

Whitman, Walt, from *Song of Myself* (1855)

1

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

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

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

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

5

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

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

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

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

33

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

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

717 By the city's quadrangular houses -- in log huts, camping with lumbermen,
718 Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,
719 Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing savannas, trailing in forests,
720 Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,
721 Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,
722 Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,
723 Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding on fish,
724 Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,
725 Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail;
726 Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the rice in its low moist field,
727 Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and slender shoots from the gutters,
728 Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate blue-flower flax,
729 Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest,
730 Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;
731 Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged limbs,
732 Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,
733 Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,
734 Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great gold-bug drops through the dark,
735 Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,
736 Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides,
737 Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle the hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;
738 Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,
739 Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,
740 Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking composedly down,)
741 Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand,
742 Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,
743 Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,
744 Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,
745 Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,
746 Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;

747 Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,
748 Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,
749 Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,
750 Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,
751 Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,
752 At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking, laughter,
753 At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw,
754 At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,
755 At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings;
756 Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,
757 Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,
758 Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare, where the cock is treading the hen,
759 Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,
760 Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,
761 Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,
762 Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding,
763 Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh,
764 Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,
765 Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,
766 Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,
767 Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,
768 Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs,
769 Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,
770 Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,
771 Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,
772 Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,
773 Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or public hall;
774 Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,
775 Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,
776 Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,
777 Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,
778 Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, impress'd seriously at the camp-meeting;
779 Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flattening the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,
780 Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or down a lane or along the beach,
781 My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;
782 Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he rides at the drape of the day,)
783 Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print,
784 By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,
785 Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;
786 Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,

787 Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,
788 Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,
789 Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while,
790 Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by my side,
791 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
792 Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,
793 Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
794 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,
795 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
796 Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
797 I tread day and night such roads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

52

1331 The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

1332 I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
1333 I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

1334 The last scud of day holds back for me,
1335 It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
1336 It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

1337 I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
1338 I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

1339 I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
1340 If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

1341 You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
1342 But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
1343 And filter and fibre your blood.

1344 Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
1345 Missing me one place search another,
1346 I stop somewhere waiting for you.