

BOOK XXXIII. SONGS OF PARTING

As the Time Draws Nigh

As the time draws nigh glooming a cloud,
A dread beyond of I know not what darkens me.

I shall go forth,
I shall traverse the States awhile, but I cannot tell whither or how long,
Perhaps soon some day or night while I am singing my voice will
suddenly cease.

O book, O chants! must all then amount to but this?
Must we barely arrive at this beginning of us? --and yet it is
enough, O soul;
O soul, we have positively appear'd--that is enough.

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,
I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage,
(Have the old forces, the old wars, played their parts? are the acts
suitable to them closed?)
I see Freedom, completely arm'd and victorious and very haughty,
with Law on one side and Peace on the other,
A stupendous trio all issuing forth against the idea of caste;
What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?
I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions,
I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken,
I see the landmarks of European kings removed,
I see this day the People beginning their landmarks, (all others give way;)
Never were such sharp questions ask'd as this day,
Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God,
Lo, how he urges and urges, leaving the masses no rest!
His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere, he colonizes the
Pacific, the archipelagoes,
With the steamship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, the
wholesale engines of war,
With these and the world-spreading factories he interlinks all
geography, all lands;
What whispers are these O lands, running ahead of you, passing under
the seas?
Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?

Is humanity forming en-masse? for lo, tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim,
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.

Ashes of Soldiers

Ashes of soldiers South or North,
As I muse retrospective murmuring a chant in thought,
The war resumes, again to my sense your shapes,
And again the advance of the armies.

Noiseless as mists and vapors,
From their graves in the trenches ascending,
From cemeteries all through Virginia and Tennessee,

From every point of the compass out of the countless graves,
In wafted clouds, in myriads large, or squads of twos or threes or
single ones they come,
And silently gather round me.

Now sound no note O trumpeters,
Not at the head of my cavalry parading on spirited horses,
With sabres drawn and glistening, and carbines by their thighs, (ah
my brave horsemen!
My handsome tan-faced horsemen! what life, what joy and pride,
With all the perils were yours.)

Nor you drummers, neither at reveille at dawn,
Nor the long roll alarming the camp, nor even the muffled beat for burial,
Nothing from you this time O drummers bearing my warlike drums.

But aside from these and the marts of wealth and the crowded promenade,
Admitting around me comrades close unseen by the rest and voiceless,
The slain elate and alive again, the dust and debris alive,
I chant this chant of my silent soul in the name of all dead soldiers.

Faces so pale with wondrous eyes, very dear, gather closer yet,
Draw close, but speak not.

Phantoms of countless lost,
Invisible to the rest henceforth become my companions,

Follow me ever--desert me not while I live.

Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living--sweet are the musical
voices sounding,

But sweet, ah sweet, are the dead with their silent eyes.

Dearest comrades, all is over and long gone,

But love is not over--and what love, O comrades!

Perfume from battle-fields rising, up from the foetor arising.

Perfume therefore my chant, O love, immortal love,

Give me to bathe the memories of all dead soldiers,

Shroud them, embalm them, cover them all over with tender pride.

Perfume all--make all wholesome,

Make these ashes to nourish and blossom,

O love, solve all, fructify all with the last chemistry.

Give me exhaustless, make me a fountain,

That I exhale love from me wherever I go like a moist perennial dew,

For the ashes of all dead soldiers South or North.

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,
willful, as I love them,

How the whirl, the contest, the wrestle of evil with good, the
sounding 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 their 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 liveness, 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?)

Song at Sunset

Splendor of ended day floating and filling me,
Hour prophetic, hour resuming the past,
Inflating my throat, you divine average,
You earth and life till the last ray gleams I sing.

Open mouth of my soul uttering gladness,
Eyes of my soul seeing perfection,
Natural life of me faithfully praising things,
Corroborating forever the triumph of things.

Illustrious every one!

Illustrious what we name space, sphere of unnumber'd spirits,

Illustrious the mystery of motion in all beings, even the tiniest insect,

Illustrious the attribute of speech, the senses, the body,

Illustrious the passing light--illustrious the pale reflection on

the new moon in the western sky,

Illustrious whatever I see or hear or touch, to the last.

Good in all,

In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,

In the annual return of the seasons,

In the hilarity of youth,

In the strength and flush of manhood,

In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,

In the superb vistas of death.

Wonderful to depart!

Wonderful to be here!

The heart, to jet the all-alike and innocent blood!

To breathe the air, how delicious!

To speak--to walk--to seize something by the hand!

To prepare for sleep, for bed, to look on my rose-color'd flesh!

To be conscious of my body, so satisfied, so large!

To be this incredible God I am!

To have gone forth among other Gods, these men and women I love.

Wonderful how I celebrate you and myself
How my thoughts play subtly at the spectacles around!
How the clouds pass silently overhead!
How the earth darts on and on! and how the sun, moon, stars, dart on and on!
How the water sports and sings! (surely it is alive!)
How the trees rise and stand up, with strong trunks, with branches
and leaves!
(Surely there is something more in each of the trees, some living soul.)

