

# On Earth

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Last Poems and an Essay

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## Reflections on Whitman in Age

The descent beckons  
as the ascent beckoned.  
Memory is a kind  
of accomplishment,  
a sort of renewal  
even

an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places  
inhabited by hordes  
heretofore unrealized . . .

W. C. Williams, "The Descent"

In age one is oneself reflective, both of what it has been to live and of what that act has become as a resonance (I'd almost written a *residence*) in memory—what it all meant, so to speak, what it had felt like. It is very hard for me to believe that what William Carlos Williams calls "the descent" (to the ending of life, one must presume) can ever be more than the accumulation a literal life must be fact of, the *stance* of a body, the *history* of such body in a particular time and place, the *manifest* of that locating "thing" in the myriad ways in which it has engaged and been engaged by the world surrounding.

Yet even the "world" itself is imagination, simply "the length of a human life," as its etymology defines. The one hundred and fifty years since Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was first published is a moment in any world so conceived, and the bridges to and from such world are not determined by rational judgments or understanding. One *knows*, as is said—one *recognizes* the footprints on the floor of the caves in the Dordogne, dating back to the Upper Paleolithic—so very far, finally, from any intellectual understanding or resolution, however insistently attempted.

Poetry is of such "age" and carries with it the same character of echo. One does not hear it unless in the most obvious way one listens. Otherwise its correspondences and determined intimacies of feeling—all the physical reception that being human constitutes—are lost. Now I know, for example, that age itself is a *body*, not a measure of time or record of how much one has grown. So Williams told me years ago, speaking of himself. "You reach for it but you can't quite get it. You try but you fail."

In a Women's Studies class in Warsaw, of all places, I asked the students, both men and women, what was their sense of old people? I had been reading almost obsessively Simone de Beauvoir's *Old Age (La Vieillesse, 1970)*. "They don't smell

good," one answered. "They ramble on." "They can't take care of themselves. No one understands what they're talking about, and they look awful." I wanted to insist, "But you will all grow old, at least if you have any luck. To be human has growing old at its end . . ." How could they possibly hear me—and how abstract, finally, that aged world must be for them—even the literally smelly elders and their mindless wandering battle must seem altogether without reality. What to say? Walt Whitman, some three years before his death, wrote this poem, among others.

The touch of flame—the illuminating fire—the loftiest look at last,

O'er city, passion, sea—o'er prairie, mountain, wood—the earth itself;

The airy, different, changing hues of all, in falling twilight,

Objects and-groups, bearings, faces, reminiscences;

The calmer sight—the golden setting, clear and broad;

So much ' the atmosphere, the points of view, the situations whence we scan,

Bro't out by them alone—so much (perhaps the best) unreck'd before;

The lights indeed from them—old age's lambent peaks.

"Old Age's Lambent Peaks," 1888

The common sense is that Whitman's poems faded as he grew older, that their art grew more mechanical and that the poems themselves had rarely the power of his more youthful writing. The life, however, is finally the poetry, the issue and manifest of its existence—not as some mystic aspect of vision or of surreal realms of elsewhere, but literally so—just as Keats's "mortal hand still capable of grasping." I want to ask, Where does one think this man *is*—other than watching the sunset? Where is this place wherein there is "The airy, different, changing hues of all, in falling twilight, / Objects and groups, bearings, faces, reminiscences; / The calmer sight." What are the compulsions of the cadence, the "airy, different" rhythms? Why the persistent backbeat, the "falling twilight," the "objects and groups, bearings, faces, reminiscences . . ."

For a poet these details are profound masteries in themselves and speak as emphatically as will the evident content one otherwise calls "the meaning." Whitman seems as if writing with a habit so deep and familiar it no longer separates from him as an art or intention. Rather, it sounds out as does "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang . . ." But Whitman is older, and therefore wiser, than was Shakespeare in so writing. Here is perhaps a better parallel:

There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons—  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes—

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference,  
Where the Meanings, are—

None may teach it—Any—  
'Tis the Seal Despair—  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air—

When it comes, the Landscape listens—  
Shadows—hold their breath—  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death—

"There's a certain Slant of light,"  
*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*,  
ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 1960

No metric will quite serve to explain Emily Dickinson's rhythms here, though the frame is certainly an old one. What, then, is one reading—or hearing—in the insistent

"Where the Meanings are," and how accommodate "When it comes, the Landscape listens—/ Shadows—hold their breath—," etc.? It cannot be a didactic "inelligence" calling such sounds to order. All one is, is a body. So it is that which speaks first.

