



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

— ❦ —
Excerpt from “Song of Myself”

Culver Pictures

Whitman, Walt (1819-1892),
American poet, whose work boldly
asserts the worth of the individual and
the oneness of all humanity.

His Influence

Whitman's defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Life

- 1819: Huntington, New York
- a particularly close relationship with his mother
- moved to Brooklyn, New York, attended public school for six years before being apprenticed to a printer
- Two years later to New York City to work in printing shops
- 1835 returned to Long Island and taught in country schools



This picture is a gentle
homage. We colorized a
classic image of Whitman
and placed him behind
"Walt's Tree"

[http://www.liglobal.com/wal
t/birthplace.shtml](http://www.liglobal.com/walt/birthplace.shtml)

- In 1838 and 1839: edited a newspaper, the *Long-Islander*, in Huntington.
- When he became bored with the job, he went back to New York City to work as a printer and journalist.
- There he enjoyed the theater, the opera, and—always an omnivorous reader—the libraries.
- Whitman wrote poems and stories for popular magazines and made political speeches.
- Democrats rewarded him with the editorship of various short-lived newspapers.

Emerson meets Whitman.

- In an 1842 lecture, American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson called for an authentic American culture to celebrate the common, everyday things in American life.
- According to author **Jim Cullen**, the young poet Walt Whitman heard Emerson's lecture and heeded his call. During the next decade Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass*, a book of poems that extolled the people and places of the United States.

(ftp://fl.hfu.edu.tw/pub/am/Emerson_met_Whitman.txt)

- For two years Whitman edited the influential Brooklyn Eagle, but he lost his position for supporting the Free-Soil party.
- After a brief sojourn in New Orleans, Louisiana, he returned to Brooklyn, where he tried to start a Free-Soil newspaper.
- After several years spent at various jobs, including building houses, Whitman began writing a new kind of poetry and thereafter neglected business.

Leaves of Grass

- In 1855 Whitman issued the first of many editions of *Leaves of Grass*, a volume of poetry in a new kind of versification, far different from his sentimental rhymed verse of the 1840s.
- Because he immodestly praised the human body and glorified the senses, Whitman was forced to publish the book at his own expense, setting some of the type himself.

- His name did not appear on the title page, but the engraved frontispiece portrait shows him posed, arms akimbo, in shirt sleeves, hat cocked at a rakish angle.



- In a long preface he announced a new democratic literature, “**commensurate with a people,**” simple and unconquerable, written by a new kind of poet who was affectionate, brawny, and heroic and who would lead by the force of his magnetic personality.
- Whitman spent the rest of his life striving to become that poet.

- The 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* contained 12 untitled poems, written in long cadenced lines that resemble the unrhymed verse of the King James Version of the Bible.
- The longest and generally considered the best, later entitled “**Song of Myself**,” was a vision of a symbolic “I” enraptured by the senses, vicariously embracing all people and places from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.
- No other poem in the first edition has the power of this poem, although “**The Sleepers**,” another visionary flight, symbolizing life, death, and rebirth, comes nearest.

Later Editions

- Stimulated by a letter of congratulations from the eminent New England essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, Whitman hastily put together another edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856), with revisions and additions; he would continue to revise the collection throughout his life.

