

Whitman comes alive

WPCC to host unique portrayal Thursday

It has now been 100 years since his death, yet the lyric passages of his poetry continue to inspire new generations of readers as they lay claim to his vision of America and of its people.

*I celebrate myself
And what I shall assume you
shall assume,
For every atom belonging to
me as good belongs to you.
I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease.
...observing a spear of
summer grass.*

The words are those of Walt Whitman — arguably America's best poet and certainly one of our nation's best known craftsmen of words, sentences and lyric phrases.

*Now for my last — let me
look back a moment;
The slower fainter ticking of
the clock is in me,
Exit, nightfall, and soon the
heart-thud stopping.
Long have we lived, joy'd,
caress'd together;
Delightful! — now separation
— Good-bye my Fancy.*

Whitman died in 1892, a crippled old man whose work had inspired harsh criticism from many of his literary contemporaries but whose lusty songs of praise for life and for living remain popular today.

The beauty and the power of those songs will literally come alive Thursday at 12:15 p.m. in Western Piedmont Community College's Moore Auditorium through the work of Daniel Barshay.

For more than an hour, Barshay will "become" the pre-Civil War Whitman, the Whitman who confounded critics in 1855 with the release of his first book, *Leaves of Grass*.

One reviewer has compared reading *Leaves of Grass* to "watching a man tear off his clothes at a dinner party and dance on the table."

For the past 13 years, Barshay has been bringing Whitman and his works to life for audiences all across America in a unique one-man portrayal of the poet who saw all the universe mirrored in a single blade of grass.

Describing his dedication to bringing Whitman's work to new audiences, Barshay recently told a New York Times reporter, "It's more than a role. It's a calling, a mission."

*All over bouquets of roses,
Oh death, I cover you over
with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac
that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the
sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come,
pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of
you O death.*

Following the pattern of the poet whom he now portrays, Barshay, 46, grew up in Brooklyn but now makes his home in Philadelphia.

He recounted to the New York Times reporter how his mother was blind and how he constantly heard spoken-word recordings of Whitman's poetry.

Turning to acting after trying his hand at various other professions, Barshay was inspired by Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight," to offer his own portrayal of Whitman.

It is more important now than

Bill
Poteat



ever before, Barshay said, to bring to life Whitman's works, both for those already familiar with them and for those who have not been exposed to his poetry

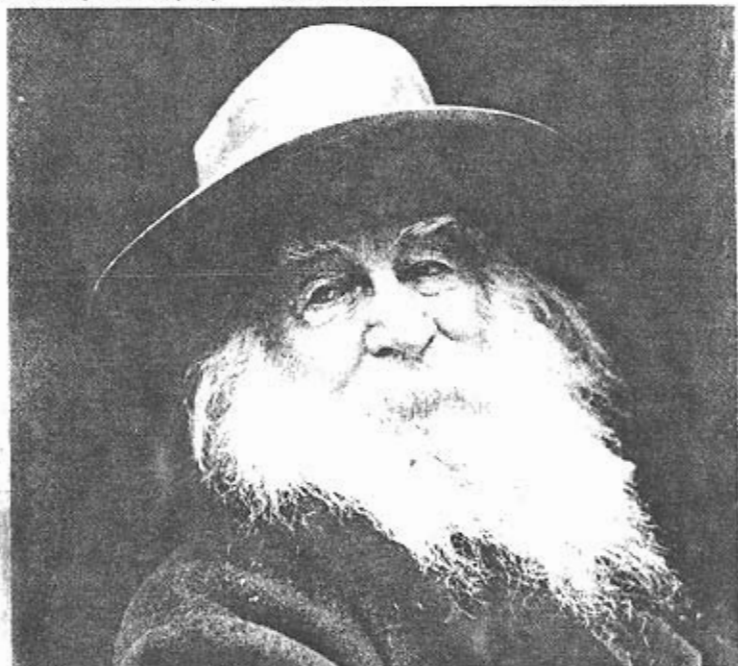
before.

For those works, Barshay believes, serve as a guide to life and as a model for American democracy — a guide and a model that are as relevant and as needed now as they were a hundred years ago.

*I have perceived that to be
with those who I like is enough,
To stop in company with the
rest at evening is enough.
To be surrounded by
beautiful curious laughing
flesh is enough.*

*to pass among them...to
touch any one...to rest
my arm ever so lightly round
his or her neck for a
moment... what is this
then?
I do not ask any more delight.
... I swim in it as a sea.*

Daniel Barshay will take to the stage as Whitman at 12:15 p.m. Thursday in the Moore Auditorium of Western Piedmont Community College. The performance is free and open to the public.



Walt Whitman in a photograph made in September of 1887.



Daniel Barshay has spent years bringing Whitman to life.