

JOHN BURROUGHS



**WHITMAN:
A STUDY**

John Burroughs

Whitman: A Study

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Nora Caldwell

EAN 8596547337492

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022



Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Historical Context](#)

[Whitman: A Study](#)

[Analysis](#)

[Reflection](#)

[Memorable Quotes](#)

[Notes](#)

Introduction

[Table of Contents](#)

At its core, *Whitman: A Study* explores how a poet's unruly experiment seeks a home in the conscience of a young democracy. John Burroughs's book is a work of literary criticism and biographical reflection devoted to Walt Whitman, composed in the late nineteenth century as debates about *Leaves of Grass* still simmered. Eschewing sensationalism, Burroughs situates the poems within their cultural weather and weighs their intentions against their reception. The result is neither a hagiography nor a prosecution, but a patient inquiry into method, temperament, and aim. Readers encounter an accessible, thoughtful guide anchored in firsthand observation and long familiarity.

Appearing amid the maturation of American letters after the Civil War, the study participates in a period when critics sought to define a national literature equal to the nation's expanding social experiment. Burroughs writes as an essayist and naturalist-critic, attentive to texture and temperament as much as to doctrine. He addresses controversies surrounding Whitman with a steady, clarifying tone, explaining why the poet's departures from convention provoked both censure and allegiance. Without pedantry, the book places Whitman against the background of newspapers, lecture halls, and print culture, positioning him less as an outlier than as a catalyst within modernizing democratic art.

The premise is straightforward: understand Whitman by examining what his poems attempt, how they are made, and how they were met. Burroughs offers close attention to form, rhythm, subject, and stance, moving between analysis and portraiture without collapsing one into the other. He weighs claims of obscurity against claims of originality, returning to recurring motifs of the self, companionship, labor, and cosmos. The voice is lucid, hospitable, and occasionally pastoral, a reminder of the author's lifelong engagement with the natural world. The effect is to slow the reader's gaze, allowing Whitman's methods to become legible without special pleading.

Democracy, in Burroughs's account, is not merely a topic of Whitman's poems but their very procedure: inclusive, untidy, and aspirational. The book traces how the poet's celebration of persons intersects with a vision of social cohesion, asking what kind of art a republic requires. It considers the relation of body to spirit without evasiveness, and the way frankness can serve dignity rather than shock. Questions of form are central. Free verse appears not as disorder, he argues, but as architecture fitted to new content. Throughout, Whitman's confidence is tested against discipline, and sympathy is tested against truthfulness, producing balanced, durable insights.

Burroughs anticipates objections and meets them with a judicious blend of summary and demonstration, modeling how to read rather than simply what to think. He attends to cadence, catalog, and address, yet he also notices temperament, humor, and reserve, refusing to reduce the poet to a thesis. The style is measured and companionable,

avoiding technical jargon while honoring complexity. Scenes of reception—reviews, rumors, defenses—are treated as evidence of a living argument between poet and public. In this way the book becomes a study of reading itself, showing how patience, context, and sympathy can sharpen rather than soften judgment.

For contemporary readers, the study matters as a guide through recurring cultural debates: how to square artistic freedom with public standards, how to honor individuality without abandoning the common good, and how new forms become legible. Burroughs's training as a naturalist helps him notice attention as an ethical act, a habit that counters distraction and factionalism. His pages model generosity without credulity, offering a language to discuss difficult art in civic terms rather than tribal ones. In a present attuned to diversity of voice and experiment in form, the book's calm reasoning widens the conversation without diluting Whitman's audacity.

To approach Whitman through Burroughs is to receive a primer in how poetry meets a public and how criticism can clear rather than cloud the air. The book equips newcomers with orientation and gives longtime readers a steadying companion, pairing sympathetic insight with disciplined appraisal. It reminds us that great works often arrive with rough edges and that a nation's literature grows by testing its thresholds. Without reducing Whitman to an emblem, Burroughs restores him to the workshop of making, where risk and purpose coexist. That workshop remains open, and this study remains a trustworthy way to enter it.

