

BOOK XVII. BIRDS OF PASSAGE

Song of the Universal

1

Come said the Muse,  
Sing me a song no poet yet has chanted,  
Sing me the universal.

In this broad earth of ours,  
Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,  
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,  
Nestles the seed perfection.

By every life a share or more or less,  
None born but it is born, conceal'd or unconceal'd the seed is waiting.

2

Lo! keen-eyed towering science,  
As from tall peaks the modern overlooking,  
Successive absolute fiats issuing.

Yet again, lo! the soul, above all science,  
For it has history gather'd like husks around the globe,  
For it the entire star-myriads roll through the sky.

In spiral routes by long detours,  
(As a much-tacking ship upon the sea,)  
For it the partial to the permanent flowing,  
For it the real to the ideal tends.

For it the mystic evolution,  
Not the right only justified, what we call evil also justified.

Forth from their masks, no matter what,  
From the huge festering trunk, from craft and guile and tears,  
Health to emerge and joy, joy universal.

Out of the bulk, the morbid and the shallow,  
Out of the bad majority, the varied countless frauds of men and states,  
Electric, antiseptic yet, cleaving, suffusing all,  
Only the good is universal.

3

Over the mountain-growths disease and sorrow,  
An uncaught bird is ever hovering, hovering,  
High in the purer, happier air.

From imperfection's murkiest cloud,  
Darts always forth one ray of perfect light,  
One flash of heaven's glory.

To fashion's, custom's discord,  
To the mad Babel-din, the deafening orgies,  
Soothing each lull a strain is heard, just heard,  
From some far shore the final chorus sounding.

O the blest eyes, the happy hearts,  
That see, that know the guiding thread so fine,  
Along the mighty labyrinth.

4

And thou America,  
For the scheme's culmination, its thought and its reality,  
For these (not for thyself) thou hast arrived.

Thou too surroundest all,  
Embracing carrying welcoming all, thou too by pathways broad and new,  
To the ideal tendest.

The measure'd faiths of other lands, the grandeurs of the past,  
Are not for thee, but grandeurs of thine own,  
Deific faiths and amplitudes, absorbing, comprehending all,  
All eligible to all.

All, all for immortality,  
Love like the light silently wrapping all,

Nature's amelioration blessing all,  
The blossoms, fruits of ages, orchards divine and certain,  
Forms, objects, growths, humanities, to spiritual images ripening.

Give me O God to sing that thought,  
Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith,  
In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold not from us,  
Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,  
Health, peace, salvation universal.

Is it a dream?  
Nay but the lack of it the dream,  
And failing it life's lore and wealth a dream,  
And all the world a dream.

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 landmen, 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!

To You

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,  
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands,  
Even now your features, joys, speech, house, trade, manners,  
    troubles, follies, costume, crimes, dissipate away from you,  
Your true soul and body appear before me.

They stand forth out of affairs, out of commerce, shops, work,  
    farms, clothes, the house, buying, selling, eating, drinking,  
    suffering, dying.

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem,  
I whisper with my lips close to your ear.  
I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you.

O I have been dilatory and dumb,  
I should have made my way straight to you long ago,  
I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing  
    but you.

I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you,  
None has understood you, but I understand you,  
None has done justice to you, you have not done justice to yourself,  
None but has found you imperfect, I only find no imperfection in you,  
None but would subordinate you, I only am he who will never consent  
    to subordinate you,

I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God,  
beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.

Painters have painted their swarming groups and the centre-figure of all,  
From the head of the centre-figure spreading a nimbus of gold-color'd light,  
But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus  
of gold-color'd light,  
From my hand from the brain of every man and woman it streams,  
effulgently flowing forever.

O I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you!  
You have not known what you are, you have slumber'd upon yourself  
all your life,  
Your eyelids have been the same as closed most of the time,  
What you have done returns already in mockeries,  
(Your thrift, knowledge, prayers, if they do not return in  
mockeries, what is their return?)

The mockeries are not you,  
Underneath them and within them I see you lurk,  
I pursue you where none else has pursued you,  
Silence, the desk, the flippant expression, the night, the  
accustom'd routine, if these conceal you from others or from  
yourself, they do not conceal you from me,  
The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, if these  
balk others they do not balk me,

The pert apparel, the deform'd attitude, drunkenness, greed,  
premature death, all these I part aside.

