2005

Leaves of Grass at 150

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Leaves of Grass

at 150

An Exhibition Chiefly from the 
Joel Myerson Collection of 
Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Rare Books and Special Collections 
2005
LEAVES OF GRASS
AT 150
an exhibit chiefly from
The Joel Myerson Collection
of Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Joel Myerson

Rare Books & Special Collections
Thomas Cooper Library
University of South Carolina
2005
This exhibit celebrates the 150th anniversary of the publication of Whitman’s major work, *Leaves of Grass*, arguably the most important and well-known book of verse in American literary history. No American writer was more completely involved in the process of seeing a book into print as was Walt Whitman. Whitman fully embraced the process by which his handwritten words were cast into metal and gift wrapped in paper or cloth for presentation to the world. He physically assisted in the setting of type and personally oversaw multiple proofs, chose the font styles and type sizes, decided what kind of paper and page size would be used, designed the bindings and paper labels for the spines, wrote advertising copy for as well as published reviews of his works, and sold the books himself. In fact, if Whitman was not residing in the city in which his book was being printed, he moved there and requested office space inside the printing establishment. The production of a book was, to Whitman, a reproduction of self that required his extended personal involvement. As he later told Horace Traubel, his theory was that “we ought to get rid of the literary middleman. The author should be in more direct and vital touch with his reader. The formal publisher should be abolished. The printer was the mechanic in the affair. The author should sell his books direct to the consumer. In the ideal situation the author would have his own type and set the type of his book.” Or Whitman would “laughingly” say, “to carry the ideal notion further, the author should not only set the type of his book and put on its cover, but, after doing this, should not sell it but should give it away.”

During his lifetime (1819-1892), Whitman published twelve separate volumes, including four volumes of prose. For six of these volumes, Whitman acted as his own publisher. For four others, he was involved in significant ways in matters of design, printing, publication, and distribution. In some cases, he allowed David McKay of Philadelphia to publish a book while Whitman simultaneously sold copies from his house in Camden, New Jersey. For other books, he paid for the printing and binding and then sold bound copies to McKay, who made his profit by marking up the price. On only a few books did Whitman participate in the traditional author-publisher relationship, wherein he received royalties from his publisher, who took all the financial risks.

This exhibit showcases the fine Whitman collection at the University of South Carolina’s Thomas Cooper Library (TCL), drawing both from earlier holdings in Special Collections, indicated in this catalogue by (SC), and, more extensively, from the Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and indicated here as (JM). Other items are
on loan from my personal collection (JMPC) and in one notable instance from Prof. G. Ross Roy (GRR). Information on items in this exhibit is from Joel Myerson, *Walt Whitman: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), from which edition, printing, and issue numbers (e.g., A 3.1.a2) have been referenced.

The central part of this catalogue lists for the record all lifetime editions, states, printings, and issues of *Leaves of Grass*, followed by their entry number in my bibliography, information about the copies held by the library, and, when relevant, a discussion of the work’s printing and publication history. As such, it provides a convenient reference to the range of *Leaves of Grass* editions on display, with coverage of the library’s holdings that is much more up-to-date than that in the library’s previous Whitman exhibit catalogue (1992, before the transfer of the Myerson Collection); it does not reflect the detailed case-by-case arrangement of items in the exhibit itself. Whitman holdings in the collection are also accessible through the Web at www.sc.edu/library.

*August 2005*

J.M.
One hundred copies of this catalogue have been produced for the exhibition opening, August 30, 2005. The exhibition has been curated by Joel Myerson and mounted by Patrick Scott and Jeffrey Makala. The catalogue text has been written by Joel Myerson and edited by Patrick Scott. The inserted Whitman facsimile, reproduced from the original manuscript at Thomas Cooper Library, is not to be further reproduced without written permission. The catalogue cover has been set and hand-printed by Jeffrey Makala on the Maxcy Press, with the cooperation of the press’s Director, Scott Gwara.

This is copy 1.
THE FOREGROUND

Although Whitman is now firmly enshrined in the “pantheon of great American writers,” this was not always the case. Indeed, unlike most now-famous authors, where one can follow their artistic development from early pieces to the more polished works of their internship to the works of their creative maturity, Whitman seems to have come out of nowhere. If he had died prior to 1855, he would be nothing more than a footnote to histories of American journalism and fiction writing, for his early writings gave no indication of the achievements to follow. These items (all JM) indicate his early abilities and topics, and are, with the exception of “A Sketch,” all fiction, not poetry:

“Death in the School-Room (a Fact),” United States Magazine and Democratic Review, August 1841 (E 29). Wrappers.


