

To Walt Whitman

By RAY LEWIS

From Songs of the Universe.

They say I sing your songs;
I know that my tones
Are not as full, as round, as vibrant as yours;
Still I am glad that with my feeble voice
I have the courage to sing your melodies.
They shake their heads these critics, murmuring,
"It is a pity she follows Walt Whitman so closely";
And I in place of being dismayed
Pray that I may be enfolded in your strong thoughts,
Impregnated with your ideals,
And that my songs will so resemble yours
That all men hearing them will cry aloud,
"Walt Whitman is their father."



I saw in Louisiana a live oak growing,
All alone stood it, and the moss hung down from the
branches,
Without any companion it grew there, uttering joyous leaves
of dark green
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty made me think of myself
But I wondered how it could utter joyous leaves, standing
alone there, without its friend, its lover near, for I knew
I could not.
And I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and
twined around it a little moss,
And brought it away—and I have placed it in sight in my room.
It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,
(For I believe lately I think of little else than of them)
Yet it remains to me a curious token—it makes me think of manly
love—
For all that, and though the live oak glistens there in Louisiana,
solitary, in a wide flat space,
Uttering joyous leaves all its life, without a friend, a lover near.
I know very well I could not.

—Whitman.