

Walt Whitman

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

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

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.

10 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, buzzed 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
15 lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the
shore, and dark-colored sea-rocks, and of hay in
the barn,
The sound of the belched words of my voice, words
loosed 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
20 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 reckoned a thousand acres much? Have
you reckoned the earth much?
Have you practised so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of
poems?

25 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
yourself.

30 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,
35 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.

40 To elaborate is no avail—learned and unlearned
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.

45 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.

50 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,
And leaves for me baskets covered with white towels,
swelling the house with their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization, and
scream at my eyes,
55 That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
Exactly the contents of one, and exactly the contents
of two, and which is ahead?

Trippers and askers surround me,
People I meet—the effect upon me of my early life,
or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,
60 The latest news, discoveries, inventions, societies,
authors old and new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, work, compliments,
dues,
The real or fancied indifference of some man or
woman I love,
The sickness of one of my folks, or of myself, or
ill-doing, or loss or lack of money, or depressions
or exaltations,
These come to me days and nights, and go from me
again,
65 But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle,
unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an
impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head, curious what will
come next,

70 Both in and out of the game, and watching and
wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated
through fog with linguists and contenders,
I have no mockings or arguments—I witness and
wait.

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.

75 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 valved voice.

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

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and
joy and knowledge that pass all the art and
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,
85 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, and heaped
stones, elder, mullen, and pokeweed.

90 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.

95 Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer, designedly dropped,
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.

100 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, and from women,
and from offspring taken soon out of their
105 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.

110 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?

115 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 ceased the moment life appeared.

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

 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-
 washed babe, and am not contained between my
 hat and boots,
 And peruse manifold objects, no two alike, and every
 125 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.

130 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 sweetheart and the old maid—for me
 mothers, and the mothers of mothers,
 For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed
 tears,
 135 For me children, and the begetters of children.

 Who need be afraid of the merge?
 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
 can never be shaken away.

140 The little one sleeps in its cradle,
 I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently
 brush away flies with my hand.

The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up
 the bushy hill,
 I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the
 bedroom;
 145 It is so—I witnessed the corpse—there the pistol
 had fallen.

The blab of the pave, the tires of carts, sluff of boot-
 soles, talk of the promenaders,
 The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating
 thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the
 granite floor,
 The snow-sleighs, the clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of
 snow-balls,
 The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of roused
 mobs,
 150 The flap of the curtained litter, a sick man inside,
 borne to the hospital,
 The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows
 and fall,
 The excited crowd, the policeman with his star,
 quickly working his passage to the centre of
 the crowd,
 The impassive stones that receive and return so many
 echoes,
 The Souls moving along—(are they invisible, while
 the least of the stones is visible?)
 What groans of over-fed or half-starved who fall sun-
 155 struck, or in fits,
 What exclamations of women taken suddenly, who
 hurry home and give birth to babes,
 What living and buried speech is always vibrating
 here—what howls restrained by decorum,
 Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made,
 acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
 I mind them or the show or resonance of them—I
 come and I depart.

160 The big doors of the country-barn stand open and
ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-
drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green
intertinged,
The armfuls are packed to the sagging mow.

I am there—I help—I came stretched atop of the
load,
165 I felt its soft jolts—one leg reclined on the other;
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and
timothy,
And roll head over heels, and tangle my hair full of
wisps.

Alone, far in the wilds and mountains, I hunt,
Wandering, amazed at my own lightness and glee,
170 In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the
night,
Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-killed game,
Soundly falling asleep on the gathered leaves, with
my dog and gun by my side.

The Yankee clipper is under her three sky-sails—
she cuts the sparkle and scud,
My eyes settle the land—I bend at her prow, or shout
joyously from the deck.

175 The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and
stopped for me,
I tucked my trowser-ends in my boots, and went and
had a good time;
You should have been with us that day round the
chowder-kettle.

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in
the far-west—the bride was a red girl,
Her father and his friends sat near, cross-legged and
dumbly smoking—they had moccasins to their
feet, and large thick blankets hanging from their
shoulders;
On a bank lounged the trapper—he was dressed
mostly in skins—his luxuriant beard and curls
180 protected his neck,
One hand rested on his rifle—the other hand held
firmly the wrist of the red girl,

She had long eyelashes—her head was bare—her
coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous
limbs and reached to her feet.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopped
outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the wood-
pile,
185 Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw
him limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log, and led him in and
assured him,
And brought water, and filled a tub for his sweated
body and bruised feet,
And gave him a room that entered from my own, and
gave him some coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and
his awkwardness,
190 And remember putting plasters on the galls of his
neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated
and passed north,
I had him sit next me at table—my fire-lock leaned
in the corner.

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men, and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life, and all so
195 lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides, handsome and richly drest, aft the blinds
of the window.
Which of the young men does she like the best?

Ah, the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.
200 Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in
your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the
twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved
them.

The beards of the young men glistened with wet, it
ran from their long hair,

205 Little streams passed all over their bodies.
An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and
 ribs.
The young men float on their backs—their white
 bellies bulge to the sun—they do not ask who
 seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with
 pendant and bending arch,
210 They do not think whom they souse with spray.
The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharp-
 ens his knife at the stall in the market,
I loiter, enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and
 break-down.
Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the
 anvil,
Each has his main-sledge—they are all out—there
 is a great heat in the fire.
From the cinder-strewed threshold I follow their
215 movements,
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their
 massive arms,
Overhand the hammers roll—overhand so slow—
 overhand so sure,
They do not hasten—each man hits in his place.
The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses
 —the blocks swags underneath on its tied-over
 chain,
The negro that drives the huge dray of the stone-yard
 —steady and tall he stands, poised on one leg on
220 the string-piece,
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast, and
 loosens over his hip-band,
His glance is calm and commanding—he tosses the
 slouch of his hat away from his forehead,
The sun falls on his crispy hair and moustache—
 falls on the black of his polished and perfect
 limbs.
I behold the picturesque giant and love him—and
 I do not stop there,

225 I go with the team also.
In me the caresser of life wherever moving—back-
ward as well as forward slueing,
To niches aside and junior bending.
Oxen that rattle the yoke or halt in the shade! what
is that you express in your eyes?
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in
my life.

230 My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck, on
my distant and day-long ramble,
They rise together—they slowly circle around.
I believe in those winged purposes,
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within
me,
And consider green and violet, and the tufted crown,
intentional,
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is
235 not something else,
And the mocking-bird in the swamp never studied the
gamut, yet trills pretty well to me,
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out
of me.

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool
night,
Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an
invitation;
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen
240 close,
I find its purpose and place up there toward the
wintry sky.

The sharp-hoofed moose of the north, the cat on the
house-sill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her
teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen, and she with her half-
spread wings,
245 I see in them and myself the same old law.
The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred
affections,
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

I am enamoured of growing outdoors.
 Of men that live among cattle, or taste of the ocean
 or woods,
 Of the builders and steerers of ships, and the wielders
 250 of axes and mauls, and the drivers of horses,
 I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
 Me going in for my chances, spending for vast
 returns,
 Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that
 will take me,
 255 Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
 Scattering it freely forever.