This poem was first attributed to Whitman in 1994.


Franklin Evans; or the Inebriate, special issue of the New World (November 1842) (A 1.1). Head title.


Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1 January-31 December 1846.

A full year’s run of this newspaper during the time at which Whitman was the editor and contributor of some 450 items.

EDITIONS OF LEAVES OF GRASS

Brooklyn, N.Y., 1855. First edition, only printing, first issue.

A 2.1.a. TCL has bindings A (SC) and B (JM). 95 pp. Probably 800 copies printed. The SC copy, the one millionth book purchased for the library, was owned by one of the printers, Thomas Rome, and purchased from a descendant of his. Also on display is an open copy of a modern facsimile reprinting by the Eakins Press (C21; JM) showing the use of the long, irregular lines unique to this edition of Leaves.

The 1855 Leaves of Grass, while published without Whitman’s name
on the title page or binding, did bear his identity in three ways: the book's copyright notice is in his name, he identifies himself as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos," in the text, and the Hollyer engraving of Whitman serves as the book's frontispiece.

Brooklyn, N.Y., 1856. Second edition, only printing.

A 2.2. TCL has two copies (JM, SC). 384 pp. Probably 1000 copies printed.

Whitman greatly expanded the length of this edition, and added titles to the poems. This edition also lacked Whitman's name on the title page, although it did appear on the binding, and the Hollyer engraving again served as the frontispiece. When Ralph Waldo Emerson responded favorably to a review copy Whitman had sent him, Whitman shamelessly quoted "I greet you at the beginning of a great career" from the letter by goldstamping it at the base of the spine. Emerson was not pleased.


A 2.3.a. TCL has bindings B (JM), C (JM, SC), and E (JM). 456 pp. 1000 copies printed. Copies in binding E were used for sale in Britain.

The third edition was the first published commercially, and Whitman's name was not on the title page or binding. The Schoff engraving of the Hine portrait of Whitman replaced the Hollyer engraving as the frontispiece. Whitman even anonymously edited and partially wrote the separately published Leaves of Grass Imprints for the purpose of advertising this edition (D4, wrappers; JM). But Thayer and Eldridge soon went out of business, and Leaves of Grass would not have another commercial publisher for two decades.


A 2.3.a. TCL has one copy (JM). American sheets with a pasted label on the title page. As happened with the first edition, no one in Britain was interested enough to make a separate edition of Leaves of Grass, so American sheets were shipped overseas and the British publisher merely pasted a small label on the title page to indicate that he was the "publisher" (or distributor) of it.


A 2.3.b. TCL has two copies (JM, SC).

A 2.3.c. TCL has two copies, both in Binding A (JM, SC). Worthington bought the Thayer & Eldridge plates at auction and reprinted the work without Whitman’s permission. Three subsequent undated reprints took place, and TCL has five copies of these (all JM).


A 43 (JM). This is a facsimile of a copy of the 1860 _Leaves of Grass_ at the New York Public Library that Whitman revised and otherwise marked up in preparation for the 1867 _Leaves._


A 2.4.a₁₋₃. TCL has a copy of the second issue (JM). First issue: 338 + 72 + 24 + 36 pp. Possibly 100 copies of the first issue and 250 copies of the second issue printed.

In the fourth edition, Whitman’s name did not appear on the title page or binding, and it was the first edition to appear without a physical likeness of Whitman, as well as the first to show Whitman’s process of adding to his text by accretion. Whereas earlier editions of _Leaves of Grass_ had incorporated new poems into the text during the typesetting stage, now Whitman physically added sheets from other works to the book. The first issue _Grass_ contains the reset text of _Leaves_ and three appendixes, each with separate pagination: the newly set “Songs Before Parting” and the remaining sheets from the separately published _Drum-Taps_ with its _Sequel_. The following year, after having exhausted the supply of sheets from _Drum-Taps_, Whitman reissued _Leaves of Grass_ with “Songs Before Parting” and then reissued _Leaves of Grass_ by itself.

Washington, 1871. Fifth edition, first and second printings, first and second issues of each.

