

Extracts from Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman

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,  
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.

7

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

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

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

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

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,  
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,  
And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken away.

16

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,  
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,  
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,  
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff  
    that is fine,  
One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the

largest the same,  
A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and  
hospitable down by the Oconee I live,  
A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest  
joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,  
A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin  
leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,  
A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;  
At home on Kanadian snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen  
off Newfoundland,  
At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking,  
At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the  
Texan ranch,  
Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving  
their big proportions,)  
Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake hands  
and welcome to drink and meat,  
A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,  
A novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons,  
Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,  
A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,  
Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.

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

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

21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

46

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,  
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,

You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every  
moment of your life.

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

51

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

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

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

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

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

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

52

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

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

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

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

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

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

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