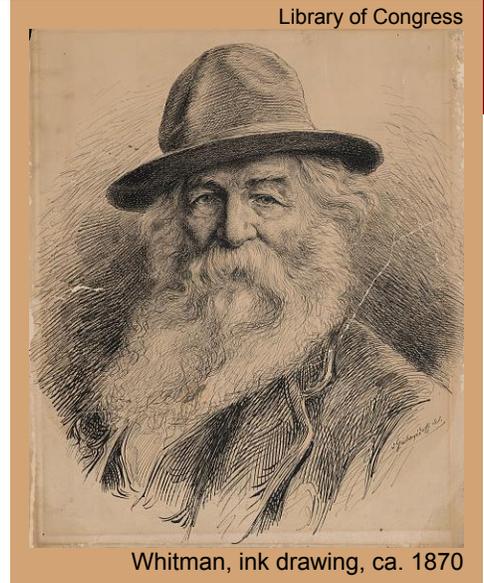


## Walt Whitman

# “Song of the Exposition”

[“After All Not to Create Only”]

- Recited by Whitman at the opening of an industrial fair, the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of the American Institute, New York City, 7 September 1871
- Published in 1871 as “After All Not to Create Only”
- Later applied to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition as “Song of the Exposition”
- Final revision 1881<sup>1</sup>



### 1

(AH little recks the laborer,  
How near his work is holding him to God,  
The loving Laborer through space and time.)

After all not to create only, or found only,  
But to bring perhaps from afar what is already founded,  
To give it our own identity, average, limitless, free,  
To fill the gross the torpid bulk with vital religious fire,  
Not to repel or destroy so much as accept, fuse, rehabilitate,  
To obey as well as command, to follow more than to lead,  
These also are the lessons of our New World;  
While how little the New after all, how much the Old, Old World!  
Long and long has the grass been growing,  
Long and long has the rain been falling,  
Long has the globe been rolling round.

### 2

Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,  
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,  
That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings,  
Placard “Removed” and “To Let” on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,  
Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,  
The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish castles, and Italian collections,  
For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.

<sup>1</sup> Text from 1891-92 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Published originally in 1871-72 edition. Presented, and images added, by the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, NC. 2005.

3

Responsive to our summons,  
Or rather to her long-nurs'd inclination,  
Join'd with an irresistible, natural gravitation,  
She comes! I hear the rustling of her gown,  
I scent the odor of her breath's delicious fragrance,  
I mark her step divine, her curious eyes a-turning, rolling,  
Upon this very scene.

The dame of dames! can I believe then,  
Those ancient temples, sculptures classic, could none of them retain her?  
Nor shades of Virgil and Dante, nor myriad memories, poems, old associations,  
magnetize and hold on to her?  
But that she's left them all — and here?

Yes, if you will allow me to say so,  
I, my friends, if you do not, can plainly see her,  
The same undying soul of earth's, activity's, beauty's, heroism's expression,  
Out from her evolutions hither come, ended the strata of her former themes,  
Hidden and cover'd by to-day's, foundation of to-day's,  
Ended, deceas'd through time, her voice by Castaly's fountain,  
Silent the broken-lipp'd Sphynx in Egypt, silent all those century-baffling tombs,  
Ended for aye the epics of Asia's, Europe's helmeted warriors, ended the primitive call of the muses,  
Calliope's call forever closed, Clio, Melpomene, Thalia dead,  
Ended the stately rhythmus of Una and Oriana, ended the quest of the Holy Graal,  
Jerusalem a handful of ashes blown by the wind, extinct,  
The Crusaders' streams of shadowy midnight troops sped with the sunrise,  
Amadis, Tancred, utterly gone, Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver gone,  
Palmerin, ogre, departed, vanish'd the turrets that Usk from its waters reflected,  
Arthur vanish'd with all his knights, Merlin and Lancelot and Galahad, all gone, dissolv'd utterly  
like an exhalation;  
Pass'd! pass'd! for us, forever pass'd, that once so mighty world, now void, inanimate, phantom world,  
Embroider'd, dazzling, foreign world, with all its gorgeous legends, myths,  
Its kings and castles proud, its priests and warlike lords and courtly dames,  
Pass'd to its charnel vault, coffin'd with crown and armor on,  
Blazon'd with Shakspeare's purple page,  
And dirged by Tennyson's sweet sad rhyme.

