

IV

POEMS OF DEMOCRACY

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 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.

FOR YOU O DEMOCRACY

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
 With the love of comrades,
 With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of
 America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over
 the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's
 necks,
 By the love of comrades,
 By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.

THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD

1

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only,
A special song before I go I'd sing o'er all the rest,
For thee, the future.

I'd sow a seed for thee of endless Nationality,
I'd fashion thy ensemble including body and soul,
I'd show away ahead thy real Union, and how it may be accomplish'd.

The paths to the house I seek to make,
But leave to those to come the house itself.

Belief I sing, and preparation;
As Life and Nature are not great with reference to the present only,
But greater still from what is yet to come,
Out of that formula for thee I sing.

2

As a strong bird on pinions free,

Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,
Such be the thought I'd think of thee America,
Such be the recitative I'd bring for thee.

The conceits of the poets of other lands I'd bring thee not,
Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long,
Nor rhyme, nor the classics, nor perfume of foreign court or indoor
library;

But an odour I'd bring as from forests of pine in Maine, or breath
of an Illinois prairie,
With open airs of Virginia or Georgia or Tennessee, or from Texas
uplands, or Florida's glades,
Or the Saguenay's black stream, or the wide blue spread of Huron,
With presentment of Yellowstone's scenes, or Yosemite,
And murmuring under, pervading all, I'd bring the rustling sea-sound,

That endlessly sounds from the two Great Seas of the world.

And for thy subtler sense subtler refrains dread Mother,
Preludes of intellect tallying these and thee, mind-formulas fitted for
thee, real and sane and large as these and thee,
Thou! mounting higher, diving deeper than we knew, thou transcendental
Union!

By thee fact to be justified, blended with thought,
Thought of man justified, blended with God,
Through thy idea, lo, the immortal reality!

Through thy reality, lo, the immortal idea!

3

Brain of the New World, what a task is thine,
To formulate the Modern--out of the peerless grandeur of the modern,
Out of thyself, comprising science, to recast poems, churches, art
(Recast, maybe discard them, end them--maybe their work is done, who
 knows?),
By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the mighty past, the
 dead,
To limn with absolute faith the mighty living present.

And yet thou living present brain, heir of the dead, the Old World
 brain,
Thou that lay folded like an unborn babe within its folds so long,
Thou carefully prepared by it so long--haply thou but unfoldest it,
 only maturest it,
It to eventuate in thee--the essence of the bygone time contain'd in
 thee,
Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, destined with
 reference to thee;
Thou but the apples, long, long, long a-growing,
The fruit of all the Old ripening to-day in thee.

4

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,
The Past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the Western
continent alone,
Earth's résumé entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied by thy
spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink or swim
with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou
bear'st the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port triumphant;
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye O helmsman, thou carriest
great companions,
Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.

5

Beautiful world of new superber birth that rises to my eyes,
Like a limitless golden cloud filling the western sky,
Emblem of general maternity lifted above all,

Sacred shape of the bearer of daughters and sons,
Out of thy teeming womb thy giant babes in ceaseless procession
 issuing,
Acceding from such gestation, taking and giving continual strength and
 life,
World of the real--world of the twain in one,
World of the soul, born by the world of the real alone, led to
 identity, body, by it alone,
Yet in beginning only, incalculable masses of composite precious
 materials,
By history's cycles forwarded, by every nation, language, hither sent,
Ready, collected here, a freer, vast, electric world, to be constructed
 here
(The true New World, the world of orbic science, morals, literatures to
 come),
Thou wonder world yet undefined, unform'd, neither do I define thee,
How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
I feel thy ominous greatness evil as well as good,
I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present, transcending the past,
I see thy light lighting, and thy shadow shadowing, as if the entire
 globe,
But I do not undertake to define thee, hardly to comprehend thee,
I but thee name, thee prophesy, as now,
I merely thee ejaculate!