Yet poetry is still thought of, insistently, as a product, as something answering either to a determined definition or else to a use not necessarily its own. Gregory Corso rightly said that only the poet can validate him- or herself. There is no other reference or judgment that can give more than an opinion. Opinions are rightly and generously the response an art may depend upon, but they do not determine what it is or can be.

"The poet thinks with his poem," Williams wrote. "In that lies his thought." What Whitman was thinking in age is not much different from that "thought" by all people in a similar situation. The titles he uses for the various later sections of *Leaves of Grass* are good instances: "Autumn Rivulets," "Whispers of Heavenly Death," "From Noon to Starry Night," "Songs of Parting, Sands at Seventy (*First Annex*)," and "Good-Bye My Fancy (*Second Annex*)." One thinks of the persistent, familiar framing of life implied—or, as put by then-youthful John Ashbery, "How much longer will I be

able to inhabit the divine sepulcher . . ." Whatever, the end seems never far enough away.

It's "Fancy" that's most useful to me here, the key, as it were, to all that did take and find place, all that world and what Whitman or any of us did make of it. It's a great word in itself, the contraction of *fantasy*: "c. 1325, 'illusory appearance,' from O.Fr. *fantasie*, from L. *phantasia*, from Gk. *phantasia* 'appearance, image, perception, imagination,' from *phantazesthai* 'picture to oneself,' from *phantos* 'visible,' from *phainesthai* 'appear,' in late Gk. 'to imagine, have visions,' related to *phaos*, *phos* 'light.' Sense of 'whimsical notion, illusion' is pre-1400, followed by that of 'imagination,' which is first attested 1539. Sense of 'day-dream based on desires' is from 1926, as is *fantasize*. . ." (The year I was born!) "Reality" is the given *imago mundi*, the *fantasy* in- to which one is born. It's where thought and sense find a way of meeting—and in no one more vividly than in Whitman. "Good-Bye My Fancy" (1891, the first of two late poems that use this phrase for title) is a painful, displacing recognition:

Good-bye my fancy—(I had a word to say,  
But 'tis not quite the time—The best of any man's word or say,

Is when its proper place arrives—and for its meaning,  
I keep mine till the last.)

It is a loss age itself determines, which parentheses cannot  
change. One knows all too well that what's to be said has  
only its own occasion. I think of Yeats writing "Sailing to  
Byzantium" (1927), beginning to feel the insistent, nagging  
limits of a physical body. But it is a controlled reflection, al-  
most elegant in its securing urbanity:

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall  
Come from the holy fire, perne in the gyre,  
And be the singing masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

Three years later, now markedly ill, he writes in the active ap-  
prehension of death a very different poem:

The unpurged images of day recede;  
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;

Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song  
After great cathedral gong;  
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains  
All that man is,  
All mere complexities,  
The fury and the mire of human veins.

"Byzantium," 1930

The metaphors here ground in the all-too-actual, the clock's  
physical striking, the edges of the day's thinking still insistent  
as the sounds of persons moving in the street below now fade  
and grow quiet. So he lies there waiting, necessarily passive,  
in a world no longer in any sense his own.

Whitman is characteristically reported as physically vul-  
nerable, beginning with his first stroke in his early fifties. He  
appears to have been a big man, but here is an account of his  
arrival at Morgan's Hall in Camden for his seventieth birth-  
day celebration:

Whitman himself was not present when the crowd gathered at  
5 P.M. [May 31, 1889]. . . . After dinner was cleared away, the air  
buzzed with anticipation of the poet's arrival. Soon a policeman  
cried, "He's coming!" The hall fell silent and all eyes were riveted on  
the entrance door.

Doubtless, many hearts sank at his pitiful condition. His large, once robust frame was now slumped in a wheel chair pushed by a male nurse. He had famously boasted in a poem of his perfect health, but a series of strokes—"whacks," he called them—had partly paralyzed him, while digestive and excretive disorders gave him what he described as a "soggy, wet, sticky" feeling as of tar oozing over him.

