



*Leaves of Grass*

WALT WHITMAN



*Come, said my soul,  
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,  
That should I after return,  
Or, long, long hence, in other spheres,  
There to some group of mates the chants resuming,  
(Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,  
Ever with pleas'd smile I may keep on,  
Ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here and now  
Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,*



BOOK I. INSCRIPTIONS

☘ One's-Self I Sing

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse,  
I say the Form complete is worthier far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing. 5

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,  
The Modern Man I sing.

☘ As I Ponder'd in Silence

As I ponder'd in silence,  
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,  
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,  
Terrible in beauty, age, and power, 5  
The genius of poets of old lands,  
As to me directing like flame its eyes,  
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,  
And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said,  
Know'st thou not there is but one theme for ever-enduring  
bards?  
And that is the theme of War, the fortune of battles, 10  
The making of perfect soldiers.

Be it so, then I answer'd,  
I too haughty Shade also sing war, and a longer and greater one  
than any,  
Waged in my book with varying fortune, with flight, advance  
and retreat, victory deferr'd and wavering,  
(Yet methinks certain, or as good as certain, at the last,) the  
field the world, 15  
For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul,  
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,  
I above all promote brave soldiers.

☞ To Foreign Lands

I heard that you ask'd for something to prove this puzzle the  
New World,  
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,  
Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what  
you wanted.

☞ I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe  
and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off  
work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the  
deckhand singing on the steamboat deck, 5  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing  
as he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the  
morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at  
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young  
fellows, robust, friendly, 10  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

☞ Poets to Come

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!  
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,  
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than  
before known,  
Arouse! for you must justify me.

I myself but write one or two indicative words  
for the future, 5  
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the  
darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a  
casual look upon you and then averts his face,  
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,  
Expecting the main things from you.

☞ To You

Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why  
should you not speak to me?  
And why should I not speak to you?

☞ Thou Reader

Thou reader throbbest life and pride and love the same as I,  
Therefore for thee the following chants.

BOOK III

☞ Song of Myself

I.  
I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
  
I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer  
grass. 5  
  
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this  
air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their  
parents the same,  
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
Hoping to cease not till death.  
  
Creeds and schools in abeyance, 10  
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never  
forgotten,  
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,  
Nature without check with original energy.

2.  
Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded  
with perfumes,  
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the  
distillation, it is odorless,  
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it, 5  
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and  
naked,  
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,  
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch  
and vine,  
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the  
passing of blood and air through my lungs, 10  
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and  
dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,

The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies  
of the wind,  
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,  
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs  
wag,  
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields  
and hill-sides, 15  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising  
from bed and meeting the sun.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the  
earth much?

Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin  
of all poems, 20

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are  
millions of suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look  
through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in  
books,

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from  
me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

5.

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to  
you,

And you must not be abased to the other.

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

Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice. 5

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,  
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd  
over upon me,

And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your  
tongue to my bare-stript heart,  
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my  
feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge  
that pass all the argument of the earth, 10

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,

And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the  
women my sisters and lovers,

And that a kelson of the creation is love,

And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields, 15

And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,

And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein  
and poke-weed.

11.

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,

Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;

Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,

She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the  
window. 5

Which of the young men does she like the best?

Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,

You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth  
bather, 10  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

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

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,  
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs. 15

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

12.  
The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife  
at the stall in the market,  
I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down.

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

From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their  
movements, 5  
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,  
Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so  
sure,  
They do not hasten, each man hits in his place.

IO

13.  
The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block  
swags underneath on its tied-over chain,  
The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and  
tall he stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,  
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens  
over his hip-band,  
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his  
hat away from his forehead,  
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of  
his polish'd and perfect limbs. 5

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

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as  
forward sluing,  
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object  
missing,  
Absorbing all to myself and for this song. 10

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

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

I believe in those wing'd purposes, 15  
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,

II

And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,  
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not  
something else,  
And the in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty  
well to me,  
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.      20

