



# Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself

By Jerome Loving

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*Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* is the first full-length critical biography of Walt Whitman in more than forty years. Jerome Loving makes use of recently unearthed archival evidence and newspaper writings to present the most accurate, complete, and complex portrait of the poet to date. This authoritative biography affords fresh, often revelatory insights into many aspects of the poet's life, including his attitudes toward the emerging urban life of America, his relationships with his family members, his developing notions of male-male love, his attitudes toward the vexed issue of race, and his insistence on the union of American states. Virtually every chapter presents material that was previously unknown or unavailable, and Whitman emerges as never before, in all his complexity as a corporal, cerebral, and spiritual being. Loving gives us a new Poet of Democracy, one for the twenty-first century.

Loving brings to life the elusive early Whitman, detailing his unhappy teaching career, typesetting jobs, quarrels with editors, and relationships with family and friends. He takes us through the Civil War—with Whitman's moving descriptions of the wounded and dying he nursed, the battlegrounds and camps he visited—demonstrating why the war became one of the defining events of Whitman's life and poetry. Loving's account of Whitman's relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the most complete and fascinating available. He also draws insights from new material about Whitman's life as a civil servant, his Lincoln lectures, and his abiding campaign to gain acceptance for what was regarded by many as a "dirty book." He examines each edition of *Leaves of Grass* in connection with the life and times that produced it, demonstrating how Whitman's poetry serves as a priceless historical document—marking such events as Grant's death, the completion of the Washington monument, Custer's defeat, and the Johnstown flood—at the same time that it reshapes the canon of American literature.

The most important gap in the Whitman record is his journalism, which has never been completely collected and edited. Previous biographers have depended on a very incomplete and inaccurate collection. Loving has found long-forgotten runs of the newspapers Whitman worked on and has gathered the largest collection of his journalism to date. He uses these pieces to significantly enhance our understanding of where Whitman stood in the political and ideological spectra of

his era.

Loving tracks down the sources of anecdotes about Whitman, how they got passed from one biographer to another, were embellished and re-contextualized. The result is a biography in which nothing is claimed without a basis in the factual record. *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* will be an invaluable tool for generations to come, an essential resource in understanding *Leaves of Grass* and its poet—who defied literary decorum, withstood condemnation, and stubbornly pursued his own way.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Despite the general resistance to his work on the part of his literary contemporaries, and their disapproval of his homoeroticism, Walt Whitman experienced incredible success during his lifetime. After the 1855 publication of *Leaves of Grass* (the first of nine editions of the book he personally saw through the press), he fast became America's national poet. He was asked to write poems commemorating the victims of natural disasters and was offered a free burial plot in exchange for a poem lauding the cemetery's beauty. Millionaire Andrew Carnegie was one of his vigorous supporters.

Whitman's success is most likely the result of the approachability--he wrote often of the immediate: the sounds of the city, men bathing in the river, the mystery around the next corner--and sheer beauty of his poems. He was also an expert self-promoter. Long before the advent of the blurb in contemporary publishing, Whitman would include reviews of his books in the appendices. Many of these were actually written by him and a few were even critical, in order to maintain a sense of objectivity. He carefully controlled his public image, but assiduously guarded his private realm, which is why, more than a century after the poet's death, debate still rages about his sexual proclivity--there simply isn't enough proof one way or another. *The Song of Himself*, the first comprehensive biography of Whitman in 20 years, is rich with details of its subject's life and times and cogent analysis of his poetry--a book that is sure to increase readers' understanding of the great poet and reinvigorate their interest in his work. --*Anna Baldwin*

### From Publishers Weekly

In this critical biography, Loving describes Walt Whitman as "half New York journalist, half New England transcendentalist," and goes on to outline skillfully the complexities and contradictions of the poet's life and times. Loving begins with the Civil War, when Whitman, his racy reputation already established by the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), nursed the wounded and wrote, as both poet and journalist, of the atrocities of the war of brother against brother. Loving then backtracks to Whitman's life in New York?Long Island, Brooklyn and "Mannahatta" (as the poet called Manhattan)?taking us through his early years as a journalist and editor, didactic novelist and versifier in the European tradition. Whitman himself emerges as a kind of liberal puritan?relatively progressive politically, rather more conservative culturally. The book is light on criticism until a detailed account of "the central literary event of the nineteenth century," a close and revealing reading of the seminal *Leaves of Grass*. While Loving discusses intimate male friendship and homoeroticism, particularly in respect to the Calamus poems, he makes little of recent gender theory on Whitman (the work of, for example, Robert K. Martin and Michael Moon) and fails to provide the narrative charge of David S. Reynolds's acclaimed 1995 cultural biography of Whitman. While students of the great American bard will value this highly detailed and thoroughly documented biography (strengthened by recently unearthed Whitman journalism), the general reader may wish to start elsewhere.

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### From Library Journal

In this meticulous and resourceful account of Walt Whitman's life, Loving (*Emily Dickinson: The Poet on the Second Story*, 1987) has successfully captured many sides of the poet's well-researched yet still obscure character. Loving covers all aspects of Whitman's private and public life, thus unveiling the poet in all his glory. Themes discussed include Whitman's youth and relationships with family members, quarrels with editors, the Civil War years, and the intricate circumstances that surrounded each edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Loving challenges us to be more than just passive readers, especially when he quotes Whitman's poetry to support his arguments. He evidently rejects the traditional, chronological way of documenting events but

doesn't overlook the importance of simple and accessible writing. Although this book is likely to be more useful and respected in academic libraries, it is strongly recommended for public libraries as well. AMirela Roncevic, "Library Journal"  
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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Steven Huckins:**

This book untitled Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself to be one of several books this best seller in this year, that is because when you read this e-book you can get a lot of benefit onto it. You will easily to buy this kind of book in the book retailer or you can order it via online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you quickly to read this book, as you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to you personally to past this publication from your list.

#### **Tonya Sewell:**

Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to set every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself however doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource data that maybe you can be among it. This great information can drawn you into fresh stage of crucial considering.

#### **Julia Hale:**

In this period of time globalization it is important to someone to get information. The information will make you to definitely understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of sources to get information example: internet, newspapers, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher which print many kinds of book. The book that recommended to you personally is Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself this publication consist a lot of the information from the condition of this world now. That book was represented how can the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The particular writer made some investigation when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book ideal all of you.

#### **Lonnie Fazio:**

Is it you who having spare time after that spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself can be the answer, oh how comes? A book you know. You are so out of date, spending your free time by reading in this fresh era is common not a nerd activity. So what these books have than the others?

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