

# A Whitman sampler

## Celebration marks poet's birthday

By Brad Meyer

Courier staff

Considered controversial by 19th century standards, the work of American's premier poet still is being studied, discussed and revered more than a century after his death.

Students, scholars and area residents with an appreciation for classic American literature gathered at Lone Star College-Montgomery Thursday to discuss and pay tribute to Walt Whitman on the 189th anniversary of his birth.

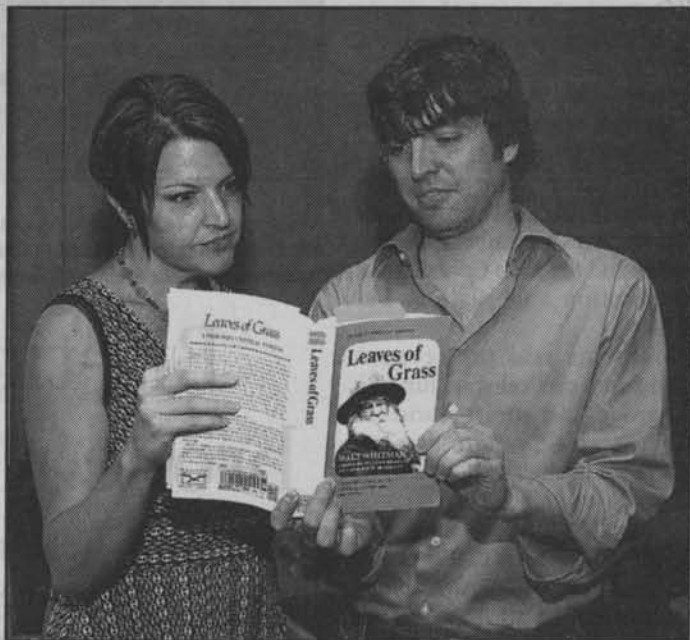
"Whitman broke barriers and defied the traditions of his time," said Dr. Jerry Loving, a Whitman biographer and professor at Texas A&M University. "He wrote about sex and real-life issues that faced society."

Most writers of the era, especially poets, wrote about nature and lofty ideals in an elegant and pastoral style, Loving said. But Whitman spoke in the common vernacular and addressed topics many considered taboo in the Victorian era.

While the scholars acknowledged some readers initially are intimidated by Whitman's writing, most discover his poetry and prose is worth the intellectual investment. In addition to the well-known "Leaves of Grass," Loving and Killingsworth recommend "Song of Myself" and "Dream Taps" to those seeking Whitman's best.

The annual celebration of Whitman's birthday, featuring a scholarly review followed by a reading of his and other influential poetry, is sponsored by the Montgomery County Literary Arts Council. The group hosts a variety of literary events, including bringing current writers to Montgomery County to discuss their work and encourage the development of new writers. In December, the group has an annual celebration of Emily Dickinson's birthday.

For more information about the Montgomery County Literary Arts Council, visit [www.literaryartscouncil.org](http://www.literaryartscouncil.org) or call (936) 273-7257.



Staff photo by Brad Meyer

Alicia Bankston, left, and Darren Jackson, instructors at Lone Star College-Montgomery, review "Leaves of Grass," Wal Whitman's best-known work, at the annual scholarly review of the writer's work.