**American Literary Seminar I:**

**19th Century American Literature**

**Course Packet: POETRY**

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**Department of English Language and Literature**

E. A. Poe:

**Annabel Lee**

It was many and many a year ago,

   In a kingdom by the sea,

That a maiden there lived whom you may know

   By the name of Annabel Lee;

And this maiden she lived with no other thought

   Than to love and be loved by me.

*I* was a child and *she* was a child,

   In this kingdom by the sea,

But we loved with a love that was more than love—

   I and my Annabel Lee—

With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven

   Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,

   In this kingdom by the sea,

A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling

   My beautiful Annabel Lee;

So that her highborn kinsmen came

   And bore her away from me,

To shut her up in a sepulchre

   In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,

   Went envying her and me—

Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,

   In this kingdom by the sea)

That the wind came out of the cloud by night,

   Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love

   Of those who were older than we—

   Of many far wiser than we—

And neither the angels in Heaven above

   Nor the demons down under the sea

Can ever dissever my soul from the soul

   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams

   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes

   Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side

   Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,

   In her sepulchre there by the sea—

   In her tomb by the sounding sea.

# Lenore

Ah, broken is the golden bowl! the spirit flown forever!  
Let the bell toll! -a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river -   
And, Guy De Vere, hast thou no tear? -weep now or never more!  
See! on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love, Lenore!  
Come! let the burial rite be read -the funeral song be sung! -   
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young -   
A dirge for her, the doubly dead in that she died so young.  
  
"Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,  
And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her -that she died!  
How shall the ritual, then, be read? -the requiem how be sung  
By you -by yours, the evil eye, -by yours, the slanderous tongue  
That did to death the innocence that died, and died so young?"  
  
Peccavimus; but rave not thus! and let a Sabbath song  
Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no wrong!  
The sweet Lenore hath "gone before," with Hope, that flew beside,  
Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy bride -   
For her, the fair and debonnaire, that now so lowly lies,  
The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes -   
The life still there, upon her hair -the death upon her eyes.  
  
Avaunt! tonight my heart is light. No dirge will I upraise,  
But waft the angel on her flight with a paean of old days!  
Let no bell toll! -lest her sweet soul, amid its hallowed mirth,  
Should catch the note, as it doth float up from the damned Earth.  
To friends above, from fiends below, the indignant ghost is riven -   
From Hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven -   
From grief and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven."

**To -- -- --. Ulalume: A Ballad**

The skies they were ashen and sober;

      The leaves they were crispéd and sere—

      The leaves they were withering and sere;

It was night in the lonesome October

      Of my most immemorial year;

It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,

      In the misty mid region of Weir—

It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,

      In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,

      Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—

      Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.

These were days when my heart was volcanic

      As the scoriac rivers that roll—

      As the lavas that restlessly roll

Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek

      In the ultimate climes of the pole—

That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek

      In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,

      But our thoughts they were palsied and sere—

      Our memories were treacherous and sere—

For we knew not the month was October,

      And we marked not the night of the year—

      (Ah, night of all nights in the year!)

We noted not the dim lake of Auber—

      (Though once we had journeyed down here)—

We remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,

      Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent

      And star-dials pointed to morn—

      As the star-dials hinted of morn—

At the end of our path a liquescent

      And nebulous lustre was born,

Out of which a miraculous crescent

      Arose with a duplicate horn—

Astarte's bediamonded crescent

      Distinct with its duplicate horn.

And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:

      She rolls through an ether of sighs—

      She revels in a region of sighs:

She has seen that the tears are not dry on

      These cheeks, where the worm never dies,

And has come past the stars of the Lion

      To point us the path to the skies—

      To the Lethean peace of the skies—

Come up, in despite of the Lion,

      To shine on us with her bright eyes—

Come up through the lair of the Lion,

      With love in her luminous eyes."

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,

      Said—"Sadly this star I mistrust—

      Her pallor I strangely mistrust:—

Oh, hasten! oh, let us not linger!

      Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must."

In terror she spoke, letting sink her

      Wings till they trailed in the dust—

In agony sobbed, letting sink her

      Plumes till they trailed in the dust—

      Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied—"This is nothing but dreaming:

      Let us on by this tremulous light!

      Let us bathe in this crystalline light!

Its Sybilic splendor is beaming

      With Hope and in Beauty to-night:—

      See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!

Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,

      And be sure it will lead us aright—

We safely may trust to a gleaming

      That cannot but guide us aright,

      Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night."

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,

      And tempted her out of her gloom—

      And conquered her scruples and gloom:

And we passed to the end of the vista,

      But were stopped by the door of a tomb—

      By the door of a legended tomb;

And I said—"What is written, sweet sister,

      On the door of this legended tomb?"

      She replied—"Ulalume—Ulalume—

      'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!"

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober

      As the leaves that were crispèd and sere—

      As the leaves that were withering and sere,

And I cried—"It was surely October

      On *this* very night of last year

      That I journeyed—I journeyed down here—

      That I brought a dread burden down here—

      On this night of all nights in the year,

      Oh, what demon has tempted me here?

Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—

      This misty mid region of Weir—

Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber—

      In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

Said *we*, then—the two, then—"Ah, can it

      Have been that the woodlandish ghouls—

      The pitiful, the merciful ghouls—

To bar up our way and to ban it

      From the secret that lies in these wolds—

      From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds—

Had drawn up the spectre of a planet

      From the limbo of lunary souls—

This sinfully scintillant planet

      From the Hell of the planetary souls?"

**The Raven**

[First published in 1845]

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| --- | --- | --- |
| horizontal space | Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary, Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. `'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, `tapping at my chamber door - Only this, and nothing more.'  Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December, And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor. Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore - For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore - Nameless here for evermore.  And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before; So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating `'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door - Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; - This it is, and nothing more,'  Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer, `Sir,' said I, `or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore; But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping, And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door, That I scarce was sure I heard you' - here I opened wide the door; - Darkness there, and nothing more.  Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before; But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token, And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, `Lenore!' This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, `Lenore!' Merely this and nothing more.  Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning, Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before. `Surely,' said I, `surely that is something at my window lattice; Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore - Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; - 'Tis the wind and nothing more!'  Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter, In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore. Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he; But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door - Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door - Perched, and sat, and nothing more.  Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling, By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore, `Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, `art sure no craven. Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore - Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!' Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'  Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly, Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore; For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door - Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door, With such name as `Nevermore.'  But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only, That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour. Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered - Till I scarcely more than muttered `Other friends have flown before - On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.' Then the bird said, `Nevermore.'  Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken, `Doubtless,' said I, `what it utters is its only stock and store, Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore - Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore Of "Never-nevermore."'  But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling, Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door; Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore - What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore Meant in croaking `Nevermore.'  This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core; This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er, But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er, *She* shall press, ah, nevermore!  Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor. `Wretch,' I cried, `thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent thee Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore! Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!' Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'  `Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! - Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore, Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted - On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore - Is there - *is* there balm in Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!' Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'  `Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore - Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore - Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?' Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'  `Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting - `Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore! Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken! Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit the bust above my door! Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!' Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'  And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door; And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor; And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor Shall be lifted - nevermore! | horizontal space |

# vertical space The Bells

**I.**

Hear the sledges with the bells--

Silver bells!

