

WALT WHITMAN

[The selections from Whitman are printed by the kind permission of Messrs. Small, Maynard & Co., the authorized publishers of his works; and of Messrs. Horace L. Traubel and Thomas B. Harned, his literary executors.]

THERE WAS A CHILD WENT FORTH¹

THERE was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that
object he became,
And that object became part of him for the
day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of
years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning-
glories, and white and red clover, and the
song of the phœbe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the sow's
pink-faint litter, and the mare's foal and
the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barnyard or by
the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so
curiously below there, and the beautiful
curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful
flat heads, all became part of him. ¹⁰

The field-sprouts of Fourth-month and
Fifth-month became part of him,
Winter-grain sprouts and those of the
light-yellow corn, and the esculent roots
of the garden,
And the apple-trees cover'd with blossoms
and the fruit afterward, and wood-ber-
ries, and the commonest weeds by the
road,
And the old drunkard staggering home from
the outhouse of the tavern whence he
had lately risen,
And the schoolmistress that pass'd on her
way to the school,

¹ In the first edition, 1855, without title. In the second edition, 1856, called 'Poem of The Child That Went Forth and Always Goes Forth Forever and Forever.'

And the friendly boys that pass'd, and the
quarrelsome boys,
And the tidy and fresh-cheek'd girls, and
the barefoot negro boy and girl,
And all the changes of city and country
wherever he went.
His own parents, he that had father'd him
and she that had conceiv'd him in her
womb and birth'd him,
They gave this child more of themselves
than that, ²⁰
They gave him afterward every day, they
became part of him.

The mother at home quietly placing the
dishes on the supper-table,
The mother with mild words, clean her cap
and gown, a wholesome odor falling off
her person and clothes as she walks by,
The father, strong, self-sufficient, manly,
mean, anger'd, unjust,
The blow, the quick loud word, the tight
bargain, the crafty lure,
The family usages, the language, the com-
pany, the furniture, the yearning and
swelling heart,
Affection that will not be gainsay'd, the
sense of what is real, the thought if after
all it should prove unreal,
The doubts of day-time and the doubts of
night-time, the curious whether and how,
Whether that which appears so is so, or is
it all flashes and specks?
Men and women crowding fast in the streets
if they are not flashes and specks what
are they? ³⁰
The streets themselves and the façades of
houses, and goods in the windows,
Vehicles, teams, the heavy-plank'd wharves,
the huge crossing at the ferries,
The village on the highland seen from afar
at sunset, the river between,
Shadows, aureola and mist, the light falling
on roofs and gables of white or brown two
miles off,

The schooner near by sleepily dropping
down the tide, the little boat slack-tow'd
astern,
The hurrying tumbling waves, quick-broken
crests, slapping,
The strata of color'd clouds, the long bar of
maroon-tint away solitary by itself, the
spread of purity it lies motionless in,
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the
fragrance of salt marsh and shore mud,
These became part of that child who went
forth every day, and who now goes, and
will always go forth every day.¹

1855.

SONG OF MYSELF²

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

¹ In the early editions, the following line was added at the end of the poem:—

And these become part of him or her that peruses them now.

² In 1855, without title. In 1856, as the 'Poem of Walt Whitman, an American.' In the third edition, 1860, with the title, 'Walt Whitman,' and so in the following editions until 1881, when the present title was first used.

The sections were first numbered in 1867. It must be noted from the beginning that Whitman celebrates himself not as an isolated individual, but as the type of all individual selves, claiming for them all absolute equality. Compare the poem beginning:—

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.
One of Whitman's early fragments (*Notes and Fragments*, p. 36, no. 112) reads:—

I celebrate myself to celebrate you;
I say the same word for every man and woman living.

Compare also Whitman's Preface to the 1876 edition of *Leaves of Grass*: 'Then I meant "Leaves of Grass," as published, to be the Poem of average Identity (of yours, whoever you are, now reading these lines). . . . All serves, helps—but in the centre of all, absorbing all, giving, for your purpose, the only meaning and vitality to all, master or mistress of all, under the law, stands Yourself. To sing the Song of that law of average Identity, and of Yourself, consistently with the divine law of the universal, is a main intention of these "Leaves."'

In his 'myself' he means to picture the typical democratic self. It was both by temperament, and also with a definite purpose in view, that he chose to speak in the first person. One of his early fragmentary notes reads: 'Ego-style. First-person-style. Style of composition an animated ego-style—"I do not think" "I perceive"—or something involving self-esteem, decision, authority—as opposed to the current *third person style, essayism, didactic*, removed from animation, stating general truths in a didactic, well-smoothed. . . .' (*Notes and Fragments*, p. 179.)

