

"Song of Myself": A Lexicon

A large part of the brilliance of "Song of Myself" is the raffishness and playfulness of its diction. The poem belongs in that way to the mid-19th century's love of linguistic play that also characterizes Dickens and Melville and Twain. The English language exploded in the 19th century. This must have been a function of English wealth and technical innovation, mixed with the expansion of the language through the British Empire to much of the world, and the emergence and continued development of parallel branches of the language in the United States and India and Canada and Australia. It was also the century of the development of mass literacy. When Wordsworth published *Lyrical Ballads*, something like 40% of English males could produce a signature, and less than 25% of English females. In the 19th century, especially in the United States, people were learning to read, a fact that shows up, poignantly, early in "Song of Myself":

*Have you practiced so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?*

This hard-bought acquisition of language and the development of technologies that delivered inexpensive books and magazines and newspapers must account for a certain word-drunkenness in the English language writers of mid-century that is unlike anything else in English except perhaps the verse of Chaucer and the plays of Shakespeare, two other moments when new technologies were delivering a wild mix of learned and vernacular language to a new class of people. Paul Zweig, in his study of Whitman, reports on a librarian in the New York Public Library, who remembered Walt Whitman arriving at regular intervals to look up words in the dictionary. In these annotations, we've walked, informally and at random, in his footsteps, as we tried to look over his shoulder and track down for ourselves what the feel of many of his word-choices must have been in 1855. Our principle of selection was perhaps arbitrary, a mix of curiosity at usages we didn't recognize and others that it simply never would have occurred to us to use. Whitman remarked, of Longfellow's poems, that they failed to take advantage of "the native raciness" of American English. These notes, then, are undertaken in wonder, as homage to a poet, a poem, and a language.

1 *I celebrate myself,*

celebrate This is the first unexpected word in the poem. "Celebrate," of course, means now as it did then, to treat a person or occasion festively. It also meant to extol or praise and, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, "to make widely known, to display." Hence its association with celebrity. (Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" was published in 1858.) But the word also had the elder meaning, primary in the Oxford English Dictionary, in which "to celebrate" was "to perform a religious ceremony" or to observe a day or person or event "with ceremonies of respect."

3 *For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

atom Epicurus or, for that matter, Lucretius could have given Whitman "atom," but he was an enthusiastic reader of popular science. One of the books Whitman reviewed in the *Brooklyn Eagle* in 1847 was the translation of a German science text, Justus Leibig's *Chemistry in its Application to Physiology and Agriculture*. David Reynolds: "Leibig presented a scientific rationale for what would become one of Whitman's main answers to cynics: even if matter were all, nature constantly regenerates itself and turns death into life through chemical transformation. . . . When an organism decomposed, its atoms were chemically recombined, immediately giving rise, in his words, 'to another arrangement of the atoms of the body, that is, to the production of a compound that did not exist before.' Every thirty years, he estimated, a billion people and several billion animals died and were absorbed into the earth. Their atoms became transferred to the earth, rocks, and the varieties of plant life, whose atoms in turn became the sources of new life. Whatever diseases they had were lost in the transforming process." (DR, p. 240)

8 *The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.*

distillation This is the first of many instances of his love of the terms of art from the 19th-century American trades and crafts. The word usually refers to the process of vaporizing a liquid in order to extract or purify some element in a complex substance through condensation, especially in making liquors and perfumes. Whitman uses it here in the secondary usage, meaning, "the product of distillation." He likes the word so well, he repeats it in the next line:

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless. At least one effect of using the word this way is that it puts the process back into the product; it's an aspect of his fascination with the way things are made and the work that goes into making them.

14 *Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,*

loveroot "Lovage: a plant of the genus *Ligusticum*. Also called love-root, angelica, licorice root, wild celery, sea parsley." *Dictionary of American Regional English*, III, 48. The parsley family, so it is a relative of wild carrot, or Queen Anne's lace.

silkthread Noah Webster gives his readers for "silk" "the fine soft thread produced by the insect called silk-worm or bombyx," but also "the filiform style of the female flower of maiz, which resembles real silk in fineness and softness" and "Virginia silk, a plant of the genus *Periploca*, which climbs and winds about other plants, trees, &c." The deliciousness of the line, of course, is the way Whitman veers from his list of sounds and motions into vegetal and sexual imagery, as if the phrase "buzz'd whispers" introduced a new train of thought.

crotch "1. The angle or region of the angle formed by the junction of two parts or members, such as two branches, limbs, or legs."—AHD

17 *The sound of the belched words of my voice . . . words loosed to the eddies of the wind*

belched There seems to be no shade of meaning of this word that doesn't give you a burp or a violent eructation. Noah Webster gives as a secondary definition "to eject violently from a deep hollow place" and the OED notices that it is used metaphorically for the action of cannons and volcanoes and notices that Thomas Carlyle, whose prose Whitman passionately admired, writes of "rusty firelocks" belching and in 1865 the batteries in Frances Parkman's history of the French-Indian wars belch, so perhaps Whitman had a triumphantly military burst of sound in mind.

37 *Always the procreant urge of the world*

procreant We've always thought this word, in this crucial line, was one of Whitman's quasi-scientific coinages. It turns out that it has a quite distinguished literary ancestry. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*: "this bird hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle;" Wordsworth, 1817: "Her procreant vigils Nature keeps/ Amid the unfathomable deeps;" Arthur Hugh Clough, 1849: "The procreant heat and furor of our youth."

41 *Sure as the most certain sure . . . plumb in the uprights, well entretied, braced in the beams,*

well entretied Another word, in fact a whole line, from the trades. Whitman worked off and on as a carpenter and house-builder. "Entretied" is not in Webster. For "entrete" the OED gives "a plaster," from the French and remarks that it's obsolete; a 1913 dictionary, *Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia*, gives "a bandage, a plaster." One scholarly edition of the poem (EG) says the word means "cross-braced," but cites no authority for this usage. So either plastered or cross-braced, and deliciously exact and of its time in either case.

42 *Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,*

electrical Whitman wrote this line some years after Michael Faraday's critical experiments on induction in 1839 and before James Maxwell's *Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field* in 1865. The world was coming to understand electromagnetic energy and Whitman would live to see New York City ablaze with electric lights. There is a small literature on Whitman and magnetism and electricity that includes Joseph Beaver's *Walt Whitman—Poet of Science* and the work of David Reynolds. They've noted that he paraphrases the geologist Richard Owens when he writes, "The sun there at the center though conceal'd, / Electric life forever at the center." He had also read Humboldt on animal magnetism and seemed in his 19th-century New Age milieu to have supposed an association between magnetism, electricity, and sexual energy which the phrenologists called "adhesiveness" and "amativeness." The point here is that he is using a fashionable and up-to-date word to mean, roughly, "tingling with personal energy."

54 *Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,*

acceptation The expected word would be “acceptance.” But OED gives a contemporary instance of its use as “favorable reception,” by H. Reed, *Lectures on English Literature*, 1855: “What else can explain the large acceptation, which a poem like Gray’s ‘Elegy’ found at once?” which clues us to what must have been the flavor of the word for Whitman.

realization The OED is rich in useful possibilities. “1. The action of making real or investing with reality,” which cites an 1881 usage: “. . . no realization of the fears which he expressed;” “2. the action of forming a clear and distinct concept,” 1874: “a vivid realization of the person of Christ;” “3. the conversion of paper money or property into a more available form,” 1881: “the realization of the insolvent’s estate.”

83 *And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own,*

elderhand The word seems to be Whitman’s invention. Quite amazingly, he dropped it from the 1881 edition of the poem, substituting the word “promise.” See note to line 1283.

86 *And that a kelson of the creation is love*

kelson On Long Island, when Whitman was growing up, and in the Brooklyn shipyards he had plenty of opportunity to observe the boatbuilding trade. AHD lists “kelson” as a variant of “keelson,” which it defines as “a timber or girder placed parallel with and bolted to the keel for additional strength.”

89 *And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and elder and mullein and pokeweed.*

wormfence J. R. Bartlett’s 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms* gives us this: “A rail fence laid up in a zig-zag manner.” And offers this citation, undated: “Mr. Haskell, one of the delegates from Tennessee, told a story about a man in his ‘diggings,’ who was once struck by ‘Joe Larkins,’ by which he was knocked at least forty rods. He fell against a *worm-fence*, and carried away about forty panels, rail-riders and all. —*N. Y. Mirror*.” Early English travelers described worm fences as particularly characteristic of the New York country landscape. And the Rev. Hugh Jones noticed them in 1724 in *The Present State of Virginia* notices them as a characteristic American form, though he’s not very exact: “Wormfences are made of rails supporting one another very firmly in a particular manner.”

elder *Sambucus* is a genus of shrubs and small trees, having small white flowers and red or blackish berry-like fruit. All three of the plants in this line do well in the disturbed soil of roadsides, where one might find fences of wood or heaped stones.

mullein Common mullein, *verbascum thapsus*, is a member of the snapdragon family. It has, the Peterson-Mckenny *Field Guide to the Wildflowers*, says “large flannel-textured leaves” and yellow flowers in a club-like flowerheads. It flowers through the summer and grows on roadsides and in vacant lots all over the northeast U.S.

pokeweed *Phytolacca Americana* is a plant of the eastern U.S., the only member of the family to grow there. It’s a weedy, large-leaved plant with coarse, reddish stems. The field guide notices that the greenish-white sepals look like petals. The small flowers are white, the berries purple-black. Damp thickets, roadsides, clearings.

94 *A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,*

remembrancer The passage is the argument from design recast as Victorian flirtation. The definition that captures this is from the OED: “A thing serving to remind one; a reminder; a memento, souvenir.” And gives us Hawthorne from *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), “The freckles . . . friendly remembrancers of the April sun and breeze” and W. D. Howells’ *Italian Journey* (1862): “A bit of sacred wood for a remembrancer.”

97 *Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic*

hieroglyphic Root *hieros*, “holy.” Paul Zweig gives a wonderful account (pp. 157–60) of Walt Whitman’s fascination with the ‘Egyptian Museum,’ an exhibition in second story rooms at 659 Broadway in Manhattan of the personal collection of Egyptian artifacts of an English doctor Henry Abbot, who had practiced medicine for 30 years in Cairo. Whitman wrote an article about the place in 1855. He read George Sand on the hermetic mysteries of Egypt and conducted “long talks” with Abbot about “the visual enigma of signs and stylized pictures known as hieroglyphics” and also about Osiris and Egyptian vegetative myths.

100 *Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.*

Kanuck Slang for French Canadian. Bartlett spells it “cannuck” and gives “a name applied to Canadians by people in the Northern states.”

Tuckahoe Bartlett cites *The Farmer’s Encyclopedia*: “(*Lucoperdon solidu*. Clayton, *Flora Virginica*.) The Virginia truffle. A curious vegetable, sometimes called by the name of Indian Bread, or Indian Loaf, found in the Southern States, bordering on the Atlantic. It is a natural production, the origin of which has greatly perplexed naturalists, as it is commonly found several feet under the surface, and, like the truffle of Europe, has apparently no stem or leafy appendage connecting it with the external atmosphere. . . . The Southern botanists regard the *tuckahoe* as a fungus.” And he adds, “The term *tuckahoe* is often applied to an inhabitant of Lower Virginia, and to the poor land in that section of the State.”

Cuff Slang for African American. We haven’t been able to track the origin of this phrase. It appears in a lot of 19th-century American writing as an African American name, including the apocryphal story of the vaudevillian James Rice and the origin of ‘Jim Crow.’

