University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy
Department of English and American Studies

Walt Whitman "Song of Myself"

Bachelor Paper

Author: Markéta Ferstová
Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.

2011

Univerzita Pardubice
Filozofická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Walt Whitman "Song of Myslelf"

Walt Whitman "Zpěv o mně"

Bakalářská práce

Autor: Markéta Ferstová
Vedoucí: Prof. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.

2011

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Akademický rok: **2006/2007**

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Markéta FERSTOVÁ**

Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro hospodářskou praxi**

Název tématu: **Walt Whitman: Song of Myself**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Stručný úvod do problematiky Whitmanova díla.
Sbírka Leaves of Grass – vznik, struktura a vývoj.
Song of Myself – klíčový text a jeho různé interpretace.
České překladatelské interpretace básně.
Závěr.

Rozsah grafických prací:

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Basnici zítřku/Walt Whitman, Alfred Mombert; Básnické překlady Emanuela z Lešehradu; Praha: Kvasnička a Hampl, 1931

Demokracie, ženo má!: výbor ze "Stébel trávy"/Walt Whitman; vybral a přeložil Pavel Eisner; Praha: Jaroslav Podroužek, 1945

Stébla trávy: Výbor poesie a prózy/Walt Whitman; Z angl. orig. přel. Jiří Kolář a Zdeněk Urbánek; Praha Naše vojsko, 1956

Stébla trávy/Walt Whitman; Z anglického originálu přeložili JIří Kolář a Zdeněk Urbánek; Hradec Králové: Cylindr, 1998

Stébla trávy/Walt Whitman; Jiří Kolář a Zdeněk Urbánek; Praha: Odeon, 1969

Zpívám o sobě/Walt Whitman; Z anglického originálu přeložil Ivan Skála; Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1983

Stébla trávy/Walt Whitman; z anglického originálu přeložil Jaroslav Vrchlický; Praha: B. Kočí 1906

The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman; Ezra Greenspan, et. Al.,; Cambridge University Press, 1995

Walt Whitman: A study; John Addington Symonds; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

Leaves of Grass; Walt Whitman; New York: New Zork University Press, 1965

www. Literature On-line – kritiky

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **doc. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **30. dubna 2007**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **31. března 2008**

L.S.

prof. PhDr. Petr Vorel, CSc.
děkan

PaedDr. Monika Černá, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2007

Prohlašuji:

Tuto práci jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.
Byla jsem seznámena s tím, že se na moji práci vztahují práva a povinnosti vyplývající ze zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., autorský zákon, zejména se skutečností, že Univerzita Pardubice má právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití této práce jako školního díla podle § 60 odst. 1 autorského zákona, a s tím, že pokud dojde k užití této práce mnou nebo bude poskytnuta licence o užití jinému subjektu, je Univerzita Pardubice oprávněna ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložila, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše.

Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně Univerzity Pardubice.

V Pardubicích dne 30.11.2011

Markéta Ferstová

ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Walt Whitman “Song of Myself”
Autor práce	Markéta Ferstová
Obor	Anglický jazyk pro hospodářskou praxi
Rok obhajoby	2009
Vedoucí práce	Prof. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.
Anotace	Práce zpracovává život a dílo básníka Walta Whitmana, analyzuje jeho sbírku *Stébla trávy* a porovnává rozbory jeho básně “Zpěv o mně”.
Klíčová slova	19. století, Americký básník, Walt Whitman, Stébla trávy, Zpívám o sobě, Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself

ABSTRACT:

This work deals with the analysis of Walt Whitman's life and work. Its aim is to establish a general portrayal of the 19th century poet and to analyze his life-long work, the collection *Leaves of Grass*, and mainly the poem "Song of Myself."

ABSTRAKT:

Práce se zabývá rozborem života a díla Walta Whitmana. Jejím cílem je předat obecný pohled na básníka 19. století a rozbor jeho celoživotního díla, sbírky Stébla trávy, především básně "Zpěv o mně."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Doc. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc. for his support and constructive criticism throughout the study.

In addition, I am grateful to my family, especially to Mr. David Müller, for their kind encouragment and interest in my work.

CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman` s *Leaves of Grass*, "Song of Myself", the first title that comes to our mind when one pronounces Whitman` s name. The poem that was as much admired, cursed, and discussed as possible. Influenced by such masters of „light muse" as William Shakespeare or Homer, Whitman himself became the influence for the upcoming literary generations.

Following his life, his work, and focusing on his most famous poem "Song of Myself", this bachelor paper will try to provide a comprehensive picture of Whitman being the author and the significance of his work. The material used here is definitely limited and can not exemplify all theories, data, or information about the author and his work. The main aim would rather be to establish general picture of Walt Whitman and his life work "Song of Myself."

Walt Whitman was a 19th century resident of the „melting pot" (as America had been once known), in the place crowded with immigrants who just at that time began to create their own culture there, in the place where even a small change of steady traditions and conventions meant gross violation of standards resulting in social expatriation. Right on this spot, Walt Whitman began to sing his song abounding in sensations which were new, scandalous and umbrageous/insulting. It took him a long time to become a central figure of modern American poetry.

Walt Whitman was a pioneer of new American poetry. His masterpiece *Leaves of Grass* belongs to those few poetical schemes which affected not only American but also European poetry. Upon the decision of literally historians and critics, Whitman has been equalled to the greatest writers of the world. Although he lived in 19th century, his modern poetic structure gave an impulse to many other following poets. More than century after the publication of the final edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's poetry continues to be a very controversial subject for discussions.

2. WALT WHITMAN´S BIOGRAPHY

2.1 Childhood

Walter Whitman was born on May 31st, 1819, on a farm at West Hills, Long Island, in a coastal village about fifty kilometres to the east from New York. Whitman's parents named Louisa Van Velsor Whitman and Walter Whitman, a house builder, carpenter and farmer, had interest in Quaker thoughts[1]. In his bibliographical notes written in third person singular Whitman said:

> The ancestors of Walt Whitman, on both the paternal and maternal sides, kept a good table, sustain'd the hospitalities, decorums, and an excellent social reputation in the county, and they were often of mark'd individuality. (Specimen Days; *John Burroughs's* NOTES; pp 696)

He was the second child out of nine, and was after his birth immediately nicknamed "Walt" to distinguish him from his father. Whitmans` other seven children were named Jesse (1818–1870), Mary Elizabeth (1821–1899), Hannah Louisa (1823–1908); Andrew Jackson (1827–1863); George Washington (1829–1901); Thomas Jefferson (1833–1890); and Edward (1835-1892). Firstly, Walter Whitman Sr. gave their children names after the family members, but then turned to the heroes of the American Revolution [2] and the War of 1812[3]. The youngest Whitman's brother Edward was mentally and physically handicapped.

In the age of twelve Walt` s family moved to Brooklyn, living first in Front Street, near the ferry. Here, Whitman was growing up as a son of the urban worker and loving to live close to the East River, where he used to drive the ferries back and forth to New York City, imbibing an experience that would remain significant for him his whole life. He loved ferries and people who worked on them and his poem published in 1856 and eventually entitled "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" explores the full resonance of

[1] The Religious Society of Friends, generally accepted founder George Fox, Quakers believe that each individual is directly responsible to God, so they have no priests or pastors and no religious ceremonies. They do not even have a church

[2] Dated 1776 – 1783

[3] The War of 1812 was fought between the United States and Great Britain from June 1812 to the spring of 1815, although the peace treaty ending the war was signed in Europe in December 1814. The main land fighting of the war occurred along the Canadian border, in the Chesapeake Bay region, and along the Gulf of Mexico; extensive action also took place at sea.

this experience. Summer holiday as well as some years of his childhood Whitman spent in the countryside:

> Plenty of sea shore, sandy, stormy, uninviting, the horizon boundless, the air too strong for invalids, the bays a wonderful resort for aquatic birds, the south-side meadows cover'd with salt hay, the soil of the island generally tough, but good for the locust-tree, the apple orchard, and the blackberry, and with numberless springs of the sweetest water in the world. (*John Burroughs;* pp. 697*)*

The idyllic Long Island countryside formed a sharp contrast to the crowded energy of the quickly growing Brooklyn-New York City urban centre.

Intellectual influences that widely formed both Whitman's personality and his thinking at home during his childhood can be reflected in his work. His father and mother were Quakers but they did not attend the church regularly. Walter Whitman Sr. was a friend of Tom Paine[4] and the Quaker preacher Elias Hicks[5] whose orations Whitman remembered with great fondness – later he would write short biographical studies on both of them (Čapek, pp. 377). In his notes one can find such a reminiscence of Elias Hicks as the following:

> I have listen'd to his preaching so often when a child, and sat with my mother at social gatherings where he was the centre, and every one so pleas'd and stirr'd by his conversation. (Specimen Days; Reminiscence of Elias Hicks, pp 881)

Being a religious minority, Quakers were chased all over America and their harsh experience brought them into conflict with the American ruling circle. In 1825 Marquis de Lafayette[6] attended the Brooklyn Independence Day celebration and embraced Whitman in his arms. Whitman later regarded this as an omen of his future greatness (Herrington, pp. 1)

---

[4] Thomas "Tom" Paine (February 9, 1737 - June 8, 1809) was an author, pamphleteer, radical, inventor, intellectual, revolutionary, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He has been called "a corsetmaker by trade, a journalist by profession, and a propagandist by inclination.

[5] Elias Hicks (March 19, 1748 – February 27, 1830) was an itinerant Quaker preacher from Long Island, New York, who promoted doctrines that embroiled him in controversy that led to the first major schism within the Religious Society of Friends.

[6] Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette (6 September 1757 – 20 May 1834), often known as simply Lafayette, was a French aristocrat and military officer born in Chavaniac, in the province of Auvergne in south central France. Lafayette was a general in the American Revolutionary War, where he served in the Continental Army under George Washington, and a leader of the Garde Nationale during the French Revolution.

Another and obviously stronger ideological influence was the American Revolution and thoughts of the early American bourgeois democracy. Although Whitman`s ancestors had lived in the New World comfortably with a piece of land under their management, in the time Walt was born his family was lackland. His father had subscribed a utopian socialistic journal *The Free Inquirer* and Walt not only read this journal but even attended many lectures of Frances Wright[7] who was one of Whitman` s heroes. As an old man, Whitman remembered how only her "appearance was charming…. she plied my body and soul". (Čapek, pp. 378)

2.2 Adolescence

At the age of eleven, Whitman abandoned his schools books and began to work as an office boy in the service of a lawyer and a doctor. He wrote about one of these jobs in the collection of different prosaic notes and sketches which contains Whitman's autobiographic records - in the collection *Specimen Days*:

> I had a nice desk and window-nook to myself; Edward C. kindly help'd me at my handwriting and composition, and, (the signal event of my life up to that time,) subscribed for me to a big circulating library. For a time I now revel'd in romance-reading of all kinds; first, the "Arabian Nights," all the volumes, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in very many other directions, took in Walter Scott's novels, one after another, and his poetry, (and continue to enjoy novels and poetry to this day.) (Specimen Days; My First Reading. – Lafayette, pp 699)

When Whitman was twelve years old, he became an apprentice in *Long Island Patriot*, a liberal, working-class newspaper where he learned "the printing trade and was first exposed to the excitement of putting words into print, observing how thought and event could be quickly transformed into language and immediately communicated to thousands of readers" (Symonds, pp. 22) The printing office was placed in the building which once used to be the headquarters of the general Washington during the American Revolution:

[7] Frances Wright (September 6, 1795 – December 13, 1852) also widely known as Fanny Wright, was a Scottish-born lecturer, writer, freethinker, feminist, abolitionist, and social reformer, who became a U. S. citizen in 1825.

