

*FROM INSCRIPTIONS*¹

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 physiognomy² 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.

1867, 1871

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, 5
But you ye untold latencies will thrill to every page.

1865, 1881

 Song of Myself¹

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. 5

1. This title was first used for the opening poems of *Leaves of Grass* in 1871; in 1881 the number of poems was increased from nine to twenty-four.

2. The practice of judging or interpreting human character from facial features.

1. In the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poem later called "Song of Myself" appeared without a title and without numbered sections or

stanzas. For the 1856 edition, Whitman titled it "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," and in the 1860 edition he titled it "Walt Whitman"; it retained that title in the 1867 and 1871 editions, and in the 1881 edition was named "Song of Myself." Whitman made numerous other changes to the poem from the first 1855 printing to the 1881 final version.

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, 15
 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,
 I am mad for it to be in contact with me. 20

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,
 The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the
 wind, 25
 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.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth
 much? 30
 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,)
 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, 35
 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, 40
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. 45

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,²
braced in the beams,
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical, 50
I and this mystery here we stand.

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

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, 55
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss
I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

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, 60
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 cipher³ and show me to a cent,
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is
ahead? 65

2. Cross-braced; reinforced.

3. Calculate.