103 *It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,*

transpire Webster, 1828: “to emit through the pores of the skin; to send off in vapor.” AHD: “to give off (vapor containing waste products) through the pores of the skin or the stomata of plant tissue.” Interesting to its use here, if it is primarily a technical, botanical term.

127 *I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,*

adjunct This is another example of Whitman’s pure love of the odd and unexpected word, which, it turns out, has a number of technical meanings. The 1828 Webster:

[L. adjunctus, joined, from adjungo. See Join.]

1. Something added to another, but not essentially a part of it; as, water absorbed by a cloth or sponge is its adjunct. Also a person joined to another.
2. In metaphysics, a quality of the body or the mind, whether natural or acquired; as color, in the body; thinking, in the mind.
3. In grammar, words added to illustrate or amplify the force of other words; as, the *History of the American Revolution*. The words in Italics are the adjuncts of History.
4. In music, the word is employed to denominate the relation between the principal mode and the modes of its two fifths.
5. The adjunct deities, among the Romans, were inferior deities which were added as assistants to the principal gods; as Bellona to Mars; to Vulcan, the Cabiri; to the Good Genius, the Lares; to the Evil, the Lemures.
6. In the royal academy of sciences at Paris, the adjuncts are certain members attached to the study of particular sciences. They are twelve in number, created in 1716.
7. Adjunct has been used for a colleague, but rarely.

And then Webster cites the term as an adjective—applied to professors. “a. Added to or united with, as an adjunct professor.” So they were trying to figure out how not to pay teachers a living wage even in 1828.

138 *I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,*

broadcloth “1. a densely textured woolen cloth with a plain or twill weave and a lustrous finish. 2. A closely woven silk, cotton, or synthetic fabric with a narrow crosswise rib.” —AHD

gingham “A yarn-dyed cotton fabric woven in stripes, checks, plaids, or solid colors.” —AHD. It’s characteristic that he specifies the fabrics. Here is Kris Driessen, an historian of American quilting, commenting on women’s clothing in the 19th century in “The Influence of American Women’s Lives on Textiles,” at the *Quilt History* website: “For most of the 19th century, women spent their days in severely restrictive clothing. Even servant class women wore a minimum of four layers of clothing, year round. A woman’s clothing could weigh up to 40 pounds. It started with the chemise (a slip-type garment that served as a bra) and pantaloons (long underpants with a slit in the middle so a chamberpot could be used without undressing). These were worn under a corset with a corset cover. The hourglass shape was highly desired and no woman ever considered leaving her bedroom in the morning without being tightly laced. Hoops and petticoats were then overlaid, the number depending on current fashion. THEN the woman dressed in long sleeved, floor length dresses depending on her chores for the day.”

146 *The blab of the pave . . . the tires of carts and sluff of bootsoles and talk of the promenaders*

blab Webster gives us the verb “to blab” (“to utter or tell in a thoughtless manner”) and the noun “blab” (“a babbler; a telltale”) but neither quite captures Whitman’s wonderful invention of the city street as a babbler; and **pave**

for “pavement” seems to be his own stylish shorthand. Neither Webster nor Bartlett lists the word as a noun; the OED finds an instance in a poem in *Harpers* in 1881—“I see them on every pave in Rome”—but it could well be a borrowing from Whitman.

sluff Not Webster or Bartlett or the OED gives us the sound of feet on pavement, either in this spelling or the more common “slough,” as in sloughing off a skin, so this is probably pure onomatopoeic invention.

147 *The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,*

omnibus OED: “A four-wheeled public vehicle for carrying passengers with the inside seats extending along the sides and entrance at the rear, with or without seats on the roof.” The term came into use in 1828, which may date the beginning of modern urban life. “Brower established New York City’s first public transportation route in 1827, a 12-seat stagecoach called ‘Accommodation’ that ran along Broadway from the Battery to Bleecker Street. By 1831, Brower had added the ‘Sociable’ and ‘Omnibus.’ The next year, John Mason organized the New York and Harlem Railroad, a street railway that used horse-drawn cars with metal wheels and ran on metal track. By 1855, 593 omnibuses traveled on 27 Manhattan routes and horse-drawn cars ran on street railways on Third, Fourth, Sixth, and Eighth Avenues” (<http://www.mta.info/nyct/facts/fhist.htm>). See also Beaver, Ch. 1, page 1: “Whitman surveyed nature from the top of a Broadway omnibus.”

159 *I mind them or the resonance of them I come again and again.*

resonance “*Path.* The sound heard in auscultation of the chest while the person is speaking, or that elicited by percussion of various parts of the body. P. M. LATHAM *Lect. Clin. Med.* I. i. 15 ‘There are other sounds . . . entirely produced by our percussion of the præcordial region. These should rather be called resonances than sounds.’”—OED. Another instance of Whitman’s wide reading and exquisite exactness. The modern meaning (AHD: “Richness or significance, especially in evoking an association or strong emotion”) was also available. Carlyle, *History of the French Revolution*: “He had a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling.”

163 *The armfuls are packed to the sagging mow*

mow AHD was still in 1978 defining the noun as “1. a place for storing hay or grain. 2. Feed so stored.” Whitman spent his early childhood on a Long Island farm.

166 *I jump from the crossbeams, and seize the clover and timothy,*

timothy AHD: “A grass, *Phleum pratense*, native to Eurasia, having narrow, cylindrical flower-spikes, and widely cultivated for hay. [Said to have been taken from New York to the Carolinas in 1720 by Timothy Hanson, American farmer.]”

173 *The Yankee clipper is under her three skysails she cuts the sparkle and scud,*

Yankee clipper A clipper was (AHD) ‘a sharp-bowed sailing vessel of the mid-19th century, having tall masts and sharp lines and built for great speed.’

sky-sails AHD: “a small square sail above the royal in a square-rigged vessel.” A royal was “a sail set on the royal mast.” The royal mast was “a small mast immediately above the topgallant mast.” The topgallant mast was “the mast above the topmast.” The topmast was “the mast that is below the topgallant mast in a square-rigged ship.” The point is that Whitman registers precisely the technology that gave the ship its speed and splendid look.

sparkle and scud Webster 1828 defines “scud: as “a low, thin cloud, or cloud driven by rain.” The first meanings in the OED relate to clouds but also give us “open foam and spray driven by the wind” and cite 1850 as the earliest nautical usage. AHD: “*Nautical:* To run before a gale with little or no sail set,” and for the noun “Wind-driven clouds, mist, or rain” and “A sudden light shower.” For “sparkle” Webster gives “a spark; a luminous particle” and OED, among other definitions, “a lively brightness.” Its application to the play of light on the sea seems to be Whitman’s invention.

185 *Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsey and weak,*

limpsey Though the exactness of “the swung half-door” deserves comment, it probably doesn’t need annotation, except to inquire how doors cut in half horizontally so that either the upper or lower part could be opened separately acquired the name, in English, of “Dutch door.” Limpsey: variation of “limp.” “E. BURRITT *Walk Land’s End* viii. 284 That child . . . makes two steps forward before its limpsy body loses its balance. 1868 WHITMAN *Sel. Poems* 119 The death-howl, the limpsey tumbling body, the rush of friend and foe thither.”—OED

190 *And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles,*

galls AHD: “a skin sore caused by friction or abrasion: a *saddle gall*.” The term was applied to humans by 1440.

192 *I had him sit next me at table . . . my firelock leaned in the corner.*

firelock In the mid-19th century firelocks—long-barreled guns with an ignition created by friction or percussion and smooth-bored—were being replaced in the British and U.S. armies by rifles—long-barreled guns with spiral bores, which made them more accurate and more deadly, a technical innovation that contributed to the carnage of the Civil War. Whitman may be using the name of the older gun to portray his rustic speaker in this passage. The gun was presumably there to protect the fugitive from slavecatchers. (The infamous Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850.) See Alexander Rose, *American Rifle: A Biography*, New York, 2008.

193 *Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,*

Twenty-eight young men Though it’s been our intention to gloss and not interpret the poem, it seems worth pointing out here that scholars have guessed that Whitman’s interest in Egyptian mythology led him to construct this scene, even as it feels like something from a (particularly daring) Victorian novel, as a fable of the lunar cycle, in which the moon goddess, Isis, has twenty-eight young male consorts, one for each day of the lunar month.

212 *I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and breakdown.*

shuffle and breakdown Here is Justin Kaplan quoting Whitman on butcher boys: “And when they have nothing else to do, they amuse themselves with a jig, or a breakdown. The capacities of the ‘market-roarers’ in all the mysteries of a double shuffle, it needs not our word to endorse.” For “breakdown,” OED gives “a riotous dance, with which balls are often terminated in the country; a dance in the peculiar style of the negroes.’ U.S.” and cites Bartlett as a source, and this sentence from *New England Tales* (1864): “Don’t clear out when the quadrilles are over, for we are going to have a breakdown to wind up with.” “Shuffle” survives into AHD: “A dance in which the feet scrape along the floor at each step.”

Here is Wikipedia on minstrel dancing: “Dances like the Turkey Trot, the Buzzard Lope, and the Juba dance all had their origins in the plantations of the South, and some were popularized by black performers such as William Henry Lane, Signor Cornmeali (“Old Corn Meal”), and John “Picayune” Butler. One performance by Lane in 1842 was described as consisting of “sliding steps, like a shuffle, and not the high steps of an Irish jig.” Lane and the white men who mimicked him moved about the stage with no obvious foot movement. The walkaround, a common feature of the minstrel show’s first act, was ultimately of West African origin and featured a competition between individuals hemmed in by the other minstrels. Elements of white tradition remained, of course, such as the fast-paced *breakdown* that formed part of the repertoire beginning with Rice.”

213 *Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,*

environ Webster 1828: “1. To surround; to encompass; to encircle; as a plain environed with mountains. 2. To involve; to envelop; as, to environ with darkness, or with difficulties. 3. To besiege; as a city environed with troops.” An image of several smiths in a shop working around the same anvil; the vowel sounds must have taken him to this phrasing.

214 *Each has his main-sledge they are all out there is a great heat in the fire.*

main-sledge For “sledge” OED gives “a large, heavy hammer, usually wielded with both hands, especially the large hammer used by a blacksmith.” None of the dictionaries give us “main-sledge;” it was presumably a term of art for the smith’s main or heaviest hammer.

216 *The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,*

sheer Possibly a metaphor from (AHD) “the upward curve, or the amount of upward curve, of the longitudinal lines of a ship’s hull, as seen from the side.”

219 *The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses the block swags underneath on its tied-over chain,*

We are not sure what’s going on here, though it is evident that Whitman does. The **block** could be “a heavy piece of timber or wood, usually with one plain surface; or it is rectangular, and rather thick than long” (Webster 1828) that the dray is carrying, or else a very large “piece of wood in which a pulley

runs; used also for the pulley, or the block itself and the sheaves, or wheels" (also Webster).

swag Webster 1828: "To sink down by its weight; to lean." The OED cites a relevant usage from 1876: "A timber-dray . . . with a great trunk swinging and swagging on the road."

220 *The negro that drives the huge dray of the stoneyard . . . steady and tall he stands poised on one leg on the stringpiece,*

dray AHD: "A low, heavy cart without sides, used for haulage."

stringpiece "(a) a long piece of timber serving to connect and support a framework (e.g. a floor, bridge); a longitudinal railway-sleeper (U.S.); a heavy squared timber carried along the edge of a wharf-front." —OED

222 *His glance is calm and commanding . . . he tosses the slouch of his hat away from his forehead,*

slouch As a noun, referring to "the fact or condition of slouching," OED gives an 1851 instance from Mayne Reid: "under the slouch of broad sombreros." Later the look became the thing: "a soft hat with a broad flexible brim" (AHD).