> An old printer in the office, William Harts-horne, a revolutionary character, who had seen Washington, was a special friend of mine, and I had many a talk with him about long past times. (Specimen Days; Printing Office. -- Old Brooklyn, pp 700)

Not only did the conversation with William enrich Whitman, but he, as an autodidact, also absorbed an eclectic but wide-ranging education thought through his visits to museums, his profound reading, and his penchant for engaging everyone he met in conversation and debates:

> At 16, 17, and so on, was fond of debating societies, and had an active membership with them, off and on, in Brooklyn and one or two country towns on the island. A most omnivorous novel-reader, these and later years, devour'd everything I could get. Fond of the theatre, also, in New York, went whenever I could -- sometimes witnessing fine performances. (Specimen Days; Growth -- Health – Work)

Except for the above mentioned job opportunities, Whitman also worked as a compositor in different New York journals; he experienced his own first articles, in the upscale New York Mirror in 1834. He described his feelings later in his life: “How it made my heart double-beat to see my piece on the pretty white paper, in nice type.” (Specimen Days; Starting Newspapers, pp. 920)

At the age of eighteen, Whitman became a teacher at some public schools in at least ten different Long Island towns, rooming in the homes of his students, getting very little paid/payment, moving from town to town. Whitman thinks back on it: “This latter I consider one of my best experiences and deepest lessons in human nature behind the scenes, and in the masses.” (Specimen Days; Growth – Health – Work)

Ages 20, he became a publisher, an editor, a redactor and a printer of one provincial paper. This period of his life was described in his memories in *Press* paper, published in Camden:

> My first real venture was the "Long Islander," in my own beautiful town of Huntington, in 1839. I was about twenty years old. I had been teaching country school for two or three years in various parts of Suffolk and Queens counties, but liked printing; had been at it while a lad, learn'd the trade of compositor, and was encouraged to start a paper in the region where I was born. I went to New York, bought a press and types, hired some little help, but did most of the work myself, including the press-work. Everything seem'd turning out well; (only my own restlessness prevented me gradually establishing a permanent property there.) I bought

> a good horse, and every week went all round the country serving my papers, devoting one day and night to it. I never had happier jaunts -- going over to south side, to Babylon, down the south road, across to Smithtown and Comac, and back home. The experiences of those jaunts, the dear old-fashion'd farmers and their wives, the stops by the hay-fields, the hospitality, nice dinners, occasional evenings, the girls, the rides through the brush, come up in my memory to this day. (Specimen Days; Starting Newspapers, pp. 920)

2.3 Adulthood

He returned back to New York and worked as a printer and a journalist for various papers. He attended theatre once again and fell in love with the opera. Whitman wrote about Shakespeare plays the following:

> As boy or young man I had seen, (reading them carefully the day beforehand,) quite all Shakespeare's acting dramas, play'd wonderfully well. Even yet I cannot conceive anything finer than old Booth in "Richard Third," or "Lear," (I don't know which was best,) or Iago, (or Pescara, or Sir Giles Overreach, to go outside of Shakespeare) -- or Tom Hamblin in "Macbeth" -- or old Clarke, either as the ghost in "Hamlet," or as Prospero in "the Tempest," with Mrs. Austin As Ariel, And Peter Richings As Caliban." (Specimen Days; Plays And Operas Too, pp. 705)

The theatrical passion followed the musical one, Whitman said:

> Fanny Kemble -- name to conjure up great mimic scenes withal -- perhaps the greatest. I remember well her rendering of Bianca in "Fazio," and Marianna in "the Wife." Nothing finer did ever stage exhibit -- the veterans of all nations said so, and my boyish heart and head felt it in every minute cell. The lady was just matured, strong, better than merely beautiful, born from the footlights, had had three years' practice in London and through the British towns, and then she came to give America that young maturity and roseate power in all their noon, or rather forenoon, flush. It was my good luck to see her nearly every night she play'd at the old Park -- certainly in all her principal characters. (Specimen Days; Plays And Operas Too, pp. 705)

Whitman acquired his reputation as a journalist and published his fiction and poems in conventional verse. His best years for fiction were between 1840 and 1845 when he placed his stories in a range of magazines, including the *American Review* and the *Democratic Review*, one of the nation's most prestigious literary magazines. (Holloway, pp. 31) Whitman immersed into political life:

> From 1840 to 1841 he turned his hand to campaigning for the Democratic presidential candidate Martin Van Buren. In 1842 Whitman was appointed editor of the *Aurora* and published a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans,* of the Inebriate, a work he later called "damned rot". The work *Franklin Evans*, a temperance tract was widely read. Since August 1841 till September 1842 *Democratic Review* published seven stories by Whitman. His stories and poems were characterized by the strong ethic ton and displayed sympathy with the poor and suffering. (Herrington, Literature Online)

For two years Whitman worked as a general editor of Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, a liberal New York magazine, probably the best status he ever had. This period brought political and culture growth to him. He wrote leading articles about all important political questions, read much American and British news, studied municipal government and wrote about problems of municipal administration reforms, attended theatre and operas, and followed all published books. It is estimated that during these days Whitman published review and notes about more then two hundred books. (Symonds, pp. 30)

In the year 1848 Whitman accompanied on his journey by his brother Jefferson worked in New Orleans as an editor of *Daily Crescent*. After his return in September that year he began editing Brooklyn *Freeman.* (Holloway, pp. 32)

The main problem of those times was slavery and Whitman was active in the faith against it. During his job in *Daily Eagle* Whitman was not an abolitionist yet, but he fought against the most dangerous endeavour, against slave owners` effort to expand slavery throughout the territory of the United States.

Years between the American Revolution a the Civil War (1861–1865), Whitman as a general editor of *Daily Eagle* used to polemize from time to time with the abolitionists, he strongly held the view of the Free-Soil movement, namely against slavery expansion behind the borders originally stated by the Congress of the United States and for the retention of the American North-West as Free-Soiler. (Čapek, pp. 382)

Whitman wrote several leading articles proximate to the principles of the abolishment; he also expanded arguments of the Free-Soil movement with the point of fulmination that slavery meant for the working class in the North. We can read in one of his leading articles in *Daily Eagle*:

> The voice of the North declares that work mustn't be vilified. Young men from Free states mustn't be discharged from new areas (where slavery does not exist) by imposing there system that would void their honourable effort from the venerability. (Čapek, pp. 386)

Not only did Whitman fight against slavery, but he even fought against high prevent duty. In the leading article in *Daily Eagle* Whitman compared the government effort for war to one Moliere's quotation, e.g. when he speaks about a rich doctor: "I had to kill fair number of people to become so rich."

In the autumn of the revolutionary year 1848[8] Whitman wrote a review of Napoleon by Hazzlittov:

> Now we wish all people in all kingdoms of European continent to rise to so magnificent destruction of history like in French revolution to uproot royal and clerical government that year after year discriminates humanity constantly beneath…. Observing how deep got in the predatory teeth of royal government – and how everything throughout is replet´d by clerical poison – not strange opinion that that only some vehement disestablishment of social and political construction could achieve abundant goal. (Kolář, pp. 383)

Whitman's solidarity with the revolutionary streams in Europe was the basis for his view expressed in his poems *Europe*, *France*.

In the end of the revolutionary year 1848 Whitman was no longer the general editor of *Daily Eagle* since he joined more radical antislavery forces and therefore was expelled from *Daily Eagle* which was the central organ of the Democratic Party. A new job was offered to him immediately in New Orleans and Whitman accepted it:

> In 1848, '49, I was occupied as editor of the "daily Eagle" newspaper, in Brooklyn. The latter year went off on a leisurely journey and working expedition (my brother Jeff with me) through all the middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Lived awhile in New Orleans, and work'd there on the editorial staff of "daily Crescent" newspaper. After a time plodded back northward, up the Mississippi, and around to, and by way of the great lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to Niagara falls and lower Canada, finally returning through central New York and down the Hudson; traveling altogether probably 8000 miles this trip, to and fro. '51,

[8] The European Revolutions of 1848, known in some countries as the Spring of Nations, Springtime of the Peoples or the Year of Revolution, were a series of political upheavals throughout Europe. Described by some historians as a revolutionary wave, the period of unrest began in France, with the French Revolution of 1848, and soon spread to the rest of Europe where populist human aspirations variously sought constitutional, liberal, nationalist or socialistic changes in society often at the cost of traditionally influential dynastic or religious authorities.

> '53, occupied in house-building in Brooklyn. (For a little of the first part of that time in printing a daily and weekly paper, "the Freeman.") (Specimen Days; Through Eight Years) (Specimen Days; Through Eight Years)

This journey strengthened his antislavery effort to be sharper and more offensive. His work for *Freeman*, new party of the Free Soil movement, lasted for less than a year since Whitman found out that the radical movement was not radical enough and that the tendency to compromise with slavery forces was even in this political party.

> I take the opportunity to those who were my friends to render devout thanks from the bottom of grateful heart. My enemies – and on the whole to all old conservatives – I contemn and fight them as ever. (*Freeman*)

The stage of Whitman's emergence was closed. The events of these days brought him to a conclusion that rehabilitation was not going to arise from the dicker of the professional politics. Until his thirties Whitman developed himself especially as a journalist. These years turned into an essential organic and development milestone of the slow growth of him as a poet. He improved himself in the gift of writing, acquired the richness of the English language, immerged deeply into literature and drama, and began to create his own imaginations about cultural needs of America. As a redactor, he participated in political fights being a spokesman during political meetings and was an active member of the party. He travelled and experienced at first hand the viciousness of slavery when being a passer-by in the slave markets and saw a big part of the United States. His journey enriched his knowledge of the French language which he later wrongly used in his work.

Since 1847 Whitman wrote notes resembling painting sketches about his thoughts and poetic experiments that trained him for *Leave of Grass*. He wrote a note:

> The best poetry is simply the poetry that hold the most perfect beauty – the beauty for ear, beauty for brain, beauty for heart, the beauty fro place and time. (Kolář, pp. 387)

Poetry was not only a spontaneous feeling or merely a capture of natural beauty through words. A poem should touch one` s mind as well as his heart and senses, it should represent both a thought and an emotion, it should represent not only the poet himself but also the county and times he lives in; it should not reflect reality but on the

contrary, it should evoke emotions, thoughts and the will to act in the reader. He cited Saint-Beuva:

> For us the famous poet is the one who incites reader's imagination and forces him to think, who leads them to become the poet theirselves thanks to his thoughts in the work. The most famous poet in not the one who created successful work; it is the one who incites the most; the one, who you can not totally understand for the first reading and who leaves you to wish, explain, study and complete it yourselves. (Kolář, pp. 387)

Among his notes that were found after his death, we can find his quote: "Poet is a crimp. He goes and beat the drum."

He saw the poet as a revolutionary figure that incites and rouses people and set them on foot. When he left work for *Freeman* he suddenly changed his career of a political editor and even left the society where he had had success and had been honoured. In this important period of his life, Whitman decided not to write for the main source of income, but to get back to his life as a worker. He worked, like his father, as a carpenter and for the next six years in which he wrote and prepared the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* he did not came to New York dressed in fashionable clothes but in an open-necked working dress which he admired in defiance of conventions. But the main issue of this mien was his inner intention: he wanted *Leaves of Grass* to be the poetic child of him as a worker. (Čapek, 389)

His irregular job enabled him to go out for walks, to dream, to think and to formulate his feelings in the notes which were less and less resembling the common poems.

According to Eldrid Herrington, the author of Whitman's bibliography published by Chadwyck-Healey (Literature Online Biography), Whitman published several poems and short stories in prestigious magazines such as the *Democratic Review* and the *American Review*. Whitman's pieces showed small literary promise, but in the 1850s he began to experiment with the poetic form in such poems as e.g."Resurgemus," published in *New York Daily Tribune.*

The au naturel thinker tired of fights for power switched from intellectual formulations to emotional excitement. He felt how unrelenting rivalry was changing into uniformity. Civilization subjugated to the waste land, inhabitants united into a nation.

His poem "Bloody Money*"* was the first free-verse poem on slavery issue published in *New York Daily Tribune* on 22nd March 1850. (Halloway, pp. 32)

There is a number of speculations about Whitman's private life in those several years before he entered the age of thirty-seven.

Whitman's life between the faulted year 1855 when the first edition of his work was published and the preparing of so-called "deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass* in the year 1892 was full of diligent author's and editor's work which added to the collection of original poems new poems of various kind such as for example "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" or larger units as "Enfans d´Adam" (later "Children of Adam" or "Calamus"). (Halloway, pp. 32)

An important experience to the Whitman's life was added by the Civil War. Whitman himself did not enlist in the Union Army but when he discovered on 16th December 1862 due to a listing of fallen and wounded soldiers in the *New York Tribune* that his brother George had been wounded Whitman went to Fredericksburg, Virginia, to find him. Whitman later wrote: "Walking all day and night, unable to ride, trying to get information, trying to get access to big people." (Herrigton, pp. 2)

Whitman nursed his brother back to health, and seeing the numbers of soldiers in need of aid and companionship, decided to become a wound-dresser in Washington hospitals. He was able to identify himself with the sufferings of the wounded and could empathise even their pain. (Herrigton, Literature Online Biography). He wrote their letters home, brought small gifts to be shared round, gave money and food to the impoverished, and held the hands of the dying:

> I found among the crowded cots in the Patent-office. He likes to have some one to talk to, and we will listen to him. He got badly hit in his leg and side at Fredericksburgh that eventful Saturday, 13th of December. (Specimen Days; Fifty Hours Left Wounded On The Field)

With the help of his friend Charley Eldridge and in order to continue this work, Whitman took up a part-time job in the Army Paymaster's office in 1863 and collected donations for his volunteering; he lived simply in order to support the soldiers as much as his salary would allow him. Whitman` s experience was enriched not only by the life of the soldiers, he also befriended a conductor of a streetcar who would become his long-standing but probably unrequited love, Pete Doyle. After the Union's defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run in September 1861, his first poem with the war theme, "*Beat,*

Beat, Drums" was published in two papers; the recruiting fervour of his early war works was now softened due to his years as a nursing volunteer. Whitman wrote war correspondence for New York and Brooklyn papers and did copying to support himself and to supply funds for his ministrations. (Halloway, pp. 32)

In 1864 prostrated Whitman returned home to Brooklyn for nearly a half-year, where he continued to visit hospitals. He also planned to write a collection of poems sucked by war experience, *Drum-Taps*. Later on, he was appointed to clerkship in Indian Bureau, in the Department of the Interior, where he worked few hours a day.