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 par-
ents 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, ¹⁰
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.³

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 design-
edly 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. ¹¹

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,

³ The last eight lines of section 1 are not found in the earlier editions, and were not added until 1881.

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. ²⁰

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. ³⁰

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

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 con-
tain'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 my-
self,
(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, ¹⁰
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 chil-
dren.

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, tire-
less, and cannot be shaken away.

⁸
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,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair,
I note where the pistol has fallen.

⁹
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 pack'd to the sagging
mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop
of the load,
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.

¹⁰
Alone far in the wilds and mountains I
hunt,
Wandering amazed at my own lightness
and glee,
In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot
to pass the night,
Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-kill'd
game,
Falling asleep on the gather'd leaves with
my dog and gun by my side.

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

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early
and stopt for me,
I tuck'd 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. ¹⁰

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the
open air in the far west, the bride was a
red girl,
Her father and her 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
drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant beard
and curls protected his neck, he held his
bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare,
her coarse straight locks descended upon
her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her
feet.

The runaway slave came to my house and
stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of
the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen
I saw him limpy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led
him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his
sweated body and bruised feet,

And gave him a room that enter'd from my
own, and gave him some coarse clean
clothes, ²⁰
And remember perfectly well his revolving
eyes and his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls
of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was re-
cuperated and pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock
lean'd in the corner.

¹⁴
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, listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward
the wintry sky.
The sharp-hoof'd 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,
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 enamour'd of growing out-doors, ¹¹
Of men that live among cattle or taste of
the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships and
the wielders 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, easi-
est, is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for
vast returns,
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the
first that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my
good will,
Scattering it freely forever.

16

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,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and
 stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,
 One of the Nation of many nations, the
 smallest the same and the largest the
 same,
 A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a
 planter nonchalant and hospitable down
 by the Oconee I live,
 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 Elk-
 horn in my deer-skin leggings, a Louisi-
 anian or Georgian,
 A boatman over lakes or bays or along
 coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;
 At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or up in
 the bush, or with fishermen off New-
 foundland,
 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 (loving their big pro-
 portions),
 Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, com-
 rade of all who shake hands and welcome
 to drink and meat,
 A learner with the simplest, a teacher of
 the thoughtfulest,
 A novice beginning yet experient of myriads
 of seasons,
 Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank
 and religion,
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman,
 sailor, quaker,
 Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physi-
 cian, priest.

I resist any thing better than my own
 diversity,
 Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
 And am not stuck up, and am in my
 place.

(The moth and the fish-eggs are in their
 place,

The bright suns I see and the dark suns I
 cannot see are in their place,
 The palpable is in its place and the impal-
 pable is in its place.)

17

These are really 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 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 the common air that bathes the
 globe.

18

With music strong I come, with my cornets
 and my drums,
 I play not marches for accepted victors
 only, I play marches for conquer'd and
 slain persons.¹

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.

I beat and pound for the dead,
 I blow through my embouchures my loud-
 est and gayest for them.²

Vivas to those who have fail'd!
 And to those whose war-vessels sank in the
 sea!
 And to those themselves who sank in the
 sea!

¹ Instead of these two lines, the original edition has:
 This is the breath of laws and songs and behaviour,
 This is the tasteless water of souls . . . this is the true sus-
 tenance.
 It is for the illiterate . . . it is for the judges of the supreme
 court . . . it is for the federal capitol and the state capitols,
 It is for the admirable communes of literary men and com-
 posers and singers and lecturers and engineers and savans,
 It is for the endless races of working people and farmers and
 seamen.
 This is the trill of a thousand clear cornets and scream of the
 octave flute and strike of triangles.
 I play not a march for victors only . . . I play great marches
 for conquer'd and slain persons.

² I sound triumphal drums for the dead.
¹ I sing through my embouchures the loudest and gayest
 music to them. (1855.)

And to all generals that lost engagements,
 and all overcome heroes!
 And the numberless unknown heroes equal
 to the greatest heroes known!

20

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

I know I am solid and sound,
 To me the converging objects of the uni-
 verse perpetually flow,
 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 earla-
 cue cut with a burnt stick at night.

I know I am august,
 I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself
 or be understood,
 I see that the elementary laws never apolo-
 gize,
 (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 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
 cheerfulness I can wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in
 granite,
 I laugh at what you call dissolution,
 And I know the amplitude of time.

21

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.

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,¹
 We have had ducking and deprecating
 about enough,
 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,²
 I call to the earth and sea half-held by the
 night.
 Press close bare-bosom'd night — press
 close magnetic nourishing night!
 Night of south winds — night of the large
 few stars!
 Still nodding night — mad naked summer
 night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
 Earth of departed sunset — earth of the
 mountains misty-topt!