I say I see, my friends, if you do not, the illustrious emigré, (having it is true in her day, although  
the same, changed, journey'd considerable,)  
Making directly for this rendezvous, vigorously clearing a path for herself, striding through  
the confusion,  
By thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle undismay'd,  
Bluff'd not a bit by drain-pipe, gasometers, artificial fertilizers,  
Smiling and pleas'd with palpable intent to stay,  
She's here, install'd amid the kitchen ware!

4

But hold — don't I forget my manners?  
To introduce the stranger, (what else indeed do I live to chant for?) to thee Columbia;  
In liberty's name welcome immortal! clasp hands,  
And ever henceforth sisters dear be both.

Fear not O Muse! truly new ways and days receive, surround you,  
I candidly confess a queer, queer race, of novel fashion,  
And yet the same old human race, the same within, without,  
Faces and hearts the same, feelings the same, yearnings the same,  
The same old love, beauty and use the same.

5

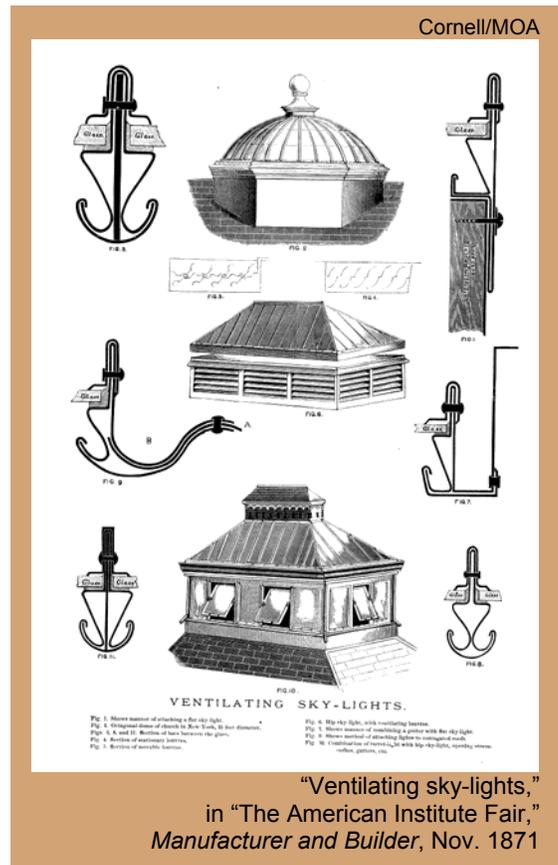
We do not blame thee elder World, nor really separate  
ourselves from thee,  
(Would the son separate himself from the father?)  
Looking back on thee, seeing thee to thy duties,  
    grandeurs, through past ages bending, building,  
We build to ours to-day.

Mightier than Egypt's tombs,  
Fairer than Grecia's, Roma's temples,  
Prouder than Milan's statued, spired cathedral,  
More picturesque than Rhenish castle-keeps,  
We plan even now to raise, beyond them all,  
Thy great cathedral sacred industry, no tomb,  
A keep for life for practical invention.

As in a waking vision,  
E'en while I chant I see it rise, I scan and prophesy  
    outside and in,  
Its manifold ensemble.

Around a palace, loftier, fairer, ampler than any yet,  
Earth's modern wonder, history's seven outstripping,  
High rising tier on tier with glass and iron facades,  
Gladdening the sun and sky, enhued in cheerfulest hues,  
Bronze, lilac, robin's-egg, marine and crimson,  
Over whose golden roof shall flaunt, beneath thy banner Freedom,  
The banners of the States and flags of every land,  
A brood of lofty, fair, but lesser palaces shall cluster.

