

**The Legacy of Transcendentalism: 1**  
**Emily Dickinson 1830-1886 & Walt Whitman 1819-1892**

- American Transcendentalism
- Movement in (1) philosophy and (2) social reform movement
- Associated with the Transcendental Club (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1836)
- Embodies American Romanticism – emphasis on the individual's relationship with the world
- The world embodies divine law
- The individual must discover it for himself



# Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Nature" (1836)

- The universe is a text that can answer our questions
- Solitude is necessary for the proper apprehension of nature
- The landscape is not able to be owned
- Contemplating Nature is restorative – bringing us into a proper relation with the divine and the world



# Nature (1836)

Standing on the bare ground, — my head  
bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into  
infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I  
become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I  
see all; the currents of the Universal Being  
circulate through me; I am part or particle of  
God.



# The Poet (1844)

- People do not embrace the spiritual fire at the source of culture.
- The poet, expressing beauty, connects directly with nature and with the spiritual wisdom that informs it.
- A poem is like an organic thing, with its own spirit. When thought comes to ripeness, it detaches itself from its maker, like winged seeds.





# The Poet (1844)

- The poetry of the factory and the railway is part of the great Order, like a beehive or a spider's web.
- The poet is the Namer or Language-maker, whose work imitates God's.
- The poet's naming of things is second nature to him, and his symbols point to the natural truth of things.



# The Poet (1844)

- Patterned language is like pattern in nature, *e.g.* on a sea-shell
- Other forms of imagination – *e.g.* mathematics – work similarly. All can liberate us.





# The Poet (1844)

Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres.



# The Poet (1844)

Doubt not, O poet, but persist. Say, 'It is in me, and shall out.' Stand there, baulked and dumb, stuttering and stammering, hissed and hooted, stand and strive, until, at last, rage draw out of thee that *dream*-power which every night shows thee is thine own; a power transcending all limit and privacy, and by virtue of which a man is the conductor of the whole river of electricity.



Leaves  
*of*  
Grass.

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Brooklyn, New York:  
1855.