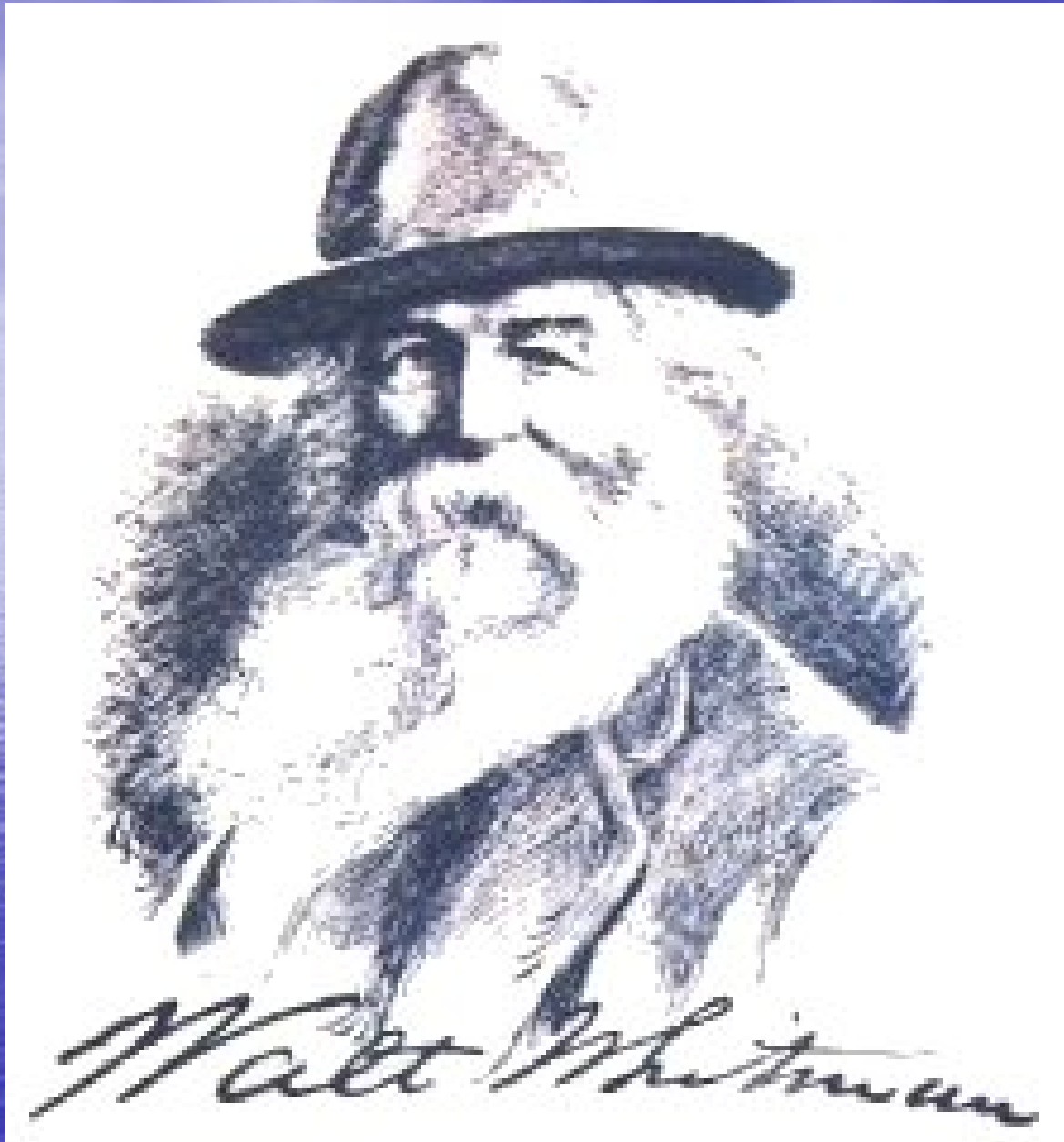
See NAAL 1033

- The most significant 1856 poem is “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” in which the poet vicariously joins his readers and all past and future ferry passengers. In the third edition (1860), Whitman began to give his poetry a more allegorical structure (*see Allegory*).

- In “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” a mockingbird (the voice of nature) teaches a little boy (the future poet) the meaning of death.
- Italian opera, of which Whitman was extremely fond, strongly influenced the music of this poem.
- Two new clusters of poems, “Children of Adam” and “Calamus,” deal with sexual love and male friendship.

