

## TO A STRANGER

Walt Whitman

PASSING stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,  
You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me, as of a  
dream,)

I have somewhere surely lived a life of joy with you,  
All is recall'd as we flit by each other, fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured,  
You grew up with me, were a boy with me, or a girl with me,                   5  
I ate with you, and slept with you—your body has become not yours only, nor left  
my body mine only,

You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass—you take of my  
beard, breast, hands, in return,

I am not to speak to you—I am to think of you when I sit alone, or wake at night  
alone,

I am to wait—I do not doubt I am to meet you again,  
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.

# CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY

Walt Whitman

1

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,

And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,  
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,

The similitudes of the past and those of the future,

The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,

The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,

The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,

The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,

Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,

Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,

Others will see the islands large and small;

Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,

A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,

Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

3

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations

hence,

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,  
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,  
Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was  
refresh'd,  
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood  
yet was hurried,  
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes  
of steamboats, I look'd.

I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,  
Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with  
motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,  
Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in  
strong shadow,  
Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south,  
Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,  
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,  
Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the  
sunlit water,  
Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,  
Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,  
Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,  
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,  
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at anchor,  
The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,  
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine  
pennants,  
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,  
The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,  
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,  
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests  
and glistening,  
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite  
storehouses by the docks,  
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by  
the barges, the hay-boat, the belated lighter,  
On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and  
glaringly into the night,  
Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over the

tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets.

4

These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,  
I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,  
The men and women I saw were all near to me,  
Others the same—others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them,  
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

5

What is it then between us?  
What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?

Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not,  
I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,  
I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around it,  
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,  
In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,  
In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me,  
I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,  
I too had receiv'd identity by my body,  
That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my  
body.

6

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,  
The dark threw its patches down upon me also,  
The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious,  
My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?  
Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,  
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,  
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,  
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,  
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,  
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,  
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,  
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,  
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting,  
Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,  
Was call'd by my nighest name by clear loud voices of young men as they saw me

approaching or passing,  
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh  
against me as I sat,  
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly, yet never told  
them a word,  
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,  
  
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,  
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,  
Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

7

Closer yet I approach you,  
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in  
advance,  
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Who was to know what should come home to me?  
Who knows but I am enjoying this?  
Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all  
you cannot see me?

8

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd  
Manhattan?  
River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?  
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated  
lighter?

What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call  
me promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I approach?  
What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in  
my face?  
Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?

We understand then do we not?  
What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?  
What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is  
accomplish'd, is it not?

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!

Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!

Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me, or the men and women generations after me!

Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!

Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta! stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!

Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!

Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!

Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!

Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my highest name!

Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!

Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;

Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with the hasting current;

Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;

Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!

Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sunlit water!

Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd schooners, sloops, lighters!

Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset!

Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light over the tops of the houses!

Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,

You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,

About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung out divinest aromas,

Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,

Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,

Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.

You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,

We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward,

Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,

We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us,  
We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also,  
You furnish your parts toward eternity,  
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

# SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE

Walt Whitman

9

(America! I do not vaunt my love for you;  
I have what I have.)

The axe leaps!

The solid forest gives fluid utterances;

They tumble forth, they rise and form,

Hut, tent, landing, survey,

Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,

Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, jamb, lath, panel, gable,

Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition-house, library,

Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, shutter, turret, porch,

Hoe, rake, pitch-fork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw, jack-plane, mallet, wedge,  
rounce,

Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,

Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not,

Capitols of States, and capitol of the nation of States,

Long stately rows in avenues, hospitals for orphans, or for the poor or sick,

Manhattan steamboats and clippers, taking the measure of all seas.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of the using of axes anyhow, and the users, and all that neighbors them,

Cutters down of wood, and haulers of it to the Penobscot or Kennebec,

Dwellers in cabins among the California mountains, or by the little lakes, or on  
the Columbia,

Dwellers south on the banks of the Gila or Rio Grande—friendly gatherings, the  
characters and fun,

Dwellers up north in Minnesota and by the Yellowstone river—dwellers on coasts  
and off coasts,

Seal-fishers, whalers, arctic seamen breaking passages through the ice.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets;

Shapes of the two-threaded tracks of railroads;



Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches;  
Shapes of the fleets of barges, towns, lake and canal craft, river craft.

The shapes arise!

Ship-yards and dry-docks along the Eastern and Western Seas, and in many a  
bay and by-place,

The live-oak kelsons, the pine planks, the spars, the hackmatack-roots for knees,

The ships themselves on their ways, the tiers of scaffolds, the workmen busy  
outside and inside,

The tools lying around, the great auger and little auger, the adze, bolt, line,  
square, gouge, and bead-plane.

10

The shapes arise!

The shape measur'd, saw'd, jack'd, join'd, stain'd,

The coffin-shape for the dead to lie within in his shroud;

The shape got out in posts, in the bedstead posts, in the posts of the bride's bed;

The shape of the little trough, the shape of the rockers beneath, the shape of the  
babe's cradle;

The shape of the floor-planks, the floor-planks for dancers' feet;

The shape of the planks of the family home, the home of the friendly parents and  
children,

The shape of the roof of the home of the happy young man and woman—the roof  
over the well-married young man and woman,

The roof over the supper joyously cook'd by the chaste wife, and joyously eaten  
by the chaste husband, content after his day's work.

The shapes arise!

The shape of the prisoner's place in the court-room, and of him or her seated in  
the place;

The shape of the liquor-bar lean'd against by the young rum-drinker and the old  
rum-drinker;

The shape of the shamed and angry stairs, trod by sneaking footsteps;

The shape of the sly settee, and the adulterous unwholesome couple;

The shape of the gambling-board with its devilish winnings and losings;

The shape of the step-ladder for the convicted and sentenced murderer, the  
murderer with haggard face and pinion'd arms,

The sheriff at hand with his deputies, the silent and white-lipp'd crowd, the  
dangling of the rope.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of doors giving many exits and entrances;  
The door passing the dissever'd friend, flush'd and in haste;  
The door that admits good news and bad news;  
The door whence the son left home, confident and puff'd up;  
The door he enter'd again from a long and scandalous absence, diseas'd, broken  
down, without innocence, without means.