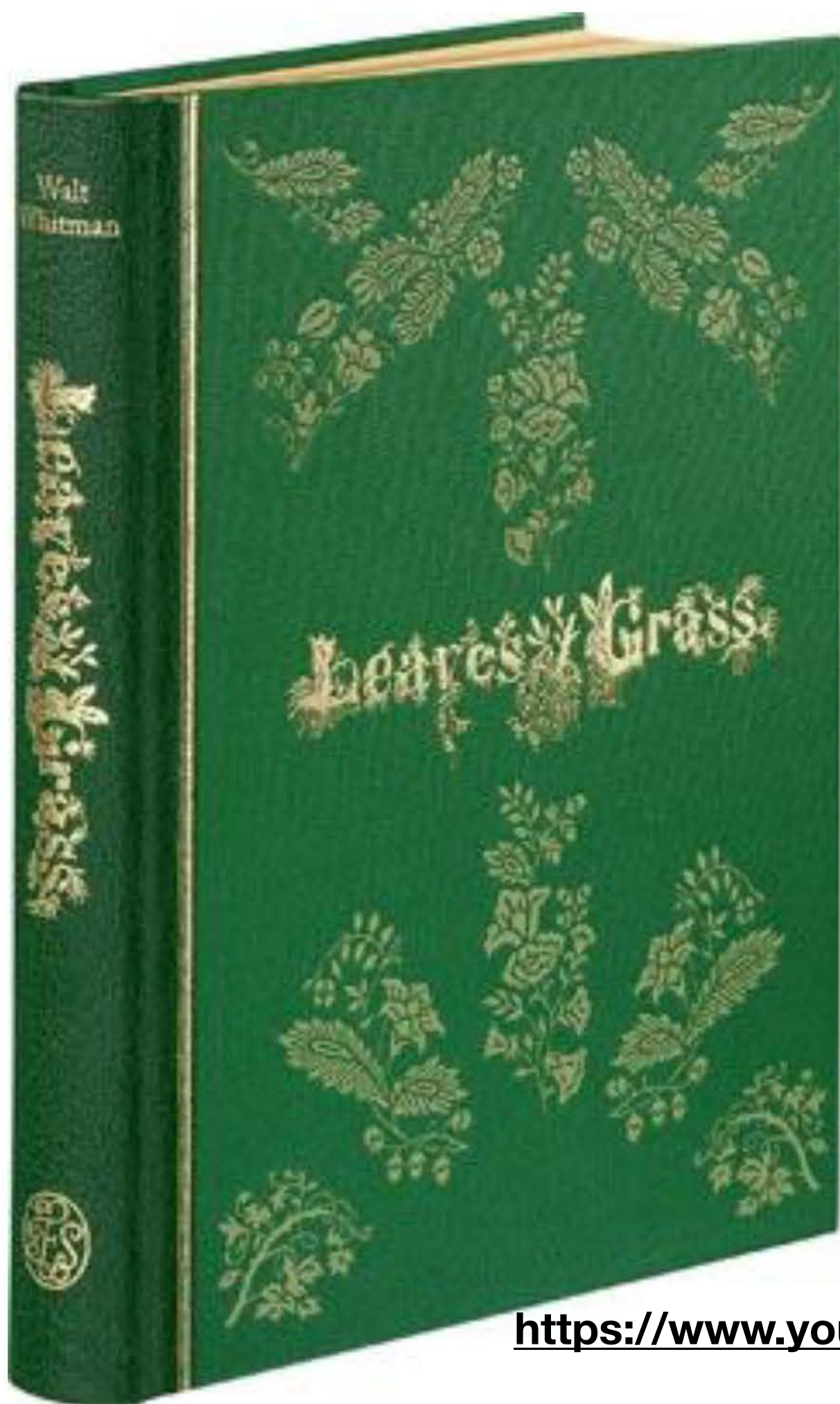


York City Parks  
This is a shared public space  
ment and recreation. We want you  
time. Dogs must be properly  
1. Please be courteous and  
g of debris  
park  
n designated areas  
ept in designated areas between the  
when the park is open  
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rk closes at 1am.  
t Parks, please call 311 or visit  
w.nyc.gov/parks.  
Parks & Recreation  
Icons: No smoking, No alcohol, No dogs, No bicycles, No skateboarding