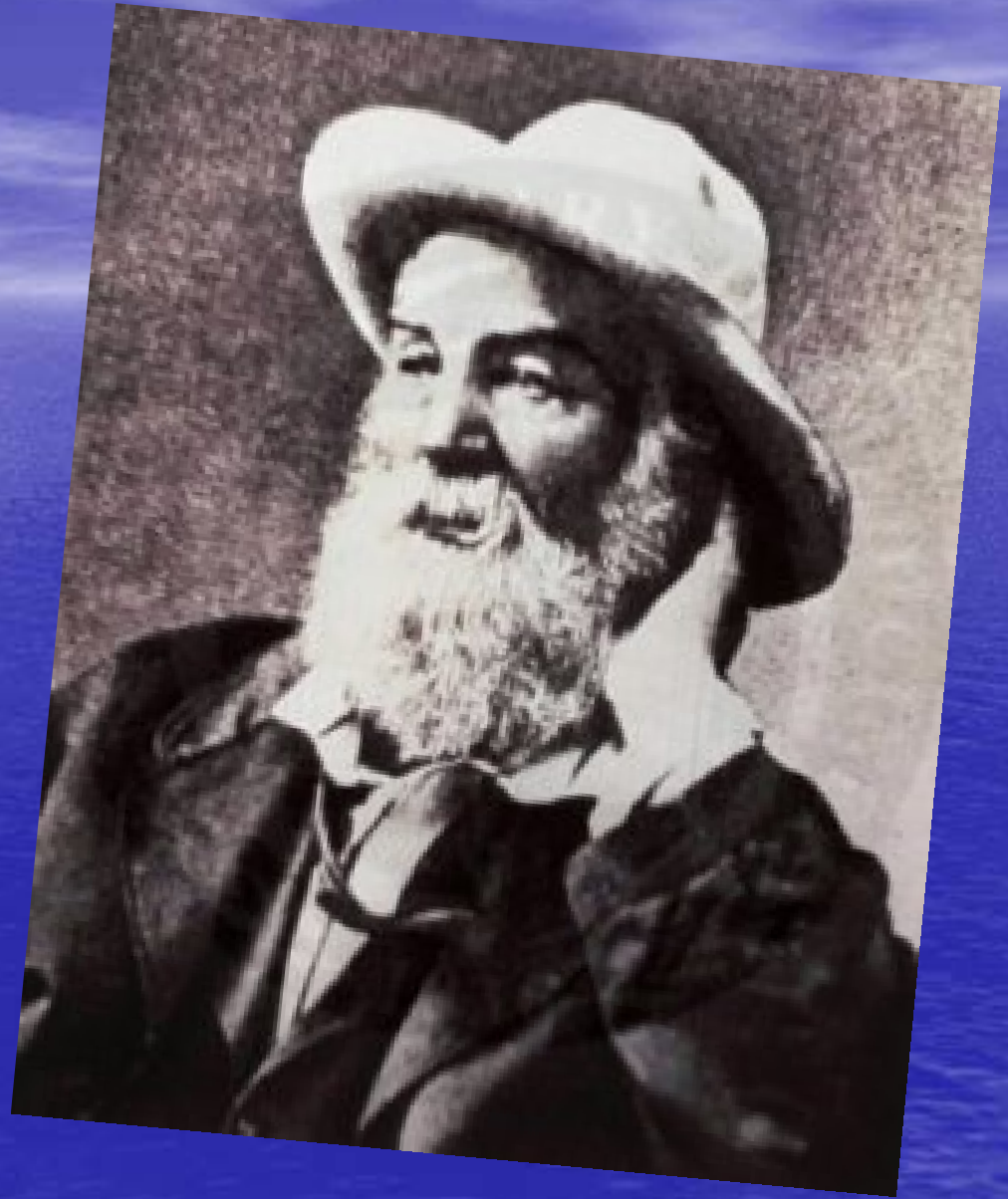
- *Drum-Taps* (1865, later added to the 1867 edition of *Leaves*) reflects Whitman's deepening awareness of the significance of the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the hope for reconciliation between North and South.
- *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1866) contains "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the great elegy for President Abraham Lincoln, and one of Whitman's most popular works, "O Captain! My Captain!" "Passage to India" (1871) used modern communications and transportation as symbols for its transcendent vision of the union of East and West and of the soul with God.

- Finally, in **1881**, Whitman arranged his poems to his satisfaction, but he continued to add new poems to the various editions of *Leaves of Grass* until the final version was produced in 1892. A posthumous cluster, “Old Age Echoes,” appeared in 1897. All of his poems were included in the definitive “Reader’s Edition” of *Leaves of Grass* (1965), edited by Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley.



- *Picture of Whitman in the Broadway Station of the PATCO Hi-Speed Line*

- Walt Whitman, who spent his last years in Camden, NJ, toiled long hours tending to the needs of sick and injured soldiers during the Civil War. His notes and writings about this period give a fascinating insight into the poet and this sad time in United States history.