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,
 260 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 ordained with crossed hands at the
 altar,
 The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum
 of the big wheel,
 265 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 con-
 firmed case,
 He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in
 his mother's bedroom;
 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;
 270 The malformed limbs are tied to the anatomist's
 table,
 What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
 The quadroon girl is sold at the 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
 275 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 emigrants cover the wharf
 or levee,
 As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the over-
 seer views them from his saddle,
 The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run
 280 for their partners, the dancers bow to each other,
 The youth lies awake in the cedar-roofed garret, and
 harks to the musical rain,
 The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill
 the Huron,
 The reformer ascends the platform, he spouts with
 his mouth and nose,
 The company returns from its excursion, the darkey
 brings up the rear and bears the well-riddled
 target,
 The squaw, wrapt in her yellow-hemmed cloth, is
 285 offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale,
 The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery
 with half-shut eyes bent side-ways,
 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-haired Yankee girl works with her sewing-
 290 machine, or in the factory or mill,
 The nine months' gone is in the parturition chamber,
 her faintness and pains are advancing,
 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 red and
 gold,
 The canal-boy trots on the tow-path—the bookkeeper
 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
 295 professions,
 The regatta is spread on the bay—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 camera and plate are prepared, the lady must sit
 for her daguerreotype,
 300 The bride unrumple her white dress, the minute-
 hand of the clock moves slowly,
 The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-
 opened 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;)
 305 The President, holding a cabinet council, is sur-
 rounded by the Great Secretaries,
 On the piazza walk five friendly matrons 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 tanners are
 tinning the roof—the masons are calling for
 310 mortar,
 In single file, each shouldering his hod, pass onward
 the laborers,
 Seasons pursuing each other, the indescribable crowd
 is gathered—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,

315 The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the
 squatter strikes deep with his axe,
 Flatboatmen make fast, towards dusk, near the cotton-
 wood or pekan-trees,
 Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river,
 or through those drained by the Tennessee, or
 through those of the Arkansaw,
 Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chatta-
 hooche or Altamahaw,
 Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and
 great-grandsons around them,
 320 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 one and all tend inward to me, and I tend
 outward to them,
 325 And such as it is to be of these, more or less, I am.

 I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the
 wise,
 Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
 Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with
 the stuff that is fine,
 330 One of the great nation, the nation of many nations,
 the smallest the same, and the largest the same,
 A southerner soon as a northerner, a planter non-
 chalant and hospitable,
 A Yankee, bound my own way, ready for trade, my
 joints the limberest joints on earth and the
 sternest joints on earth,
 A Kentuckian, walking the vale of the Elkhorn in
 my deer-skin leggings,
 A boatman over lakes or bays, or along coasts—a
 Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye,
 A Louisianian or Georgian—a Poke-easy from sand-
 hills and pines,
 335 At home on Kanadian snow-shoes, or up in the bush,
 or with fishermen off Newfoundland,
 At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest,
 and tacking,
 At home on the hills of Vermont, or in the woods

of Maine, or the Texan ranch,
 Comrade of Californians—comrade of free north-
 westerners, and loving their big proportions,
 Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen—comrade of all
 who shake hands and welcome to drink and
 340 meat,
 A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thought-
 fullest,
 A novice beginning, yet experient of myriads of
 seasons,
 Of every hue, trade, rank, caste and religion,
 Not merely of the New World, but of Africa, Europe,
 Asia—a wandering savage,
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, lover,
 345 quaker,
 A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician,
 priest.

I resist anything better than my own diversity,
 And breathe the air, and leave plenty after me,
 And am not stuck up, and am in my place.

350 The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place,
 The suns I see, and the suns I cannot see, are in their
 place,
 The palpable is in its place, and the impalpable is in
 its place.

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and
 lands—they are not original with me,
 If they are not yours as much as mine, they are
 nothing, or next to nothing,
 If they do not enclose everything, they are next to
 355 nothing,
 If they are not the riddle and the untying of the
 riddle, they are nothing, If they are not just as close as they are distant, they
 are nothing.

This is the grass that grows wherever the land is
 and the water is,
 This is the common air that bathes the globe.

This is the breath for America, because it is my
 breath,
 360 This is for laws, songs, behavior,
 This is the tasteless water of Souls—this is the true
 sustenance.

This is for the illiterate, and for the judges of the
Supreme Court, and for the Federal capitol and
the State capitols,
And for the admirable communes of literats, com-
posers, singers, lecturers, engineers, and savans,
And for the endless races of work-people, farmers,
and seamen.

365 This is the trilling of thousands of clear cornets,
screaming of octave flutes, striking of triangles.

I play not here marches for victors only—I play
great marches for conquered and slain persons.

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall—battles are lost in the
same spirit in which they are won.

370 I beat triumphal drums for the dead,
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and
gayest music to them.

Vivas to those who have failed!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements! and all
overcome heroes!
375 And the numberless unknown heroes, equal to the
greatest heroes known.

This is the meal pleasantly set—this is the meat and
drink for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous—I
make appointments with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited,
380 The heavy-lipped slave is invited—the venerealee is
invited,
There shall be no difference between them and the
rest.

This is the press of a bashful hand—this is the float
and odor of hair,
This is the touch of my lips to yours—this is the
murmur of yearning,
This is the far-off depth and height reflecting my
own face,

385 This is the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet
 again.

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
Well, I have—for the Fourth Month showers have,
 and the mica on the side of a rock has.

Do you take it I would astonish?
Does the daylight astonish? Does the early redstart,
 twittering through the woods?
390 Do I astonish more than they?

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.

Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

395 What is a man anyhow? What am I? What are
 you?

All I mark as my own, you shall offset it with your
 own,
Else it were time lost listening to me.

I do not snivel that snivel the world over,
That months are vacuums, and the ground but
 wallow and filth,
400 That life is a suck and a sell, and nothing remains at
 the end but threadbare crape, and tears.

Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for
 invalids—conformity goes to the fourth-removed,
I cock my hat as I please, indoors or out.

Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be
 ceremonious?

405 Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair,
 counsell'd with doctors, and calculated close,
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

In all people I see myself—none more, and not one a
 barleycorn less,
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

And I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe per-
 petually flow,

410 All are written to me, and I must get what the
writing means.

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a
carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut
with a burnt stick at night.

I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be
understood,
415 I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant
my house by, after all.

I exist as I am—that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware, I sit content,

And if each and all be aware, I sit content.
One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and
420 that is myself,
And whether I come to my own to-day, or in ten
thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerful-
ness I can wait

My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
425 And I know the amplitude of time.

I am the poet of the body,
And I am the poet of the Soul.

The pleasures of heaven are with me, and the pains
of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself—the latter
I translate into a new tongue.

430 I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a
man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother
of men.

I chant the chant of dilation or pride,
We have had ducking and deprecating about enough,
435 I show that size is only development.