What a world of merriment their melody foretells!

How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,

In the icy air of night!

While the stars that oversprinkle

All the heavens, seem to twinkle

With a crystalline delight;

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells

From the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells--

From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

**II.**

Hear the mellow wedding bells

Golden bells!

What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!

Through the balmy air of night

How they ring out their delight!

From the molten-golden notes,

And all in tune,

What a liquid ditty floats

To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats

On the moon!

Oh, from out the sounding cells,

What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!

How it swells!

How it dwells

On the Future! how it tells

Of the rapture that impels

To the swinging and the ringing

Of the bells, bells, bells,

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells--

To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

**III.**

Hear the loud alarum bells--

Brazen bells!

What tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

In the startled ear of night

How they scream out their affright!

Too much horrified to speak,

They can only shriek, shriek,

Out of tune,

In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,

In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,

Leaping higher, higher, higher,

With a desperate desire,

And a resolute endeavor

Now--now to sit or never,

By the side of the pale-faced moon.

Oh, the bells, bells, bells!

What a tale their terror tells

Of Despair!

How they clang, and clash, and roar!

What a horror they outpour

On the bosom of the palpitating air!

Yet the ear, it fully knows,

By the twanging,

And the clanging,

How the danger ebbs and flows ;

Yet, the ear distinctly tells,

In the jangling,

And the wrangling,

How the danger sinks and swells,

By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells--

Of the bells--

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells--

In the clamour and the clangour of the bells!

**IV.**

Hear the tolling of the bells--

Iron bells!

What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!

In the silence of the night,

How we shiver with affright

At the melancholy meaning of their tone!

For every sound that floats

From the rust within their throats

Is a groan.

And the people--ah, the people--

They that dwell up in the steeple,

All alone,

And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,

In that muffled monotone,

Feel a glory in so rolling

On the human heart a stone--

They are neither man nor woman--

They are neither brute nor human--

They are Ghouls:--

And their king it is who tolls ;

And he rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls,

Rolls

A pæan from the bells!

And his merry bosom swells

With the pæan of the bells!

And he dances, and he yells ;

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the pæan of the bells--

Of the bells :

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the throbbing of the bells--

Of the bells, bells, bells--

To the sobbing of the bells ;

Keeping time, time, time,

As he knells, knells, knells,

In a happy Runic rhyme,

To the rolling of the bells--

Of the bells, bells, bells--

To the tolling of the bells,

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells--

Bells, bells, bells--

To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

**To Helen**

Helen, thy beauty is to me

   Like those Nicéan barks of yore,

That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,

   The weary, way-worn wanderer bore

   To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,

   Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,

Thy Naiad airs have brought me home

   To the glory that was Greece,

   And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche

   How statue-like I see thee stand,

The agate lamp within thy hand!

   Ah, Psyche, from the regions which

   Are Holy-Land!

**Sonnet—﻿To Science**

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!

   Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.

Why preyest thou thus upon the poet’s heart,

   Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?

How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,

   Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering

To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,

   Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?

Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car,

   And driven the Hamadryad from the wood

To seek a shelter in some happier star?

   Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,

The Elfin from the green grass, and from me

The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION

(1846)

CHARLES DICKENS, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says- "By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done."

I cannot think this the precise mode of procedure on the part of Godwin- and indeed what he himself acknowledges, is not altogether in accordance with Mr. Dickens' idea- but the author of "Caleb Williams" was too good an artist not to perceive the advantage derivable from at least a somewhat similar process. Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its denouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the denouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis- or one is suggested by an incident of the day- or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative-designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or autorial comment, whatever crevices of fact, or action, may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view- for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest- I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone- whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone- afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would- that is to say, who could- detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say- but, perhaps, the autorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers- poets in especial- prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy- an ecstatic intuition- and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought- at the true purposes seized only at the last moment- at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view- at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable- at the cautious selections and rejections- at the painful erasures and interpolations- in a word, at the wheels and pinions- the tackle for scene-shifting- the step-ladders, and demon-traps- the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is by no means common, in which an author is at all in condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions, and, since the interest of an analysis or reconstruction, such as I have considered a desideratum, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analysed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the modus operandi by which some one of my own works was put together. I select 'The Raven' as most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition- that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, per se, the circumstance- or say the necessity- which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression- for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, ceteris paribus, no poet can afford to dispense with anything that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones- that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least, one-half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose- a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, inevitably, with corresponding depressions- the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art- the limit of a single sitting- and that, although in certain classes of prose composition, such as "Robinson Crusoe" (demanding no unity), this limit may be advantageously overpassed, it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit- in other words, to the excitement or elevation-again, in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect- this, with one proviso- that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper length for my intended poem- a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical, stands not in the slightest need of demonstration- the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect- they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul- not of intellect, or of heart- upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating the "beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes- that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment- no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to is most readily attained in the poem. Now the object Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion, a homeliness (the truly passionate will comprehend me), which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement or pleasurable elevation of the soul. It by no means follows, from anything here said, that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast- but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the tone of its highest manifestation- and all experience has shown that this tone is one of sadness. Beauty of whatever kind in its supreme development invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

The length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem- some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects- or more properly points, in the theatrical sense- I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the refrain. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be in a primitive condition. As commonly used, the refrain, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone- both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity- of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by adhering in general to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain- the refrain itself remaining for the most part, unvaried.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the nature of my refrain. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied it was clear that the refrain itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence would, of course, be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best refrain.

The question now arose as to the character of the word. Having made up my mind to a refrain, the division of the poem into stanzas was of course a corollary, the refrain forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt, and these considerations inevitably led me to the long o as the most sonorous vowel in connection with r as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had pre-determined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact it was the very first which presented itself.

The next desideratum was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I had at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the preassumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by a human being- I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a non-reasoning creature capable of speech, and very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone.

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven, the bird of ill-omen, monotonously repeating the one word "Nevermore" at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object- supremeness or perfection at all points, I asked myself- "Of all melancholy topics what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?" Death, was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length the answer here also is obvious- "When it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore." I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the application of the word repeated, but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending, that is to say, the effect of the variation of application. I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover- the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"- that I could make this first query a commonplace one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover, startled from his original nonchalance by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition, and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character- queries whose solution he has passionately at heart- propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture- propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which reason assures him is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote), but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the expected "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrows. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me, or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction, I first established in my mind the climax or concluding query- that query to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer- that query in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have had its beginning- at the end where all works of art should begin- for it was here at this point of my preconsiderations that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us- by that God we both adore,

Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore-

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."