11

Her shape arises,

She, less guarded than ever, yet more guarded than ever;  
The gross and soil'd she moves among do not make her gross and soil'd;  
She knows the thoughts as she passes—nothing is conceal'd from her;  
She is none the less considerate or friendly therefor;  
She is the best belov'd—it is without exception—she has no reason to fear, and  
she does not fear;  
Oaths, quarrels, hiccupp'd songs, smutty expressions, are idle to her as she  
passes;  
She is silent—she is possess'd of herself—they do not offend her;  
She receives them as the laws of nature receive them—she is strong,  
She too is a law of nature—there is no law stronger than she is.

12

The main shapes arise!

Shapes of Democracy, total—result of centuries;  
Shapes, ever projecting other shapes;  
Shapes of turbulent manly cities;  
Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,  
Shapes bracing the earth, and braced with the whole earth.

## OF BEING NUMEROUS, 40

George Oppen

Whitman: 'April 19, 1864

The capitol grows upon one in time, especially as they have got the great figure on top of it now, and you can see it very well. It is a great bronze figure, the Genius of Liberty I suppose. It looks wonderful toward sundown. I love to go and look at it. The sun when it is nearly down shines on the headpiece and it dazzles and glistens like a big star: it looks quite curious...'

# SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the  
same,  
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,  
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,  
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,  
Nature without check with original energy.

2

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,  
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,  
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,  
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,  
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,  
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine,  
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and  
air through my lungs,  
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color'd sea-  
rocks, and of hay in the barn,  
The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind,

A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,  
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,  
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hill-sides,  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and  
meeting the sun.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?  
Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?  
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,  
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)  
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the  
eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,  
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,  
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

# SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

3

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,  
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,  
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,  
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,  
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Urge and urge and urge,  
Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase,  
always sex,  
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well entretied, braced in  
the beams,  
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,  
I and this mystery here we stand.

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,  
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,  
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am  
silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,  
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than  
the rest.

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;  
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and  
    withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread,  
Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their  
    plenty,  
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,  
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,  
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,  
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?

## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

5

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,  
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,  
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,  
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,  
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,  
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-  
stript heart,  
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the  
argument of the earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters  
and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is love,  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-  
weed.



## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

6

A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark,  
and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,  
Growing among black folks as among white,  
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the  
same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,  
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,  
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their  
mothers' laps,  
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,  
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,  
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,  
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,

And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of  
their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?  
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,  
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,  
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,  
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

7

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?

I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not  
contain'd between my hat and boots,

And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,

The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,

I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as  
myself,

(They do not know how immortal, but I know.)

Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,

For me those that have been boys and that love women,

For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,

For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the mothers of  
mothers,

For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,

For me children and the begetters of children.

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,

I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,

And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken away.

## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

15

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,

The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild  
ascending lisp,

The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,

The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,

The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,

The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,

The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,

The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,

The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day loafe and looks at the  
oats and rye,

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,

(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-room;)

The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,

He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;

The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,

What is removed drops horribly in a pail;

The quadron girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the bar-  
room stove,

The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the gate-  
keeper marks who pass,

The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do not know  
him;)

The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,

The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their rifles,  
some sit on logs,

Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;

The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee,

As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them from his  
saddle,

The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the  
dancers bow to each other,

The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical rain,

The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,

The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale,  
The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut eyes bent sideways,  
As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the shore-going passengers,  
The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it off in a ball, and stops now and then for the knots,  
The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne her first child,  
The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the factory or mill,  
The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering with blue and gold,  
The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk, the shoemaker waxes his thread,  
The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,  
The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,  
The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white sails sparkle!)  
The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,  
The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about the odd cent;)  
The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,  
The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,  
The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck,  
The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each other, (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)  
The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great Secretaries,  
On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,  
The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,  
The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,  
As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the jingling of loose change,  
The floor-men are laying the floor, the tinnners are tinning the roof, the masons are calling for mortar,  
In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;  
Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it is the fourth of Seventh-month, (what salutes of cannon and small arms!)

Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows, and the  
winter-grain falls in the ground;  
Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen  
surface,  
The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his  
axe,  
Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-trees,  
Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those drain'd by  
the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,  
Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or Altamahaw,  
  
Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons around  
them,  
In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their day's  
sport,  
The city sleeps and the country sleeps,  
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,  
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife;  
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,  
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,  
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

# SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

23

Endless unfolding of words of ages!  
And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.

A word of the faith that never balks,  
Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.

It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,  
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.

I accept Reality and dare not question it,  
Materialism first and last imbuing.

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!  
Fetch stonecrop mixt with cedar and branches of lilac,  
This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this made a grammar of the old  
cartouches,  
These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas.  
This is the geologist, this works with the scalpel, and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen, to you the first honors always!  
Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,  
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.

Less the reminders of properties told my words,  
And more the reminders they of life untold, and of freedom and extrication,  
And make short account of neuters and geldings, and favor men and women fully  
equipt,  
And beat the gong of revolt, and stop with fugitives and them that plot and  
conspire.

# SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

33

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,  
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,  
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,  
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,  
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision.

By the city's quadrangular houses—in log huts, camping with lumbermen,  
Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,  
Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing  
savannas, trailing in forests,  
Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,  
Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,  
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns  
furiously at the hunter,  
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding  
on fish,  
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,  
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the  
mud with his paddle-shaped tail;  
Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the rice in its  
low moist field,  
Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and slender shoots  
from the gutters,  
Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate blue-  
flower flax,  
Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest,  
Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;  
Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged  
limbs,  
Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,  
Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,  
Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great gold-bug drops



through the dark,  
Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,  
Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their  
hides,  
Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle the  
hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;  
Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,  
Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,  
Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking  
composedly down,)  
Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green  
eggs in the dented sand,  
Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,  
Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,  
Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,  
Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,  
Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;  
Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,  
Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,  
Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,  
Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,  
Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,  
At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking,  
laughter,  
At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through  
a straw,  
At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,  
At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings;  
Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,  
Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd,  
where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,  
Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare,  
where the cock is treading the hen,  
Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,  
Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,  
Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,  
Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is  
curving and winding,  
Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human  
laugh,

Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,  
Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,  
Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,  
Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,  
Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and  
    feeds upon small crabs,  
Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,  
Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,  
Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,  
Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,  
Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or  
    public hall;  
Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,  
Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,  
Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,  
Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,  
Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, impress'd  
    seriously at the camp-meeting;  
Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flattening the  
    flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,  
Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or down a  
    lane or along the beach,  
My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;  
Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he rides at  
    the drape of the day,)  
Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin  
    print,  
By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,  
Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;  
Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,  
Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,  
Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,  
Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while,  
Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by my side,  
Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,  
Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty  
    thousand miles,  
Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,  
Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,  
Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,

Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,  
I tread day and night such roads.