226 *In me the caresser of life wherever moving . . . backward as well as forward slueing,*

slueing Webster 1828: "In seaman's language, to turn anything conical or cylindrical &c about its axis without removing it; to turn." AHD: To slue is "to turn or twist (something) sideways" or "to twist (a mast or boom) around on its axis." Another example of Whitman's metaphorical use of a 19th-century technical term.

236 *And the mocking bird in the swamp never studied the gamut*

gamut "2. The 'Great Scale' (of which the invention is ascribed to Guido d'Arezzo), comprising the seven hexachords or partial scales, and consisting of all the recognized notes used in mediæval music. It extended from *ut* (= G on the lowest line of the bass stave) to *E-la* (= E in the highest space of the treble). *Obs. exc. Hist.*" "3. Hence in later use: The whole series of notes that are recognized by musicians. Sometimes also used for: The major diatonic scale, or the 'scale' recognized by any particular people, or at any period." —OED. See Zweig on Whitman's love of opera, 46–48.

258 *The carpenter dresses his plank . . . the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp*

foreplane OED: "1842 GWILT *Encycl. Archit.* Gloss., *Fore Plane* in carpentry and joinery the first plane used after the saw or axe. 1847 EMERSON *Repr. Men, Uses Gt. Men Wks.* (Bohn) I. 278 Every carpenter who shaves with a fore-plane borrows the genius of a forgotten inventor."

260 *The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm*

king-pin AHD gives for "king-bolt": "A vertical bolt that joins the body of a wagon or other vehicle to its front axle and usually acts as a pivot; also called *kingpin*." The context seems nautical, but none of the nautical dictionaries we consulted gives us this word.

268 *The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case*

jour OED: "U.S. colloq. abbrev. of JOURNEYMAN. 1854 B. P. Shillaber *Life & Sayings Mrs. Partington* 146 'I wouldn't be so bothered about my meals,' said a jour printer to a brother typo."

case OED: "Printing. The receptacle or frame in which the compositor has his types, divided into compartments for the various letters, figures, and spaces."

269 *He turns his quid of tobacco*

quid "1. A small lump of something (esp. tobacco) for chewing. Also *fig.*" —OED. A variant of "cud" and in common use in the 19th century. 1884: "His mind was revolving the problem of existence like a quid of gum."

272 *The quadroon girl is sold at the stand . . . the drunkard nods by the barroom stove*

quadroon "1. A person who is by descent three-quarters white and one-quarter black; a person with one black grandparent. Formerly also: "a person with one black great-grandparent (*obs. rare*)."

 —OED

279 *The woollypates hoe in the sugarfield, the overseer views them from his saddle*

woollypates Bartlett on "woollyheads," 1859: "A term applied in the first instance to negroes, and then to anti-slavery politicians."

282 *The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron*

Wolverine OED: "3. A nickname for an inhabitant of Michigan. 1835 C. F. Hoffman *Winter in Far West*: The genuine wolverine, or naturalized Michigianian."

Huron There are three Huron Rivers in Michigan. A trapper, so we are probably in the Upper Peninsula.

288 *The young sister holds out the skein, the elder sister winds it off in a ball and stops now and then for the knots*

skein OED: "1. a. A quantity of thread or yarn, wound to a certain length upon a reel, and usually put up in a kind of loose knot."

291 *The nine months' gone is in the parturition chamber, her faintness and pains are advancing*

parturition chamber OED: "1. a. Chiefly *techn.* and *literary*. The action of giving birth to young; childbirth. Also: a confinement." Not clear whether he has a physical room in mind or the act of giving birth. See Richard and Dorothy Wertz, *Lying In: A History of Childbirth in America*, 1977.

292 *The pavingman leans on his twohanded rammer*

rammer "An instrument for ramming or beating down earth, or forcing stones into the ground; a piledriver." —OED. Records a use of the term in 1497. Also, "5. *coarse slang*. the penis."

293 *The canal-boy trots on the towpath*

towpath "A path by the side of a canal or navigable river for use in towing. 1882 R. MACKENZIE *America* 305 He had begun life on the towpath as a driver of mules." —OED

299 *The camera and plate are prepared, the lady must sit for her daguerreotype*

camera and plate A very basic description of the parts involved in the creation of a **daguerreotype**. The daguerreotype, invented by Louis Daguerre in France in 1839, was a pioneering photographic process. Walt Whitman haunted Matthew Brady's daguerreotype studio on Broadway in Manhattan, and remarked about *Leaves of Grass* in his journals, "In these Leaves everything is literally photographed. Nothing is poeticized." See Reynolds on Whitman and photography, 280–86.

307 *The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold*

fish-smack "1. A single-masted sailing-vessel, fore-and-aft rigged like a sloop or cutter, and usually of light burden, chiefly employed as a coaster or for fishing, and formerly as a tender to a ship of war." —OED

311 *In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers*

hod OED: "An open receptacle for carrying mortar, and sometimes bricks or stones, to supply builders at work; also the quantity carried in it, a hodful."

315 *The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his axe*

squatter "1809 Kendall *Travels*: "Upon visiting his lands, he finds possession taken by a race of men, (the settlers and lumberers,) who in this view are called squatters." —OED

316 *The flatboatmen make fast toward dusk near the cottonwood or pekantries*

flatboatmen Flat-boat: "U.S. A large roughly-made boat formerly much used for floating goods, etc. down the Mississippi and other western rivers. 1837 Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*: Notwithstanding the increase of steam-boats in the Mississippi, flat boats are still much in use. 1883 C. F. Woolson, *For the Major*: African slaves poling their flat-boats along the Southern rivers." —OED. The pecan trees give us a Southern river.

318 *The torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahoochee or Altamahaw*

Chattahoochee The Chattahoochee originates in the Appalachians in northeast Georgia and flows southwestward to Atlanta where it turns straight south and joins the Apalachicola in the Florida panhandle. The name comes from the Creek language.

Altamaha Originates at the confluence of the Oconee and the Ocmulgee and flows east through central Georgia to the Atlantic. The names of many other rivers figure in the poem: the Red, the Tennessee, the Arkansas, the Elkhorn, the Niagara, and the Mississippi. Rivers and canals were still the transportation infrastructure of the United States in 1855. The great push for a transcontinental railroad began in the 1860s.

334 *A boatman over the lakes or bays or along coasts . . . a Hoosier, a Badger, a Buckeye*

Hoosier "a. A nickname for a native or inhabitant of the state of Indiana." —OED. Often pejoratively used, but not in the case of Whitman's poem.

Badger "a. Esp. in Wisconsin: a lead miner, *spec.* one who lives in a dugout close to the diggings. Now *hist.* and *rare.* b. A native or inhabitant of Wisconsin." —OED

Buckeye "2. a. A native of Ohio, the 'Buckeye State', in which the *Æsculus glabra* abounds. *colloq.*" —OED

335 *A Louisianian or Georgian, a poke-easy from sandhills and pines*

poke-easy "A slow or lazy person or animal; slow, easy-going." —DARE. Mainly a Southern expression. 1851 *Southern Literary Messenger*: "She couldn't bear, she said, your psalm-singing, poke-easy, good-for-nothing, dumb-founded, sighing sort of beaux."

337 *At home in the fleet of iceboats, sailing with the rest and tacking*

iceboats The term was used both for ice-breaking ships and for "a boat mounted on runner for propulsion on the ice" (OED), which these probably are. 1819: "They go with incredible swiftness, sometimes so quick as to affect the breath." 1868: "The river had good sport for skaters and the navigators of ice-boats."

342 *A novice beginning experient of myriads of seasons*

experient This is pure styling, or "flash" as they might have said in New York in 1854. OED includes the word—meaning "having experience, or being acquainted with"—and describes it as obsolete. It was used in 1420, "the awardeyne with his rodde experient" and in a Chapman play in 1630.

345 *A farmer, mechanic, or artist . . . a gentlemen, sailor, lover or quaker*

quaker Since the word is not capitalized, it isn't clear whether he means a Quaker or, in contrast to "lover," a faint-hearted person.

346 *A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest.*

fancy-man In the 19th century "the Fancy" was the art of boxing and all the stylish hangers-on associated with the sport. And OED: "c. *slang.* A man who lives upon the earnings of a prostitute." 1821: "One of the Fancy, he was not a fancy-man." 1890: "They will bear from the 'fancy-man' any usage, however brutal."

rowdy "Of American, but otherwise quite obscure, origin" says the OED. "Originally, a backwoodsman of a rough and lawless type; hence, a rough, disorderly person; one addicted to quarrelling, fighting, or disturbing the peace." 1824: "The riotous roisters, or as they are here [Kentucky] called, rowdies, will fight from mere love of fighting."

349 *And am not stuck up, and am in my place.*

stuck up The expression seems to have been a 19th-century invention. Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839: "He's a nasty stuck-up monkey, that's what I consider him," said Mrs. Squeers."

363 *It is for the admirable communes of literary men and composers and singers and lecturers and engineers and savans*

commune A French administrative term until a revolutionary group calling themselves the Commune of Paris seized political control of the city in 1789, so it can mean at once "a village" and "a self-declared revolutionary community."

savans In James P. Warren's *Walt Whitman's Language Experiment*, he comments on Whitman's taste for borrowing foreign words to coin new ones in English: "The words are based on foreign borrowings, but often Whitman either alters the foreign base to create an original word or employs foreign endings to create an original combination with a lexically established English words. The examples he gives include savans, veneralee, compend, promulge, and debouch. So "savants," learned persons, become "savans."

365 *This is the trill of a thousand clear cornets and scream of the octave flute and strike of triangles*

octave flute "n. (a) a small flute sounding an octave higher than the ordinary flute, a piccolo; (b) a flute stop in an organ sounding an octave higher than the ordinary pitch." —OED

369 *I sound triumphal drums for the dead . . . I fling through my embouchures the loudest and gayest music to them*

embouchures "Music. 'The part of a musical instrument applied to the mouth' (Grove)." —OED. And here, probably, the mouth formed for that purpose.

375 *The keptwoman and sponger and thief are hereby invited . . . the heavy-lipped slave is invited . . . the veneralee is invited,*

keptwoman Whitman's spelling in the 1855 edition. He later revised to "kept woman."

sponger Though it is not in NW, this term for "one who lives meanly at other's expense" goes back at least to the late 17th century in England

veneralee A coinage which presumably means a leech, or possibly someone afflicted with a venereal disease.

377 *This is the press of a bashful hand . . . this is the float and odor of hair,*

float This is a sweet invention. Presumably he just means "flowing." Among the twenty or so meanings for this word in the OED, there seems no meaning with an American or technical provenience.

380 *This is the thoughtful merge of myself and the outlet again.*

merge "An act or instance of merging; a merger" says the OED, which remarks that the word is very rare as a noun. Here it is for all practical purposes a coinage. And "outlet" gives it a watery connotation and its suggestion of "margin."

outlet Hence "a channel of egress or discharge, a vent, a way out." In extended use: "a way out of a difficulty; a means of escape or relief; (also) a way of expressing or releasing emotion, energy, talent, etc. c. *fig.* Issue, outcome. *Obs. rare.*" —OED

384 *Does the daylight astonish? or the early redstart twittering through the woods?*

redstart A warbler, *Setophaga ruticilla*, of the eastern U.S. winters in Mexico and the West Indies, so its return to the woods signals the beginning of spring.

