

Selections from "Song of Myself," 1855 edition:

[1]

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

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

[2]

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

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

The smoke of my own breath,
Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration . . . the beating of my heart . . . the passing of blood
and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored 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 along the fields and hillsides,
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 practiced so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

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

[5]

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

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

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my barestript
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 elderhand of my own,

And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers and the women my sisters
and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love;
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and elder and mullen and
pokeweed.

[6]

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

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

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

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 mothers' laps,
And here you are the mothers' laps.

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

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

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their
laps.

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

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

All goes onward and outward . . . and nothing collapses,
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-washed babe . . . and am not
contained between my hat and boots,
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike, and every one good,
The earth good, and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.
I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as
myself;
They do not know how immortal, but I know.

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

For me all 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,
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.

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork 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'oeuvre 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 shortcake.

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

In vain the speeding or shyness,
In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against my approach,
In vain the mastadon retreats beneath its own powdered bones,
In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold shapes,
In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great monsters lying low,
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 razorbilled auk sails far north to Labrador,
I follow quickly . . . I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

I think I could turn and live awhile with the animals . . . they are so placid and self-
 contained,
I stand and look at them sometimes half the day long.

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,
Not 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.

I do not know where they got those tokens,
I must have passed that way untold times ago and negligently dropt them,
Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,

Infinite and omnigenous and the like of these among them;
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that shall be my amie,
Choosing to go with him on brotherly terms.

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

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

I but use you a moment and then I resign you stallion . . . and do not need your
paces, and outgallop them,
And myself as I stand or sit pass faster than you.

[11]

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 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.

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,
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 swell 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,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

[12]

The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife at the stall in the
market,
I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and breakdown.
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 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.

[24]

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,
Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . eating drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist . . . no stander above men and women or apart from them . . . no
more modest than immodest.

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Whoever degrades another degrades me . . . and whatever is done or said returns
at last to me,
And whatever I do or say I also return.

Through me the afflatus surging and surging . . . through me the current and index.

I speak the password primeval . . . I give the sign of democracy;
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the
same terms.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs,
Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff,
And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,

Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts . . . voices veiled, and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.
I do not press my finger across my mouth,
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart,
Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
Seeing hearing and feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from;
The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer,
This head is more than churches or bibles or creeds.

If I worship any particular thing it shall be some of the spread of my body;
Translucent mould of me it shall be you,
Shaded ledges and rests, firm masculine coulter, it shall be you,
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you,
You my rich blood, your milky stream pale strippings 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 and beard and brawn it shall be you,
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 liveoak, loving loungee in my winding paths, it
shall be 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.
I cannot tell how my ankles bend . . . nor whence the cause of my faintest wish,
Nor the cause of the friendship I emit . . . nor the cause of the friendship I take
again.

To walk up my stoop is unaccountable . . . 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.

To behold the daybreak!
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.

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!

[31]

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork 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'oeuvre 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 shortcake.

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And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
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[51]

The past and present wilt I have filled them and emptied 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, for no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.

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 and will soonest be through with his supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?

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

[52]

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

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

The last scud of day holds back for me,

It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadowed wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
I depart as air I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.

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

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

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

WHEN I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns
before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add,
divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he
lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Song of the Broad-Axe (later version)

1

WEAPON, shapely, naked, wan!
Head from the mother's bowels drawn!
Wooded flesh and metal bone! limb only one, and lip only one!
Gray-blue leaf by red-heat grown! helve produced from a little seed sown!
Resting the grass amid and upon,
To be lean'd, and to lean on.

Strong shapes, and attributes of strong shapes—masculine trades, sights and sounds;
Long varied train of an emblem, dabs of music;
Fingers of the organist skipping staccato over the keys of the great organ.

2

Welcome are all earth's lands, each for its kind;
Welcome are lands of pine and oak;
Welcome are lands of the lemon and fig;
Welcome are lands of gold;
Welcome are lands of wheat and maize—welcome those of the grape;
Welcome are lands of sugar and rice;
Welcome the cotton-lands—welcome those of the white potato and sweet potato;
Welcome are mountains, flats, sands, forests, prairies;
Welcome the rich borders of rivers, table-lands, openings;
Welcome the measureless grazing-lands—welcome the teeming soil of orchards, flax, honey, hemp;
Welcome just as much the other more hard-faced lands;
Lands rich as lands of gold, or wheat and fruit lands;
Lands of mines, lands of the manly and rugged ores;
Lands of coal, copper, lead, tin, zinc;
LANDS OF IRON! lands of the make of the axe!