Synopsis

[Table of Contents](#)

Whitman: A Study by John Burroughs is a compact critical portrait of Walt Whitman and his poetic project in *Leaves of Grass*. Written in the late nineteenth century by a longtime observer and advocate of the poet, it aims to take stock of Whitman's achievement, sift persistent objections, and situate his work within American literature. Burroughs opens by framing Whitman as a writer whose novelty invited misunderstanding, then sets his discussion around the poet's declared purposes: to fashion a democratic art, to place the common person at the center of poetry, and to fuse spiritual aspiration with the tangible facts of everyday life.

He sketches the growth of Whitman's career through the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass*, emphasizing the book's continuous self-revision and the poet's sense of an ongoing, unitary design. Burroughs recounts the early mixture of admiration and hostility the poems provoked, the recurrent charge of indecency, and the corresponding defenses that appealed to the work's candor and moral intention. Without dwelling on biographical minutiae, he uses the publication history to show how Whitman refined his enterprise, regrouping poems, enlarging themes, and testing his audience's tolerance while holding to the same guiding aim of articulating an American voice unprecedented in scale and scope.

Turning to technique, Burroughs explains Whitman's departure from inherited meters as a deliberate cultivation of long-lined, speech-based rhythms, an instrument suited to vast, enumerative themes. He treats the catalog as a structural device rather than a mere list, arguing that its accumulations generate momentum and breadth. Syntactic parallelism, biblical cadences, and an orator's posture, he claims, create coherence where conventional rhyme would mislead. The critique of formlessness is carefully addressed: Burroughs locates pattern in recurring motifs, tonal modulations, and organic development within and across poems, presenting Whitman's formal choices as consistent with his effort to make poetry feel like unmediated experience.

From form he moves to themes, stressing Whitman's insistence that the individual and the collective are mutually defining. The poems celebrate labor, travel, the city, and the plains as emblems of a shared American experiment, while also venturing into mystical self-expansion that seeks a union with all beings. Burroughs underscores the poet's embrace of the body as a gateway to the soul, reading frank passages as part of an ethical realism rather than provocation. He tracks Whitman's confidence in a future-oriented democracy that relies on affection, equality, and a widened sympathy, even as the poems acknowledge estrangement and the strain of national upheaval.

Examining representative groupings, Burroughs highlights the war poems for their steadier discipline and somber vision, noting how scenes of hospitals and marches consolidate Whitman's broader claims about comradeship

and sacrifice. He contrasts these with the intimate love poems and with meditations of the shore and open road, where expansiveness shades into reflective stillness. Throughout, he weighs strengths and flaws, conceding occasional prolixity or roughness while maintaining that the central notes—compassion, breadth, and spiritual confidence—carry the work. The analysis remains attentive to sequence and placement, showing how clusters enter into dialogue and redirect the reader's sense of the whole.

He then situates Whitman within the wider literary landscape, contrasting his aims with those of traditionally formal verse and with the refined artistry prized in European models. For Burroughs, the innovation lies less in the abandonment of meter than in the transfer of poetic authority to common speech, national character, and a reader invited to participate rather than merely admire. He treats the poet's self-assertion as representative rather than egotistic, and answers charges of obscurity by pointing to a consistent symbolic vocabulary. The study thus frames Whitman not as an isolated eccentric but as a central experiment in American aesthetics and civic feeling.

The book closes by measuring Whitman's legacy against the tests of time, suggesting that his poems endure where they most successfully embody amplitude, tenderness, and a bracing sense of reality. Without claiming perfection or universal appeal, Burroughs argues that the poet's fusion of democratic ideal, spiritual hunger, and vernacular power sets a durable standard for later writers. As a contemporaneous appraisal that combines advocacy with scrutiny, *Whitman: A Study* offers a clear pathway into a

challenging body of work and an early map of its controversies. Its broader significance lies in modeling how to read originality without domesticating it, and how to value candor as rigor.

Historical Context

[Table of Contents](#)

John Burroughs published *Whitman: A Study* in 1896, four years after Walt Whitman's death in Camden, New Jersey. Issued by a major Boston and New York house, it appeared amid the Gilded Age's crowded literary marketplace of magazines, lecture halls, and expanding publishing firms. American literature was increasingly institutionalized through clubs, lyceums, and university courses, and critical biographies of national figures were in demand. Burroughs, already known for nature essays in periodicals, used the biographical-critical format common in the era. The study situates Whitman within postbellum United States culture, offering a retrospective assessment when reputations were being consolidated and archives organized.

