

The background of the entire image is a close-up, artistic photograph of tall grasses. The grasses are silhouetted against a bright, warm light source, creating a golden-yellow glow. The blades of grass are long and thin, some pointing upwards and others leaning over, creating a sense of movement and texture. The overall color palette is dominated by warm tones of gold, orange, and brown.

Leaves of Grass

WALT WHITMAN

Leaves of Grass

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Leaves of Grass

Walt Whitman

Notes



*Come, said my soul,
Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one,)
That should I after return,
Or, long, long hence, in other spheres,
There to some group of mates the chants resuming,
(Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,)
Ever with pleas'd smile I may keep on,
Ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here
and now
Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,*

Walt Whitman

BOOK I. INSCRIPTIONS



One's-Self I Sing

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the
Muse, I say
the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

As I Ponder'd in Silence

As I ponder'd in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,

Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said,
Know'st thou not there is but one theme for ever-enduring
bards?

And that is the theme of War, the fortune of battles,
The making of perfect soldiers.

Be it so, then I answer'd,
I too haughty Shade also sing war, and a longer and
greater one than any,
Waged in my book with varying fortune, with flight,
advance
and retreat, victory deferr'd and wavering,
(Yet methinks certain, or as good as certain, at the last,)
the
field the world,
For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul,
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I above all promote brave soldiers.

In Cabin'd Ships at Sea

In cabin'd ships at sea,
The boundless blue on every side expanding,
With whistling winds and music of the waves, the large

imperious waves,
Or some lone bark buoy'd on the dense marine,
Where joyous full of faith, spreading white sails,
She cleaves the ether mid the sparkle and the foam of day,
or under
 many a star at night,
By sailors young and old haply will I, a reminiscence of
the land, be read,
In full rapport at last.

Here are our thoughts, voyagers' thoughts,
Here not the land, firm land, alone appears, may then by
them be said,
The sky o'erarches here, we feel the undulating deck
beneath our feet,
We feel the long pulsation, ebb and flow of endless
motion,
The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast
suggestions of the
 briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables,
The perfume, the faint creaking of the cordage, the
melancholy rhythm,
The boundless vista and the horizon far and dim are all
here,
And this is ocean's poem.

Then falter not O book, fulfil your destiny,
You not a reminiscence of the land alone,
You too as a lone bark cleaving the ether, purpos'd I know
not
 whither, yet ever full of faith,
Consort to every ship that sails, sail you!
Bear forth to them folded my love, (dear mariners, for you
I fold it
 here in every leaf;)
Speed on my book! spread your white sails my little bark

athwart the

imperious waves,

Chant on, sail on, bear o'er the boundless blue from me to
every sea,

This song for mariners and all their ships.

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 a Historian

You who celebrate bygones,
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races,
the life
that has exhibited itself,
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics,
aggregates,
rulers and priests,
I, habitan of the Alleghanies, treating of him as he is in
himself
in his own rights,
Pressing the pulse of the life that has seldom exhibited
itself,
(the great pride of man in himself,)

Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future.

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.

Eidolons

I met a seer,
Passing the hues and objects of the world,
The fields of art and learning, pleasure, sense,
To glean eidolons.

Put in thy chants said he,
No more the puzzling hour nor day, nor segments, parts,
put in,
Put first before the rest as light for all and entrance-song
of all,
That of eidolons.

Ever the dim beginning,
Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle,
Ever the summit and the merge at last, (to surely start
again,)
Eidolons! eidolons!

Ever the mutable,
Ever materials, changing, crumbling, re-cohering,
Ever the ateliers, the factories divine,
Issuing eidolons.

Lo, I or you,
Or woman, man, or state, known or unknown,
We seeming solid wealth, strength, beauty build,
But really build eidolons.

The ostent evanescent,
The substance of an artist's mood or savor's studies long,
Or warrior's, martyr's, hero's toils,
To fashion his eidolon.

Of every human life,
(The units gather'd, posted, not a thought, emotion, deed,
left out,)
The whole or large or small summ'd, added up,
In its eidolon.

The old, old urge,
Based on the ancient pinnacles, lo, newer, higher
pinnacles,
From science and the modern still impell'd,
The old, old urge, eidolons.

The present now and here,
America's busy, teeming, intricate whirl,
Of aggregate and segregate for only thence releasing,
To-day's eidolons.

These with the past,
Of vanish'd lands, of all the reigns of kings across the sea,
Old conquerors, old campaigns, old sailors' voyages,
Joining eidolons.

Densities, growth, facades,
Strata of mountains, soils, rocks, giant trees,
Far-born, far-dying, living long, to leave,
Eidolons everlasting.

Exalte, rapt, ecstatic,
The visible but their womb of birth,
Of orbic tendencies to shape and shape and shape,

The mighty earth-eidolon.