Quoth the Raven- "Nevermore."

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover, and secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able in the subsequent composition to construct more vigorous stanzas I should without scruple have purposely enfeebled them so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere rhythm, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite, and yet, for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing. The fact is that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the "Raven." The former is trochaic- the latter is octametre acatalectic, alternating with heptametre catalectic repeated in the refrain of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrametre catalectic. Less pedantically the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short, the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds), the third of eight, the fourth of seven and a half, the fifth the same, the sixth three and a half. Now, each of these lines taken individually has been employed before, and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination into stanza; nothing even remotely approaching this has ever been attempted. The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven- and the first branch of this consideration was the locale. For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields- but it has always appeared to me that a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident- it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his chamber- in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished- this in mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the subject of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The locale being thus determined, I had now to introduce the bird- and the thought of introducing him through the window was inevitable. The idea of making the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping of the wings of the bird against the shutter, is a "tapping" at the door, originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging, the reader's curiosity, and in a desire to admit the incidental effect arising from the lover's throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first to account for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage- it being understood that the bust was absolutely suggested by the bird- the bust of Pallas being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.

About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic- approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible- is given to the Raven's entrance. He comes in "with many a flirt and flutter."

Not the least obeisance made he- not a moment stopped or stayed he,

But with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is more obviously carried out:-

Then this ebony bird, beguiling my sad fancy into smiling

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,

"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no

craven,

Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore-

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore?"

Quoth the Raven- "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,

Though its answer little meaning- little relevancy bore;

For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door-

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,

With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the denouement being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness- this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line,

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests- no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven's demeanour. He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader- to bring the mind into a proper frame for the denouement- which is now brought about as rapidly and as directly as possible.

With the denouement proper- with the Raven's reply, "Nevermore," to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world- the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion. So far, everything is within the limits of the accountable- of the real. A raven, having learned by rote the single word "Nevermore," and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams- the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanour, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore"- a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer, "Nevermore." With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects so handled, however skillfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required- first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness- some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that richness (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term), which we are too fond of confounding with the ideal. It is the excess of the suggested meaning- it is the rendering this the upper instead of the under-current of the theme- which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind), the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem- their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The under-current of meaning is rendered first apparent in the line-

"Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my

door!"

Quoth the Raven "Nevermore!"

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical- but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making him emblematical of Mournful and never ending Remembrance is permitted distinctly to be seen:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon that is dreaming,

And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor

Shall be lifted- nevermore.

### WALT WHITMAN (1819-1892)

#### SONG OF MYSELF

1

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

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

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

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

2

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

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

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

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

33   Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,   
34   You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)   
35   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,   
36   You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,   
37   You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

3

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

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

44   Urge and urge and urge,   
45   Always the procreant urge of the world.

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

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

[49](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#49n)   Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well entretied, braced in the beams,   
50   Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,   
51   I and this mystery here we stand.

52   Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

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

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

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

59   I am satisfied -- I see, dance, laugh, sing;   
60   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,   
61   Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty,   
62   Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,   
63   That they turn from gazing after and down the road,   
64   And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,   
65   Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?

4

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

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

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

5

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

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

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

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

6

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

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

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

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

106   Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,   
107   And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,   
108   Growing among black folks as among white,   
[109](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#109n)   Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7

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

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

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

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

145   Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,   
[146](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#146n)   I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,   
147   And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken away.

8

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

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

152   The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,   
153   I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen.

[154](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#154n)   The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,   
155   The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,   
156   The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,   
157   The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs,   
158   The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,   
159   The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,   
160   The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd,   
161   The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,   
162   What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,   
163   What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes,   
164   What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum,   
[165](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#165n)   Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,   
166   I mind them or the show or resonance of them -- I come and I depart.

9

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

171   I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,   
172   I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,   
[173](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#173n)   I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,   
174   And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

10

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

[180](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#180n)   The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud,

181   My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.

182   The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me,   
183   I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time;   
184   You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.

[185](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#185n)   I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the bride was a red girl,   
[186](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#186n)   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,   
187   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,   
188   She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.

189   The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,   
190   I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,   
[191](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#191n)   Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,   
192   And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,   
193   And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,   
194   And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse clean clothes,   
195   And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,   
196   And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;   
197   He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,   
[198](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#198n)   I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

11

199   Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,   
200   Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;   
201   Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

202   She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,   
203   She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

204   Which of the young men does she like the best?   
205   Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

206   Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,   
207   You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

208   Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,   
209   The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

210   The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long hair,   
211   Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

212   An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,   
213   It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

214   The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,   
215   They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,   
216   They do not think whom they souse with spray.

12

217   The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife at the stall in the market,   
[218](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#218n)   I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down.

[219](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#219n)   Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,   
220   Each has his main-sledge, they are all out, there is a great heat in the fire.

221   From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements,   
222   The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,   
223   Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so sure,   
224   They do not hasten, each man hits in his place.

13

225   The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags underneath on its tied-over chain,   
[226](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#226n)   The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,   
227   His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-band,   
228   His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away from his forehead,   
229   The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his polish'd and perfect limbs.

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

[232](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#232n)   In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward sluing,   
233   To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,   
234   Absorbing all to myself and for this song.

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

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

239   I believe in those wing'd purposes,   
240   And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,   
241   And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,   
242   And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else,   
243   And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty well to me,   
244   And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.

14

245   The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,   
246   Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,   
247   The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,   
248   Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.

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

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

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

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

15

264   The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,   
265   The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp,   
266   The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,   
[267](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#267n)   The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,   
268   The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,

269   The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,   
270   The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,   
271   The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,   
[272](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#272)   The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day loafe and looks at the oats and rye,   
273   The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,   
274   (He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-room;)   
[275](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#275n)   The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,   
[276](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#276n)   He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;   
277   The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,   
278   What is removed drops horribly in a pail;   
[279](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#279n)   The quadroon girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,   
280   The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the gate-keeper marks who pass,   
281   The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do not know him;)   
[282](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#282n)   The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,   
283   The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their rifles, some sit on logs,   
284   Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;   
[285](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#285n)   The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee,   
286   As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them from his saddle,   
287   The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the dancers bow to each other,   
288   The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical rain,   
[289](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#289n)   The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,   
290   The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale,   
291   The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut eyes bent sideways,   
292   As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the shore-going passengers,   
[293](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#293n)   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,   
294   The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne her first child,   
[295](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#295n)   The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the factory or mill,   
296   The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering with blue and gold,   
297   The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk, the shoemaker waxes his thread,   
298   The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,  
299   The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,   
[300](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#300n)   The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white sails sparkle!)   
[301](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#301n)   The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,   
302   The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about the odd cent;)   
303   The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,   
304   The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,   
305   The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck,   
306   The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each other,   
307   (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)   
308   The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great Secretaries,   
[309](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#309n)   On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,   
310   The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,   
311   The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,   
312   As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the jingling of loose change,   
313   The floor-men are laying the floor, the tinners are tinning the roof, the masons are calling for mortar,   
[314](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#314n)   In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;   
[315](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#315n)   Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it is the fourth of Seventh-month, (what salutes of cannon and small arms!)   
316   Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows, and the winter-grain falls in the ground;   
317   Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen surface,   
318   The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his axe,   
319   Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-trees,   
[320](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#320n)   Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,   
[321](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#321n)   Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or Altamahaw,