391 *All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own*

offset We wondered if "offset" was a particularly modern verb. OED says it is, in the meaning "to set off as an equivalent against something else, to counter-balance" chiefly an American usage. The earliest it gives is from 1792. And then there is this, since Whitman worked in printer's offices: "*Printing = to set off* at SET *v.* Phrasal verbs. Also occas. *trans.* 1888 C. T. JACOBI *Printers' Vocab.* 122 When the ink off-sets from one sheet to another."

395 *That life is a suck and a sell, and nothing remains at the end but threadbare crape and tears*

suck Bartlett glosses this, so it was apparently common slang in 1856: A monstrous humbug—a grand suck in." The OED in its turn cites Bartlett: "7. *slang.* A deception; a disappointing event or result. Also *suck-in.* 1856 Dow *Serm.* II. 316 (Bartlett) A monstrous humbug, a grand suck in."

sell In the sense of "swindle," the OED dates this word from 1853. It was apparently racetrack slang. 1857: "The thing is what in the language of the turf is called 'a sell.'"

crape OED: "1. a. A thin transparent gauze-like fabric, plain woven, without any twill, of highly twisted raw silk or other staple, and mechanically embossed, so as to have a crisped or minutely wrinkled surface. The name originally comprised fine worsted fabrics (see b.); but it is now chiefly limited to a black silk (or imitation silk) fabric much used for ladies' mourning dresses, and for funereal trimming and draping."

396 *Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids . . . conformity goes to the fourth-removed*

truckling Webster on "truckle": "To yield or bend obsequiously to the will of another; to submit; to creep. Small states must truckle to large ones." The

OED cites Thackeray in *The Book of Snobs*, 1848: "The habit of truckling and cringing."

fold It seems that the metaphor here is that the obsequious body folds like the folds of paper in which medicines were purchased.

fourth-removed OED on "removed": "Distant in relationship by a certain degree of descent or consanguinity." A continuation of the sardonic metaphors of social submission—it's the poor relations who have to cringe.

408 *I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night*

carlacue A variant spelling of curlicue, which the OED *Supplement* (1930) finds in 1840: "I soon saw by the way in which the white man's track doubled and doubled again . . . that the fellow could not be cutting such carlicues for nothing." For "curlicue": "a fantastic curl or twist." Here is Bartlett: "Carlicues, or Curlycues. Boyish tricks, capers. *To cut* or *cut up carlicues* is to cut capers." 'Sally,' says I, 'will you take me for better or worse?' This put her considering, and I gave a flourishing about the room, and cut a curlycue with my right foot, as much as to say, "Take your own time." —*McClintock's Tales*

412 *I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by after all*

level Another term from the carpenter's craft. Webster 1828: "An instrument in mechanics by which to find or draw a horizontal line, as in setting buildings, or in making canals and drains. The instruments for these purposes are various; as the air level, the carpenter's level, the mason's level, and the gunner's level."

419 *My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite,*

tenoned OED: "furnished or made with a tenon" A tenon is "a projection fashioned on the end or the side of a piece of wood, to fit into a corresponding cavity, or MORTISE, is a corresponding piece."

mortised "1. a. *trans.* To fasten or join securely; to fix in or join together closely and firmly; (*Joinery*) to join with a mortise; to fasten *into* or *to* by means of mortise and tenon; to secure (a tenon) with a mortise. Also *fig.*" In the 1850s in the United States mortise and tenon construction began to give way to balloon frame construction, made possible—and fast—by machine-produced penny-nails. Gideon: "in America materials were plentiful and skilled labor scarce; in Europe skilled labor was plentiful and materials scarce. It is this difference which accounts for differences in the structure of American and European industry from the fifties on."

425 *The first I graft and increase upon myself*

graft A horticulturist's term, but *increase upon myself*, though clear enough, is such an odd and unexpected phrasing.

429 *I chant a new chant of dilation or pride*

dilation The noun form is not in Webster, who defines "dilate": "1. To expand; to distend; to enlarge or extend in all directions; opposed to contract. The air dilates the lungs; air is dilated by rarefaction. 2. To enlarge; to relate at large; to tell copiously or diffusely; as, to dilate upon the policy of a measure. In this sense, it is generally used intransitively. Spenser and Shakespeare have used it in a transitive sense; as, to dilate a theme." OED finds in Charles Lamb in 1823 "Those natural dilations of the youthful spirit."

436 *Press close magnetic nourishing night!*

magnetic See the note on **electrical**, line 42. And there was among Whitman's phrenological friends another sense of the word. Kaplan: "I openly avow my belief in Animal Magnetism," Orson (Fowler, Whitman's publisher) announced, 'because I have seen so many facts and experiments that I know it to be true.' The universe was represented as a vast battery of 'irradiating power' or 'nervous force' that worked on principles conveniently confused with those of the magnetic telegraph." (p. 150)

442 *Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue*

vitreous OED: "1. a. Of or belonging to, consisting or composed of, glass; of the nature of glass; glassy. 3. *vitreous electricity*, positive electricity obtained from glass by friction." In use in the 17th century. In the 19th; "He had left the vitreous and mercurial climate of France . . . for the voluptuous and indolent air of Italy."

445 *Far-swooping elbowed earth!*

elbowed The first use of this adjective the OED finds in 1825: "c. Formed into the shape of an elbow, bent, curved." The instance is "An elbowed seat had been introduced."

462 *Partaker of influx and efflux . . . extoler of hate and conciliation*

influx and efflux OED: "influx: The act or fact of flowing in; an inflow, as of a physical fluid, water, air, light, heat, spiritual or immaterial influence into the soul, etc." "efflux: 1. A flowing outwards of water or other liquid; a stream, river. Also, of air, gases, volatile particles, magnetic or electric currents, etc.; opposed to *afflux* or *influx*. Also *attrib.* Hence, a channel of outflow." Bacon uses them both as scientific terms in 1626. 1823: "A strong influx of light." 1860: ". . . the influx of His grace."

463 *Extoler of amies and those that sleep in each others' arms*

amies According to the OED "amy" for "friend or lover" was in use in England in the 1300s and not after.

468 *Washes and razors for foofoos . . . for me freckles and a bristling beard*

foofoos Bartlett: "In New York a slang word meaning 'an outsider.' Or one not in on the secrets of a society, party, or band." He provides this instance: "Don't know what a foo-foo is? Well, as you're a greenhorn, I'll enlighten you. A foo-foo, or outsider, is a chap who can't come the big figure." The "big figure" was "three cents for a glass of grog and a night's lodgings" according to a play set in the Bowery. Mark Twain entitled Chapter 17 of *The Prince and the Pauper* "Foo-foo the First."

473 *Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy?*

scrofula An old medical term for chronic enlargement of the lymph gland. In 1828 Webster defined it this way: "A disease, called vulgarly the king's evil, characterized by hard, scirrous, and often indolent tumors in the glands of the neck, under the chin, in the arm-pits, &c." In the mid-19th century (Miller, p. 88) it was thought to be caused by too-frequent pregnancies.

484 *And mine a word of the modern . . . a word en masse*

modern As an adjective, to distinguish ancient from modern times or languages, the word dates to the 16th century. As a noun with the sense of 'of the present, the new, up-to-date,' OED cites 1897, 1905.

en masse Seems to have come into English to mean "in a mass or body" around 1815. "The public, *enmasse*,/ Hath affirmed that these Lays other efforts surpass." One of the milder effects, perhaps, of the French revolution.

487 *A word of reality . . . materialism first and last imbueing*

materialism In the sense of a philosophy based on the idea that nothing exists except matter and its movements, OED dates this word to 1748. It came into its own in the 19th century where it was often associated with irreligious thought. OED quotes a sermon of 1850: "The miserable materialism of the mass."

488 *Hurrah for positive science! Long live exact demonstration!*

positive science OED on "positive" in this sense that connects to the positivism of Auguste Comte: "Dealing only with matters of fact and experience; practical, realistic." Comte's *Philosophie positive* was published in 1830.

489 *Fetch stonecrop and mix it with cedar and branches of lilac*

stonecrop "The common name of *Sedum acre* (N.O. *Crassulaceae*), an herb with bright yellow flowers and small cylindrical fleshy sessile leaves, growing in masses on rocks, old walls, etc.; also applied (with or without defining word) to other species of *Sedum*, esp. those of similar growth, and of allied genera, as the N. American *Penthorum*" —OED

490 *This is the lexicographer or chemist . . . this made a grammar of the old cartouches*

cartouches "A cartouche is an oval ring used in hieroglyphic writing to set off the characters of a royal or divine name. The earliest examiners of the Rosetta stone had noticed that a group of characters enclosed in an oval appeared at a point in the hieroglyphic inscription corresponding to the place where the name of the pharaoh Ptolemy Epiphanes occurred in the Greek inscription." It was this study of the royal cartouches, beginning in 1785, that led to the deciphering of the hieroglyphics by Jean Francois Champollion in 1832. It was one of the intellectual achievements of the age.

496 *And go on the square for my own sake and for other's sake*

go on the square We have not been able to find this exact usage. Here is Wikipedia on a similar, but contemporary phrase: "To **kid on the square** is to be joking, but at the same time really mean it. In this context, the *square* means 'genuine' or 'true' in the same sense as *fair and square*, *square deal* and

three square meals, with an origin in carpentry, where a *square* is a tool used to ensure that objects are perpendicular to one another."

499 *Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos*

roughs Not a noun in either Webster or Bartlett. OED gives: "A man or lad belonging to the lower classes and inclined to commit acts of violence or disorder; a rowdy" and dates it from 1837.

kosmos In the later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, the line reads "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son". OED: "The world or universe as an ordered and harmonious system." Reynolds: "The word, which had been popularized by the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, epitomized the progressive scientist's vision of the universe. . . . The first volume of his six-volume work, *Kosmos*, appeared in 1845, the second two years later." (pp. 244–45)

506 *Through me the afflatus surging and surging . . . through me the current and index*

afflatus OED: "The miraculous communication of supernatural knowledge; hence also, the imparting of an over-mastering impulse, poetic or otherwise; inspiration." Joseph Priestly, *Natural and Revealed Religion*, 1782: "Orpheus said antient poets wrote by a divine afflatus."

current Used for the flow of rivers since the 14th century. OED cites this from 1842: "From the manner in which the peculiar force called electricity is seemingly transmitted through certain bodies, the term *current* is commonly used to denote its apparent progress."

index Rich in its range of meanings. Webster 1828: "1. That which points out; that which shows or manifests; 2. The hand that points to any thing, as the hour of the day, the road to a place. 3. A table of the contents of a book; a table of references in an alphabetical order. 4. In anatomy, the forefinger, or pointing finger. 5. In arithmetic and algebra, that which shows to what power any quantity is involved; the exponent. 6. The index of a globe, or the gnomon, is a little style fitted on the North Pole, which by turning with the globe, serves to point to certain divisions of the hour circle. 7. In music, a direct."

514 *And of the threads that connect the stars—and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff,*

fatherstuff Apparently Whitman's coinage.

525 *Seeing hearing and feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle*

tag OED: "1. Originally, one of the narrow, often pointed, *laciniæ* or pendent pieces made by slashing the skirt of a garment; hence, any hanging ragged or torn piece; also, any end or rag of ribbon or the like. 2. A small pendent piece or part hanging from, or attached more or less loosely to the main body of anything. With numerous specific applications, e.g. a. A matted lock of wool on a sheep; a tag-lock; a twisted or matted lock of hair. b. A shred of animal tissue. c. A shred of metal in a casting. d. A final curl, twirl, or flourish added to a letter, sometimes used as a mark of contraction. e. *fig.* An appendage; the tail-end (of any proceedings)."