Thee in thy future,

Thee in thy only permanent life, career, thy own unloosen'd mind, thy
soaring spirit,
Thee as another equally needed sun, radiant, ablaze, swift-moving,
fructifying all,
Thee risen in potent cheerfulness and joy, in endless great hilarity,
Scattering for good the cloud that hung so long, that weigh'd so
long upon the mind of man,
The doubt, suspicion, dread, of gradual, certain decadence of man;
Thee in thy larger, saner brood of female, male--thee in thy athletes,
moral, spiritual, South, North, West, East,
(To thy immortal breasts, Mother of All, thy every daughter, son,
endear'd alike, forever equal),
Thee in thy own musicians, singers, artists, unborn yet, but certain,
Thee in thy moral wealth and civilization (until which thy proudest
material civilization must remain in vain),
Thee in thy all-supplying, all-enclosing worship--thee in no single
bible, saviour, merely,
Thy saviours countless, latent within thyself, thy bibles incessant
within thyself, equal to any, divine as any
(Thy soaring course thee formulating, not in thy two great wars,
nor in thy century's visible growth,
But far more in these leaves and chants, thy chants, great Mother!),
Thee in an education grown of thee, in teachers, studies, students,
born of thee,
Thee in thy democratic fêtes en-masse, thy high original festivals,
operas, lecturers, preachers,

Thee in thy ultimata (the preparations only now completed, the
edifice on sure foundations tied),
Thee in thy pinnacles, intellect, thought, thy topmost rational
joys, thy love and godlike aspiration,
In thy resplendent coming literati, thy full-lung'd orators, thy
sacerdotal bards, kosmic savans,
These! these in thee (certain to come), to-day I prophesy.

6

Land tolerating all, accepting all, not for the good alone, all good
for thee,
Land in the realms of God to be a realm unto thyself,
Under the rule of God to be a rule unto thyself.

(Lo, where arise three peerless stars,
To be thy natal stars my country, Ensemble, Evolution, Freedom,
Set in the sky of Law.)

Land of unprecedented faith, God's faith,
Thy soil, thy very subsoil, all upheav'd,
The general inner earth so long so sedulously draped over, now hence
for what it is boldly laid bare,
Open'd by thee to heaven's light for benefit or bale.

Not for success alone,
Not to fair-sail unintermitted always,
The storm shall dash thy face, the murk of war and worse than war shall
 cover thee all over
(Wert capable of war, its tug and trials? be capable of peace, its
 trials,
For the tug and mortal strain of nations come at last in prosperous
 peace, not war);
In many a smiling mask death shall approach beguiling thee, thou in
 disease shalt swelter,
The livid cancer spread its hideous claws, clinging upon thy breasts,
 seeking to strike thee deep within,
Consumption of the worst, moral consumption, shall rouge thy face with
 hectic,
But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and surmount them all,
Whatever they are to-day and whatever through time they may be,
They each and all shall lift and pass away and cease from thee,
While thou, Time's spirals rounding, out of thyself, thyself still
 extricating, fusing,
Equable, natural, mystical Union thou (the mortal with immortal blent),
Shalt soar toward the fulfilment of the future, the spirit of the
 body and the mind,
The soul, its destinies.

The soul, its destinies, the real real
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real);

In thee America, the soul, its destinies,
Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!
By many a throe of heat and cold convuls'd (by these thyself
solidifying),
Thou mental, moral orb--thou New, indeed new, Spiritual World!
The Present holds thee not--for such vast growth as thine,
For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,
The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.

WHAT BEST I SEE IN THEE

To U. S. G. return'd from his World's Tour.

What best I see in thee

Is not that where thou mov'st down history's great highways,
Ever undimm'd by time shoots warlike victory's dazzle,

Or that thou sat'st where Washington sat, ruling the land in peace,
Or thou the man whom feudal Europe fêted, venerable Asia swarm'd upon
Who walk'd with kings with even pace the round world's promenade;
But that in foreign lands, in all thy walks with kings,

Those prairie sovereigns of the West, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois,
Ohio's, Indiana's millions, comrades, farmers, soldiers, all to the
front,

Invisibly with thee walking with kings with even pace the round world's
promenade,

Were all so justified.

AS I WALK THESE BROAD MAJESTIC DAYS

As I walk these broad majestic days of peace
(For the war, the struggle of blood finish'd, wherein, O terrific
Ideal,
Against vast odds erewhile having gloriously won,
Now thou stridest on, yet perhaps in time toward denser wars,
Perhaps to engage in time in still more dreadful contests, dangers,
Longer campaigns and crises, labours beyond all others),
Around me I hear that éclat of the world, politics, produce,
The announcements of recognized things, science,
The approved growth of cities and the spread of inventions.

I see the ships (they will last a few years),
The vast factories with their foremen and workmen,
And hear the indorsement of all, and do not object to it.

But I too announce solid things,
Science, ships, politics, cities, factories, are not nothing,
Like a grand procession to music of distant bugles pouring,
triumphantly moving, and grander heaving in sight,
They stand for realities--all is as it should be.

Then my realities;
What else is so real as mine?