322   Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons around them,   
[323](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#323n)   In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their day's sport,   
324   The city sleeps and the country sleeps,   
325   The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,   
326   The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife;   
327   And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,   
328   And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,   
329   And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

16

330   I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,   
331   Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,   
332   Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,   
333   Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,   
334   One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same,   
[335](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#335n)   A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable down by the Oconee I live,   
336   A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,   
[337](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#337n)   A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,   
[338](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#338n)   A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;   
339   At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen off Newfoundland,   
340   At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking,   
341   At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the Texan ranch,   
342   Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving their big proportions,)   
343   Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to drink and meat,   
344   A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfullest,   
345   A novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons,   
346   Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,   
347   A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,   
[348](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#348n)   Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.

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

352   (The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place,   
353   The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place,   
354   The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.)

17

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

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

18

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

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

365   I beat and pound for the dead,   
[366](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#366n)   I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them.

[367](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#367n)   Vivas to those who have fail'd!   
368   And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!   
369   And to those themselves who sank in the sea!   
370   And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!   
371   And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!

19

372   This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,   
373   It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all,   
374   I will not have a single person slighted or left away,   
[375](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#375n)   The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited,   
376   The heavy-lipp'd slave is invited, the venerealee is invited;   
377   There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

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

382   Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?   
[383](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#383n)   Well I have, for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on the side of a rock has.

384   Do you take it I would astonish?   
[385](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#385n)   Does the daylight astonish? does the early redstart twittering through the woods?   
386   Do I astonish more than they?

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

20

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

391   What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

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

394   I do not snivel that snivel the world over,   
395   That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth.

[396](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#396n)   Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids, conformity goes to the fourth-remov'd,   
397   I wear my hat as I please indoors or out.

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

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

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

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

406   I know I am deathless,   
407   I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,   
[408](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#408n)   I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night.

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

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

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

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

21

422   I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,   
423   The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,   
424   The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.

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

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

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

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

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

438   Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!   
439   Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!   
440   Earth of departed sunset -- earth of the mountains misty-topt!   
[441](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#441n)   Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!   
442   Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!   
443   Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!   
444   Far-swooping elbow'd earth -- rich apple-blossom'd earth!   
445   Smile, for your lover comes.

446   Prodigal, you have given me love -- therefore I to you give love!   
447   O unspeakable passionate love.

22

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

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

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

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

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

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

[468](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#468n)   Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy?   
469   Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be work'd over and rectified?

[470](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#470n)   I find one side a balance and the antipodal side a balance,   
471   Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine,   
472   Thoughts and deeds of the present our rouse and early start.

[473](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#473n)   This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,   
474   There is no better than it and now.

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

23

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

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

481   It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,   
482   That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.

483   I accept Reality and dare not question it,   
484   Materialism first and last imbuing.

485   Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!   
[486](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#486n)   Fetch stonecrop mixt with cedar and branches of lilac,   
[487](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#487n)   This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this made a grammar of the old cartouches,   
488   These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas.   
489   This is the geologist, this works with the scalpel, and this is a mathematician.

490   Gentlemen, to you the first honors always!   
491   Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,   
492   I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.

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

24

[497](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#497n)   Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,   
498   Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,   
499   No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,   
500   No more modest than immodest.

501   Unscrew the locks from the doors!   
[502](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#502n)   Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

503   Whoever degrades another degrades me,   
504   And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

[505](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#505n)   Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index.

506   I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,   
507   By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.

508   Through me many long dumb voices,   
509   Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,   
510   Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,   
511   Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,   
512   And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the father-stuff,   
513   And of the rights of them the others are down upon,   
514   Of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, despised,   
515   Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.

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

519   I do not press my fingers across my mouth,   
520   I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart,   
521   Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.

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

524   Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,   
525   The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,   
526   This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

527   If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it,   
528   Translucent mould of me it shall be you!   
529   Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!   
[530](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#530n)   Firm masculine colter it shall be you!   
[531](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#531n)   Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you!   
532   You my rich blood! your milky stream pale strippings of my life!   
533   Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!   
534   My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!   
[535](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#535n)   Root of wash'd sweet-flag! timorous pond-snipe! nest of guarded duplicate eggs! it shall be you!   
536   Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall be you!   
537   Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you!   
538   Sun so generous it shall be you!   
539   Vapors lighting and shading my face it shall be you!   
540   You sweaty brooks and dews it shall be you!   
541   Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you!   
542   Broad muscular fields, branches of live oak, loving lounger in my winding paths, it shall be you!   
543   Hands I have taken, face I have kiss'd, mortal I have ever touch'd, it shall be you.

544   I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,   
545   Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy,   
546   I cannot tell how my ankles bend, nor whence the cause of my faintest wish,   
547   Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause of the friendship I take again.

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

550   To behold the day-break!   
[551](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#551n)   The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,   
552   The air tastes good to my palate.

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

555   Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous prongs,   
556   Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven.

557   The earth by the sky staid with, the daily close of their junction,   
558   The heav'd challenge from the east that moment over my head,   
559   The mocking taunt, See then whether you shall be master!

25

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

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

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

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

569   Come now I will not be tantalized, you conceive too much of articulation,   
570   Do you not know O speech how the buds beneath you are folded?   
571   Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,   
572   The dirt receding before my prophetical screams,   
573   I underlying causes to balance them at last,   
574   My knowledge my live parts, it keeping tally with the meaning of all things,   
575   Happiness, (which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of this day.)

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

579   Writing and talk do not prove me,   
[580](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#580n)   I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face,   
581   With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic.

26

582   Now I will do nothing but listen,   
583   To accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it.

584   I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my meals,   
585   I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice,   
586   I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following,   
587   Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night,   
588   Talkative young ones to those that like them, the loud laugh of work-people at their meals,   
589   The angry base of disjointed friendship, the faint tones of the sick,   
590   The judge with hands tight to the desk, his pallid lips pronouncing a death-sentence,   
591   The heave'e'yo of stevedores unlading ships by the wharves, the refrain of the anchor-lifters,   
592   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,   
593   The steam whistle, the solid roll of the train of approaching cars,   
594   The slow march play'd at the head of the association marching two and two,   
[595](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#595n)   (They go to guard some corpse, the flag-tops are draped with black muslin.)

