

Songs of Myself-an Analysis Section 6-10

SECTION 6 - The Child and the Meaning of Grass

*“A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands,
/ How could I answer the child?”*

A child asks Whitman what grass is.

Grass becomes a symbolic question—what is life, nature, God, the universe?

Whitman admits he does not have a fixed answer. This shows philosophical uncertainty and openness.

“I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.”

Grass is like a flag of his personality—green symbolizes hope and life.

Whitman sees nature as connected to the self.

“Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord”

Grass is imagined as God's handkerchief, meaning divine presence is everywhere.

Whitman presents a pantheistic view—God exists in nature.

“Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.”

Grass is like a child of nature—innocent, new, continuously born. Nature is self-renewing.

“Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic”

Grass is a universal symbol understood by all people.

Hieroglyphic suggests a mysterious but meaningful symbol of life.

“Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones”

*Grass grows everywhere—rich, poor, all races, all lands.
Symbol of equality and democracy.*

“And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.”

*Grass grows on graves—death and life are connected.
Death is not an end; it feeds new life.*

“The smallest sprout shows there is really no death”

*Death is an illusion; life continues in other forms.
This reflects transcendentalist philosophy.*

“And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.”

Death is not tragic but fortunate—a transition to another state of existence.

Themes:

- Nature as divine
- Death and immortality
- Democratic equality
- Mystical symbolism

SECTION 7 - The Cosmic Self

*“Has any one supposed it lucky to be born? / I hasten to inform
him or her it is just as lucky to die.”*

*Birth and death are equally natural and blessed.
Whitman rejects fear of death.*

“I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe”

He identifies with both dying and newborns—his self is universal.

“I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself.”

*Every person is equal and eternal.
Whitman expresses spiritual democracy.*

“They do not know how immortal, but I know.”

People are unaware of their spiritual nature; the poet is enlightened.

“I know I am deathless.”

Whitman claims spiritual immortality—his soul cannot die.

“I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter’s compass”

His soul cannot be measured by science or logic.

“I know I shall not pass like a child’s carlacue cut with a burnt stick”

He will not disappear like childish drawings—his existence is permanent.

“I know I am august”

He asserts dignity and majesty of the self.

“I exist as I am, that is enough.”

*Self-acceptance and self-celebration.
Core Whitman philosophy: The self is sacred.*

SECTION 8 - Identity with All People

“I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul”

*Whitman celebrates both physical and spiritual aspects.
He rejects dualism—body and soul are united.*

“The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me”

He experiences all human emotions and realities.

“I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.”

*He accepts good and evil as part of human experience.
No moral judgment—inclusive realism.*

“I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters”

*He identifies with oppressed and powerful alike.
Democratic vision.*

“I will not have a single person slighted or left away”

Every human being matters.

“I am the man, I suffered, I was there.”

Whitman imagines himself in others' experiences—radical empathy.

SECTION 9 - Union with Nature

“The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready”

He describes rural America—symbols of openness and freedom.

"The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon"

Celebrates agricultural labor and common people.

"I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass."

Famous line: leisure and contemplation.

Whitman practices poetic meditation on ordinary things.

"My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air"

He is physically made from American soil—national identity.

"Born here of parents born here from parents the same"

Celebrates American lineage, continuity.

"I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health, begin, / Hoping to cease not till death."

Poem is a lifelong journey of self-exploration.

SECTION 10 - The Journey Through Society

"Creeds and schools in abeyance, / Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten"

He rejects rigid institutions and doctrines.

Prefers personal experience over formal religion or education.

"I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard"

He allows all thoughts and experiences to speak freely—no censorship.

“Nature without check with original energy.”

Nature is spontaneous and free—ideal model for human life.

Whitman describes many American scenes:

- *fishermen*
- *runaway slaves*
- *soldiers*
- *women*
- *city streets*
- *lovers*
- *workers*

He merges his identity with all of them.

“I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise”

He includes all ages and types of people.

“One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same”

America as multicultural democracy; equality of states and people.

“I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy”

Whitman sees himself as prophet of democracy.

“By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.”

True democracy means equal rights for all.

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MAJOR CRITICAL THEMES (SECTIONS 6-10)

Nature and Pantheism

Nature is divine; grass symbolizes God, life, death, and equality.

Death and Immortality

Death is not final; it is transformation. The soul is eternal.

The Democratic Self

Whitman identifies with all people—slaves, masters, men, women, rich, poor.

Body and Soul Unity

Rejects Christian dualism; celebrates physical and spiritual equally.

Individualism and Freedom

Self-celebration and self-knowledge as the highest values.

America as a Symbol

America represents universal humanity and democracy.