

WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY SINGS ABOUT AMERICA

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN! – response to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln

O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.
 O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
 Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head;
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

I HEAR AMERICA SINGING – a poem about industrializing America

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.

Excerpt from SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE (2) – welcoming immigration

Welcome are all earth's lands, each for its kind,
 Welcome are lands of pine and oak,
 Welcome are lands of the lemon and fig,
 Welcome are lands of gold,
 Welcome are lands of wheat and maize, welcome those of the grape,
 Welcome are lands of sugar and rice,
 Welcome the cotton-lands, welcome those of the white potato and sweet potato,
 Welcome are mountains, flats, sands, forests, prairies,
 Welcome the rich borders of rivers, table-lands, openings,
 Welcome the measureless grazing-lands, welcome the teeming soil of orchards, flax, honey, hemp;
 Welcome just as much the other more hard-faced lands,
 Lands rich as lands of gold or wheat and fruit lands,
 Lands of mines, lands of the manly and rugged ores,
 Lands of coal, copper, lead, tin, zinc,
 Lands of iron-lands of the make of the axe.

Excerpt from SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE (9, 12) – expansion and work

The axe leaps!

The solid forest gives fluid utterances,

They tumble forth, they rise and form,

Hut, tent, landing, survey,

Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,

Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, lamb, lath, panel, gable,

Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition-house, library,

Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, turret, porch,

Hoe, rake, pitchfork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw, jack-plane, mallet, wedge, rounce,

Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,

Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not,

Capitols of States, and capitol of the nation of States,

Long stately rows in avenues, hospitals for orphans or for the poor or sick,

Manhattan steamboats and clippers taking the measure of all seas.

The shapes arise!

Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets,

Shapes of the two-threaded tracks of railroads,

Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches,

Shapes of the fleets of barges, tows, lake and canal craft, river craft,

Ship-yards and dry-docks along the Eastern and Western seas, and in many a bay and by-place,

The live-oak kelsons, the pine planks, the spars, the hackmatack-roots for knees,

The ships themselves on their ways, the tiers of scaffolds, the workmen busy outside and inside,

The tools lying around, the great auger and little auger, the adze, bolt, line, square, gouge, and bead-plane.

The main shapes arise!

Shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries,

Shapes ever projecting other shapes,

Shapes of turbulent manly cities,

Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,

Shapes bracing the earth and braced with the whole earth.

Excerpts from A SONG FOR OCCUPATIONS (1, 5) – work transform America

A SONG for occupations!

In the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the developments,
And find the eternal meanings.

Neither a servant nor a master I,

I take no sooner a large price than a small price, I will have my own whoever enjoys me,
I will be even with you and you shall be even with me.

House-building, measuring, sawing the boards,

Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, coopering, tin-roofing, shingle-dressing,

Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers,

The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the coal-kiln and brickkiln,

Coal-mines and all that is down there, the lamps in the darkness, echoes, songs, what meditations, what
vast native thoughts looking through smutch'd faces,

Iron-works, forge-fires in the mountains or by river-banks, men around feeling the melt with huge
crowbars, lumps of ore, the due combining of ore, limestone, coal,

The blast-furnace and the puddling-furnace, the loup-lump at the bottom of the melt at last, the rolling-
mill, the stumpy bars of pig-iron, the strong clean-shaped Trail for railroads,

Oil-works, silk-works, white-lead-works, the sugar-house, steam-saws, the great mills and factories,

Stone-cutting, shapely trimmings for facades or window or door-lintels, the mallet, the tooth-chisel, the
jib to protect the thumb,

The calking-iron, the kettle of boiling vault-cement, and the fire under the kettle,

The cotton-bale, the stevedore's hook, the saw and buck of the sawyer, the mould of the moulder, the
working-knife of the butcher, the ice-saw, and all the work with ice,

The work and tools of the rigger, grappler, sail-maker, block-maker,

Goods of gutta-percha, papier-mache, colors, brushes, brush-making, glazier's implements,

The veneer and glue-pot, the confectioner's ornaments, the decanter and glasses, the shears and flat-iron,

The awl and knee-strap, the pint measure and quart measure, the counter and stool, the writing-pen of
quill or metal, the making of all sorts of edged tools,

The brewery, brewing, the malt, the vats, every thing that is done by brewers, wine-makers, vinegar-
makers,

Leather-dressing, coach-making, boiler-making, rope-twisting, distilling, sign-painting, lime-burning,
cotton-picking, electroplating, electrotyping, stereotyping,

Stave-machines, planing-machines, reaping-machines, ploughing-machines, thrashing-machines, steam
wagons,

The cart of the carman, the omnibus, the ponderous dray,

Pyrotechny, letting off color'd fireworks at night, fancy figures and jets;

Beef on the butcher's stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the butcher in his killing-clothes,

The pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the scalding's tub, gutting, the cutter's cleaver, the
packer's maul, and the plenteous winterwork of pork-packing,

Flour-works, grinding of wheat, rye, maize, rice, the barrels and the half and quarter barrels, the loaded
barges, the high piles on wharves and levees,

The men and the work of the men on ferries, railroads, coasters, fish-boats, canals;

The hourly routine of your own or any man's life, the shop, yard, store, or factory,

These shows all near you by day and night-workman! whoever you are, your daily life!

Excerpts from THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD (4, 6) – a poem about Imperialism?

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
 Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,
 The Past is also stored in thee,
 Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the Western continent alone,
 Earth's resume entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied by thy spars,
 With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink or swim with thee,
 With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou bear'st the other continents,
 Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port triumphant;
 Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye O helmsman, thou carriest great companions,
 Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
 And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.

Not for success alone,
 Not to fair-sail unintermitted always,
 The storm shall dash thy face, the murk of war and worse than war shall cover thee all over,
 (Wert capable of war, its tug and trials? be capable of peace, its trials,
 For the tug and mortal strain of nations come at last in prosperous peace, not war;)
 In many a smiling mask death shall approach beguiling thee, thou in disease shalt swelter,
 The livid cancer spread its hideous claws, clinging upon thy breasts, seeking to strike thee deep within,
 Consumption of the worst, moral consumption, shall rouge thy face with hectic,
 But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and surmount them all,
 Whatever they are to-day and whatever through time they may be,
 They each and all shall lift and pass away and cease from thee,
 While thou, Time's spirals rounding, out of thyself, thyself still extricating, fusing,
 Equable, natural, mystical Union thou, (the mortal with immortal blent,)
 Shalt soar toward the fulfilment of the future, the spirit of the body and the mind,
 The soul, its destinies.

In thee America, the soul, its destinies,
 Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!
 By many a throe of heat and cold convuls'd, (by these thyself solidifying,)
 Thou mental, moral orb--thou New, indeed new, Spiritual World!
 The Present holds thee not--for such vast growth as thine,
 For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,
 The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.

WE TWO BOYS TOGETHER CLINGING – a poem about friendship and love

WE two boys together clinging,
 One the other never leaving,
 Up and down the roads going, North and South excursions making,
 Power enjoying, elbows stretching, fingers clutching,
 Arm'd and fearless, eating, drinking, sleeping, loving.
 No law less than ourselves owning, sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening,
 Misers, menials, priests alarming, air breathing, water drinking, on the turf or the sea-beach dancing,
 Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking, feebleness chasing,
 Fulfilling our foray.

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