WALT  
WHITMAN  
PARK

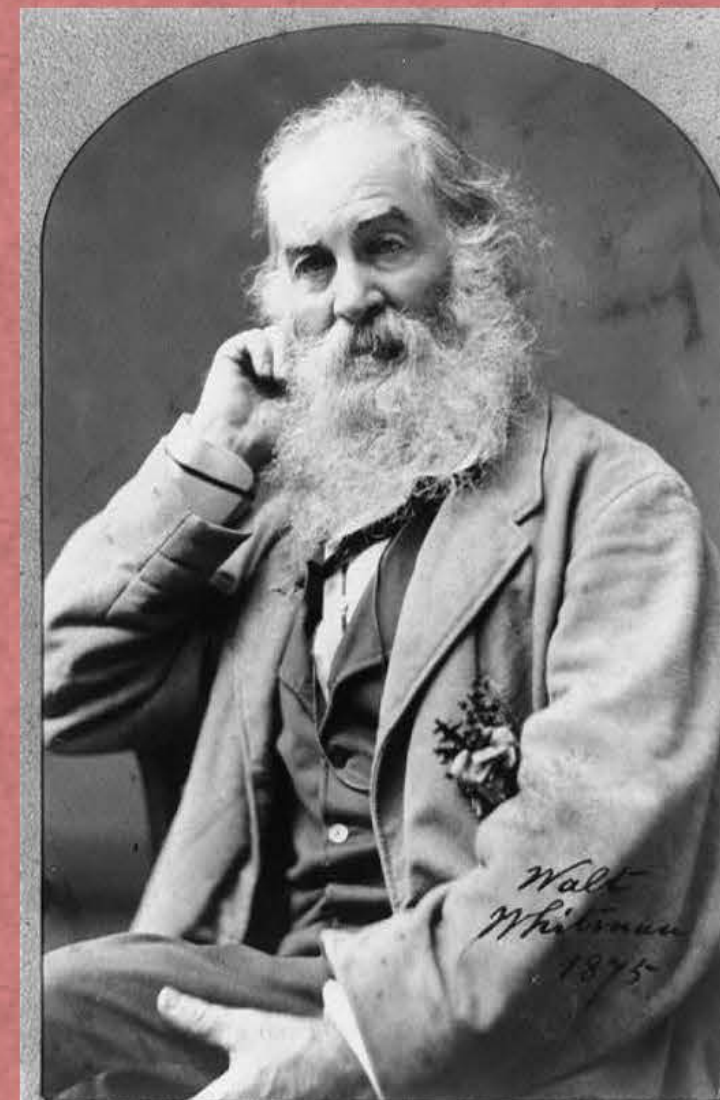
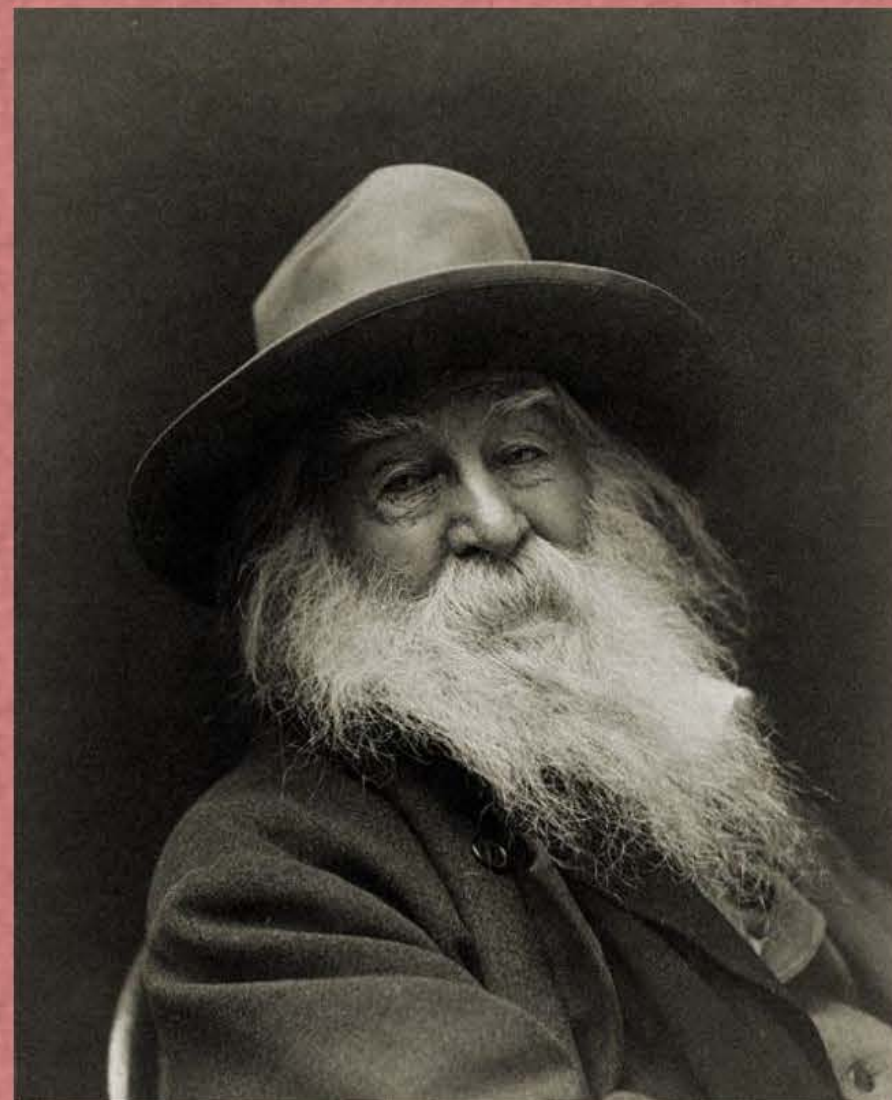
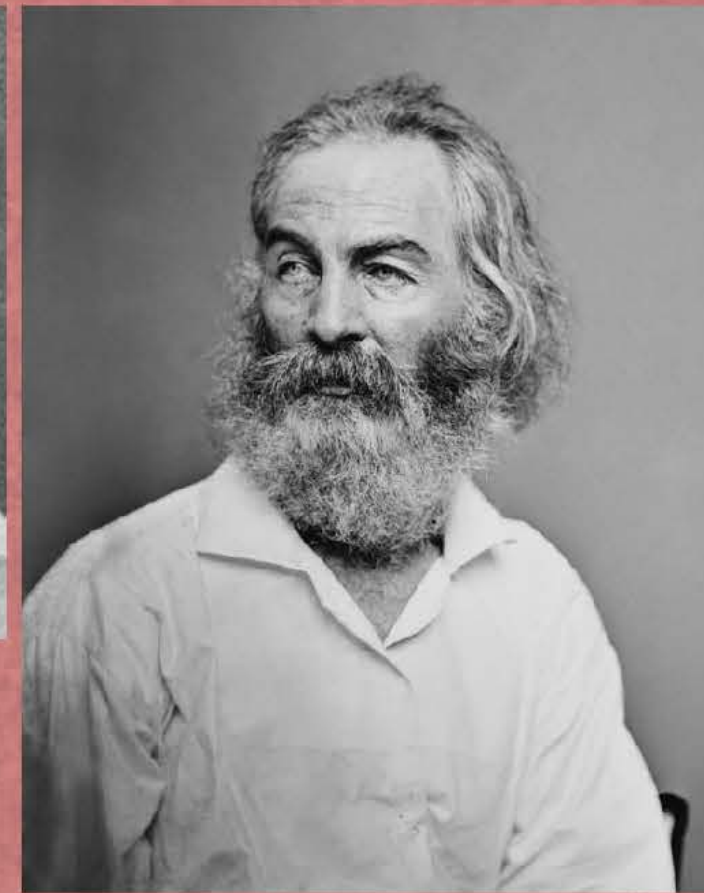
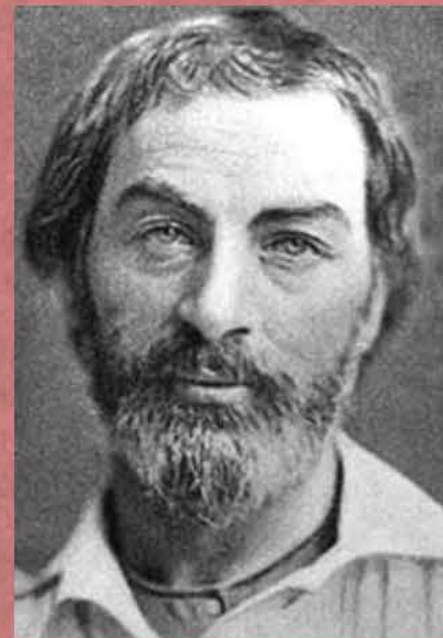






