



LEAVES OF GRASS

WALT WHITMAN

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GIBBS
SMITH

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TO ENRICH AND INSPIRE HUMANKIND

CONTENTS

Preface	XIV
INSCRIPTIONS	1
One's-Self I Sing	1
As I Ponder'd in Silence	1
In Cabin'd Ships at Sea	2
To Foreign Lands	3
To a Historian	3
To Thee Old Cause	3
Eidólons	4
For Him I Sing	6
When I Read the Book	6
Beginning My Studies	6
Beginners	7
To the States	7
On Journeys Through the States	7
To a Certain Cantatrice	8
Me Imperturbe	8
Savantism	8
The Ship Starting	8
I Hear America Singing	9
What Place Is Besieged?	9
Still Though the One I Sing	9
Shut Not Your Doors	9
Poets to Come	10
To You	10
Thou Reader	10
STARTING FROM PAUMANOK	10
SONG OF MYSELF	21
CHILDREN OF ADAM	72
To the Garden the World	72
From Pent-Up Aching Rivers	73
I Sing the Body Electric	75
A Woman Waits for Me	82
Spontaneous Me	83
One Hour to Madness and Joy	85
Out of the Rolling Ocean the Crowd	86
Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals	86
We Two, How Long We Were Fool'd	87
O Hymen! O Hymenee!	87
I Am He That Aches with Love	87
Native Moments	88
Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City	88
I Heard You Solemn-Sweet Pipes of the Organ	88
Facing West from California's Shores	89

As Adam Early in the Morning	89
CALAMUS	89
In Paths Untrodden	89
Scented Herbage of My Breast	90
Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand	91
For You, O Democracy	93
These I Singing in Spring	93
Not Heaving from My Ribb'd Breast Only	94
Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances	95
The Base of All Metaphysics	95
Recorders Ages Hence	96
When I Heard at the Close of the Day	97
Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me?	97
Roots and Leaves Themselves Alone	98
Not Heat Flames Up and Consumes	98
Trickle Drops	99
City of Orgies	99
Behold This Swarthy Face	99
I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing	100
To a Stranger	100
This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful	100
I Hear It Was Charged Against Me	101
The Prairie-Grass Dividing	101
When I Peruse the Conquer'd Fame	101
We Two Boys Together Clinging	102
A Promise to California	102
Here the Frailest Leaves of Me	102
No Labor-Saving Machine	102
A Glimpse	103
A Leaf for Hand in Hand	103
Earth, My Likeness	103
I Dream'd in a Dream	103
What Think You I Take My Pen in Hand?	104
To the East and to the West	104
Sometimes with One I Love	104
To a Western Boy	104
Fast Anchor'd Eternal O Love!	105
Among the Multitude	105
O You Whom I Often and Silently Come	105
That Shadow My Likeness	105
Full of Life Now	105
SALUT AU MONDE!	106
SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD	115
CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY	124
SONG OF THE ANSWERER	129
OUR OLD FEUILLAGE	133

A SONG OF JOYS	138
SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE	144
SONG OF THE EXPOSITION	154
SONG OF THE REDWOOD-TREE	162
A SONG FOR OCCUPATIONS	166
A SONG OF THE ROLLING EARTH	173
YOUTH, DAY, OLD AGE AND NIGHT	177
BIRDS OF PASSAGE	178
Song of the Universal	178
Pioneers! O Pioneers!	180
To You	183
France (<i>the 18th Year of these States</i>)	185
Myself and Mine	186
Year of Meteors (<i>1859-60</i>)	188
With Antecedents	189
A BROADWAY PAGEANT	190
SEA-DRIFT	194
Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking	194
As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life	199
Tears	201
To the Man-of-War-Bird	202
Aboard at a Ship's Helm	202
On the Beach at Night	203
The World Below the Brine	204
On the Beach at Night Alone	204
Song for All Seas, All Ships	205
Patroling Barnegat	206
After the Sea-Ship	206
BY THE ROADSIDE	207
A Boston Ballad (<i>1854</i>)	207
Europe (<i>The 72d and 73d Years of These States</i>)	209
A Hand-Mirror	210
Gods	210
Germs	211
Thoughts	211
When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer	212
Perfections	212
O Me! O Life!	212
To a President	212
I Sit and Look Out	213
To Rich Givers	213
The Dalliance of the Eagles	213
Roaming in Thought (<i>After reading Hegel</i>)	214
A Farm Picture	214
A Child's Amaze	214