Have you outstript the rest? Are you the President?
It is a trifle—they will more than arrive there every
one, and still pass on.

I am He that walks with the tender and growing
Night,
I call to the earth and sea, half-held by the Night.

440 Press close, bare-bosomed Night! Press close, mag-
netic, nourishing Night!
Night of south winds! Night of the large few stars!
Still, nodding night! Mad, naked, summer night.

445 Smile, O voluptuous, cool-breathed Earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset! Earth of the mountains,
misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon, just
tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark, mottling the tide of the
river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds, brighter and
clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbowed Earth! Rich, apple-blossomed
Earth!
450 Smile, for YOUR LOVER comes!

Prodigal, you have given me love! Therefore I to
you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love!

Thruster holding me tight, and that I hold tight!
We hurt each other as the bridegroom and the bride
hurt each other.

455 You Sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess
what you mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me;
We must have a turn together—I undress—hurry
me out of sight of the land,
460 Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
Dash me with amorous wet—I can repay you.

Sea of stretched ground-swells!
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths!
Sea of the brine of life! Sea of unshovelled and

always-ready graves!
 Howler and scooper of storms! Capricious and dainty
 Sea!
 I am integral with you—I too am of one phase, and
 465 of all phases.

Partaker of influx and efflux—extoller of hate and
 conciliation,
 Extoller of amies, and those that sleep in each others'
 arms.

I am he attesting sympathy,
 Shall I make my list of things in the house, and skip
 the house that supports them?

I am the poet of common sense, and of the demon-
 470 strable, and of immortality,
 And am not the poet of goodness only—I do not
 decline to be the poet of wickedness also.

Washes and razors for foofoos—for me freckles and
 a bristling beard.

What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
 Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me—I
 stand indifferent,
 475 My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,
 I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging
 pregnancy?
 Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be worked
 over and rectified?

I step up to say that what we do is right, and what
 we affirm is right—and some is only the ore of
 right,
 480 Witnesses of us—one side a balance, and the antip-
 odal side a balance,
 Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine,
 Thoughts and deeds of the present, our rouse and
 early start.

This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,
 There is no better than it and now.

What behaved well in the past, or behaves well
 485 to-day, is not such a wonder,

The wonder is, always and always, how can there be
a mean man or an infidel.

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
And mine a word of the modern—a word en-masse.

490 A word of the faith that never balks,
One time as good as another time—here or hence-
forward, it is all the same to me.

A word of reality—materialism first and last im-
buing.

Hurrah for positive Science! long live exact demon-
stration!

Fetch stonecrop, mixt with cedar and branches of
lilac,

495 This is the lexicographer—this the chemist—this
made a grammar of the old cartouches,
These mariners put the ship through dangerous un-
known seas,
This is the geologist—this works with the scalpel—
and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen! I receive you, and attach and clasp
hands with you,

The facts are useful and real—they are not my
dwelling—I enter by them to an area of the
dwelling.

o

500 I am less the reminder of property or qualities, and
more the reminder of life,
And go on the square for my own sake and for others'
sakes,

And make short account of neuters and geldings, and
favor men and women fully equipped,
And beat the gong of revolt, and stop with fugitives,
and them that plot and conspire.

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a
kosmos,

505 Disorderly, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, breeding,
No sentimentalist—no stander above men and wo-
men, or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.

535 the spread of my own body.

Translucent mould of me, it shall be you!
 Shaded ledges and rests, it shall be you!
 Firm masculine colter, it shall be you.

Whatever goes to the tilth of me, it shall be you!
 You my rich blood! Your milky stream, pale strip-
 540 pings of my life.

Breast that presses against other breasts, it shall be
 you!
 My brain, it shall be your occult convolutions.

Root of washed sweet-flag! Timorous pond-snipe!
 Nest of guarded duplicate eggs! it shall be
 you!
 Mixed tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall
 be you!
 545 Trickling sap of maple! Fibre of manly wheat! it
 shall be you!
 Sun so generous, it shall be you!

Vapors lighting and shading my face, it shall be
 you!
 You sweaty brooks and dews, it shall be you!
 Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me, it
 shall be you!
 Broad, muscular fields! Branches of live oak! Lov-
 ing lounge in my winding paths! it shall be
 550 you!
 Hands I have taken—face I have kissed—mortal I
 have ever touched! it shall be you.

I dote on myself—there is that lot of me, and all so
 luscious,
 Each moment, and whatever happens, thrills me with
 joy.

O I am so wonderful!
 I cannot tell how my ankles bend, nor whence the
 555 cause of my faintest wish,
 Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause
 of the friendship I take again.

That I walk up my stoop, I pause to consider if it
 really be,
 That I eat and drink is spectacle enough for the great

authors and schools,
 A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than
 the metaphysics of books.

560 To behold the day-break!
 The little light fades the immense and diaphanous
 shadows,
 The air tastes good to my palate.

Hefts of the moving world, at innocent gambols,
 silently rising, freshly exuding,
 Scooting obliquely high and low.

565 Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous
 prongs,
 Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven.

The earth by the sky staid with—the daily close of
 their junction,
 The heaved challenge from the east that moment over
 my head,
 The mocking taunt, See then whether you shall be
 master!

570 Dazzling and tremendous, how quick the sun-rise
 would kill me,
 If I could not now and always send sun-rise out
 of me.

We also ascend, dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
 We found our own, O my Soul, in the calm and cool
 of the day-break.

575 My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
 With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds, and
 volumes of worlds.

Speech is the twin of my vision—it is unequal to
 measure itself;
 It provokes me forever,
 It says sarcastically, *Walt, you understand enough—
 why don't you let it out then?*

Come now, I will not be tantalized—you conceive
 too much of articulation.

580 Do you not know how the buds beneath are folded?
 Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,

The dirt receding before my prophetic screams,
I underlying causes, to balance them at last,
My knowledge my live parts—it keeping tally with
the meaning of things,
585 Happiness—which, whoever hears me, let him or her
set out in search of this day.

My final merit I refuse you—I refuse putting from
me the best I am.

Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me,
I crowd your sleekest talk by simply looking toward
you.

Writing and talk do not prove me,
590 I carry the plenum of proof, and everything else, in
my face,
With the hush of my lips I confound the topmost
skeptic.

I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen,
To accrue what I hear into myself—to let sounds
contribute toward me.

I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat,
gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my
meals.

595 I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human
voice,
I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused
or following,
Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city—
sounds of the day and night,
Talkative young ones to those that like them—the
recitative of fish-peddlers and fruit-peddlers—the
loud laugh of work-people at their meals,
The angry base of disjointed friendship—the faint
tones of the sick,

600 The judge with hands tight to the desk, his shaky lips
pronouncing a death-sentence,
The heave'e'yo of stevedores unlading ships by the
wharves—the refrain of the anchor-lifters,
The ring of alarm-bells—the cry of fire—the whirr
of swift-streaking engines and hose-carts, with
premonitory tinkles, and colored lights,
The steam-whistle—the solid roll of the train of

approaching cars,
 The slow-march played at night at the head of the
 association, marching two and two,
 (They go to guard some corpse—the flag-tops are
 605 draped with black muslin.)