[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2M5O3\\_FYB4A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2M5O3_FYB4A)





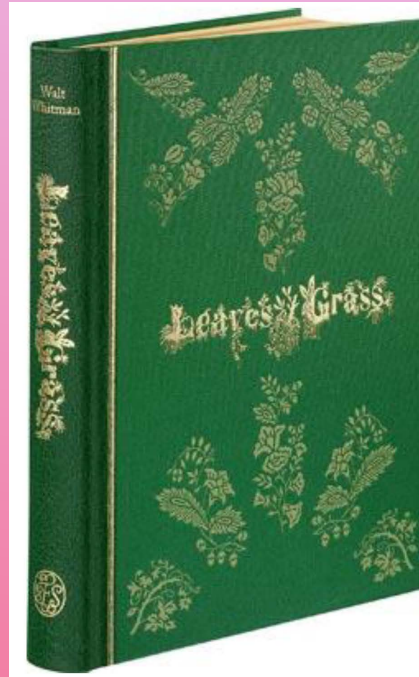








# Key ideas from Norton Introduction 20-23



Revolution in poetry- in both form and content.  
Powerful impact on later poets.

Spiritual (Quaker) origins and the impact of this on his writing.

Democratic, egalitarian bias in all his work and attuned to both country and city.

*Leaves of Grass* central symbol of his poetic intentions.

Constructive involvement in war.

Whitman's view of Lincoln as the soul of America- firm and profoundly religious.

Spontaneous Me p.1133

# Emerson to Whitman

Concord 21 July  
Mass<sup>ts</sup> } 1855

Dear Sir,

I am not  
blind to the worth of  
the wonderful gift of  
"Leaves of Grass." I find  
it the most extraordinary  
piece of wit & wisdom  
that America has yet  
contributed. I am very

offic. I wish to see  
my benefactor, & have  
felt much like striking  
my tasks, & visiting New York  
to pay you my respects.

R.W. Emerson.

Mr Walter Whitman.

21 July

1855 Concord Massachusetts

Dear Sir,

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our Western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely of fortifying and encouraging.

I did not know until I, last night, saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a Post-Office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

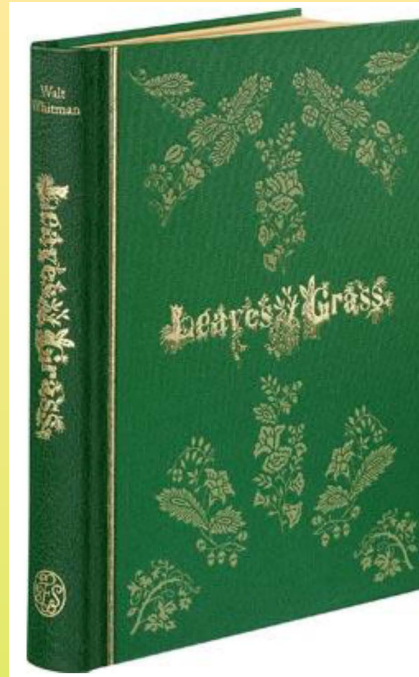
R.W. Emerson.





## Song of Myself (1855)

- Structure
  - grew in length over several editions
  - numbers added in a later edition
  - 52 sections – cyclical?
- Influence of Emerson?
- Organic form – Emersonian or not?
- “Poet of Personality”
- “Poet of democracy”
- Beginning of Modern poetry



**Democratic and fearless in language; affirmative at all aspects of experience; filled with a sense of the importance of being alive, awake, taking nothing for granted.**

**Poetry committed to making CONNECTIONS with all and everything. Verse form connected musically to its subject.**

**Sensuality and acceptance of all aspects of the physical body; defiantly anti-conventional Christianity in this matter.**