Whitman's career formed the backdrop Burroughs addressed. *Leaves of Grass* first appeared in 1855 in Brooklyn, self-published and typeset in part by Whitman, and expanded through successive editions, including the so-called deathbed edition of 1891–1892. Early praise from Ralph Waldo Emerson contrasted with persistent controversy over Whitman's sexual candor and unconventional free verse. In 1865, Secretary of the Interior James Harlan dismissed Whitman from clerical employment after seeing *Leaves of Grass*, though Whitman soon found a post at the Treasury. In 1881, Boston publisher James R. Osgood withdrew *Leaves of Grass* under threat from the

Massachusetts district attorney, underscoring ongoing moral scrutiny.

Burroughs's perspective grew from direct acquaintance with Whitman in Washington, D.C., during the Civil War. Moving to the capital in 1864 to work as a federal clerk, Burroughs encountered Whitman, who spent extensive time visiting and comforting soldiers in military hospitals and later held minor government posts. The wartime atmosphere of the capital, the hospitals, and the Potomac's environs provided settings for their conversations and walks. Whitman's hospital service and the war's national trauma informed poems gathered in *Drum-Taps*, and Burroughs observed the poet's habits firsthand. That proximity lent authority to Burroughs's later critical portrait and informed his insistence on Whitman's character.

A New York State native born in 1837, Burroughs was emerging as a prominent American naturalist writer by the 1870s, publishing in magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's*. His *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person* appeared in 1867, one of the earliest book-length defenses of the poet, drawing on personal knowledge and contemporary documents. By the 1890s he was widely recognized for observational essays on birds, seasons, and rural life, and for popular treatments of evolutionary thought. This profile positioned him to interpret Whitman's poetics for general readers, bridging literary criticism, biography, and natural history.

The study also reflects currents of American intellectual life shaped by Transcendentalism and postwar democratic idealism. Emerson's early endorsement of Whitman

encouraged a generation to read the poet as a voice of expansive individualism and national possibility. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, debates about citizenship, labor, and expansion pressed writers to define American character. Boston- and New York-based editors and clubs mediated these debates, while canonical authority still tilted toward New England. Burroughs frames Whitman as a distinctly American figure operating beyond conventional meters and genteel norms, a stance cast against lingering Brahmin tastes and sectional cultural hierarchies.

Scientific discourse provided another framework that Burroughs applied. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and later popular science by figures like T. H. Huxley shaped discussions of nature, development, and law. Burroughs popularized evolutionary ideas in essays and books, and he read Whitman's catalogues and organic metaphors through this lens of process and growth. The era's confidence in observation, fieldwork, and natural classification offered analogies for literary analysis accessible to middle-class readers. By aligning Whitman with modern science and a vitalist rhetoric of nature, Burroughs countered claims of formlessness, emphasizing structure emergent from life rather than from inherited prosody.

Cultural battles over obscenity and literary decorum directly shaped Whitman's reception and Burroughs's defense. The federal Comstock Act of 1873 empowered postal authorities to suppress obscene materials, and local prosecutors pursued similar agendas. The Boston withdrawal of *Leaves of Grass* in 1881 became a touchstone

for debates about art, morality, and free expression; Whitman quickly republished in Philadelphia with Rees Welsh. In this climate, Burroughs's emphasis on Whitman's health, sincerity, and ethical intention responded to specific legal and civic pressures rather than abstract theory. His treatment aims to recast contested passages within a moral vocabulary acceptable to respectable audiences.

Whitman: A Study thus belongs to a late-nineteenth-century reassessment that sought national literary forebears and consistent criteria for judging them. Appearing after Whitman's death and amid renewed editions and memoirs, it collects biographical detail, textual summary, and evaluative argument to stabilize the poet's image. The book reflects its era's respect for firsthand testimony, ethical uplift, and scientific rhetoric, while critiquing sectarian puritanism and restrictive poetics. By locating Whitman within American democratic experience and natural fact, Burroughs argues for his representative stature and artistic coherence. The study mirrors the institutions that produced it, even as it challenges their cultural boundaries.