The Runner	214
Beautiful Women	214
Mother and Babe	214
Thought	214
Visor'd	215
Thought	215
Gliding O'er all	215
Hast Never Come to Thee an Hour	215
Thought	215
To Old Age	215
Locations and Times	215
Offerings	215
To the States (<i>To Identify the 16th, 17th, or 18th Presidentiad</i>)	216
DRUM-TAPS	216
First O Songs for a Prelude	216
Eighteen Sixty-One	218
Beat! Beat! Drums!	219
From Paumanok Starting I Fly Like a Bird	220
Song of the Banner at Daybreak	220
Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deeps	226
Virginia—The West	228
City of Ships	228
The Centenarian's Story	229
Cavalry Crossing a Ford	233
Bivouac on a Mountain Side	233
An Army Corps on the March	233
By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame	234
Come Up from the Fields Father	234
Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night	235
A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown	237
A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim	238
As Toilsome I Wander'd Virginia's Woods	238
Not the Pilot	239
Year That Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me	239
The Wound-Dresser	239
Long, Too Long America	242
Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun	242
Dirge for Two Veterans	244
Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice	245
I Saw Old General at Bay	245
The Artilleryman's Vision	246
Ethiopia Saluting the Colors	247
Not Youth Pertains to Me	247
Race of Veterans	248
World Take Good Notice	248

O Tan-Faced Prairie-Boy	248
Look Down Fair Moon	248
Reconciliation	248
How Solemn As One by One (<i>Washington City, 1865</i>)	249
As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado	249
Delicate Cluster	250
To a Certain Civilian	250
Lo, Victress on the Peaks	250
Spirit Whose Work Is Done (<i>Washington City, 1865</i>)	251
Adieu to a Soldier	251
Turn O Libertad	252
To the Leaven'd Soil They Trod	252
MEMORIES OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN	253
When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd	253
O Captain! My Captain!	260
Hush'd Be the Camps To-Day (<i>May 4, 1865</i>)	261
This Dust Was Once the Man	261
BY BLUE ONTARIO'S SHORE	262
Reversals	275
AUTUMN RIVULETS	275
As Consequent, Etc.	275
The Return of the Heroes	276
There Was a Child Went Forth	281
Old Ireland	282
The City Dead-House	283
This Compost	284
To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire	285
Unnamed Land	287
Song of Prudence	288
The Singer in the Prison	290
Warble for Lilac-Time	292
Outlines for a Tomb (<i>G. P., Buried 1870</i>)	293
Out from Behind This Mask (<i>To Confront a Portrait</i>)	295
Vocalism	296
To Him That Was Crucified	297
You Felons on Trial in Courts	297
Laws for Creations	298
To a Common Prostitute	298
I Was Looking a Long While	299
Thought	299
Miracles	299
Sparkles from the Wheel	300
To a Pupil	301
Unfolded out of the Folds	301
What Am I After All	302
Kosmos	302
Others May Praise What They Like	302

Who Learns My Lesson Complete?	303
Tests	304
The Torch	304
O Star of France (1870-71).	304
The Ox-Tamer	305
An Old Man's Thought of School (<i>For the Inauguration of a Public School, Camden, New Jersey, 1874</i>)	306
Wandering at Morn	307
Italian Music in Dakota (<i>"The Seventeenth—the finest Regimental Band I ever heard."</i>)	308
With All Thy Gifts	308
My Picture-Gallery	308
The Prairie States	309
PROUD MUSIC OF THE STORM.	309
PASSAGE TO INDIA	314
PRAYER OF COLUMBUS	322
THE SLEEPERS.	324
TRANSPPOSITIONS	332
TO THINK OF TIME	332
WHISPERS OF HEAVENLY DEATH.	337
Darest Thou Now O Soul	337
Whispers of Heavenly Death	338
Chanting the Square Deific	338
Of Him I Love Day and Night	340
Yet, Yet, Ye Downcast Hours	340
As If a Phantom Caress'd Me	341
Assurances	341
Quicksand Years	342
That Music Always Round Me	342
What Ship Puzzled at Sea	343
A Noiseless Patient Spider	343
O Living Always, Always Dying	343
To One Shortly to Die	343
Night on the Prairies	344
Thought	345
The Last Invocation	345
As I Watch the Ploughman Ploughing	345
Pensive and Faltering	346
THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD	346
A PAUMANOK PICTURE	351
FROM NOON TO STARRY NIGHT	351
Thou Orb Aloft Full-Dazzling	351
Faces	352