**Everywhere is special- different from English Romantic poets.**

**The poet as a gateway to OUR true selves.**

**INCANTATORY power of his verse.**

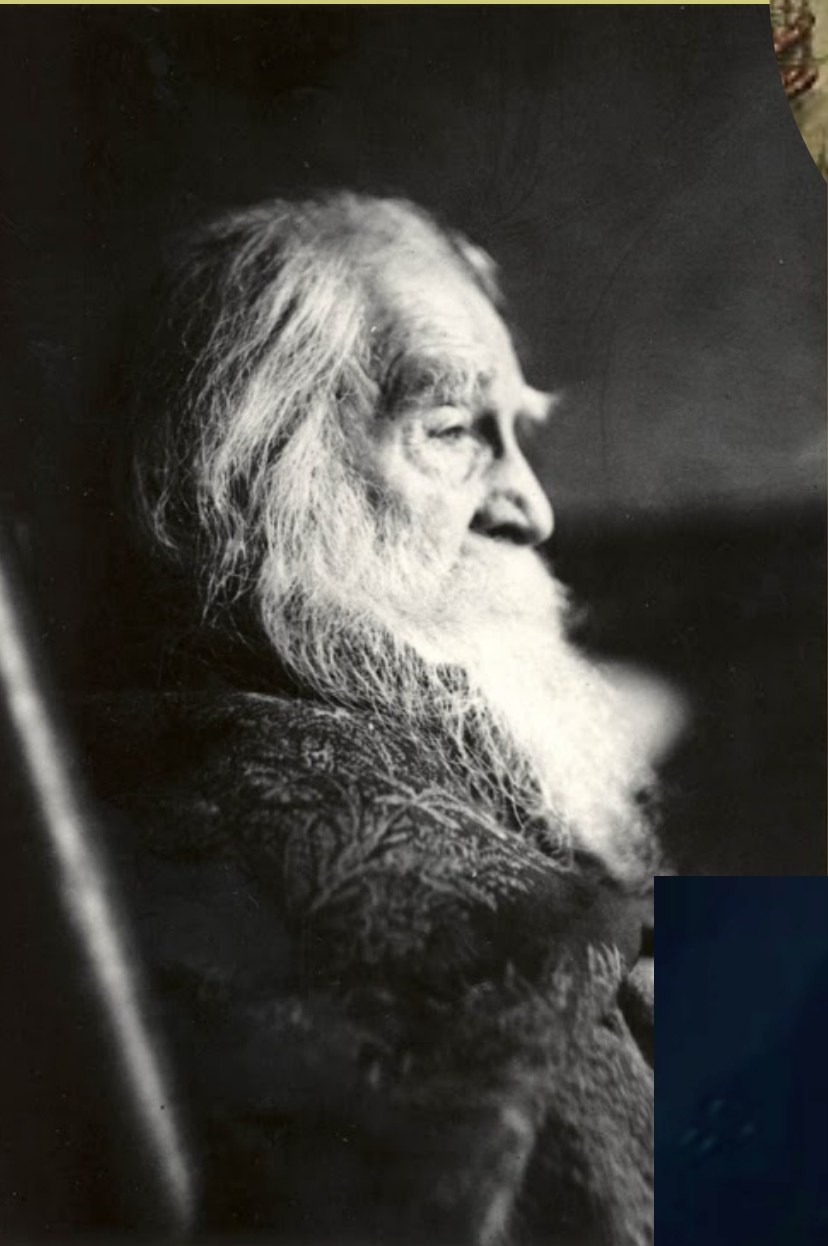
**Conveying everyday life in all its immediacy enfolded in image and rhythm.**

**“Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan”- Alive, fearless, anti-racism, slavery, anti-conventional church.**

**Importance of breath, sound and BEING.**

**Belief in “a leaf of grass” and what we can learn from animals**





**Mannahatta 1609**





# *Mannahatta*

I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,  
Whereupon lo! upsprang the aboriginal name.

Now I see what there is in a name, a word, liquid, sane, unruly, musical, self-sufficient,  
I see that the word of my city is that word from of old,  
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb,  
Rich, hemm'd thick all around with sailships and steamships, an island sixteen miles  
long, solid-founded,  
Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly  
uprising toward clear skies,  
Tides swift and ample, well-loved by me, toward sundown,  
The flowing sea-currents, the little islands, larger adjoining islands, the heights, the  
villas,

The countless masts, the white shore-steamers, the lighters, the ferry-boats, the black  
sea-steamers well-model'd,

The down-town streets, the jobbers' houses of business, the houses of business of the  
ship-merchants and money-brokers, the river-streets,

Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week,

The carts hauling goods, the manly race of drivers of horses, the brown-faced sailors,  
The summer air, the bright sun shining, and the sailing clouds aloft,

The winter snows, the sleigh-bells, the broken ice in the river, passing along up or  
down with the flood-tide or ebb-tide,

The mechanics of the city, the masters, well-form'd, beautiful-faced, looking you  
straight in the eyes,