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

599   I hear the chorus, it is a grand opera,   
600   Ah this indeed is music -- this suits me.

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

603   I hear the train'd soprano (what work with hers is this?)   
[604](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#604n)   The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,   
605   It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them,   
606   It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,   
607   I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,   
[608](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#608n)   Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death,

609   At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,   
610   And that we call Being.

27

611   To be in any form, what is that?   
612   (Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back thither,)   
[613](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#613n)   If nothing lay more develop'd the quahaug in its callous shell were enough.

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

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

28

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

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

637   I am given up by traitors,   
638   I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest traitor,   
639   I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.

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

29

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

644   Parting track'd by arriving, perpetual payment of perpetual loan,   
645   Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.

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

30

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

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

655   (Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so,   
656   Only what nobody denies is so.)

657   A minute and a drop of me settle my brain,   
658   I believe the soggy clods shall become lovers and lamps,   
659   And a compend of compends is the meat of a man or woman,   
660   And a summit and flower there is the feeling they have for each other,   
[661](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#661n)   And they are to branch boundlessly out of that lesson until it becomes omnific,   
662   And until one and all shall delight us, and we them.

31

663   I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,   
[664](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#664n)   And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,   
665   And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,   
666   And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,   
667   And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,   
668   And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,   
[669](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#669n)   And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

[670](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#670n)   I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,   
671   And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,   
672   And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,   
673   But call any thing back again when I desire it.

674   In vain the speeding or shyness,   
675   In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against my approach,   
676   In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder'd bones,   
677   In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold shapes,   
678   In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great monsters lying low,   
679   In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,   
680   In vain the snake slides through the creepers and logs,   
681   In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the woods,   
682   In vain the razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador,   
683   I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

32

684   I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,   
685   I stand and look at them long and long.

686   They do not sweat and whine about their condition,   
687   They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,   
688   They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,   
689   Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,   
690   Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,   
691   Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

692   So they show their relations to me and I accept them,   
693   They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession.

694   I wonder where they get those tokens,   
695   Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?

696   Myself moving forward then and now and forever,   
697   Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,   
[698](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#698n)   Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,   
699   Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,   
700   Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.

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

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

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

33

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

714   My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,   
[715](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#715n)   I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,   
716   I am afoot with my vision.

717   By the city's quadrangular houses -- in log huts, camping with lumbermen,   
718   Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,   
[719](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#719n)   Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing savannas, trailing in forests,   
720   Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,   
721   Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,   
722   Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,   
723   Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding on fish,   
[724](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#724n)   Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,   
725   Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail;   
726   Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the rice in its low moist field,   
727   Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and slender shoots from the gutters,   
[728](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#728n)   Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate blue-flower flax,   
729   Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest,   
730   Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;   
731   Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged limbs,   
732   Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,   
733   Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,   
[734](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#734n)   Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great gold-bug drops through the dark,   
735   Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,   
736   Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides,   
737   Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle the hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;   
738   Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,   
739   Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,   
740   Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking composedly down,)   
[741](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#741n)   Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand,   
742   Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,   
743   Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,   
744   Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,   
745   Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents,   
746   Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;   
747   Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,   
748   Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,   
749   Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,   
750   Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,   
751   Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,   
[752](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#752n)   At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking, laughter,   
753   At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw,   
754   At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,   
[755](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#755n)   At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings;   
756   Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,   
[757](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#757n)   Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,   
758   Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare, where the cock is treading the hen,   
759   Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,   
760   Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,   
761   Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,   
762   Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding,   
763   Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh,   
764   Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,   
765   Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,   
766   Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,   
767   Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,   
768   Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs,   
769   Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,   
[770](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#770n)   Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,   
771   Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,   
772   Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,   
773   Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or public hall;   
774   Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new and old,   
775   Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,   
776   Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,   
777   Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,   
778   Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, impress'd seriously at the camp-meeting;   
[779](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#779n)   Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flatting the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,   
780   Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or down a lane or along the beach,   
781   My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;  
782   Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he rides at the drape of the day,)   
783   Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print,   
784   By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,   
785   Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;   
786   Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,   
787   Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,   
788   Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,   
789   Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while,   
790   Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by my side,   
791   Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,   
792   Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,   
793   Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,   
794   Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,   
795   Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,   
796   Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,   
797   I tread day and night such roads.

798   I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,   
[799](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#799n)   And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.

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

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

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

[806](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#806n)   I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff, clinging to topples of brittle and blue.

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

[817](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#817n)   I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,   
818   I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,   
819   I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

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

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

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

838   I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,   
839   Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,   
[840](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#840n)   I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my skin,   
841   I fall on the weeds and stones,   
842   The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,   
843   Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

34

871   Now I tell what I knew in Texas in my early youth,   
872   (I tell not the fall of Alamo,   
873   Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,   
874   The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo,)   
[875](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#875n)   'Tis the tale of the murder in cold blood of four hundred and twelve young men.

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

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

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

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

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

35

[897](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#897n)   Would you hear of an old-time sea-fight?   
898   Would you learn who won by the light of the moon and stars?   
899   List to the yarn, as my grandmother's father the sailor told it to me.

[900](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#900n)   Our foe was no skulk in his ship I tell you, (said he,)   
[901](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#901n)   His was the surly English pluck, and there is no tougher or truer, and never was, and never will be;   
[902](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#902n)   Along the lower'd eve he came horribly raking us.

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

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

907   Fighting at sun-down, fighting at dark,   
[908](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#908n)   Ten o'clock at night, the full moon well up, our leaks on the gain, and five feet of water reported,   
909   The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in the after-hold to give them a chance for themselves.

[910](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#910n)   The transit to and from the magazine is now stopt by the sentinels,   
911   They see so many strange faces they do not know whom to trust.

912   Our frigate takes fire,   
[913](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#913n)   The other asks if we demand quarter?   
[914](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#914n)   If our colors are struck and the fighting done?

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

917   Only three guns are in use,   
918   One is directed by the captain himself against the enemy's mainmast,   
[919](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#919n)   Two well serv'd with grape and canister silence his musketry and clear his decks.

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

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

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

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

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

36

929   Stretch'd and still lies the midnight,   
930   Two great hulls motionless on the breast of the darkness,   
931   Our vessel riddled and slowly sinking, preparations to pass to the one we have conquer'd,   
932   The captain on the quarter-deck coldly giving his orders through a countenance white as a sheet,   
933   Near by the corpse of the child that serv'd in the cabin,   
934   The dead face of an old salt with long white hair and carefully curl'd whiskers,   
935   The flames spite of all that can be done flickering aloft and below,   
936   The husky voices of the two or three officers yet fit for duty,   
937   Formless stacks of bodies and bodies by themselves, dabs of flesh upon the masts and spars,   
938   Cut of cordage, dangle of rigging, slight shock of the soothe of waves,   
939   Black and impassive guns, litter of powder-parcels, strong scent,   
940   A few large stars overhead, silent and mournful shining,   
941   Delicate sniffs of sea-breeze, smells of sedgy grass and fields by the shore, death-messages given in charge to survivors,   
942   The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of his saw,   
943   Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short wild scream, and long, dull, tapering groan,   
944   These so, these irretrievable.