The Mystic Trumpeter	355
To a Locomotive in Winter	358
O Magnet-South	359
Mannahatta	360
All Is Truth.	361
A Riddle Song	362
Excelsior	363
Ah Poverties, Wincings, and Sulky Retreats	363
Thoughts	364
Mediums	364
Weave in, My Hardy Life.	365
Spain, 1873-74.	365
By Broad Potomac's Shore	366
From Far Dakota's Cañons (<i>June 25, 1876</i>)	366
Old War-Dreams	367
Thick-Sprinkled Bunting.	367
What Best I See in Thee	368
Spirit That Form'd This Scene	368
As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days	369
A Clear Midnight	369
SONGS OF PARTING	370
As the Time Draws Nigh	370
Years of the Modern.	370
Ashes of Soldiers	371
Thoughts	373
Song at Sunset	374
As at Thy Portals Also Death	376
My Legacy	376
Pensive on Her Dead Gazing	377
Camps of Green	378
The Sobbing of the Bells (<i>Midnight, Sept. 19-20, 1881</i>)	379
As They Draw to a Close	379
Joy, Shipmate, Joy!	379
The Untold Want	379
Portals	380
These Carols	380
Now Finalè to the Shore	380
So Long!	380
SANDS AT SEVENTY	383
Mannahatta	383
Paumanok	383
From Montauk Point	383
To Those Who've Fail'd	383
A Carol Closing Sixty-Nine	383
The Bravest Soldiers	384
A Font of Type	384

As I Sit Writing Here	384
My Canary Bird	384
Queries to My Seventieth Year	384
The Wallabout Martyrs	385
The First Dandelion	385
America	385
Memories	385
To-Day and Thee	385
After the Dazzle of Day	386
Abraham Lincoln, Born Feb. 12, 1809	386
Out of May's Shows Selected	386
Halcyon Days	386
FANCIES AT NAVESINK	386
The Pilot in the Mist	386
Had I the Choice	387
You Tides with Ceaseless Swell	387
Last of Ebb, and Daylight Waning	387
And Yet Not You Alone	388
Proudly the Flood Comes In	388
By That Long Scan of Waves	388
Then Last Of All	388
Election Day, November, 1884	389
With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea!	389
Death of General Grant	390
Red Jacket (<i>From Aloft</i>)	390
Washington's Monument February, 1885	391
Of That Blithe Throat of Thine	391
Broadway	392
To Get the Final Lilt of Songs	392
Old Salt Kossabone	392
The Dead Tenor	393
Continuities	393
Yonnonidio	394
Life	394
"Going Somewhere"	394
Small the Theme of My Chant	395
True Conquerors	395
The United States to Old World Critics	395
The Calming Thought of All	396
Thanks in Old Age	396
Life and Death	396
The Voice of the Rain	397
Soon Shall the Winter's Foil Be Here	397
While Not the Past Forgetting	397
The Dying Veteran	398
Stronger Lessons	398
A Prairie Sunset	398

Twenty Years	399
Orange Buds by Mail from Florida	399
Twilight	400
You Lingering Sparse Leaves of Me	400
Not Meagre, Latent Boughs Alone	400
The Dead Emperor	400
As the Greek's Signal Flame	400
The Dismantled Ship	401
Now Precedent Songs, Farewell	401
An Evening Lull	401
Old Age's Lambent Peaks	401
After the Supper and Talk	402
GOOD-BYE MY FANCY	402
Sail out for Good, Eidólon Yacht!	402
Lingering Last Drops	403
Good-Bye My Fancy	403
On, On the Same, Ye Jocund Twain!	403
My 71st Year	403
Apparitions	404
The Pallid Wreath	404
An Ended Day	404
Old Age's Ship & Crafty Death's	404
To the Pending Year	405
Shakspeare-Bacon's Cipher	405
Long, Long Hence	405
Bravo, Paris Exposition!	405
Interpolation Sounds	406
To the Sun-Set Breeze	406
Old Chants	407
A Christmas Greeting	407
Sounds of the Winter	408
A Twilight Song	408
When the Full-Grown Poet Came	409
Osceola	409
A Voice from Death	409
A Persian Lesson	411
The Commonplace	411
"The Rounded Catalogue Divine Complete"	412
Mirages	412
L. of G.'s Purport	412
The Unexpress'd	413
Grand Is the Seen	413
Unseen Buds	414
Good-Bye My Fancy!	414

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.

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,
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,
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,
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.

In Cabin'd Ships at Sea

In cabin'd ships at sea,
The boundless blue on every side expanding,
With whistling winds and music of the waves, the large
 imperious waves,
Or some lone bark buoy'd on the dense marine,
Where joyous full of faith, spreading white sails,
She cleaves the ether mid the sparkle and the foam of day, or
 under many a star at night,
By sailors young and old haply will I, a reminiscence of the
 land, be read,
In full rapport at last.