On May that year Whitman was promoted to a clerkship of the second class, but in June was dismissed by James Harlan, Secretary of the Interior, on the moral grounds: Harlan having read a copy of *Leaves of Grass* found it obscene and fired Whitman. Whitman's friend William Douglas O'Connor [9] gave Whitman his sobriquet by publishing *The Good Gray Poet*, protesting against Whitman` s dismissal for authorship "of an indecent book". Whitman was soon after given an appointment as a copyist in the Attorney General` s office. (Čapek, pp. 405)

Whitman` s opinions during the Civil War were not as radical as those of his eighteens; his political attitude was of the mean follower. The main aim was rather to keep the union than to abolish slavery. This non-radical attitude can be read above all in his poem "From Paumanok Starting " in which he sings:

> To sing first, (to the tap of the war-drum, if need be,)
> The idea of all—of the western world, one and inseparable.
> And then the song of each member of These States. (lines 9-11)

The word "Slavery" appears in his entire civil war poems just twice. The first time in a short poem called "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors*"* in which a black girl strictly discourses the cruelty of slavery, but Whitman did not process or amplify this theme. The second appearance can be read in the poem "Turn, O Libertad" where he announced the end of war and slavery. (Kaplan)

It does not mean that Whitman` s opinion about war was undemocratic. It was incomplete and his understanding of the problem did not reach the depth which he was able to show during other important events before and after the war.

[9] William Douglas O'Connor (1832-1889) had a long time championship of Walt Whitman and his poetry.

In New York 1865 Whitman published himself *Drum-Taps*, a series of poems (53) on 72 pages on the theme of the war which celebrated soldiers but did not mention slavery and the causes of the conflict.

One of the most famous of the early pieces is "Beat! Beat! Drums!." The spondaic and anapaestic measures reinforce the martial sound of an army on march:

> Beat! beat! drums! --- blow! bugles! blow!
> Through the windows --- through doors --- burst like a ruthless force,
> Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
> Into the school where the scholar is studying;
> Leave not the bridegroom quiet --- no happiness must he have now with his bride,
> Nor the peace farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
> So fierce you whirr and pound you drums --- so shrill you bugles blow. (lines 1-7)

No one could go on with his normal life once the war had begun. The integrity of the Union was threatened. Although his poems written in the war-time period are full of deep nationalism and brilliant literary neatness he did not succeed to find a publisher for them. Therefore he published them himself in a booklet. Among them are some of the best poems about the Civil War. All but the first few copies contain *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, which includes "When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd", poem that was inspired by the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in April 1865. It is one of the finest elegies on the president` s death, but the poem he was mostly asked to read during his lifetime was "O Captain, My Captain", whose regular meter and rhyme scheme suited contemporary tastes. (Herrington, pp. 2)

An interesting moment came when Whitman founded out that the separation of the South had been warded off; Whitman abandoned his non-radical opinion of the national union and reverted to radicalism again. In his poem "Adieu to a Soldier" he sings:

> Adieu, dear comrade!
> Your mission is fulfill'd—but I, more warlike,
> Myself, and this contentious soul of mine,
> Still on our own campaigning bound,
> Through untried roads, with ambushes, opponents lined,
> Through many a sharp defeat and many a crisis—often baffled,
> Here marching, ever marching on, a war fight out—aye here,
> To fiercer, weightier battles give expression. (lines 8-15)

Whitman worked as a copyist in the Attorney General's office till an illness came eight years later. He had stable income which provided him with enough time to read and write and though he was not respected as a poet in his own country, he began to gain reputation and favourable attention of literary critics in Europe.

In the year 1868 William Rossetti[10] published docked collection of Whitman's poems called *Poems by Walt Whitman* which gained the appreciation from Alfred Tennyson[11] and other important representatives of the English literature. Soon after, passages of his poetic work began to be issued in German, French, Danish and other languages. (Herrington, pp. 2)

In 23rd January 1873 Whitman suffered an attack of paralysis. In his earlier life, he was an example of tough health, but during the Civil War Whitman overstrained his physical power, systematically overworked and overlooked doctor's advices spending more and more time with the sick and the infected in primitive hospitals, finally he incurred himself blood-poisoning from an infected stab. Whitman's health was decimated and he could not hold his appointment anymore. He took his private savings and set for the sea coast in search of health but got only as far as Camden, New Jersey, where he lived with his brother Col. George Whitman till 1884. When George and his wife Louisa moved away from Camden, Whitman bought a house at 328 Mickle Street where he spent the rest of his life. He kept on writing, from time to time went for a trip and delivered his annual Lincoln lectures. He spent much of his time in the nature writing some notes about nature and enjoyed the support and friendship of his followings such were Lord Houghton[12], John Burroughs[13], and J. H. Johnston[14]. (Holloway, pp. 36)

After his health condition had improved, he visited Ontario, Montreal, Quebec and the Saguenay River with his friend Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke[15], making notes that

[10] William Michael Rossetti (25 September 1829 – 5 February 1919) was an English writer and critic.
[11] Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson, Fellow of Royal Society (6 August 1809 – 6 October 1892) was an English poet, the leading poet of the Victorian age

[12] Richard Monckton Milnes, 1st Baron Houghton Fellow of Royal Society (19 June 1809 - 11 August 1885) was an English poet, patron of literature and politician.
[13] John Burroughs (3 April 1837 – 29 March 1921) was an American naturalist and essayist participating in the evolution of the U.S. conservation movement.
[14] John H. Johnston was a New York jeweler who befriended Whitman and housed him for long stays in New York in the late 1870s.
[15] Maurice Bucke (18 March 1837 – 19 February 1902), often called Maurice Bucke, was an important Canadian progressive psychiatrist. Bucke wrote three book-length studies: *Man's Moral Nature*, *Walt Whitman*, and *Cosmic Consciousness*, a classic in the modern study of mystical experience.

were posthumously published in *Dairy in Canada*. Whitman's close friend Horace Trabel (19 December 1858 - 8 September 1919) , a socialistic poet who was accompanying Whitman in his last days, published three collections of *With Walt Whitman in Camden* with the transcription of records of their daily conversations. The greybeard continued writing becoming more tolerant in his expectation of the better future and more utopian in his perspectives. (Holloway, pp. 32)

In 1882 Whitman published *Specimen Days and Collect*, a body of prose writings and autobiographical sketches, particularly about his experience in the Civil War; it also included *Democratic Vistas,* where faith in a good heart of man did not leave him, *Two Rivulets*, essays on literature, and notes about his trip to the west and his walks in New Jersey.

In 1888 Whitman printed *November Boughs*, a collection of new poetry and prose essays, and *Complete Poems and Prose of Walt Whitman, 1885-1888* with the help of his friend Horace Traubel. In April of this year Whitman suffered another paralytic attack, this time worse than the previous one, and in December 1890 fell ill with pneumonia. In January 1892 he had another relapse and three months later, on 26th March 1892, died at Camden. (Čapek, pp. 408)

30th March 1892 Whitman was buried in a tomb in Harleigh Cemetery based on William Blake` s design where both his mother and father were to be re-buried on either side of him three years before his own death. Always sociable, Whitman was loved and known throughout Camden where more than a thousand mourners from all walks of life attended his funeral, lining the two-mile stretch from his home to his grave. (Holloway, pp. 37)

To recapitulate, Whitman came from a farmer family and liked to come back to his hometown in Long Island where his ancestors had lived for several generations. He worked as a printer but also as a teacher, a journalist and a carpenter. During the Civil War he nursed as a voluntary attendant and after the war he shortly worked as an officer. His individual philosophic ideas together with his private wishes were incorporated in his literary work. Whitman's unaccustomed and wild poetry was not accepted. The poet's work was charged with inartificial, immoral and homosexual features for which he was released from the civil service. Paralyzed by the strokes which hastened his sudden secluded life in the small town of Camden nearby Philadelphia, he modestly continued to live among his friends and admirers.

3. LEAVES OF GRASS

3.1 1st Edition

In 1855 two momentous events occurred. On July 4th Whitman published his first volume of 12 poems, *Leaves of Grass*, at his own expense and on July 11th his father died. Whitman had begun working on the volume probably as early as 1847. The book's elaborately embossed cover belied the stark simplicity of its title page: "there was a daguerreotype of the author and publisher in this workman's clothes but no identifying name was printed." (Loving, pp. 1) The picture that withstand to all reputable image shows how the official portrait of the poet should look like. Its cover announced novelty and unreasonableness before the reader opened this 95-paged book: a slim volume of huge quarto paper with a dark green book cover and with the title *Leaves of Grass* printed in golden letters out of which long golden bines and roots of grass grow:

As Encyclopaedia of American Poetry claims eight American editions were published during 1885 and 1881/82:

Leaves of Grass (Brooklyn, 1855)
Leaves of Grass (Brooklyn, 1856)
Leaves of Grass (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge; London: Trübner, 1860-61)
Leaves of Grass (New York: 1867)
Leaves of Grass (Washington, 1871-1872)
Leaves of Grass (Camden, NJ, 1876)
Leaves of Grass (Boston: James R. Osgood, [1881])
Leaves of Grass (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1891-'2)

The name "Walt Whitman" appeared midway in the first poem, later entitled "Song of Myself": "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos." The book was prefaced by a statement of his theories on poetry written in an emotional and reflective way which was closer to poetry than to the conventional prose. Whitman declared in the preface: "Here are the roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and

nonchalance that the soul loves." Later on, a part of the preface was converted into the poem "By blue Ontario's shore." (Szczesiul, pp. 1)

The preface that introduced the volume was untitled, as were all twelve poems written in long psalmic cola with no fixed meter or rhyming scheme and almost no enjambment. Even the author's punctuation in the prose featured curiosity which he obstinately held – rich usage of suspension points instead of regular sentence construction. (Loving, pp. 1)

The first edition was composed not only of "Song of Myself" but even of poems later titled "A Song for Occupations," "To Think of Time," "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric," "Faces," "The Song of the Answerer," "Europe: The 72nd and 73rd Years of These States," "There was a Child Went Forth," "Who Learns My Lessons Complete," and "Great are the Myths." (Szczesiul, pp. 2)

Upon its publication, he sent a copy to Ralph Waldo Emerson[16] who praised it so highly that Whitman reprinted Emerson's respond in the subsequent editions without having obtained Emerson's permission. The letter from Emerson included the now famous line: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career."

Other positive reviews published in New York newspapers were reputedly written by Whitman himself. He compared *Leaves of Grass* to Alfred Tennyson's *Maud and Other Poems*, arguing that the form of his poems suited America and democracy, not the "dandified forms´ of England's first-class poet". (Herrington, pp. 1)

The first as well as the second edition were commercial failure mainly because of Whitman's unorthodox rhythm, innovation in verse form, so called free verse in long rhythmical lines with a natural structure, and the quotidian nature of his subject matter.

3.2 2nd Edition

The second, once again self-published, edition (1856) included thirty-two poems, now titled, parts of the prose preface of the first edition were transformed into a poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore," or such significant additions as "Sun-Down Poem" (later "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"), and "Song of the Open Road." There was also a

[16] Ralph Waldo Emerson (25 May 1803 – 27 April 1882) was an American lecturer, philosopher, essayist, and poet, best remembered for leading the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century.

forty-two-paged appendix of the first edition reviews entitled "Leaves Droppings." Whitman added, deleted, and combined some lines. For example, he deleted the two-line curse against those who defiled the human body at the end of the 1855 "I Sing the Body Electric" and added a 36-line quasi-anatomical catalogue. Whitman quoted the phrase from Emerson's letter in gold on the spine of this edition: "I Greet You at the Beginning of a Great Career". (Szczesiul, pp. 2)

Neither the 1855 nor the 1856 editions sold well but *Leaves of Grass* was thought well off not only by Emerson but also by Bronson Alcott[17], Henry David Thoreau[18], and well-wishers Moncure Conway[19], and William Dean Howells[20], who visited Whitman in Brooklyn in 1856. Their admiration, though, was not sufficient for Whitman to find a publisher for the third edition. He returned to journalism then and he edited the *Brooklyn Times* for two years.