The log at the wood-pile, the axe supported by it;
 The sylvan hut, the vine over the doorway, the space clear'd for a garden,
 The irregular tapping of rain down on the leaves, after the storm is lull'd,
 The wailing and moaning at intervals, the thought of the sea,
 The thought of ships struck in the storm, and put on their beam ends, and the cutting away of masts;
 The sentiment of the huge timbers of old-fashion'd houses and barns;
 The remember'd print or narrative, the voyage at a venture of men, families, goods,
 The disembarkation, the founding of a new city,
 The voyage of those who sought a New England and found it—the outset anywhere,
 The settlements of the Arkansas, Colorado, Ottawa, Willamette,
 The slow progress, the scant fare, the axe, rifle, saddle-bags;
 The beauty of all adventurous and daring persons,
 The beauty of wood-boys and wood-men, with their clear untrimm'd faces,
 The beauty of independence, departure, actions that rely on themselves,
 The American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, the boundless impatience of restraint,
 The loose drift of character, the inkling through random types, the solidification;
 The butcher in the slaughter-house, the hands aboard schooners and sloops, the raftsmen, the pioneer,
 Lumbermen in their winter camp, day-break in the woods, stripes of snow on the limbs of trees, the occasional snapping,
 The glad clear sound of one's own voice, the merry song, the natural life of the woods, the strong day's work,
 The blazing fire at night, the sweet taste of supper, the talk, the bed of hemlock boughs, and the bear-skin;
 —The house-builder at work in cities or anywhere,
 The preparatory jointing, squaring, sawing, mortising,
 The hoist-up of beams, the push of them in their places, laying them regular,
 Setting the studs by their tenons in the mortises, according as they were prepared,
 The blows of mallets and hammers, the attitudes of the men, their curv'd limbs,
 Bending, standing, astride the beams, driving in pins, holding on by posts and braces,
 The hook'd arm over the plate, the other arm wielding the axe,
 The floor-men forcing the planks close, to be nail'd,
 Their postures bringing their weapons downward on the bearers,
 The echoes resounding through the vacant building;
 The huge store-house carried up in the city, well under way,
 The six framing-men, two in the middle, and two at each end, carefully bearing on their shoulders a heavy stick for a cross
 beam,
 The crowded line of masons with trowels in their right hands, rapidly laying the long side-wall, two hundred feet from front
 rear,
 The flexible rise and fall of backs, the continual click of the trowels striking the bricks,
 The bricks, one after another, each laid so workmanlike in its place, and set with a knock of the trowel-handle,
 The piles of materials, the mortar on the mortar-boards, and the steady replenishing by the hod-men;
 —Spar-makers in the spar-yard, the swarming row of well-grown apprentices,
 The swing of their axes on the square-hew'd log, shaping it toward the shape of a mast,
 The brisk short crackle of the steel driven slantingly into the pine,
 The butter-color'd chips flying off in great flakes and slivers,
 The limber motion of brawny young arms and hips in easy costumes;
 The constructor of wharves, bridges, piers, bulk-heads, floats, stays against the sea;
 —The city fireman—the fire that suddenly bursts forth in the close-pack'd square,
 The arriving engines, the hoarse shouts, the nimble stepping and daring,
 The strong command through the fire-trumpets, the falling in line, the rise and fall of the arms forcing the water,
 The slender, spasmodic, blue-white jets—the bringing to bear of the hooks and ladders, and their execution,
 The crash and cut away of connecting wood-work, or through floors, if the fire smoulders under them,

The crowd with their lit faces, watching—the glare and dense shadows;
—The forger at his forge-furnace, and the user of iron after him,
The maker of the axe large and small, and the welder and temperer,
The chooser breathing his breath on the cold steel, and trying the edge with his thumb,
The one who clean-shapes the handle, and sets it firmly in the socket;
The shadowy processions of the portraits of the past users also,
The primal patient mechanics, the architects and engineers,
The far-off Assyrian edifice and Mizra edifice,
The Roman lictors preceding the consuls,
The antique European warrior with his axe in combat,
The uplifted arm, the clatter of blows on the helmeted head,
The death-howl, the limpsey tumbling body, the rush of friend and foe thither,
The siege of revolted lieges determin'd for liberty,
The summons to surrender, the battering at castle gates, the truce and parley;
The sack of an old city in its time,
The bursting in of mercenaries and bigots tumultuously and disorderly,
Roar, flames, blood, drunkenness, madness,
Goods freely rifled from houses and temples, screams of women in the gripe of brigands,
Craft and thievery of camp-followers, men running, old persons despairing,
The hell of war, the cruelties of creeds,
The list of all executive deeds and words, just or unjust,
The power of personality, just or unjust.