*Here are our thoughts, voyagers' thoughts,
Here not the land, firm land, alone appears, may then by them
 be said,
The sky o'erarches here, we feel the undulating deck beneath
 our feet,
We feel the long pulsation, ebb and flow of endless motion,
The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast suggestions of
 the briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables,
The perfume, the faint creaking of the cordage, the melancholy
 rhythm,
The boundless vista and the horizon far and dim are all here,
And this is ocean's poem.*

Then falter not O book, fulfil your destiny,
You not a reminiscence of the land alone,
You too as a lone bark cleaving the ether, purpos'd I know not
 whither, yet ever full of faith,
Consort to every ship that sails, sail you!
Bear forth to them folded my love, (dear mariners, for you I
 fold it here in every leaf;)
Speed on my book! spread your white sails my little bark
 athwart the imperious waves,
Chant on, sail on, bear o'er the boundless blue from me to
 every sea,
This song for mariners and all their ships.

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.

To a Historian

You who celebrate bygones,
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races, the
 life that has exhibited itself,
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics, aggre-
 gates, rulers and priests,
I, habitan of the Alleghanies, treating of him as he is in him-
 self in his own rights,
Pressing the pulse of the life that has seldom exhibited itself,
 (the great pride of man in himself,)
Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future.

To Thee Old Cause

To thee old cause!
Thou peerless, passionate, good cause,
Thou stern, remorseless, sweet idea,
Deathless throughout the ages, races, lands,
After a strange sad war, great war for thee,
(I think all war through time was really fought, and ever will
 be really fought, for thee.)
These chants for thee, the eternal march of thee.

(A war O soldiers not for itself alone,
Far, far more stood silently waiting behind, now to advance in
 this book.)

Thou orb of many orbs!
Thou seething principle! thou well-kept, latent germ! thou
 centre!
Around the idea of thee the war revolving,
With all its angry and vehement play of causes,
(With vast results to come for thrice a thousand years,)
These recitatives for thee,—my book and the war are one,
Merged in its spirit I and mine, as the contest hinged on thee,
As a wheel on its axis turns, this book unwitting to itself,
Around the idea of thee.

Eidólons

I met a seer,
Passing the hues and objects of the world,
The fields of art and learning, pleasure, sense,
 To glean eidólons.
Put in thy chants said he,
No more the puzzling hour nor day, nor segments, parts, put in,
Put first before the rest as light for all and entrance-song of all,
 That of eidólons.
Ever the dim beginning,
Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle,
Ever the summit and the merge at last, (to surely start again,)
 Eidólons! eidólons!
Ever the mutable,
Ever materials, changing, crumbling, re-cohering,
Ever the ateliers, the factories divine,
 Issuing eidólons.
Lo, I or you,
Or woman, man, or state, known or unknown,
We seeming solid wealth, strength, beauty build,
 But really build eidólons.
The ostent evanescent,
The substance of an artist's mood or savan's studies long,
Or warrior's, martyr's, hero's toils,
 To fashion his eidólón.
Of every human life,
(The units gather'd, posted, not a thought, emotion, deed, left
 out,)
The whole or large or small summ'd, added up,
 In its eidólón.
The old, old urge,
Based on the ancient pinnacles, lo, newer, higher pinnacles,
From science and the modern still impell'd,
 The old, old urge, eidólons.
The present now and here,
America's busy, teeming, intricate whirl,
Of aggregate and segregate for only thence releasing,
 To-day's eidólons.

These with the past,
Of vanish'd lands, of all the reigns of kings across the sea,
Old conquerors, old campaigns, old sailors' voyages,
 Joining eidólons.
Densities, growth, facades,
Strata of mountains, soils, rocks, giant trees,
Far-born, far-dying, living long, to leave,
 Eidólons everlasting.
Exaltè, rapt, ecstatic,
The visible but their womb of birth,
Of orbic tendencies to shape and shape and shape,
 The mighty earth-eidolon.
All space, all time,
(The stars, the terrible perturbations of the suns,
Swelling, collapsing, ending, serving their longer, shorter use,)
 Fill'd with eidólons only.
The noiseless myriads,
The infinite oceans where the rivers empty,
The separate countless free identities, like eyesight,
 The true realities, eidólons.
Not this the world,
Nor these the universes, they the universes,
Purport and end, ever the permanent life of life,
 Eidólons, eidólons.
Beyond thy lectures learn'd professor,
Beyond thy telescope or spectroscope observer keen, beyond all
 mathematics,
Beyond the doctor's surgery, anatomy, beyond the chemist
 with his chemistry,
 The entities of entities, eidólons.
Unfix'd yet fix'd,
Ever shall be, ever have been and are,
Sweeping the present to the infinite future,
 Eidólons, eidólons, eidólons.
The prophet and the bard,
Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,
Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, interpret yet to
 them,
 God and eidólons.