¹ Among Whitman's early memoranda of the essen-
 tial things not to be omitted from *Leaves of Grass* we
 find: "Boldness — Nonchalant ease and indifference.
 To encourage me or any one else continually to strike
 out alone." (*Notes and Fragments*, p. 57.)

² The original form of this beautiful apostrophe to
 Night is to be found in *Notes and Fragments*, p. 17: —

Night of south winds — night of the large few stars!
 Still slumberous night — mad, naked summer night!

Smile, O voluptuous, procreant earth!
 Earth of the nodding and liquid trees!
 Earth of the mountains, misty-topt
 Earth of departed sunset — Earth of shine and dark, mottling
 the tide of the river!
 Earth of the vitreous fall of the full moon just tinged with
 blue!
 Earth of the limpid gray of clouds purer and clearer for my
 sake!
 Earth of far arms — rich, apple-blossomed earth!
 Smile, for your lover comes!

Spread round me earth! Spread with your curtained hours
 Take me as many a time you've taken;
 Till springing up in . . .

Prodigal, you have given me love;
 Sustenance, happiness, health have given;
 Therefore I to you give love;
 O unspeakable, passionate love!

Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon
just tinged with blue! ²⁰
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 elbow'd earth — rich apple-
blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prodigal, you have given me love — there-
fore I to you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love!

²²
You sea! I resign myself to you also — I
guess what you mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked in-
viting 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,
Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy
drowse,
Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay
you.

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd
yet always-ready graves,
Howler and scooper of storms, capricious
and dainty sea,
I am integral with you, I too am of one
phase and of all phases.

³⁰
All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor
resist it,
They do not need the obstetric forceps of
the 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 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 feel-
ing they have for each other,
And they are to branch boundlessly out of
that lesson until it becomes omnific,
And until one and all shall delight us, and
we them.

³¹
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,
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 depress'd head
surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger
sextillions of infidels.

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, ¹⁰
Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees
of a new purchase,
Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, haul-
ing 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 rip-
ples and shades in the breeze; ²¹
Scaling mountains, pulling myself cau-
tiously 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 ter-
rible throes under its ribs, ³⁰
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 un-
known 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, ⁴⁰
Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of
hard wood outside,
Upon the race-course, or enjoying pic-
nics or jigs or a good game of base-
ball,
At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironi-
cal license, bull-dances, drinking, laugh-
ter,
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-raising;
Where the mocking-bird sounds his deli-
cious 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 mascu-
line 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, ⁵⁰
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 curv-
ing 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,⁶⁰
 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,⁷⁰
 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,⁸⁰
 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,¹
 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,²
 And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.⁹⁰

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

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,¹⁰⁰
 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,

¹ Compare the old ballad:—

I saw the new moon late vestreen
 With the old moon in her arms.

² I visit the orchards of God and look at the spheric product. (1835.)

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 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,¹¹¹
 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,¹²⁰
 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,¹³⁰
 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 débris,
 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.¹⁴¹

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 artilleryman, 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,¹⁵⁰
 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.

34

Now I tell what I knew in Texas in my
early youth,¹
(I tell not the fall of Alamo,
Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at
Alamo.)
Tis the tale of the murder in cold blood of
four hundred and twelve young men.

Retreating they had form'd in a hollow
square with their baggage for breast-
works,
Nine hundred lives out of the surrounding
enemies, nine times their number, was
the price they took in advance,
Their colonel was wounded and their am-
munition gone,
They treated for an honorable capitulation,
receiv'd writing and seal, gave up their
arms and march'd back prisoners of war.

They were the glory of the race of ran-
gers,¹⁰
Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper,
courtship,
Large, turbulent, generous, handsome,
proud, and affectionate,
Bearded, sunburnt, drest in the free cos-
tume 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.

None obey'd 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,

¹ Instead of the first five lines of this section, the original edition has: —

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

Hear now the tale of a jet-black sunrise,
Hear of the murder in cold-blood of four hundred and twelve young men.

The maim'd and mangled dug in the dirt,
the new-comers saw them there,²⁰
Some half-kill'd attempted to crawl away,
These were despatch'd with bayonets or
batter'd with the blunts of muskets,
A youth not seventeen years old seiz'd his
assassin till two more came to release
him,
The three were all torn and cover'd 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.²

35

Would you hear of an old-time sea-
fight?³
Would you learn who won by the light of
the moon and stars?
List to the yarn, as my grandmother's
father the sailor told it to me.

Our foe was no skulk in his ship I tell you
(said he),
His was the surly English pluck, and there
is no tougher or truer, and never was,
and never will be;
Along the lower'd eve he came horribly
raking us.