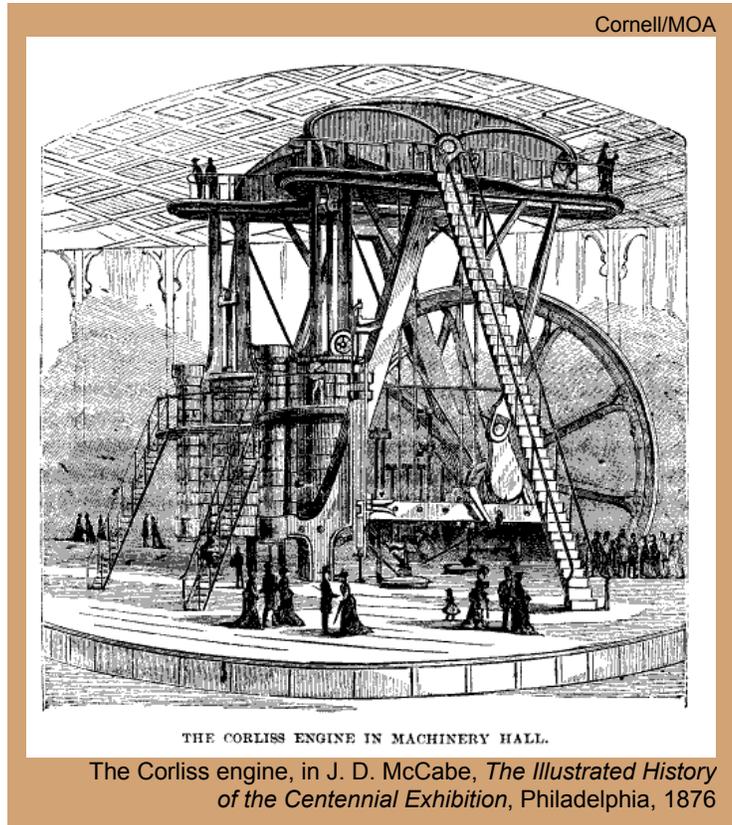
Somewhere within their walls shall all that forwards perfect human life be started,  
Tried, taught, advanced, visibly exhibited.



“Ventilating sky-lights,”  
in “The American Institute Fair,”  
*Manufacturer and Builder*, Nov. 1871

Not only all the world of works, trade, products,  
But all the workmen of the world here to be represented.

Here shall you trace in flowing operation,  
In every state of practical, busy movement,  
the rills of civilization,  
Materials here under your eye shall  
change their shape as if by magic,  
The cotton shall be pick'd almost in the  
very field,  
Shall be dried, clean'd, ginn'd, baled,  
spun into thread and cloth before you,  
You shall see hands at work at all the old  
processes and all the new ones,  
You shall see the various grains and how  
flour is made and then bread baked by  
the bakers,  
You shall see the crude ores of California  
and Nevada passing on and on till they  
become bullion,  
You shall watch how the printer sets type,  
and learn what a composing-stick is,  
You shall mark in amazement the Hoe  
press whirling its cylinders, shedding  
the printed leaves steady and fast,  
The photograph, model, watch, pin, nail,  
shall be created before you.



In large calm halls, a stately museum shall teach you the infinite lessons of minerals,  
In another, woods, plants, vegetation shall be illustrated — in another animals, animal life  
and development.  
One stately house shall be the music house,  
Others for other arts — learning, the sciences, shall all be here,  
None shall be slighted, none but shall here be honor'd, help'd, exempl'd.

6

(This, this and these, America, shall be *your* pyramids and obelisks,  
Your Alexandrian Pharos, gardens of Babylon,  
Your temple at Olympia.)

The male and female many laboring not,  
Shall ever here confront the laboring many,  
With precious benefits to both, glory to all,  
To thee America, and thee eternal Muse.

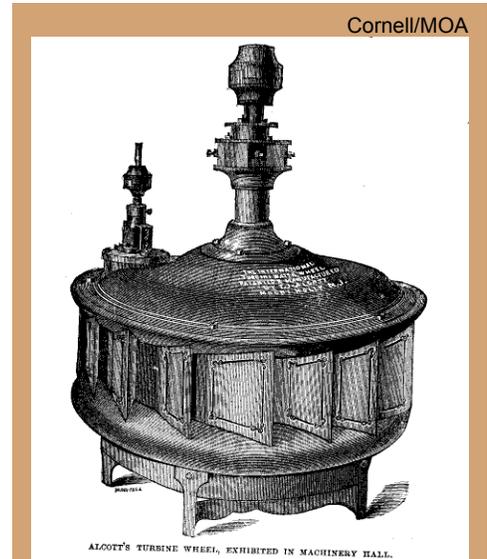
And here shall ye inhabit powerful Matrons!  
 In your vast state vaster than all the old,  
 Echoed through long, long centuries to come,  
 To sound of different, prouder songs, with stronger themes,  
 Practical, peaceful life, the people's life, the People themselves,  
 Lifted, illumin'd, bathed in peace — elate, secure in peace.