O amazement of things--even the least particle!
O spirituality of things!
O strain musical flowing through ages and continents, now reaching
me and America!
I take your strong chords, intersperse them, and cheerfully pass
them forward.

I too carol the sun, usher'd or at noon, or as now, setting,
I too throb to the brain and beauty of the earth and of all the
growths of the earth,
I too have felt the resistless call of myself.

As I steam'd down the Mississippi,
As I wander'd over the prairies,
As I have lived, as I have look'd through my windows my eyes,
As I went forth in the morning, as I beheld the light breaking in the east,

As I bathed on the beach of the Eastern Sea, and again on the beach
of the Western Sea,
As I roam'd the streets of inland Chicago, whatever streets I have roam'd,
Or cities or silent woods, or even amid the sights of war,
Wherever I have been I have charged myself with contentment and triumph.

I sing to the last the equalities modern or old,
I sing the endless finales of things,
I say Nature continues, glory continues,
I praise with electric voice,
For I do not see one imperfection in the universe,
And I do not see one cause or result lamentable at last in the universe.

O setting sun! though the time has come,
I still warble under you, if none else does, unmitigated adoration.

As at Thy Portals Also Death

As at thy portals also death,
Entering thy sovereign, dim, illimitable grounds,
To memories of my mother, to the divine blending, maternity,
To her, buried and gone, yet buried not, gone not from me,
(I see again the calm benignant face fresh and beautiful still,

I sit by the form in the coffin,
I kiss and kiss convulsively again the sweet old lips, the cheeks,
the closed eyes in the coffin;)
To her, the ideal woman, practical, spiritual, of all of earth,
life, love, to me the best,
I grave a monumental line, before I go, amid these songs,
And set a tombstone here.

My Legacy

The business man the acquirer vast,
After assiduous years surveying results, preparing for departure,
Devises houses and lands to his children, bequeaths stocks, goods,
funds for a school or hospital,
Leaves money to certain companions to buy tokens, souvenirs of gems
and gold.

But I, my life surveying, closing,
With nothing to show to devise from its idle years,
Nor houses nor lands, nor tokens of gems or gold for my friends,
Yet certain remembrances of the war for you, and after you,
And little souvenirs of camps and soldiers, with my love,
I bind together and bequeath in this bundle of songs.

Pensive on Her Dead Gazing

Pensive on her dead gazing I heard the Mother of All,
Desperate on the torn bodies, on the forms covering the battlefields gazing,
(As the last gun ceased, but the scent of the powder-smoke linger'd,)
As she call'd to her earth with mournful voice while she stalk'd,
Absorb them well O my earth, she cried, I charge you lose not my
 sons, lose not an atom,
And you streams absorb them well, taking their dear blood,
And you local spots, and you airs that swim above lightly impalpable,
And all you essences of soil and growth, and you my rivers' depths,
And you mountain sides, and the woods where my dear children's
 blood trickling redden'd,
And you trees down in your roots to bequeath to all future trees,
My dead absorb or South or North--my young men's bodies absorb,
 and their precious precious blood,
Which holding in trust for me faithfully back again give me many a
 year hence,
In unseen essence and odor of surface and grass, centuries hence,
In blowing airs from the fields back again give me my darlings, give
 my immortal heroes,
Exhale me them centuries hence, breathe me their breath, let not an

atom be lost,

O years and graves! O air and soil! O my dead, an aroma sweet!

Exhale them perennial sweet death, years, centuries hence.

Camps of Green

Nor alone those camps of white, old comrades of the wars,

When as order'd forward, after a long march,

Footsore and weary, soon as the light lessens we halt for the night,

Some of us so fatigued carrying the gun and knapsack, dropping

asleep in our tracks,

Others pitching the little tents, and the fires lit up begin to sparkle,

Outposts of pickets posted surrounding alert through the dark,

And a word provided for countersign, careful for safety,

Till to the call of the drummers at daybreak loudly beating the drums,

We rise up refresh'd, the night and sleep pass'd over, and resume our

journey,

Or proceed to battle.

Lo, the camps of the tents of green,

Which the days of peace keep filling, and the days of war keep filling,

With a mystic army, (is it too order'd forward? is it too only

halting awhile,

Till night and sleep pass over?)

Now in those camps of green, in their tents dotting the world,
In the parents, children, husbands, wives, in them, in the old and young,
Sleeping under the sunlight, sleeping under the moonlight, content
and silent there at last,
Behold the mighty bivouac-field and waiting-camp of all,
Of the corps and generals all, and the President over the corps and
generals all,
And of each of us O soldiers, and of each and all in the ranks we fought,
(There without hatred we all, all meet.)

For presently O soldiers, we too camp in our place in the
bivouac-camps of green,
But we need not provide for outposts, nor word for the countersign,
Nor drummer to beat the morning drum.