Libertad and the divine average, freedom to every slave on the face
of the earth,
The rapt promises and luminè of seers, the spiritual world, these
centuries-lasting songs,
And our visions, the visions of poets, the most solid announcements
of any.

THE UNITED STATES TO OLD WORLD CRITICS

Here first the duties of to-day, the lessons of the concrete,
Wealth, order, travel, shelter, products, plenty;
As of the building of some varied, vast, perpetual edifice,
Whence to arise inevitable in time, the towering roofs, the lamps,
The solid-planted spires tall shooting to the stars.

YEARS OF THE MODERN

Years of the modern! years of the unperform'd!
Your horizon rises, I see it parting away for more august dramas,
I see not America only, not only Liberty's nation but other nations
 preparing,
I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the
 solidarity of races,
The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war,
No one knows what will happen next, such portents fill the days and
 nights;
Years prophetic! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to
 pierce it, is full of phantoms,
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams O
 years!
Your dreams O years, how they penetrate through me! (I know not
 whether I sleep or wake.)
The perform'd America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow
 behind me,
The unperform'd, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.

O STAR OF FRANCE

1870-71

O star of France,
The brightness of thy hope and strength and fame,
Like some proud ship that led the fleet so long,
Beseems to-day a wreck driven by the gale, a mastless hulk,
And 'mid its teeming madden'd half-drown'd crowds,
Nor helm nor helmsman.

Dim smitten star,
Orb not of France alone, pale symbol of my soul its dearest hopes,
The struggle and the daring, rage divine for liberty,
Of aspirations toward the far ideal, enthusiast's dreams of
 brotherhood,
Of terror to the tyrant and the priest.

Star crucified--by traitors sold,
Star panting o'er a land of death, heroic land,
Strange, passionate, mocking, frivolous land.

Miserable! yet for thy errors, vanities, sins, I will not now rebuke
 thee,

Thy unexampled woes and pangs have quell'd them all,

And left thee sacred.

In that amid thy many faults thou ever aimedst highly,
In that thou wouldst not really sell thyself however great the price,
In that thou surely wakedst weeping from thy drugg'd sleep,
In that alone among thy sisters thou, giantess, didst rend the ones
 that shamed thee,
In that thou couldst not, wouldst not, wear the usual chains,
This cross, thy livid face, thy pierced hands and feet,
The spear thrust in thy side.

O star! O ship of France, beat back and baffled long!
Bear up O smitten orb! O ship continue on!

Sure as the ship of all, the Earth itself,
Product of deathly fire and turbulent chaos,
Forth from its spasms of fury and its poisons,
Issuing at last in perfect power and beauty,
Onward beneath the sun following its course,
So thee O ship of France!

Finish'd the days, the clouds dispel'd,
The travail o'er, the long-sought extrication,
When lo! reborn, high o'er the European world,
(In gladness answering thence, as face afar to face, reflecting ours
 Columbia),

Again thy star O France, fair lustrous star,
In heavenly peace, clearer, more bright than ever,
Shall beam immortal.

THOUGHTS

1

Of these years I sing,
How they pass and have pass'd through convuls'd pains, as through
parturitions,
How America illustrates birth, muscular youth, the promise, the sure
fulfilment, the absolute success, despite of people--illustrates
evil as well as good,
The vehement struggle so fierce for unity in one's-self;
How many hold despairingly yet to the models departed, caste, myths,
obedience, compulsion, and to infidelity,
How few see the arrived models, the athletes, the Western States, or
see freedom or spirituality, or hold any faith in results
(But I see the athletes, and I see the results of the war glorious and
inevitable, and they again leading to other results).

How the great cities appear--how the Democratic masses, turbulent,
wilful, as I love them,
How the whirl, the contest, the wrestle of evil with good, the sound
and resounding, keep on and on,
How society waits unform'd, and is for a while between things ended and
things begun,
How America is the continent of glories, and of the triumph of

freedom and of the Democracies, and of the fruits of society,
and of all that is begun,
And how the States are complete in themselves--and how all triumphs
and glories are complete in themselves, to lead onward,
And how these of mine and of the States will in turn be convuls'd,
and serve other parturitions and transitions,
And how all people, sights, combinations, the Democratic masses too,
serve--and how every fact, and war itself, with all its
horrors, serves,
And how now or at any time each serves the exquisite transition of
death.