Still, the undeniable Whitman magnetism was there. He was wrapped in a blue overcoat, under which he wore a black dinner jacket, a natty departure from his usual plain gray one. His clean white shirt was open at the neck, and his round felt hat was pushed back on his head. His snowy hair and cascading beard gave him a jovian majesty. Tiny wrinkles seamed his face, but his pink complexion gave him a deceptive air of health. His gray-blue eyes, their large lids drooping, had a look of tired wisdom and stolid impassivity. The high-arched eyebrows made him seem slightly surprised.

David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, Prologue

A sequence of poems written a few years earlier, "Fancies at Navesink," makes most clear the fact of age and, particularly, how Whitman felt himself located in that circumstance. He had long practiced in being the curious "icon" of his own intent. Borges says of him, "Walt Whitman himself was a myth, a myth of a man who wrote, a very unfortunate

man, very lonely, and yet he made of himself a rather splendid vagabond. I have pointed out that Whitman is perhaps the only writer on earth who has managed to create a mythological person of himself and one of the three persons of the Trinity is the reader, because when you read Walt Whitman, you are Walt Whitman. Very strange that he did that, the only person on earth."

Although the ability to project such scale as "Song of Myself" lessens in age, Whitman's impulse and rhetoric stay put. So I wonder just when he had been on that high point of ground overlooking the Navesink River and the sea. He must have known, like they say, that a local name for "Navesink" was "Neverstunk," come not as the former from the name of a tribe of the Lenni-Lenapi family, who cultivated oysters on the banks of the river, but from the fact that the hills, as the sun lowered, cast such long shadows out over the sea. So they were thought by passing ships "never" to be "stunk" out of sight. The rise of ground back of the river, Mount Mitchell, is the highest point on all the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida. So one looks out from it, whether in sight or in mind, and sees an ample and far-reaching prospect—sea, town, river, and sky. Whitman begins with an echo of nostalgic history:

*The Pilot in the Mist*

Screaming the northern rapids— (an old St. Lawrence  
reminiscence,

A sudden memory-flash comes back, I know not why,  
Here waiting for the sunrise, gazing from this hill.)

Again 'tis just at morning—a heavy haze contends with  
day-break,

Again the trembling, laboring vessel veers me—I press through  
foam-dashed rocks that almost touch me,

Again I mark where aft the small thin Indian helmsman  
Looms in the mist, with brow elate and governing hand.

There is such pleasure here in the sounds of the words as  
they move, "Again 'tis just at morning," "Again the trem-  
bling, laboring vessel veers me." The markedly early hour is  
lovely as well, dear to children and the old, with its fresh,  
open quiet, its promptings unquestioned by anyone at all. I  
am moved by the way the apparent real, "Here waiting for  
this sunrise, gazing from this hill," melds with the recollec-  
tion, the "foam-dashed rocks that almost touch me." Just so  
the habit of giving directions in the town where I grew up  
would say, "Turn left by the old house that used to be there  
before it burned down." Does it matter, I wonder, that  
Whitman may never have "steam[ed] the northern rapids,"

that there is no "old St. Lawrence reminiscence, / A sudden  
memory-flash"? I recognize increasingly in my own insistent  
memories that much they bring with them is both true and  
false. They have their own story.

The next section of "Fancies at Navesink" seems most a  
reckoning-up, an evidence of his models and ambitions, but  
it doesn't argue that they were his finally—"Tennyson's fair  
ladies, / Meter or wit the best," etc.

*Had I the Choice*

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards

To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,

Homer with all his wars and warriors—Hector, Achilles, Ajax,

Or Shakspeare's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello—

Tennyson's fair ladies,

Meter or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme,

delight of singers;

These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,

Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer

Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,

And leave its odor there.

I suppose this is what poets can be persuaded they should  
write. Poems about writing poems are almost without ex-

ception drab. *Look at me, I'm being sea!* But one recalls what he had done—as here:

... Where to answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,  
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,  
And again death, death, death, death  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd  
child's heart,  
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly  
all over,

Death, death, death, death, death.

"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," 1859

In contrast, "Had I the Choice" presumes a choice, which is not so simply the case, as Whitman must have known. "These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter" is no loss of powers, rather a curiously determined lapse, almost perversely "chosen" here. In contrast, he next tries a large cast, already familiar in his earlier work:

*You Tides with Ceaseless Swell*

You tides with ceaseless swell! you power that does this work!  
You unseen force, centripetal, centrifugal, through space's spread,  
Rapport of sun, moon, earth, and all the constellations,  
What are the messages by you from distant stars to us? what  
Sirius? what Capella's?  
What central heart—and you the pulse—vivifies all? what  
boundless aggregate of all?  
What subtle indirection and significance in you? what clue you?  
what fluid, vast identity,  
Holding the universe with all its parts as one—as sailing in a ship?