3.3 3rd Edition

In 1860 third edition was published by the company Thayer & Eldridge which was a young, progressive Boston printing firm fervent to be associated with Whitman. This time, an enlarged edition of one hundred and fifty-four poems was printed in 1000 copies and was sold quickly. However, Thayer & Eldridge went bankrupt in December 1860 and the plates for the third edition were sold at auction. They eventually fell into hands of Richard Worthington's New York publishing house which continued to reprint the book for many years without the author's permission. (Szczesiul, pp. 2)

The third edition appeared almost on the eve of the Civil War and according to many critics it was the most successful piece remarkable for its one hundred and twenty-two additional poems. The edition included the dirge "A Word Out of the Sea" (later "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking") and 45 love, friendship and homosexual

[17] Amos Bronson Alcott (29 November 1799 – 4 March 1888) was an American teacher, writer, philosopher, and reformer. As an educator, Alcott pioneered new ways of interacting with young students, focusing on a conversational style, and avoided traditional punishment.
[18] Henry David Thoreau (born David Henry Thoreau (12 July 1817 – 6 May 1862) was an American author, poet, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, historian, philosopher, and leading transcendentalist.
[19] Moncure Daniel Conway (17 March 1832 – 5 November 1907) was an American abolitionist, Unitarian clergyman, and author.
[20] William Dean Howells (1 March 1837 – 11 May 1920) was an American realist author and literary critic.

poems in the “Calamus” series, set beside the erotic and heterosexual series “Enfans d´Adam” (later “Children of Adam”). Emerson tried to convince Whitman to remove this part from the volume because of the puritan public manner but did not succeed. (Herrignton, pp. 2)

After the third edition Whitman continued working for New York periodicals. In 1862 his brother was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg and Whitman moved to Washington. He volunteered in a war hospital writing *Drum-taps* and working on extensive revisions of *Leaves of Grass* which he published in the fourth edition in 1867.

3.4 4th Edition

There were three issues of the fourth edition; all contain the 338-page *Leaves of Grass* proper followed in the first issue by *Drum-Taps*, *Sequel to Drum-Taps,* and *Songs Before Parting*. The second issue omits *Sequel to Drum-Taps,* while the third issue contains only the 338 pages of *Leaves of Grass*. Of the few new poems in the main section, "One's-Self I Sing" has garnered the most critical attention. Many of the older poems were revised, and two of the clusters were re-divided. (Szczesiul, pp. 3)

3.5 5th Edition

Between the years 1871 and 1872, the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared with the poem *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* integrated into the text together with thirty-two poems of *Leaves of Grass* such as “Passage to India” which formed the central cluster of the book. (Herrington, pp. 2)

In winter 1873 Whitman suffered his first stroke which left him partially paralyzed. He moved to Camden and lived there with his brother George and sister-in-law Louisa.

3.6 6th Edition

In 1876 the “Centennial” edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published. This less extensively revised “Author’s Edition” was a reprint of the 1871-72 edition plates, with

the addition of all pamphlet publications of the second volume titled "Two Rivulets" in uniform binding as a two-volume collection of poetry and prose. Money for this edition came mainly from English subscribers as William Michael Rossetti[21], Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Edmund Gosse[22]. (Szczesiul, pp. 4)

3.7 7th Edition

After his health had improved, he set for a journey around America. In 1882 Whitman published *Specimen Days and Collect* that also included *Democratic Vistas* and *Two Rivulets*, essays on literature, and notes about his trip to the west an his walks in New Jersey.

In 1881, a Boston publishing house of James R. Osgood and Company made an agreement with Whitman to publish the seventh edition enlarged by twenty new poems. The revisions of this 382-pages *Leaves of Grass* edition was final and any new work produced over the next decade would be annexed to the back of this text. Initial sales of the 1881-82 Osgood edition had business success, but in March of 1882 the Boston District Attorney threatened the publisher with prosecution for distributing obscene material and ordered it to be either censured or withdrawn from public sale. Whitman refused to expurgate his work and Osgood stopped publication, handing over to the author approximately 225 unbound copies and the stereotype plates from which they had been printed. These plates were used for a total of fifteen printings with a variety of publishers as Philadelphia Rees Welsh, 1882, or Glasgow: Wilson & McCormick, 1883, and Philadelphia: David McKay, 1884. The seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* is therefore bibliographically the most complex one of all Whitman's works. Between 1882 an 1891 the publishing houses sold a total of 6414 copies of the seventh edition (Szczesiul, pp 4)

[21] William Michael Rossetti (25 September 1829 – 5 February 1919) was an English writer and critic.
[22] Sir Edmund William Gosse (21 September 1849 – 16 May 1928) was an English poet, author and critic.

3.8 8th edition

The 1891-92 "Deathbed Edition" of *Leaves of Grass* was in fact the second issue of the twelfth printing of the seventh edition; the annexes were also reprinted. With his health fading, Whitman "created" this final "edition" of *Leaves of Grass* by using sheets from the 1888 printing. He bound them with old titles and leaves together with the annexes appended at the back. Whitman wrote on the copyright page to the 1891-92 edition: “I wish to say that I prefer and recommend this present one, complete, for future printing, if there should be any.” Whitman knew that he had little time left and that this would be his last edition. The book appeared for sale early in 1892, and Whitman died in his Camden, New Jersey home on March 26 of that year. (Szczesiul, pp. 5)

4. SONG OF MYSELF

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself", the heart of the book, is the most famous of the twelve poems originally published in *Leaves of Grass*. First published in 1855, Whitman made extensive revisions to the book, changing titles, motifs, and adding whole poems until 1881, and tinkering further until his death in 1892. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass the poem was untitled, in the following edition this poem took on the title "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American" and in the 1860 – 1871 editions it was shortened simply to "Walt Whitman." The final widely known title "Song of Myself" appeared firstly in the 1881 edition. "Song of Myself," is a long poem in fifty-two sections which is considered by many to be his masterpiece.

This personal epic is introduced by two groups of poems composed after 1855. The first section called "Inscription," epigraph-like cluster and the second, programmatic "Starting from Paumanok," preceded the leading "Song of Myself." The first poem in "Inscriptions," "One's-Self I Sing," opens not only the section but the entire volume in terms of its major themes. Harralson's Encyclopaedia of American Poetry explains the theme of this part:

> As a micro version of *Leaves of Grass*, it celebrates the "simple separate person," yet utters "the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." The second stanza establishes that the poet will sing "Of physiology from top to toe" and of equality between male and female. He intends to speak of both body and soul and of modernity.

The final collection of *Leaves of Grass* includes 369 poems, nevertheless, "Song of Myself" remains the "premier" poem in *Leaves of Grass* and the poet's most important work; in the 1881 edition 1336 lines grouped into 52 sections.

The poem's sections are the central theme of this study. The whole poem can be found in the appendix 1. The following part focuses on the points of view of the following critics: Ivan Marki[23], V. A. Shahane[24], James E. Miller[25], and Jerome

[23] Ivan Marki was the Edmund A. LeFerve Professor of English and has taught English at Hamilton College since 1965.
[24] V. A. Shahane is a published author and an editor. Published credits of V. A. Shahane include York Notes on "A Passage to India" by E.M. Forster and Whitman's Leaves of Grass
[25] James E. Miller (1920–2010) was an American scholar and the Helen A. Regenstein Professor Emeritus of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago, where he completed his graduate work, taught, and served as chairman of the English department

Loving[26]. Not all authors analyse all sections; sometimes they split some of the sections into one conclusion or omit them completely.

4.1 Section 1

Loving analyzes the first stanza with the focus on the first two lines:

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

Since the beginning of the poem**,** Loving feels that Whitman tries to convince the reader that the celebrations of self should be a representative act. He continues his analysis:

> Song of Myself" is not a monologue, but half a dialogue between the "I" of the poem and the "you" of the reader. First of all, Whitman revived the use of the first person in literature. Second, he spoke directly to the reader, not merely in the company of an assumed reader. It is an "I"-"you" exchange in which the colloquial and even slang punctuate the rhythm of the poem: "For every atom belong to me as good belongs to you/I loafe and invite my soul. (lines[27] 3, 4)

Also Greenspan revealed the language Whitman had used: "The poet began his verses with participles and participial phrases which let him loosen the leash of syntactical connection in his poetry". (Greenspan, pp. 95) The most informative phenomena of Whitman's poetry is his simple grammatical scheme "I am." His poetic "I" gave a new meaning of the idea of self-determination. It successfully answered the question "Who am I?" with the reply: "I am anyone, anywhere, anytime" (Greenspan, pp. 102):

> I celebrate myself;
> And what I assume you shall assume;
> For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you. (lines 1-3)

Miller confirms Loving`s opinion:

> Song of Myself" portrays (and mythologizes) Whitman's poetic birth and the journey into knowing launched by that "awakening." But the "I" who speaks is not alone. His camerado, the "you" addressed in the poem's second line, is the reader, placed on shared ground with the poet, a

[26] Jerome Loving was a distinguished Professor of English, Texas A&M University, 1973, 2003
[27] For the following parts where only the note line(s) and number is mentioned with no name reference, the line numbers refer to the Whitman´s poem Song of Myself.

> presence throughout much of the journey. As the poem opens, the reader encounters the poet "observing a spear of summer grass" and extending an invitation to his soul. He vows to "permit to speak at every hazard, / Nature without check with original energy. (Miller, pp 1)

Both critics agree not only on the conversation between Whitman and the reader but even on the form he uses. Loving adds:

> Along with the use of the adjective “good” in place of the adverb and the slang term “loafe” Whitman’s idiom suggests a poet who is of the people. He is also totally American: “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. (Loving, pp. 3)

In the starting section, Marki sees a disclosure “of the private world of its protagonist” whereas soul offered by Whitman connects “the whole world without losing any of its own integrity.” (Marki, pp. 1)

The conclusion can be found in Shahane: “This poem celebrates the poet’s self, but, while the “I” is the poet himself, it is, at the same time, universalized.” (Shahane, pp. 1)

The starting lines of the poem unite the critics in their feelings, conclusions and thoughts which probably would make Whitman sufficient.

4.2 Section 2

In the 1855 edition the main theme for Loving is freedom. He paraphrases the poem itself as Whitman’s fascination for nature and everyday life process, “The smoke of my own breath” and sums it up:

> Whitman requires no “miracles” other than those of nature itself, he finds his nature much more than an emblem of the something just as “clear and sweet” as the soul. (Loving, pp. 3)

According to Shahane, the section 2 “declares identity separateness from civilization and its closeness to nature.” It also refers to “the joy he [the poet] feels through his senses.” Once again he invites the reader to follow him and “stop this day and night” in order to discover “the origin of all poems.” (Shahane, pp. 1)

Miller connects lines 10 and 19: “Creeds and schools in abeyance,/I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked” with simple Whitman’s

preparation for the "soul's visit" in the section 5. It should dramatize "the transfiguring event that launches the poet on his lifelong quest."(Miller, pp. 1)

The second section portrays a poet of nature who is fascinated by all common events especially in their pure simplicity.

4.3 Section 3-4

These sections are skipped by all critics except Shahane:

> Whitman chides the "talkers," "trippers," and "askers" for wasting their time discussing "the beginning and the end," and "the latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies ... More important is the eternal procreant urge of the world." He prepares himself for the union of his body with his soul: "I witness and wait." As his soul is "clear and sweet," so are all the other parts of his body - and everyone's bodies. "Not an inch ... is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest." (Shahane, pp. 1)

This chant records Whitman's reconciliation with his current situation and feeling of satisfaction. The reader can perceive a slight glimpse of something unusual going to happen.

4.4 Section 5

Loving informs us that the section 5 was an originally an unsectioned poem. Miller, following the idea of the life quest, calls this part "the awakening portrayed" linked to the next section 6. Shahane agrees with Miller's conclusion: „poet's ... union with his soul", which brings Whitman peace and joy, referring to lines 92, 93 and 95 of the poem:

> 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 ... a kelson [an important structural part of a ship] of the creation is love

This union brings him peace and joy.

Loving was the first to link this section to sexuality:

> The body and soul engage in what appears to be a sexual act. Yet it is important to note that the reader cannot completely follow the imagery. We might envision the scene of the point where the soul parts "the shirt from (the body's) bosom-bone," but the scene becomes uncharitable in

> any recognizable reality when the soul also plunges its "tongue to (the body's) bare-sprit heart." The sexual act, accordingly, produces not fleshly progeny but a mystical vision of the world, passing "all the argument of the earth." This is the central contradiction of "Song of Myself" --- that the body is sometimes equal to the soul and at other times merely symbolic of it. (Loving, pp. 3)

Not only could this part be perceived sexually, but it also evokes a romantic scene full of fresh air, nature, freedom and harmony.

