

Multitudes: A Celebration of the Yale Collection of American Literature, 1911–2011
On view at Beinecke Library, Yale University, July 8 through October 1, 2011

Checklist and Descriptions: American Poetry

American Poetry: Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855).

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1856).

An example of the Yale Collection of American Literature's great strength in printed, manuscript, and visual materials documenting American Poetry is its outstanding collection of materials relating to the life and writing of Walt Whitman. One of the most important works of American Literature, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is a celebration of the democratic spirit, the emotional and intellectual power of literature and art, and the poet himself. In the 150 years since it was first published, *Leaves of Grass* and its author have played a crucial role in shaping American literature and America's literary imagination. The Beinecke's Whitman holdings contain copies of all major editions of *Leaves of Grass*, including five copies of the extraordinarily rare first edition, published in 1855, and several copies of the 1856 second edition, featuring a quotation from a letter Whitman received from Ralph Waldo Emerson in response to the first edition: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career...."

Walt Whitman, "Pictures," ca. 1850s.

Samuel Hollyer, lithograph from a daguerreotype of Walt Whitman by Gabriel Harrison, 1855.

Brady's Portrait Galleries, photograph of Walt Whitman, 1865.

G. F. E. Pearsall, photograph of Walt Whitman, 1872.

Edy Bros., photograph of Walt Whitman, 1880.

Walt Whitman's last pair of eyeglasses.

In addition to printed works, the Library's Walt Whitman Collection contains letters, manuscripts, photographs, art, and other material dating from 1842–1949, and features the

Whitmania of Yale benefactors Owen Franklin Aldis, Louis Mayer Rabinowitz, Adrian Van Sinderen and others. Outstanding manuscripts include Whitman's early 1850s poem "Pictures," often called a prototype for poems in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* because its expansive energy predicts the experimental free verse that characterizes Whitman's work. The Collection also includes numerous photographs of the poet. Whitman was quite conscious of his public persona and understood the powerful role that photography, still a new and developing technology, could play in helping him to reach his American audience. From the "rough" depicted in the portrait on the title page of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, to the respectable bard appearing in the edition published five years later, to the "Good Gray Poet" that emerged in the 1860s, Whitman's photographic image evolved over the course of his career as a writer and public figure. The Whitman Collection also includes artworks and objects such as bronze medallions and Whitman's own eyeglasses.