Those last five words come in with such poignance. Like Coleridge's "gentleman from Porlock," they break the sliding rhetoric with such a charmingly apt instance of what Whitman had in mind. Otherwise I have the feeling that this section also is finally an exercise. The sea can't be put as such a simplifying reference—it's too real.

If there has been any confusion as to what Whitman is centered upon, it's now clear indeed that the sea is his preoccupation, as it has been persistently throughout his life. In age the sea becomes more and more present as source and as that to which one returns, metaphorically perhaps but also quite literally, losing signifying name and function, entering



the utterly common fare of all beyond any differentiation or exception. There is no longer a locating ground.

*Last of Ebb, and Daylight Waning*

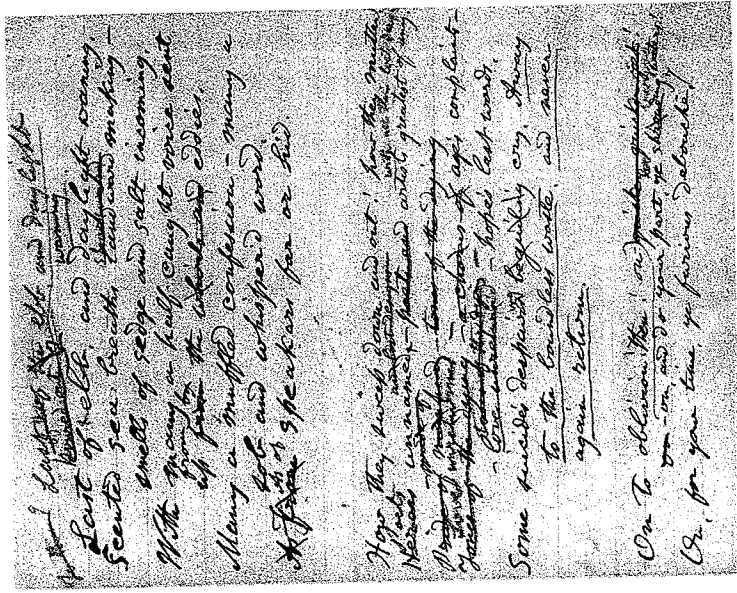
Last of ebb, and daylight waning,  
Scented sea-cool landward making, smells of sedge and salt  
incoming,  
With many a half-caught voice sent up from the eddies,  
Many a muffled confession—many a sob and whisper'd word  
As of speakers far or hid.

How they sweep down and out! How they murmur!  
Poets unnamed—artists greatest of any, with cherish'd lost designs,  
Love's unresponse—a chorus of age's complaints—hope's last  
words,

Some suicide's despairing cry, *Away to the boundless waste, and  
never again return.*

On to oblivion then!  
On, on and do your part, ye burying, ebbing tide!  
On for your time, ye furious débouché!

In the surviving manuscript of this poem one can see the same determining emphasis. Again it is useful evidence of Whitman's need to find the active *place* of his own situation, caught with neither a "here" nor a "there" to define him



securely. "Love's unresponse," for example, is not at all the same as "Love unreturned," apparently the initial phrase he thought to use. In the resolved draft "Love" is what no longer responds, simply does not answer. The distance from person increases as "love" shifts from agency, a state, to "Love," a generality, a subject having its own authority and determination. In like sense, the shift from "As from speakers" to "As of speakers" in the fifth line marks a very different human relation.

*And Yet Not You Alone*

And yet not you alone, twilight and burying ebb,  
Nor you, ye lost designs alone—nor failures, aspirations;  
I know, divine deceitful ones, your glamour's seeming;  
Duly by you, from you, the tide and light again—duly the  
hinges turning  
Duly the needed discord-parts offsetting, blending,  
Weaving from you, from Sleep, Night, Death, itself,  
The rhythmus of Birth eternal.

Now as ever the insistent wash, the roll and return of the waves, the light recurring, "duly the hinges turning" must be the constants, "the rhythmus of Birth eternal," writ however large. One *needs* them, needs the familiar, the company, the chittering birds at the feeder, the far-off hum of the persis-

tent traffic, the chimneys and cranes out the window over the rooftops to the trashed small harbor.