531 *Shaded ledges and rests, firm masculine coulter, it shall be you*

coulter OED: "The iron blade fixed in front of the share in a plough; it makes a vertical cut in the soil, which is then sliced horizontally by the share."

532 *Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you*

tilth Webster 1828: "The state of being tilled or prepared for a crop. We say, land is in good tilth, when it is manured, plowed, broken and mellowed for receiving the seed. We say also, ground is in bad tilth. When we say, land is in tilth, we mean in good condition for the seed; not in tilth, in a bad condition." Here is Wordsworth in the 1851 *Prelude*, which Whitman read: "I paused and cast/ Upon his rich domains, vineyard and tilth,/ Green meadow-ground and many-colored woods/ A farewell look."

535 *My brain it shall be your occult convolutions*

occult OED: "1. a. Not disclosed or divulged, secret; kept secret; communicated only to the initiated. Now *rare*." And "c. *Science* (now *hist.*). Of a property or matter: not manifest to direct observation; discoverable only by experiment; unexplained; latent."

536 *Root of washed sweet-flag, timorous pond-snipe, nest of guarded duplicate eggs, it shall be you*

sweet-flag This is Whitman's beloved calamus, *Acorus calamus*, a tall perennial wetland plant with a strikingly phallic spadix. Here is Wikipedia on the

cultural symbolism of the plant: "The calamus has long been a symbol of male love. The name is associated with a Greek myth: Kalamos, a son of the river-god Maeander, who loved Karpos, the son of Zephyrus and Chloris. When Karpos drowned, Kalamos was transformed into a reed, whose rustling in the wind was interpreted as a sigh of lamentation. The plant was a favorite of Henry David Thoreau (who called it sweet flag), and also of Walt Whitman, who added a section called the 'Calamus' poems, possibly celebrating his love of men, to the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The name *Sweet Flag* refers to its sweet scent (it has been used as a strewing herb) and the wavy edges of the leaves which are supposed to resemble a fluttering flag."

pond-snipe There are two species of North American snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*, the common snipe, and *Gallinago delicata*, Wilson's snipe. They overlap in New York, where the common snipe is much more common. Both species, typically, lay a clutch of four eggs. However, the male leaves the nest with the first two fledglings to hatch, the female with the last two—so searchers often came across nests with two eggs, which suits Whitman's metaphorical purpose.

549 *To walk up my stoop is unaccountable*

stoop OED: "*US and Canada*: "An uncovered platform before the entrance to a house" and cites an instance in Hawthorne in 1837. Also *Backwoods of Canada*, 1833: "The Canadians call these verandahs 'stoups.'"

576 *My knowledge my live parts . . . it keeping tally with the meaning of things*

tally See Harold Bloom, *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*, Oxford 1982 for an exhaustive discussion of Whitman's use of this word which has resonance in several domains, including counting in two columns, voting, and baseball.

582 *I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face*

plenum Webster 1828: "Fullness of matter in space." OED: "1. a. Physics. A space completely filled with matter; spec. the whole of space regarded as being so filled. Contrasted with *VACUUM*. 1876 C. SLAGG Sanitary Work IX." And: "Chiefly literary. In extended use: a condition of fullness or great quantity; a place filled with something." George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 1858: "He must have some approximate conception of the mode in which the doctrines that have so much vitality in the plenum of his own brain will comport themselves in vacuo."

589 *Talkative young ones to those that like them . . . the recitative of fish-pedlars and fruit-pedlars . . . the loud laugh of workpeople at their meals*

recitative Came into English with the art it names in the mid-17th century. OED: "A style of musical declamation, intermediate between singing and ordinary speech, commonly employed in the dialogue and narrative parts of operas and oratorios." Its usage was metaphorical by the 18th. Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*, 1771, "Because every language had its peculiar recitative."

601 *The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling me full*

orbic OED: "*rare*. Having the form of an orb; circular, rounded, orbal." And finds an instance in 1619, and this from 1892, *Saturday Review*, "He gazes up with rapturous, orbical eyes."

flex Not in Webster. In the OED, it is a verb: "To bend. Now only in scientific use, *esp.* with reference to the bending of a joint or limb by the action of the flexor muscles." So another instance of Whitman's making nouns from verbs and verbs from nouns.

603 *The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies*

Uranus The discovery of the seventh planet was made by Sir William Herschel in 1781. For Whitman's enthusiasm about astronomy, see Beaver.

608 *Steeped amid honeyed morphine . . . my windpipe squeezed in the fakes of death*

fakes For "fake" 1828 Webster gives only this: "One of the circles or windings of a cable or hawser, as it lies in a coil; a single turn." OED also describes it as a nautical noun of obscure origin. But also gives this definition: "An act of faking; contrivance, 'dodge.'" with the earliest citation in 1828. The verb in OED means "To lay a rope in fakes or coils."

612 *If nothing lay more developed the quahaug and its callous shell were enough.*

quahaug An American word, of course, from the Narraganset for the Atlantic round clam, *Venus mercenaria*.

614 *I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop*

conductors For the meaning of "something that conducts or permits the passage of heat or electricity," OED gives a first instance in 1734. For Whitman on the nerve endings and electricity, see Beaver (pp. 87–88): "The sun itself, the force of life, was held by scientists to be an electric force; Richard Owen, the geologist, posited as his first axiom that the sun is the source of all stimulus, 'and stimulation the cause of motion.' His second axiom reads as follows: 'The phenomena of heat, light, and electricity, (the latter in all its forms,) may result from modifications of motion, (vibratory or undulatory, disturbed equilibrium, etc.) and many facts point to a similarity or connection between volcanic, electrical, and nervous energy.' The suspicion, voiced by Owen and others," says Beaver, "that even nervous agency was connected somehow with electric force is expressed by Whitman as early as 'Song of Myself.'"

658 *And a compend of compends is the meat of a man or woman,*

compend OED: "compend = COMPENDIUM. (transf. and fig). 1882 J. PAYNE 1001 Nights I. 182 'He's such a compend of beauties.'"

660 *And they are to branch boundlessly out of that lesson until it becomes omnific,*

omnific Though this is the sort of word one associates with the Latin-loving English prose writers of the 17th century, the word does appear in 1828 Webster: "[L. *omnis*, all, and *facio*, to make.] All-creating." With this instance, "Thou deep, peace! said then th' omnific word, your discord end," which suggests that its flavor was theological.

663 *And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,*

pismire Webster 1828: "The insect called the ant or emmet." "Obsolete except as dialect," says the OED which guesses that the word derives "from the urinous smell of anthills." It finds an instance in an 1821 English poem: "Where the pismire hills abound."

664 *And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,*

tree-toad Probably *Hyla arborea*. Bright leaf-green above and white underneath with adhesive toe pads.

chef-d'oeuvre OED: "A masterpiece." Earliest instance, 1772. Walter Scott uses it in his journal to describe paintings in 1831.

670 *I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots,*

gneiss Webster 1828: "In mineralogy, a species of aggregated rock, composed of quartz, feldspar and mica, of a structure more or less distinctly slaty. The layers, whether straight or curved, are frequently thick, but often vary considerably in the same specimen. It passes on one side into granite, from which it differs in its slaty structure, and on the other into mica slate. It is rich in metallic ores."

esculent OED: "Suitable for food, eatable." Bacon uses it in 1626. By the 19th century it is an agriculturist's and a botanist's word: "The 4th of August was the period when the juicy esculent could be first enjoyed."

671 *And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,*

stucco'd It is a verb in Webster 1828: "To plaster; to overlay with fine plaster." Comes into English from Italian early, 1598. Another instance of the language of the building trades.

675 *In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against my approach,*

plutonic OED: "Geol. Of, relating to, or designating rocks formed by the action of heat at great depths in the earth's crust, esp. as distinguished from volcanic rocks formed at or near the earth's surface; abyssal, intrusive. Also (now hist.): designating, relating to, or advocating the theory of Plutonism

(contrasted with Neptunian)." This was, of course, the period of a revolution in geology. Plutonism was a theory, proposed around the turn of the 19th century that volcanic activity was the source of rocks on the surface of the earth. Neptunism claimed that rocks had originated from a great flood and were basically sedimentary in origin. Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which Whitman knew, superseded these theories. Lyell, 1833: "The unstratified crystalline rocks have been very commonly called Plutonic, from the opinion that they were formed by igneous action at great depths."

676 *In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powdered bones,*

mastodon Webster 1828: "n. [Gr. *mamilla*, and *tooth*.] A genus of mammiferous animals resembling the elephant, now extinct, and known only by their fossil remains. It includes the N. American mammoth." The word was apparently first used in French in 1806. Tennyson: "Nature brings not back the mastodon."

682 *In vain the razorbilled auk sails far north to Labrador,*

razorbilled auk *Alca torda*. They breed in the north Atlantic from the Arctic Circle to Maine, and winter south to the Jersey coast, so Whitman may have seen them on Long Island.

698 *Infinite and omnigenous and the like of these among them;*

omnigenous OED: "Of all kinds." Clearly a savant's word. Coleridge, 1814, in a letter: "A miraculous combination of erudition, broad, deep, and omnigenous."

714 *I am afoot with my vision.*

afoot Webster 1828: "1. On foot; borne by the feet; opposed to riding. 2. In action; in a state of being planned for execution; as, a design is afoot, or on foot."

716 *Along the ruts of the turnpike . . . along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,*

turnpike From the mid-18th century in England, meaning a toll road. It appears in 1828 Webster.

gulch Does not appear in the 1828 Webster or in Bartlett. OED: "U.S. A narrow and deep ravine." Earliest instance from Bayard Taylor in 1850: "The word *gulch* denotes a mountain ravine, steep, abrupt, and inaccessible." So this is Whitman's knowing use of a fairly new American landscape term.

717 *Hoing my onion-patch, and rows of carrots and parsnips . . . crossing savannas . . . trailing in forests,*

savannas OED: "1. a. A treeless plain; *properly*, one of those found in various parts of tropical America." Comes from Spanish into English early, but became a particularly North American term. George Washington, 1753: ". . . the nearest and levellest way was now impassible, by Reason of many large and mirey Savannahs." Francis Parkman, 1865: "Next came the broad sunlight and the wide savanna."

718 *Prospecting . . . gold-digging . . . girdling the trees of a new purchase,*

girdling OED: "To cut through the bark of a tree in a circle extending round the trunk, or to remove a certain breadth of bark in a similar circle, either for the purpose of killing the tree or for that of rendering it more fruitful; sometimes in *pass.* of injuries caused accidentally, e.g., by a tight wire or by the gnawing of rabbits. Also with *round*." This was how new settlers in the American forests began to transform them into farmland.

725 *Over the sharp-peaked farmhouse with its scalloped scum and slender shoots from the gutters;*

scalloped scum Neither Webster 1828 nor OED gives any definition of "scum" that doesn't amount to the froth that rises to the surface in boiling or fermentation, or some metaphorical derivation. "Scalloped," of course, is "Having the border, edge, or outline cut into a series of segments of circles resembling a scallop-shell" (OED), but, unless there is some other meaning of "scum," this must be a description of rainwater both foaming and drizzling from the farmhouse gutters and rainspout. Or "scum" is a variant of "scrim."

726 *Over the western persimmon . . . over the longleaved corn and the delicate blue-flowered flax;*

western persimmon *Diospyros virginiana*, the American persimmon or possumwood tree, grows mostly in the southeastern U.S., and west to Texas and Oklahoma.

729 *Scaling mountains . . . pulling myself cautiously up . . . holding on by low scragged limbs,*

scrag Webster 1828: "Something thin or lean with roughness. A raw-boned person is called a scrag, but the word is vulgar."