2

Of seeds dropping into the ground, of births,
Of the steady concentration of America, inland, upward, to impregnable
and swarming places,
Of what Indiana, Kentucky, Arkansas, and the rest, are to be,
Of what a few years will show there in Nebraska, Colorado, Nevada,
and the rest
(Or afar, mounting the Northern Pacific to Sitka or Aliaska),
Of what the feuillage of America is the preparation for--and of what
all sights, North, South, East and West, are,
Of this Union welded in blood, of the solemn price paid, of the unnamed
lost ever present in my mind;

Of the temporary use of materials for identity's sake,
Of the present, passing, departing--of the growth of completer men
 than any yet,
Of all sloping down there where the fresh free giver the mother, the
 Mississippi flows,
Of mighty inland cities yet unsurvey'd and unsuspected,
Of the new and good names, of the modern developments, of inalienable
 homesteads,
Of a free and original life there, of simple diet and clean and sweet
 blood,
Of litheness, majestic faces, clear eyes, and perfect physique there,
Of immense spiritual results future years far West, each side of the
 Anahuacs,
Of these songs, well understood there (being made for that area),
Of the native scorn of grossness and gain there
(O it lurks in me night and day--what is gain after all to savageness
 and freedom?).

BY BLUE ONTARIO'S SHORE

By blue Ontario's shore,
As I mused of these warlike days and of peace return'd, and the dead
that return no more,
A Phantom gigantic superb, with stern visage accosted me,
Chant me the poem, it said, that comes from the soul of America,
chant me the carol of victory,
And strike up the marches of Libertad, marches more powerful yet,
And sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy.

(Democracy, the destin'd conqueror, yet treacherous lip-smiles
everywhere,
And death and infidelity at every step.)

2

A Nation announcing itself,
I myself make the only growth by which I can be appreciated,
I reject none, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms.

A breed whose proof is in time and deeds,
What we are we are, nativity is answer enough to objections,
We wield ourselves as a weapon is wielded,
We are powerful and tremendous in ourselves,
We are executive in ourselves, we are sufficient in the variety of
ourselves,

We are the most beautiful to ourselves and in ourselves,
We stand self-pois'd in the middle, branching thence over the world,
From Missouri, Nebraska, or Kansas, laughing attacks to scorn.

Nothing is sinful to us outside of ourselves,
Whatever appears, whatever does not appear, we are beautiful or
sinful in ourselves only.

(O Mother--O Sisters dear!

If we are lost, no victor else has destroy'd us,
It is by ourselves we go down to eternal night.)

3

Have you thought there could be but a single supreme?

There can be any number of supremes--one does not countervail another
any more than one eyesight countervails another, or one life
countervails another.

All is eligible to all,

All is for individuals, all is for you,

No condition is prohibited, not God's or any.

All comes by the body, only health puts you rapport with the universe.

Produce great Persons, the rest follows.

4

Piety and conformity to them that like,
Peace, obesity, allegiance, to them that like,
I am he who tauntingly compels men, women, nations,
Crying, Leap from your seats and contend for your lives!

I am he who walks the States with a barb'd tongue, questioning every
one I meet,

Who are you that wanted only to be told what you knew before?

Who are you that wanted only a book to join you in your nonsense?

(With pangs and cries as thine own O bearer of many children,
These clamours wild to a race of pride I give.)

O lands, would you be freer than all that has ever been before?

If you would be freer than all that has been before, come listen to me.

Fear grace, elegance, civilization, delicatessen,

Fear the mellow sweet, the sucking of honey juice,

Beware the advancing mortal ripening of Nature,

Beware what precedes the decay of the ruggedness of states and men.

5

Ages, precedents, have long been accumulating undirected materials,
America brings builders, and brings its own styles.

The immortal poets of Asia and Europe have done their work and
pass'd to other spheres,
A work remains, the work of surpassing all they have done.

America, curious toward foreign characters, stands by its own at all
hazards,
Stands removed, spacious, composite, sound, initiates the true use of
precedents,
Does not repel them or the past or what they have produced under their
forms,
Takes the lesson with calmness, perceives the corpse slowly borne
from the house,
Perceives that it waits a little while in the door, that it was
fittest for its days,
That its life has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who
approaches,
And that he shall be fittest for his days.

Any period one nation must lead,
One land must be the promise and reliance of the future.

These States are the amplest poem,
Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations,
Here the doings of men correspond with the broadcast doings of the
 day and night,
Here is what moves in magnificent masses careless of particulars,
Here are the roughs, beards, friendliness, combativeness, the soul
 loves,
Here the flowing trains, here the crowds, equality, diversity, the soul
 loves.

