

Why is the collection called Leaves of Grass?

“Song of Myself”

“The volatile mixture of public and private concerns, political and sexual material, utopian content and regressive fantasy that characterizes Whitman’s best work is managed with spectacular success in “Song of Myself.” The poem as a whole is the sometimes buoyant, sometimes anguished, and ultimately unresolved attempt to turn these various preoccupations into facets of a single mystery or vision.” (Tenney Nathanson)

-written when Whitman was 37 years old and it is an epic – Whitman = hero

-52 sections long (52 weeks in a year)

-one section compliments or expands on the preceding

-uses cataloging technique extensively

-visual poetry, not just for the ears

-each line is a complete thought

-requires reader enthusiasm

-attempts to be a suitable epic for a democracy by trying to unify opposites

for example: Whitman is concerned about the union of body and soul

Arrangement of the poem by sections:

1-6 invocation – identifies the I

7-22 concerned with the self and soul and the power of the mind

23-32 concerned with the self and body and reality both physical, material

33-43 concerned with self and relation to the divine (God) or connection to everything through sympathy

44-52 farewell to the reader and conclusion