4

Muscle and pluck forever!
What invigorates life, invigorates death,
And the dead advance as much as the living advance,
And the future is no more uncertain than the present,
And the roughness of the earth and of man encloses as much as the delicatessen of the earth and of man,
And nothing endures but personal qualities.
What do you think endures?
Do you think the great city endures?
Or a teeming manufacturing state? or a prepared constitution? or the best-built steamships?
Or hotels of granite and iron? or any chef-d'oeuvres of engineering, forts, armaments?

Away! These are not to be cherish'd for themselves;
They fill their hour, the dancers dance, the musicians play for them;
The show passes, all does well enough of course,
All does very well till one flash of defiance.

The great city is that which has the greatest man or woman;
If it be a few ragged huts, it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

5

The place where the great city stands is not the place of stretch'd wharves, docks, manufactures, deposits of produce,
Nor the place of ceaseless salutes of new comers, or the anchor-lifters of the departing,
Nor the place of the tallest and costliest buildings, or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth,
Nor the place of the best libraries and schools—nor the place where money is plentiest,
Nor the place of the most numerous population.

Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards;
Where the city stands that is beloved by these, and loves them in return, and understands them;
Where no monuments exist to heroes, but in the common words and deeds;
Where thrift is in its place, and prudence is in its place;
Where the men and women think lightly of the laws;
Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases;
Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons;
Where fierce men and women pour forth, as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unript waves;
Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority;
Where the citizen is always the head and ideal—and President, Mayor, Governor, and what not, are agents for pay;
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves;
Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs;
Where speculations on the Soul are encouraged;
Where women walk in public processions in the streets, the same as the men,
Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men;
Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands;
Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands;
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands;
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the great city stands.

6

How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!
How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man's or woman's look!

All waits, or goes by default, till a strong being appears;
A strong being is the proof of the race, and of the ability of the universe;
When he or she appears, materials are overaw'd,
The dispute on the Soul stops,
The old customs and phrases are confronted, turn'd back, or laid away.

What is your money-making now? what can it do now?
What is your respectability now?
What are your theology, tuition, society, traditions, statute-books, now?
Where are your jibes of being now?
Where are your cavils about the Soul now?

7

A sterile landscape covers the ore—there is as good as the best, for all the forbidding appearance;
There is the mine, there are the miners;
The forge-furnace is there, the melt is accomplish'd; the hammers-men are at hand with their tongs and hammers;
What always served, and always serves, is at hand.

Than this, nothing has better served—it has served all:
Served the fluent-tongued and subtle-sensed Greek, and long ere the Greek:
Served in building the buildings that last longer than any;
Served the Hebrew, the Persian, the most ancient Hindostanee;
Served the mound-raiser on the Mississippi—served those whose relics remain in Central America;

Served Albic temples in woods or on plains, with unhewn pillars, and the druids;
Served the artificial clefts, vast, high, silent, on the snow-cover'd hills of Scandinavia;
Served those who, time out of mind, made on the granite walls rough sketches of the sun, moon, stars, ships, ocean-waves;
Served the paths of the irruptions of the Goths—served the pastoral tribes and nomads;
Served the long, long distant Kelt—served the hardy pirates of the Baltic;
Served before any of those, the venerable and harmless men of Ethiopia;
Served the making of helms for the galleys of pleasure, and the making of those for war;
Served all great works on land, and all great works on the sea;
For the mediæval ages, and before the mediæval ages;
Served not the living only, then as now, but served the dead.

8

I see the European headsman;
He stands mask'd, clothed in red, with huge legs, and strong naked arms,
And leans on a ponderous axe.

(Whom have you slaughter'd lately, European headsman?
Whose is that blood upon you, so wet and sticky?)

I see the clear sunsets of the martyrs;
I see from the scaffolds the descending ghosts,
Ghosts of dead lords, uncrown'd ladies, impeach'd ministers, rejected kings,
Rivals, traitors, poisoners, disgraced chieftains, and the rest.

I see those who in any land have died for the good cause;
The seed is spare, nevertheless the crop shall never run out;
(Mind you, O foreign kings, O priests, the crop shall never run out.)

I see the blood wash'd entirely away from the axe;
Both blade and helve are clean;
They spirt no more the blood of European nobles—they clasp no more the necks of queens.