6

Land of lands and bards to corroborate!
Of them standing among them, one lifts to the light a west-bred face,
To him the hereditary countenance bequeath'd both mother's and
 father's,
His first parts substances, earth, water, animals, trees,
Built of the common stock, having room for far and near,
Used to dispense with other lands, incarnating this land,
Attracting it body and soul to himself, hanging on its neck with
 incomparable love,
Plunging his seminal muscle into its merits and demerits,
Making its cities, beginnings, events, diversities, wars, vocal in him,
Making its rivers, lakes, bays, embouchure in him,

Mississippi with yearly freshets and hanging chutes, Columbia, Niagara,
Hudson, spending themselves lovingly in him,
If the Atlantic coast stretch or the Pacific coast stretch, he
stretching with them North or South,
Spanning between them East and West, and touching whatever is
between them,
Growths growing from him to offset the growths of pine, cedar, hemlock,
live-oak, locust, chestnut, hickory, cottonwood, orange,
magnolia,
Tangles as tangled in him as any canebrake or swamp,
He likening sides and peaks of mountains, forests coated with northern
transparent ice,
Off him pasturage sweet and natural as savanna, upland, prairie,
Through him flights, whirls, screams, answering those of the fish-hawk,
mocking-bird, night-heron, and eagle,
His spirit surrounding his country's spirit, unclosed to good and evil,
Surrounding the essences of real things, old times and present times,
Surrounding just found shores, islands, tribes of red aborigines,
Weather-beaten vessels, landings, settlements, embryo stature and
muscle,
The haughty defiance of the Year One, war, peace, the formation of the
Constitution,
The separate States, the simple elastic scheme, the immigrants,
The Union always swarming with blatherers and always sure and
impregnable,
The unsurvey'd interior, log-houses, clearings, wild animals, hunters,

trappers,
Surrounding the multiform agriculture, mines, temperature, the
gestation of new States,
Congress convening every Twelfth-month, the members duly coming up
from the uttermost parts,
Surrounding the noble character of mechanics and farmers, especially
the young men,
Responding their manners, speech, dress, friendships, the gait they
have of persons who never knew how it felt to stand in the
presence of superiors,
The freshness and candor of their physiognomy, the copiousness and
decision of their phrenology,
The picturesque looseness of their carriage, their fierceness when
wrong'd,
The fluency of their speech, their delight in music, their curiosity,
good temper and open-handedness, the whole composite make,
The prevailing ardour and enterprise, the large amativeness,
The perfect equality of the female with the male, the fluid movement
of the population,
The superior marine, free commerce, fisheries, whaling, gold-digging,
Wharf-hemm'd cities, railroad and steamboat lines intersecting all
points,
Factories, mercantile life, labour-saving machinery, the Northeast,
Northwest, Southwest,
Manhattan firemen, the Yankee swap, southern plantation life,
Slavery--the murderous, treacherous conspiracy to raise it upon the

ruins of all the rest,
On and on to the grapple with it--Assassin! then your life or ours
be the stake, and respite no more.

7

(Lo, high toward heaven, this day,
Libertad, from the conqueress' field return'd,
I mark the new aureola around your head,
No more of soft astral, but dazzling and fierce,
With war's flames and the lambent lightnings playing,
And your port immovable where you stand,
With still the inextinguishable glance and the clinch'd and lifted
fist,
And your foot on the neck of the menacing one, the scorner utterly
crush'd beneath you,
The menacing arrogant one that strode and advanced with his senseless
scorn, bearing the murderous knife,
The wide-swelling one, the braggart that would yesterday do so much,
To-day a carrion dead and damn'd, the despised of all the earth,
An offal rank, to the dunghill maggots spurn'd.)

8

Others take finish, but the Republic is ever constructive and ever
keeps vista,
Others adorn the past, but you O days of the present, I adorn you,
O days of the future I believe in you--I isolate myself for your sake,
O America because you build for mankind I build for you,
O well-beloved stone-cutters, I lead them who plan with decision and
science,
Lead the present with friendly hand toward the future.
(Bravas to all impulses sending sane children to the next age!
But damn that which spends itself with no thought of the stain, pains,
dismay, feebleness, it is bequeathing.)

9

I listened to the Phantom by Ontario's shore,
I heard the voice arising demanding bards,
By them all native and grand, by them alone can these States be
fused into the compact organism of a nation.

To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account,
That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living
principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres
of plants.

Of all races and eras these States with veins full of poetical stuff

most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them
the greatest,
Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their
poets shall.

(Soul of love and tongue of fire:

Eye to pierce the deepest deeps and sweep the world!

Ah Mother, prolific and full in all besides, yet how long barren,
barren?)