4.5 Section 6

The section 6 is a frequent passage to be referred to by many teachers of Whitman's poetry. It is probably the most famous part of the poem in which the imagination of the reader can be fully developed. Line 99: "A child said *What is the grass*? fetching it to me with full hands;"

According to Shahane, it "introduces the central symbol" of the whole poem. To answer the question means to think about it little bit longer.

> Here the grass is a symbol of the divinity latent in the ordinary, common life of man and it is also a symbol of the continuity inherent in the life-death cycle. No one really dies. (Shahane, pp. 2)

Miller suggests Whitman's lifelong wisdom: "Providing ample occasion for the poet to establish many of the subjects and themes that are addressed elsewhere in *Leaves of Grass*." (Miller, pp. 2)

Loving comments this section by explanation of the grass motif which is compared to a handkerchief by Whitman:

> In other words, the grass is likened to a handkerchief that is dropped to gain our attention. It is "a uniform hieroglyphic," a secret and sacred writing from God. The grass, uniformly green and "hopeful" suggests the cyclical nature of existence: "All goes onward an outward, nothing collapses,/And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier." (lines 102 -104)

Miller comments furthermore: "Whitman is forced to explore his own use of symbolism and his inability to break things down to essential principles." (Miller, pp. 1) The bunches of grass became a symbol of the regeneration in nature. The motif of

ultimate symbol of democracy that links all people grows everywhere like grass. Even the sad historic moment of the Civil War evokes the connection with grass: grass feeds on the bodies of the dead. The mortality of everyone could lead into the thought of death caused by the fight for democracy. Whitman refused this symbolism: "I wish I could translate the hints" (line 121).

Čapek interprets the grass symbol in three possible ways. Firstly, as the equality of all people of all races, which is expressed by the following lines:

> 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. (lines 106 – 108)

Secondly, as a belief in the growth and development of one's life and its triumph over the death:

> 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 (lines 126-129)

The final interpretation of the grass symbol suggests Whitman` s optimism, his faith in people and the final victory of mankind:

> I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven. (line 101)

Probably the most discussed section offers as many possibilities of interpretation as any poet desires to achieve. Here the reader can find whatever he or she wishes. To start the reader's imagination makes the poet` s dream come true.

4.6 Section 7

According to Loving, Whitman is going back to his experience in this section:

> death with the dying and birth with the new-wash´d babe, and am not contain´d between my hat and boots." (line 133) Much later in the poem, he recalls how "cycles" (line 507) of time had "ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen" (line 1156). "Before I was born out of my mother" he continues, "generation guided me/My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it." (lines 1159, 1160)

Shahane comments this part of the poem:

> The poet signifies his universal nature, which finds it “just as lucky to die” as to be born. The universal self finds both “the earth good and the stars good.” The poet is part of everyone around him. He sees all and condemns nothing. (Shahane, pp. 3)

Miller offers the interconnection between this section and the beginning in “the focus on the grass imagery in section 6” following by Whitman’s movement “to the theme of “en-masse,” in section 7-16.” (Miller, pp. 2)

The section is full of equality between both men and women and birth and death, which leaves in the reader the feeling of dauntlessness and pleasure for every moment when one is alive.

4.7 Section 8-16

The critics link the meaning of those sections together, except for the section 11 which will be analyzed bellow.

In the words of Shahane, these sections reveal Whitman’s experience gained by observing his surroundings and by falling in love with all of the world.

> 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. (lines 327-329)

As Miller claims the author “becomes Walt Whitman, American, roaming the continent, celebrating everyday scenes of ordinary life.” (Miller, pp. 2) Referring to the section 13, lines 232 and 234: "caresser of life wherever moving . . . Absorbing all to myself and for this song" Miller finds poet` s self-presentation, and adds: “This movement rises in a crescendo to the extended catalogue of section 15, with its rapid-fire snapshots of American types and scenes.” (Miller, pp. 2)

The explanation of the parts is understandable as the author writes about everything he can see, feel and touch through his life in the city and countryside. The reader can easily imagine the place where the poet used to live and the life around him.

These sections illustrate places and events which Whitman experienced. With the true detailed description the reader can easily imagine all the places and their spirit.

4.8 Section 11

Because of school textbooks and mainly because of the theme itself, the return to the section 11 is needed.

Loving mentions this section only in one short sentence: "This poet relates to and speaks for everyone, even the sexually frustrated woman in section 11 of the poem." Referring to the poet that experienced and saw "everything from the 'suicide sprawl[ing] on the bloody floor' to the 'runaway slave.'" and now he hands it over to all people.

The commentary of Miller claims that the episode of the 11th section is more optimistic than the sixth section. The "twenty-ninth bather," how this part is usually called, achieves to draw the reader in and convince him/her "to truly experience the world one must be fully in it and of it, yet distinct enough from it to have some perspective, and invisible so as not to interfere with it unduly." (Miller, pp. 2) The commentary follows:

> This paradoxical set of conditions describes perfectly the poetic stance Whitman tries to assume. The lavish eroticism of this section reinforces this idea: sexual contact allows two people to become one yet not one--it offers a moment of transcendence. As the female spectator introduced in the beginning of the section fades away, and Whitman's voice takes over, the eroticism becomes homoeroticism. Again this is not so much the expression of a sexual preference as it is the longing for communion with every living being and a connection that makes use of both the body and the soul (although Whitman is certainly using the homoerotic sincerely, and in other ways too, particularly for shock value). (Miller, pp.2)

Such a short part of the whole poem brings something unusual, something scandalous, and something that does not belong to the publicly accepted poetry. Whitman's rebellion and his view of the world are without obstacles, it is a simple world with everything that belongs to it.

4.9 Section 17

Miller mentions this part shortly: “Moving away from American diversity in section 17, the poet turns to human commonality—to "the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is." (line 359) (Miller, pp. 3)

Shahane also points out shortly that this section “refers to the universality of the poet” referring to “thoughts of all men in all ages and lands” (part of line 355).

In this chant the feeling of brotherhood prevails against in the same way included equality.

4.10 Section 18-19

According to the opinion of Shahane, the sections 18 and 19 offer “the themes of God, life, death and nature.” (Shahane, pp. 3)

> Their primary aim is to reveal the nature of the poet’s journey through life and the spiritual knowledge which he strives for along the way. They reveal an essential element in a mystical experience—the awakening of the poet’s self. (Shahane, pp. 3)

Shahane concludes its observation: “Sections 1 to 5 concern the poet’s entry into a mystical state, while sections 6-16 describe the awakening of the poet’s self to his own universality.” (Shahane, pp. 3)

Not only does Miller link these sections together, but he also links the section 18-24 and comments on it like Whitman’s procedure to defuse traditional discriminations, celebration of "conquer'd and slain persons" (line 362). The connection is found in the increase of the author’s focusing fixation “on the equality of body and soul and ways of rescuing the body from its inferior status.” Miller sees the presentation of the nude in the section 24 “Walt Whitman, a kosmos” (beginning of line 497), using metaphor for all parts of his body “Firm masculine colter,” (line 530) “duplicate eggs” (line 535), as the turn to “himself and his own body.” (Miller, pp. 3)

The poet is ready for the coming change and invites everyone to join his journey which is even defended by the comparison to everyday events.

4.11 Section 20-23

A simple note of Marki that describes the author of the poem “hankering, gross, mystical, nude” (line 389) comes from this section where the author presents himself.

Shahane compares this part to the declaration that everything the poet can say about himself can also be said by the reader about himself or herself. Whitman reveals himself as a “solid and sound” , (line 403) “deathless” , (line 406) and “august” (line 409) figure who treats the others the same way he treats himself, noone being better or worse. (Shahane, pp. 3)

4.12 Section 21-23

Only Shahane writes about these sections referring to the first line “the poet of the Body” and also the line “the poet of the Soul”. Whitman proclaims himself to be an emotional person feeling pleasures and pains of the others, thanksgiving for love he can gain and give. “Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!/O unspeakable passionate love.” (lines 446, 447). The following section also introduces Whitman, his love for sea “I am integral with you” (line 458); here, he refers to its unsteady moods which are common for both of them. Whitman admits both side of himself: “I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also” (line 463); both sides complement each other. In the section 23 the author confirms his acceptance of “Reality,” but he does not completely agrees: “your facts... are not my dwelling” (line 491).

Whitman present himself as if he has no humiliation of other people, he involves even his body and thanks to metaphor connects it with the nature.

4.12 Section 24

Shahane focuses on the word “kosmos” (line 497), the mark given to Whitman by the author, Whitman, a word “meaning a universe significant and amounts to a renewed definition of the poet’s self as one who loves all people.” He is the voice for all people “many long dumb voices” (line 508), the voice of those

whom “the others are down upon,” prisoners, slaves, thieves and dwarfs, they articulated and transfigured by him. “He also speaks of lust and the flesh, for each part of the body is a miracle: “The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer” (line 525).” (Shahane, pp. 3)

Whitman expresses his faith in the human body because all its items merit admiration and respect.

4.13 Section 25

In the words of Miller, Whitman, “having worked through some of the conditions of perception and creation arrives at a moment where speech becomes necessary.” (Miller, pp. 3)

> Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,
> It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,
> Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then? (lines 566-568)

Shahane points out that “Whitman dwell on the comprehensive range of the poet’s power.” (Shahane, pp. 3) Referring to “with the twirl of my tongue I encompass world and volumes of world. Speech is the twin of my vision” (lines 565, 566) Shahane finds poet’s preference “writing and talk do not prove me” (line 579). “What he is can be seen in his face.” (Shahane, pp. 3)

To sum up the section 20-25, Shahane remarks:

> The poet’s self-appraisal is the keynote. He describes himself as gross and mystical. He feels he is part of all that he has met and seen. He is essentially a poet of balance, since he accepts both good and evil in his cosmos. His awareness of the universe, or cosmic consciousness, is expressed when he calls himself “a kosmos,” invoking a picture of the harmony of the universe. He accepts all life, naked and bare, noble and ignoble, refined and crude, beautiful and ugly, pleasant and painful. The physical and the spiritual both are aspects of his vision, which has an organic unity like the unity of the body and the soul. Whitman realizes that the physical as well as the spiritual are aspects of the Divine. The culmination of the poet’s experience of self is the ecstasy of love. Contemplating the meaning of grass in terms of mystical experience, he understands that all physical phenomena are as deathless as the grass. (Shahane, pp. 4)

Being a representative of the whole humanity and perceiving the life as a miracle of beauty, Whitman accepts everything that life contains. These stanzas are close on a note of exaltation of the poet's power of expression, although they indicate that his deeper self is beyond expression.

4.15 Section 26-38

Only Shahane analyzes all sections that are mentioned above. Whitman again uses his sense - this time hearing - and enjoys it: the "bravuras of birds," the "bustle of growing wheat" "the sound of the human voice" (lines 581, 582). Even the sense of touch is essential. The fascinated poet asks: "Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity" (line 616). Shahane claims: "With all his senses, the poet responds to existence and living", "the puzzle of puzzles ... that we call Being" (lines 606, 607). (Shahane, pp. 4)

The miracle of touch is commented upon even by Miller who points out that senses evoke "the erotic dimension." (Miller, pp. 3) Finding in the poem the climatic point of orgasm continues with poet's "tender farewell to complic touch" and on the other hand exploration "the knowledge by the experience "What is less or more than a touch?" (line 648). (Miller, pp. 3) "The most intense of physical ecstasies" known to Whitman follows the though of being "one with the animals." The author "resigns" (line 705) the stallion, "realizing that deeper knowledge lies in wait." (Miller, pp. 3)

According to Miller, Whitman enriched by the touch experience is "ready for the second major phrase of his journey." The longest section of the whole poem begins with the affirmations: "Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at, / What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass." (lines 708, 709). The poet is "no longer bound by the ties of space and time"(Miller, pp. 4) "I am afoot with my vision" (line 714). The main issue in the opinion of Miller is revealed in the section 33:

> But in one of the strangest reversals in "Song of Myself," this peak of exaltation in section 33 glides into its opposite as the poet begins to identify more and more closely with the outcasts and rejected: "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there." (line 831) He becomes the "old-faced infants

> and the lifted sick," (line 829) the mother "condemned for a witch," (line 833) "the hounded slave." (line 834) (Miller, pp. 4)

The intensification of despair can be observed thought sections 34-37, “until at the end the poet becomes a homeless beggar.” Whitman did not feel such despair during similar identifications with outcasts in sections 17-20. The possible conclusion recorded by Miller is as follows: “the poet has moved obscurely beyond the knowledge of his previous phase.” (Miller, pp. 4)

Shahane shares agreement with Miller in his comments on the content of sections 31-33 where Whitman expressed his fascination by “infinite wonders in small things” referring to “a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars” and “the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery.” (Shahane, pp. 5) As he himself incorporates an endless “range of things, people, and animals,” he knows the power of his vision which ranges everywhere: “I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,/I am afoot with my vision.” His identification with every human, dead or alive, especially in sections 34-36, and his relationship with different events of American history, makes him feel “replenish’d with supreme power, one of an average unending procession” (line 968). (Shahane, pp. 5)

Shahane finds the conclusion in the change of focusing. In the previous sections the focus was aimed on his observations whereas in this part it is aimed on what “I” am or what “I” am becoming. Whitman developed a microscopic vision where his fascination by the details of “the commonplace” rules. Whitman’s knowledge is ecstatic; his senses offer him his joy, and the physical enjoyment suggests a sexual union as the culmination of this experience of ecstasy. Everyday life becomes “permeated with mystical significance”. (Shahane, pp. 5) Even in this Whitman “identifies himself with every being and every object” concluding that the “identification forms an integral part of his concept of what ‚I’ am. The process of identification arises out of the belief that the poet’s soul is a part of the universal soul and therefore should seek union with it.” (Shahane, pp. 5) Whitman finds the connection between the body, the soul and the union in animals that preceded the union “they are born pure”. Following sections 33-37, Whitman describes his

experience with “a spiritual illumination, passing through suffering, despair, and the dark night of the soul to finally achieve purification. The poet’s self, inspired by his insights, venerates God, the Divine Reality” (Shahane, pp. 6)

Marki argues about the section 38 that even the poem is mainly “optimistic and self-confident,” the parts where the poet is "somehow . . . stunn'd" (line 958) appear:

> Time and again by moments of anxiety, even terror, and haunted by powerful images of frustration, violence, and death. He can extricate himself from each of these episodes but cannot shake them off completely. To discover and thereby confront and overcome the forces that stun him, he must probe the depths of his self. (Marki, pp. 4)

Whitman portrays on himself how people should behave to reach the mystery of democracy; he supposes one should behave in a way to reach it in the best way.