CIVIL WAR AND LATER LIFE

- During the Civil War Whitman ministered to wounded soldiers in Union army hospitals in **Washington, D.C.** He remained there, working as a government clerk, until 1873, when he suffered a stroke that left him **partially paralyzed**.
- **The Wound Dresser** (Medical Humanities: Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database, NYU School of Medicine)
An annotation about Whitman's poem with a link to the **online text** at Bartleby.com.
- He then went to live with his brother George in Camden, New Jersey, until 1884, when he bought his own house.

from Whitman's **Drum Taps** and Washington's Civil War Hospitals

- "The expression of American personality through this war is not to be looked for in the great campaign, & the battle-fights. It is to be looked for . . . in the hospitals, among the wounded."
- <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/hospital/whitman.htm>



- Walt Whitman's house
Mickle Boulevard
Camden, New Jersey 08103
(856) 964-5383

- He lived there, writing and revising *Leaves of Grass*, despite failing health, until his death. In his later years Whitman also wrote some prose of lasting value.

- The essays in *Democratic Vistas* (1871) are now considered a classic discussion of the theory of democracy and its possibilities.
- The collection *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882) contains his earliest recollections, descriptions of the war years and of the assassination of Lincoln, and nature notes written in old age.



Be simple and
True with
American
raised on a
lady and
less than

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwhtml/wwcoll.html>

- **Notebooks and Butterfly**
- This collection offers access to the four **Walt Whitman Notebooks** and a cardboard butterfly that disappeared from the Library of Congress in 1942. They were returned on February 24, 1995.