I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,  
And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,  
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

I help myself to material and immaterial,  
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.

I anchor my ship for a little while only,  
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.

I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff,  
clinging to topples of brittle and blue.

I ascend to the foretruck,  
I take my place late at night in the crow's-nest,  
We sail the arctic sea, it is plenty light enough,  
Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful beauty,  
The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the scenery is plain in all  
directions,  
The white-topt mountains show in the distance, I fling out my fancies toward  
them,  
We are approaching some great battle-field in which we are soon to be engaged,  
We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass with still feet and  
caution,  
Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin'd city,  
The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities of the globe.

I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,  
I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,  
I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs,  
They fetch my man's body up dripping and drown'd.

I understand the large hearts of heroes,

The courage of present times and all times,  
How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship, and  
    Death chasing it up and down the storm,  
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and  
    faithful of nights,  
And chalk'd in large letters on a board, Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;  
How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would not give it  
    up,  
How he saved the drifting company at last,  
How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from the side of their  
    prepared graves,  
How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd  
    unshaved men;  
All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,  
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,  
The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children  
    gazing on,  
The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with  
    sweat,  
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous buckshot  
    and the bullets,  
All these I feel or am.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,  
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,  
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my skin,  
I fall on the weeds and stones,  
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,  
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,  
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded  
    person,  
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,  
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,  
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,

I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,  
They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,  
Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,  
White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared of their fire-  
caps,  
The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.

Distant and dead resuscitate,  
They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.

I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,  
I am there again.

Again the long roll of the drummers,  
Again the attacking cannon, mortars,  
Again to my listening ears the cannon responsive.

I take part, I see and hear the whole,  
The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim'd shots,  
The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip,  
Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs,  
The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion,  
The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air.

Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his hand,  
He gasps through the clot Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments.

## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,  
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,  
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,  
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,  
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

## SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

5

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,  
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,  
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,  
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,  
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,  
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-  
stript heart,  
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the  
argument of the earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters  
and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is love,  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-  
weed.

# SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman

33

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,  
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,  
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,  
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,  
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision.

By the city's quadrangular houses—in log huts, camping with lumbermen,  
Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,  
Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing  
savannas, trailing in forests,  
Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,  
Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,  
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns  
furiously at the hunter,  
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding  
on fish,  
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,  
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the  
mud with his paddle-shaped tail;  
Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the rice in its  
low moist field,  
Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and slender shoots  
from the gutters,  
Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate blue-  
flower flax,  
Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest,  
Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;  
Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged  
limbs,  
Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,  
Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,  
Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great gold-bug drops



through the dark,  
Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,  
Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their  
hides,  
Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle the  
hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;  
Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,  
Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,  
Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking  
composedly down,)  
Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green  
eggs in the dented sand,  
Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,  
Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,  
Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,  
Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,  
Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;  
Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,  
Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,  
Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,  
Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,  
Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,  
At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking,  
laughter,  
At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through  
a straw,  
At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,  
At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings;  
Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,  
Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd,  
where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,  
Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare,  
where the cock is treading the hen,  
Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,  
Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,  
Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,  
Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is  
curving and winding,  
Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human  
laugh,

Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,  
Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,  
Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,  
Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,  
Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and  
    feeds upon small crabs,  
Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,  
Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,  
Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,  
Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,  
Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or  
    public hall;  
Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,  
Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,  
Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,  
Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,  
Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, impress'd  
    seriously at the camp-meeting;  
Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flattening the  
    flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,  
Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or down a  
    lane or along the beach,  
My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;  
Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he rides at  
    the drape of the day,)  
Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin  
    print,  
By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,  
Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;  
Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,  
Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,  
Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,  
Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while,  
Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by my side,  
Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,  
Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty  
    thousand miles,  
Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,  
Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,  
Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,

Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,  
I tread day and night such roads.

I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,  
And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,  
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

I help myself to material and immaterial,  
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.

I anchor my ship for a little while only,  
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.

I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff,  
clinging to topples of brittle and blue.

I ascend to the foretruck,  
I take my place late at night in the crow's-nest,  
We sail the arctic sea, it is plenty light enough,  
Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful beauty,  
The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the scenery is plain in all  
directions,  
The white-topt mountains show in the distance, I fling out my fancies toward  
them,  
We are approaching some great battle-field in which we are soon to be engaged,  
We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass with still feet and  
caution,  
Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin'd city,  
The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities of the globe.

I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,  
I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,  
I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs,  
They fetch my man's body up dripping and drown'd.

I understand the large hearts of heroes,

The courage of present times and all times,  
How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship, and  
    Death chasing it up and down the storm,  
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and  
    faithful of nights,  
And chalk'd in large letters on a board, Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;  
How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would not give it  
    up,  
How he saved the drifting company at last,  
How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from the side of their  
    prepared graves,  
How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd  
    unshaved men;  
All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,  
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,  
The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children  
    gazing on,  
The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with  
    sweat,  
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous buckshot  
    and the bullets,  
All these I feel or am.

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Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,  
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my skin,  
I fall on the weeds and stones,  
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,  
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,  
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded  
    person,  
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,  
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,  
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,

I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,  
They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,  
Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,  
White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared of their fire-  
caps,  
The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.

Distant and dead resuscitate,  
They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.

I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,  
I am there again.

Again the long roll of the drummers,  
Again the attacking cannon, mortars,  
Again to my listening ears the cannon responsive.

I take part, I see and hear the whole,  
The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim'd shots,  
The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip,  
Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs,  
The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion,  
The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air.

Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his hand,  
He gasps through the clot Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments.

## OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING

Walt Whitman

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,  
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,  
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,  
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed  
    wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,  
Down from the shower'd halo,  
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,  
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,  
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,  
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I heard,  
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears,  
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,  
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,  
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,  
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,  
From such as now they start the scene revisiting,  
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,  
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,  
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,  
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,  
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,  
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,  
A reminiscence sing.

Once Paumanok,  
When the lilac-scent was in the air and Fifth-month grass was growing,  
Up this seashore in some briers,  
Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together,  
And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown,  
And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,  
And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,  
And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing them,  
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! shine! shine!  
Pour down your warmth, great sun!

While we bask, we two together.