I see the headsman withdraw and become useless;
I see the scaffold untrodden and mouldy—I see no longer any axe upon it;
I see the mighty and friendly emblem of the power of my own race—the newest, largest race.

9

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

The axe leaps!
The solid forest gives fluid utterances;
They tumble forth, they rise and form,
Hut, tent, landing, survey,
Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,
Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, jamb, lath, panel, gable,
Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition-house, library,
Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, shutter, turret, porch,
Hoe, rake, pitch-fork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw, jack-plane, mallet, wedge, rounce,

Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,
Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not,
Capitols of States, and capitol of the nation of States,
Long stately rows in avenues, hospitals for orphans, or for the poor or sick,
Manhattan steamboats and clippers, taking the measure of all seas.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of the using of axes anyhow, and the users, and all that neighbors them,
Cutters down of wood, and haulers of it to the Penobscot or [Kennebec](#),
Dwellers in cabins among the California mountains, or by the little lakes, or on the [Columbia](#),
Dwellers south on the banks of the Gila or Rio Grande—friendly gatherings, the characters and fun,
Dwellers up north in Minnesota and by the Yellowstone river—dwellers on coasts and off coasts,
Seal-fishers, whalers, arctic seamen breaking passages through the ice.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets;
Shapes of the two-threaded tracks of railroads;
Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches;
Shapes of the fleets of barges, towns, lake and [canal](#) craft, river craft.

The shapes arise!

Ship-yards and dry-docks along the Eastern and [Western](#) Seas, and in many a bay and by-place,
The live-oak kelsons, the pine planks, the spars, the hackmatack-roots for knees,
The ships themselves on their ways, the tiers of scaffolds, the workmen busy outside and inside,
The tools lying around, the great auger and little auger, the adze, bolt, line, square, gouge, and bead-plane.

10

The shapes arise!

The shape measur'd, saw'd, jack'd, join'd, stain'd,
The coffin-shape for the dead to lie within in his shroud;
The shape got out in posts, in the bedstead posts, in the posts of the bride's bed;
The shape of the little trough, the shape of the rockers beneath, the shape of the babe's cradle;
The shape of the floor-planks, the floor-planks for dancers' feet;
The shape of the planks of the family home, the home of the friendly parents and children,
The shape of the roof of the home of the happy young man and woman—the roof over the well-married young man and woman,
The roof over the supper joyously cook'd by the chaste wife, and joyously eaten by the chaste husband, content after his work.

The shapes arise!

The shape of the prisoner's place in the court-room, and of him or her seated in the [place](#);
The shape of the liquor-bar lean'd against by the young rum-drinker and the old rum-drinker;
The shape of the shamed and angry stairs, trod by sneaking footsteps;
The shape of the sly settee, and the adulterous unwholesome couple;
The shape of the gambling-board with its devilish winnings and [losings](#);
The shape of the step-ladder for the convicted and sentenced murderer, the murderer with haggard face and pinion'd arms
The sheriff at hand with his deputies, the silent and white-lipp'd crowd, the dangling of the [rope](#).

The shapes arise!

Shapes of doors giving many exits and entrances;

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

11

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

12

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

The Sleepers

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

How solemn they look there, stretched and still;
How quiet they breathe, the little children in their cradles.

The wretched features of ennuyees, the white features of corpses, the livid faces of
drunkards, the sick-gray faces of onanists,
The gashed bodies on battlefields, the insane in their strong-doored rooms, the
sacred idiots,
The newborn emerging from gates and the dying emerging from gates,
The night pervades them and enfolds them.

The married couple sleep calmly in their bed, he with his palm on the hip of the

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

The blind sleep, and the deaf and dumb sleep,
The prisoner sleeps well in the prison the runaway son sleeps,

The murderer that is to be hung next day how does he sleep?
And the murdered person how does he sleep?

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

I stand with drooping eyes by the worstsuffering and restless,
I pass my hands soothingly to and fro a few inches from them;
The restless sink in their beds they fitfully sleep.

The earth recedes from me into the night,
I saw that it was beautiful and I see that what is not the earth is beautiful.

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

I am a dance Play up there! the fit is whirling me fast.

I am the everlaughing it is new moon and twilight,
I see the hiding of douceurs I see nimble ghosts whichever way I look,
Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and where it is neither ground or
sea.

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

I am the actor and the actress the voter . . the politician,
The emigrant and the exile . . the criminal that stood in the box,
He who has been famous, and he who shall be famous after today,
The stammerer the wellformed person . . the wasted or feeble person.

