CALAMUS: A SERIES OF LETTERS WRITTEN DURING THE YEARS 1868-1880 TO A YOUNG FRIEND

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649467440

Calamus: A Series of Letters Written During the Years 1868-1880 to a Young Friend by Walt Whitman

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd. Cover @ 2017

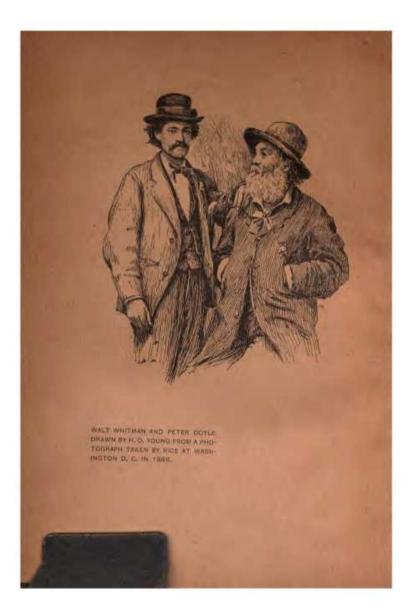
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WALT WHITMAN

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Trieste



CALAMUS A SERIES OF LETTERS WRITTEN DURING THE YEARS 1868-1880 BY WALT WHITMAN TO A YOUNG FRIEND (PETER DOYLE) EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE M.D. ONE OF WHITMAN'S LITERARY EXECUTORS

> ¹⁴ Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,

The friend, the lover's portrait of whom his friend his lover was fondest,

Who was not proud of his songs but of the measureless ocean of love within him and freely poured it forth."

Leaves of Grass (Ed'n 1892), p. 102.

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PUBLISHED BY LAURENS MAYNARD AT 287 CONGRESS STREET IN BOSTON MDCCCXCVII A A A A

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WHEN I heard at the close of the day how my name had been receiv'd with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that follow'd,

And else when I carous'd, or when my plans were accomplish'd, still I was not happy,

But the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health, refresh'd, singing, inhaling the ripe breath of Autumn,

When I saw the full moon in the west grow pale and disappear in the morning light,

When I wander'd alone over the beach, and undressing bathed, laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun rise,

And when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way coming, O then I was happy,

O then each breath tasted sweeter, and all that day my food nourish'd me more, and the beautiful day pass'd well,

And the next came with equal joy, and with the next at evening came my friend,

And that night when all was still I heard the waters roll slowly continually up the shores,

I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me whispering to congratulate me,

For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,

In the stillness in the Autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me,

And his arm lay lightly around my breast — and that night I was happy.

Leaves of Grass (Ed'n 1898) pp. 102-103.

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I have been privileged to read a series of letters addressed by Whitman to a young man, whom I will call P., and who was tenderly beloved by him. They throw a flood of light upon "Calamus," and are superior to any commentary. It is greatly to be hoped that they may be published. Whitman, it seems, met P. at Washington not long before the year 1869 when the lad was about eighteen years of age. They soon became attached, Whitman's friendship being returned with at least equal warmth by P. The letters breathe a purity and simplicity of affection, a naïveté and reasonableness, which are very remarkable considering the unmistakable intensity of the emotion. Throughout them, Whitman shows the tenderest and wisest care for his young friend's welfare, helps him in material ways, and bestows upon him the best advice, the heartiest encouragement, without betraying any sign of patronage or preaching. Illness soon attacked Walt. He retired to Camden, and P., who was employed as "baggage-master on the freight trains" of a railway, was for long unable to visit him. There is something very wistful in the words addressed from a distance by the aging poet to this "son of responding kisses." I regret that we do not possess P.'s answers, Yet, probably, to most readers, they would not appear highly interesting; for it is clear he was only an artless and uncultured workman .- JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS in Walt Whitman - A Study. pp 78, 79.

I HEAR it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions,

But really I am neither for nor against institutions,

(What indeed have I in common with them? or what with the destruction of them?)

Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these States inland and seaboard,

And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the water,

-

Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument,

The institution of the dear love of comrades.

Leaves of Grass (Ed's (Aga) p. 107