Two together!

Winds blow south, or winds blow north,  
Day come white, or night come black,  
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,  
Singing all time, minding no time,  
While we two keep together.

Till of a sudden,  
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,  
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,  
Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,  
Nor ever appear'd again.

And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,  
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather,  
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,  
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,  
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,  
The solitary guest from Alabama.

*Blow! blow! blow!*  
*Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;*  
*I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.*

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,  
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,  
Down almost amid the slapping waves,  
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.

He call'd on his mate,  
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know.

Yes my brother I know,  
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,  
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,  
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,  
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their  
sorts,

The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,  
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,  
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,  
Following you my brother.

*Soothe! soothe! soothe!*  
*Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,*  
*And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,*  
*But my love soothes not me, not me.*

*Low hangs the moon, it rose late,*  
*It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.*

*O madly the sea pushes upon the land,*  
*With love, with love.*

*O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?*  
*What is that little black thing I see there in the white?*

*Loud! loud! loud!*  
*Loud I call to you, my love!*

*High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,*  
*Surely you must know who is here, is here,*  
*You must know who I am, my love.*

*Low-hanging moon!*  
*What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?*  
*O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!*  
*O moon do not keep her from me any longer.*

*Land! land! O land!*  
*Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate back again if you only*  
*would,*  
*For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.*

*O rising stars!*  
*Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of you.*



*O throat! O trembling throat!  
Sound clearer through the atmosphere!  
Pierce the woods, the earth,  
Somewhere listening to catch you must be the one I want.*

*Shake out carols!  
Solitary here, the night's carols!  
Carols of lonesome love! death's carols!  
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!  
O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea!  
O reckless despairing carols.*

*But soft! sink low!  
Soft! let me just murmur,  
And do you wait a moment you husky-nois'd sea,  
For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,  
So faint, I must be still, be still to listen,  
But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately to me.*

*Hither my love!  
Here I am! here!  
With this just-sustain'd note I announce myself to you,  
This gentle call is for you my love, for you.*

*Do not be decoy'd elsewhere,  
That is the whistle of the wind, it is not my voice,  
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,  
Those are the shadows of leaves.*

*O darkness! O in vain!  
O I am very sick and sorrowful.*

*O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea!  
O troubled reflection in the sea!  
O throat! O throbbing heart!  
And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.*

*O past! O happy life! O songs of joy!  
In the air, in the woods, over fields,*

*Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!*  
*But my mate no more, no more with me!*  
*We two together no more.*

The aria sinking,  
All else continuing, the stars shining,  
The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous echoing,  
With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,  
On the sands of Paumanok's shore gray and rustling,  
The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping, the face of the sea  
almost touching,  
The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves, with his hair the atmosphere  
dallying,  
The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last tumultuously bursting,  
The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly depositing,  
The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,  
The colloquy there, the trio, each uttering,  
The undertone, the savage old mother incessantly crying,  
To the boy's soul's questions sullenly timing, some drown'd secret hissing,  
To the outsetting bard.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)  
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?  
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you,  
Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,  
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more  
sorrowful than yours,  
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,  
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you,  
Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,  
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,  
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there in the night,  
By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,  
The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,  
The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,)  
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,  
The word final, superior to all,  
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;  
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?  
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before day-break,

Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,  
And again death, death, death, death,  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,  
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,  
Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget,  
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,  
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,  
With the thousand responsive songs at random,  
My own songs awaked from that hour,  
And with them the key, the word up from the waves,  
The word of the sweetest song and all songs,  
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,  
(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending  
aside,)  
The sea whisper'd me.

# I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC

Walt Whitman

1

I sing the body electric,  
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,  
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,  
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?  
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?  
And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?  
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

2

The love of the body of man or woman balks account, the body itself balks  
account,  
That of the male is perfect, and that of the female is perfect.

The expression of the face balks account,  
But the expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face,  
It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and  
wrists,  
It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees, dress  
does not hide him,  
The strong sweet quality he has strikes through the cotton and broadcloth,  
To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more,  
You linger to see his back, and the back of his neck and shoulder-side.

The sprawl and fulness of babes, the bosoms and heads of women, the folds  
of their dress, their style as we pass in the street, the contour of their shape  
downwards,  
The swimmer naked in the swimming-bath, seen as he swims through the  
transparent green-shine, or lies with his face up and rolls silently to and fro in  
the heave of the water,  
The bending forward and backward of rowers in row-boats, the horseman in his  
saddle,  
Girls, mothers, house-keepers, in all their performances,  
The group of laborers seated at noon-time with their open dinner-kettles, and

their wives waiting,  
The female soothing a child, the farmer's daughter in the garden or cow-yard,  
The young fellow hoeing corn, the sleigh-driver driving his six horses through the crowd,  
The wrestle of wrestlers, two apprentice-boys, quite grown, lusty, good-natured, native-born, out on the vacant lot at sun-down after work,  
The coats and caps thrown down, the embrace of love and resistance,  
The upper-hold and under-hold, the hair rumpled over and blinding the eyes;  
The march of firemen in their own costumes, the play of masculine muscle through clean-setting trowsers and waist-straps,  
The slow return from the fire, the pause when the bell strikes suddenly again, and the listening on the alert,  
The natural, perfect, varied attitudes, the bent head, the curv'd neck and the counting;  
Such-like I love—I loosen myself, pass freely, am at the mother's breast with the little child,  
Swim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with the firemen, and pause, listen, count.

3

I knew a man, a common farmer, the father of five sons,  
And in them the fathers of sons, and in them the fathers of sons.

This man was of wonderful vigor, calmness, beauty of person,  
The shape of his head, the pale yellow and white of his hair and beard, the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes, the richness and breadth of his manners,  
These I used to go and visit him to see, he was wise also,  
He was six feet tall, he was over eighty years old, his sons were massive, clean, bearded, tan-faced, handsome,  
They and his daughters loved him, all who saw him loved him,  
They did not love him by allowance, they loved him with personal love,  
He drank water only, the blood show'd like scarlet through the clear-brown skin of his face,  
He was a frequent gunner and fisher, he sail'd his boat himself, he had a fine one presented to him by a ship-joiner, he had fowling-pieces presented to him by men that loved him,  
When he went with his five sons and many grand-sons to hunt or fish, you would pick him out as the most beautiful and vigorous of the gang,  
You would wish long and long to be with him, you would wish to sit by him in the

boat that you and he might touch each other.