I hear the violoncello, or man's heart's complaint;
 I hear the keyed cornet—it glides quickly in through
 my ears,
 It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and
 breast.

610 I hear the chorus—it is a grand-opera,
 Ah, this indeed is music! This suits me.

A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me,
 The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling
 me full.

I hear the trained soprano—she convulses me like
 the climax of my love-grip,
 The orchestra wrenches such ardors from me, I did
 not know I possessed them,
 615 It throbs me to gulps of the farthest down horror,
 It sails me—I dab with bare feet—they are licked
 by the indolent waves,
 I am exposed, cut by bitter and poisoned hail,
 Steeped amid honeyed morphine, my windpipe throt-
 tled in fakes of death,
 620 At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
 And that we call BEING.

To be in any form—what is that?
 (Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come
 back thither,)
 If nothing lay more developed, the quahaug in its
 callous shell were enough.

625 Mine is no callous shell,
 I have instant conductors all over me, whether I pass
 or stop,
 They seize every object, and lead it harmlessly
 through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am
 happy,
 To touch my person to some one else's is about as

much as I can stand.

- 630 Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Treachorous tip of me reaching and crowding to
 help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike
 what is hardly different from myself,
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld
 drip,
- 635 Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial,
Depriving me of my best, as for a purpose,
Unbuttoning my clothes, holding me by the bare
 waist,
Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sun-light
 and pasture-fields,
Immodestly sliding the fellow-senses away,
They bribed to swap off with touch, and go and graze
- 640 at the edges of me,
No consideration, no regard for my draining strength
 or my anger,
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them
 a while,
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry
 me.
- 645 The sentries desert every other part of me,
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,
They all come to the headland, to witness and assist
 against me.
- I am given up by traitors,
I talk wildly—I have lost my wits—I and nobody
 else am the greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland—my own hands
 carried me there.
- 650 You villain touch! what are you doing? My breath
 is tight in its throat,
Unclench your floodgates! you are too much for me.
- Blind, loving, wrestling touch! sheathed, hooded,
 sharp-toothed touch!
Did it make you ache so, leaving me?
- Parting, tracked by arriving—perpetual payment of

perpetual loan,
 Rich showering rain, and recompense richer after-
 655 ward.

Sprouts take and accumulate—stand by the curb
 prolific and vital,
 Landscapes, projected, masculine, full-sized, and
 golden.

All truths wait in all things,
 They neither hasten their own delivery, nor resist it,
 They do not need the obstetric forceps of the
 660 surgeon,
 The insignificant is as big to me as any,
 What is less or more than a touch?

Logic and sermons never convince,
 The damp of the night drives deeper into my Soul.

Only what proves itself to every man and woman
 665 is so,
 Only what nobody denies is so.

A minute and a drop of me settle my brain,
 I believe the soggy clods shall become lovers and
 lamps,
 And a compend of compends is the meat of a man or
 woman,
 And a summit and flower there is the feeling they
 670 have for each other,
 And they are to branch boundlessly out of that lesson
 until it becomes omnific,
 And until every one shall delight us, and we them.

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-
 work of the stars,
 And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of
 sand, and the egg of the wren,
 675 And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
 And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors
 of heaven,
 And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all
 machinery,
 And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses
 any statue,
 And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions
 of infidels,

And I could come every afternoon of my life to look
 at the farmer's girl boiling her iron tea-kettle
 and baking short-cake.
 680

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I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss,
 fruits, grains, esculent roots,
 And am stuccoed with quadrupeds and birds all over,
 And have distanced what is behind me for good
 reasons,
 And call anything close again, when I desire it.

685

In vain the speeding or shyness,
 In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against
 my approach,
 In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own pow-
 dered bones,
 In vain objects stand leagues off, and assume manifold
 shapes,
 In vain the ocean settling in hollows, and the great
 monsters lying low,
 690

In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,
 In vain the snake slides through the creepers and
 logs,
 In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the
 woods,
 In vain the razor-billed auk sails far north to
 Labrador,
 I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure
 of the cliff.

695

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are
 so placid and self-contained,
 I stand and look at them sometimes an hour at a
 stretch.
 They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their
 sins,
 They do not make me sick discussing their duty to
 God,
 700

No one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the
 mania of owning things,
 Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived
 thousands of years ago,
 Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole
 earth.

So they show their relations to me, and I accept
 them,
 They bring me tokens of myself—they evince them
 plainly in their possession.

705 I do not know where they get those tokens,
 I may have passed that way untold times ago, and
 negligently dropt them,
 Myself moving forward then and now forever,
 Gathering and showing more always and with
 velocity,
 Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among
 them,

710 Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remem-
 brancers,
 Picking out here one that I love, to go with on
 brotherly terms.

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive
 to my caresses,
 Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
 Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
 Eyes well apart, full of sparkling wickedness—ears
 715 finely cut, flexibly moving.

His nostrils dilate, as my heels embrace him,
 His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure, as we
 speed around and return.

I but use you a moment, then I resign you stallion,
 Why do I need your paces, when I myself out-gallop
 them?
 720 Even, as I stand or sit, passing faster than you.

O swift wind! Space! my Soul! now I know it is
 true, what I guessed at,
 What I guessed when I loafed on the grass,
 What I guessed while I lay alone in my bed,
 And again as I walked the beach under the paling
 stars of the morning.

725 My ties and ballasts leave me—I travel—I sail—
 my elbows rest in the sea-gaps,
 I skirt the 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
 730 forests,
 Prospecting—gold-digging—girdling the trees of a
 new purchase,
 Scorched ankle-deep by the hot sand—hauling my
 boat down the shallow river,
 Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb over-
 head—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,
 735 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-tail,
 Over the growing sugar—over the cotton plant—
 over the rice in its low moist field,
 Over the sharp-peaked farm house, with its scalloped
 scum and slender shoots from the gutters,
 Over the western persimmon—over the long-leaved
 corn—over the delicate blue-flowered flax,
 740 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,
 745 Where the bat flies in the Seventh Month eve—
 Where the great gold-bug drops through the
 dark,
 Where the flails keep time on the barn floor,
 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 cob-

