindicated Whitman by publishing a biased and exaggerated biographical study , The Good Gray Poet , in January 1866 . The fifty @-@ cent pamphlet defended Whitman as a wholesome patriot , established the poet 's nickname and increased his popularity . Also aiding in his popularity was the publication of " O Captain ! My Captain ! " , a relatively conventional poem on the death of Abraham Lincoln , the only poem to appear in anthologies during Whitman 's lifetime .

Part of Whitman 's role at the Attorney General 's office was interviewing former Confederate soldiers for Presidential pardons . " There are real characters among them " , he later wrote , " and you know I have a fancy for anything out of the ordinary . " In August 1866 , he took a month off in order to prepare a new edition of Leaves of Grass which would not be published until 1867 after difficulty in finding a publisher . He hoped it would be its last edition . In February 1868 , Poems of Walt Whitman was published in England thanks to the influence of William Michael Rossetti , with minor changes that Whitman reluctantly approved . The edition became popular in England , especially with endorsements from the highly respected writer Anne Gilchrist . Another edition of Leaves of Grass was issued in 1871 , the same year it was mistakenly reported that its author died in a railroad accident . As Whitman 's international fame increased , he remained at the attorney general 's office until January 1872 . He spent much of 1872 caring for his mother who was now nearly eighty and struggling with arthritis . He also traveled and was invited to Dartmouth College to give the commencement address on June 26 , 1872 .

= = = Health decline and death = = =

After suffering a paralytic stroke in early 1873 , Whitman was induced to move from Washington to the home of his brother ? George Washington Whitman , an engineer ? at 431 Stevens Street in Camden , New Jersey . His mother , having fallen ill , was also there and died that same year in May . Both events were difficult for Whitman and left him depressed . He remained at his brother 's home until buying his own in 1884 . However , before purchasing his home , he spent the greatest period of his residence in Camden at his brother 's home in Stevens Street . While in residence there he was very productive , publishing three versions of Leaves of Grass among other works . He was also last fully physically active in this house , receiving both Oscar Wilde and Thomas Eakins . His other brother , Edward , an " invalid " since birth , lived in the house .

When his brother and sister @-@ in @-@ law were forced to move for business reasons , he bought his own house at 328 Mickle Street (now 330 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr . Boulevard) . First taken care of by tenants , he was completely bedridden for most of his time in Mickle Street . During this time , he began socializing with Mary Oakes Davis ? the widow of a sea captain . She was a neighbor , boarding with a family in Bridge Avenue just a few blocks from Mickle Street . She moved in with Whitman on February 24 , 1885 , to serve as his housekeeper in exchange for free rent . She brought with her a cat , a dog , two turtledoves , a canary , and other assorted animals . During this time , Whitman produced further editions of Leaves of Grass in 1876 , 1881 , and 1889 .

While in Southern New Jersey Whitman spent a good portion of his time in the then quite pastoral community of Laurel Springs between 1876 and 1884 , converting one of the Stafford Farm buildings to his summer home . The restored summer home has been preserved as museum by the local historical society . Part of his Leaves of Grass was written here , and in his Specimen Days he wrote of the spring , creek and lake . To him , Laurel Lake was " the prettiest lake in : either America or Europe . "

As the end of 1891 approached , he prepared a final edition of Leaves of Grass , a version that has been nicknamed the " Deathbed Edition . " He wrote , " L. of G. at last complete ? after 33 y 'rs of hackling at it , all times & moods of my life , fair weather & foul , all parts of the land , and peace & war , young & old . " Preparing for death , Whitman commissioned a granite mausoleum shaped like a house for \$ 4 @, @ 000 and visited it often during construction . In the last week of his life , he was too weak to lift a knife or fork and wrote : " I suffer all the time : I have no relief , no escape : it is monotony ? monotony ? monotony ? in pain . "

Whitman died on March 26 , 1892 . An autopsy revealed his lungs had diminished to one @-@ eighth their normal breathing capacity , a result of bronchial pneumonia , and that an egg @-@

sized abscess on his chest had eroded one of his ribs . The cause of death was officially listed as " pleurisy of the left side , consumption of the right lung , general miliary tuberculosis and parenchymatous nephritis . " A public viewing of his body was held at his Camden home ; over one thousand people visited in three hours . Whitman 's oak coffin was barely visible because of all the flowers and wreaths left for him . Four days after his death , he was buried in his tomb at Harleigh Cemetery in Camden . Another public ceremony was held at the cemetery , with friends giving speeches , live music , and refreshments . Whitman 's friend , the orator Robert Ingersoll , delivered the eulogy . Later , the remains of Whitman 's parents and two of his brothers and their families were moved to the mausoleum .