37

945   You laggards there on guard! look to your arms!   
946   In at the conquer'd doors they crowd! I am possess'd!   
947   Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering,   
948   See myself in prison shaped like another man,   
949   And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

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

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

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

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

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

38

959   Enough! enough! enough!   
960   Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!   
961   Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping,   
962   I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

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

966   I remember now,   
967   I resume the overstaid fraction,   
968   The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves,   
[969](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#969n)   Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

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

[974](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#974n)   Eleves, I salute you! come forward!   
975   Continue your annotations, continue your questionings.

39

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

978   Is he some Southwesterner rais'd out-doors? is he Kanadian?   
979   Is he from the Mississippi country? Iowa, Oregon, California?   
980   The mountains? prairie-life, bush-life? or sailor from the sea?

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

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

40

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

989   Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands,   
[990](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#990n)   Say, old top-knot, what do you want?

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

994   Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity,   
995   When I give I give myself.

996   You there, impotent, loose in the knees,   
[997](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#997n)   Open your scarf'd chops till I blow grit within you,   
998   Spread your palms and lift the flaps of your pockets,   
999   I am not to be denied, I compel, I have stores plenty and to spare,   
1000   And any thing I have I bestow.

1001   I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me,   
1002   You can do nothing and be nothing but what I will infold you.

[1003](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1003n)   To cotton-field drudge or cleaner of privies I lean,   
1004   On his right cheek I put the family kiss,   
1005   And in my soul I swear I never will deny him.

1006   On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes.   
1007   (This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics.)

1008   To any one dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door.   
1009   Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,   
1010   Let the physician and the priest go home.

1011   I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will,   
1012   O despairer, here is my neck,   
1013   By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me.

1014   I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up,   
1015   Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,   
1016   Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.

1017   Sleep -- I and they keep guard all night,   
1018   Not doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you,   
1019   I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,   
1020   And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you is so.

41

1021   I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs,   
1022   And for strong upright men I bring yet more needed help.

1023   I heard what was said of the universe,   
1024   Heard it and heard it of several thousand years;   
1025   It is middling well as far as it goes -- but is that all?

1026   Magnifying and applying come I,   
1027   Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,   
1028   Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,   
[1029](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1029n)   Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,   
[1030](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1030n)   Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,   
[1031](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1031n)   In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved,   
[1032](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1032n)   With Odin and the hideous-faced Mexitli and every idol and image,   
1033   Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more,   
1034   Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days,   
1035   (They bore mites as for unfledg'd birds who have now to rise and fly and sing for themselves,)   
1036   Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself, bestowing them freely on each man and woman I see,   
1037   Discovering as much or more in a framer framing a house,   
1038   Putting higher claims for him there with his roll'd-up sleeves driving the mallet and chisel,   
1039   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,   
1040   Lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than the gods of the antique wars,   
1041   Minding their voices peal through the crash of destruction,   
[1042](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1042n)   Their brawny limbs passing safe over charr'd laths, their white foreheads whole and unhurt out of the flames;   
1043   By the mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple interceding for every person born,   
1044   Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists,   
1045   The snag-tooth'd hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come,  
[1046](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1046n)   Selling all he possesses, traveling on foot to fee lawyers for his brother and sit by him while he is tried for forgery;   
1047   What was strewn in the amplest strewing the square rod about me, and not filling the square rod then,   
[1048](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1048n)   The bull and the bug never worshipp'd half enough,   
1049   Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd,   
1050   The supernatural of no account, myself waiting my time to be one of the supremes,   
1051   The day getting ready for me when I shall do as much good as the best, and be as prodigious;   
1052   By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator,   
1053   Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows.

42

1054   A call in the midst of the crowd,   
[1055](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1055n)   My own voice, orotund sweeping and final.

1056   Come my children,   
1057   Come my boys and girls, my women, household and intimates,   
1058   Now the performer launches his nerve, he has pass'd his prelude on the reeds within.

1059   Easily written loose-finger'd chords -- I feel the thrum of your climax and close.

1060   My head slues round on my neck,   
1061   Music rolls, but not from the organ,   
1062   Folks are around me, but they are no household of mine.

1063   Ever the hard unsunk ground,   
1064   Ever the eaters and drinkers, ever the upward and downward sun, ever the air and the ceaseless tides,   
1065   Ever myself and my neighbors, refreshing, wicked, real,   
1066   Ever the old inexplicable query, ever that thorn'd thumb, that breath of itches and thirsts,   
1067   Ever the vexer's hoot! hoot! till we find where the sly one hides and bring him forth,   
1068   Ever love, ever the sobbing liquid of life,   
1069   Ever the bandage under the chin, ever the trestles of death.

1070   Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,   
1071   To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,   
1072   Tickets buying, taking, selling, but in to the feast never once going,   
1073   Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the chaff for payment receiving,   
1074   A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

1075   This is the city and I am one of the citizens,   
1076   Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets, newspapers, schools,   
1077   The mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores, real estate and personal estate.

[1078](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1078n)   The little plentiful manikins skipping around in collars and tail'd coats,   
1079   I am aware who they are, (they are positively not worms or fleas,)   
1080   I acknowledge the duplicates of myself, the weakest and shallowest is deathless with me,   
1081   What I do and say the same waits for them,   
1082   Every thought that flounders in me the same flounders in them.

1083   I know perfectly well my own egotism,   
1084   Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,   
1085   And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself.

1086   Not words of routine this song of mine,   
1087   But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring;   
1088   This printed and bound book -- but the printer and the printing-office boy?   
1089   The well-taken photographs -- but your wife or friend close and solid in your arms?   
1090   The black ship mail'd with iron, her mighty guns in her turrets -- but the pluck of the captain and engineers?   
1091   In the houses the dishes and fare and furniture -- but the host and hostess, and the look out of their eyes?   
1092   The sky up there -- yet here or next door, or across the way?   
1093   The saints and sages in history -- but you yourself?   
1094   Sermons, creeds, theology -- but the fathomless human brain,   
1095   And what is reason? and what is love? and what is life?

43

1096   I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over,   
1097   My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,   
1098   Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,   
1099   Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,   
1100   Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun,   
[1101](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1101n)   Making a fetich of the first rock or stump, powowing with sticks in the circle of obis,   
[1102](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1102n)   Helping the llama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,   
[1103](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1103n)   Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and austere in the woods a gymnosophist,   
[1104](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1104n)   Drinking mead from the skull-cup, to Shastas and Vedas admirant, minding the Koran,   
[1105](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1105n)   Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the stone and knife, beating the serpent-skin drum,   
1106   Accepting the Gospels, accepting him that was crucified, knowing assuredly that he is divine,   
1107   To the mass kneeling or the puritan's prayer rising, or sitting patiently in a pew,   
1108   Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis, or waiting dead-like till my spirit arouses me,   
1109   Looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of pavement and land,   
1110   Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.