731 *Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheatlot,*

wheatlot Webster 1828, on "lot": "In the United States, a piece or division of land; perhaps originally assigned by drawing lots, but now any portion, piece or division. So we say, a man has a lot of land in Broadway, or in the meadow; he has a lot in the plain, or on the mountain; he has a home-lot, a house-lot, a wood-lot."

732 *Where the bat flies in the July eve . . . where the great goldbug drops through the dark;*

goldbug Probably a golden tortoise beetle, of the *Chrysomelidae* family in North America, unless it is a common term for firefly, or some other insect of the 19th-century New York summer dark. None of the dictionaries help. Here is an entomology website and a different geography: "Few who see the 'gold bug' forget it. It is one of the most striking insects in the Puget Sound area. The golden tortoise beetle is a stunning, vibrant metallic gold color. It has a magical quality, not only because of the brilliance of its color, but also because the brilliance isn't permanent. *Metriorhina* can alter color within a short time period, turning from brilliant gold to a dull, spotty reddish color."

733 *Where the flails keep time on the barn floor,*

flails OED: "1. An instrument for threshing corn by hand, consisting of a wooden staff or handle, at the end of which a stouter and shorter pole or club, called a swingle or swipple, is so hung as to swing freely. 1868 ROGERS *Pol. Econ.* x. (1876) 24 Thirty years ago all corn, or nearly all corn, was threshed by the flail." ("Corn" here means "grain.")

736 *Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, and andirons straddle the hearth-slab, and cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;*

cheese-cloth The cloth through which the curds are pressed in cheese-making.

andirons Webster 1828: "An iron utensil used, in Great Britain, where coal is the common fuel, to support the ends of a spit; but in America, used to support the wood in fire places."

hearth-slab for "hearthstone": "A stone or stones forming a hearth; also fig. in 1847 Emerson *Poems*, p. 58. (MA) I go to seek my own hearth-stone." —DARE

737 *Where triphammers crash . . . where the press is whirling its cylinders;*

triphammers OED: "A massive machine-hammer operated by a tripping device, as a wheel with projecting teeth, a cam, or the like, by which it is raised and then allowed to drop; a tilt-hammer. Also fig. 1854 EMERSON *Lett. & Soc. Aims, Eloquence* Wks. (Bohn) III. 190 What character, what infinite variety, belong to the voice! sometimes it is a flute, sometimes a trip-hammer." Whitman spent a lot of time in print shops.

740 *Where the life-car is drawn on the slipnoose . . . where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand,*

life-car Greenspan: "A watertight boat or chamber used in rescues to haul people through surf too unsettled for open boats." No source given.

slipnoose OED: "a noose which tightens and slackens by means of a slip-knot."

743 *Where the ground-shark's fin cuts like a black chip out of the water,*

ground-shark The Greenland shark, *Somniosus microcephalus*, also known as the sleeper, grey, or ground shark, native to the waters of the North Atlantic around Greenland and Iceland.

744 *Where the half-burned brig is riding on unknown currents,*

brig OED: "A vessel with two masts square-rigged like a ship's fore- and main-masts, but carrying also on her main-mast a lower fore-and-aft sail with a gaff and boom."

749 *Upon a door-step . . . upon the horse-block of hard wood outside,*

horse-block OED: "A small platform, usually of stone, ascended by 3 or 4 steps, for convenience in mounting a horse; also a portable structure of wood, or the like, for the same purpose."

750 *Upon the race-course, or enjoying pic-nics or jigs or a good game of base-ball,*

pic-nics Came into existence in the middle of the 18th century to denote elegant parties at which each guest brought a dish, an aristocratic pot-luck. Came by the mid-19th to mean an outdoor party, but it was still a piquant phrase.

jigs OED: "A lively, rapid, springy kind of dance."

base-ball Traubel's *Conversations with Whitman*: "—it's our game: that's the chief fact in connection with it: America's game: has the snap, go fling, of the American atmosphere—belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly, as our constitutions, laws: is just as important in the sum total of our historic life."

751 *At he-festivals with blackguard jibes and ironical license and bull-dances and drinking and laughter,*

he-festivals Whitman's invention?

bull-dances OED: "1867 SMYTH *Sailor's Word-bk.*, *Bull-dance*, at sea it is performed by men only, when without women. It is sometimes called a stag-dance."

752 *At the cider-mill, tasting the sweet of the brown squash*

squash Neither "squash" nor "squish" in Webster. OED: "1. *intr.* To collapse into a soft, pulpy mass. 1884 Mark Twain *Huck Finn*: 'He'd a squashed down like a bluff bank that the river has cut under.'" In a later edition he revised "squash" to "mash."

754 *At musters and beach-parties and friendly bees and huskings and house-raisings;*

muster OED: "The number of people or things assembled on a particular occasion; an assembly, a collection. 1863 W. C. BALDWIN *Afr. Hunting* viii. 325 We set off, a strong muster, two days ago, to hunt part of the forest in which the elephants stand." In Webster 1828 the term is only military.

bees OED: "In allusion to the social character of the insect (originally in U.S.): A meeting of neighbours to unite their labours for the benefit of one of their number; e.g. as is done still in some parts, when the farmers unite to get in each other's harvests in succession; usually preceded by a word defining the purpose of the meeting, as *apple-bee, husking-bee, quilting-bee, raising-bee* etc."

huskings OED: "The action of removing a husk. *spec. in U.S.*, the removal of the husk from Indian corn; hence, a party or gathering of the neighbours and friends of a farmer to assist him in husking his corn, usually enlivened with festivities; called also *husking-bee*."

house-raisings OED: "(U.S.), 'a gathering of the inhabitants in a thinly settled district to assist a neighbor in raising the frame of his house' (*Cent. Dict.*)"

756 *Where the hay-rick stands in the barnyard, and the dry-stalks are scattered, and the brood cow waits in the hovel,*

hay-ricks OED: "A haystack. 1837 DICKENS *Pickw.* vii, 'The rich, sweet smell of the hayricks.'"

brood cow "Brood" is "offspring," so OED: "With the sense of *breeding*, hence *brood hen, brood mare*, and the like."

hovel "A shed" in 1828 Webster. OED: "1. An open shed; an outhouse used as a shelter for cattle, a receptacle for grain or tools." 1655: "Cottages for themselves and Hovels for the Cattel."

762 *Where the laughing-gull scoots by the slappy shore and laughs her near-human laugh*

laughing-gull The common name for the Atlantic gull, *Larus atricilla*.

slappy Not in the dictionaries.

764 *Where the band-necked partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out;*

band-necked partridges *Perdix perdix*, the gray partridge, is the only North American species and it doesn't have a notably banded neck. Perhaps he was thinking of pheasants. The behavior he describes is quite specific. Like pheasants, partridges are an introduced species and this seems to describe their behavior. Pheasants tend to roost in trees.

767 *Where the yellow-crowned heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs;*

yellow-crowned night heron *Nycticorax violaceus*, the smaller of the two North American night herons. A resident of Long Island marshes, though it is more common further south.

769 *Where the katydid works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well;*

katydid OED: "A large longhorn grasshopper of the family Tettigoniidae, of arboreal habits, which produces by stridulation a noise to which its name is due; the common or broad-winged species (*Cyrtophyllum concavum*) abounds in the central and eastern states of America."

chromatic Applied to color as well as sound. OED: "Full of color, brightly or highly colored." And this: "In *Rhetoric*, florid, elaborate, artificial." In music, "containing notes which do not belong to the diatonic scale."

770 *Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,*

citrons Webster 1828: "A large species of lemon."

silver-wired His own look at the cucumber leaf.

771 *Through the salt-lick or orange glade . . . or under conical firs;*

salt-lick OED: "lick: 2. *N. Amer.* a. A spot to which animals resort to lick the salt or salt earth found there. Also *buffalo-lick*, *salt-lick*."

778 *Looking in at the shop-windows in Broadway the whole forenoon . . . pressing the flesh of my nose to the thick plate-glass,*

plate-glass The word and the product appeared in the 1720s and was widely manufactured in the US by the 1850s, though still a fashionable innovation in store windows.

781 *Coming home with the bearded and dark-cheeked bush-boy . . . riding behind him at the drape of the day;*

bush-boy No idea. OED gives "a native Australian or bushman," but that seems unlikely. "Bush" was associated with several 19th-century processes. It referred to "the metal lining of the axle hole of a wheel" and in printing to "an alloy of copper and tin."

785 *Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure;*

dicker OED: "U.S. To trade by barter or exchange; to truck; to bargain in a petty way, to haggle." James Fenimore Cooper, 1848: "The white men who penetrated to the semi-wilds were always ready to dicker and to swap." Of equal interest is **adventure** as a verb: "I. To commit to chance. 1. *trans.* To take the chance of; to commit to fortune; to undertake a thing of doubtful issue; to try, to chance, to venture upon."

791 *Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,*

seven satellites, etc. Saturn, which has by current measure a diameter of 74,900 miles.

795 *Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,*

backing and filling Originally a nautical term: OED: "to back a sail, a yard: to lay it aback; to brace the yard so that the wind may blow directly on the front of the sail, and thus retard the ship's course."

799 *I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul,*
swallowing !!!

805 *I go hunting polar furs and the seal . . . leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff . . . clinging to topples of brittle and blue.*

topples There is in the OED a 1907 instance of "topple" as a noun, and it is colloquial: "This ain't the topple over of the Coll building yet."

brittle and blue Two adjectives for nouns to describe sea ice.

806 *I ascend to the foretruck . . . I take my place late at night in the crow's nest . . .*

foretruck OED: "d. *Naut.* Chiefly in words denoting some 'part of a ship's frame and machinery which lies near the stem, or in that direction, in opposition to *aft* or *after*' (Adm. Smyth); also of parts connected with the foremast."

813 *I am a free companion . . . I bivouac by invading watchfires.*

bivouac Originally a military usage come into English from the Thirty Years' War. (OED) "to remain, esp. during the night, in the open air without tents, it also came to mean simply "*transf.* To rest or pass the night in the open air. 1814 SCOTT *Wav.* II. i. 8 These distinguished personages bivouacked among the flowery heath, wrapped up in their plaids."

watchfires OED: "a fire maintained during the night as a signal, or for the use of a sentinel, party or person on watch."

836 *I clutch the rails of the fence . . . my gore dribs thinned with the ooze of my skin,*

gore An honorable old word, etymologically connected to animal dung, it came by the 17th century to mean "Blood in the thickened state that follows effusion. In poetical language often: Blood shed in carnage."—OED

drib OED says it is obsolete. "1. *intr.* To fall in drops; *fig.* to go on little by little." Also "to dribble" and "to fall in driblets." In use in the 16th century. Whitman may have reinvented it or it survived to North America in spoken English.

854 *Again the reveille of drummers . . . again the attacking cannon and mortars and howitzers,*

howitzers OED: "A short piece of ordnance, usually of light weight, specially designed for the horizontal firing of shells with small charges, and adapted for use in a mountainous country. 1695 *Lond. Gaz.* No. 3106/3, 40 Mortars and Hauwitzers." 1812 *Examiner* 14 Sept. 581/1 We drove the enemy from . . . the town by howitzers." In the taxonomies of artillery pieces used by European (and European-style) armies in the 18th, 19th centuries, according to Wikipedia, the howitzer stood between the gun or cannon (which was characterized by a longer barrel, larger propelling charges, smaller shells, higher velocities and flatter trajectories) and the mortar (which has the ability to fire projectiles at even higher angles of ascent and descent). So Whitman, the journalist, got the array of armaments right.