There is no endowment in man or woman that is not tallied in you,  
There is no virtue, no beauty in man or woman, but as good is in you,  
No pluck, no endurance in others, but as good is in you,  
No pleasure waiting for others, but an equal pleasure waits for you.

As for me, I give nothing to any one except I give the like carefully  
to you,  
I sing the songs of the glory of none, not God, sooner than I sing  
the songs of the glory of you.

Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazard!  
These shows of the East and West are tame compared to you,  
These immense meadows, these interminable rivers, you are immense  
and interminable as they,  
These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent  
dissolution, you are he or she who is master or mistress over them,  
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain,  
passion, dissolution.

The hopples fall from your ankles, you find an unfailing sufficiency,  
Old or young, male or female, rude, low, rejected by the rest,  
whatever you are promulges itself,  
Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided, nothing

is scanted,

Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance, ennui, what you are  
picks its way.

France [the 18th Year of these States

A great year and place

A harsh discordant natal scream out-sounding, to touch the mother's  
heart closer than any yet.

I walk'd the shores of my Eastern sea,

Heard over the waves the little voice,

Saw the divine infant where she woke mournfully wailing, amid the  
roar of cannon, curses, shouts, crash of falling buildings,

Was not so sick from the blood in the gutters running, nor from the single  
corpses, nor those in heaps, nor those borne away in the tumbrils,

Was not so desperate at the battues of death--was not so shock'd at  
the repeated fusillades of the guns.

Pale, silent, stern, what could I say to that long-accrued retribution?

Could I wish humanity different?

Could I wish the people made of wood and stone?

Or that there be no justice in destiny or time?

O Liberty! O mate for me!

Here too the blaze, the grape-shot and the axe, in reserve, to fetch  
them out in case of need,

Here too, though long repress, can never be destroy'd,

Here too could rise at last murdering and ecstatic,

Here too demanding full arrears of vengeance.

Hence I sign this salute over the sea,

And I do not deny that terrible red birth and baptism,

But remember the little voice that I heard wailing, and wait with  
perfect trust, no matter how long,

And from to-day sad and cogent I maintain the bequeath'd cause, as  
for all lands,

And I send these words to Paris with my love,

And I guess some chansonniers there will understand them,

For I guess there is latent music yet in France, floods of it,

O I hear already the bustle of instruments, they will soon be  
drowning all that would interrupt them,

O I think the east wind brings a triumphal and free march,

It reaches hither, it swells me to Joyful madness,

I will run transpose it in words, to justify

I will yet sing a song for you ma femme.

## Myself and Mine

Myself and mine gymnastic ever,  
To stand the cold or heat, to take good aim with a gun, to sail a  
boat, to manage horses, to beget superb children,  
To speak readily and clearly, to feel at home among common people,  
And to hold our own in terrible positions on land and sea.

Not for an embroiderer,  
(There will always be plenty of embroiderers, I welcome them also,)  
But for the fibre of things and for inherent men and women.

Not to chisel ornaments,  
But to chisel with free stroke the heads and limbs of plenteous  
supreme Gods, that the States may realize them walking and talking.

Let me have my own way,  
Let others promulge the laws, I will make no account of the laws,  
Let others praise eminent men and hold up peace, I hold up agitation  
and conflict,  
I praise no eminent man, I rebuke to his face the one that was  
thought most worthy.

(Who are you? and what are you secretly guilty of all your life?  
Will you turn aside all your life? will you grub and chatter all

your life?

And who are you, blabbing by rote, years, pages, languages, reminiscences,  
Unwitting to-day that you do not know how to speak properly a single word?)

Let others finish specimens, I never finish specimens,  
I start them by exhaustless laws as Nature does, fresh and modern  
continually.

I give nothing as duties,  
What others give as duties I give as living impulses,  
(Shall I give the heart's action as a duty?)

Let others dispose of questions, I dispose of nothing, I arouse  
unanswerable questions,  
Who are they I see and touch, and what about them?  
What about these likes of myself that draw me so close by tender  
directions and indirections?

I call to the world to distrust the accounts of my friends, but  
listen to my enemies, as I myself do,  
I charge you forever reject those who would expound me, for I cannot  
expound myself,  
I charge that there be no theory or school founded out of me,  
I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free.