10

Of these States the poet is the equable man,
Not in him but off from him things are grotesque, eccentric, fail of
their full returns,
Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad,
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither
more nor less,
He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key,
He is the equalizer of his age and land,
He supplies what wants supplying, he checks what wants checking,
In peace out of him speaks the spirit of peace, large, rich, thrifty
building populous towns, encouraging agriculture, arts, commerce,
lighting the study of man, the soul, health, immortality,
government,

In war he is the best backer of the war, he fetches artillery as
good as the engineer's, he can make every word he speaks draw
blood,
The years straying toward infidelity he withholds by his steady faith,
He is no arguer, he is judgment (Nature accepts him absolutely),
He judges not as the judges but as the sun falling round a helpless
thing,
As he sees the farthest he has the most faith,
His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things,
In the dispute on God and eternity he is silent,
He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and dénouement,
He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as
dreams or dots.

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,
The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots.

Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality,
They live in the feelings of young men and the best women
(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always
ready to fall for Liberty).

For the great Idea,
That, O my brethren, that is the mission of poets.

Songs of stern defiance ever ready,
Songs of the rapid arming and the march,
The flag of peace quick-folded, and instead the flag we know,
Warlike flag of the great Idea.

(Angry cloth I saw there leaping!
I stand again in leaden rain your flapping folds saluting,
I sing you over all, flying beckoning through the fight--O the
 hard-contested fight!
The cannons ope their rosy-flashing muzzles--the hurtled balls scream,
The battle-front forms amid the smoke--the volleys pour incessant
 from the line,
Hark, the ringing word Charge!--now the tussle and the furious
 maddening yells,
Now the corpses tumble curl'd upon the ground,
Cold, cold in death, for precious life of you,
Angry cloth I saw there leaping.)

12

Are you he who would assume a place to teach or be a poet here in the
 States?

The place is august, the terms obdurate.

Who would assume to teach here may well prepare himself body and mind,
He may well survey, ponder, arm, fortify, harden, make lithe himself,
He shall surely be question'd beforehand by me with many and stern
questions.

Who are you indeed who would talk or sing to America?

Have you studied out the land, its idioms and men?

Have you learn'd the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography,
pride, freedom, friendship of the land? its substratums and
objects?

Have you consider'd the organic compact of the first day of the
first year of Independence, sign'd by the Commissioners,
ratified by the States, and read by Washington at the head of
the army?

Have you possess'd yourself of the Federal Constitution?

Do you see who have left all feudal processes and poems behind them,
and assumed the poems and processes of Democracy?

Are you faithful to things? do you teach what the land and sea, the
bodies of men, womanhood, amativeness, heroic angers, teach?

Have you sped through fleeting customs, popularities?

Can you hold your hand against all seductions, follies, whirls, fierce
contentions? are you very strong? are you really of the whole
People?

Are you not of some coterie? some school or mere religion?
Are you done with reviews and criticisms of life? animating now to life
itself?

Have you vivified yourself from the maternity of these States?

Have you too the old ever-fresh forbearance and impartiality?

Do you hold the like love for those hardening to maturity? for the
last-born? little and big? and for the errant?

What is this you bring my America?

Is it uniform with my country?

Is it not something that has been better told or done before?

Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?

Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?--is the good old cause
in it?

Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians,
literats, of enemies' lands?

Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?

Does it answer universal needs? will it improve manners?

Does it sound with trumpet-voice the proud victory of the Union in that
secession war?

Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?

Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in my
strength, gait, face?

Have real employments contributed to it? original makers, not mere
amanuenses?

Does it meet modern discoveries, calibres, facts, face to face?

What does it mean to American persons, progresses, cities?

Chicago, Kanada, Arkansas?

Does it see behind the apparent custodians the real custodians

standing, menacing, silent, the mechanics, Manhattanese,

Western men, Southerners, significant alike in their apathy,

and in the promptness of their love?

Does it see what finally befalls, and has always finally befallen, each

temporizer, patcher, outsider, partialist, alarmist, infidel,

who has ever ask'd any thing of America?

What mocking and scornful negligence?

The track strew'd with the dust of skeletons,

By the roadside others disdainfully toss'd.

13

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,

The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,

Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,

America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive it or

conceal from it, it is impassive enough,

Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them,

If its poets appear it will in due time advance to meet them, there

is no fear of mistake

(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country

absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it).

He masters whose spirit masters, he tastes sweetest who results
sweetest in the long run,
The blood of the brawn beloved of time is unconstraint;
In the need of songs, philosophy, an appropriate native grand-opera,
shipcraft, any craft,
He or she is greatest who contributes the greatest original practical
example.