= = Writing = =

Whitman 's work breaks the boundaries of poetic form and is generally prose @-@ like . He also used unusual images and symbols in his poetry , including rotting leaves , tufts of straw , and debris . He also openly wrote about death and sexuality , including prostitution . He is often labeled as the father of free verse , though he did not invent it .

= = = Poetic theory = = =

Whitman wrote in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* , " The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it . " He believed there was a vital , symbiotic relationship between the poet and society . This connection was emphasized especially in " *Song of Myself* " by using an all @-@ powerful first @-@ person narration . As an American epic , it deviated from the historic use of an elevated hero and instead assumed the identity of the common people . *Leaves of Grass* also responded to the impact that recent urbanization in the United States had on the masses .

= = Lifestyle and beliefs = =

= = = Alcohol = = =

Whitman was a vocal proponent of temperance and in his youth rarely drank alcohol . He once stated he did not taste " strong liquor " until he was thirty and occasionally argued for prohibition . One of his earliest long fiction works , the novel *Franklin Evans* ; or , *The Inebriate* , first published November 23 , 1842 , is a temperance novel . Whitman wrote the novel at the height of popularity of the Washingtonian movement though the movement itself was plagued with contradictions , as was *Franklin Evans* . Years later Whitman claimed he was embarrassed by the book and called it a " damned rot " . He dismissed it by saying he wrote the novel in three days solely for money while he was under the influence of alcohol himself . Even so , he wrote other pieces recommending temperance , including *The Madman* and a short story " *Reuben 's Last Wish* " . Later in life he was more liberal with alcohol , enjoying local wines and champagne .

= = = Religion = = =

Whitman was deeply influenced by deism . He denied any one faith was more important than another , and embraced all religions equally . In " *Song of Myself* " , he gave an inventory of major religions and indicated he respected and accepted all of them ? a sentiment he further emphasized in his poem " *With Antecedents* " , affirming : " I adopt each theory , myth , god , and demi @-@ god , / I see that the old accounts , bibles , genealogies , are true , without exception " . In 1874 , he was invited to write a poem about the Spiritualism movement , to which he responded , " It seems to me nearly altogether a poor , cheap , crude humbug . " Whitman was a religious skeptic : though he accepted all churches , he believed in none . God , to Whitman , was both immanent and

transcendent and the human soul was immortal and in a state of progressive development . American Philosophy : An Encyclopedia classes him as one of several figures who " took a more pantheist or pandeist approach by rejecting views of God as separate from the world . "

= = = Sexuality = = =

Though biographers continue to debate his sexuality , he is usually described as either homosexual or bisexual in his feelings and attractions . However , there is disagreement among biographers as to whether Whitman had actual sexual experiences with men . Whitman 's sexual orientation is generally assumed on the basis of his poetry , though this assumption has been disputed . His poetry depicts love and sexuality in a more earthy , individualistic way common in American culture before the medicalization of sexuality in the late 19th century . Though *Leaves of Grass* was often labeled pornographic or obscene , only one critic remarked on its author 's presumed sexual activity : in a November 1855 review , Rufus Wilmot Griswold suggested Whitman was guilty of " that horrible sin not to be mentioned among Christians . " Whitman had intense friendships with many men and boys throughout his life . Some biographers have suggested that he may not have actually engaged in sexual relationships with males , while others cite letters , journal entries , and other sources that they claim as proof of the sexual nature of some of his relationships . English poet and critic John Addington Symonds spent twenty years in correspondence trying to pry the answer from him . In 1890 he wrote to Whitman , " In your conception of Comradeship , do you contemplate the possible intrusion of those semi @-@ sexual emotions and actions which no doubt do occur between men ? " In reply , Whitman denied that his work had any such implication , asserting " [T] hat the calamus part has even allow 'd the possibility of such construction as mention 'd is terrible ? I am fain to hope the pages themselves are not to be even mention 'd for such gratuitous and quite at this time entirely undream 'd & unreck 'd possibility of morbid inferences ? wh ' are disavow 'd by me and seem damnable , " and insisting that he had fathered six illegitimate children . Some contemporary scholars are skeptical of the veracity of Whitman 's denial or the existence of the children he claimed .