WHITMAN: A STUDY

Main Table of Contents

PRELIMINARY

BIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL

HIS RULING IDEAS AND AIMS

HIS SELF-RELIANCE

HIS RELATION TO ART AND LITERATURE

HIS RELATION TO LIFE AND MORALS

HIS RELATION TO CULTURE

HIS RELATION TO HIS COUNTRY AND HIS TIMES

HIS RELATION TO SCIENCE

HIS RELATION TO RELIGION

A FINAL WORD

PRELIMINARY

Table of Contents

I

The writing of this preliminary chapter, and the final survey and revision of my Whitman essay, I am making at a rustic house I have built at a wild place a mile or more from my home upon the river. I call this place Whitman Land, because in many ways it is typical of my poet,—an amphitheatre of precipitous rock, slightly veiled with a delicate growth of verdure, enclosing a few acres of prairie-like land, once the site of an ancient lake, now a garden of unknown depth and fertility. Elemental ruggedness, savageness, and grandeur, combined with wonderful tenderness, modernness, and geniality[1q]. There rise the gray scarred cliffs, crowned here and there with a dead hemlock or pine, where, morning after morning, I have seen the bald-eagle perch, and here at their feet this level area of tender humus, with three perennial springs of delicious cold water flowing in its margin; a huge granite bowl filled with the elements and potencies of life. The scene has a strange fascination for me, and holds me here day after day. From the highest point of rocks I can overlook a long stretch of the river and of the farming country beyond; I can hear owls hoot, hawks scream, and roosters crow. Birds of the garden and orchard meet birds of the forest upon the shaggy cedar posts that uphold my porch. At dusk the call of the whippoorwill mingles with the chorus of the pickerel frogs, and in the morning I hear through the robins' cheerful burst

the sombre plaint of the mourning-dove. When I tire of my manuscript, I walk in the woods, or climb the rocks, or help the men clear up the ground, piling and burning the stumps and rubbish. This scene and situation, so primitive and secluded, yet so touched with and adapted to civilization, responding to the moods of both sides of the life and imagination of a modern man, seems, I repeat, typical in many ways of my poet, and is a veritable Whitman land. Whitman does not to me suggest the wild and unkempt as he seems to do to many; he suggests the cosmic and the elemental, and this is one of the dominant thoughts that run through my dissertation. Scenes of power and savagery in nature were more welcome to him, probably more stimulating to him, than the scenes of the pretty and placid, and he cherished the hope that he had put into his "Leaves" some of the tonic and fortifying quality of Nature in her more grand and primitive aspects.

His wildness is only the wildness of the great primary forces from which we draw our health and strength[2q]. Underneath all his unloosedness, or free launching forth of himself, is the sanity and repose of nature.

II

I first became acquainted with Whitman's poetry through the columns of the old "Saturday Press[1]" when I was twenty or twenty-one years old (1858 or 1859). The first things I remember to have read were "There was a child went forth," "This Compost," "As I ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," "Old Ireland," and maybe a few others. I was attracted by the new poet's work from the first. It seemed to let me

into a larger, freer air than I found in the current poetry. Meeting Bayard Taylor about this time, I spoke to him about Whitman. "Yes," he said, "there is something in him, but he is a man of colossal egotism."

A few years later a friend sent me a copy of the Thayer & Eldridge edition[2] of "Leaves of Grass" of 1860. It proved a fascinating but puzzling book to me. I grazed upon it like a colt upon a mountain, taking what tasted good to me, and avoiding what displeased me, but having little or no conception of the purport of the work as a whole. I found passages and whole poems here and there that I never tired of reading, and that gave a strange fillip to my moral and intellectual nature, but nearly as many passages and poems puzzled or repelled me. My absorption of Emerson had prepared me in a measure for Whitman's philosophy of life, but not for the ideals of character and conduct which he held up to me, nor for the standards in art to which the poet perpetually appealed. Whitman was Emerson translated from the abstract into the concrete[3q]. There was no privacy with Whitman; he never sat me down in a corner with a cozy, comfortable shut-in feeling, but he set me upon a hill or started me upon an endless journey. Wordsworth had been my poet of nature, of the sequestered and the idyllic; but I saw that here was a poet of a larger, more fundamental nature, indeed of the Cosmos itself. Not a poet of dells and fells, but of the earth and the orbs. This much soon appeared to me, but I was troubled by the poet's apparent "colossal egotism," by his attitude towards evil, declaring himself "to be the poet of wickedness also;" by his seeming attraction toward the turbulent and the disorderly;