Already a nonchalant breed, silently emerging, appears on the streets,
People's lips salute only doers, lovers, satisfiers, positive knowers,
There will shortly be no more priests, I say their work is done,
Death is without emergencies here, but life is perpetual emergencies
here,
Are your body, days, manners, superb? after death you shall be superb,
Justice, health, self-esteem, clear the way with irresistible power,
How dare you place any thing before a man?

14

Fall behind me States!

A man before all--myself, typical, before all.

Give me the pay I have served for,

Give to sing the songs of the great Idea, take all the rest,
I have loved the earth, sun, animals, I have despised riches,
I have given alms to every one that ask'd, stood up for the stupid and
crazy, devoted my income and labour to others,
Hated tyrants, argued not concerning God, had patience and indulgence
toward the people, taken off my hat to nothing known or unknown,
Gone freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young, and
with the mothers of families,
Read these leaves to myself in the open air, tried them by trees,
stars, rivers,
Dismiss'd whatever insulted my own soul or defiled my body,
Claim'd nothing to myself which I have not carefully claim'd for
others on the same terms,
Sped to the camps, and comrades found and accepted from every State
(Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean'd to breathe his last,
This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourish'd, rais'd, restored,
To life recalling many a prostrate form);
I am willing to wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of
myself,
Rejecting none, permitting all.

(Say O Mother, have I not to your thought been faithful?
Have I not through life kept you and yours before me?)

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
It is not the earth, it is not America who is so great,
It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up there, or any one,
It is to walk rapidly through civilizations, governments, theories,
Through poems, pageants, shows, to form individuals.

Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals,
The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single
individual--namely to You.

(Mother! with subtle sense severe, with the naked sword in your hand,
I saw you at last refuse to treat but directly with individuals.)

16

Underneath all, Nativity,
I swear I will stand by my own nativity, pious or impious so be it;
I swear I am charm'd with nothing except nativity.
Men, women, cities, nations, are only beautiful from nativity.

Underneath all is the Expression of love for men and women

(I swear I have seen enough of mean and impotent modes of expressing
love for men and women,
After this day I take my own modes of expressing love for men and
women).

I swear I will have each quality of my race in myself
(Talk as you like, he only suits these States whose manners favour the
audacity and sublime turbulence of the States).

Underneath the lessons of things, spirits, Nature, governments,
ownerships, I swear I perceive other lessons,
Underneath all to me is myself, to you yourself (the same monotonous
old song).

17

O I see flashing that this America is only you and me,
Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me,
Its Congress is you and me, the officers, capitols, armies, ships,
are you and me,
Its endless gestations of new States are you and me,
The war (that war so bloody and grim, the war I will henceforth
forget) was you and me,
Natural and artificial are you and me,

Freedom, language, forms, employments, are you and me,
Past, present, future, are you and me.

I dare not shirk any part of myself,
Not any part of America good or bad,
Not to build for that which builds for mankind,
Not to balance ranks, complexions, creeds, and the sexes,
Not to justify science nor the march of equality,
Nor to feed the arrogant blood of the brawn belov'd of time.

I am for those that have never been master'd,
For men and women whose tempers have never been master'd,
For those whom laws, theories, conventions, can never master.

I am for those who walk abreast with the whole earth,
Who inaugurate one to inaugurate all.

I will not be outfaced by irrational things,
I will penetrate what it is in them that is sarcastic upon me,
I will make cities and civilizations defer to me,
This is what I have learnt from America--it is the amount, and it I
teach again.

(Democracy, while weapons were everywhere aim'd at your breast,
I saw you serenely give birth to immortal children, saw in dreams your
dilating form,

Saw you with spreading mantle covering the world.)

18

I will confront these shows of the day and night,
I will know if I am to be less than they,
I will see if I am not as majestic as they,
I will see if I am not as subtle and real as they,
I will see if I am to be less generous than they,
I will see if I have no meaning, while the houses and ships have
 meaning,
I will see if the fishes and birds are to be enough for themselves,
 and I am not to be enough for myself.

I match my spirit against yours you orbs, growths, mountains, brutes,
Copious as you are I absorb you all in myself, and become the master
 myself,
America isolated yet embodying all, what is it finally except myself?
These States, what are they except myself?

I know now why the earth is gross, tantalizing, wicked, it is for my
 sake,
I take you specially to be mine, you terrible, rude forms.