1111   One of that centripetal and centrifugal gang I turn and talk like a man leaving charges before a journey.

1112   Down-hearted doubters dull and excluded,   
1113   Frivolous, sullen, moping, angry, affected, dishearten'd, atheistical,   
1114   I know every one of you, I know the sea of torment, doubt, despair and unbelief.

[1115](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1115n)   How the flukes splash!   
1116   How they contort rapid as lightning, with spasms and spouts of blood!

1117   Be at peace bloody flukes of doubters and sullen mopers,   
1118   I take my place among you as much as among any,   
1119   The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the same,   
1120   And what is yet untried and afterward is for you, me, all, precisely the same.

1121   I do not know what is untried and afterward,   
1122   But I know it will in its turn prove sufficient, and cannot fail.

1123   Each who passes is consider'd, each who stops is consider'd, not a single one can it fail.

1124   It cannot fail the young man who died and was buried,   
1125   Nor the young woman who died and was put by his side,   
1126   Nor the little child that peep'd in at the door, and then drew back and was never seen again,   
1127   Nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and feels it with bitterness worse than gall,   
[1128](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1128n)   Nor him in the poor house tubercled by rum and the bad disorder,   
[1129](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1129n)   Nor the numberless slaughter'd and wreck'd, nor the brutish koboo call'd the ordure of humanity,   
1130   Nor the sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in,   
1131   Nor any thing in the earth, or down in the oldest graves of the earth,   
1132   Nor any thing in the myriads of spheres, nor the myriads of myriads that inhabit them,   
1133   Nor the present, nor the least wisp that is known.

44

1134   It is time to explain myself -- let us stand up.

1135   What is known I strip away,   
1136   I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.

1137   The clock indicates the moment -- but what does eternity indicate?

1138   We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers,   
1139   There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

1140   Births have brought us richness and variety,   
1141   And other births will bring us richness and variety.

1142   I do not call one greater and one smaller,   
1143   That which fills its period and place is equal to any.

1144   Were mankind murderous or jealous upon you, my brother, my sister?   
1145   I am sorry for you, they are not murderous or jealous upon me,   
1146   All has been gentle with me, I keep no account with lamentation,   
1147   (What have I to do with lamentation?)

[1148](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1148n)   I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be.

1149   My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,   
1150   On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the steps,   
1151   All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.

1152   Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,   
1153   Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,   
1154   I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,   
1155   And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

1156   Long I was hugg'd close -- long and long.

1157   Immense have been the preparations for me,   
1158   Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

1159   Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,   
1160   For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,   
1161   They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

1162   Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,   
1163   My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

1164   For it the nebula cohered to an orb,   
1165   The long slow strata piled to rest it on,   
1166   Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,   
[1167](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1167n)   Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.

1168   All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,   
1169   Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

45

1170   O span of youth! ever-push'd elasticity!   
1171   O manhood, balanced, florid and full.

1172   My lovers suffocate me,   
1173   Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,   
1174   Jostling me through streets and public halls, coming naked to me at night,   
1175   Crying by day Ahoy! from the rocks of the river, swinging and chirping over my head,   
1176   Calling my name from flower-beds, vines, tangled underbrush,   
1177   Lighting on every moment of my life,   
[1178](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1178n)   Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses,   
1179   Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts and giving them to be mine.

1180   Old age superbly rising! O welcome, ineffable grace of dying days!

1181   Every condition promulges not only itself, it promulges what grows after and out of itself,   
1182   And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

1183   I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,   
1184   And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the rim of the farther systems.

1185   Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,   
1186   Outward and outward and forever outward.

1187   My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,   
1188   He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,   
1189   And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside them.

1190   There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage,   
1191   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,   
1192   We should surely bring up again where we now stand,   
1193   And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.

1194   A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span or make it impatient,   
1195   They are but parts, any thing is but a part.

1196   See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,   
1197   Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.

1198   My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,   
1199   The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,   
[1200](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1200n)   The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there.

46

1201   I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and never will be measured.

1202   I tramp a perpetual journey, (come listen all!)   
1203   My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods,   
1204   No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair,   
1205   I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,   
1206   I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, exchange,   
1207   But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,   
1208   My left hand hooking you round the waist,   
1209   My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road.

1210   Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,   
1211   You must travel it for yourself.

1212   It is not far, it is within reach,   
1213   Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know,   
1214   Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land.

1215   Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine, and let us hasten forth,   
1216   Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go.

[1217](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1217n)   If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your hand on my hip,   
1218   And in due time you shall repay the same service to me,   
1219   For after we start we never lie by again.

1220   This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded heaven,   
1221   And I said to my spirit When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?   
1222   And my spirit said No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond.

1223   You are also asking me questions and I hear you,   
1224   I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.

1225   Sit a while dear son,   
1226   Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk to drink,   
[1227](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1227n)   But as soon as you sleep and renew yourself in sweet clothes, I kiss you with a good-by kiss and open the gate for your egress hence.

1228   Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,   
1229   Now I wash the gum from your eyes,   
1230   You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life.

1231   Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,   
1232   Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,   
1233   To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair.

47

1234   I am the teacher of athletes,   
1235   He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own,   
1236   He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher.

1237   The boy I love, the same becomes a man not through derived power, but in his own right,   
1238   Wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear,   
1239   Fond of his sweetheart, relishing well his steak,   
1240   Unrequited love or a slight cutting him worse than sharp steel cuts,   
1241   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,   
[1242](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1242n)   Preferring scars and the beard and faces pitted with small-pox over all latherers,   
1243   And those well-tann'd to those that keep out of the sun.

1244   I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?   
1245   I follow you whoever you are from the present hour,   
1246   My words itch at your ears till you understand them.

1247   I do not say these things for a dollar or to fill up the time while I wait for a boat,   
1248   (It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,   
1249   Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.)

1250   I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house,   
1251   And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air.

1252   If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,   
1253   The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key,   
1254   The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

1255   No shutter'd room or school can commune with me,   
1256   But roughs and little children better than they.

1257   The young mechanic is closest to me, he knows me well,   
1258   The woodman that takes his axe and jug with him shall take me with him all day,   
1259   The farm-boy ploughing in the field feels good at the sound of my voice,  
1260   In vessels that sail my words sail, I go with fishermen and seamen and love them.

1261   The soldier camp'd or upon the march is mine,   
1262   On the night ere the pending battle many seek me, and I do not fail them,   
1263   On that solemn night (it may be their last) those that know me seek me.

1264   My face rubs to the hunter's face when he lies down alone in his blanket,   
1265   The driver thinking of me does not mind the jolt of his wagon,   
1266   The young mother and old mother comprehend me,   
1267   The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment and forget where they are,   
1268   They and all would resume what I have told them.