4.16 Section 39-41

Miller returns at first to the beginning of the section 38 where Whitman refuses the character of a beggar he has assumed: "Enough! enough! enough!" (line 958), to point out the impulsive course rearrange of the author on his journey: "I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake" (line 960). While the poet is never completely open about the essential meaning, Whitman writes that he "remember[s] now" (line 964) and resumes "the overstaid fraction" (line 965). Using metaphor “overstaid fraction” of nature which is contained in rebirth that continued (or continues) in crucifixion, involves people’s association with the universalized experience of Christ: "The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves, / Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me" (line 966, 967). As a result of his misery the author emerges “replenish'd” (line 968) with “supreme power," a power that expands beyond association with the identification with the browbeaten and refused, a power indeed to bring "help for the sick as they pant on their backs" (line 1118) as well as "yet more needed help" (line 1119) for "strong upright men" (line 1119). (Miller, pp, 5)

According to Shahane, Whitman communicates himself as “a sort of superman, flowing through life and the world doing good.” (Shahane, pp. 7) He helps to the poor and the distress: „To any one dying, thither I speed/ ... Let the physician and the

priest go home" (line 1005, 1006). He would seize "the descending man and raise him with resistless will ... /By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me."

"The friendly and flowing savage" (line 974) stands for the important idea which summarizes the development of images and emotions it the section 39.

Section 41 involves the religion issue, Whitman incorporates all religions: (Shahane, pp. 7)

> Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
> Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,
> Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
> In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved. (lines 1025 – 1028)

The poet proves that everyone is divine and can choose his or her own god who loves him/her equally. Whitman rejects the meaning of old gods because "God is to be found in all men". The poet states, "The supernatural is of no account", (line 1048) "meaning that the Divine is here on earth for all men, who must only become ready to accept this divinity".

Shahane adds that the poet's section remarks about the experience of Indian wise people and mystics (the Samadhi[28]) "who, on realizing the state of spiritual absorption, are endowed with divine and superhuman power". The author is aware of his newly gained, hallowed and phenomenal power rising from "the union of his self with the Divine". (Shahane, pp. 7)

Whitman as a superman can touch everything and give advices to anyone. Here the reader can follow the life of the poet because all the poet writes about is what he himself once experienced.

[28] It has been described as a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object, and in which the mind becomes still, one-pointed or concentrated while the person remains conscious.

4.17 Section 42-52

Shahane comments the final ten sections with the reference to the first two rhymes of the chants:

> A call in the midst of the crowd
> My own voice, orotund sweeping and final, (lines 1051,1052)

The author assumed the pose of diviner while admitting his affinity with humankind. He says, “I know perfectly well my own egotism” (line 1080), but he would expand it to involve all human and bring “you whoever you are flush with myself” (line 1082). He sees unfairness that exists in society but understands that the reality beneath the corruption is deathless: “The weakest and shallowest is deathless with me” line 1077).

Following this section deals with the author’s slight religious contempt but his own belief welcomes “ancient and modern” (line 1095). He studies all religions and even looks beyond them to “what is yet untried” (line 1117). This unidentified feature will be unsuccessful for the distress and the dead. (Shahane, pp. 7)

In the section 44, Whitman expresses his wish to “launch all men and women ... into the Unknown” (line 1033) Relieving them of what they already know the poet will prove them their association with infinity. “We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers, /There are trillions ahead and trillions ahead of them” (lines 1135, 1136). The author is aware of the face-off of his self with boundless time and boundless space and becomes conscious that he and his readers are “products of ages past and future”. (Shahane, pp. 8)

Once again the idea of “eternity and the ages of man” appears in the section 45. “Great Camerado” (line 1197) is the answer for mystical union with God. Whitman courses himself to the “perpetual journey” (line 1199), forcing everyone to come with him and pronouncing the caution, “Not 1, not any one else can travel that road for you, /You must travel it fro yourself.” (lines 1207, 1208). In the section 47 Whitman utters that he is a teacher, but he desires that his students learn to declare their own individuality: “He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher.” (line 1233). The thought “the soul is not more than the body” (line 1266) is repeated in

the section 48 as well as the exclamation “the body is not more than the soul” (line 1267). The importance of the God is not greater than the importance of one’s self. Whitman requests man not to be “curious about God” (line 1275) because God is all over the place and in the whole thing: “In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass.” (line 1282).

In the section 49, Whitman is not dread of death: “And as to you Death, you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me” (line 1286) for the possibility that there is no death. People die and are reborn in various forms. Whitman himself has died “ten thousand times before” (line 1295). In the following section the author feels that “there is something that outweighs death, although it is hard for him to put a name to it: “it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is HAPPINESS.” (line 1315)

The closing two sections are the representation of leaving. “The past and present wilt—I have fill’d them, emptied them,/And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.” (line 1316, 1317) Whitman identifies his work as

> obscure but sees the paradoxes in his works as natural components in the mysteries of the cosmos: “Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large—I contain multitudes) (lines1321-1323).”” Whitman can wait for those who will understand him. He tells them, “If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles,” for he will have become part of the eternal life cycle. Although it may be difficult to find or interpret him, he will be waiting. “Missing me one place search another,/I stop somewhere waiting for you.” (lines 1342, 1343) (Shahane, pp. 8)

Whitman’s „journey and quest for selfhood have now come full circle“. The poet opened by wish to “loaf on the grass” and closes by leaving himself “to the dirt to grow from the grass I love” (line 1336).

These songs imply many of the relevant thoughts and dogmas of the poet. Whitman fetches a new memo of belief for the strong and the weak, a faith in the harmony and neatness of the universe. Whitman, “noting what has been said about the universe shows how his own theories, which have a more universal scope, transcend them”. (Shahane, pp. 8)

Adopting the self of the Savage-Christ, he brings oration which figures transcendence of the limited through a union for one person’s soul with the Divine Soul. Whitman proposes to guide people “into the unknown” (line 1133) -that is, into

transcendent reality.” The poet speaks about “the self as part of the eternal life process.” There is no death, for man is reincarnated time and time again. Whitman talks about human’s “relation with the moment and eternity. Eternity is time endless as is the self.

Shahane concluded the poem:

> Grass is the central symbol of “Song of Myself,” and it represents the divinity contained in all living things. Although no traditional form is apparent, the logical manner in which the poet returns to his image of grass shows that “Song of Myself” was planned to have an order and unity of idea and (Shahane, pp. 8)

Sections 38-49 are recorded by Miller as Whitman’s assurance in his transcendent supremacy which expands through these sections. Section 43 deals with the author’s asserting with all beliefs “worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern” (line 1095), and in the following section the poet honours his place “in evolutionary theory: both religion and science contain the seeds that provide the source for his supreme power”. (Miller, pp. 6)

The section 46 portrays Whitman on his “perpetual journey,” (line 1199) that he has “no chai, no church, no philosophy,” (line 1202) that he cannot travel the road for “you” (line 1207), but “you must travel it for yourself” (line 1208). Sections 48 and 49 deal again with the confirmation of the equality of “body with the soul” as well as of “identify of selfhood and Godhead.” With no difference Whitman declares death and life so inseparably connected as to cause to be unimaginable without the other. At the close of the section 49 the author seems to quit further attempt to express in words what he is aware of and rely to the natural world for help: "O suns—O grass of graves—O perpetual transfers and promotions, / If you do not say any thing how can I say any thing?" (lines 1297, 1298)

In the section 50, Whitman appears to be coming out of a “trance-like” status like he began in the section 5: "Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes, / I sleep—I sleep long." (lines 1307, 1308) Emerging from his intense slumber, the author stutters nearly inconsecutive: "I do not know **it** . . . **it** is a word unsaid, / **It** is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol" (emphasis added)(lines 1309, 1310). Referring to “it” stays under discussion and can be understood as indescribable transcendent significance of Whitman’s “experience on his dream-like journey.” This

interpretation can be suggested only by implicit correlation: “Something **it** swings on more than the earth I swing on, / To **it** the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me" (emphasis added) (lines 1311, 1312). Latterly Whitman speaks to those “brothers and sisters” (line 1314) first brought to mind in the section 5, with the effort to find out a word that might express some impulse, however insufficiently, of the transcendent meaning learnt on his journey: "It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness" (line 1315).

Whitman addresses the final two concluding sections 51 and 52 to the reader. “The poet does not deny but dismisses his “contradictions,” asserting, “I am large, I contain multitudes” (line 1323).” Upon the start of his journey (section 1) the poet assured he would “permit to speak at every hazard, / Nature without check with original energy,” also at the end he presents himself as “not a bit tamed,” as “untranslatable,” (line 1329) as one who calls his “barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (line 1330). His journey ends, he gets ready for leaving, bestows himself “to the dirt to grow from grass” (line 1336). He loves and advises the reader “if you want me again look for me under your boot-soles” (line 1337). Till the end, Whitman maintains that “his transcendental knowledge gained on his spiritual journey cannot be embodied in words, but that nevertheless it can be conveyed indirectly”. (Miller, pp. 7)

Miller concludes the ending:

> Readers will come to “know," not because he has conveyed his meaning abstractly, but rather because he has come to "filter and fibre" (line 1340) their blood. At the end, the poet admonishes his readers to "keep encouraged" (line 1341) and continue their search for him, promising: "I stop somewhere waiting for you." (line 1343) (Miller, pp. 7)

Whitman’s symbol of immortal grass evokes the endless significance of the poem and the metaphor of time expresses the open possibility to reach the author’s world whenever the reader wishes.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper is a study of Walt Whitman, his life and his life work. It is based on the analysis of the poem “Song of Myself” and its aim is to describe the variety of the thoughts and explanations of the poem. Secondly, the work follows the author’s life which was the main source of the inspiration for his poems.

As results of this analysis show, Whitman’s life and common experience can be read in his work, him being the poet of the city celebrating industry, machines, workmen as well as the poet of nature who loves the ocean, ships, waves, and grass.

The collection *Leaves of Grass*, unconventional in both its content and technique shocked Whitman’s contemporaries with its candour about sexuality, and created a radical poetry voicing a radical consciousness. Whitman collected all his work into this compilation. This masterpiece was edited, rewritten; poems were added, removed, re-titled, and transformed. His poetry was a compound of commonplaces, experience and sentimentalism. The true poetic inspiration created Whitman’s own rhythms as well as his own mystic world.

“Song of Myself,” a long poem in fifty-two sections is considered by many to be Whitman’s masterpiece. The poem celebrates the freedom and dignity of the individual and sings the praise of democracy and the brotherhood of man. The author rejects religion, focuses on the individual, on humanity based on science and on the main principle of equality; the whole work is very positive.

The poem which gained little public recognition in 19th century was criticized for the exaltation of the body and sexual love portrayed by the author and also for its innovation in the verse form. Whitman used free verse in long rhythmical lines with a natural, organic structure, simple style, unrhymed and unmeasured. To find the meaning of the poems is a difficult task, especially since Walt Whitman was the poet who liked leaving the reader in his own world of fantasy.