858 *The ambulanza slowly passing and trailing its red drip,*

ambulanza Italian for "ambulance," of course. According to the OED, the word came into use during the Crimean War. Hence, the continental turn Whitman gives it.

872 *They were the glory of the race of rangers*

rangers OED identifies it as an American term: "A body of mounted troops, or other armed men, ranging over a tract of land." Goes back at least to 1742 in Georgia: "For the safety of the colony it is necessary to have rangers who can ride the woods."

892 *Our foe was no skulk in his ship, I tell you,*

skulk OED: "One who skulks or hides himself; a shirker." Melville, *Omoo*, 1847: "Where's that skulk, Chips?" shouted Jermin down the fore-castle scuttle."

894 *Along the lowered eve he came, horribly raking us.*

lowered eve ? in the evening dark? "lowered" in the sense of "descended"?

raking OED: "To sweep with shot" since 1630. Nothing new, but the appropriate nautical term.

895 *We closed with him . . . the yards entangled . . . the cannon touched,*

yards OED: "Naut. A wooden spar, comparatively long and slender, slung . . . from and in front of the mast and serving to support a squaresail."

898 *On our lower-gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all around and blowing up overhead.*

pieces OED: "Mil & Naut. Cannon."

900 *The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in the after-hold to give them a chance for themselves.*

master-at-arms OED: "Naut. A warrant officer . . . appointed to instruct the officers and the crew of a ship of war in the use of small arms."

after-hold OED "hold": "The interior cavity of a ship where cargo is stored." Whitman puts prisoners in a specific compartment of the ship.

901 *The transit to and from the magazine was now stopped by the sentinels,*

magazine OED: "A place in which gunpowder and other explosives are kept."

903 *Our frigate was afire . . . the other asked if we demanded quarters? if our colors were struck and the fighting done?*

quarter OED: "Exemption from being immediately put to death, granted to a vanquished opponent by a victor in battle."

colors OED: "A flag, ensign, or standard of a regiment or ship." To *strike* a sail is to lower it, in this case, in surrender.

908 *Two well-served with grape and canister silenced his musketry and cleared his decks.*

grape Short for "grapeshot," the small cast iron balls discharged from cannons.

canister Short for "canister-shot." OED: "consisting of a number of small iron balls . . . packed in a cylindrical tin case fitting the bore of the gun from which it is to be fired. 1809 *Naval Chron.* XXI. 25 Repeated broadsides of grape and cannister shot."

931 *The wheeze, the cluck, the swash of falling blood*

swash OED, 1849: "He heard the swash of the water against the sides of the ship." 1863, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old House*: "The swash and swell of the passing steamers."

937 *What sobers the Brooklyn boy as he looks down the shores of the Wallabout and remembers the prison ships,*

Wallabout Whitman lived as a boy at 12 Ryerson Street near Wallabout Bay and the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Wikipedia: "The area was the site where the infamous British prison ships moored during Revolutionary War from about 1776–1783. Over 10,000 soldiers and sailors died due to deliberate neglect on these rotting hulks, more American deaths than from every battle of the war combined. Though their corpses were buried on the eroding shore in shallow graves, or often simply thrown overboard, local women collected remains when they became exposed or washed onshore and many more were discovered with the development of the area and expansion of the pier."

938 *What burnt the gums of the redcoat at Saratoga when he surrendered his brigades,*

burnt the gums ?

944 *For me the keepers of convicts shoulder their carbines and keep watch,*

carbines OED: "A kind of fire-arm, shorter than the musket, used by the cavalry and other troops; 'a kind of medium between the pistol and the musket' (J.). 1858 Greener, *Gunnery* 399 Double rifled carbines can be constructed of so light a weight that their exclusive use for cavalry is not far distant." So many weapons named in this poem!

951 *Askers embody themselves in me, and I am embodied in them*

Askers OED, R. Burton, *Gold Coast*, 1881: "They beg with a good grace, and not with an insult and a curse, as the European 'asker,' when refused."

961 *I remember . . . I resume the overstaid fraction,*

overstaid fraction One of the most mysterious phrases in the poem. It has provoked a lot of commentary and interpretation, coming as it does at a climactic moment in the poem that is filled with Christian death and resurrection imagery.

Here is Webster 1828 on "fraction": "1. The act of breaking or state of being broken, especially by violence." This is followed by a rather laborious definition of fractions in arithmetic: "2. In arithmetic and algebra, a broken part of an integral or integer; any division of a whole number or unit, as 2/5, two fifths, 1/4, one fourth, which are called vulgar fractions. In these, the figure above the line is called the numerator, and the figure below the line the denominator. In decimal fractions, the denominator is a unit, or 1, with as many cyphers annexed, as the numerator has places. They are commonly expressed by writing the numerator only, with a point before it by which it is separated from the whole number; thus .5, which denotes five tenths, 5/10, or half the whole number; .25, that is 25/100, or a fourth part of the whole number."

OED adds the senses of "a broken place, breach, fissure, rupture. 1798: 'Wounds, fractions, and dislocations,'" and "an interruption of good feeling or harmony; dissension, discord," but the examples are from the 17th century, and, finally, "in the Eucharist: the act of breaking or dividing the bread. 1877, Chambers, *Divine Worship*: 'The Fraction is the most solemn, ancient, and significant action of the whole formulary of consecration.'" For "stayed," Webster 1828 has: "Staid; fixed; settled; sober. It is now written staid, which see." For "stay," "1. To remain; to continue in a place; to abide for any indefinite time." and "3. To wait; to attend; to forbear to act." The simplest paraphrase in this connotative wealth would be "the part of the whole that stayed over," i.e. the living.

962 *The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it*

confide OED: "To entrust (an object of care, a task) to a person with reliance on his fidelity and competence." Also "to impart as a secret."

966 *Inland and by the seacoast and boundary lines . . . and we pass the boundary lines.*

boundary lines Not clear what he had in mind. The late 18th and early 19th centuries saw a number of boundary line treaties, from the establishment of the Mason-Dixon lines through the establishment of the Canadian and Mexican boundaries, and the boundary lines created by treaties with the Indian tribes.

967 *Our swift ordinances are on their way over the whole earth,*

ordinances OED: "The act of ordering or regulating, regulation, direction management. *Archaic.* 1885, John Ruskin: 'Unless music exalt and purify, it is not under St. Cecilia's ordinance.'" And: "An authoritative instruction as to how to proceed or act; an established set of principles; a system of government; authority; discipline. *Obs.* 1847, Tennyson: 'Then the voice of Ida sounded, issuing ordinance.'" Also "Warlike provision, equipment and stores." Also "That which is ordained or decreed by a Deity or fate."

968 *The blossoms we wear in our hats are the growth of two thousand years*

the blossoms we wear in our hats Possibly the blossoms are cockades or worn jauntily in the place of cockades, "Knots of ribbon or rosettes, worn in the hat as a badge of rank," if "ordinance" in the previous line carries a military sense.

969 *Eleves I salute you*

Eleves French for "students."

981 *Slowstepping feet and the common features, and the common modes and emanations,*

Slowstepping OED gives slow-going, slow-moving, and slowpacing, but not "slowstepping."

emanations There are three relevant fields of meaning. OED: "The process of flowing forth, issuing, or proceeding from anything as a source; often applied to the origination of created beings from God"; also "Something emitted or radiated from a material object; especially applied to impalpable things, as light, an electric or magnetic effluvium, an odor, etc.," and "Applied to immaterial things, moral and spiritual powers, virtues, qualities."

984 *Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask . . . lie over*

flaunt Now rare, says the OED, as a noun meaning "The action or habit of flaunting, or making display," but finds an example in 1830 in a poem by Holmes: "Who needs the silken tassel's flaunt/ Beside the golden corn?"

bask Also rare, meaning "A 'bath' or suffusion of genial warmth," also with a 19th-century example. 1876: "A perfect bask of sunshine lying over it."

lie over OED: "To be held or deferred to a future occasion. 1856: 'I have a strange story to tell, but that must lie over, or I shall miss my omnibus.'"

985 *You light surfaces only . . . I force the surfaces and the depths also.*

force The nearest meaning for "force" as a transitive verb is horticultural, "To hasten by artificial means the maturity of" (OED). Neither "force a passage" or "compel an outcome" quite fits this idiom.

987 *Say old topknot! what do you want?*

topknot OED: "A tuft of hair on the top or crown of the head of a person or animal; a knob of hair worn on the crown of the head in some styles of hair-dressing; also, a plume or crest of feathers or filaments on the head of a bird" and "The head. *slang.* 1869 E. WAUGH *Hermit Cobbler*, 'I doubt it's unsattled his top-knot a bit.'" Doesn't show up in the dictionaries of 19th-century slang we were able to consult.

993 *You there, impotent, loose in the knees, open your scarfed chops till I blow grit within you,*

loose in the knees OED on "loose": "Of the joints: slack, relaxed from weakness. R. L. Stevenson, 1893: 'My eyes besides were still troubled and my knees loose under me.'"

scarfed There seems to be no sense that doesn't mean "wrapped in a scarf," except in either a carpenter's or shipbuilder's sense (OED: "1823: In each piece of timber to be joined, the parts of the joints that come in contact are called scarves") or a medical one ("to scarf" is "to bind up wounds with, or as with, a scarf"). This could be either one, or punningly both.

chops OED: "Jaw, sides of the face. 1877: 'I'll slap thy chops fo' tha.'"

1002 *This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics.*

jetting OED: Walter Scott, 1814: "Conflicting tides that foam and fret/ And high their mingled billows jet."

1009 *I dilate you with tremendous breath . . . I buoy you up;*

dilate OED: "1. To expand, amplify, enlarge." 1851: "Heat dilates matter with an irresistible force." 1871: "As we have seen, it [Christianity] dilates our whole being."

1019 *It is middling well as far as it goes . . . but is that all?*

middling Webster 1828: "Of middle rank, state, size or quality; about equally distant from the extremes; moderate. Thus we speak of people of the middling class or sort, neither high nor low; of a man of middling capacity or understanding; a man of middling size; fruit of a middling quality." In the sense of "moderately good, mediocre, second-rate," the OED says it is "*colloq.* Or *vulgar.*" Matthew Arnold, 1882: "The abundant consumption of middling literature."

1020 *Magnifying and applying come I,*

magnify OED: "1. To speak or act for the glory and honor of a person or thing; to glorify, extol." Macaulay, *History of England*, 1849: "Everywhere men magnified his valour, genius, and patriotism." "2. To make greater in size, status, importance." "4. To increase the apparent size of an object (by artificial means)." 1853: "The effects of fog on estimations of dimension are well-known: men are magnified to giants."

apply Multiple meanings could be relevant. OED: "To put a thing into contact with another; to put close *to*; to place (a flame, heat, a measuring instrument, etc.) in immediate proximity *to*; to minister to, to bring to bear on, 1817: 'They applied coercion . . .'; to set oneself closely to a task; to devote one's energy *to*."

1021 *Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,*

hucksters Webster, 1828: "1. A retailer of small articles, of provisions, nuts, &c. 2. A mean trickish fellow." OED: from the 16th century, "a broker, a middleman; 2. a. *trans.* and *fig.* A person ready to make his profit of anything in a mean or petty way; one who basely barter his services, etc., for

gain; a mercenary; an overreacher of others. 1868: 'I am no huckster to sell my daughter to the highest bidder.'"

1022 *The most they offer for mankind and eternity less than a spirt of my own seminal wet*

spirt Also "spurt." OED: "A jet or slender spout of water, or other liquid. 1840: Browning, *Sordello*: 'One bright spirt of water bubbles in.'"