Peter Doyle may be the most likely candidate for the love of Whitman 's life . Doyle was a bus conductor whom Whitman met around 1866 , and the two were inseparable for several years . Interviewed in 1895 , Doyle said : " We were familiar at once ? I put my hand on his knee ? we understood . He did not get out at the end of the trip ? in fact went all the way back with me . " In his notebooks , Whitman disguised Doyle 's initials using the code " 16 @.@ 4 " (P.D. being the 16th and 4th letters of the alphabet) . Oscar Wilde met Whitman in America in 1882 and told the homosexual @-@ rights activist George Cecil Ives that Whitman 's sexual orientation was beyond question ? " I have the kiss of Walt Whitman still on my lips . " The only explicit description of Whitman 's sexual activities is secondhand . In 1924 , Edward Carpenter told Gavin Arthur of a sexual encounter in his youth with Whitman , the details of which Arthur recorded in his journal . Late in his life , when Whitman was asked outright whether his " Calamus " poems were homosexual , he chose not to respond . The manuscript of his love poem " Once I Pass 'd Through A Populous City " , written when was Whitman was 29 , indicates it was originally about a man .

Another possible lover was Bill Duckett . As a teenager , he lived on the same street in Camden and moved in with Whitman , living with him a number of years and serving him in various roles . Duckett was fifteen when Whitman bought his house at 328 Mickle Street . From at least 1880 , Duckett and his grandmother , Lydia Watson , were boarders , subletting space from another family at 334 Mickle Street . Because of this proximity , it is obvious that Duckett and Whitman met as neighbors . Their relationship was close , with the youth sharing Whitman 's money when he had it . Whitman described their friendship as " thick " . Though some biographers describe him as a boarder , others identify him as a lover . Their photograph [pictured] is described as " modeled on the conventions of a marriage portrait " , part of a series of portraits of the poet with his young male friends , and encrypting male ? male desire . Yet another intense relationship of Whitman with a young man was the one with Harry Stafford , with whose family Whitman stayed when at Timber Creek , and whom he first met when Stafford was 18 , in 1876 . Whitman gave Stafford a ring ,

which was returned and re @-@ given over the course of a stormy relationship lasting several years . Of that ring , Stafford wrote to Whitman , " You know when you put it on there was but one thing to part it from me , and that was death . "

There is also some evidence that Whitman may have had sexual relationships with women . He had a romantic friendship with a New York actress , Ellen Grey , in the spring of 1862 , but it is not known if it was also sexual . He still had a photograph of her decades later , when he moved to Camden , and he called her " an old sweetheart of mine " . In a letter , dated August 21 , 1890 , he claimed , " I have had six children ? two are dead " . This claim has never been corroborated . Toward the end of his life , he often told stories of previous girlfriends and sweethearts and denied an allegation from the New York Herald that he had " never had a love affair " . As Whitman biographer Jerome Loving wrote , " the discussion of Whitman 's sexual orientation will probably continue in spite of whatever evidence emerges . "

= = = Sunbathing and swimming = = =

Whitman reportedly enjoyed bathing naked and sunbathing nude . In his work Manly Health and Training written under the pseudonym Mose Velsor , he advises men to swim naked . In A Sun @-@ bathed Nakedness , he wrote ,

Never before did I get so close to Nature ; never before did she come so close to me ? Nature was naked , and I was also ? Sweet , sane , still Nakedness in Nature ! ? ah if poor , sick , prurient humanity in cities might really know you once more ! Is not nakedness indecent ? No , not inherently . It is your thought , your sophistication , your fear , your respectability , that is indecent . There come moods when these clothes of ours are not only too irksome to wear , but are themselves indecent .

= = = Shakespeare authorship = = =

Whitman was an adherent of the Shakespeare authorship question , refusing to believe in the historic attribution of the works to William Shakespeare of Stratford @-@ upon @-@ Avon . Whitman comments in his November Boughs (1888) regarding Shakespeare 's historical plays :

Conceiv 'd out of the fullest heat and pulse of European feudalism ? personifying in unparalleled ways the medieval aristocracy , its towering spirit of ruthless and gigantic caste , with its own peculiar air and arrogance (no mere imitation) ? only one of the " wolfish earls " so plenteous in the plays themselves , or some born descendant and knower , might seem to be the true author of those amazing works ? works in some respects greater than anything else in recorded literature .

= = = Slavery = = =

Whitman opposed the extension of slavery in the United States and supported the Wilmot Proviso . At first he was opposed to abolitionism , believing the movement did more harm than good . In 1846 , he wrote that the abolitionists had , in fact , slowed the advancement of their cause by their " ultraism and officiousness " . His main concern was that their methods disrupted the democratic process , as did the refusal of the Southern states to put the interests of the nation as a whole above their own . In 1856 , in his unpublished The Eighteenth Presidency , addressing the men of the South , he wrote " you are either to abolish slavery or it will abolish you " . Whitman also subscribed to the widespread opinion that even free African @-@ Americans should not vote and was concerned at the increasing number of African @-@ Americans in the legislature .