7

Away with themes of war! away with war itself!  
 Hence from my shuddering sight to never more return that  
 show of blacken'd, mutilated corpses!  
 That hell unpent and raid of blood, fit for wild tigers or for  
 lop-tongued wolves, not reasoning men,  
 And in its stead speed industry's campaigns,  
 With thy undaunted armies, engineering,  
 Thy pennants labor, loosen'd to the breeze,  
 Thy bugles sounding loud and clear.

Away with old romance!  
 Away with novels, plots and plays of foreign courts,  
 Away with love-verses sugar'd in rhyme, the intrigues,  
 amours of idlers,  
 Fitted for only banquets of the night where dancers to late  
 music slide,  
 The unhealthy pleasures, extravagant dissipations of the few,  
 With perfumes, heat and wine, beneath the dazzling  
 chandeliers.

To you ye reverent sane sisters,  
 I raise a voice for far superber themes for poets and for art,  
 To exalt the present and the real,  
 To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk  
 and trade,  
 To sing in songs how exercise and chemical life are never  
 to be baffled,  
 To manual work for each and all, to plough, hoe, dig,  
 To plant and tend the tree, the berry, vegetables, flowers,  
 For every man to see to it that he really do something,  
 for every woman too;  
 To use the hammer and the saw, (rip, or cross-cut,)  
 To cultivate a turn for carpentering, plastering, painting,  
 To work as tailor, tailoress, nurse, hostler, porter,  
 To invent a little, something ingenious, to aid the washing,  
 cooking, cleaning,  
 And hold it no disgrace to take a hand at them themselves.



Cornell/MOA

ALCOTT'S TURBINE WHEEL, EXHIBITED IN MACHINERY HALL.

Turbine wheel



PATENT FOLDING BED, EXHIBITED IN THE MAIN BUILDING.

Folding bed

In McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876*

I say I bring thee Muse to-day and here,  
 All occupations, duties broad and close,  
 Toil, healthy toil and sweat, endless, without cessation,  
 The old, old practical burdens, interests, joys,  
 The family, parentage, childhood, husband and wife,  
 The house-comforts, the house itself and all its belongings,  
 Food and its preservation, chemistry applied to it,  
 Whatever forms the average, strong, complete, sweet-blooded man or woman, the perfect  
     longeve personality,  
 And helps its present life to health and  
     happiness, and shapes its soul,  
 For the eternal real life to come.

With latest connections, works, the inter-  
 transportation of the world,  
 Steam-power, the great express lines, gas,  
 petroleum,  
 These triumphs of our time, the Atlantic's  
     delicate cable,  
 The Pacific railroad, the Suez canal, the  
     Mont Cenis and Gothard and Hoosac  
     tunnels, the Brooklyn bridge,  
 This earth all spann'd with iron rails, with  
     lines of steamships threading every  
     sea,  
 Our own rondure, the current globe  
     I bring.

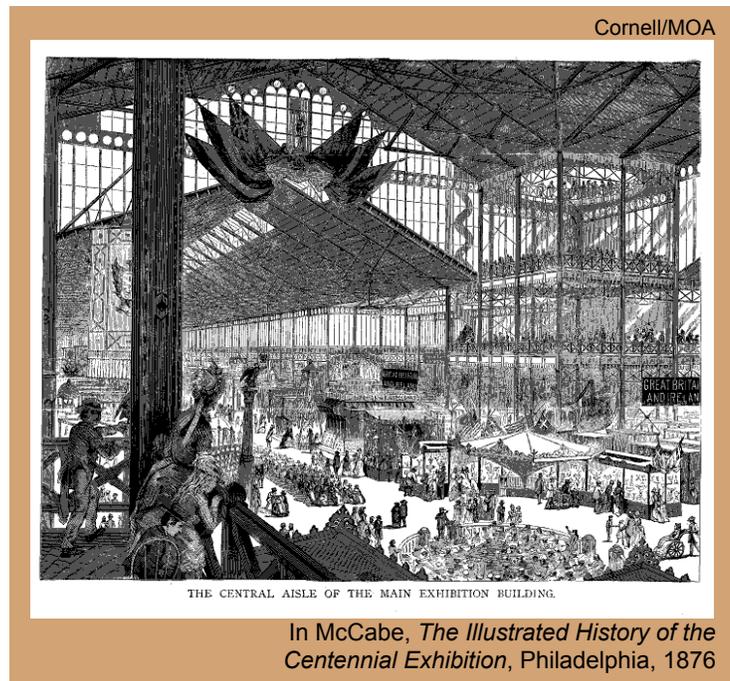
8

And thou America,  
 Thy offspring towering e'er so high, yet higher Thee above all towering,  
 With Victory on thy left, and at thy right hand Law;  
 Thou Union holding all, fusing, absorbing, tolerating all,  
 Thee, ever thee, I sing.