Trottoirs throng'd, vehicles, Broadway, the women, the shops and shows,

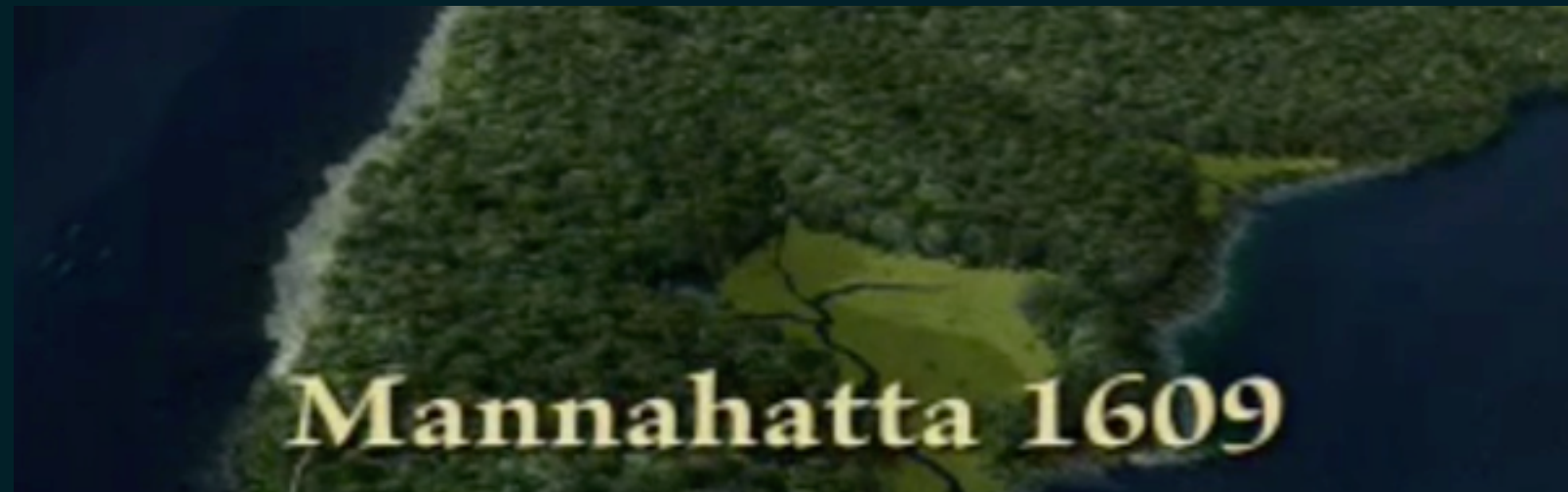
A million people—manners free and superb—open voices—hospitality—the most  
courageous and friendly young men,

City of hurried and sparkling waters! city of spires and masts!

City nested in bays! my city!