In terms of differences among the opinions of the above mentioned critics, it must be said that no bigger differences were noticed. The ideas which were suggested were often similar and can be summarized: Walt Whitman’s "Song of Myself" could have easily been titled "Song of Humanity."

6. RESUMÉ

Tato práce pojednává o Waltu Whitmanovi, jeho životě a celoživotním díle. Jejím cílem je analýza básně „Zpěv o mně“ a porovnání různých názorů a významů básně. Současně se práce zabývá životem autora, který byl hlavním zdrojem inspirace pro autorovy básně.

V úvodu se práce zabývá Whitmanovým životem, neboť každodenní zážitky a zkušenosti můžeme najít v jeho díle. Whitman je básníkem města opěvujícím průmysl, stroje, dělníky stejně jako básníkem přírody, který miluje oceán, lodě, vlny a trávu.

Sbírka *Stébla trávy*, nezvyklá obsahem a technikou šokovala současníky svou otevřeností k sexualitě a vytvořila radikální poezii hlásající základní uvědomělost. Whitman spojil všechny své práce do této sbírky. Celoživotní dílo bylo editováno, přepisováno, básně byly přidávány, odebírány, přejmenovávány a pozměňovány. Jeho poezie je spojená s běžnými místy a zkušenostmi, sentimentalitou. Pravdivá básníkova inspirace pomohla vytvořit Whitmanův vlastní rým a jeho vlastní kouzelný svět.

Báseň “Zpěv o mně”, která sestává z padesáti dvou sekcí, je mnohými považována za Whitmanovo mistrovské dílo. Báseň slaví svobodu a důstojnost jedince a opěvuje cenu demokracie a bratrství lidí. Básník diskutuje o náboženství, zaměřuje se na jednotlivce, lidskost a hlavně princip rovnosti. Whitman velebí lidskost a všechny lidské vlastnosti.

Ve své době neúspěšná báseň, byla kritizována pro Whitmanovo velebení těla a sexuality a také pro svou originalitu ve volném verši. Básník používal volného verše v dlouhých rytmických řádcích s přirozenou až organickou strukturou, jednoduchým stylem, bez rýmu. Odolal vlivu britské tradiční poezie v obvyklé formě.

Výklady básní jsou velmi diskutabilní, neboť právě Walt Whitman nechával svým čtenářům maximální možný prostor pro jejich vlastní fantazii a často za tímto účelem nechával myšlenky v básních nedokončené.

Rozdílnosti výkladů básně „Zpěv o mně“ jsou minimální. Často se opakující názory na podobné části básně se dají shrnout v tvrzení: báseň Walta Whitmana „Zpěv o mně“ by mohla nést název „Zpěv o lidskosti.“

WORKS CITED

Books:

Greenspan, Ezra, et. Al. *The Cambridge companion to Walt Whitman*. Cambridge Uniersity Press, 1995.

Holloway, Emory. *Complete Poetry & Selected Prose and Letters / Walt Whitman*. London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938.

Kolář, Jiří and Urbánek Zdeněk. *Stébla trávy./ Walt Whitman* [epilogue Abe Čapek]. Prague: Naše vojsko, 1956.

Kolář, Jiří and Urbánek Zdeněk. *Stébla trávy/ Walt Whitman* [epilogue Josef Jařab]. Hradec Králové: Cylindr, 1998.

Skála, Ivan: *Zpívám o sobě / Walt Whitman.* Prague: Československý spisovatel 1983.

Symonds, John Aldington. *Walt Whitman: A Study*. New York: E.P. Dutton& Co.

Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose, edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1982.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: New York University Press, 1965.

Whitman, Walt. *Specimen days and collect*. Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882-1883.

Computerized resources:

Herrington, Eldrid. *Whitman Walt, 1819-1892*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 2002 [Literature Online Biography].

Folsom, Ed Folsom and Price, Kenneth M. *The Walt Whitman Archive.* Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. [online] 1995–2009 <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/> (1st March 2009)

Loving, Jerome. "Walt Whitman (1819-1892)" In *Encyclopaedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by Eric L. Haralson. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998. [Literature Online] (1st March 2009)

Marki, Ivan. *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition. The Walt Whitman Encyclopedia, 1995-2009. <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_21.html > (1st March 2009)

Miller, James E., Jr. *'Song of Myself' [1855]*. The Walt Whitman Encyclopedia, 1995–2009. <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_52.html > (1st March 2009)

Miller, Brian. *SparkNote on Shakespeare's Hamlet*. 15 Jan 2006. <http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/whitman/section2.rhtml>. (1st March 2009)

Shahane, V. A. *CliffsNotes on Leaves of Grass.* 30 Mar 2009. <http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/id-60.html>. (1st March 2009)

Szczesiul, Anthony. *Walt Whitman and the Development of Leaves of Grass*. Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina [online] 25 June 1999. <http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/amlit/whitman/whitman.html> (1st March 2009)

APPENDIX:

Walt Whitman “Song of Myself”

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.

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.

2

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, words 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 yourself.

3

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Urge, and urge, and urge;
Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance—always substance and increase, always sex;
Always a knit of identity—always distinction—always a breed of life.

To elaborate is no avail—learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well entretied, braced in the beams,
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,
I and this mystery, here we stand.

Clear and sweet is my Soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my Soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
Till that becomes unseen, and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best, and dividing it from the worst, age vexes age;
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean;
Not an inch, nor a particle of an inch, is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing:
As the hugging and loving Bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day, with stealthy tread,
Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels, swelling the house with

their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization, and scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me a cent,
Exactly the contents of one, and exactly the contents of two, and which is ahead?

4

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

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am;
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary;
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head, curious what will come next;
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it.

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

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 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, and heap'd stones, elder, mullen 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, 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 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.

8

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

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

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bed-room;
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair—I note where the pistol has fallen.

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

9

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

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

10

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

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

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me;

I tuck’d my trowser-ends in my boots, and went and had a good time:
(You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.)

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 bruis’d 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.)

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 glisten’d with wet, it ran from their long hair:
Little streams pass’d all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass’d over their bodies;
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs—their white bellies bulge to the sun—they do not ask who seizes fast to them;
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch;
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 break-down.

Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil;
Each has his main-sledge—they are all out—(there is a great heat in the fire.)

From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements;
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms;
Over-hand the hammers swing—over-hand so slow—over-hand so sure:
They do not hasten—each man hits in his place.

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 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 moustache—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 slueing;
To niches aside and junior bending.

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.

14

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

The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen, and she with her half-spread wings;
I see in them and myself the same old law.

The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections;
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

I am enamour'd of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle, or taste of the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships, and the wielders of axes and mauls, and the drivers of horses;
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

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

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 complete 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 young sister holds out the skein, while the elder sister winds it off in a ball, and stops now and then for the knots;
The one-year wife is recovering and happy, having a week ago borne her first child;
The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine, or in the factory or mill;
The nine months' gone is in the parturition chamber, her faintness and pains are advancing;
The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer—the reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book—the sign-painter is lettering with red and gold;
The canal boy trots on the tow-path—the 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 regatta is spread on the bay—the race is begun—how the white sails sparkle!
The drover, watching his drove, sings out to them that would stray;
The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about

the odd cent;)
The camera and plate are prepared, the lady must sit for her daguerreotype;
The bride unrumples 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 tinners 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 cottonwood or pekan-trees;
Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river, or through those drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansaw;
Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahoochee 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 one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them;
And such as it is to be of these, more or less, I am.

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 Great Nation, 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 by 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 thoughtfullest;
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;
A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.

I resist anything better than my own diversity;
I 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 suns I see, and the suns I cannot see, are in their place;
The palpable is in its place, and the impalpable is in its place.)

17

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

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

18

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

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

I beat and pound for the dead;
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them.

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

19

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

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

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

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

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

20

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

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

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

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

Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids—conformity goes to the fourth-remov'd;
I wear my hat as I please, indoors or out.

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

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

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

And I know I am solid and sound;
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow;
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

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

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

I exist as I am—that is enough;
If no other in the world be aware, I sit content;
And if each and all be aware, I sit content.

One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and that is myself;
And whether I come to my own to-day, or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

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

21

I am the poet of the Body;
And I am the poet of the Soul.

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

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

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

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

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night;
I call to the earth and sea, half-held by the night.

Press close, bare-bosom'd night! Press close, magnetic, nourishing night!
Night of south winds! night of the large few stars!
Still, nodding night! mad, naked, summer night.

Smile, O voluptuous, cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees;
Earth of departed sunset! earth of the mountains, misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon, just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark, mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds, brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth! rich, apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes!

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

22

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

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

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

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

I am not the poet of goodness only—I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.

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

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

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

I find one side a balance, and the antipodal side a balance;
Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine;
Thoughts and deeds of the present, our rouse and early start.

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

What behaved well in the past, or behaves well to-day, is not such a wonder;
The wonder is, always and always, how there can be a mean man or an infidel.

23

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
And mine a word of the modern—the word En-Masse.

A word of the faith that never balks;
Here or henceforward, it is all the same to me—I accept Time, absolutely.

It alone is without flaw—it rounds and completes all;
That mystic, baffling wonder I love, alone completes all.

I accept reality, and dare not question it;
Materialism first and last imbuing.

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!
Fetch stonecrop, mixt with cedar and branches of lilac;
This is the lexicographer—this the chemist—this made a grammar of the old cartouches;

These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas;
This is the geologist—this works with the scalpel—and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen! to you the first honors always:
Your facts are useful and real—and yet they are not my dwelling;
(I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.)

Less the reminders of properties told, my words;
And more the reminders, they, of life untold, and of freedom and extrication,
And make short account of neuters and geldings, and favor men and women fully equipt,
And beat the gong of revolt, and stop with fugitives, and them that plot and conspire.

24

Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, 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.

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 slaves;
Voices of prostitutes, and of deform'd persons;
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 trivial, flat, foolish, despised,
Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices;
Voice 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 lounger 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 dote on myself—there is that lot of me, and all so luscious;
Each moment, and whatever happens, thrills me with joy.

O I am wonderful!
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!

25

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

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

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

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

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

Do you not know, O speech, how the buds beneath you are folded?
Waiting in gloom, protected by frost;
The dirt receding before my prophetical screams;
I underlying causes, to balance them at last;
My knowledge my live parts—it keeping tally with the meaning of things,
HAPPINESS—which, whoever hears me, let him or her set out in search of this day.

My final merit I refuse you—I refuse putting from me what I really am;
Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me;
I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking toward you.

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

26

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

I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my meals;
I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice;
I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following;

Sounds of the city, and sounds out of the city—sounds of the day and night;
Talkative young ones to those that like them—the loud laugh of work-people at their meals;
The angry base of disjointed friendship—the faint tones of the sick;
The judge with hands tight to the desk, his pallid lips pronouncing a death-sentence;
The heave'e'yo of stevedores unlading ships by the wharves—the refrain of the anchor-lifters;
The ring of alarm-bells—the cry of fire—the whirr of swift-streaking engines and hose-carts, with premonitory tinkles, and color'd lights;
The steam-whistle—the solid roll of the train of approaching cars;
The slow-march play'd at the head of the association, marching two and two,
(They go to guard some corpse—the flag-tops are draped with black muslin.)

I hear the violoncello ('tis the young man's heart's complaint;)
I hear the key'd cornet—it glides quickly in through my ears;
It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and breast.

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

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

I hear the train'd soprano—(what work, with hers, is this?)
The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies;
It wrenches such ardors from me, I did not know I possess'd them;
It sails me—I dab with bare feet—they are lick'd by the indolent waves;
I am exposed, cut by bitter and angry hail—I lose my breath,
Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death;
At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
And that we call BEING.

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,
Treacherous 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 villian touch! what are you doing? My breath is tight in its throat;
Unclench your floodgates! you are too much for me.

29

Blind, loving, wrestling touch! sheath'd, hooded, sharp-tooth'd touch!
Did it make you ache so, leaving me?

Parting, track’d by arriving—perpetual payment of perpetual loan;
Rich, showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.

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

30

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

Logic and sermons never convince;
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

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

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

31

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d’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 depress’d 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, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,
And am stucco’d with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
And call anything close again, when I desire it.

In vain the speeding or shyness;
In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against my approach;
In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder’d 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 razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador;
I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

32

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd;
I stand and look at them long and 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 wonder where they get those tokens:
Did I pass that way huge times ago, and negligently drop 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 I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.

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

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

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

33

O swift wind! O space and time! now I see it is true, what I guessed at;

What I guess’d when I loaf’d on the grass;
What I guess’d while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walk’d the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me—I travel—I sail—my elbows rest in the sea-gaps;
I skirt the sierras—my palms cover continents;
I am afoot with my vision.

