

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*  
(1892 version; original version, 1855)

1

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

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

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

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

2

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

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

The smoke of my own breath,

Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and  
vine,  
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of  
blood and air through my lungs,  
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-  
color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,  
The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the  
wind,  
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,  
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,  
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and  
hill-sides,  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed  
and meeting the sun.

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

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

5

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

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,  
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even  
the best,

Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

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

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

6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?  
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am  
not contain'd between my hat and boots,  
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,  
The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good.

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,  
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and  
fathomless as myself,  
(They do not know how immortal, but I know.)

Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,  
For me those that have been boys and that love women,  
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,  
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the  
mothers of mothers,  
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,  
For me children and the begetters of children.

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,  
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,  
And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken  
away.

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.

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the  
bride was a red girl,  
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly smoking,  
they had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging  
from their shoulders,  
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was 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 limpsy 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,  
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 recuperated and pass'd north,  
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

13

The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags  
underneath on its tied-over chain,  
The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he  
stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,  
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his  
hip-band,  
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat  
away from his forehead,  
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his  
polish'd and perfect limbs.

I behold the picturesque giant and love him, and I do not stop there,  
I go with the team also.

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as  
forward sluing,  
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,  
Absorbing all to myself and for this song.

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade, what is  
that you express in your eyes?  
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck on my distant and day-  
long ramble,  
They rise together, they slowly circle around.

I believe in those wing'd purposes,  
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,  
And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,  
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something  
else,  
And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty well  
to me,

And the look of the bay-mare shames silliness out of me.

15

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,  
The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its  
wild ascending lisp,  
The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving  
dinner,  
The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,  
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,

The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,  
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,  
The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,  
The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day loafe and looks  
at the oats and rye,

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,  
(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-  
room;)

The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,  
He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;  
The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,  
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;  
The quadroon girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the  
bar-room stove,

The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the  
gate-keeper marks who pass,  
The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do  
not know him;)

The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,  
The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their  
rifles, some sit on logs,  
Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his  
piece;

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

As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them  
 from his saddle,  
 The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners,  
 the dancers bow to each other,  
 The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical  
 rain,  
 The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,  
 The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and  
 bead-bags for sale,  
 The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut eyes  
 bent sideways,  
 As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the  
 shore-going passengers,  
 . . . .  
 The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne  
 her first child,  
 The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the  
 factory or mill,  
 The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead  
 flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering with blue  
 and gold,  
 The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk,  
 the shoemaker waxes his thread,  
 The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow  
 him,  
 The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,  
 . . . .  
 The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,  
 The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling  
 about the odd cent;)  
 The bride unrumpled her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock  
 moves slowly,  
 The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,  
 The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and  
 pimpled neck,

The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each  
 other,  
 (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)  
 The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great  
 Secretaries,  
 On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined  
 arms,  
 The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,  
 The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,  
 As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the  
 jingling of loose change,  
 The floor-men are laying the floor, the tinnners are tinning the roof, the  
 masons are calling for mortar,  
 In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;  
 Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it is  
 the fourth of Seventh-month, (what salutes of cannon and small  
 arms!)  
 Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows,  
 and the winter-grain falls in the ground;  
 Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the  
 frozen surface,  
 The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep  
 with his axe,  
 Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-  
 trees,  
 Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those  
 drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,  
 Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or  
 Altamahaw,  
 Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons  
 around them,  
 In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their  
 day's sport,  
 The city sleeps and the country sleeps,  
 The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,

The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by  
his wife;  
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,  
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,  
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

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 Elkhorn in my deer-skin leggings,  
a Louisianian 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 Newfoundland,  
At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking,  
At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the  
Texan ranch,  
Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving  
their big proportions,)  
Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade 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, physician, 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 impalpable is in its place.)

24

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,  
Turbulent, fleshy, 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.

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

I speak the pass-word 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 prisoners and slaves,  
Voices of the diseas'd 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  
father-stuff,  
And of the rights of them the others are down upon,

Of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, despised,  
Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,  
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,  
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

I do not press my fingers 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, 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  
touch'd from,  
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,  
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my  
own body, or any part of it,  
Translucent mould of me it shall be you!  
Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!  
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!  
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you!  
You my rich blood! your milky stream pale strippings of my life!  
Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!  
My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!  
Root of wash'd sweet-flag! timorous pond-snipe! nest of guarded  
duplicate eggs! it shall be you!  
Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, 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 live oak, loving lounge in my  
winding paths, it shall be you!  
Hands I have taken, face I have kiss'd, mortal I have ever touch'd, it  
shall be you.

I detest 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.

That I walk up my stoop, I pause to consider if it really be,  
A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics  
of books.

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

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

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 heav'd challenge from the east that moment over my head,  
The mocking taunt, See then whether you shall be master!

27  
To be in any form, what is that?  
(Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back thither.)

If nothing lay more develop'd the quahaug in its callous shell were  
enough.

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

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

28

Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,  
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,  
Treachorous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,  
My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly  
different from myself,  
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,  
Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip,  
Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial,  
Depriving me of my best as for a purpose,  
Unbuttoning my clothes, holding me by the bare waist,  
Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sunlight and pasture-  
fields,  
Immodestly sliding the fellow-senses away,  
They bribed to swap off with touch and go and graze at the edges of  
me,  
No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,  
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them a while,  
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.

The sentries desert every other part of me,  
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,  
They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.

I am given up by traitors,

I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest  
traitor,  
I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.

You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its throat,  
Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me.

- 33

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

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

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,  
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,  
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,  
I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,  
They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

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

Distant and dead resuscitate,

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

I am an old 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,  
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.

51

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,  
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?  
Look in my face while I snuff the side of evening,  
(Talk honestly, 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? who 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 shadow'd  
wilds,  
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

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

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

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

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