

Kate Britt

TO WALT WHITMAN

"I announce what comes after me."
Whitman, So Long! LG 1892

Has America done what was promis'd?
This century of loss brought forth consummations?
We heard your song, Camerado;
Your challenge rang out in a little old print
shop in Brooklyn.

While your music was acclaimed in England,
Perhaps it was proximity that deafened us.
Or fear.

Your melody wasted when the ship went down,
Leaving words to be read on dust covered stages,
In silent auditoriums, under tattered American
flags.

We denied you, made you notorious,
But do not abandon us.
The men, the women, the largest oak, and tiny
ant,

I, too, tremble at the faith you discourse.
And, you know, I've never even been to
Camden . . .

Perhaps I fear to arrive and not find you on
the littered streets, my gay friend,
Selling the latest edition of Leaves to a few
warm-blooded Jerseyites.

I hear they've erected a monument to you in that
city:

Celebrating the muse across the Delaware.

Sing to me, Walt Whitman!
Is there not beauty to be found here?
Is there not truth or good accessible?
Bring forth birth and death triumphant.
Kind sir, with your touch teach me to live,
Teach me to raise my voice in song.