



UNCLE WALT WHITMAN

“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 the 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.

“A Noiseless Patient Spider”

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark’d where on a 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 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.

"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.

"By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame"

By the bivouac's fitful flame
A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow--but first I note,
The tents of the sleeping army, the fields' and the woods' dim outline,
The darkness lit by spots of kindled fire, the silence,
Like a phantom far or near an occasional figure moving,
The shrubs and trees (as I lift my eyes they seem to be stealthily watching me),
While wind in procession thoughts, O tender and wondrous thoughts,
Of life and death, of home and the past an loved, and of those that are far away;
A solemn and slow procession there as I sit on the ground,
By the bivouac's fitful flame.

"Reconciliation"

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost;
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again,
and ever again, this soil'd world:
For my enemy is dead--a man divine as myself is dead;
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin -- I draw near;
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Excerpts from “Song of Myself”

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.

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,
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,

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.

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,)
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.

“Pioneers! O Pioneers!”

Come my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!

For we cannot tarry here,
We must march my darlings, we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing as we go the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We primeval forests felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within,
We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Colorado men are we,
From the peaks gigantic, from the great sierras and the high plateaus,
From the mine and from the gully, from the hunting trail we come,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

From Nebraska, from Arkansas,
Central inland race are we, from Missouri, with the continental
blood intervein'd,
All the hands of comrades clasping, all the Southern, all the Northern,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

O resistless restless race!

O beloved race in all! O my breast aches with tender love for all!

O I mourn and yet exult, I am rapt with love for all,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

Raise the mighty mother mistress,

Waving high the delicate mistress, over all the starry mistress,

(bend your heads all,)

Raise the fang'd and warlike mistress, stern, impassive, weapon'd mistress,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

See my children, resolute children,

By those swarms upon our rear we must never yield or falter,

Ages back in ghostly millions frowning there behind us urging,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

On and on the compact ranks,

With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill'd,

Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

O to die advancing on!

Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come?

Then upon the march we fittest die, soon and sure the gap is fill'd.

Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the pulses of the world,

Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat,

Holding single or together, steady moving to the front, all for us,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

Life's involv'd and varied pageants,

All the forms and shows, all the workmen at their work,

All the seamen and the landsmen, all the masters with their slaves,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the hapless silent lovers,

All the prisoners in the prisons, all the righteous and the wicked,

All the joyous, all the sorrowing, all the living, all the dying,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

I too with my soul and body,

We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way,

Through these shores amid the shadows, with the apparitions pressing,

Pioneers! O pioneers!

Lo, the darting bowling orb!
Lo, the brother orbs around, all the clustering suns and planets,
All the dazzling days, all the mystic nights with dreams,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

These are of us, they are with us,
All for primal needed work, while the followers there in embryo wait behind,
We to-day's procession heading, we the route for travel clearing,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you daughters of the West!
O you young and elder daughters! O you mothers and you wives!
Never must you be divided, in our ranks you move united,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Minstrels latent on the prairies!
(Shrouded bards of other lands, you may rest, you have done your work,)
Soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Not for delectations sweet,
Not the cushion and the slipper, not the peaceful and the studious,
Not the riches safe and palling, not for us the tame enjoyment,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Do the feasters gluttonous feast?
Do the corpulent sleepers sleep? have they lock'd and bolted doors?
Still be ours the diet hard, and the blanket on the ground,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Has the night descended?
Was the road of late so toilsome? did we stop discouraged nodding
on our way?
Yet a passing hour I yield you in your tracks to pause oblivious,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the daybreak call--hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind,
Swift! to the head of the army!--swift! spring to your places,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

“The Wound Dresser”

1

An old man bending I come among new faces,
Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,
Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love me,
(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead;)
Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,
Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the other was equally brave;)
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us?
What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains?

2

O maidens and young men I love and that love me,
What you ask of my days those the strangest and sudden your talking recalls,
Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and dust,
In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the rush of successful charge,
Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a swift running river they fade,
Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not on soldiers' perils or soldiers' joys,
(Both I remember well—many of the hardships, few the joys, yet I was content.)

But in silence, in dreams' projections,
While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,
So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off the sand,
With hinged knees returning I enter the doors, (while for you up there,
Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart.)

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass, the ground,
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd hospital,
To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return,
To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss,
An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries a refuse pail,
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd again.

I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds,
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,
One turns to me his appealing eyes—poor boy! I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you.

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
 The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,)
 The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
 Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
 (Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
 In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,
 I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
 Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head,
 His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
 And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,
 But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
 And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,
 Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive,
 While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,
 The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
 These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame.)

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
 Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,
 The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
 I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
 Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
 (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,
 Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)

“Good-bye, My Fancy!”

Good-bye my Fancy!
Farewell dear mate, dear love!
I'm going away, I know not where,
Or to what fortune, or whether I may ever see you again,
So Good-bye my Fancy.
Now for my last -- let me look back a moment;
The slower fainter ticking of the clock is in me,
Exit, nightfall, and soon the heart-thud stopping.
Long have we lived, joy'd, caress'd together;
Delightful! -- now separation -- Good-bye my Fancy.
Yet let me not be too hasty,
Long indeed have we lived, slept, filter'd, become really blended
into one;
Then if we die we die together, (yes, we'll remain one.)
If we go anywhere we'll go together to meet what happens,
May-be we'll be better off and blither, and learn something,
May-be it is yourself now really ushering me to the true songs, (who
knows?)
May-be it is you the mortal knob really undoing, turning -- so now finally,
Good-bye -- and hail! my Fancy.