WALT WHITMAN
QUARTERLY REVIEW

Volume 22 | Number 4 (2005) pps. 205-206

Reynolds, David S., ed., Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: The 150th Anniversary Edition [review]

Ed Folsom
University of Iowa, ed-folsom@uiowa.edu

ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)
ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

Copyright © 2005 The University of Iowa

Recommended Citation
Folsom, Ed. "Reynolds, David S., ed., Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: The 150th Anniversary Edition [review]." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 22 (Spring 2005), 205-206.

Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1776

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walt Whitman Quarterly Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

WALT WHITMAN. *Leaves of Grass: 150th Anniversary Edition.* Edited by David S. Reynolds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. xvi + 167 pp.

It is good to have the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* reissued during the sesquicentennial celebration of its publication. The Oxford University Press dustjacket copy tells us, however, that this special anniversary edition "captures the typeface, design, and layout of the original edition supervised by Whitman himself," giving readers "a sense of the 'ur-text' of *Leaves of Grass*." Well, there *have* been facsimiles of the first edition that have done a very good job of doing just that—most recently, the beautiful *Library of American Poets* 1855 *Leaves*, published by Collectors Reprints in 1992 and faithfully reproducing the original typeface, design, and layout. But the new Oxford edition is not a true facsimile, although it looks like it is trying to be one. The title page leaves off Whitman's name just as in the original but instead places the editor's name prominently in the space that Whitman left blank. Then the title page is repeated, this time without the author's or editor's name, but we notice the typeface and spacing are different than in the original, and the familiar decoration that stands between *Leaves of Grass* and "Brooklyn, New York: 1855" in the original is replaced with a sort of echo of the 1855 decoration. Across from the title page is a fuzzy reprint of the 1855 engraving of Whitman, but the striking effect of anonymity in the original is undermined by a bracketed caption identifying Whitman. We turn the page again to find the preface, reprinted in its familiar two-column format but now in modern type, repaginated, and prominently titled "Preface," even though there was no such title in the original edition (this inaccuracy is compounded by the repetition of "Preface" as a running head).

The poems are also printed in modern typeface, but at least here the publisher has kept the individual pages intact and has been careful to break each page as it was in the original. Most critics over the past century and a half have referred to the twelve poems in the original *Leaves* as "untitled," even though Whitman clearly put a title on the first six (using the identical title of "Leaves of Grass"), leaving only the final six—probably for reasons of space—untitled. The Oxford edition faithfully retains the "Leaves of Grass" identical titles on the first six poems but inaccurately adds the "Leaves of Grass" title to the final six poems as well, and then, following Malcolm Cowley's lead in his 1959 Viking Press reprinting of the first edition, undermines the effect by adding the final 1881 titles of the poems in brackets underneath the "Leaves of Grass" titles. The size of the book is much smaller than the original. It's still a handsome volume, but the nagging inaccuracies undercut what could have been an impressive smaller facsimile version. Those seeking to experience the physical appearance of the original volume would do better to get one of the true facsimiles (by Collectors Reprints or Eakins Press or Chandler Publishing), though these are becoming difficult to find.

The reason for choosing this edition would be the helpful collection of additional materials that are appended to the pseudo-facsimile: an informative afterword by David Reynolds, a collection of the known reviews of the first edition (including Whitman's self-reviews), Emerson's famous 1855 let-

ter to Whitman greeting him "at the beginning of a great career," and Whitman's cheeky response to Emerson, published originally in the 1856 edition of *Leaves*.

The University of Iowa ED FOLSOM