750 webs 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
 out of its ribs,
 Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, float-
 ing 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,
 755 Where the she-whale swims with her calf, and never
 forsakes it,
 Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pen-
 nant of smoke,
 Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out
 of the water,
 Where the half-burned brig is riding on unknown
 currents,
 Where shells grow to her slimy deck—Where the
 dead are corrupting below,
 760 Where the striped and starred 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,
 765 bull-dances, drinking, laughter,
 At the cider-mill, tasting the sweet of the brown
 squish, 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 gur-
 gles, cackles, screams, weeps,
 Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard—Where
 the dry-stalks are scattered—Where the brood
 770 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 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,
 775 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-necked partridges roost in a ring on the
 ground with their heads out,
 Where burial coaches enter the arched gates of a
 cemetery,
 780 Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and
 icicled trees,
 Where the yellow-crowned 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,
 785 Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under con-
 ical firs,
 Through the gymnasium—through the curtained
 saloon—through the office or public hall,
 Pleased with the native, and pleased with the foreign
 —pleased with the new and old,
 Pleased with women, the homely as well as the
 handsome,
 Pleased with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet
 and talks melodiously,
 Pleased with the tunes of the choir of the white-
 washed church,
 790 Pleased with the earnest words of the sweating
 Methodist preacher, or any preacher—Impressed
 seriously at the camp-meeting,
 Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the
 whole forenoon—flating the flesh of my nose
 on the thick plate-glass,
 Wandering the same afternoon with my face turned

up to the clouds,
 My right and left arms round the sides of two
 friends, and I in the middle;
 Coming home with the silent and dark-cheeked
 bush-boy—riding behind him at the drape of
 795 the day,
 Far from the settlements, studying the print of ani-
 mals' feet, or the moccason print,
 By the cot in the hospital, reaching lemonade to a
 feverish patient,
 By the confined 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
 800 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 Judea, 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
 805 ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,
 Speeding with tailed 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,
 810 I tread day and night such roads.

 I visit the orchards of spheres, and look at the product,
 And look at quintillions ripened, and look at quin-
 tillions green.

 I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul,
 My course runs below the soundings of plummets.
 815 I help myself to material and immaterial,
 No guard can shut me off, nor 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.

- 820 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-topped mountains show in the distance—
825 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 out-posts of the encampment—
we pass with still feet and caution,
Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and
ruined city,
The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the
living cities of the globe.
- 830 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 drowned.
- 835 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 one inch,
and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,
And chalked in large letters, on a board, *Be of good
cheer, We will not desert you,*
How he followed with them, and tacked with them—
840 and would not give it up,
How he saved the drifting company at last,
How the lank loose-gowned women looked when
boated from the side of their prepared graves,
How the silent old-faced infants, and the lifted sick,

and the sharp-lipped unshaved men,
 All this I swallow—it tastes good—I like it well—
 it becomes mine,
 845 I am the man—I suffered—I was there.

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
 The mother, condemned for a witch, burnt with dry
 wood, her children gazing on,
 The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the
 the fence, blowing, covered with sweat,
 The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck
 —the murderous buck-shot and the bullets,
 850 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, thinned
 with the ooze of my skin,
 I fall on the weeds and stones,
 855 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 hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and
 observe.

860 I am the mashed fireman with breastbone 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 cleared the beams away—they tenderly
 lift me forth.

865 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—
 870 I am the clock myself.

I am an old artilleryist—I tell of my fort's bombard-
 ment,
 I am there again.

Again the reveille of drummers,
 Again the attacking cannon, mortars, howitzers,
 875 Again the attacked send cannon responsive.

I take part—I see and hear the whole,
 The cries, curses, roar—the plaudits for well-aimed
 shots,
 The ambulanza slowly passing, trailing its red drip,
 Workmen searching after damages, making indis-
 pensable repairs,
 880 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

I tell not the fall of Alamo,
 885 Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
 The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo.

Hear now the tale of the murder in cold blood of four
 hundred and twelve young men.

Retreating, they had formed in a hollow square, with
 their baggage for breastworks,
 Nine hundred lives out of the surrounding enemy's,
 nine times their number, was the price they took
 in advance,
 890 Their colonel was wounded and their ammunition
 gone,
 They treated for an honorable capitulation, received
 writing and seal, gave up their arms, and
 marched back prisoners of war.

They were the glory of the race of rangers,
 Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship,

Large, turbulent, generous, brave, handsome, proud,
and affectionate,
895 Bearded, sunburnt, dressed in the free costume of
hunters,
Not a single one over thirty years of age.

The second First Day morning they were brought out
in squads and massacred—it was beautiful early
summer,
The work commenced about five o'clock, and was over
by eight.

900 None obeyed the command to kneel,
Some made a mad and helpless rush—some stood
stark and straight,
A few fell at once, shot in the temple or heart—the
living and dead lay together,
The maimed and mangled dug in the dirt—the new-
comers saw them there,
Some, half-killed, attempted to crawl away,
These were despatched with bayonets, or battered with
the blunts of muskets,
905 A youth not seventeen years old seized his assassin till
two more came to release him,
The three were all torn, and covered with the boy's
blood.

At eleven o'clock began the burning of the bodies:
That is the tale of the murder of the four hundred
and twelve young men.

910 Did you read in the sea-books of the old-fashioned
frigate-fight?
Did you learn who won by the light of the moon and
stars?

Our foe was no skulk in his ship, I tell you,
His was the English pluck—and there is no tougher
or truer, and never was, and never will be;
Along the lowered eve he came, horribly raking us.

915 We closed with him—the yards entangled—the
cannon touched,
My captain lashed fast with his own hands.

We had received some eighteen-pound shots under
the water,

On our lower-gun-deck two large pieces had burst at
the first fire, killing all around, and blowing up
overhead.

Ten o'clock at night, and the full moon shining, and
the leaks on the gain, and five feet of water
reported,
The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in
the after-hold, to give them a chance for them-
selves.

920 The transit to and from the magazine was now
stopped by the sentinels,
They saw so many strange faces, they did not know
whom to trust.

Our frigate was afire,
The other asked if we demanded quarter?
If our colors were struck, and the fighting done?

925 I laughed content when I heard the voice of my little
captain,
We have not struck, he composedly cried, *We have
just begun our part of the fighting.*

Only three guns were in use,
One was directed by the captain himself against the
enemy's main-mast,
Two, well served with grape and canister, silenced his
musketry and cleared his decks.

930 The tops alone seconded the fire of this little battery,
especially the main-top,
They all held out bravely during the whole of the
action.

Not a moment's cease,
The leaks gained fast on the pumps—the fire eat
toward the powder-magazine,
One of the pumps was shot away—it was generally
thought we were sinking.

935 Serene stood the little captain,
He was not hurried—his voice was neither high
nor low,
His eyes gave more light to us than our battle-
lanterns.

Toward twelve at night, there in the beams of the
moon, they surrendered to us.

940 Stretched and still lay the midnight,
Two great hulls motionless on the breast of the
darkness,
Our vessel riddled and slowly sinking—preparations
to pass to the one we had conquered,
The captain on the quarter-deck coldly giving his
orders through a countenance white as a sheet,
Near by, the corpse of the child that served in the
cabin,
The dead face of an old salt with long white hair and
carefully curled whiskers,
945 The flames, spite of all that could be done, flickering
aloft and below,
The husky voices of the two or three officers yet fit
for duty,
Formless stacks of bodies, and bodies by themselves
—dabs of flesh upon the masts and spars,
Cut of cordage, dangle of rigging, slight shock of the
soothe of waves,
Black and impassive guns, litter of powder-parcels,
strong scent,
Delicate sniffs of sea-breeze, smells of sedgy grass and
fields by the shore, death-messages given in
950 charge to survivors,
The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of
his saw,
Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short wild
scream, and long dull tapering groan,
These so—these irretrievable.