4

I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is enough,  
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,  
To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough,  
To pass among them or touch any one, or 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 in a sea.

There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and  
in the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well,  
All things please the soul, but these please the soul well.

5

This is the female form,  
A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,  
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,  
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless vapor, all falls aside  
but myself and it,  
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was expected of  
heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed,  
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise  
ungovernable,  
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused, mine too  
diffused,  
Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and  
deliciously aching,  
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love, white-blow  
and delirious juice,  
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,  
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,  
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day.

This the nucleus—after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman,  
This the bath of birth, this the merge of small and large, and the outlet again.

Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the  
rest,  
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul.

The female contains all qualities and tempers them,  
She is in her place and moves with perfect balance,  
She is all things duly veil'd, she is both passive and active,  
She is to conceive daughters as well as sons, and sons as well as daughters.

As I see my soul reflected in Nature,  
As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty,  
See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see.

6

The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,  
He too is all qualities, he is action and power,  
The flush of the known universe is in him,  
Scorn becomes him well, and appetite and defiance become him well,  
The wildest largest passions, bliss that is utmost, sorrow that is utmost become  
him well, pride is for him,  
The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,  
Knowledge becomes him, he likes it always, he brings every thing to the test of  
himself,  
Whatever the survey, whatever the sea and the sail he strikes soundings at last  
only here,  
(Where else does he strike soundings except here?)

The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,  
No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers' gang?  
Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?  
Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as  
you,  
Each has his or her place in the procession.

(All is a procession,  
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)

Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest ignorant?  
Do you suppose you have a right to a good sight, and he or she has no right to a  
sight?  
Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse float, and the soil is on  
the surface, and water runs and vegetation sprouts,  
For you only, and not for him and her?

7

A man's body at auction,  
(For before the war I often go to the slave-mart and watch the sale,)  
I help the auctioneer, the sloven does not half know his business.

Gentlemen look on this wonder,  
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for it,  
For it the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one animal or plant,  
For it the revolving cycles truly and steadily roll'd.

In this head the all-baffling brain,  
In it and below it the makings of heroes.

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white, they are cunning in tendon and nerve,  
They shall be stript that you may see them.

Exquisite senses, life-lit eyes, pluck, volition,  
Flakes of breast-muscle, pliant backbone and neck, flesh not flabby, good-sized  
arms and legs,  
And wonders within there yet.

Within there runs blood,  
The same old blood! the same red-running blood!  
There swells and jets a heart, there all passions, desires, reachings, aspirations,  
(Do you think they are not there because they are not express'd in parlors and  
lecture-rooms?)

This is not only one man, this the father of those who shall be fathers in their  
turns,  
In him the start of populous states and rich republics,  
Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments.

How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the  
centuries?  
(Who might you find you have come from yourself, if you could trace back  
through the centuries?)

8

A woman's body at auction,



She too is not only herself, she is the teeming mother of mothers,  
She is the bearer of them that shall grow and be mates to the mothers.

Have you ever loved the body of a woman?

Have you ever loved the body of a man?

Do you not see that these are exactly the same to all in all nations and times all  
over the earth?

If any thing is sacred the human body is sacred,  
And the glory and sweet of a man is the token of manhood untainted,  
And in man or woman a clean, strong, firm-fibred body, is more beautiful than  
the most beautiful face.

Have you seen the fool that corrupted his own live body? or the fool that  
corrupted her own live body?

For they do not conceal themselves, and cannot conceal themselves.

9

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the  
likes of the parts of you,

I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (and that  
they are the soul,)

I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that they are my  
poems,

Man's, woman's, child's, youth's, wife's, husband's, mother's, father's, young  
man's, young woman's poems,

Head, neck, hair, ears, drop and tympan of the ears,

Eyes, eye-fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows, and the waking or sleeping of the lids,

Mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws, and the jaw-hinges,

Nose, nostrils of the nose, and the partition,

Cheeks, temples, forehead, chin, throat, back of the neck, neck-slue,

Strong shoulders, manly beard, scapula, hind-shoulders, and the ample side-  
round of the chest,

Upper-arm, armpit, elbow-socket, lower-arm, arm-sinews, arm-bones,

Wrist and wrist-joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb, forefinger, finger-joints,  
finger-nails,

Broad breast-front, curling hair of the breast, breast-bone, breast-side,

Ribs, belly, backbone, joints of the backbone,

Hips, hip-sockets, hip-strength, inward and outward round, man-balls, man-  
root,

Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above,  
Leg fibres, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg,  
Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel;  
All attitudes, all the shapeliness, all the belongings of my or your body or of any  
one's body, male or female,  
The lung-sponges, the stomach-sac, the bowels sweet and clean,  
The brain in its folds inside the skull-frame,  
Sympathies, heart-valves, palate-valves, sexuality, maternity,  
Womanhood, and all that is a woman, and the man that comes from woman,  
The womb, the teats, nipples, breast-milk, tears, laughter, weeping, love-looks,  
love-perturbations and risings,  
The voice, articulation, language, whispering, shouting aloud,  
Food, drink, pulse, digestion, sweat, sleep, walking, swimming,  
Poise on the hips, leaping, reclining, embracing, arm-curving and tightening,  
The continual changes of the flex of the mouth, and around the eyes,  
The skin, the sunburnt shade, freckles, hair,  
The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked meat of  
the body,  
The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,  
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence downward toward  
the knees,  
The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and the marrow in the  
bones,  
The exquisite realization of health;  
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!

## TO A LOCOMOTIVE IN WINTER

Walt Whitman

Thee for my recitative!

Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the winter-day declining,  
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat convulsive,  
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass, and silvery steel,  
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy  
sides,  
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering in the distance,  
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,  
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple,  
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack,  
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels,  
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,  
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering;  
Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent,  
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,  
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,  
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,  
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.

Fierce-throated beauty!

Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at night,  
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing all,  
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,  
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)  
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,  
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,  
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

## PASSAGE TO INDIA

Walt Whitman

2

Passage O soul to India!

Eclaircise the myths Asiatic, the primitive fables.