and, at times, by what the critics had called his cataloguing style of treatment.

When I came to meet the poet himself, which was in the fall of 1863, I felt less concern about these features of his work; he was so sound and sweet and gentle and attractive as a man, and withal so wise and tolerant, that I soon came to feel the same confidence in the book that I at once placed in its author, even in the parts which I did not understand. I saw that the work and the man were one, and that the former must be good as the latter was good. There was something in the manner in which both the book and its author carried themselves under the sun, and in the way they confronted America and the present time, that convinced beyond the power of logic or criticism.

The more I saw of Whitman, and the more I studied his "Leaves," the more significance I found in both, and the clearer it became to me that a new type of a man and a new departure in poetic literature were here foreshadowed. There was something forbidding, but there was something vital and grand back of it. I found to be true what the poet said of himself,—

"Bearded, sunburnt, gray-neck'd, forbidding, I have
arrived,
To be wrestled with as I pass for the solid prizes of
the universe,
For such I afford whoever can persevere to win
them,"—

I have persevered in my study of the poet, though balked many times, and the effect upon my own mental and

spiritual nature has been great; no such "solid prizes" in the way of a broader outlook upon life and nature, and, I may say, upon art, has any poet of my time afforded me. There are passages or whole poems in the "Leaves" which I do not yet understand ("Sleep-Chasings" is one of them), though the language is as clear as daylight; they are simply too subtle or elusive for me; but my confidence in the logical soundness of the book is so complete that I do not trouble myself at all about these things.



I would fain make these introductory remarks to my essay a sort of window through which the reader may get a fairly good view of what lies beyond. If he does not here get any glimpse or suggestion of what pleases him, or of what he is looking for, it will hardly be worth while for him to trouble himself further.

A great many readers, perhaps three fourths of the readers of current poetry, and not a few of the writers thereof, cannot stand Whitman at all, or see any reason for his being. To such my essay, if it ever comes to their notice, will be a curiosity, may be an offense. But I trust it will meet with a different reception at the hands of the smaller but rapidly growing circle of those who are beginning to turn to Whitman as the most imposing and significant figure in our literary annals.

The rapidly growing Whitman literature attests the increasing interest to which I refer. Indeed, it seems likely that by the end of the century the literature which will have grown up around the name of this man will surpass in bulk

and value that which has grown up around the name of any other man of letters born within the century.

When Mr. Stedman wrote his essay upon the poet early in the eighties, he referred to the mass of this literature. It has probably more than doubled in volume in the intervening years: since Whitman's death in the spring of '92, it has been added to by William Clark's book upon the poet, Professor Trigg's study of Browning and Whitman, and the work of that accomplished critic and scholar, so lately gone to his rest, John Addington Symonds. This last is undoubtedly the most notable contribution that has yet been made, or is likely very soon to be made, to the Whitman literature. Mr. Symonds declares that "Leaves of Grass," which he first read at the age of twenty-five, influenced him more than any other book has done, except the Bible,—more than Plato, more than Goethe.

When we remember that the man who made this statement was eminently a man of books, deeply read in all literatures, his testimony may well offset that of a score of our home critics who find nothing worthy or helpful in Whitman's work. One positive witness in such a matter outweighs any number of negative ones.