O Christ! This is mastering me!
955 Through the conquered doors they crowd. I am
possessed.

What the rebel said, gayly adjusting his throat to the
rope-noose,
What the savage at the stump, his eye-sockets empty,
his mouth spirting whoops and defiance,
What stills the traveller come to the vault at Mount
Vernon,
What sobers the Brooklyn boy as he looks down the
shores of the Wallabout and remembers the
Prison Ships,

960 What burnt the gums of the red-coat at Saratoga
 when he surrendered his brigades,
These become mine and me every one—and they are
 but little,
I become as much more as I like.

965 I become any presence or truth of humanity here,
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

For me the keepers of convicts shoulder their
 carbines and keep watch,
It is I let out in the morning and barred at night.

Not a mutineer walks hand-cuffed to the jail, but I
 am hand-cuffed to him and walk by his side,
I am less the jolly one there, and more the silent one,
 with sweat on my twitching lips.

970 Not a youngster is taken for larceny, but I go up too,
 and am tried and sentenced.

Not a cholera patient lies at the last gasp, but I also
 lie at the last gasp,
My face is ash-colored—my sinews gnarl—away
 from me people retreat.

Askers embody themselves in me, and I am embodied
 in them,
I project my hat, sit shame-faced, and beg.

975 Enough—I bring such to a close,
Rise extatic through all, sweep with the true gravita-
 tion,
The whirling and whirling elemental within me.

980 Somehow I have been stunned. Stand back!
Give me a little time beyond my cuffed head, slum-
 bers, dreams, gaping,
I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!
That I could forget the trickling tears, and the blows
 of the bludgeons and hammers!
That I could look with a separate look on my own
 crucifixion and bloody crowning.

I remember now,

985 I resume the overstaid fraction,
 The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided
 to it, or to any graves,
 Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

I troop forth replenished with supreme power, one of
 an average unending procession,
 We walk the roads of the six North Eastern States,
 and of Virginia, Wisconsin, Manhattan Island,
 Philadelphia, New Orleans, Texas, Charleston,
 Havana, Mexico,
 990 Inland and by the sea-coast and boundary lines, and
 we pass all boundary lines.

Our swift ordinances are on their way over the whole
 earth,
 The blossoms we wear in our hats are the growth of
 two thousand years.

Élèves, I salute you!
 I see the approach of your numberless gangs—I see
 you understand yourselves and me,
 995 And know that they who have eyes and can walk are
 divine, and the blind and lame are equally divine,
 And that my steps drag behind yours, yet go before
 them,
 And are aware how I am with you no more than I am
 with everybody.

The friendly and flowing savage, Who is he?
 Is he waiting for civilization, or past it and master-
 ing it?

1000 Is he some south-westerner, raised out-doors? Is he
 Kanadian?
 Is he from the Mississippi country? Iowa, Oregon,
 California? the mountains? prairie-life, bush-
 life? or from the sea?

Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire
 him,
 They desire he should like them, touch them, speak
 to them, stay with them.

Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as
 grass, uncombed head, laughter, and naïveté,
 Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes

1005 and emanations,
 They descend in new forms from the tips of his
 fingers,
 They are wafted with the odor of his body or breath
 —they fly out of the glance of his eyes.

 Flaunt of the sunshine, I need not your bask,—lie
 over!
 You light surfaces only—I force surfaces and depths
 also.
 1010 Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands,
 Say, old Top-knot! what do you want?

 Man or woman! I might tell how I like you, but
 cannot,
 And might tell what it is in me, and what it is in
 you, but cannot,
 And might tell that pining I have—that pulse of my
 nights and days.

 1015 Behold! I do not give lectures or a little charity,
 What I give, I give out of myself.

 You there, impotent, loose in the knees,
 Open your scarfed chops till I blow grit within you,
 Spread your palms, and lift the flaps of your pockets;
 I am not to be denied—I compel—I have stores
 1020 plenty and to spare,
 And anything I have I bestow.

 I do not ask who you are—that is not important to
 me,
 You can do nothing, and be nothing, but what I will
 infolld you.

 To a drudge of the cotton-fields or cleaner of privies
 I lean,
 1025 On his right cheek I put the family kiss,
 And in my soul I swear, I never will deny him.

 On women fit for conception I start bigger and nim-
 bler babes,
 This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant
 republics.

 To any one dying—thither I speed, and twist the
 knob of the door,
 1030 Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,

Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man, and raise him with resist-
less will.

O despairer, here is my neck,
By God! you shall not go down! Hang your whole
weight upon me.

1035 I dilate you with tremendous breath—I buoy you up,
Every room of the house do I fill with an armed force,
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.

Sleep! I and they keep guard all night,
Not doubt—not decease shall dare to lay finger upon
you,

1040 I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to
myself,
And when you rise in the morning you will find what
I tell you is so.

I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on
their backs,
And for strong upright men I bring yet more needed
help.

1045 I heard what was said of the universe,
Heard it and heard it of several thousand years;
It is middling well as far as it goes,—But is that all?

Magnifying and applying come I,
Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,
The most they offer for mankind and eternity less
than a spirt of my own seminal wet,

1050 Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules
his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf,
the crucifix engraved,
With Odin, and the hideous-faced Mexitli, and every
idol and image,

1055 Taking them all for what they are worth, and not a
cent more,
Admitting they were alive and did the work of their
day,
Admitting they bore mites, as for unfledged birds,

who have now to rise and fly and sing for them-
 selves,
 Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better
 in myself—bestowing them freely on each man
 and woman I see,
 Discovering as much, or more, in a framer framing a
 house,
 Putting higher claims for him there with his rolled-
 up sleeves, driving the mallet and chisel,
 1060 Not objecting to special revelations—considering a
 curl of smoke or a hair on the back of my hand
 just as curious as any revelation,
 Those ahold of fire engines and hook-and-ladder ropes
 no less to me than the Gods of the antique wars,
 Minding their voices peal through the crash of
 destruction,
 Their brawny limbs passing safe over charred laths—
 their white foreheads whole and unhurt out of
 the flames;
 1065 By the mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple
 interceding for every person born,
 Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from
 three lusty angels with shirts bagged out at
 their waists,
 The snag-toothed hostler with red hair redeeming sins
 past and to come,
 Selling all he possesses, travelling on foot to fee
 lawyers for his brother, and sit by him while he
 is tried for forgery;
 What was strewn in the amplest strewing the square
 rod about me, and not filling the square rod
 then,
 1070 The bull and the bug never worshipped half enough,
 Dung and dirt more admirable than was dreamed,
 The supernatural of no account—myself waiting my
 time to be one of the Supremes,
 The day getting ready for me when I shall do as
 much good as the best, and be as prodigious,
 Guessing when I am it will not tickle me much to
 receive puffs out of pulpit or print;
 1075 By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator,
 Putting myself here and now to the ambushed womb
 of the shadows.