All space, all time,
(The stars, the terrible perturbations of the suns,
Swelling, collapsing, ending, serving their longer, shorter
use,)
Fill'd with eidolons only.

The noiseless myriads,
The infinite oceans where the rivers empty,
The separate countless free identities, like eyesight,
The true realities, eidolons.

Not this the world,
Nor these the universes, they the universes,
Purport and end, ever the permanent life of life,
Eidolons, eidolons.

Beyond thy lectures learn'd professor,
Beyond thy telescope or spectroscope observer keen,
beyond all mathematics,
Beyond the doctor's surgery, anatomy, beyond the chemist
with his chemistry,
The entities of entities, eidolons.

Unfix'd yet fix'd,
Ever shall be, ever have been and are,
Sweeping the present to the infinite future,
Eidolons, eidolons, eidolons.

The prophet and the bard,
Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,
Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, interpret yet
to them,
God and eidolons.

And thee my soul,
Joys, ceaseless exercises, exaltations,
Thy yearning amply fed at last, prepared to meet,
Thy mates, eidolons.

Thy body permanent,
The body lurking there within thy body,
The only purport of the form thou art, the real I myself,
An image, an eidolon.

Thy very songs not in thy songs,
No special strains to sing, none for itself,
But from the whole resulting, rising at last and floating,
A round full-orb'd eidolon.

For Him I Sing

For him I sing,
I raise the present on the past,
(As some perennial tree out of its roots, the present on the
past,)
With time and space I him dilate and fuse the immortal
laws,
To make himself by them the law unto himself.

When I Read the Book

When I read the book, the biography famous,
And is this then (said I) what the author calls a man's life?
And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my
life?

(As if any man really knew aught of my life,
Why even I myself I often think know little or nothing of
my real life,

Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clues and
indirections

I seek for my own use to trace out here.)

Beginning My Studies

Beginning my studies the first step pleas'd me so much,
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of
motion,

The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any farther,
But stop and loiter all the time to sing it in ecstatic songs.

Beginners

How they are provided for upon the earth, (appearing at intervals,)

How dear and dreadful they are to the earth,

How they inure to themselves as much as to any—what a paradox

appears their age,

How people respond to them, yet know them not,

How there is something relentless in their fate all times,

How all times mischoose the objects of their adulation and reward,

And how the same inexorable price must still be paid for the same

great purchase.

To the States

To the States or any one of them, or any city of the States,
Resist

much, obey little,

Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,

Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city of this earth,
ever

afterward resumes its liberty.

On Journeys Through the States

On journeys through the States we start,
(Ay through the world, urged by these songs,
Sailing henceforth to every land, to every sea,)
We willing learners of all, teachers of all, and lovers of all.

We have watch'd the seasons dispensing themselves and
passing on,

And have said, Why should not a man or woman do as
much as the

seasons, and effuse as much?

We dwell a while in every city and town,
We pass through Kanada, the North-east, the vast valley of
the

Mississippi, and the Southern States,

We confer on equal terms with each of the States,

We make trial of ourselves and invite men and women to
hear,

We say to ourselves, Remember, fear not, be candid,
promulge the

body and the soul,

Dwell a while and pass on, be copious, temperate, chaste,
magnetic,

And what you effuse may then return as the seasons
return,

And may be just as much as the seasons.

To a Certain Cantatrice

Here, take this gift,
I was reserving it for some hero, speaker, or general,
One who should serve the good old cause, the great idea,
the
 progress and freedom of the race,
Some brave confronter of despots, some daring rebel;
But I see that what I was reserving belongs to you just as
much as to any.

Me Imperturbe

Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,
Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in the midst of
irrational things,
Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,
Finding my occupation, poverty, notoriety, foibles, crimes,
less
 important than I thought,
Me toward the Mexican sea, or in the Mannahatta or the
Tennessee,
 or far north or inland,
A river man, or a man of the woods or of any farm-life of
these
 States or of the coast, or the lakes or Kanada,
Me wherever my life is lived, O to be self-balanced for
contingencies,

To confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents,
rebuffs, as
the trees and animals do.

Savantism

Thither as I look I see each result and glory retracing
itself and

nestling close, always obligated,

Thither hours, months, years—thither trades, compacts,
establishments, even the most minute,

Thither every-day life, speech, utensils, politics, persons,
estates;

Thither we also, I with my leaves and songs, trustful,
admirant,

As a father to his father going takes his children along
with him.

The Ship Starting

Lo, the unbounded sea,

On its breast a ship starting, spreading all sails, carrying
even

her moonsails.

The pennant is flying aloft as she speeds she speeds so
stately—

below emulous waves press forward,

They surround the ship with shining curving motions and
foam.

