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SIGNET
CLASSICS

Walt Whitman
Leaves of Grass



A SIGNET CLASSIC

Walt Whitman

Poet, journalist, lover of freedom, Walt Whitman was born near Huntington, Long Island, New York on May 31, 1819. His father—a farmer and later a carpenter—moved his wife and nine children to Brooklyn in 1823. Walt attended public school until the age of twelve. Then for two decades he worked alternately as printer and journalist, except for two years of teaching on Long Island. In 1848, his “free soil” political beliefs lost him the editorship of the conservative Brooklyn *Eagle*, and he left the East to travel by stagecoach, train, and steamboat throughout the Southwest before returning home. In 1855, Whitman published his great tribute to America, the volume of poems which was to become his life’s work, *Leaves of Grass*. Although praised by Emerson, it met with a disappointing reception, and Whitman continued, thereafter, to revise and expand it. In all, between 1855 and 1892, he published nine editions; the first eight editions were all different in contents and arrangement. The ninth retained the format of the eighth but included some additional poems. During the Civil War and for some years after, Whitman worked as a war correspondent and government clerk, devoting much of his time to caring for the sick and wounded in the hospitals around Washington. His reactions to and interpretations of the struggle for freedom are to be found in *The Wound Dresser* and *Drum-Taps*. Stricken with paralysis in 1873, the poet retired to Camden, New Jersey, where he lived until his death on March 27, 1892.

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