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

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

I roll myself upon you as upon a bed . . . I resign myself to the dusk.

He whom I call answers me and takes the place of my lover,
He rises with me silently from the bed.

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

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

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

O hotcheeked and blushing! O foolish hectic!
O for pity's sake, no one must see me now! . . . my clothes were stolen while I
was abed,
Now I am thrust forth, where shall I run?

Pier that I saw dimly last night when I looked from the windows,
Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you and stay . . . I will not chafe
you;
I feel ashamed to go naked about the world,
And am curious to know where my feet stand . . . and what is this flooding
me, childhood or manhood . . . and the hunger that crosses the bridge
between.

The cloth laps a first sweet eating and drinking,
Laps life-swelling yolks . . . laps ear of rose-corn, milky and just ripened:
The white teeth stay, and the boss-tooth advances in darkness,
And liquor is spilled on lips and bosoms by touching glasses, and the best liquor afterward.

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

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

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

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

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

I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the sea,

stead.

A red squaw came one breakfasttime to the old homestead,
On her back she carried a bundle of rushes for rushbottoming chairs;
Her hair straight shiny coarse black and profuse halfenveloped her face,
Her step was free and elastic . . . her voice sounded exquisitely as she spoke.
My mother looked in delight and amazement at the stranger,
She looked at the beauty of her tallborne face and full and pliant limbs,
The more she looked upon her she loved her,
Never before had she seen such wonderful beauty and purity;
She made her sit on a bench by the jamb of the fireplace . . . she cooked food for
her,
She had no work to give her but she gave her remembrance and fondness.

The red squaw staid all the forenoon, and toward the middle of the afternoon she
went away;
O my mother was loth to have her go away,
All the week she thought of her . . . she watched for her many a month,
She remembered her many a winter and many a summer,
But the red squaw never came nor was heard of there again.

Now Lucifer was not dead . . . or if he was I am his sorrowful terrible heir;
I have been wronged . . . I am oppressed . . . I hate him that oppresses me,
I will either destroy him, or he shall release me.

Damn him! how he does defile me,
How he informs against my brother and sister and takes pay for their blood,
How he laughs when I look down the bend after the steamboat that carries away my
woman.

Now the vast dusk bulk that is the whale's bulk . . . it seems mine,
Warily, sportsman! though I lie so sleepy and sluggish, my tap is death.

A show of the summer softness . . . a contact of something unseen . . . an amour
of the light and air;
I am jealous and overwhelmed with friendliness,
And will go gallivant with the light and the air myself,
And have an unseen something to be in contact with them also.

O love and summer! you are in the dreams and in me,
Autumn and winter are in the dreams . . . the farmer goes with his thrift,
The droves and crops increase . . . the barns are wellfilled.

Elements merge in the night . . . ships make tacks in the dreams . . . the sailor
sails . . . the exile returns home,
The fugitive returns unharmed . . . the immigrant is back beyond months and years;
The poor Irishman lives in the simple house of his childhood, with the wellknown
neighbors and faces,
They warmly welcome him . . . he is barefoot again . . . he forgets he is welloff;
The Dutchman voyages home, and the Scotchman and Welchman voyage home . .

and the native of the Mediterranean voyages home;
To every port of England and France and Spain enter wellfilled ships;
The Swiss foots it toward his hills . . . the Prussian goes his way, and the
Hungarian his way, and the Pole goes his way,
The Swede returns, and the Dane and Norwegian return.

The homeward bound and the outward bound,
The beautiful lost swimmer, the ennuyee, the onanist, the female that loves unre-
quited, the moneymaker,
The actor and actress . . . those through with their parts and those waiting to
commence,
The affectionate boy, the husband and wife, the voter, the nominee that is chosen
and the nominee that has failed,
The great already known, and the great anytime after to day,
The stammerer, the sick, the perfectformed, the homely,
The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that sat and sentenced him, the fluent
lawyers, the jury, the audience,
The laughter and weeper, the dancer, the midnight widow, the red squaw,
The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is wronged,
The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark,
I swear they are averaged now . . . one is no better than the other,
The night and sleep have likened them and restored them.
I swear they are all beautiful,
Every one that sleeps is beautiful . . . every thing in the dim night is beautiful,
The wildest and bloodiest is over and all is peace.

Peace is always beautiful,
The myth of heaven indicates peace and night.