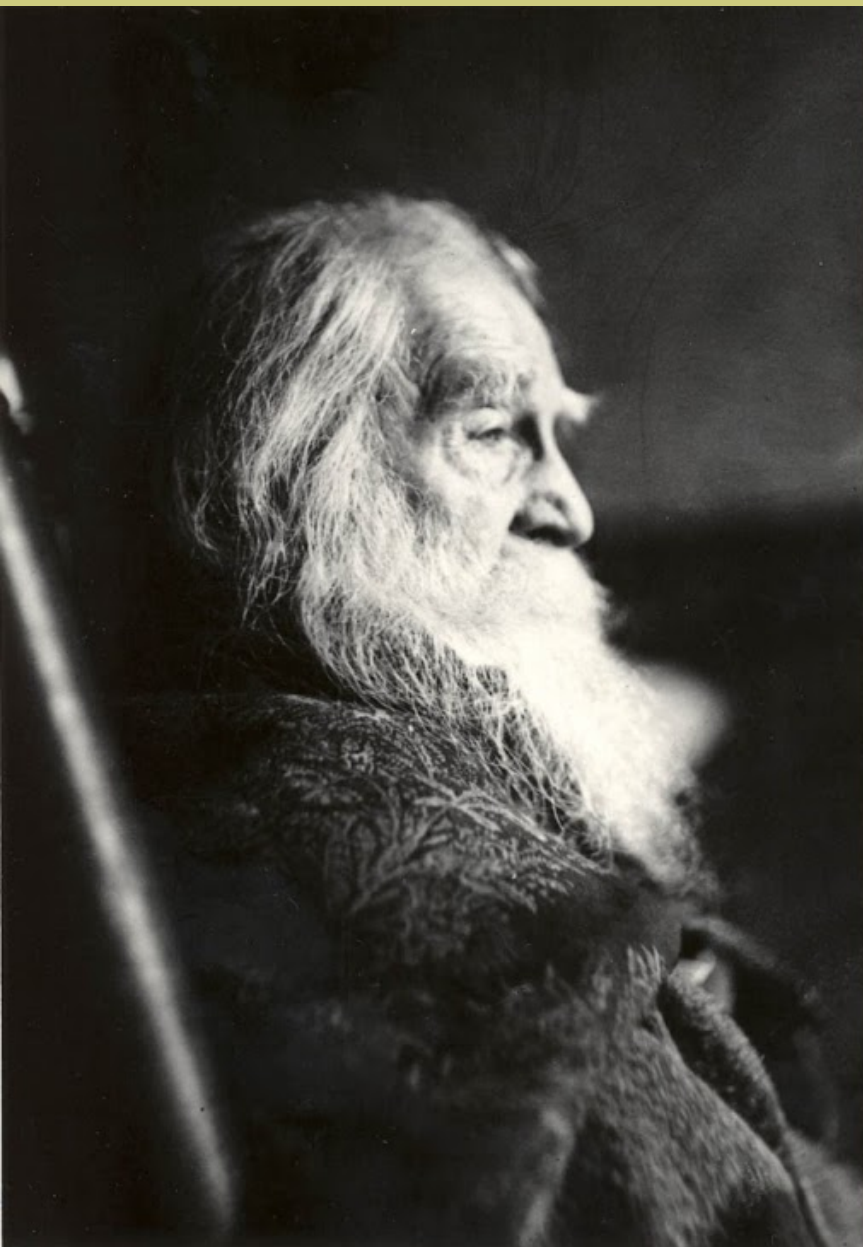
**Mannahatta 1609**







# Crossing Brooklyn Ferry





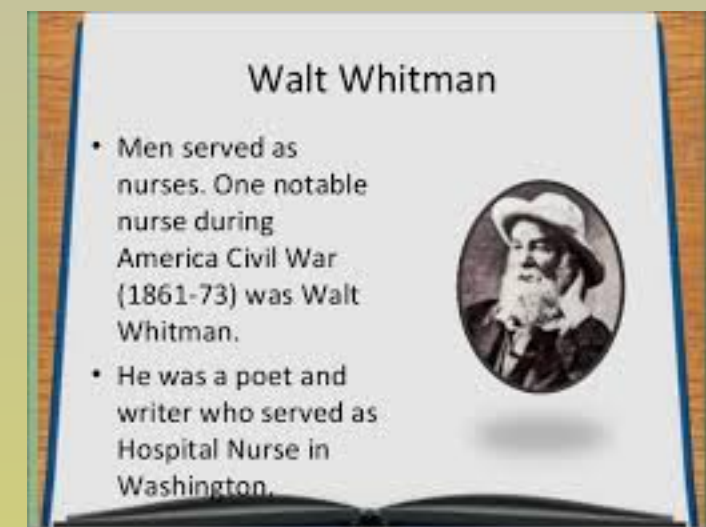


**Seeing present and future**  
**Food of impressions- sharpness of sensory observations**  
**Incantatory overcoming of constraints of time**  
**Formal freedom- Free Verse (pioneered by William Blake)**

## **Crossing Brooklyn Ferry**



# Civil War Poems



## Drum Taps p.1145

**Stark, bleak quality of the verse compared to *Leaves of Grass*- trying to hold on to some appreciation of divinity in nature... in the face of death and pain....**





O Captain! My Captain!



Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, & the Civil War  
THEHOMESCHOOLMOM

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done;  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:

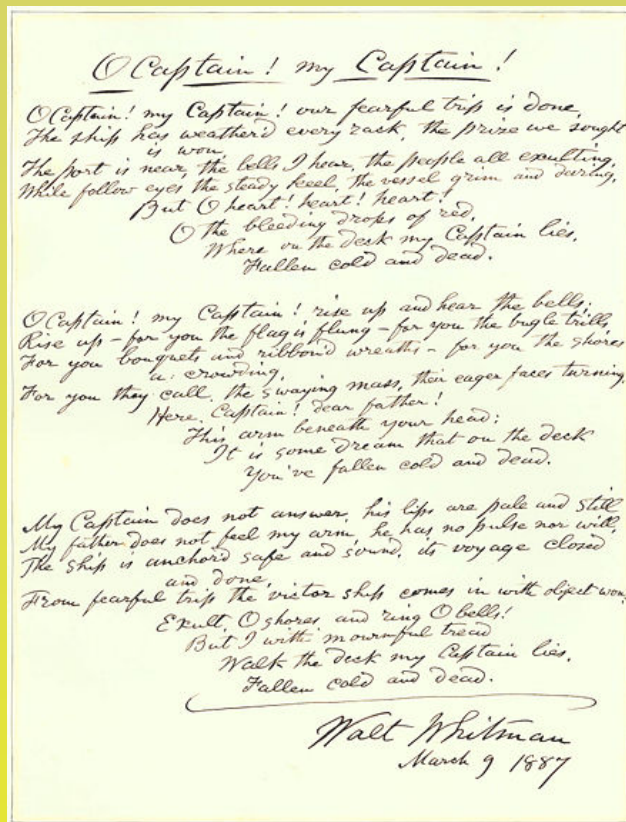
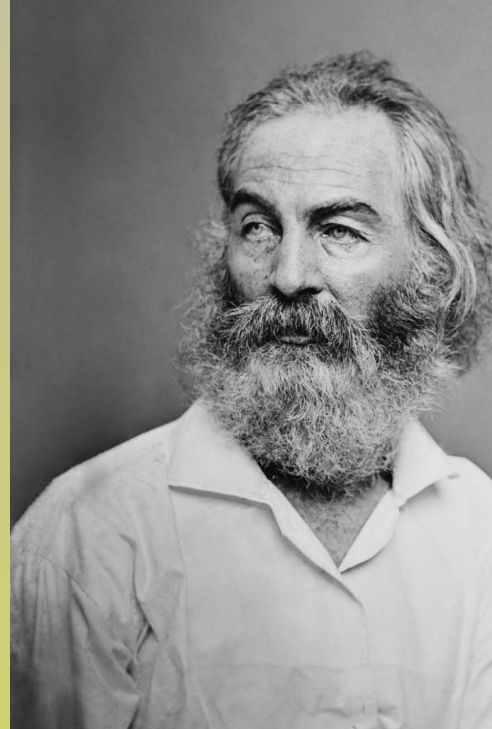
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head;  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;  
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;

Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!  
But I, with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.