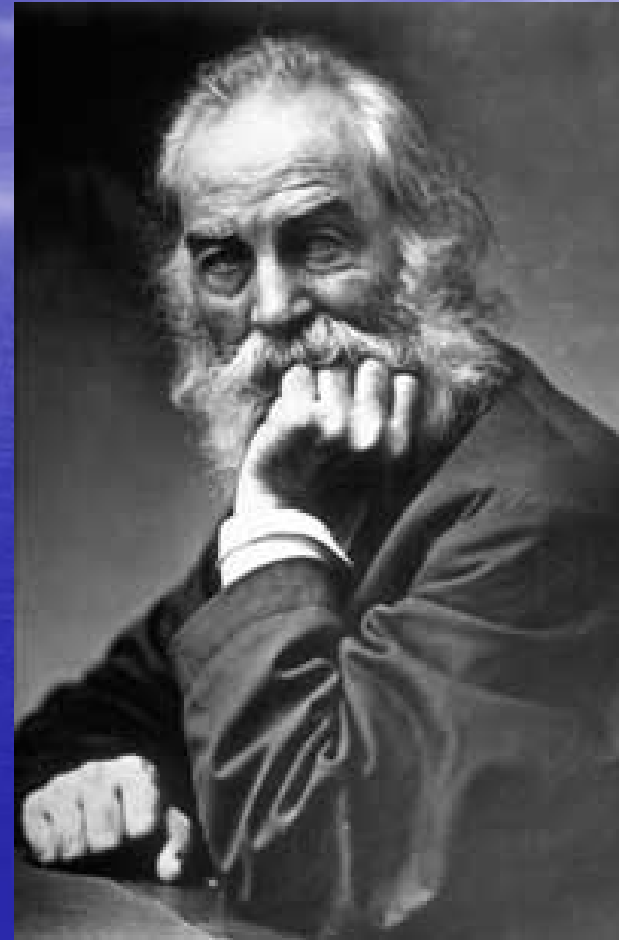


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Whitman's Reputation

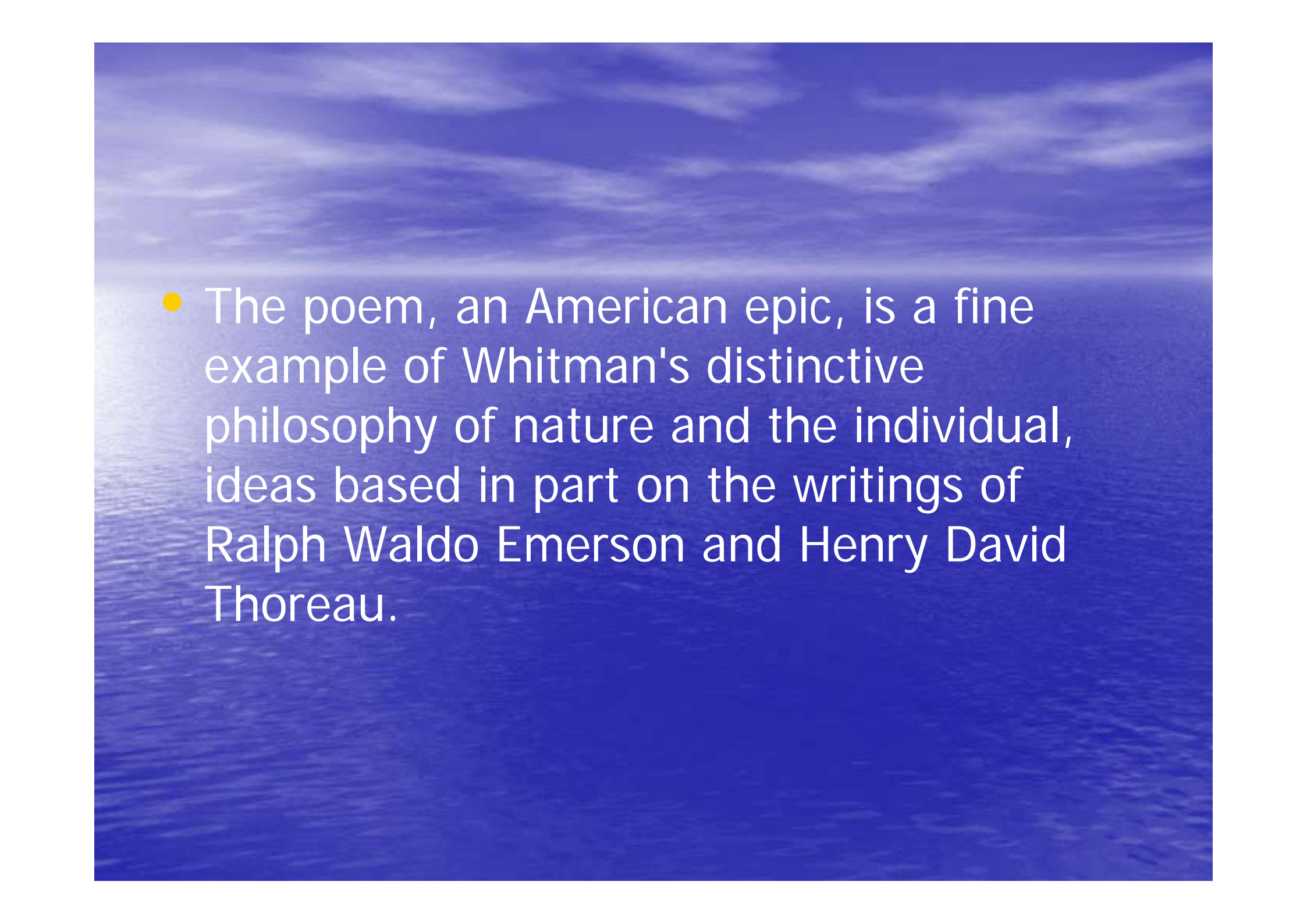
- Today, Whitman's poetry has been translated into every major language. It is widely recognized as a formative influence on the work of such American writers as Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens.
- Allen Ginsberg in particular was inspired by Whitman's bold treatment of sexuality.

- Many modern scholars have sought to assess Whitman's life and literary career. Works such as the 5-volume edition of his correspondence (1961-1969) and the 16-volume definitive edition of his *Collected Writings* (1963-1980) provide a balanced view of his achievements.



Song of Myself

- The sensual “*Song of Myself*”, which appeared under another title in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), is by far Walt Whitman's best-known poem.
- At the time of publication, the free verse and frank sexual content of the poem as exemplified in this excerpt, boldly distinguished Whitman's work from that of others in mid 19th century America.

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- The poem, an American epic, is a fine example of Whitman's distinctive philosophy of nature and the individual, ideas based in part on the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.



Song of Myself

Stanza 1 - 5

1

- 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.
- 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,

1

- I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
- Hoping to cease not till death.
- Creeds and schools in abeyance,
- 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,
- I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,

2

- 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,
- The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,

2

- 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,
- The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.

2

- Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?
- Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?
- Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?
- Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
- You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)

2

- 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.