Thou, also thou, a World,  
 With all thy wide geographies, manifold, different, distant,  
 Rounded by thee in one — one common orbic language,  
 One common indivisible destiny for All.

And by the spells which ye vouchsafe to those your ministers in earnest,  
 I here personify and call my themes, to make them pass before ye.

Behold, America! (and thou, ineffable guest and sister!)  
 For thee come trooping up thy waters and thy lands;  
 Behold! thy fields and farms, thy far-off woods and mountains,  
 As in procession coming.



Behold, the sea itself,  
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships;  
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind, speckle the green and blue,  
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming in or out of port,  
See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants of smoke.

Behold, in Oregon, far in the north and west,  
Or in Maine, far in the north and east, thy cheerful axemen,  
Wielding all day their axes.

Behold, on the lakes, thy pilots at their wheels, thy oarsmen,  
How the ash writhes under those muscular arms!

There by the furnace, and there by the anvil,  
Behold thy sturdy blacksmiths swinging their sledges,  
Overhand so steady, overhand they turn and fall with joyous clank,  
Like a tumult of laughter.

Mark the spirit of invention everywhere, thy rapid patents,  
Thy continual workshops, foundries, risen or rising,  
See, from their chimneys how the tall flame-fires stream.

Mark, thy interminable farms, North, South,  
Thy wealthy daughter-states, Eastern and Western,  
The varied products of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Georgia, Texas, and the rest,  
Thy limitless crops, grass, wheat, sugar, oil, corn, rice, hemp, hops,  
Thy barns all fill'd, the endless freight-train and the bulging storehouse,  
Thy grapes that ripen on thy vines, the apples in thy orchards,  
Thy incalculable lumber, beef, pork, potatoes, thy coal, thy gold and silver,  
The inexhaustible iron in thy mines.

All thine O sacred Union!  
Ships, farms, shops, barns, factories, mines,  
City and State, North, South, item and aggregate,  
We dedicate, dread Mother, all to thee!

Protectress absolute, thou! bulwark of all!  
For well we know that while thou givest each and all, (generous as God,)  
Without thee neither all nor each, nor land, home,  
Nor ship, nor mine, nor any here this day secure,  
Nor aught, nor any day secure.

## 9

And thou, the Emblem waving over all!  
Delicate beauty, a word to thee, (it may be salutary,)

Remember thou hast not always been as here to-day so comfortably ensovereign'd,  
In other scenes than these have I observ'd thee flag,  
Not quite so trim and whole and freshly blooming in folds of stainless silk,  
But I have seen thee bunting, to tatters torn upon thy splinter'd staff,  
Or clutch'd to some young color-bearer's breast with desperate hands,  
Savagely struggled for, for life or death, fought over long,  
'Mid cannons' thunder-crash and many a curse and groan and yell, and rifle-volleys cracking sharp,  
And moving masses as wild demons surging, and lives as nothing risk'd,  
For thy mere remnant grimed with dirt and smoke and sopp'd in blood,  
For sake of that, my beauty, and that thou might'st dally as now secure up there,  
Many a good man have I seen go under.

Now here and these and hence in peace, all thine, O Flag!  
And here and hence for thee, O universal Muse! and thou for them!  
And here and hence O Union, all the work and workmen thine!  
None separate from thee — henceforth One only, we and thou,  
(For the blood of the children, what is it, only the blood maternal?  
And lives and works, what are they all at last, except the roads to faith and death?)

While we rehearse our measureless wealth, it is for thee, dear Mother,  
We own it all and several to-day indissoluble in thee;  
Think not our chant, our show, merely for products gross or lucre — it is for thee, the soul  
in thee, electric, spiritual!  
Our farms, inventions, crops, we own in thee! cities and States in thee!  
Our freedom all in thee! our very lives in thee!

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