48

1269   I have said that the soul is not more than the body,   
1270   And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,   
1271   And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,   
1272   And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud,   
1273   And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the earth,   
1274   And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds the learning of all times,   
1275   And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero,   
1276   And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe,   
1277   And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.

1278   And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,   
1279   For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,   
1280   (No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death.)

1281   I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,   
1282   Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

1283   Why should I wish to see God better than this day?   
1284   I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,   
1285   In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,   
1286   I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,   
1287   And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,   
1288   Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

49

1289   And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me.

[1290](http://depts.washington.edu/lsearlec/TEXTS/WHITMAN/SONGSELF.HTM#1290n)   To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,   
1291   I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,   
1292   I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,   
1293   And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

1294   And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,   
1295   I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,   
1296   I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

1297   And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,   
1298   (No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

1299   I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,   
1300   O suns -- O grass of graves -- O perpetual transfers and promotions,   
1301   If you do not say any thing how can I say any thing?

1302   Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,   
1303   Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,   
1304   Toss, sparkles of day and dusk -- toss on the black stems that decay in the muck,   
1305   Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

1306   I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,   
1307   I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected,   
1308   And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small.

50

1309   There is that in me -- I do not know what it is -- but I know it is in me.

1310   Wrench'd and sweaty -- calm and cool then my body becomes,   
1311   I sleep -- I sleep long.

1312   I do not know it -- it is without name -- it is a word unsaid,   
1313   It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

1314   Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,   
1315   To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

1316   Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

1317   Do you see O my brothers and sisters?   
1318   It is not chaos or death -- it is form, union, plan -- it is eternal life -- it is Happiness.

51

1319   The past and present wilt -- I have fill'd them, emptied them,   
1320   And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

1321   Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?   
1322   Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,   
1323   (Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

1324   Do I contradict myself?   
1325   Very well then I contradict myself,   
1326   (I am large, I contain multitudes.)

1327   I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.

1328   Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper?   
1329   Who wishes to walk with me?

1330   Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

52

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Emiliy Dickinson**

49  
  
I never lost as much but twice,  
And that was in the sod.  
Twice have I stood a beggar  
Before the door of God!  
  
Angels—twice descending  
Reimbursed my store—  
Burglar! Banker—Father!  
I am poor once more!

67

Success is counted sweetest

By those who ne'er succeed.

To comprehend a nectar

Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host

Who took the Flag today

Can tell the definition

So clear of victory

As he defeated – dying –

On whose forbidden ear

The distant strains of triumph

Burst agonized and clear!

# I taste a liquor never brewed (214)

I taste a liquor never brewed –

From Tankards scooped in Pearl –

Not all the Frankfort Berries

Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of air – am I –

And Debauchee of Dew –

Reeling – thro’ endless summer days –

From inns of molten Blue –

When “Landlords” turn the drunken Bee

Out of the Foxglove’s door –

When Butterflies – renounce their “drams” –

I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –

And Saints – to windows run –

To see the little Tippler

Leaning against the – Sun!

241  
  
I like a look of Agony,  
Because I know it's true—  
Men do not sham Convulsion,  
Nor simulate, a Throe—  
  
The Eyes glaze once—and that is Death—  
Impossible to feign  
The Beads upon the Forehead  
By homely Anguish strung.

# The Soul selects her own Society (303)

The Soul selects her own Society —

Then — shuts the Door —

To her divine Majority —

Present no more —

Unmoved — she notes the Chariots — pausing —

At her low Gate —

Unmoved — an Emperor be kneeling

Upon her Mat —

I’ve known her — from an ample nation —

Choose One —

Then — close the Valves of her attention —

Like Stone —

# A Bird came down the Walk (328)

A Bird came down the Walk—

He did not know I saw—

He bit an Angleworm in halves

And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew

From a convenient Grass—

And then hopped sidewise to the Wall

To let a Beetle pass—

He glanced with rapid eyes

That hurried all around—

They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—

He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,

I offered him a Crumb

And he unrolled his feathers

And rowed him softer home—

Than Oars divide the Ocean,

Too silver for a seam—

Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon

Leap, plashless as they swim.

# After great pain, a formal feeling comes – (372)

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –

The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –

The stiff Heart questions ‘was it He, that bore,’

And ‘Yesterday, or Centuries before’?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –

A Wooden way

Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –

Regardless grown,

A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –

Remembered, if outlived,

As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –

First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –

441.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *THIS is my letter to the world,* |  |
| *That never wrote to me,—* |  |
| *The simple news that Nature told,* |  |
| *With tender majesty.* |  |
|  |  |
| *Her message is committed* | *5* |
| *To hands I cannot see;* |  |
| *For love of her, sweet countrymen,* |  |
| *Judge tenderly of me!* |  |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

449.

[I died for Beauty](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated) — [but was scarce  
Adjusted in the Tomb  
When One who died  
for Truth, was lain  
In an adjoining room](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)  
  
[He questioned softly "Why I failed"?  
"For Beauty", I replied](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)  
["And I — for Truth — Themself are One  
We Brethren, are", He said](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)  
  
[And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night  
We talked between the Rooms](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)  
[Until the Moss had reached our lips](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)  
[And covered up — our names](http://genius.com/Emily-dickinson-i-died-for-beauty-but-was-scarce-annotated)

986.

# A narrow fellow in the grass (1096)

A narrow fellow in the grass

Occasionally rides;

You may have met him—did you not

His notice sudden is,

The grass divides as with a comb,

A spotted shaft is seen,

And then it closes at your feet,

And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,

A floor too cool for corn,

But when a boy and barefoot,

I more than once at noon

Have passed, I thought, a whip lash,

Unbraiding in the sun,

When stooping to secure it,

It wrinkled and was gone.

Several of nature’s people

I know, and they know me;

I feel for them a transport

Of cordiality.

But never met this fellow,

Attended or alone,

Without a tighter breathing,

And zero at the bone.

# Because I could not stop for Death (479)

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess – in the Ring –

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –

We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed us –

The Dews drew quivering and chill –

For only Gossamer, my Gown –

My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses’ Heads

Were toward Eternity –

57.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| TITLE divine is mine |  |
| The Wife without |  |
| The Sign. |  |
| Acute degree |  |
| Conferred on me— | *5* |
| Empress of Calvary. |  |
| Royal all but the |  |
| Crown— |  |
| Betrothed, without the swoon |  |
| God gives us women | *10* |
| When two hold |  |
| Garnet to garnet, |  |
| Gold to gold— |  |
| Born—Bridalled— |  |
| Shrouded— | *15* |
| In a day |  |
| Tri-Victory— |  |
| “My Husband” |  |
| Women say |  |
| Stroking the melody, | *20* |
| Is this the way? |  |