We closed with him, the yards entangled,
the cannon touch'd,
My captain lash'd fast with his own hands.

We had receiv'd 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.¹⁰

Fighting at sun-down, fighting at dark,
Ten o'clock at night, the full moon well up,
our 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 themselves.

³ In the original edition there was added the line: —

And that was a jet-black sunrise.

³ Did you read in the sea-books of the old-fashioned frigate-
fight? (1855.)

The transit to and from the magazine is
now stopt by the sentinels,
They see so many strange faces they do
not know whom to trust.

Our frigate takes fire,
The other asks if we demand quarter?
If our colors are struck and the fighting
done?

Now I laugh content, for I hear the voice
of my little captain,
We have not struck, he composedly cries,
*we have just begun our part of the fight-
ing.*

Only three guns are in use,²¹
One is directed by the captain himself
against the enemy's mainmast,
Two well serv'd with grape and canister
silence his musketry and clear his decks.

The tops alone second the fire of this little
battery, especially the main-top,
They hold out bravely during the whole of
the action.

Not a moment's cease,
The leaks gain fast on the pumps, the fire
eats toward the powder-magazine.

One of the pumps has been shot away, it is
generally thought we are sinking.

Serene stands the little captain,
He is not hurried, his voice is neither high
nor low,³⁰
His eyes give more light to us than our
battle-lanterns.

Toward twelve there in the beams of the
moon they surrender to us.

36

Stretch'd and still lies 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 have
conquer'd,
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 serv'd
in the cabin,

The dead face of an old salt with long white
hair and carefully curl'd whiskers,
The flames spite of all that can be done
flickering aloft and below,
The husky voices of the two or three offi-
cers 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 pow-
der-parcels, strong scent,
A few large stars overhead, silent and
mournful shining,
Delicate sniffs of sea-breeze, smells of sedgy
grass and fields by the shore, death-mes-
sages given in charge to survivors,
The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnaw-
ing teeth of his saw,
Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short
wild scream, and long, dull, tapering
groan,
These so, these irretrievable.

44

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?¹

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 va-
riety,
And other births will bring us richness and
variety.

I do not call one greater and one smaller,
That which fills its period and place is equal
to any.¹⁰

¹ After this line there followed, in the original edi-
tion, another paragraph of two lines: —

Eternity lies in bottomless reservoirs . . . its buckets are
rising forever and ever,
They pour and they pour and they exhale away.

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

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, 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 travel'd, and still I mount
and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind
me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I
know I was even there,²⁰
I waited unseen and always, and slept
through the lethargic mist,¹
And took my time, and took no hurt from
the fetid carbon.

Long I was hugg'd close — long and long.

Immense have been the preparations for
me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have
help'd me.

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and row-
ing 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 gen-
erations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing
could overlay it.³⁰

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.

¹ I waited unseen and always, and slept while God car-
ried me through the lethargic mist. (1855.)

All forces have been steadily employ'd to
complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust
soul.

46

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

I tramp a perpetual journey, (come listen
all!)
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,
exchange,
But each man and each woman of you I
lead upon a knoll,
My left hand hooking you round the waist,
My right hand pointing to landscapes of
continents and the public road.

Not I, not any one else can travel that road
for you,¹⁰
You must travel it for yourself.

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 everywhere on water and on
land.

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

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
look'd at the crowded heaven,²⁰
And I said to my spirit *When we become
the enfolders of those orbs, and the plea-
sure and knowledge of every thing in them,
shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?*
And my spirit said *No, we but level that lift
to pass and continue beyond.*

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 dear son,
Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk
to drink,
But as soon as you sleep and renew your-
self in sweet clothes, I kiss you with a
good-by kiss and open the gate for your
egress hence.

Long enough have you dream'd contempt-
ible 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.³⁰

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 to me, shout, and laughingly
dash with your hair.

47

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,
Wicked rather than virtuous out of conform-
ity or fear,
Fond of his sweetheart, relishing well his
steak,
Unrequited love or a slight cutting him
worse than sharp steel 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 the beard and faces
pitted with small-pox over all lather-
ers,
And those well-tann'd to those that keep
out of the sun.¹⁰

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 under-
stand 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,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be
loosen'd.)

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,²⁰
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second
my words.

No shutter'd 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 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 sound of my voice,
In vessels that sail my words sail, I go with
fishermen and seamen and love them.

The soldier camp'd or upon the march is
mine,
On the night ere the pending battle many
seek me, and I do not fail them,
On that solemn night (it may be their last)
those that know me seek me.¹³⁰

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 compre-
hend me,
The girl and the wife rest the needle a
moment and forget where they are,
They and all would resume what I have
told them.

¹ These three lines appeared first in the edition of 1867.