Not you alone proud truths of the world,  
Nor you alone ye facts of modern science,  
But myths and fables of eld, Asia's, Africa's fables,  
The far-darting beams of the spirit, the unloos'd dreams,  
The deep diving bibles and legends,  
The daring plots of the poets, the elder religions;  
O you temples fairer than lilies pour'd over by the rising sun!  
O you fables spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known, mounting to  
    heaven!  
You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold!  
Towers of fables immortal fashion'd from mortal dreams!  
You too I welcome and fully the same as the rest!  
You too with joy I sing.

Passage to India!

Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?  
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,  
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.

A worship new I sing.

You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours,  
You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours,  
You, not for trade or transportation only,  
But in God's name, and for thy sake O soul.

3

Passage to India!

Lo soul for thee of tableaus twain,  
I see in one the Suez canal initiated, open'd,  
I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading the van,

I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the  
distance,  
I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd,  
The gigantic dredging machines.

In one again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same,)  
I see over my own continent the Pacific railroad surmounting every barrier,  
I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte carrying freight and  
passengers,  
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle,  
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world,  
I cross the Laramie plains, I note the rocks in grotesque shapes, the buttes,  
I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions, the barren, colorless, sage-deserts,  
I see in glimpses afar or towering immediately above me the great mountains, I  
see the Wind river and Wahsatch mountains,  
I see the Monument mountain and the Eagle's Nest, I pass the Promontory, I  
ascend the Nevadas,  
I scan the noble Elk mountain and wind around its base,  
I see the Humboldt range, I thread the valley and cross the river,  
I see the clear waters of lake Tahoe, I see forests of majestic pines,  
Or crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages of  
waters and meadows,  
Marking through these and after all, in duplicate slender lines,  
Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,  
Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,  
The road between Europe and Asia.

(Ah Genoese thy dream! thy dream!  
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,  
The shore thou foundest verifies they dream.)

1861

Walt Whitman

Arm'd year--year of the struggle,  
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year,  
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,  
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on  
your shoulder,  
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at  
your side,  
As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the continent,  
Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great cities,  
Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you as one of the workmen, the dwellers in  
Manhattan,  
Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,  
Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait and descending the Alleghanies,  
Or down from the great lakes or in Pennsylvania, or on deck along the Ohio river,  
Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at Chattanooga on  
the mountain top,  
Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs clothed in blue, bearing weapons,  
robust year,  
Heard your determin'd voice launch'd forth again and again,  
Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd cannon,  
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

## CAVALRY CROSSING A FORD

Walt Whitman

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green island,  
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun--hark to the musical  
clank,  
Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,  
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent  
rest on the saddles,  
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford--while,  
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,  
The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.

# THE SLEEPERS

Walt Whitman

1

I wander all night in my vision,  
Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly stepping and stopping,  
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers,  
Wandering and confused, lost to myself, ill-assorted, contradictory,  
Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping.

How solemn they look there, stretch'd and still,  
How quiet they breathe, the little children in their cradles.

The wretched features of ennuyes, the white features of corpses, the livid faces of  
drunkards, the sick-gray faces of onanists,  
The gash'd bodies on battle-fields, the insane in their strong-door'd rooms, the  
sacred idiots, the new-born emerging from gates, and the dying emerging  
from gates,  
The night pervades them and infolds them.

The married couple sleep calmly in their bed, he with his palm on the hip of the  
wife, and she with her palm on the hip of the husband,  
The sisters sleep lovingly side by side in their bed,  
The men sleep lovingly side by side in theirs,  
And the mother sleeps with her little child carefully wrapt.

The blind sleep, and the deaf and dumb sleep,  
The prisoner sleeps well in the prison, the runaway son sleeps,  
The murderer that is to be hung next day, how does he sleep?  
And the murder'd person, how does he sleep?

The female that loves unrequited sleeps,  
And the male that loves unrequited sleeps,  
The head of the money-maker that plotted all day sleeps,  
And the enraged and treacherous dispositions, all, all sleep.

I stand in the dark with drooping eyes by the worst-suffering and the most  
restless,  
I pass my hands soothingly to and fro a few inches from them,



The restless sink in their beds, they fitfully sleep.

Now I pierce the darkness, new beings appear,  
The earth recedes from me into the night,  
I saw that it was beautiful, and I see that what is not the earth is beautiful.

I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other sleepers each in turn,  
I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,  
And I become the other dreamers.

I am a dance--play up there! the fit is whirling me fast!

I am the ever-laughing--it is new moon and twilight,  
I see the hiding of douceurs, I see nimble ghosts whichever way I look,  
Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and where it is neither  
ground nor sea.

Well do they do their jobs those journeymen divine,  
Only from me can they hide nothing, and would not if they could,  
I reckon I am their boss and they make me a pet besides,  
And surround me and lead me and run ahead when I walk,  
To lift their cunning covers to signify me with stretch'd arms, and resume the  
way;  
Onward we move, a gay gang of blackguards! with mirth-shouting music and  
wild-flapping pennants of joy!

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,  
The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box,  
He who has been famous and he who shall be famous after to-day,  
The stammerer, the well-form'd person, the wasted or feeble person.

I am she who adorn'd herself and folded her hair expectantly,  
My truant lover has come, and it is dark.

Double yourself and receive me darkness,  
Receive me and my lover too, he will not let me go without him.

I roll myself upon you as upon a bed, I resign myself to the dusk.  
He whom I call answers me and takes the place of my lover,  
He rises with me silently from the bed.

Darkness, you are gentler than my lover, his flesh was sweaty and panting,  
I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me.

My hands are spread forth, I pass them in all directions,  
I would sound up the shadowy shore to which you are journeying.

Be careful darkness! already what was it touch'd me?  
I thought my lover had gone, else darkness and he are one,  
I hear the heart-beat, I follow, I fade away.

2

I descend my western course, my sinews are flaccid,  
Perfume and youth course through me and I am their wake.

It is my face yellow and wrinkled instead of the old woman's,  
I sit low in a straw-bottom chair and carefully darn my grandson's stockings.

It is I too, the sleepless widow looking out on the winter midnight,  
I see the sparkles of star shine on the icy and pallid earth.

A shroud I see and I am the shroud, I wrap a body and lie in the coffin,  
It is dark here under ground, it is not evil or pain here, it is blank here, for  
reasons.