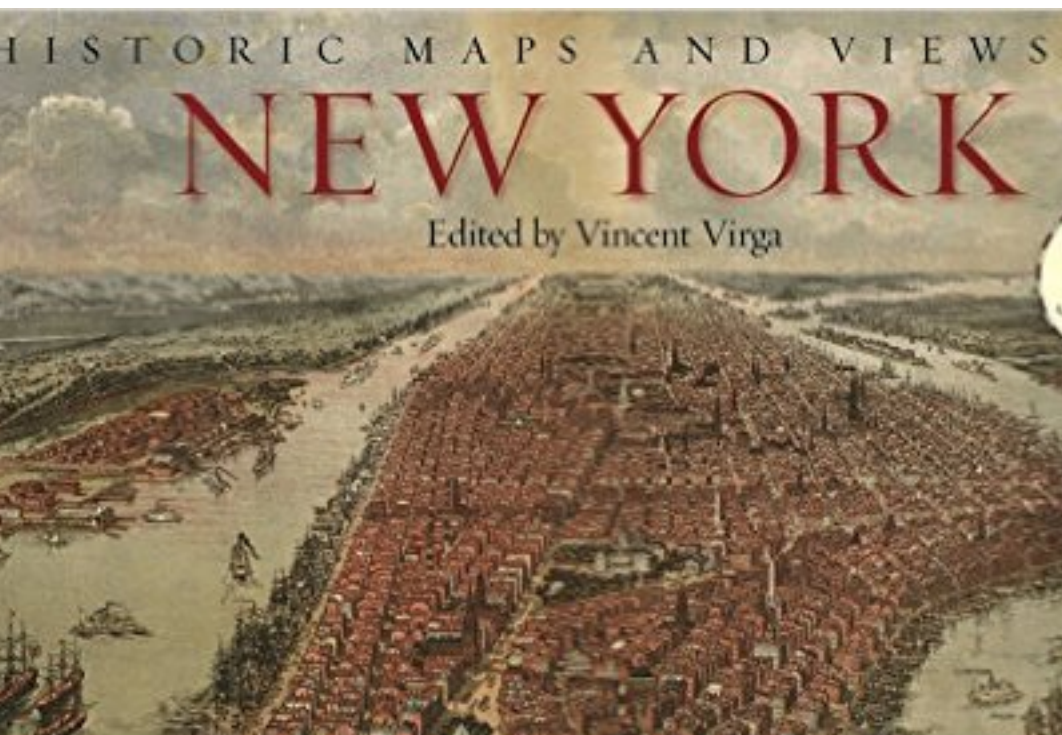


# Whitman's vision of America in *Democratic Vistas*

Honeycombed from top to toe with infidelism....  
thieves and scalliwags... the north just as full of bad  
stuff as the south....



<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/whitman/vistas/vistas.html>



Whitman condemned the corruption and greed of the **Gilded Age**, denouncing the post-Civil War materialism that had overtaken the country. "Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us," he wrote. His solution to the moral crisis was literature: "Two or three really original American poets...would give more compaction and more moral identity, (the quality to-day most needed) to these States, than all its Constitutions, legislative and judicial ties," he declared, believing that literature would unite the country.





# Emily Dickinson

Key ideas from Norton Introduction  
1246-1250/82-86

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLeMZ5WldrI>

**One of America's Greatest poets.**

**In life-style diametrically opposite to Whitman but sharing in many of his attitudes:  
to religion, to nature, to spirituality, to freedom in verse form (although radically different  
to Whitman)**

**Key themes: states of mind; querying God's plans; intensity of life's experiences;  
confrontation with death; intense quest for freedom and against all forms of orthodoxy;  
Key aspects of form: enjambement; ambiguity; metrical and syntactical experiments;  
openly expressive of sexual and romantic longings....**



# Emily Dickinson

- \*Poems about her ecstatic experience: 207 (I taste a liquor) p.87**
- \*Poems about her attitude to religion: 236 (Some keep the Sabbath) p.87**
- \*Poems about states of Being: 320; (There's a certain slant of light) p.90;**
- \*Poems that challenge world hierarchies: 124 (Safe in their Alabaster Chambers) p.1251; 409 (The Soul selects her own Society) p.93; 620 ( Much Madness is divinest Sense) p.96**
- \*Poems that confront the experience of death: 340 (I felt a Funeral, in my Brain) p.90; 479 (Because I could not stop for Death) p.94; 591 (I heard a Fly buzz- when I died-) p.96; 1773 (My life closed twice before it's close) p.1271.**
- \*Poems about nature: 359 (A Bird, came down the Walk) p.92; 1096 (A narrow fellow in the Grass) p.99.**
- \*Poems about her poetry: 519 (This is my letter to the World) p.96; 1263 (Tell all the truth but tell it slant) p.100;**
- \*Poem about being like a Loaded Gun: 764 (My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun) p.1267.**