After me, vista!



O I see life is not short, but immeasurably long,  
I henceforth tread the world chaste, temperate, an early riser, a  
steady grower,  
Every hour the semen of centuries, and still of centuries.

I must follow up these continual lessons of the air, water, earth,  
I perceive I have no time to lose.

Year of Meteors [1859-60

Year of meteors! brooding year!  
I would bind in words retrospective some of your deeds and signs,  
I would sing your contest for the 19th Presidential,  
I would sing how an old man, tall, with white hair, mounted the  
scaffold in Virginia,  
(I was at hand, silent I stood with teeth shut close, I watch'd,  
I stood very near you old man when cool and indifferent, but trembling  
with age and your unheal'd wounds you mounted the scaffold;)  
I would sing in my copious song your census returns of the States,  
The tables of population and products, I would sing of your ships  
and their cargoes,  
The proud black ships of Manhattan arriving, some fill'd with  
immigrants, some from the isthmus with cargoes of gold,

Songs thereof would I sing, to all that hitherward comes would welcome give,  
And you would I sing, fair stripling! welcome to you from me, young  
prince of England!

(Remember you surging Manhattan's crowds as you pass'd with your  
cortege of nobles?

There in the crowds stood I, and singled you out with attachment;)   
Nor forget I to sing of the wonder, the ship as she swam up my bay,  
Well-shaped and stately the Great Eastern swam up my bay, she was  
600 feet long,

Her moving swiftly surrounded by myriads of small craft I forget not  
to sing;

Nor the comet that came unannounced out of the north flaring in heaven,  
Nor the strange huge meteor-procession dazzling and clear shooting  
over our heads,

(A moment, a moment long it sail'd its balls of unearthly light over  
our heads,

Then departed, dropt in the night, and was gone;)

Of such, and fitful as they, I sing--with gleams from them would  
gleam and patch these chants,

Your chants, O year all mottled with evil and good--year of forebodings!  
Year of comets and meteors transient and strange--lo! even here one  
equally transient and strange!

As I flit through you hastily, soon to fall and be gone, what is this chant,  
What am I myself but one of your meteors?

## With Antecedents

1

With antecedents,  
With my fathers and mothers and the accumulations of past ages,  
With all which, had it not been, I would not now be here, as I am,  
With Egypt, India, Phenicia, Greece and Rome,  
With the Kelt, the Scandinavian, the Alb and the Saxon,  
With antique maritime ventures, laws, artisanship, wars and journeys,  
With the poet, the skald, the saga, the myth, and the oracle,  
With the sale of slaves, with enthusiasts, with the troubadour, the  
    crusader, and the monk,  
With those old continents whence we have come to this new continent,  
With the fading kingdoms and kings over there,  
With the fading religions and priests,  
With the small shores we look back to from our own large and present shores,  
With countless years drawing themselves onward and arrived at these years,  
You and me arrived--America arrived and making this year,  
This year! sending itself ahead countless years to come.

2

O but it is not the years--it is I, it is You,  
We touch all laws and tally all antecedents,  
We are the skald, the oracle, the monk and the knight, we easily

include them and more,

We stand amid time beginningless and endless, we stand amid evil and good,  
All swings around us, there is as much darkness as light,  
The very sun swings itself and its system of planets around us,  
Its sun, and its again, all swing around us.

As for me, (torn, stormy, amid these vehement days,)

I have the idea of all, and am all and believe in all,

I believe materialism is true and spiritualism is true, I reject no part.

(Have I forgotten any part? any thing in the past?

Come to me whoever and whatever, till I give you recognition.)

I respect Assyria, China, Teutonia, and the Hebrews,

I adopt each theory, myth, god, and demigod,

I see that the old accounts, bibles, genealogies, are true, without  
exception,

I assert that all past days were what they must have been,

And that they could no-how have been better than they were,

And that to-day is what it must be, and that America is,

And that to-day and America could no-how be better than they are.

3

In the name of these States and in your and my name, the Past,

And in the name of these States and in your and my name, the Present time.

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,  
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time,  
(For the sake of him I typify, for the common average man's sake,  
your sake if you are he,)  
And that where I am or you are this present day, there is the centre  
of all days, all races,  
And there is the meaning to us of all that has ever come of races  
and days, or ever will come.