

As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free

COMMENCEMENT POEM, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, N.H., JUNE 26, 1872,
RECITED BY WALT WHITMAN, ON INVITATION OF PUBLIC LITERARY SOCIETIES.

1.

As a strong bird on pinions free,
Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,
Such be the thought I'd think to-day of thee, America,
Such be the recitative I'd bring to-day for thee.

The conceits of the poets of other lands I bring thee not,
Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long,
Nor rhyme—nor the classics—nor perfume of foreign court, or indoor
library;
But an odor I'd bring to-day as from forests of pine in the north, in
Maine—or breath of an Illinois prairie,
With open airs of Virginia, or Georgia, or Tennessee—or from Texas
uplands, or Florida's glades,
With presentment of Yellowstone's scenes, or Yosemite;
And murmuring under, pervading all, I'd bring the rustling sea-sound,
That endlessly sounds from the two great seas of the world.

And for thy subtler sense, subtler refrains, O Union!
Preludes of intellect tallying these and thee—mind-formulas fitted for
thee—real, and sane, and large as these and thee;
Thou, mounting higher, diving deeper than we knew—thou transcen-
dental Union!
By thee Fact to be justified—blended with Thought;
Thought of Man justified—blended with God:
Through thy Idea—lo! the immortal Reality!
Through thy Reality—lo! the immortal Idea!

2.

Brain of the New World! what a task is thine!
To formulate the Modern.....Out of the peerless grandeur of the modern,
Out of Thyself—comprising Science—to recast Poems, Churches, Art,
(Recast—may-be discard them, end them-May-be their work is done—
who knows?)
By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the mighty past, the
dead,
To limn, with absolute faith, the mighty living present.

(And yet, thou living, present brain! heir of the dead, the Old World
brain!
Thou that lay folded, like an unborn babe, within its folds so long!

30 Thou carefully prepared by it so long!—haply thou but unfoldest it—only
maturest it;
It to eventuate in thee—the essence of the by-gone time contain'd in
thee;
Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, destined with refer-
ence to thee,
The fruit of all the Old, ripening to-day in thee.)

3.

35 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 thy western conti-
nent alone;
Earth's *résumé* entire floats on thy keel, O ship!—is steadied by thy
spars;
40 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, steer with good strong hand and wary eye, O helmsman—thou
carryest great companions,
45 Venerable, priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
And royal, feudal Europe sails with thee.

4.

Beautiful World of new, superber Birth, that rises to my eyes,
Like a limitless golden cloud, filling the western sky;
Emblem of general Maternity, lifted above all;
50 Sacred shape of the bearer of daughters and sons;
Out of thy teeming womb, thy giant babes in ceaseless procession is-
suing,
Acceding from such gestation, taking and giving continual strength and
life;
World of the Real! world of the twain in one!
World of the Soul—born by the world of the real alone—led to identity,
body, by it alone;
55 Yet in beginning only—incalculable masses of composite, precious ma-
terials,
By history's cycles forwarded—by every nation, language, hither sent,
Ready, collected here—a freer, vast, electric World, to be constructed
here,
(The true New World—the world of orbic Science, Morals, Literatures
to come,)

60 Thou Wonder World, yet undefined, unform'd—neither do I define thee;
 How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
 I feel thy ominous greatness, evil as well as good;
 I watch thee, advancing, absorbing the present, transcending the past;
 I see thy light lighting and thy shadow shadowing, as if the entire globe;
 65 But I do not undertake to define thee—hardly to comprehend thee;
 I but thee name—thee prophecy—as now!
 I merely thee ejaculate!

Thee in thy future;
 Thee in thy only permanent life, career—thy own unloosen'd mind—thy
 soaring spirit;
 Thee as another equally needed sun, America—radiant, ablaze, swift—
 moving, fructifying all;
 70 Thee! risen in thy potent cheerfulness and joy—thy endless, great hilar-
 ity!
 (Scattering for good the cloud that hung so long—that weigh'd so long
 upon the mind of man,
 The doubt, suspicion, dread, of gradual, certain decadence of man;)

Thee in thy larger, saner breeds of Female, Male—thee in thy athletes,
 moral, spiritual, South, North, West, East,
 (To thy immortal breasts, Mother of All, thy every daughter, son, en-
 dear'd alike, forever equal;)

75 Thee in thy own musicians, singers, artists, unborn yet, but certain;
 Thee in thy moral wealth and civilization (until which thy proudest
 material wealth and civilization must remain in vain);
 Thee in thy all-supplying, all-enclosing Worship—thee in no single bible,
 saviour, merely,
 Thy saviours countless, latent within thyself—thy bibles incessant, within
 thyself, equal to any, divine as any;
 Thee in an education grown of thee—in teachers, studies, students, born
 of thee;

80 Thee in thy democratic fetes, en masse—thy high original festivals, op-
 eras, lecturers, preachers;
 Thee in thy ultimata, (the preparations only now completed—the edifice
 on sure foundations tied,)
 Thee in thy pinnacles, intellect, thought—thy topmost rational joys—thy
 love, and godlike aspiration,
 In thy resplendent coming literati—thy full-lung'd orators—thy sacerdo-
 tal bards—kosmic savans,
 These! these in thee, (certain to come,) to-day I prophecy.

85 **5.**
 Land tolerating all—accepting all—not for the good alone—all good for
 thee;

Land in the realms of God to be a realm unto thyself;
Under the rule of God to be a rule unto thyself.

90 (Lo! where arise three peerless stars,
To be thy natal stars, my country–Ensemble–Evolution–Freedom,
Set in the sky of Law.)

Land of unprecedented faith–God’s faith!
Thy soil, thy very subsoil, all upheav’d;
The general inner earth, so long, so sedulously draped over, now and
95 hence for what it is, boldly laid bare,
Open’d by thee to heaven’s light, for benefit or bale.

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;
100 (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 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:
105 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 extri-
cating, 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,
110 The Soul–its destinies.

The Soul, its destinies–the real real,
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;)
In thee, America, the Soul, its destinies;
Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!
115 By many a throe of heat and cold convuls’d–(by these thyself solidify-
ing;
Thou mental, moral orb! thou New, indeed new, Spiritual World!
The Present holds thee not–for such vast growth as thine–for such un-
parallel’d flight as thine,
The Future only holds thee, and can hold thee.