The Sobbing of the Bells [Midnight, Sept. 19-20, 1881]

The sobbing of the bells, the sudden death-news everywhere,
The slumberers rouse, the rapport of the People,
(Full well they know that message in the darkness,
Full well return, respond within their breasts, their brains, the

sad reverberations,)

The passionate toll and clang--city to city, joining, sounding, passing,
Those heart-beats of a Nation in the night.

As They Draw to a Close

As they draw to a close,
Of what underlies the precedent songs--of my aims in them,
Of the seed I have sought to plant in them,
Of joy, sweet joy, through many a year, in them,
(For them, for them have I lived, in them my work is done,)
Of many an aspiration fond, of many a dream and plan;
Through Space and Time fused in a chant, and the flowing eternal identity,
To Nature encompassing these, encompassing God--to the joyous,
 electric all,
To the sense of Death, and accepting exulting in Death in its turn
 the same as life,
The entrance of man to sing;
To compact you, ye parted, diverse lives,
To put rapport the mountains and rocks and streams,
And the winds of the north, and the forests of oak and pine,
With you O soul.

Joy, Shipmate, Joy!

Joy, shipmate, Joy!

(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)

Our life is closed, our life begins,

The long, long anchorage we leave,

The ship is clear at last, she leaps!

She swiftly courses from the shore,

Joy, shipmate, joy.

The Untold Want

The untold want by life and land ne'er granted,

Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find.

Portals

What are those of the known but to ascend and enter the Unknown?
And what are those of life but for Death?

These Carols

These carols sung to cheer my passage through the world I see,
For completion I dedicate to the Invisible World.

Now Finale to the Shore

Now finale to the shore,
Now land and life finale and farewell,
Now Voyager depart, (much, much for thee is yet in store,)
Often enough hast thou adventur'd o'er the seas,
Cautiously cruising, studying the charts,
Duly again to port and hawser's tie returning;
But now obey thy cherish'd secret wish,
Embrace thy friends, leave all in order,
To port and hawser's tie no more returning,
Depart upon thy endless cruise old Sailor.

So Long!

To conclude, I announce what comes after me.

I remember I said before my leaves sprang at all,
I would raise my voice jocund and strong with reference to consummations.

When America does what was promis'd,
When through these States walk a hundred millions of superb persons,
When the rest part away for superb persons and contribute to them,
When breeds of the most perfect mothers denote America,
Then to me and mine our due fruition.

I have press'd through in my own right,
I have sung the body and the soul, war and peace have I sung, and
the songs of life and death,
And the songs of birth, and shown that there are many births.

I have offer'd my style to every one, I have journey'd with confident step;
While my pleasure is yet at the full I whisper So long!
And take the young woman's hand and the young man's hand for the last time.

I announce natural persons to arise,
I announce justice triumphant,
I announce uncompromising liberty and equality,
I announce the justification of candor and the justification of pride.

I announce that the identity of these States is a single identity only,
I announce the Union more and more compact, indissoluble,
I announce splendors and majesties to make all the previous politics
of the earth insignificant.

I announce adhesiveness, I say it shall be limitless, unloosen'd,
I say you shall yet find the friend you were looking for.

I announce a man or woman coming, perhaps you are the one, (So long!)
I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste,
affectionate, compassionate, fully arm'd.

I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold,
I announce an end that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.

I announce myriads of youths, beautiful, gigantic, sweet-blooded,
I announce a race of splendid and savage old men.

O thicker and faster--(So long!)
O crowding too close upon me,
I foresee too much, it means more than I thought,

It appears to me I am dying.

Hasten throat and sound your last,

Salute me--salute the days once more. Peel the old cry once more.

Screaming electric, the atmosphere using,

At random glancing, each as I notice absorbing,

Swiftly on, but a little while alighting,

Curious envelop'd messages delivering,

Sparkles hot, seed ethereal down in the dirt dropping,

Myself unknowing, my commission obeying, to question it never daring,

To ages and ages yet the growth of the seed leaving,

To troops out of the war arising, they the tasks I have set

promulging,

To women certain whispers of myself bequeathing, their affection

me more clearly explaining,

To young men my problems offering--no dallier I--I the muscle of

their brains trying,

So I pass, a little time vocal, visible, contrary,

Afterward a melodious echo, passionately bent for, (death making

me really undying,)

The best of me then when no longer visible, for toward that I have

been incessantly preparing.

What is there more, that I lag and pause and crouch extended with

unshut mouth?

Is there a single final farewell?
My songs cease, I abandon them,
From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally solely to you.

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,
(Is it night? are we here together alone?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms--decease calls me forth.

O how your fingers drowse me,
Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse lulls the tympan
of my ears,
I feel immersed from head to foot,
Delicious, enough.

Enough O deed impromptu and secret,
Enough O gliding present--enough O summ'd-up past.

Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,
I receive now again of my many translations, from my avatars
ascending, while others doubtless await me,
An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts
awakening rays about me, So long!

Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.