A 2.5.a₁₋₂, A 2.5.b₁₋₂. On display are copies of the first printing, first issue in wrappers, and a proof of the title page of the second issue (both JMPC). TCL has three copies of the second printing, first issue (JM [2], SC). First printing first issue: 384 pp.; second issue, 384 + 120 pp. 500 copies of the second printing, first issue printed.

The fifth edition lacks Whitman’s name on the title page but has it on the binding. The first printing was packaged in two ways: the first issue has _Leaves of Grass_ only and the second has _Leaves_ bound together with the sheets of the separately published _Passage to India_. In the second printing, first issue, _Leaves_ and _Passage to India_ were reprinted and again bound together. Then Whitman took 100 sheets of _Leaves_ only and inserted a cancelled title leaf, with a Camden, N.J., imprint (see next entry for more information).

A2.5.b. TCL has one copy of the second printing, second issue, signed on title page and with pasted-in intercalations (JM, purchased through the Treasures Acquisition Program, 2005), together with an uncut proof sheet for the intercalations (JM). One hundred copies were issued.

In order to help celebrate the United States centennial, Whitman reissued *Leaves of Grass* in 1876 along with a volume of his prose writing, *Two Riddles*, both volumes bound alike as the *Centennial Edition*, limited to a hundred sets. Rather than reprinting *Leaves of Grass*, he inserted a cancel title leaf and printed four new poems on a separate slip, which he then cut into four sections or intercalations and pasted on the blank parts of pages in the text. He signed the title page to each copy, making this the first time Whitman’s name appeared on the title page of *Leaves of Grass*, although not in type. Two likenesses of Whitman appeared in this volume: the Hollyer engraving and the Linton engraving of the Potter photograph.


A 2.5.c.1-3. TCL has three copies of the third printing, second issue (JM [2], SC). 600 copies were printed.

Later in 1876, Whitman reprinted the intercalated volumes, setting in type the previously intercalated poems.

Washington, 1872 [i.e., London: John Camden Hotten, 1873]. Sixth edition, only printing.

A 2.6. TCL three two copies, all in binding A (JM [2], SC). 384 + 120 + 14 pp. Contains *Leaves of Grass, Passage to India*, and *After All, Not to Create Only*.

The sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass* is an unauthorized type-facsimile piracy by the London publisher John Camden Hotten, whose anonymous piracy is no doubt due to British censorship laws, under which one could be prosecuted for publishing an obscene book but not for merely distributing it, and which he probably thought he could avoid more easily by posing as the distributor of the book rather than as the publisher of it.


A 10.1.a-b. TCL has two copies of the second printing (JM, SC). Wrappers. 31 pp. The first separate edition of Whitman’s prose introduction to his book of poetry; many more would follow, as it
Veil with their lids, O Soul!
The standards of the light
Of sense shut off the left
To darkness now retiring
The objective to the known behind, the left
Revealing the vast unknown
(Thou art dropped from thee)

How curious looking hence to
appears the world, to each
Each appears also of thy life - each
passion of each event.
And this thy world's voyage.

Walt Whitman: "Veil with their lids," manuscript poem, 1 leaf [ca. 1870], in the Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina
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became clear that in this work Whitman was formulating his poetic beliefs and practices.


A 2.7.a.2. TCL has copies of both states of the first issue, the first (the title page reads ‘1881-2’) in binding A (JM) and the second (the title page reads ‘1881-82’) also in binding A (JM [2], SC). 382 pp. 1010 copies printed. Whitman shipped some sheets from the first printing to England for the publisher Trübner to use in securing copyright; and they sold them with a cancel title leaf but declined further involvement.

Whitman was able to return to a commercial publisher for the seventh edition (or sixth American edition) of Leaves of Grass in 1881. Nevertheless, he still sold copies from his home, as the postcard on display of 8 March 1881, acknowledging an order from J. Christopher Starr, shows (JM).