3

- I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,
- But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.
- There was never any more inception than there is now,
- Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
- And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
- Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.
- Urge and urge and urge,
- Always the procreant urge of the world.

3

- Out of the dimness opposite equals advance,
always substance and increase, always sex,
- Always a knit of identity, always distinction,
always a breed of life.
- To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd
feel that it is so.
- Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the
uprights, well entretied, braced in the beams,
- Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty,
electrical,
- I and this mystery here we stand.
- Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet
is all that is not my soul.

3

- Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
- Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.
- Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,
- Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

3

- Welcome is every organ and attribute of me,
and of any man hearty and clean,
- Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and
none shall be less familiar than the rest.
- I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;
- As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at
my side through the night, and withdraws at the
peep of the day with stealthy tread,

3

- Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty,
- Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,
- That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
- And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
- Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?

4

- Trippers and askers surround me,
- People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,
- The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,
- My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
- The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,

4

- The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
- Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;
- These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
- But they are not the Me myself.

4

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

4

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

5

- I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
- And you must not be abased to the other.
- Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
- Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,
- Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd 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.

5

- Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
- And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
- And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
- And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,

5

- a metal or wooden beam attached to the upper side of a boat's keel to reinforce it

- And that a kelson of the creation is love,
- And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
- And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
- And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

The Runaway Slave

- American poet Walt Whitman's famous "Song of Myself" addresses the great hardship that runaway slaves faced in a section of the tenth stanza.
- Not only did they risk injury, exhaustion, and starvation, they were rarely certain who would give them shelter and who would turn them in to the authorities.

- Whitman writes of having to “assure” the slave that he would be safe.
- The fact that the man in the poem has the slave sit next to him illustrates Whitman's belief in the equality of all humans.



Section of Stanza 10

- The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
- I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
- Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,
- And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
- And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
- And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse
- clean clothes,

- And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,
- And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
- He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
- I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

Do you know?

- Though he received little formal education, Whitman often attended the opera and also spent time studying great works of literature in the libraries of New York City.
- The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was not well received by the public, but was praised by American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson in a letter that Whitman published in the second edition.
- In 1865 Whitman was fired from a government job with the Department of the Interior after he was discovered to be the author of *Leaves of Grass*

Readings

- 1005: Preface
- 1019: Letter to Emerson
- 1030: Spontaneous Me
- 1033: Crossing Brooklyn Ferry
- 1038: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking
- 1049: When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd
- 1056: A Noiseless Spider
- 1100: Democratic Vistas

A white rectangular box containing the name "Walt Whitman" written in a black, cursive, handwritten style.

- Come, said my soul,
- Such verses for my body let us write, (for we are one,)
- That should I after death invisibly 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; Xas, first, I here
and now
- Signing for soul and body, set to them my name,

- 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, too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
- I above all promote brave soldiers.
- 1871

- 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 clues and indirections
- I seek for my own use to trace out here.)
- 1867

- 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.
- 1867

- 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 deck-hand 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.
- 1860

- Crossing Brooklyn Ferry
- 1
- Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
- Clouds of the west; Xsun there half an hour high; XI see you also face to face.
- Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!
- On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,
- And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

- 2

- The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,
- The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
- The similitudes of the past and those of the future,

- The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,
- The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,
- The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,
- The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.
- Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,

- Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
- Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,
- Others will see the islands large and small;
- Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,
- A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,
- Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

- 3
- It avails not, time nor place; distance avails not,
- I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,
- Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
- Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
- Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd,
- Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet was hurried,
- Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes of steamboats, I look'd.

- I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,
- Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,
- Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in strong
- shadow,
- Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south,
- Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,

- Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
- Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water,
- Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,
- Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,
- Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,
- Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,
- Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops,

- saw the ships at anchor,
- The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,
- The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants,
- The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,
- The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,
- The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,
- The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,
- The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite storehouses by the docks,
- On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the

- barges, the hay-boat, the belated lighter,
- On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into the night,
- Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over the tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets.

- SKIP to 9



- 9

- Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide,
and ebb with the ebb-tide!
- Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd
waves!
- Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench
with your splendor me, or the men and
women generations after me!
- Cross from shore to shore, countless
crowds of passengers!

- Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta!
stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!
- Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw
out questions and answers!
- Suspend here and everywhere, eternal
float of solution!
- Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the
house or street or public assembly!

- Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my nighest name!
- Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
- Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!
- Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;
- Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with the hasting current;

- Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;
- Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!
- Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sunlit water!
- Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd schooners, sloops, lighters!

- Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset!
- Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light over the tops of the houses!
- Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,
- You necessary film, continue to envelop the

- soul,
- About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our divinest aromas,
- Thrive, cities--bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,
- Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,
- Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.

- You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,
- We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward,
- Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,
- We use you, and do not cast you aside--we plant you permanently within us,
- We fathom you not--we love you--there is perfection in you also,
- You furnish your parts toward eternity,
- Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.
- 1856

OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING

- Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
- Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
- Out of the Ninth-month midnight,

OUT OF THE CRADLE ENDLESSLY ROCKING

- Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
- Down from the shower'd halo,
- Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,
- Out from the patches of briars and blackberries,

- From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
- From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I heard,
- From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears,
- From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,
- From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,

- From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
- From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
- From such as now they start the scene revisiting,
- As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
- Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
- A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,

- Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
- I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
- Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
- A reminiscence sing.
- *****

- TEARS

- Tears! tears! tears!
- In the night, in solitude, tears,
- On the white shore dripping, dripping, suck'd in by the sand,
- Tears, not a star shining, all dark and desolate,
- Moist tears from the eyes of a muffled head;
- O who is that ghost? that form in the dark, with tears?
- What shapeless lump is that, bent, crouch'd there on the sand?
- Streaming tears, sobbing tears, throes, choked with wild cries;
- O storm, embodied, rising, careering with swift steps along the beach!

- O wild and dismal night storm, with wind--
O belching and desperate!
- O shade so sedate and decorous by day,
with calm countenance and regulated
pace,
- But away at night as you fly, none
looking--O then the unloosen'd ocean,
- Of tears! tears! tears!

- 1867

WHEN I HEARD THE LEARN'D ASTRONOMER

- When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
- When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
- When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
- When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
- How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
- Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
- In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
- Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.
- 1865

PERFECTIONS

- Only themselves understand themselves and the like of themselves,
- As souls only understand souls.

Memories of President Lincoln

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D

- 1
- When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
- And the great star early droop'd in the western sky
in the night,
- I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning
spring.
- Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
- Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the
west
- And thought of him I love.

- 2

- O powerful western fallen star!
- O shades of night; XO moody, tearful night!
- O great star disappear'd; XO the black murk that hides the star!
- O cruel hands that hold me powerless; XO helpless soul of me!
- O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

- 3

- In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
- Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
- With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
- With every leaf a miracle; Xand from this bush in the dooryard,
- With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
- A sprig with its flower I break.

- 4

- In the swamp in secluded recesses,
- A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.
- Solitary the thrush,
- The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
- Sings by himself a song.
- Song of the bleeding throat,
- Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,
- If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

- 5

- Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
- Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray debris,
- Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
- Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
- Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,
- Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
- Night and day journeys a coffin.

- 6

- Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
- Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,
- With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,
- With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
- With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
- With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbarred heads,
- With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
- With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn,
- With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
- The dim-lit churches and the shuddering

- organs;Xwhere amid these you journey,
- With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
- Here, coffin that slowly passes,
- I give you my sprig of lilac.

- 7

- (Nor for you, for one alone,
- Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
- For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and sacred death.
- All over bouquets of roses,
- O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
- But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
- Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
- With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
- For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

- 8
- O western orb sailing the heaven,
- Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,
- As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
- As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
- As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on,)
- As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not what kept me from sleep,)
- As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,

- As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,
- As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,
- As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
- Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

● * * * * *

A noiseless patient spider,

- A noiseless patient spider,
- I mark'd where on little promontory it stood isolated,
- Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
- It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
- Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.
- And you O my soul where you stand,
- Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans

A noiseless patient spider,

- of space,
- Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,
seeking the spheres to connect them,
- Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the
ductile anchor hold,
- Till the gossamer thread you fling catch
somewhere, O my soul.
- (1862-3)

- O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
- And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
- And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?
- Sea-winds blown from east and west,
- Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
- These and with these and the breath of my chant,
- I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

- 11
- O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
- And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
- To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Links

- Biography of Whitman: <http://www.top-biography.com/9036-Walt%20Whitman/ataglance.htm>
- Manuscripts and notebooks: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwhtml/wwhome.html> at Library of Congress