(It seems to me that every thing in the light and air ought to be happy,  
Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave let him know he has enough.)

3

I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the  
sea,  
His brown hair lies close and even to his head, he strikes out with courageous  
arms, he urges himself with his legs,  
I see his white body, I see his undaunted eyes,  
I hate the swift-running eddies that would dash him head-foremost on the rocks.

What are you doing you ruffianly red-trickled waves ?  
Will you kill the courageous giant? will you kill him in the prime of his middle  
age?

Steady and long he struggles,  
He is baffled, bang'd, bruise'd, he holds out while his strength holds out,  
The slapping eddies are spotted with his blood, they bear him away, they roll  
    him, swing him, turn him,  
His beautiful body is borne in the circling eddies, it is continually bruise'd on  
    rocks,  
Swiftly and out of sight is borne the brave corpse.

4

I turn but do not extricate myself,  
Confused, a past-reading, another, but with darkness yet.

The beach is cut by the razory ice-wind, the wreck-guns sound,  
The tempest lulls, the moon comes floundering through the drifts.

I look where the ship helplessly heads end on, I hear the burst as she strikes, I  
    hear the howls of dismay, they grow fainter and fainter.

I cannot aid with my wringing fingers,  
I can but rush to the surf and let it drench me and freeze upon me.

I search with the crowd, not one of the company is wash'd to us alive,  
In the morning I help pick up the dead and lay them in rows in a barn.

5

Now of the older war-days, the defeat at Brooklyn,  
Washington stands inside the lines, he stands on the intrench'd hills amid a  
    crowd of officers,  
His face is cold and damp, he cannot repress the weeping drops,  
He lifts the glass perpetually to his eyes, the color is blanch'd from his cheeks,  
He sees the slaughter of the southern braves confided to him by their parents.

The same at last and at last when peace is declared,  
He stands in the room of the old tavern, the well-belov'd soldiers all pass  
    through,  
The officers speechless and slow draw near in their turns,  
The chief encircles their necks with his arm and kisses them on the cheek,  
He kisses lightly the wet cheeks one after another, he shakes hands and bids  
    good-by to the army.

6

Now what my mother told me one day as we sat at dinner together,  
Of when she was a nearly grown girl living home with her parents on the old  
homestead

A red squaw came one breakfast-time to the old homestead,  
On her back she carried a bundle of rushes for rush-bottoming chairs,

Her hair, straight, shiny, coarse, black, profuse, half-envelop'd her face,  
Her step was free and elastic, and her voice sounded exquisitely as she spoke.

My mother look'd in delight and amazement at the stranger,  
She look'd at the freshness of her tall-borne face and full and pliant limbs,  
The more she look'd upon her she loved her,  
Never before had she seen such wonderful beauty and purity,  
She made her sit on a bench by the jamb of the fireplace, she cook'd food for her,  
She had no work to give her, but she gave her remembrance and fondness.

The red squaw staid all the forenoon, and toward the middle of the afternoon she  
went away,

O my mother was loth to have her go away,  
All the week she thought of her, she watch'd for her many a month,  
She remember'd her many a winter and many a summer,  
But the red squaw never came nor was heard of there again.

7

A show of the summer softness--a contact of something unseen--an amour of the  
light and air,

I am jealous and overwhelm'd with friendliness,  
And will go gallivant with the light and air myself.

O love and summer, you are in the dreams and in me,  
Autumn and winter are in the dreams, the farmer goes with his thrift,  
The droves and crops increase, the barns are well-fill'd.

Elements merge in the night, ships make tacks in the dreams,  
The sailor sails, the exile returns home,  
The fugitive returns unharm'd, the immigrant is back beyond months and years,

The poor Irishman lives in the simple house of his childhood with the well-known

neighbors and faces,  
They warmly welcome him, he is barefoot again, he forgets he is well off,  
The Dutchman voyages home, and the Scotchman and  
Welshman voyage home, and the native of the  
Mediterranean voyages home,  
To every port of England, France, Spain, enter well-fill'd ships,  
The Swiss toots it toward his hills, the Prussian goes his way, the Hungarian his  
way, and the Pole his way,  
The Swede returns, and the Dane and Norwegian return.

The homeward bound and the outward bound,  
The beautiful lost swimmer, the ennuye, the onanist, the female that loves  
unrequited, the money-maker,  
The actor and actress, those through with their parts and those waiting to  
commence,  
The affectionate boy, the husband and wife, the voter, the nominee that is chosen  
and the nominee that has fail'd,  
The great already known and the great any time after to-day,  
The stammerer, the sick, the perfect-form'd, the homely,  
The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that sat and sentenced him, the  
fluent lawyers, the jury, the audience,  
The laugher and weeper, the dancer, the midnight widow, the red squaw,  
The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is wrong'd,  
The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark,  
I swear they are averaged now--one is no better than the other,  
The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored them.

I swear they are all beautiful,  
Every one that sleeps is beautiful, every thing in the dim light is beautiful,  
The wildest and bloodiest is over, and all is peace.

Peace is always beautiful,  
The myth of heaven indicates peace and night.  
The myth of heaven indicates the soul,  
The soul is always beautiful, it appears more or it appears less, it comes or it lags  
behind,  
It comes from its embower'd garden and looks pleasantly on itself and encloses  
the world,  
Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, and perfect and clean the womb  
cohering,

The head well-grown proportion'd and plumb, and the bowels and joints  
proportion'd and plumb.

The soul is always beautiful,  
The universe is duly in order, every thing is in its place,  
What has arrived is in its place and what waits shall be in its place,  
The twisted skull waits, the watery or rotten blood waits,  
The child of the glutton or venerealee waits long, and the child of the drunkard  
waits long, and the drunkard himself waits long,  
The sleepers that lived and died wait, the far advanced are to go on in their turns,  
and the far behind are to come on in their turns,  
The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite  
--they unite now.