This is far and away the most bibliographically complex edition of Leaves, one which shows a total of fifteen printings, two states, and seventeen issues during Whitman’s lifetime. The Osgood second printing of 1882 had a title page dated ‘1881-82’ and was distributed in London by David Bogue with a cancel title leaf dated ‘1881’. It is with the third printing that the tale really gets interesting: Osgood published what they called a ‘Third Edition’ (really third printing) in 1882, and Bogue sold the book in London again with 1881 on the title page. After Osgood had completed three printings, the district attorney of Massachusetts denounced the book as “obscene literature,” and when Whitman refused to bowdlerize it by revising it, they withdrew the book from publication and turned over the remaining sets of sheets to the author. Whitman took the sheets, added a cancel title leaf which he signed in each of the 225 copies, and bound them in casings as the “Author’s Edition” in 1882, selling the copies himself from his home in Camden. Then, also in 1882, the Philadelphia firm of Rees, Welsh obtained the plates from Osgood and published the fourth through seventh printings, incorporating some textual changes. Rees Welsh also did an eighth printing, dated 1882, but the firm was bought out in November by David McKay, who took some leftover sheets and placed his cancel title leaf dated 1883 on them. McKay then reprinted the book with an 1882 title page. The next year he produced the tenth printing, which was sold in Glasgow by Wilson & McCormick with sheets bearing either cancel or integral British title leaves dated ‘1883’. For the eleventh printing of 1884, McKay used four different bindings, two of which may have been employed for copies sold in Britain, even though Wilson & McCormick again sold copies with a cancel title leaf. Then
    A 2.7.h. Copies from this printing cannot be differentiated from those of the four previous ones.

    A 2.7.h. TCL has one copy (JM). Title leaf is a cancel.

    A 2.7.i. TCL has one copy (JM).

    A 2.7.j. 500 copies printed.

    A 2.7.j. TCL has one copy of the first state (SC). Title leaf is integral. 100 sheets sent to Britain for this issue.

    A 2.7.j. TCL has one copy (JM). Title leaf is a cancel. 200 sheets sent to Britain for this issue.

    A 2.7.k. TCL has two copies, bindings A, D (both JM). 382 pp. 2400 copies printed. Binding D was probably used for copies sent to Britain for sale. A second issue, published in Glasgow by Wilson & McCormick in 1884, has a cancel title leaf.

    A 2.7.k. TCL has four copies (JM [3], SC). Title leaf is a cancel. 404 pp. Leaves of Grass and “Sands at Seventy.” Approximately 940 of the 2400 copies printed were used in this issue; the others were used in later issues.

    A 2.7.l. TCL has two copies (JM, SC). Between 1400 and 2200 copies printed.
OTHER BOOKS INCORPORATED INTO
LEAVES OF GRASS

Drum-Taps. New York [and Washington], 1865[-1866].
   A 3.1.a. TCL has two copies (JM, SC). 72 + 24 pp. 1000 copies printed. This second issue includes the Sequel, with its poem "O Captain! My Captain!" on the death of Abraham Lincoln.

Passage to India. Washington, 1871.
   A 5.1.a. TCL has one copy (JM). Wrappers. 120 pp.

After All, Not to Create Only. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1871.
   A 6.2. TCL has three copies, bindings A (JM, SC) and B (JM). 24 pp. 2000 copies printed.

   A 7.1.a. TCL has two copies (JM, SC). Wrappers. 18 pp. These poems were subsequently revised and spread through various editions of Leaves of Grass, rather than being bound into any specific editions of Leaves.

   A 11.1.a. TCL has one copy in binding B (JM). 376 pp. 1000 copies printed.

   A 11.1.b1. TCL has copies in binding A (JM, SC) and B (JM). 1172 copies printed.

   A 11.1.b2. TCL has one copy (JM). Title leaf is a cancel.

   A 11.1.c. TCL has copies in the first state (JM, binding A) and the second state (JM, binding B). Title leaf is integral. Possibly 500 copies printed in America for British sale.

Both Whitman and David McKay were simultaneously publishing a number of Whitman's later books, a circumstance that is, to put it mildly, unusual. For example, Whitman had also projected publishing both November Boughs and Good-Bye My Fancy through McKay, and then separately, binding them in a two-volumes-in-one format for his friends,
but he died before the second part of the plan could be carried out. 

(November Boughs, by the way, shows all the characteristics of a typical Whitman book: there are two presentation bindings and three styles of the trade binding.) Whitman ordered extra copies of both titles printed in 1891, and after his death his literary executors bound each in a large paper format in green cloth, as opposed to the red of the trade bindings, and for many years these were considered the first printings because of their large paper format.