Daily, it would seem, the persons one has lived with go, leaving an inexorable emptiness. Some bright person, writing of the old, remarked that their insistent rehearsal of who has died would be better understood if one thinks of old age as a neighborhood in which almost daily a house burns down. Who would not be affected by that, one wonders. Isn't that worth talking about?

*Proudly the Flood Comes In*

Proudly the flood comes in, shouting, foaming, advancing,  
Long it holds at the high, with bosom broad outswelling,  
All throbs, dilates—the farms, woods, streets of cities—  
workmen at work,  
Mainsails, topsails, jibs, appear in the offing—steamers' pennants  
of smoke—and under the forenoon sun,  
Freighted with human lives, gaily the outward bound, gaily the  
inward bound,  
Flaunting from many a spar the flag I love.

No doubt Whitman was making himself convenient to public sentiment of the time, much as today one recognizes that not a single member of Congress will state him- or herself as *not* "believing in God." The "flaunting" of flags is hardly

new, and who knows but Whitman's own sentiments were so persuaded? He surely loved a parade. But the poet, or, for my interests now, the "Dear old man," as Tennyson addressed him in a letter in 1887, the increasingly sick old man, is not so clearly present. This verse, despite its bright sense of physical details, is committed overtly to a public display of his authority as classic "elder statesman."

Horace Traubel in his exceptional devotion to the recording of Whitman's last years, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* in nine volumes, has many reports of his poor health. Though Traubel wants his hero to win out, he is not expectably very confident. Here is what he writes as part of an entry, "Monday, June 4, 1888":

Ferguson referred to me this morning several questions about which I had to confer with W. I went to Camden in consequence this noon, reaching 328 [Mickle Street] at a quarter past twelve. Found Harned there with two of his children, Mrs. Davis also, all of them in the parlor, anxiously regarding W., who lay on the sofa. What was the matter? My alarm was instant. But W. was very cheerful: "I seem to have had since last night three strokes of a paralytic character—shocks, premonitions. That's all there is to it. Don't worry about it, boy." He held my hand warmly and firmly. When he drove off from Harned's yesterday with Doctor Bucke he was in great good humor and (for him) apparent health. In the evening he undertook to sponge him-

self, in his own room, alone, and while so engaged fell to the floor, finding himself unable to move or to call for assistance, lying there, he thought, helplessly, for several hours. When asked why he did not call Mrs. Davis he said: "I thought best to fight it out myself." He added to me: "I have had many such attacks in the past—they do not alarm me—though I am aware they do not signify good health." This morning two perhaps lighter attacks had followed—one of which, the last, that from which he was recovering on my arrival, having somewhat affected his speech. "I never suffered that entanglement in my former experiences," he explained. Harned was present when this occurred. No doctor there. "Don't get a doctor," commanded W., adding humorously: "I think of it this way, you know: that if the doctors come I shall not only have to fight the disease but fight them, whereas if I am left alone I have but the one foe to contend with." Mrs. Davis happening to say: "I hope it will all pass off," he replied: "I guess it will but if it does not it will be all right." W. attributes the trouble to his "infernal indigestion" suffered of late. "I have passed through hells of indigestion," Harned suggested. "Fast for awhile—cut your belly off." W. smiled. "I am aware of the need of caution but I am aware also of the fact that I must keep the fire going."

There's a kind of Will Rogers affability here given Whitman, as if he were being depicted primarily for his role of the Great Grey Poet rather than described as the old and vulnerable man he clearly was. It's no joke to be "several hours" on the floor, unable to raise oneself or to call for help.

Traubel seems the perfect straight man, however, for such phrases as "I have had many such attacks in the past—they do not alarm me—though I am aware they do not signify good health." What could Traubel have written, I suppose, no matter what Whitman said.

*By That Long Scan of Waves*

By that long scan of waves, myself call'd back, resumed upon myself,  
In every crest some undulating light or shade—some retrospect,  
Joys, travels, studies, silent panoramas—scenes, ephemeral,  
The long past war, the battles, hospital sights, the wounded and the dead,  
Myself through every by-gone phase—my idle youth—old age at hand,  
My three score years of life summ'd up, and more, and past,  
By any grand ideal tried, intentionless, the whole a nothing,  
And haply yet some drop within God's scheme's ensemble—some wave, or part of a wave,  
Like one of yours, ye multitudinous ocean.