By the city’s quadrangular houses—in log huts—camping with lumbermen;
Along the ruts of the turnpike—along the dry gulch and rivulet bed;
Weeding my onion-patch, or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips—crossing savannas—trailing in forests;
Prospecting—gold-digging—girdling the trees of a new purchase;
Scorch’d ankle-deep by the hot sand—hauling my boat down the shallow river;
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead—where the buck turns furiously at the hunter;
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock—where the otter is feeding on fish;
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou;
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey—where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail;
Over the growing sugar—over the yellow-flower’d cotton plant—over the rice in its low moist field;
Over the sharp-peak’d farm house, with its scallop’d scum and slender shoots from the gutters;
Over the western persimmon—over the long-leav’d corn—over the delicate blue-flower flax;
Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest;
Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;
Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged limbs;
Walking the path worn in the grass, and beat through the leaves of the brush;
Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot;
Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve—where the great gold-bug drops through the dark;
Where flails keep time on the barn floor;
Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow;
Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides;
Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen—where andirons straddle the hearth-slab—where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;
Where trip-hammers crash—where the press is whirling its cylinders;
Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs;
Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself, and

looking composedly down;)
Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose—where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand;
Where the she-whale swims with her calf, and never forsakes it;
Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke;
Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water;
Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,
Where shells grow to her slimy deck—where the dead are corrupting below;
Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments;
Approaching Manhattan, up by the long-stretching island;
Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance;
Upon a door-step—upon the horse-block of hard wood outside;
Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs, or a good game of base-ball;
At he-festivals, with blackguard jibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking, laughter;
At the cider-mill, tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw;
At apple-peelings, wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find;
At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings:
Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps;
Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard—where the dry-stalks are scattered—where the brood-cow waits in the hovel;
Where the bull advances to do his masculine work—where the stud to the mare—where the cock is treading the hen;
Where the heifers browse—where geese nip their food with short jerks;
Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie;
Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near;
Where the humming-bird shimmers—where the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding;
Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh;
Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden, half hid by the high weeds;
Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out;
Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery;
Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees;
Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs;
Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon;
Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well;
Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves;
Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs;
Through the gymnasium—through the curtain'd saloon—through the

office or public hall;
Pleas'd with the native, and pleas'd with the foreign—pleas'd with the new and old;
Pleas'd with women, the homely as well as the handsome;
Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously;
Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the white-wash'd church;
Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, or any preacher—impresse`d seriously at the camp-meeting:
Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon—flatting the flesh of my nose on the thick plate-glass;
Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds,
My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle:
Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy—(behind me he rides at the drape of the day;)
Far from the settlements, studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print;
By the cot in the hospital, reaching lemonade to a feverish patient;
Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle:
Voyaging to every port, to dicker and adventure;
Hurrying with the modern crowd, as eager and fickle as any;
Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him;
Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while;
Walking the old hills of Judea, with the beautiful gentle God by my side;
Speeding through space—speeding through heaven and the stars;
Speeding amid the seven satellites, and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles;
Speeding with tail'd meteors—throwing fire-balls like the rest;
Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly;
Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing;
I tread day and night such roads.

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

I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul;
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

I help myself to material and immaterial;
No guard can shut me off, nor law prevent me.

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

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

I ascend to the foretruck;

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

I am a free companion—I bivouac by invading watchfires.

I turn the bridegroom out of bed, and stay with the bride myself;
I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

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

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

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

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

Agonies are one of my changes of garments;
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 artillerist—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.

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

34

Now I tell what I knew in Texas in my early youth;

(I tell not the fall of Alamo,
Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo;)
'Tis the tale of the murder in cold blood of four hundred and twelve young men.

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

They were the glory of the race of rangers;
Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship,
Large, turbulent, generous, handsome, proud, and affectionate,
Bearded, sunburnt, drest in the free costume of hunters,
Not a single one over thirty years of age.

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

None obey'd the command to kneel;
Some made a mad and helpless rush—some stood stark and straight;
A few fell at once, shot in the temple or heart—the living and dead lay together;
The maim'd and mangled dug in the dirt—the newcomers saw them there;
Some, half-kill'd, attempted to crawl away;
These were despatch'd with bayonets, or batter'd with the blunts of muskets;
A youth not seventeen years old seiz'd his assassin till two more came to release him;
The three were all torn, and cover'd with the boy's blood.

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

35

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

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

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

We had receiv'd some eighteen pound shots under the water;
On our lower-gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all around, and blowing up overhead.

Fighting at sun-down, fighting at dark;
Ten o'clock at night, the full moon well up, our leaks on the gain, and five feet of water reported;
The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in the afterhold, to give them a chance for themselves.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36

Stretch'd and still lies the midnight;
Two great hulls motionless on the breast of the darkness;

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

37

O Christ! This is mastering me!
In at the conquer'd doors they crowd. I am possess'd.

I embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering;
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

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

Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail, but I am handcuff'd to him and walk by his side;
(I am less the jolly one there, and more the silent one, with sweat on my twitching lips.)

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

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

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

38

Enough! enough! enough!
Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!

Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping;
I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

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

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

I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an average unending procession;
Inland and sea-coast we go, and we pass all boundary lines;
Our swift ordinances on their way over the whole earth;
The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years.

Eleves, I salute you! come forward!
Continue your annotations, continue your questionings.

39

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

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

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

Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncomb'd head, laughter, and naiveté,
Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations;
They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers;
They are wafted with the odor of his body or breath—they fly out of the glance of his eyes.

40

Flaunt of the sunshine, I need not your bask,—lie over!
You light surfaces only—I force surfaces and depths also.

Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands;

Say, old Top-knot! what do you want?

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

Behold! I do not give lectures, or a little charity;
When I give, I give myself.

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

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

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

On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes;
(This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics.)

To any one dying—thither I speed, and twist the knob of the door;
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed;
Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man, and raise him with resistless will.

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

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

Sleep! I and they keep guard all night;
Not doubt—not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you;
I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself;
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you is so.

41

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

I heard what was said of the universe;
Heard it and heard it of several thousand years:

It is middling well as far as it goes,—But is that all?

Magnifying and applying come I,
Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,
Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson;
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved,
With Odin, and the hideous-faced Mexitli, and every idol and image;
Taking them all for what they are worth, and not a cent more;
Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days;
(They bore mites, as for unfledg'd birds, who have now to rise and fly and sing for themselves;)
Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself—bestowing them freely on each man and woman I see;
Discovering as much, or more, in a framer framing a house;
Putting higher claims for him there with his roll'd-up sleeves, driving the mallet and chisel;
Not objecting to special revelations—considering a curl of smoke, or a hair on the back of my hand, just as curious as any revelation;
Lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than the Gods of the antique wars;
Minding their voices peal through the crash of destruction,
Their brawny limbs passing safe over charr'd laths—their white foreheads whole and unhurt out of the flames:
By the mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple interceding for every person born;
Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists;
The snag-tooth'd hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come,
Selling all he possesses, traveling on foot to fee lawyers for his brother, and sit by him while he is tried for forgery;
What was strewn in the amplest strewing the square rod about me, and not filling the square rod then;
The bull and the bug never worship'd half enough;
Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd;
The supernatural of no account—myself waiting my time to be one of the Supremes;
The day getting ready for me when I shall do as much good as the best, and be as prodigious:
By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator;
Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows.

42

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

Come my children;

Come my boys and girls, my women, household, and intimates;
Now the performer launches his nerve—he has pass'd his prelude on the reeds within.

Easily written, loose-finger'd chords! I feel the thrum of your climax and close.

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

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

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

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

The little plentiful mannikins, skipping around in collars and tail'd coats,
I am aware who they are—(they are positively not worms or fleas.)

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

I know perfectly well my own egotism;
I know my omnivorous lines, and will not write any less;
And would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with myself.

No words of routine are mine,
But abruptly to question, to leap beyond, yet nearer bring:
This printed and bound book—but the printer, and the printing-office boy?

The well-taken photographs—but your wife or friend close and solid in your arms?
The black ship, mail'd with iron, her mighty guns in her turrets—but the pluck of the captain and engineers?
In the houses, the dishes and fare and furniture—but the host and hostess, and the look out of their eyes?
The sky up there—yet here, or next door, or across the way?
The saints and sages in history—but you yourself?
Sermons, creeds, theology—but the fathomless human brain,
And what is reason? and what is love? and what is life?

43

I do not despise you, priests;
My faith is the greatest of faiths, and the least of faiths,
Enclosing worship ancient and modern, and all between ancient and modern,
Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the Gods, saluting the sun,
Making a fetish of the first rock or stump, powwowing with sticks in the circle of obis,
Helping the lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,
Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession—rapt and austere in the woods, a gymnosophist,
Drinking mead from the skull-cup—to Shastas and Vedas admirant—minding the Koran,
Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the stone and knife, beating the serpent-skin drum,
Accepting the Gospels—accepting him that was crucified, knowing assuredly that he is divine,
To the mass kneeling, or the puritan's prayer rising, or sitting patiently in a pew,
Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis, or waiting dead-like till my spirit arouses me,
Looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of pavement and land,
Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.

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

Down-hearted doubters, dull and excluded,
Frivolous, sullen, moping, angry, affected, dishearten'd, atheistical;
I know every one of you—I know the sea of torment, doubt, despair and unbelief.

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

Be at peace, bloody flukes of doubters and sullen mopers;
I take my place among you as much as among any;

The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the same,
And what is yet untried and afterward is for you, me, all, precisely the same.

I do not know what is untried and afterward;
But I know it will in its turn prove sufficient, and cannot fail.

Each who passes is consider'd—each who stops is consider'd—not a single one can it fail.

It cannot fail the young man who died and was buried,
Nor the young woman who died and was put by his side,
Nor the little child that peep'd in at the door, and then drew back, and was never seen again,
Nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and feels it with bitterness worse than gall,
Nor him in the poor house, tubercled by rum and the bad disorder,
Nor the numberless slaughter'd and wreck'd—nor the brutish koboo call'd the ordure of humanity,
Nor the sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in,
Nor anything in the earth, or down in the oldest graves of the earth,
Nor anything in the myriads of spheres—nor one of the myriads of myriads that inhabit them,
Nor the present—nor the least wisp that is known.

44

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be.

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

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

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

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

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen;
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings;
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided me;
My embryo has never been torpid—nothing could overlay it.

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

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

45

O span of youth! Ever-push'd elasticity!
O manhood, balanced, florid, and full.

My lovers suffocate me!
Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
Jostling me through streets and public halls—coming naked to me at night,
Crying by day *Ahoy!* from the rocks of the river—swinging and chirping over my head,
Calling my name from flower-beds, vines, tangled underbrush,
Lighting on every moment of my life,
Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses,
Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts, and giving them to be mine.

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

Every condition promulges not only itself—it promulges what grows after and out of itself,

And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

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

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

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

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

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

See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that;
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.

My rendezvous is appointed—it is certain;
The Lord will be there, and wait till I come, on perfect terms;
(The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine, will be there.)

46

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

I tramp a perpetual journey—(come listen all!)
My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods;
No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair;
I have no chair, no church, no philosophy;
I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, or exchange;
But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,
My left hand hooking you round the waist,
My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents, and a plain public road.

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

It is not far—it is within reach;
Perhaps you have been on it since you were born, and did not know;

Perhaps it is every where on water and on land.

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

If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your hand on my hip,
And in due time you shall repay the same service to me;
For after we start, we never lie by again.

This day before dawn I ascended a hill, and look'd at the crowded heaven,
And I said to my Spirit, *When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?*
And my Spirit said, *No, we but level that life, to pass and continue beyond.*

You are also asking me questions, and I hear you;
I answer that I cannot answer—you must find out for yourself.

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

Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams;
Now I wash the gum from your eyes;
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light, and of every moment of your life.

Long have you timidly waded, holding a plank by the shore;
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair.

47

I am the teacher of athletes;
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own, proves the width of my own;
He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher.

The boy I love, the same becomes a man, not through derived power, but in his own right,
Wicked, rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear,
Fond of his sweetheart, relishing well his steak,
Unrequited love, or a slight, cutting him worse than sharp steel cuts,
First-rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye, to sail a skiff, to sing a song, or play on the banjo,
Preferring scars, and the beard, and faces pitted with small-pox, over all latherers,

And those well tann’d to those that keep out of the sun.

I teach straying from me—yet who can stray from me?
I follow you, whoever you are, from the present hour;
My words itch at your ears till you understand them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

48

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul;
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one’s self is,
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy, walks to his own funeral, drest in his shroud,
And I or you, pocketless of a dime, may purchase the pick of the earth,
And to glance with an eye, or show a bean in its pod, confounds the learning of all times,
And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may

become a hero,
And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe,
And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I, who am curious about each, am not curious about God;
(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God, and about death.)

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

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

49

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

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

And as to you, Corpse, I think you are good manure—but that does not offend me;
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips—I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

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

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

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

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night;
I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected;
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small.

50

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

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes;
I sleep—I sleep long.

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

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

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

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

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

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 bequeathe 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.