IV

For making another addition to the growing Whitman literature, I have no apology to offer. I know well enough that "writing and talk" cannot "prove" a poet; that he must be his own proof or be forgotten; and my main purpose in writing about Whitman, as in writing about nature, is to tell readers what I have found there, with the hope of inducing

them to look for themselves. At the same time, I may say that I think no modern poet so much needs to be surrounded by an atmosphere of comment and interpretation, through which readers may approach him, as does Whitman. His work sprang from a habit or attitude of mind quite foreign to that with which current literature makes us familiar,—so germinal is it, and so little is it beholden to the formal art we so assiduously cultivate. The poet says his work "connects lovingly with precedents," but it does not connect lovingly with any body of poetry of this century. "Leaves of Grass" is bound to be a shock to the timid and pampered taste of the majority of current readers. I would fain lessen this shock by interposing my own pages of comment between the book and the public. The critic can say so many things the poet cannot. He can explain and qualify and analyze, whereas the creative artist can only hint or project. The poet must hasten on, he must infold and bind together, he must be direct and synthetic in every act. Reflection and qualification are not for him, but action, emotion, volition, the procreant blending and surrender. He works as Nature does, and gives us reality in every line.

Whitman says:—

"I charge you forever reject those who would expound me, for I cannot expound myself."

The type of mind of Whitman's, which seldom or never emerges as a mere mentality, an independent thinking and knowing faculty, but always as a personality, always as a complete human entity, never can expound itself, because its operations are synthetic and not analytic, its mainspring

is love and not mere knowledge. In his prose essay called "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," appended to the final edition of his poems, Whitman has not so much sought to expound himself as to put his reader in possession of his point of view, and of the considerations that lie back of his work. This chapter might render much that I have written superfluous, were there not always a distinct gain in seeing an author through another medium, or in getting the equivalents of him in the thoughts and ideals of a kindred and sympathetic mind. But I have not consciously sought to expound Whitman, any more than in my other books I have sought to expound the birds or wild nature. I have written out some things that he means to me, and the pleasure and profit I have found in his pages.

There is no end to what can be drawn out of him. It has been said and repeated that he was not a thinker, and yet I find more food for thought in him than in all other poets. It has been often said and repeated that he is not a poet, and yet the readers that respond to him the most fully appear to be those in whom the poetic temperament is paramount. I believe he supplies in fuller measure that pristine element, something akin to the unbreathed air of mountain and shore, which makes the arterial blood of poetry and literature, than any other modern writer.

V

We can make little of Whitman unless we allow him to be a law unto himself, and seek him through the clews which he himself brings. When we try him by current modes, current taste, and demand of him formal beauty, formal art,

we are disappointed. But when we try him by what we may call the scientific standard, the standard of organic nature, and demand of him the vital and the characteristic,—demand of him that he have a law of his own, and fulfill that law in the poetic sphere,—the result is quite different.

More than any other poet, Whitman is what we make him; more than any other poet, his greatest value is in what he suggests and implies, rather than in what he portrays; and more than any other poet must he wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of himself. "I make the only growth by which I can be appreciated," he truly says.

His words are like the manna that descended upon the Israelites, "in which were all manner of tastes; and every one found in it what his palate was chiefly pleased with. If he desired fat in it, he had it. In it the young men tasted bread; the old men honey; and the children oil." Many young men,—poets, artists, teachers, preachers,—have testified that they have found bread in Whitman, the veritable bread of life; others have found honey, sweet poetic morsels; and not a few report having found only gall.

VI

In considering an original work like "Leaves of Grass," the search is always for the grounds upon which it is to be justified and explained. These grounds in this work are not easy to find; they lie deeper than the grounds upon which the popular poets rest. Because they are not at once seen, many readers have denied that there are any such grounds. But to deny a basis of reality to a work with the history of

"Leaves of Grass," and a basis well grounded on æsthetic and artistic principles, is not to be thought of.

The more the poet eludes us, the more we know he has his hiding-place somewhere. The more he denies our standards, the more we know he has standards of his own which we must discover; the more he flouts at our literary conventions, the more we must press him for his own principles and methods. How does he justify himself to himself? Could any sane man have written the Children of Adam poems[3] who was not sustained by deepest moral and æsthetic convictions? It is the business of the critic to search for these principles and convictions, and not shirk the task by ridicule and denial.