(Mother, bend down, bend close to me your face,

I know not what these plots and wars and deferments are for,
I know not fruition's success, but I know that through war and crime
your work goes on, and must yet go on.)

19

Thus by blue Ontario's shore,
While the winds fann'd me and the waves came trooping toward me,
I thrill'd with the power's pulsations, and the charm of my theme
was upon me,
Till the tissues that held me parted their ties upon me.

And I saw the free souls of poets,
The loftiest bards of past ages strode before me,
Strange large men, long unwaked, undisclosed, were disclosed to me.

20

O my rapt verse, my call, mock me not!
Not for the bards of the past, not to invoke them have I launch'd you
forth,
Not to call even those lofty bards here by Ontario's shores,
Have I sung so capricious and loud my savage song.

Bards for my own land only I invoke
(For the war, the war is over, the field is clear'd),
Till they strike up marches henceforth triumphant and onward,
To cheer O Mother your boundless expectant soul.

Bards of the great Idea! bards of the peaceful inventions! (for the
war, the war is over!)

Yet bards of latent armies, a million soldiers waiting ever-ready,
Bards with songs as from burning coals or the lightning's fork'd
stripes!

Ample Ohio's, Kanada's bards--bards of California! inland bards--bards
of the war!

You by my charm I invoke.

EPILOGUE

RISE O DAYS FROM YOUR FATHOMLESS DEEPS

RISE O DAYS FROM YOUR FATHOMLESS DEEPS

1

Rise O days from your fathomless deeps, till you loftier, fiercer
sweep,
Long for my soul hungering gymnastic I devour'd what the earth gave me,
Long I roam'd the woods of the north, long I watch'd Niagara pouring,
I travel'd the prairies over and slept on their breast, I cross'd the
Nevadas, I cross'd the plateaus
I ascended the towering rocks along the Pacific, I sail'd out to sea,
I sail'd through the storm, I was refresh'd by the storm
I watch'd with joy the threatening maws of the waves,
I mark'd the white combs where they career'd so high, curling over.
I heard the wind piping; I saw the black clouds,
Saw from below what arose and mounted (O superb! O wild as my heart,
and powerfull!),
Heard the continuous thunder as it bellow'd after the lightning,

Noted the slender and jagged threads of lightning as sudden and fast
amid the din they chased each other across the sky;
These, and such as these, I, elate, saw--saw with wonder, yet pensive
and masterful,
All the menacing might of the globe uprisen around me,
Yet there with my soul I fed, I fed content, supercilious.

2

'Twas well, O soul--'twas a good preparation you gave me,
Now we advance our latent and ampler hunger to fill,
Now we go forth to receive what the earth and the sea never gave us,
Not through the mighty woods we go, but through the mightier cities,
Something for us is pouring now more than Niagara pouring,
Torrents of men (sources and rills of the Northwest are you indeed
inexhaustible?),
What, to pavements and homesteads here, what were those storms of the
mountains and sea?
What, to passions I witness around me to-day? was the sea risen?
Was the wind piping the pipe of death under the black clouds?
Lo! from deeps more unfathomable, something more deadly and savage,
Manhattan rising, advancing with menacing front--Cincinnati, Chicago,
unchain'd;
What was that swell I saw on the ocean? behold what comes here,
How it climbs with daring feet and hands--how it dashes!

How the true thunder bellows after the lightning--how bright the
flashes of lightning!

How Democracy with desperate vengeful port strides on, shown through
the dark by those flashes of lightning!

(Yet a mournful wail and low sob I fancied I heard through the dark,
In a lull of the deafening confusion.)

3

Thunder on! stride on, Democracy! strike with vengeful stroke!

And do you rise higher than ever yet O days, O cities!

Crash heavier, heavier yet O storms! you have done me good,

My soul prepared in the mountains absorbs your immortal strong
nutriment,

Long had I walk'd my cities, my country roads through farms, only half
satisfied,

One doubt nauseous undulating like a snake, crawl'd on the ground
before me,

Continually preceding my steps, turning upon me oft, ironically hissing
low;

The cities I loved so well I abandon'd and left, I sped to the
certainties suitable to me,

Hungering, hungering, hungering, for primal energies and Nature's
dauntlessness,

I refresh'd myself with it only, I could relish it only,

I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire--on the water and air I
waited long;

But now I no longer wait, I am fully satisfied, I am gluttoned,

I have witness'd the true lightning, I have witness'd my cities
electric,

I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike America rise,

Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary wilds,

No more the mountains roam or sail the stormy sea.

* * * * *

THE END