A 12.1.a1. TCL has copies in bindings B (JM), C (JM), D (JM), and E (JM, SC). Binding B was used on only 100 copies for presentation by Whitman; this copy is inscribed by Whitman to Horace Traubel. 140 pp. Between 1000 and 1100 copies printed.


A 12.1.a2. TCL has one copy (JM). Title leaf is a cancel.

Philadelphia: David McKay, 1888 [i.e., 1891]. First edition, third printing.

A 12.1.c. TCL has three copies (JM [2], SC). Possibly 100 copies printed.


A 13. TCL has copies in bindings A (JM) and C (JM [2], SC). Also on display is one of the unbound copies, in unsewn sheets, that was found in Whitman’s room after his death (JM). 66 pp. 1000 copies printed.

POSTSCRIPT

Toward the end of his life, as Whitman became less interested in revising the existing texts of the poems in Leaves of Grass than in adding new poems to it, he began in earnest a process he had used only sparingly before, of making proof slips of individual poems. As a friend recalled, “Each bit when it left his hands in manuscript was sent to a quaint old printing establishment ... where it was set up in type. It was then returned to the author, who made such corrections as seemed to him desirable, and after this a revised and re-corrected copy was struck off and sent out as the matter to be used punctation literatin’” by journal and newspaper editors. Slips exist for nearly a hundred individual
poems and brief prose pieces. Sometimes these are little more than extra copies of tear sheets ordered by Whitman, but more often they are conscious and original creations. Rather than sending off a handwritten copy of the poem, Whitman would send his manuscript to the local print shop, read and revise it in proof, order clean copies printed (both with and without his name), and submit them to editors and distribute them to friends.

Galley proofs for *On, on the same, ye jocund twain!* (1891), *With husky haughty lips, o sea!* (1884), *You lingering sparse leaves of me* (1887).

Broadside. F 59, F 98, F 101 (all JM). *On, on the same, ye jocund twain!*, published in the 9 June 1891 *Once a Week*, also has a handwritten comment by Thomas Harned (who would later be one of Whitman’s literary executors) about Whitman’s use of these proofs; *With husky haughty lips, o sea!* appeared in the March 1884 *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*; and *You lingering sparse leaves of me* was published in the November 1887 *Lippincott’s Magazine*.

Unlike his publications at the start of his career, as Whitman became a famous and appreciated poet towards the end of his life, his works appeared in more mainstream journals; indeed many of them, as this representative sampling (all JM) shows, were in the best-regarded magazines of the time.


“Twilight,” *Century Magazine*, December 1887 (E 2670).

“Have We a National Literature,” *North American Review*, March 1891 (E 2758).

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS ON DISPLAY**

Page from Whitman’s dictionary, signed by him, along with a photograph of him in about 1870 (JM).

“Veil with their lids . . . ,” manuscript poem, [ca. 1870].

lifetime, these lines seem to anticipate "Out from behind This Mask" in the 19 February 1876 New York Daily Tribune.

Sheet with spine label for 1871 Leaves of Grass (A 2.5.a) and advertisement for Whitman's books, probably designed by Whitman (JMPC).

Advertising poster for Whitman's books (1872), designed by Whitman (F 94; SC, purchased with support from the Thomas Cooper Society, 2000).

Whitman, manuscript letter to David McKay, 18 December 1886, acknowledging receipt of royalties (JMPC).

Envelope with printed return address for Whitman (JMPC).

Whitman, [Letter to William Michael Rossetti, 17 March 1876].

Broadside. F 38 (JM). One way Whitman kept in touch with his British admirers was to write one of them with the full knowledge (and hope) that his letter would be passed on to a wider audience. In this case, Rossetti printed up copies at his own expense for distribution.

Broadside announcement for the 1881-1882 edition of Leaves of Grass (A 2.7.1; JM).

A Memorandum at a Venture (1882).

Broadside. F 44 (JM). Whitman paid for 200 copies of this article to be reprinted from the June 1882 North American Review for distribution to his friends and admirers.

[The Spanish element in our nationality] (1883).

Broadside. F 73 (JM). Whitman’s comments on one aspect of the multicultural basis of American life were printed in the 5 August 1883 Philadelphia Press and the 11 August 1883 Critic.

Printed spine label for Complete Poems & Prose, 1888 (A 2.7.m), designed by Whitman (JMPC).

Leaf from Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking (Labyrinth Editions, 1978; H 49), one of the more interesting typographical interpretations of Whitman's long lines (J).