

Song of Myself by Walt Whitman

Notes about the poem:

- *Written in free verse meaning there is no particular structure;*
- *Free verse allows the poet to vary length of lines and use of rhyme (if at all);*
- *Free verse allows for poets to expand their ideas without worry about structure;*
- *You can describe Whitman's style as a relaxed, yet straight-forward; he speaks directly to the reader to make sure there is no room for misinterpretation;*
- *Whitman approaches the theme of "Song of Myself" from several angles; he speaks to the reader through different examples to convey the idea that there is room for many experiences, as well as many selves, within oneself. In other words, there are multiple experiences that impact who we are, as well as multiple sides to who we are.)*
- *Another theme of the poem is that the human spirit is capable of anything and everything.*

Poem Part 1	Notes
I celebrate myself, and sing myself, And what I assume you shall assume, For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whitman states what he's going to do in the poem: celebrate himself. This practice might seem a little arrogant, but we'll just go with it. (It turns out, that he's celebrating not only himself, but all of humanity.)• He lays out some of his ground rules: we're going to believe ("assume") whatever he believes. At another level, we're going to "take on" whatever roles or personalities the speaker takes on. (This is another definition of the word "assume.")• Whitman must have learned to share as a tyke in the sandbox: he offers up the atoms of his body as our own.•
I loafe and invite my soul, I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He introduces another character: his "soul." In this poem, the speaker and his soul are two slightly different things.• (Just a note: we normally don't call the speaker of the poem by the poet's name, but in this poem, it just makes things simpler, especially since the speaker tells us that his name <i>is</i> Walt Whitman.)• So, Whitman hangs out with his soul,

	and they look at a blade of summer grass.
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman claims that everything that he is has come from the soil; his parents and his grandparents were born the same. The implication here is that we are all born
Creeds and schools in abeyance , 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 ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman tells the reader to “retire” what we have learned in school; suspend your formal learning. We need to get find ourselves in what he considers the “original energy” – nature.

Poem Part 46	Notes
I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and never will be measured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman say's he has traveled far and for a good amount of time and he was never judged (measured) nor will he allow someone to judge him.
I tramp a perpetual journey, (come listen all!) My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods, No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair, I have no chair, no church, no philosophy, I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, exchange, But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll, My left hand hooking you round the waist, My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Tramp a perpetual journey” shows Whitman’s determination to get the reader to listen to what he is saying. The next set of highlighted lines illustrate two things: First, when Whitman says “I have no chair, no church...lead no man to a dinner table,” the emphasis here is that Whitman is not part of a group, nor does he want to be part of a group. Instead, which leads to the second idea, Whitman would rather take one person with his “hand hooking your round the waist” and lead you to outside where he can point to “landscapes of continents.” We can infer as the reader that he would rather be amongst a sole individual than part of a crowd.
Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you, You must travel it for yourself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basically Whitman is saying that no one can live your life for you, experience the world for you, that's a journey you must embark on your own.

<p>It is not far, it is within reach, Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know, Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Here Whitman again is stressing that this personal journey is within reach and that we have been on this journey since birth;
<p>Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine, and let us hasten forth, Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grab your stuff and let's go! Whitman tells the reader that there are cities and nations for us to explore
<p>If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your hand on my hip, And in due time you shall repay the same service to me, For after we start we never lie by again.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman speaks to the reader directly again, telling him that he can carry the load when you tire and lean on him when you need a break; After we start this journey we will never be the same again
<p>This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded heaven, And I said to my spirit When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then? And my spirit said No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am just going to summarize this stanza to help you understand. Whitman here uses imagery to help paint a picture. Imagine its before sunrise and he has climbed up a hill and he looks out at the sky at the stars (heaven); He talks to his spirit and questions that when he dies, will he be happy knowing that he has tried to learn and experience everything. And he spirit answers him with a "No" because we will continue to explore "beyond" death.
<p>You are also asking me questions and I hear you, I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Again he addresses the reader, indicating that he hears that we have questions that he cannot answer because we must discover the answers for ourselves. The deeper meaning here is that the questions we have about life he can't answer because our life journey is so different than his.
<p>Sit a while dear son, Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk to drink, But as soon as you sleep and renew yourself in sweet clothes, I kiss you with a good-by kiss and open the gate for your egress hence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In this stanza, Whitman tells the reader that once we have rested and eaten, he is no longer accompanying us on this journey; we are on our own.
<p>Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Wash the gum from your eyes" is a metaphor; he is telling us to not allow anyone to cloud our vision of the world or our life;

Now I wash the gum from your eyes, You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life.	we must keep our eyes open so that we don't miss "the dazzle" of our lives.
Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore, Now I will you to be a bold swimmer, To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first line here Whitman tells us that we have been holding back in our lives, playing is safe; But now he wants us to be "bold" and take risks that might ask us to "jump off in the midst" and enjoy the rush.

Poem Part 52	Notes (the following notes were found on Schmoop.com)
The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman sees a hawk and feels humbled. In his mind, the hawk says, "Dude, you've been talking, like, forever. Get this poem over with and quit yer' daydreamin'!"
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman sees himself in the hawk. His voice is "untranslatable" (meaning that no one can truly understand him) and, in another famous phrase, a "barbaric yawp." (A "yawp" is like a brute, animal sound and not a part of a refined language. It has elemental power.)
The last scud of day holds back for me, It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds, It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The day seems to wait for him to get ready to move on. It leads him on into darkness.
I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ending day might be a metaphor for death. At any rate, the poet's hair has grown "white," and he shakes his "locks" at the setting sun. He dissolves into the air, leaving like the air and fusing his flesh in the "eddies" of water. He gives himself up to the dirt. "effuse my flesh" literally translates to "shed my flesh"; "drift it in lacy jags" is Whitman's description how when he shed his skin, that he will move along the sharp currents of the water. The words "effuse" and "drift" are used here to give the actions of line a sense of importance.
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, If you want me again look for me under your	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This imagery ties together the earlier idea of the grass containing the bodies of dead people. If we want to find Whitman, we have

boot-soles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to look at the ground under our boots.
<p>You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, And filter and fibre your blood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the first line here Whitman speaks directly to us – the reader – because he wants to make a lasting connection/impression with us before the poem ends. When we find him, we won't have any idea who he is, but he'll work his power on us anyway. He gives good health to people who walk over him Strength and good health! We've got to go searching for this Whitman fellow.
<p>Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, Missing me one place search another, I stop somewhere waiting for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitman ends the poem by saying that we shouldn't be discouraged if we go looking for him but can't find him. If he's not in one place, we should search in another. He's not running away from us or trying to avoid us. He has stopped ahead of us on the journey. He's waiting for us to catch up.