And thee my soul,
Joys, ceaseless exercises, exaltations,
Thy yearning amply fed at last, prepared to meet,
Thy mates, eidólons.
Thy body permanent,
The body lurking there within thy body,
The only purport of the form thou art, the real I myself,
An image, an eidólon.
Thy very songs not in thy songs,
No special strains to sing, none for itself,
But from the whole resulting, rising at last and floating,
A round full-orb'd eidólon.

For Him I Sing

For him I sing,
I raise the present on the past,
(As some perennial tree out of its roots, the present on the
past.)
With time and space I him dilate and fuse the immortal laws,
To make himself by them the law unto himself.

When I Read the Book

When I read the book, the biography famous,
And is this then (said I) what the author calls a man's life?
And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my life?
(As if any man really knew aught of my life,
Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing of my
real life,
Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clews and indirections
I seek for my own use to trace out here.)

Beginning My Studies

Beginning my studies the first step pleas'd me so much,
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion,
The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any farther,
But stop and loiter all the time to sing it in ecstatic songs.

Beginners

How they are provided for upon the earth, (appearing at
intervals.)
How dear and dreadful they are to the earth,
How they inure to themselves as much as to any—what a
paradox appears their age,
How people respond to them, yet know them not,
How there is something relentless in their fate all times,
How all times mischoose the objects of their adulation and
reward,
And how the same inexorable price must still be paid for the
same great purchase.

To the States

To the States or any one of them, or any city of the States,
Resist much, obey little,
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,
Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city of this earth, ever
afterward resumes its liberty.

On Journeys Through the States

On journeys through the States we start,
(Ay through the world, urged by these songs,
Sailing henceforth to every land, to every sea,)
We willing learners of all, teachers of all, and lovers of all.
We have watch'd the seasons dispensing themselves and
passing on,
And have said, Why should not a man or woman do as much as
the seasons, and effuse as much?
We dwell a while in every city and town,
We pass through Kanada, the North-east, the vast valley of
the Mississippi, and the Southern States,
We confer on equal terms with each of the States,
We make trial of ourselves and invite men and women to hear,
We say to ourselves, Remember, fear not, be candid, promulge
the body and the soul,
Dwell a while and pass on, be copious, temperate, chaste,
magnetic,
And what you effuse may then return as the seasons return,
And may be just as much as the seasons.

To a Certain Cantatrice

Here, take this gift,
I was reserving it for some hero, speaker, or general,
One who should serve the good old cause, the great idea, the
progress and freedom of the race,
Some brave confronter of despots, some daring rebel;
But I see that what I was reserving belongs to you just as
much as to any.

Me Imperturbe

Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,
Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in the midst of irrational
things,
Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,
Finding my occupation, poverty, notoriety, foibles, crimes, less
important than I thought,
Me toward the Mexican sea, or in the Mannahatta or the
Tennessee, or far north or inland,
A river man, or a man of the woods or of any farm-life of these
States or of the coast, or the lakes or Kanada,
Me wherever my life is lived, O to be self-balanced for
contingencies,
To confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs,
as the trees and animals do.

Savantism

Thither as I look I see each result and glory retracing itself
and nestling close, always obligated,
Thither hours, months, years—thither trades, compacts, estab-
lishments, even the most minute,
Thither every-day life, speech, utensils, politics, persons,
estates;
Thither we also, I with my leaves and songs, trustful,
admirant,
As a father to his father going takes his children along with him.

The Ship Starting

Lo, the unbounded sea,
On its breast a ship starting, spreading all sails, carrying even
her moonsails.
The pennant is flying aloft as she speeds she speeds so
stately— below emulous waves press forward,
They surround the ship with shining curving motions and foam.

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,
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,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

What Place Is Besieged?

What place is besieged, and vainly tries to raise the siege?
Lo, I send to that place a commander, swift, brave, immortal,
And with him horse and foot, and parks of artillery,
And artillery-men, the deadliest that ever fired gun.

Still Though the One I Sing

Still though the one I sing,
(One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to Nationality,
I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection! O
quenchless, indispensable fire!)

Shut Not Your Doors

Shut not your doors to me proud libraries,
For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet
needed most, I bring,
Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made,
The words of my book nothing, the drift of it every thing,
A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the intellect,
But you ye untold latencies will thrill to every page.