 A call in the midst of the crowd,
 My own voice, orotund, sweeping, final.

1080 Come my children,
 Come my boys and girls, my women, household,
 and intimates,
 Now the performer launches his nerve—he has
 passed his prelude on the reeds within.

 Easily written, loose-fingered chords! I feel the thrum
 of their climax and close.

 1085 My head slues round on my neck,
 Music rolls, but not from the organ,
 Folks are around me, but they are no household of
 mine.

 Ever the hard unsunk ground,
 Ever the eaters and drinkers—Ever the upward
 and downward sun—Ever the air and the cease-
 less tides,
 Ever myself and my neighbors, refreshing, wicked,
 real,
 Ever the old inexplicable query—Ever that thorned
 thumb—that breath of itches and thirsts,
 1090 Ever the vexer's *hoot! hoot!* till we find where the
 sly one hides, and bring him forth;
 Ever love—Ever the sobbing liquid of life,
 Ever the bandage under the chin—Ever the tressels
 of death.

 Here and there, with dimes on the eyes walking,
 To feed the greed of the belly, the brains liberally
 spooning,
 1095 Tickets buying, taking, selling, but in to the feast
 never once going,
 Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the
 chaff for payment receiving,
 A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually
 claiming.

 This is the city, and I am one of the citizens,
 Whatever interests the rest interests me—politics,
 markets, newspapers, schools,
 Benevolent societies, improvements, banks, tariffs,
 steamships, factories, stocks, stores, real estate,
 1100 and personal estate.

 They who piddle and patter here in collars and tailed
 coats—I am aware who they are—they are not

worms or fleas.

I acknowledge the duplicates of myself—the weakest
and shallowest is deathless with me,
What I do and say, the same waits for them,
Every thought that flounders in me, the same floun-
ders in them.

1105 I know perfectly well my own egotism,
I know my omnivorous words, and cannot say any
less,
And would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with
myself.

My words are words of a questioning, and to indicate
reality and motive power:
This printed and bound book—but the printer, and
the printing-office boy?
1110 The well-taken photographs—but your wife or friend
close and solid in your arms?
The fleet of ships of the line, and all the modern
improvements—but the craft and pluck of the
admiral?
The dishes and fare and furniture—but the host and
hostess, and the look out of their eyes?
The sky up there—yet here, or next door, or across
the way?
The saints and sages in history—but you yourself?
Sermons, creeds, theology—but the human brain,
and what is reason? and what is love? and what
1115 is life?

I do not despise you, priests,
My faith is the greatest of faiths, and the least of
faiths,
Enclosing all worship ancient and modern, and all
between ancient and modern,
Believing I shall come again upon the earth after
five thousand years,
1120 Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the Gods,
saluting the sun,
Making a fetish of the first rock or stump, powwowing
with sticks in the circle of obis,
Helping the lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps
of the idols,
Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic pro-
cession—rapt and austere in the woods, a

gymnosophist,
 Drinking mead from the skull-cup—to Shastas and
 Vedas admirant—minding the Koran,
 Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the
 1125 stone and knife, beating the serpent-skin drum,
 Accepting the Gospels—accepting him that was
 crucified, knowing assuredly that he is divine,
 To the mass kneeling, or the puritan's prayer rising,
 or sitting patiently in a pew,
 Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis, or waiting
 dead-like till my spirit arouses me,
 Looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of
 pavement and land,
 1130 Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.

 One of that centripetal and centrifugal gang, I turn
 and talk like a man leaving charges before a
 journey.

 Down-hearted doubters, dull and excluded,
 Frivolous, sullen, moping, angry, affected, disheart-
 ened, atheistical,
 I know every one of you—I know the unspoken
 interrogatories,
 1135 By experience I know them.

 How the flukes splash!
 How they contort, rapid as lightning, with spasms,
 and spouts of blood!

 Be at peace, bloody flukes of doubters and sullen
 mopers,
 I take my place among you as much as among any,
 The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the
 1140 same,
 Day and night are for you, me, all,
 And what is yet untried and afterward is for you,
 me, all, precisely the same.

 I do not know what is untried and afterward,
 But I know it is sure, alive, sufficient.

 Each who passes is considered—Each who stops is
 1145 considered—Not a single one can it fail.

 It cannot fail the young man who died and was
 buried,

Nor the young woman who died and was put by his
 side,
 Nor the little child that peeped in at the door, and
 then drew back, and was never seen again,
 Nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and
 feels it with bitterness worse than gall,
 1150 Nor him in the poor-house, tubercled by rum and
 the bad disorder,
 Nor the numberless slaughtered and wrecked—nor
 the brutish koboo called the ordure of humanity,
 Nor the sacs merely floating with open mouths for
 food to slip in,
 Nor anything in the earth, or down in the oldest
 graves of the earth,
 Nor anything in the myriads of spheres—nor one of
 the myriads of myriads that inhabit them,
 1155 Nor the present—nor the least wisp that is known.

 It is time to explain myself—Let us stand up.

 What is known I strip away,
 I launch all men and women forward with me into
 THE UNKNOWN.

 The clock indicates the moment—but what does
 eternity indicate?

 1160 We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and
 summers,
 There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

 Births have brought us richness and variety,
 And other births will bring us richness and variety.

 1165 I do not call one greater and one smaller,
 That which fills its period and place is equal to any.

 Were mankind murderous or jealous upon you, my
 brother, my sister?
 I am sorry for you—they are not murderous or jeal-
 ous upon me,
 All has been gentle with me—I keep no account
 with lamentation,
 (What have I to do with lamentation?)

 1170 I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an
 encloser of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches
 between the steps,
All below duly travelled, and still I mount and mount.

1175 Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing—I know I
 was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the
 lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid
 carbon.

Long I was hugged close—long and long.

1180 Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like
 cheerful boatmen,

For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to
 hold me.
Before I was born out of my mother, generations
 guided me,
1185 My embryo has never been torpid—nothing could
 overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths,
 and deposited it with care.

1190 All forces have been steadily employed to complete
 and delight me,
Now I stand on this spot with my Soul.

O span of youth! Ever-pushed elasticity!
O manhood, balanced, florid, and full.

1195 My lovers suffocate me!
Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
Jostling me through streets and public halls—
 coming naked to me at night,
Crying by day *Ahoy!* from the rocks of the river
 —swinging and chirping over my head,
Calling my name from flower-beds, vines, tangled

under-brush,
 Or while I swim in the bath, or drink from the pump
 at the corner—or the curtain is down at the
 opera, or I glimpse at a woman's face in the
 railroad car,
 1200 Lighting on every moment of my life,
 Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses,
 Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts, and
 giving them to be mine.

 Old age superbly rising! O welcome, ineffable grace
 of dying days!

 Every condition promulges not only itself—it pro-
 mulges what grows after and out of itself,
 1205 And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

 I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled
 systems,
 And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cipher, edge
 but the rim of the farther systems.

 Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always
 expanding,
 Outward, outward, and forever outward.

 My sun has his sun, and round him obediently
 1210 wheels,
 He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
 And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest
 inside them.

 There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage,
 If I, you, the worlds, all beneath or upon their sur-
 faces, and all the palpable life, were this moment
 reduced back to a pallid float, it would not avail
 in the long run,
 1215 We should surely bring up again where we now
 stand,
 And as surely go as much farther—and then farther
 and farther.

 A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic
 leagues, do not hazard the span, or make it
 impatient,
 They are but parts—anything is but a part.

 See ever so far, there is limitless space outside

of that,
 1220 Count ever so much, there is limitless time around
 that.

My rendezvous is appointed,
 The Lord will be there, and wait till I come on per-
 fect terms.

I know I have the best of time and space, and was
 never measured, and never will be measured.

1225 I tramp a perpetual journey,
 My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff
 cut from the woods,
 No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair,
 I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,
 I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, or exchange,
 But each man and each woman of you I lead upon
 a knoll,

1230 My left hand hooking you round the waist,
 My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents,
 and a plain public road.

Not I—not any one else, can travel that road for
 you,
 You must travel it for yourself.

1235 It is not far—it is within reach,
 Perhaps you have been on it since you were born,
 and did not know,
 Perhaps it is every where on water and on land.

Shoulder your duds, and I will mine, and let us
 hasten forth,
 Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as
 we go.

1240 If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff
 of your hand on my hip,
 And in due time you shall repay the same service
 to me,
 For after we start we never lie by again.
 This day before dawn I ascended a hill, and looked
 at the crowded heaven,

And I said to my Spirit, *When we become the
 enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and
 knowledge of everything in them, shall we be*

filled and satisfied then?

And my Spirit said *No, we level that lift, to pass and*
continue beyond.

- 1245 You are also asking me questions, and I hear you,
I answer that I cannot answer—you must find out
 for yourself.
- Sit a while, wayfarer,
 Here are biscuits to eat, and here is milk to drink,
 But as soon as you sleep, and renew yourself in
 sweet clothes, I will certainly kiss you with my
 good-bye kiss, and open the gate for your egress
 hence.
- 1250 Long enough have you dreamed contemptible dreams,
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light,
 and of every moment of your life.
- Long have you timidly waded, holding a plank by
 the shore,
 Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
 To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod
1255 to me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair.
- I am the teacher of athletes,
 He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own,
 proves the width of my own,
 He most honors my style who learns under it to
 destroy the teacher.
- The boy I love, the same becomes a man, not through
 derived power, but in his own right,
1260 Wicked, rather than virtuous out of conformity or
 fear,
 Fond of his sweetheart, relishing well his steak,
 Unrequited love, or a slight, cutting him worse than
 a wound cuts,
 First rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's-eye, to
 sail a skiff, to sing a song, or play on the banjo,
 Preferring scars, and faces pitted with small-pox, over
 all latherers, and those that keep out of the sun.
- 1265 I teach straying from me—yet who can stray from
 me?
I follow you, whoever you are, from the present

hour,
My words itch at your ears till you understand
them.

I do not say these things for a dollar, or to fill up
the time while I wait for a boat,
It is you talking just as much as myself—I act as
the tongue of you,
1270 Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosened.

I swear I will never again mention love or death
inside a house,
And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only
to him or her who privately stays with me in
the open air.

If you would understand me, go to the heights or
water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or
motion of waves a key,
1275 The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

No shuttered room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they.

The young mechanic is closest to me—he knows me
pretty well,
The woodman, that takes his axe and jug with him,
shall take me with him all day,
The farm-boy, ploughing in the field, feels good at the
1280 sound of my voice,
In vessels that sail, my words sail—I go with fisher-
men and seamen, and love them.

My face rubs to the hunter's face, when he lies down
alone in his blanket,
The driver, thinking of me, does not mind the jolt
of his wagon,
The young mother and old mother comprehend me,
The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment, and
1285 forget where they are,
They and all would resume what I have told them.

I have said that the Soul is not more than the
body,
And I have said that the body is not more than
the Soul,

And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's
 self is.
 1290 And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy,
 walks to his own funeral, dressed in his shroud,
 And I or you, pocketless of a dime, may purchase
 the pick of the earth,
 And to glance with an eye, or show a bean in its
 pod, confounds the learning of all times,
 And there is no trade or employment but the young
 man following it may become a hero,
 And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub
 for the wheeled universe,
 1295 And any man or woman shall stand cool and
 supercilious before a million universes.

 And I call to mankind, Be not curious about God,
 For I, who am curious about each, am not curious
 about God,
 No array of terms can say how much I am at peace
 about God, and about death.
 I hear and behold God in every object, yet under-
 stand God not in the least,
 1300 Nor do I understand who there can be more won-
 derful than myself.

 Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
 I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four,
 and each moment then,
 In the faces of men and women I see God, and in
 my own face in the glass,
 I find letters from God dropped in the street—and
 every one is signed by God's name,
 1305 And I leave them where they are, for I know that
 others will punctually come forever and ever.

 And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality,
 it is idle to try to alarm me.

 To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,
 I see the elder-hand, pressing, receiving, supporting,
 I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
 and mark the outlet, and mark the relief and
 escape.

 1310 And as to you corpse, I think you are good manure,
 but that does not offend me,
 I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,

I reach to the leafy lips—I reach to the polished
breasts of melons.

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of
many deaths,
No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times
before.

1315 I hear you whispering there, O stars of heaven,
O suns! O grass of graves! O perpetual transfers and
promotions!
If you do not say anything, how can I say anything?

Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the souging
twilight,
1320 Toss, sparkles of day and dusk! toss on the black
stems that decay in the muck!
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
I perceive of the ghastly glimmer the sunbeams re-
flected,
And debouch to the steady and central from the
offspring great or small.

1325 There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but
I know it is in me.

Wrenched and sweaty—calm and cool then my body
becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word
unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

1330 Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing
awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my
brothers and sisters.

Do you see, O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it
is eternal life—it is HAPPINESS.

1335 The past and present wilt—I have filled them, emp-
 tied them,
 And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

 Listener up there! Here you! What have you to
 confide to me?
 Look in my face, while I snuff the sidle of evening,
 Talk honestly—no one else hears you, and I stay
 only a minute longer.

 1340 Do I contradict myself?
 Very well, then, I contradict myself,
 I am large—I contain multitudes.

 I concentrate toward them that are nigh—I wait on
 the door-slab.

 Who has done his day's work? Who will soonest be
 through with his supper?
 1345 Who wishes to walk with me?

 Will you speak before I am gone? Will you prove
 already too late?

 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.

 1350 The last scud of day holds back for me,
 It flings my likeness, after the rest, and true as any,
 on the shadowed wilds,
 It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

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

 I bequeathe myself to the dirt, to grow from the
 1355 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.

 1360 Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged,

Missing me one place, search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.