The myth of heaven indicates the soul;
The soul is always beautiful . . . it appears more or it appears less . . . it comes or
lags behind,

It comes from its embowered garden and looks pleasantly on itself and encloses the
world;
Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, and perfect and clean the womb
cohering,
The head wellgrown and proportioned and plumb, and the bowels and joints
proportioned and plumb.

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

The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed,
They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west as they lie un-
clothed;
The Asiatic and African are hand in hand the European and American are
hand in hand,
Learned and unlearned are hand in hand . . . and male and female are hand in hand;
The bare arm of the girl crosses the bare breast of her lover they press close
without lust his lips press her neck,
The father holds his grown or ungrown son in his arms with measureless love
and the son holds the father in his arms with measureless love,
The white hair of the mother shines on the white wrist of the daughter,
The breath of the boy goes with the breath of the man friend is inarmed by
friend,
The scholar kisses the teacher and the teacher kisses the scholar the wronged
is made right,
The call of the slave is one with the master's call . . . and the master salutes the slave,
The felon steps forth from the prison the insane becomes sane the suffer-
ing of sick persons is relieved,
The sweatings and fevers stop . . the throat that was unsound is sound . . the lungs
of the consumptive are resumed . . the poor distressed head is free,
The joints of the rheumatic move as smoothly as ever, and smoother than ever,
Stiflings and passages open the paralysed become supple,
The swelled and convulsed and congested awake to themselves in condition,
They pass the invigoration of the night and the chemistry of the night and awake.

I too pass from the night;
I stay awhile away O night, but I return to you again and love you;

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

I will duly pass the day O my mother and duly return to you;
Not you will yield forth the dawn again more surely than you will yield forth me
again,
Not the womb yields the babe in its time more surely than I shall be yielded from
you in my time.

Respondez!

RESPONDEZ! Respondez!

(The war is completed—the price is paid—the title is settled beyond recall;)

Let every one answer! let those who sleep be waked! let none evade!

Must we still go on with our affectations and sneaking?

Let me bring this to a close—I pronounce openly for a new distribution of roles;

Let that which stood in front go behind! and let that which was behind advance to the
front and
speak;

Let murderers, bigots, fools, unclean persons, offer new propositions!

Let the old propositions be postponed!

Let faces and theories be turn'd inside out! let meanings be freely criminal, as well
as
results!

Let there be no suggestion above the suggestion of drudgery!

Let none be pointed toward his destination! (Say! do you know your destination?)

Let men and women be mock'd with bodies and mock'd with Souls!

Let the love that waits in them, wait! let it die, or pass stillborn to other spheres!

Let the sympathy that waits in every man, wait! or let it also pass, a dwarf, to other
spheres!

Let contradictions prevail! let one thing contradict another! and let one line of my poems
contradict another!

Let the people sprawl with yearning, aimless hands! let their tongues be broken! let their
eyes

be discouraged! let none descend into their hearts with the fresh lusciousness of love!
(Stifled, O days! O lands! in every public and private corruption!

Smother'd in thievery, impotence, shamelessness, mountain-high;

Brazen effrontery, scheming, rolling like ocean's waves around and upon you, O my
days! my
lands!

For not even those thunderstorms, nor fiercest lightnings of the war, have purified the
atmosphere;)

—Let the theory of America still be management, caste, comparison! (Say! what other
theory
would you?)

Let them that distrust birth and death still lead the rest! (Say! why shall they not lead
you?)

Let the crust of hell be neared and trod on! let the days be darker than the nights! let
slumber bring less slumber than waking time brings!

Let the world never appear to him or her for whom it was all made!

Let the heart of the young man still exile itself from the heart of the old man! and let
the

heart of the old man be exiled from that of the young man!

Let the sun and moon go! let scenery take the applause of the audience! let there be
apathy

under the stars!

Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! every one who can tyrannize, let him
tyrannize to his satisfaction!

Let none but infidels be countenanced!

Let the eminence of meanness, treachery, sarcasm, hate, greed, indecency, impotence, lust,
be

taken for granted above all! let writers, judges, governments, households, religions,
philosophies, take such for granted above all!

Let the worst men beget children out of the worst women!

Let the priest still play at immortality!