Whitman's "call'd back" is quite other than Emily Dickin-son's brief, last note to Louise and Fanny Norcross, sent shortly before her death, "Little Cousins, Called Back, Emily." One needs something wherewith to make place for

whatever a life has been, its human summary if nothing else. Did it matter? Was it all phantasmagoria? Who was finally there? The roll and turn of the physical waves, their ceaseless repetition, the seeming return of each so particular, the same and yet not the same—this is the "call," recall (*recoil*), he has come to, an indeterminate spill of memories "By any grand ideal tried, intentionless, the whole a nothing." But one hopes to have been included even so, to have mattered, taken place, been part of, *done*—as one says in this utterly merci- less country—*something*.

*Then Last of All*

Then last of all, caught from these shores, this hill,  
Of you O tides, the mystic human meaning:  
Only by law of you, your swell and ebb, enclosing me the same,  
The brain that shapes, the voice that chants this song.

"Then Last of All," one tries to make sense of it, to get a grip on it, somehow find an enduring sense that the human has a sustaining pattern, is part of the proverbial whole. Age would seem age forever, but the years between Whitman's writing of these lines and my own words here mark so many bitter recognitions. I think of Robert Duncan's evocation of Whitman in "A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar":

. . . Hoover, Coolidge, Harding, Wilson  
hear the factories of human misery turning out commodities.  
For whom are the holy matins of the heart ringing?  
Noble men in the quiet of morning hear  
Indians singing the continent's violent requiem.  
Harding, Wilson, Taft, Roosevelt,  
idiots fumbling at the bride's door,  
hear the cries of men in meaningless debt and war.  
Where among these did the spirit reside  
that restores the land to productive order?  
McKinley, Cleveland, Harrison, Arthur,  
Garfield, Hayes, Grant, Johnson,  
dwell in the roots of the heart's rancor.  
How sad "amid lanes and through old woods"  
echoes Whitman's love for Lincoln!

There is no continuity then. Only a few  
posts of the good remain. I too  
that am a nation sustain the damage  
where smokes of continual ravage  
obscure the flame.

It is across great scars of wrong  
I reach toward the song of kindred men  
and strike again the naked string  
old Whitman sang from. Glorious mistake!  
that cried:

"The theme is creative and has vista."  
"He is the president of regulation."

I see always the under side turning,  
fumes that injure the tender landscape.  
From which up break  
lilac blossoms of courage in daily act  
striving to meet a natural measure.

*The Opening of the Field, 1960*

I could go on quoting. Age wants no one to leave. Things  
close down in age, like stores, like lights going off, like a  
world disappearing in a vacancy one had no thought might  
happen. It's no fun, no victory, no reward, no direction. One  
sits and waits, most usually for the doctor. So one goes in-  
side oneself, as it were, looks out from that "height" with  
only imagination to give prospect. Albeit so bitterly young,  
John Keats could nonetheless write with exact clarity:

Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music—Do I wake or sleep?

"Ode to a Nightingale," 1819

Perhaps Whitman's "fancy" was not only such a power but a person as well, even the memory of a person, that presence acknowledged over and over just as was his own being there too insistently emphasized always. In that world, perhaps one's whole life is a dream, a practical, peculiarly material dream, whose persons become the same complex "music" that Keats's nightingale evokes, a tenacious fabric of inextinguishable yearning. Is that the "world" that has to fall away in age? When one can no longer sustain it? Can it even matter, given—as the poet Edward Dorn made clear—the last thing a man says will be a word.

Good-bye my Fancy!

Farewell dear mate, dear love!

I'm going away, I know not where,

Or to what fortune, or whether I may ever see you again,

So Good-bye my Fancy.

Now for my last—let me look back a moment;

The slower fainter ticking of the clock is in me,

Exit, nightfall, and soon the heart-thud stopping.

Long have we lived, joy'd, caress'd together;  
Delightful!—now separation—Good-bye my Fancy.

Yet let me not be too hasty,

Long indeed have we lived, slept, filter'd, become really—  
into one;

Then if we die we die together, (yes, we'll remain one.)

If we go anywhere we'll go together to meet what happens,

May-be we'll be better off and blither, and learn something,

May-be it is yourself now really ushering to the true songs,

(who knows?)

May-be it is you the mortal knob really undoing, turning—so  
now finally,

Good-bye—and hail my Fancy.

"Good-Bye My Fancy," 1891