

BOOK XVI

A Song of the Rolling Earth

1

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,

Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines?

those curves, angles, dots?

No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground

and sea,

They are in the air, they are in you.

Were you thinking that those were the words, those delicious sounds

out of your friends' mouths?

No, the real words are more delicious than they.

Human bodies are words, myriads of words,

(In the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's,

well-shaped, natural, gay,

Every part able, active, receptive, without shame or the need of shame.)

Air, soil, water, fire--those are words,

I myself am a word with them--my qualities interpenetrate with

theirs--my name is nothing to them,

Though it were told in the three thousand languages, what would

air, soil, water, fire, know of my name?

A healthy presence, a friendly or commanding gesture, are words,  
sayings, meanings,  
The charms that go with the mere looks of some men and women,  
are sayings and meanings also.

The workmanship of souls is by those inaudible words of the earth,  
The masters know the earth's words and use them more than audible words.

Amelioration is one of the earth's words,  
The earth neither lags nor hastens,  
It has all attributes, growths, effects, latent in itself from the jump,  
It is not half beautiful only, defects and excrescences show just as  
much as perfections show.

The earth does not withhold, it is generous enough,  
The truths of the earth continually wait, they are not so conceal'd either,  
They are calm, subtle, untransmissible by print,  
They are imbued through all things conveying themselves willingly,  
Conveying a sentiment and invitation, I utter and utter,  
I speak not, yet if you hear me not of what avail am I to you?  
To bear, to better, lacking these of what avail am I?

(Accouche! accouchez!

Will you rot your own fruit in yourself there?

Will you squat and stifle there?)

The earth does not argue,  
Is not pathetic, has no arrangements,  
Does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise,  
Makes no discriminations, has no conceivable failures,  
Closes nothing, refuses nothing, shuts none out,  
Of all the powers, objects, states, it notifies, shuts none out.

The earth does not exhibit itself nor refuse to exhibit itself,  
    possesses still underneath,  
Underneath the ostensible sounds, the august chorus of heroes, the  
    wail of slaves,  
Persuasions of lovers, curses, gasps of the dying, laughter of young  
    people, accents of bargainers,  
Underneath these possessing words that never fall.

To her children the words of the eloquent dumb great mother never fail,  
The true words do not fail, for motion does not fail and reflection  
    does not fall,  
Also the day and night do not fall, and the voyage we pursue does not fall.

Of the interminable sisters,  
Of the ceaseless cotillons of sisters,  
Of the centripetal and centrifugal sisters, the elder and younger sisters,  
The beautiful sister we know dances on with the rest.

With her ample back towards every beholder,  
With the fascinations of youth and the equal fascinations of age,  
Sits she whom I too love like the rest, sits undisturb'd,  
Holding up in her hand what has the character of a mirror, while her  
    eyes glance back from it,  
Glance as she sits, inviting none, denying none,  
Holding a mirror day and night tirelessly before her own face.

Seen at hand or seen at a distance,  
Duly the twenty-four appear in public every day,  
Duly approach and pass with their companions or a companion,  
Looking from no countenances of their own, but from the countenances  
    of those who are with them,  
From the countenances of children or women or the manly countenance,  
From the open countenances of animals or from inanimate things,  
From the landscape or waters or from the exquisite apparition of the sky,  
From our countenances, mine and yours, faithfully returning them,  
Every day in public appearing without fall, but never twice with the  
    same companions.

Embracing man, embracing all, proceed the three hundred and  
    sixty-five resistlessly round the sun;  
Embracing all, soothing, supporting, follow close three hundred and  
    sixty-five offsets of the first, sure and necessary as they.

Tumbling on steadily, nothing dreading,  
Sunshine, storm, cold, heat, forever withstanding, passing, carrying,  
The soul's realization and determination still inheriting,  
The fluid vacuum around and ahead still entering and dividing,  
No balk retarding, no anchor anchoring, on no rock striking,  
Swift, glad, content, unbereav'd, nothing losing,  
Of all able and ready at any time to give strict account,  
The divine ship sails the divine sea.

2

Whoever you are! motion and reflection are especially for you,  
The divine ship sails the divine sea for you.

Whoever you are! you are he or she for whom the earth is solid and liquid,  
You are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in the sky,  
For none more than you are the present and the past,  
For none more than you is immortality.

Each man to himself and each woman to herself, is the word of the  
past and present, and the true word of immortality;  
No one can acquire for another--not one,  
Not one can grow for another--not one.

The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him,  
The teaching is to the teacher, and comes back most to him,  
The murder is to the murderer, and comes back most to him,

The theft is to the thief, and comes back most to him,  
The love is to the lover, and comes back most to him,  
The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him--it cannot fail,  
The oration is to the orator, the acting is to the actor and actress  
not to the audience,  
And no man understands any greatness or goodness but his own, or  
the indication of his own.

3

I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall  
be complete,  
The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains  
jagged and broken.

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those  
of the earth,  
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the  
theory of the earth,  
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account,  
unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,  
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of  
the earth.

I swear I begin to see love with sweeter spasms than that which  
responds love,  
It is that which contains itself, which never invites and never refuses.

I swear I begin to see little or nothing in audible words,  
All merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings of the earth,  
Toward him who sings the songs of the body and of the truths of the earth,  
Toward him who makes the dictionaries of words that print cannot touch.

I swear I see what is better than to tell the best,  
It is always to leave the best untold.

When I undertake to tell the best I find I cannot,  
My tongue is ineffectual on its pivots,  
My breath will not be obedient to its organs,  
I become a dumb man.

The best of the earth cannot be told anyhow, all or any is best,  
It is not what you anticipated, it is cheaper, easier, nearer,  
Things are not dismiss'd from the places they held before,  
The earth is just as positive and direct as it was before,  
Facts, religions, improvements, politics, trades, are as real as before,  
But the soul is also real, it too is positive and direct,  
No reasoning, no proof has establish'd it,  
Undeniable growth has establish'd it.

4

These to echo the tones of souls and the phrases of souls,  
(If they did not echo the phrases of souls what were they then?)

If they had not reference to you in especial what were they then?)

I swear I will never henceforth have to do with the faith that tells  
the best,

I will have to do only with that faith that leaves the best untold.

Say on, sayers! sing on, singers!

Delve! mould! pile the words of the earth!

Work on, age after age, nothing is to be lost,

It may have to wait long, but it will certainly come in use,

When the materials are all prepared and ready, the architects shall appear.

I swear to you the architects shall appear without fall,

I swear to you they will understand you and justify you,

The greatest among them shall be he who best knows you, and encloses  
all and is faithful to all,

He and the rest shall not forget you, they shall perceive that you  
are not an iota less than they,

You shall be fully glorified in them.

Youth, Day, Old Age and Night

Youth, large, lusty, loving--youth full of grace, force, fascination,



Do you know that Old Age may come after you with equal grace,  
force, fascination?

Day full-blown and splendid-day of the immense sun, action,  
ambition, laughter,

The Night follows close with millions of suns, and sleep and  
restoring darkness.