Let death be inaugurated!
Let nothing remain but the ashes of teachers, artists, moralists, lawyers, and
learn'd and
polite persons!
Let him who is without my poems be assassinated!
Let the cow, the horse, the camel, the garden-bee—let the mudfish, the lobster, the
mussel, eel, the sting-ray, and the grunting pig-fish—let these, and the like of
these, be
put on a perfect equality with man and woman!
Let churches accommodate serpents, vermin, and the corpses of those who have died of the
most
filthy of diseases!
Let marriage slip down among fools, and be for none but fools!
Let men among themselves talk and think forever obscenely of women! and let women among
themselves talk and think obscenely of men!
Let us all, without missing one, be exposed in public, naked, monthly, at the peril of our
lives! let our bodies be freely handled and examined by whoever chooses!
Let nothing but copies at second hand be permitted to exist upon the earth!
Let the earth desert God, nor let there ever henceforth be mention'd the name of God!

Let there be no God!
Let there be money, business, imports, exports, custom, authority, precedents, pallor,
dyspepsia, smut, ignorance, unbelief!
Let judges and criminals be transposed! let the prison-keepers be put in prison! let those
that
were prisoners take the keys! Say! why might they not just as well be transposed?)
Let the slaves be masters! let the masters become slaves!
Let the reformers descend from the stands where they are forever bawling! let an idiot or
insane person appear on each of the stands!
Let the Asiatic, the African, the European, the American, and the Australian, go armed
against
the murderous stealthiness of each other! let them sleep armed! let none believe in good
will!
Let there be no unfashionable wisdom! let such be scorn'd and derided off from the
earth!
Let a floating cloud in the sky—let a wave of the sea—let growing mint, spinach,
onions, tomatoes—let these be exhibited as shows, at a great price for admission!
Let all the men of These States stand aside for a few smouchers! let the few seize on what
they
choose! let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey!
Let shadows be furnish'd with genitals! let substances be deprived of their genitals!

Let there be wealthy and immense cities—but still through any of them, not a single
poet,
savior, knower, lover!
Let the infidels of These States laugh all faith away!
If one man be found who has faith, let the rest set upon him!
Let them affright faith! let them destroy the power of breeding faith!
Let the she-harlots and the he-harlots be prudent! let them dance on, while seeming lasts!
(O
seeming! seeming! seeming!)

Let the preachers recite creeds! let them still teach only what they have been taught!
Let insanity still have charge of sanity!
Let books take the place of trees, animals, rivers, clouds!
Let the daub'd portraits of heroes supersede heroes!
Let the manhood of man never take steps after itself!
Let it take steps after eunuchs, and after consumptive and genteel persons!
Let the white person again tread the black person under his heel! (Say! which is trodden
under
heel, after all?)
Let the reflections of the things of the world be studied in mirrors! let the things
themselves
still continue unstudied!
Let a man seek pleasure everywhere except in himself!
Let a woman seek happiness everywhere except in herself!
(What real happiness have you had one single hour through your whole life?)
Let the limited years of life do nothing for the limitless years of death! (What do you
suppose
death will do, then?)

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

1 FLOOD-TIDE below me! I watch you, face to face;
Clouds of the west! sun there half an hour high! I
see you also face to face.

2 Crowds of men and women attired in the usual cos-
tumes! how curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats, the hundreds and hundreds that
cross, returning home, are more curious to me
than you suppose,
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years
hence, are more to me, and more in my med-
itations, than you might suppose.

3 The impalpable sustenance of me from all things, at
all hours of the day,
The simple, compact, well-joined scheme—myself
disintegrated, every one disintegrated, yet part
of the scheme,
The similitudes of the past, and those of the future,
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights
and hearings—on the walk in the street, and
the passage over the river,

The current rushing so swiftly, and swimming with
me far away,
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me

and them,
The certainty of others—the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

4 Others will enter the gates of the ferry, and cross
from shore to shore,
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and
west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south
and east,
Others will see the islands large and small,
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross,
the sun half an hour high,
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred
years hence, others will see them,
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring in of the flood-
tide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

5 It avails not, neither time or place—instance avails
not,
I am with you, you men and women of a generation,
or ever so many generations hence,
I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and
know how it is.

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

7 I too many and many a time crossed the river, the
sun half an hour high,
I watched the Twelfth Month sea-gulls—I saw them
high in the air, floating with motionless wings,
oscillating their bodies,
I saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their
bodies, and left the rest in strong shadow,
I saw the slow-wheeling circles, and the gradual
edging toward the south.