= = Legacy and influence = =

Walt Whitman has been claimed as America 's first " poet of democracy " , a title meant to reflect his ability to write in a singularly American character . A British friend of Walt Whitman , Mary Smith Whitall Costelloe , wrote : " You cannot really understand America without Walt Whitman , without

Leaves of Grass ... He has expressed that civilization , ' up to date , ' as he would say , and no student of the philosophy of history can do without him . " Modernist poet Ezra Pound called Whitman " America 's poet ... He is America . " Andrew Carnegie called him " the great poet of America so far " . Whitman considered himself a messiah @-@ like figure in poetry . Others agreed : one of his admirers , William Sloane Kennedy , speculated that " people will be celebrating the birth of Walt Whitman as they are now the birth of Christ " .

The literary critic , Harold Bloom wrote , as the introduction for the 150th anniversary of Leaves of Grass :

If you are American , then Walt Whitman is your imaginative father and mother , even if , like myself , you have never composed a line of verse . You can nominate a fair number of literary works as candidates for the secular Scripture of the United States . They might include Melville 's Moby @-@ Dick , Twain 's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn , and Emerson 's two series of Essays and The Conduct of Life . None of those , not even Emerson 's , are as central as the first edition of Leaves of Grass .

In his own time , Whitman attracted an influential coterie of disciples and admirers . Some , like Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter , viewed Whitman both as a prophet of a utopian future and of same @-@ sex desire ? the passion of comrades . This aligned with their own desires for a future of brotherly socialism .

Whitman 's vagabond lifestyle was adopted by the Beat movement and its leaders such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in the 1950s and 1960s as well as anti @-@ war poets like Adrienne Rich and Gary Snyder . Lawrence Ferlinghetti numbered himself among Whitman 's " wild children " , and the title of his 1961 collection Starting from San Francisco is a deliberate reference to Whitman 's Starting from Paumanok . Whitman also influenced Bram Stoker , author of Dracula , and was the model for the character of Dracula . Stoker said in his notes that Dracula represented the quintessential male which , to Stoker , was Whitman , with whom he corresponded until Whitman 's death . Other admirers included the Eagle Street College , an informal group established in 1885 at the home of James William Wallace in Eagle Street , Bolton , to read and discuss the poetry of Whitman . The group subsequently became known as the Bolton Whitman Fellowship or Whitmanites . Its members held an annual ' Whitman Day ' celebration around the poet 's birthday .

Whitman 's poetry has been set to music by a large number of composers ; indeed it has been suggested his poetry has been set to music more than any other American poet except for Emily Dickinson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow . Those who have set his poems to music have included John Adams , Ernst Bacon , Leonard Bernstein , Benjamin Britten , Rhoda Coghill , Ronald Corp , George Crumb , Frederick Delius , Howard Hanson , Karl Amadeus Hartmann , Hans Werner Henze , Paul Hindemith , Ned Rorem , Ralph Vaughan Williams , Kurt Weill , and Roger Sessions . " Crossing , " an opera composed by Matthew Aucoin and inspired by Whitman 's Civil War diaries , premiered in 2015 .

On May 16 , 1957 , the Walt Whitman Bridge , which crosses the Delaware River near his home in Camden , was opened .

In 1997 , the Walt Whitman Community School opened , becoming the first private high school catering to LGBT youth .

In 2009 , Whitman was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame .

In 2013 , Whitman was inducted into the Legacy Walk , an outdoor public display that celebrates LGBT history and people .

Based on Kai Grehn 's German translation of the cycle in 2005 , a radio feature and bilingual " Kinder Adams / Children of Adam " double @-@ CD audio book , including a complete reading by Iggy Pop was released by Hörbuch Hamburg , Germany in 2014 , also featuring Marianne Sägbrecht , Martin Wuttke , Birgit Minichmayr , Alexander Fehling , Lars Rudolph , Volker Bruch , Paula Beer , Josef Osterndorf , Ronald Lippok , Jule Böwe and Robert Gwisdek .

In 2014 composer John Zorn released On Leaves of Grass , an album inspired by and dedicated to Whitman .

= = Works = =

Franklin Evans (1842)

Leaves of Grass (1855 , the first of seven editions through 1891)

Manly Health and Training (1858)

Drum @-@ Taps (1865)

Democratic Vistas (1871)

Memoranda During the War (1876)

Specimen Days (1882)