8

The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed,  
They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west as they lie  
unclothed,  
The Asiatic and African are hand in hand, the European and American are hand  
in hand,  
Learn'd and unlearn'd are hand in hand, and male and female are hand in hand,  
The bare arm of the girl crosses the bare breast of her lover, they press close  
without lust, his lips press her neck,  
The father holds his grown or ungrown son in his arms with measureless love,  
and the son holds the father in his arms with measureless love,  
The white hair of the mother shines on the white wrist of the daughter,  
  
The breath of the boy goes with the breath of the man, friend is inarm'd by  
friend,  
The scholar kisses the teacher and the teacher kisses the scholar, the wrong'd is  
made right,  
The call of the slave is one with the master's call, and the master salutes the  
slave,  
The felon steps forth from the prison, the insane becomes sane, the suffering of  
sick persons is reliev'd,  
The sweatings and fevers stop, the throat that was unsound is sound, the lungs  
of the consumptive are resumed, the poor distress'd head is free,  
The joints of the rheumatic move as smoothly as ever, and smoother than ever,  
Stiflings and passages open, the paralyzed become supple,  
The swell'd and convuls'd and congested awake to themselves in condition,

They pass the invigoration of the night and the chemistry of the night, and  
awake.

I too pass from the night,  
I stay a while away O night, but I return to you again and love you.

Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?  
I am not afraid, I have been well brought forward by you,  
I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her in whom I lay so long,  
I know not how I came of you and I know not where I go with you, but I know I  
came well and shall go well.

I will stop only a time with the night, and rise betimes,  
I will duly pass the day O my mother, and duly return to you.

## FROM PENT-UP ACHING RIVERS

Walt Whitman

From pent-up aching rivers,  
From that of myself without which I were nothing,  
From what I am determin'd to make illustrious, even if I stand sole among men,  
From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus,  
Singing the song of procreation,  
Singing the need of superb children and therein superb grown people,  
Singing the muscular urge and the blending,  
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O resistless yearning!  
O for any and each the body correlative attracting!  
O for you whoever you are your correlative body! O it, more than all else, you  
delighting!)

From the hungry gnaw that eats me night and day,  
From native moments, from bashful pains, singing them,  
Seeking something yet unfound though I have diligently sought it many a long  
year,  
Singing the true song of the soul fitful at random,  
Renascent with grossest Nature or among animals,  
Of that, of them and what goes with them my poems informing,  
Of the smell of apples and lemons, of the pairing of birds,  
Of the wet of woods, of the lapping of waves,  
Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land, I them chanting,  
The overture lightly sounding, the strain anticipating,  
The welcome nearness, the sight of the perfect body,  
The swimmer swimming naked in the bath, or motionless on his back lying and  
floating,  
The female form approaching, I pensive, love-flesh tremulous aching,  
The divine list for myself or you or for any one making,  
The face, the limbs, the index from head to foot, and what it arouses,  
The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter abandonment,  
(Hark close and still what I now whisper to you,  
I love you, O you entirely possess me,  
O that you and I escape from the rest and go utterly off, free and lawless,  
Two hawks in the air, two fishes swimming in the sea not more lawless than we;)  
The furious storm through me careering, I passionately trembling.  
The oath of the inseparableness of two together, of the woman that loves me and  
whom I love more than my life, that oath swearing.



(O I willingly stake all for you,  
O let me be lost if it must be so!  
O you and I! what is it to us what the rest do or think?  
What is all else to us? only that we enjoy each other and exhaust each other if it  
must be so;)  
From the master, the pilot I yield the vessel to,  
The general commanding me, commanding all, from him permission taking,  
From time the programme hastening, (I have loiter'd too long as it is,)  
From sex, from the warp and from the woof,  
From privacy, from frequent repinings alone,  
From plenty of persons near and yet the right person not near,  
From the soft sliding of hands over me and thrusting of fingers through my hair  
and beard,  
From the long sustain'd kiss upon the mouth or bosom,  
From the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk, fainting with excess,  
From what the divine husband knows, from the work of fatherhood,  
From exultation, victory and relief, from the bedfellow's embrace in the night,  
From the act-poems of eyes, hands, hips and bosoms,  
From the cling of the trembling arm,  
From the bending curve and the clinch,  
From side by side the pliant coverlet off-throwing,  
From the one so unwilling to have me leave, and me just as unwilling to leave,  
(Yet a moment O tender waiter, and I return,)  
From the hour of shining stars and dropping dews,  
From the night a moment I emerging flitting out,  
Celebrate you act divine and you children prepared for,  
And you stalwart loins.

# THIS COMPOST

Walt Whitman

1

Something startles me where I thought I was safest,  
I withdraw from the still woods I loved,  
I will not go now on the pastures to walk,  
I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea,  
I will not touch my flesh to the earth as to other flesh to renew me.

O how can it be that the ground itself does not sicken?  
How can you be alive you growths of spring?  
How can you furnish health you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain?  
Are they not continually putting distemper'd corpses within you?  
Is not every continent work'd over and over with sour dead?

Where have you disposed of their carcasses?  
Those drunkards and gluttons of so many generations?  
Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and meat?  
I do not see any of it upon you to-day, or perhaps I am deceiv'd,  
I will run a furrow with my plough, I will press my spade through the sod and  
    turn it up underneath,  
I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat.

2

Behold this compost! behold it well!  
Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick person--yet behold!  
The grass of spring covers the prairies,  
The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden,  
The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,  
The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches,  
The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves,  
The tinge awakes over the willow-tree and the mulberry-tree,  
The he-birds carol mornings and evenings while the she-birds sit on their nests,  
The young of poultry break through the hatch'd eggs,  
The new-born of animals appear, the calf is dropt from the cow, the colt from the  
    mare,

Out of its little hill faithfully rise the potato's dark green leaves,  
Out of its hill rises the yellow maize-stalk, the lilacs bloom in the dooryards,  
The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above all those strata of sour  
dead.

What chemistry!

That the winds are really not infectious,

That this is no cheat, this transparent green-wash of the sea which is so  
amorous after me,

That it is safe to allow it to lick my naked body all over with its tongues,

That it will not endanger me with the fevers that have deposited themselves in it,

That all is clean forever and forever,

That the cool drink from the well tastes so good,

That blackberries are so flavorful and juicy,

That the fruits of the apple-orchard and the orange-orchard, that melons, grapes,  
peaches, plums, will none of them poison me,

That when I recline on the grass I do not catch any disease,

Though probably every spear of grass rises out of what was once catching  
disease.

Now I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient,

It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,

It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of  
diseas'd corpses,

It distills such exquisite winds out of such infused fetor,

It renews with such unwitting looks its prodigal, annual, sumptuous crops,

It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at  
last.