8 I too saw the reflection of the summer sky in the
water,
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of
beams,

Looked at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round
the shape of my head in the sun-lit water,
Looked on the haze on the hills southward and south-
westward,
Looked on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with
violet,
Looked toward the lower bay to notice the arriving
ships,
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near
me,
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the
ships at anchor,
The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the
spars,
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls,
the slender serpentine pennants,
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in
their pilot-houses,
The white wake left by the passage, the quick trem-
ulous whirl of the wheels,
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sun-set,
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled
cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the
gray walls of the granite store-houses by the
docks,
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug
closely flanked on each side by the barges—the
hay-boat, the belated lighter,
On the neighboring shore, the fires from the foundry
chimneys burning high and glaringly into the
night,
Casting, their flicker of black, contrasted with wild
red and yellow light, over the tops of houses,
and down into the clefts of streets.

9 These, and all else, were to me the same as they are
to you,
I project myself a moment to tell you—also I
return.

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

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

between us?

12 Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and
place avails not.

13 I too lived, (I was of old Brooklyn,
I too walked the streets of Manhattan Island, and
bathed in the waters around it,
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within
me,
In the day, among crowds of people, sometimes they
came upon me,
In my walks home late at night, or as I lay in my
bed, they came upon me.

14 I too had been struck from the float forever held in
solution,
I too had received identity by my body,
That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I
should be, I knew I should be of my body.

15 It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
The dark threw patches down upon me also,
The best I had done seemed to me blank and sus-
picious,
My great thoughts, as I supposed them, were they not
in reality meagre? would not people laugh
at me?

16 It is not you alone who know what it is to be evil,
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Blabbed, blushed, resented, lied, stole, grudged,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly,
malignant,
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous
wish, not wanting,
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness,
none of these wanting.

17 But I was a Manhattanese, free, friendly, and proud
I was called by my nighest name by clear loud voices
of young men as they saw me approaching or
passing,
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the neg-
ligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,
Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or pub-
lic assembly, yet never told them a word,
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laugh-

ing, gnawing, sleeping,
Played the part that still looks back on the actor or
actress,
The same old rôle, the rôle that is what we make it,
as great as we like,
Or as small as we like, or both great and
small.

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

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

20 It is not you alone, nor I alone,
Not a few races, nor a few generations, nor a few
centuries,
It is that each came, or comes, or shall come, from its
due emission, without fail, either now, or then, or
henceforth.

21 Every thing indicates—the smallest does, and the
largest does,
A necessary film envelops all, and envelops the Soul
for a proper time.

22 Now I am curious what sight can ever be more stately
and admirable to me than my mast-hemm'd Man-
hatta,
My river and sun-set, and my scallop-edged waves of
flood-tide,
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in
the twilight, and the belated lighter;
Curious what Gods can exceed these that clasp me
by the hand, and with voices I love call me
promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I
approach,
Curious what is more subtle than this which ties me
to the woman or man that looks in my face,
Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning
into you.

23 We understand, then, do we not?
What I promised without mentioning it, have you not
accepted?
What the study could not teach—what the preaching

could not accomplish is accomplished, is it not?
What the push of reading could not start is started by
me personally, is it not?

24 Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with
the ebb-tide!
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edged waves!
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your
splendor me, or the men and women generations
after me;
Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of pas-
sengers!
Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta!—stand up,
beautiful hills of Brooklyn!
Bully for you! you proud, friendly, free Manhat-
tanese!
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions
and answers!
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solu-
tion!
Blab, blush, lie, steal, you or I or any one after us!
Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house, or street,
or public assembly!
Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically
call me by my highest name!
Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the
actor or actress!
Play the old rôle, the rôle that is great or small,
according as one makes it!
Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in
unknown ways be looking upon you;
Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean
idly, yet haste with the hasting current;
Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large
circles high in the air;
Receive the summer-sky, you water! and faithfully
hold it, till all downcast eyes have time to take
it from you;
Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my
head, or any one's head, in the sun-lit water;
Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down,
white-sailed schooners, sloops, lighters!
Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lowered at
sunset;
Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black
shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light
over the tops of the houses;
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you
are;
You necessary film, continue to envelop the Soul;
About my body for me, and your body for you, be

hung our divinest aromas;
Thrive, cities! bring your freight, bring your shows,
ample and sufficient rivers;
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more
spiritual;
Keep your places, objects than which none else is
more lasting.

25 We descend upon you and all things—we arrest you
all,
We realize the Soul only by you, you faithful solids
and fluids,
Through you color, form, location, sublimity, ideality,
Through you every proof, comparison, and all the
suggestions and determinations of ourselves.

26 You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beauti-
ful ministers! you novices!
We receive you with free sense at last, and are
insatiate henceforward,
Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or with-
hold yourselves from us,
We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant
you permanently within us,
We fathom you not—we love you—there is per-
fection in you also,
You furnish your parts toward eternity,
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the
Soul.