I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,

Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be
blithe and strong,

The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or
beam,

The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or
leaves off work,

The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the
deckhand

singing on the steamboat deck,

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter
singing as

he stands,

The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the
morning,

or at noon intermission or at sundown,

The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife
at work,

or of the girl sewing or washing,

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,

The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of
young

fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

What Place Is Besieged?

What place is besieged, and vainly tries to raise the siege?

Lo, I send to that place a commander, swift, brave,
immortal,

And with him horse and foot, and parks of artillery,
And artillery-men, the deadliest that ever fired gun.

Still Though the One I Sing

Still though the one I sing,

(One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to
Nationality,

I leave in him revolt, (O latent right of insurrection! O
quenchless, indispensable fire!)

Shut Not Your Doors

Shut not your doors to me proud libraries,
For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves,
yet
 needed most, I bring,
Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made,
The words of my book nothing, the drift of it every thing,
A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the
intellect,
But you ye untold latencies will thrill to every page.

Poets to Come

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater
than
 before known,
Arouse! for you must justify me.

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the
future,

I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in
the darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping,
turns a
 casual look upon you and then averts his face,

Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.

To You

Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to
me, why
 should you not speak to me?
And why should I not speak to you?

Thou Reader

Thou reader throbbest life and pride and love the same as
I,
Therefore for thee the following chants.

BOOK II



Starting from Paumanok

1

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother,
After roaming many lands, lover of populous pavements,
Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
Or a soldier camp'd or carrying my knapsack and gun, or
a miner

in California,

Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, my diet meat, my
drink from

the spring,

Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds intervals passing rapt and
happy,

Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri, aware
of

mighty Niagara,

Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hirsute
and

strong-breasted bull,

Of earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers experienced, stars,
rain, snow,

my amaze,

Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the flight of
the

mountain-hawk,

And heard at dawn the unrivall'd one, the hermit thrush
from the
 swamp-cedars,
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

2

Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.
This then is life,
Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes
and convulsions.

How curious! how real!
Underfoot the divine soil, overhead the sun.

See revolving the globe,
The ancestor-continents away group'd together,
The present and future continents north and south, with
the isthmus
 between.

See, vast trackless spaces,
As in a dream they change, they swiftly fill,
Countless masses debouch upon them,
They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts,
institutions, known.

See, projected through time,
For me an audience interminable.

With firm and regular step they wend, they never stop,
Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions,
One generation playing its part and passing on,
Another generation playing its part and passing on in its
turn,

With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards me to
listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me.

3

Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
For you a programme of chants.

Chants of the prairies,
Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the
Mexican sea,
Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and
Minnesota,
Chants going forth from the centre from Kansas, and
thence equidistant,
Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all.

4

Take my leaves America, take them South and take them
North,
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your
own off-spring,
Surround them East and West, for they would surround
you,
And you precedents, connect lovingly with them, for they
connect
lovingly with you.

I conn'd old times,
I sat studying at the feet of the great masters,
Now if eligible O that the great masters might return and
study me.

In the name of these States shall I scorn the antique?
Why these are the children of the antique to justify it.

5

Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language-shapers on other shores,
Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or
desolate,
I dare not proceed till I respectfully credit what you have
left
 wafted hither,
I have perused it, own it is admirable, (moving awhile
among it,)
Think nothing can ever be greater, nothing can ever
deserve more
 than it deserves,
Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it,
I stand in my place with my own day here.

Here lands female and male,
Here the heir-ship and heiress-ship of the world, here the
flame of
 materials,
Here spirituality the translatress, the openly-avow'd,
The ever-tending, the finale of visible forms,
The satisfier, after due long-waiting now advancing,
Yes here comes my mistress the soul.

6

The soul,
Forever and forever—longer than soil is brown and solid—
longer
 than water ebbs and flows.
I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to
be the
 most spiritual poems,
And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality,

For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of my
soul and
 of immortality.

I will make a song for these States that no one State may
under any
 circumstances be subjected to another State,
And I will make a song that there shall be comity by day
and by
 night between all the States, and between any two of
them,
And I will make a song for the ears of the President, full of
 weapons with menacing points,
And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces;
And a song make I of the One form'd out of all,
The fang'd and glittering One whose head is over all,
Resolute warlike One including and over all,
(However high the head of any else that head is over all.)

I will acknowledge contemporary lands,
I will trail the whole geography of the globe and salute
courteously
 every city large and small,
And employments! I will put in my poems that with you is
heroism
 upon land and sea,
And I will report all heroism from an American point of
view.

I will sing the song of companionship,
I will show what alone must finally compact these,
I believe these are to found their own ideal of manly love,
 indicating it in me,
I will therefore let flame from me the burning fires that
were
 threatening to consume me,