

BOOK XXIII

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 clamors 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 changing 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 ardor 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, labor-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 judge judges but as the sun failing round
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 denouement,
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.)

11

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 me 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 aims to every one that ask'd, stood up for the stupid
and crazy, devoted my income and labor 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?)

15

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.) in myself,

I swear I will have each quality of my race in myself,
(Talk as you like, he only suits these States whose manners favor
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, poems, 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.

Reversals

Let that which stood in front go behind,
Let that which was behind advance to the front,
Let bigots, fools, unclean persons, offer new propositions,
Let the old propositions be postponed,
Let a man seek pleasure everywhere except in himself,
Let a woman seek happiness everywhere except in herself