VII

If there was never any change in taste, if it always ran in the same channels,—indeed, if it did not at times run in precisely opposite channels,—there would be little hope that Walt Whitman's poetry would ever find any considerable number of readers. But one of the laws that dominate the progress of literature, as Edmond Shérer says, is incessant change, not only in thought and ideas, but in taste and the starting-points of art. A radical and almost violent change in these respects is indicated by Whitman,—a change which is in unison with many things in modern life and morals, but which fairly crosses the prevailing taste in poetry and in art. No such dose of realism and individualism under the guise of poetry has been administered to the reading public in this century. No such break with literary traditions—no such audacious attempt to tally, in a printed page, the living

Notes

[Table of Contents](#)

1 A 19th-century New York literary weekly (founded around 1858) that published essays, poetry, and reviews and helped introduce new writers, including early notices of Whitman's work.

2 The Boston publishing firm that issued Walt Whitman's controversial 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; that edition attracted substantial public attention and legal difficulty.

3 A sequence or section within Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* dealing with human sexuality and the body, long regarded as among his most explicit and historically controversial poems.

4 A style of open, low shirt collar associated with the Romantic poet Lord Byron and early 19th-century fashion, leaving the neck exposed and often worn without a cravat.

5 A large Civil War military hospital complex in Washington, D.C., that treated many seriously wounded soldiers during the 1860s and is frequently mentioned in contemporary accounts of wartime medical care.

6 A small Huntington, Long Island, newspaper that Whitman edited at about age nineteen (circa 1838), where he published early pieces and called some of his own work 'Yawps.'

7 A sequence of Civil War poems by Walt Whitman first published in 1865; many of the poems draw on his experiences in army camps and hospitals and were later incorporated into *Leaves of Grass*.

8 A poem within *Drum-Taps* that depicts an attendant caring for wounded soldiers in Civil War hospitals, notable for its vivid, firsthand hospital images.

9 An extended elegy by Whitman written in 1865 to commemorate President Abraham Lincoln after his assassination and regarded as one of Whitman's principal Civil War poems.

10 A North American songbird (*Catharus guttatus*) with a plaintive, flute-like song; Whitman uses its evening song as a natural symbol in his Lincoln elegy.

11 A poetic name Whitman used for Long Island (derived from an Algonquian placename); he employs it in the poem 'Starting from Paumanok' to evoke his native region.

12 A mid-19th-century Boston publishing firm (William Thayer and Charles W. Eldridge) that issued an 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; the firm experienced financial failure within a few years.

13 Pfaff's was a well-known New York saloon and gathering place for mid-19th-century writers, artists, and bohemians where Whitman and other literary figures met and socialized.

14 Likely Robert G. Ingersoll (1833–1899), a popular 19th-century American lawyer and lecturer known for his eloquent public speeches and freethinking views; the text refers to his having praised Whitman in a Philadelphia lecture.

15 Walt Whitman's principal book of poetry, first published in 1855 and repeatedly expanded in later editions, containing many of his major poems and serving as his lifelong project.

16 A named cluster or section within Leaves of Grass composed of poems that celebrate comradeship and intense male friendship; these poems first appeared in mid-19th-century editions and have often been discussed for their expressions of male affection.

17 A long poem by Whitman included in Leaves of Grass that presents travel and the open road as symbols of freedom, self-discovery, and democratic fellowship.

18 Whitman's central, extended poem in Leaves of Grass, written in the first person as a series of proclamations and reflections that articulate his poetic ego and democratic vision.

19 Almost certainly Barrett Wendell (1855–1921), an American literary scholar and critic who wrote influential essays on American literature and is here cited approvingly for remarks on Whitman.

20 Likely Anne Gilchrist (1828–1885), an English writer and early admirer of Whitman who wrote appreciative essays and corresponded with him, helping establish his reputation in Britain.

21 Named only as an 'eminent musician and composer' in the text, Dr. Ritter refers to a 19th-century musician praised by the author; the precise identity is not specified here and could indicate any contemporary composer called Ritter active in the mid-1800s.

22 Edmund Gosse (1849–1928) was an English poet, literary critic, and historian of literature noted for his essays and biographies; here he is cited as a critic who regarded Whitman as a poet in an undeveloped, 'protoplasmic' condition.