

Song of Myself<sup>1</sup>

## 1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
 And what I assume you shall assume,  
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,  
 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. 5

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,  
 Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and  
     their parents the same,  
 I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
 Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance, 10  
 Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never  
     forgotten,  
 I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,  
 Nature without check with original energy.

## 2

~~Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are  
     crowded with perfumes,  
 I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it, 15  
 The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.~~

~~The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the  
     distillation, it is odorless,  
 It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,  
 I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and  
     naked,  
 I am mad for it to be in contact with me.<sup>2</sup> 20~~

1. This poem, untitled and unsectioned in 1855, occupied more than half of the first edition of *L.G.* In 1856 it was titled "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American"; in the 1860 and succeeding editions it was titled simply "Walt Whitman," until in 1881 it became "Song of Myself." As the variorum readings indicate, its evolution, beginning in the notebooks of 1847–48 (see *UPP*, II, 69–86) and continuing with many revisions through seven editions, was not complete until 1881, although the poet never altered the poem fundamentally, restricting himself to changes in diction and rhythm. "Song of Myself" is essentially the epitome of the poet's "haughty" song, sure in its intent; and what to early commentators seemed a kind of chaos of poetic exuberance is now recognized as deliberate structure—perhaps an early modern example of the method of free association, but artful and controlled in its reporting of what comes into awareness. The movement of "Song of Myself" is circular rather than progressive, returning upon itself in evocation of ecstasy and confession, of identification and recognition, of rapturous union with earth and spirit—truly a celebration both personal and universal. For a generous survey of critical opinion regarding "Song of Myself," see Edwin Haviland Miller, ed., *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Mosaic of Interpretations* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), xviii–xxviii.
2. The symbolism of this passage, lines 14–20, suggests the opposition between experience from shelved books and experience from Nature—a Wordsworthian concept. See Alice L. Cooke, "A Note on Whitman's Symbolism in 'Song of Myself,'" *MLN* 65: 228–32.