1024 *Lithographing Kronos and Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,*

lithographing Lithography as a method of printing using a plate or stone with a smooth surface was invented in Germany in 1796 and was widely used in the US in the 19th century. According to the OED, "lithograph" was first used as a verb in 1825.

1025 *Buying drafts of Osiris and Isis and Belus and Brahma and Adonai,*

buying drafts Not sure which meaning Whitman has in mind. Webster 1828: "An order from one man to another directing the payment of money; a bill of exchange, e.g., 'I thought it most prudent to defer the drafts, till advice was received of the progress of the loan.'" And also "A drawing of lines for a plan; a figure described on paper; delineation; sketch; plan delineated. [See *Draught.*]," which would be in keeping with the metaphors in the lines before and after.

1026 *In my portfolio placing Manito loose, and Allah on a leaf, and the crucifix engraved*

loose . . . on a leaf . . . engraved All terms of art, it would seem, for the representations an artist might bring to a printer.

1030 *Admitting they bore mites as for unfledged birds who have now to rise and fly and sing for themselves*

mite OED: "In early use, applied to any minute insect or arachnid." I.e., the small insects fed to a baby bird. But also a coin of very small value, the small amount (Mark, 12) one is able to give.

1031 *Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself*

deific OED: "making divine; or divine, godlike." Earliest use in 1490. A theologian's term in the 19th century. 1858: "What the hard style of mystical theology called deific transformation." Though Whitman's use of it seems jaunty.

1033 *Putting higher claims for him there with his rolled-up sleeves*

putting . . . claims Couldn't find help with this usage (as opposed to making claims or laying claims), though it feels idiomatic.

1034 *Not objecting to special revelations*

special revelations In Christianity, God's initial revelation of Himself and His intent to men occurred in the Old and New Testaments. All other revelations, especially individual and private ones, were "special revelations," and usually viewed with suspicion by orthodox theologians. Joseph Smith's visit from the Angel Moroni in 1827 would be a 19th-century instance.

1035 *Those ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes*

ahold Interestingly, both Webster 1828 and OED describe "ahold" as an obsolete nautical term. AHD describes it as a noun meaning "hold or grip" and gives a current instance: "I got ahold of a bottle." Much evidence for Whitman's newspaperman's enthusiasm for firemen.

1037 *Their brawny limbs passing safe over charred laths*

lath An old word. OED: "A thin strip of wood used as a groundwork on which to fasten the slates or tiles of a roof or the plaster of a wall." From 1490 and still a term of the building trades in Whitman's time.

1040 *The snag-toothed hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come*

snag-toothed Originally a "snag" was a short stump standing out from the trunk of a tree. OED on "snaggled": "U.S. Of teeth, uneven, irregular pro-

jecting." Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus*, 1884: "I'm snaggle-toofed an' double-j'inted."

hostler The person who keeps horses at an inn, the joke about hostlers and red hair and sins lost to us now.

1041 *Selling all he possesses and traveling on foot to fee lawyers for his brother*

to fee Seems to occur with some regularity in the 19th century as a transitive verb for paying a fee to. OED: "1884: 'You must fee the waiter when you give the order.'" This incident has the feel of a story that Whitman had heard or knew about.

1045 *The supernatural of no account . . . myself waiting my time to be one of the supremes*

supremes As a noun, in the OED it refers to the Christian God. 1818, Shelley: "Heaven's dread Supreme." No instances of a plural usage (and no Diana Ross jokes).

1047 *Guessing when I am it will not tickle me much to receive puffs out of pulpit or print*

puffs For this kind of "puff," Webster 1828 gives, "A tumid or exaggerated statement or commendation." The earliest OED reference to journalistic puffs comes from 1794 (fairly early in the history of the medium): "The amount is consumed in paying for newspaper puffs." "Tickle," meaning to amuse or please, was in use in Chaucer's time.

1048 *By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator!*

life-lumps Another instance of Whitman's enthusiasm for phrenology, the science of reading a person's character from the bumps on the head. See DR, 247-49.

1049 *Putting myself here and now to the ambushed womb of the shadows!*

ambushed womb of the shadows !!!!

1054 *Now the performer launches his nerve . . . he has passed his prelude on the reeds within.*

nerve In the sense of "strength or vigor," the usage goes back to the 17th century, according to the OED. For the meaning of "courage, boldness, assurance," the earliest use is 19th century and American. Washington Irving, 1809: "He spoke forth like a man of nerve and vigor." Webster in 1828 gives three shadings: "3. Strength; firmness of body; as a man of nerve. 4. Fortitude; firmness of mind; courage. 5. Strength; force; authority; as the nerves of discipline."

the reeds within A "reed" can be a shepherd's pipe, a part of a musical instrument, the pipe of an organ, or a reed instrument. In the plural, usually with reference to an organ or to the reed section of an orchestra. "Reeds within" seems to be Whitman's invention.

1055 *Easily written loosefingered chords! I feel the thrum of their climax and close.*

loose-fingered chords The OED gives "to finger" as a verb: "To play upon (an instrument) with the fingers," though the archaic sense of "to finger out" can be heard punning on the title of Whitman's book: "To read carefully or with effort, passing the finger along the lines."

thrum The word pertains to both music and textile. Webster 1828: "To play coarsely on an instrument with the fingers," as well as: "To weave; to know; to twist; to fringe."

1056 *My head evolves on my neck*

evolves Though the Latin *volvo* means "to roll," Webster 1828 gives "To unfold; to open and expand" and so does the OED: "To unfold, unroll (something that is wrapped up)." Whitman had second thoughts and revised the phrase by the 1882 edition: "My head slues round on my neck." Perhaps Darwin had interceded.

1061 *Ever the old inexplicable query . . . ever that thorned thumb—that breath of itches and thirsts,*

thorned thumb This expression may have an interesting forebear in "to *fasb* one's thumb," which meant "to take trouble"—*fasb* meaning "to afflict, annoy, trouble, vex" (OED). Hence "Thorny: Sharp; pricking; vexatious; as

thorny points"—Webster's 1828. Probably a figure then for a nagging minor irritation.

that breath of itches and thirsts !!!? A metaphor presumably for the "old inexplicable query."

1064 *Ever the bandage under the chin . . . ever the tressels of death.*

tressels, or trestles Coffins were placed on trestles at funerals and wakes, and Whitman had the exact word for them. "A support for something, consisting of a short horizontal beam or bar with diverging legs, usually two at each end"—OED. "Trestles of death" calls up as well an obsolete use of the word, also from OED: "A stand or frame for candles or tapers burning in religious worship."

1065 *Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,*

dimes on the eyes There are references to the custom of placing coins on the eyes of the dead as early as the story of Charon in Greek mythology.

1074 *They who piddle and patter here in collars and tailed coats*

piddle Webster 1828: "To deal in trifles; to spend time in trifling objects; to attend to trivial concerns or the small parts rather than to the main." In the OED, it is more or less synonymous with *loiter*: "To work or act in an ineffectual or wasteful way; to mess about or around." Whitman revised the line by 1882: *The little plentiful manikins skipping around in collars and tail'd coats*. **Manakin** first appears in the 16th century as a term of contempt: "little man." In 1831, it is a model of the body for use in anatomy demonstration. **Mannequin** came into English from French, according to Merriam-Webster, to mean "a seamstress's dummy" and became a dummy for the display of clothes in the 19th century with the invention of the department store. The oldest department store in New York, The Marble Palace on East Broadway, opened in 1846.

1075 *I acknowledge the duplicates of myself under all the scrape-lipped and pipe-legged concealments*

scrape-lipped and pipe-legged There is a considerable literature on the semiotics of mustaches and men's fashion in the 19th century. Neither of these compounds shows up in Webster or OED. Whitman revised this line: *the weakest and shallowest is deathless with me*

1079 *I know perfectly well my own egotism,*

egotism OED finds the earliest instance of this word in the essays of Joseph Addison in 1714. By the 19th century Coleridge could speak of "the alcohol of egotism" and Emerson remark of Napoleon in 1847 that "his absorbing egotism was deadly to all other men."

1085 *The panorama of the sea . . . but the sea itself?*

panorama The term was invented in 1789 by an R. Barker to refer to "A picture of a landscape arranged on a cylindrical surface with the spectator at the center." One historian has described the panorama as "the art form *par excellence* of the early 19th century. See Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*. New York: Zone Books, 1997. Trans. by Deborah Lucas Schneider. Whitman cut this line, perhaps because panoramas had come to seem quaint by 1882.

1086 *The well-taken photographs . . . but your wife or friend close and solid in your arms?*

photograph First use in the OED dates from 1831.

1097 *Making a fetish of the first rock or stump . . . powowing with sticks in the circle of obis*

fetish Probably intended in the early-anthropological sense of "An inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit"—OED. The signal text that introduced this usage was Charles de Brosses' *Le Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1760).

powow or pow-wow Came into English in the 17th century, according to OED. An Algonquian (North American Indian) word, traced to pre-Pennsylvania: "To practice a religious or magical ritual; to gather for a council or conference." Here is Bartlett's *Americanisms* in 1852: "POW-WOW. (Indian.) This is the name given by the early chroniclers to the feasts, dances, and other public doings of the red men, preliminary to a grand hunt, a council, a war expedition, or the like. It has been adopted, in political talk, to signify any

uproarious meeting for a political purpose, at which there is more noise than deliberation, more clamor than counsel. [*J. Inman.*] 'A murder was recently committed upon a Sioux by two Chippewa. The body of the murdered Indian was taken to the fort, where a most terrific *pow-wow* was held over it by the friends of the deceased, 300 in number.' —*Western Newspaper.*"

obi A Nigerian word whose two primary meanings are well-served by Whitman's usage: it is both "a hut or house, especially one for formal or ceremonial use" and "a king, a chief" —OED.

1098 *Helping the lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,*

lama Webster 1828: "The sovereign pontiff, or rather the god of the Asiatic Tartars." "A Buddhist monk or priest, applicable in both Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism." —OED, which records the term in English in 1652.

brahmin Webster's 1828: "A priest among the Hindoos and other nations of India. There are several orders of Bramins, many of whom are very corrupt in their morals; others live sequestered from the world devoted to superstition and indolence. They are the only persons who understand the Sanscrit, or ancient language of the country, in which their sacred books are written; and to them are European nations indebted for their knowledge of the language."

1099 *Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession . . . rapt and austere in the woods, a gymnosophist,*

phallic Interestingly, Webster's 1828 has no entry for "phallic." The OED indicates its usage in 1721, "as a noun in plural denoting the festival of Dionysus." Whitman's usage echoes very closely George Grote's *A History of Greece*, published (serially) 1846–1856: "The exuberant revelry of the phallic festival and procession."

gymnosophist Greek = naked: "One of a sect of ancient Hindu philosophers of ascetic habits (known to the Greeks through the reports of the companions of Alexander), who wore little or no clothing, denied themselves flesh meat, and gave themselves up to mystical contemplation." —OED

1100 *Drinking mead from the skull-cup . . . to shasta and vedas admirant . . . minding the koran,*

shasta Actually "Shastra": OED: "Any one of the sacred writings of the Hindus." The word was known in English in 1698, but there was a considerable literature on Hinduism in English in Whitman's time.

vedas Together, all of the "four ancient sacred books of the Hindus" (OED). In English from the mid-18th century.

admirant Another bit of dandyism. Nothing in Webster. OED gives one use of "admirance," by Spenser in 1596.

1101 *Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the stone and knife —beating the serpent-skin drum;*

teokallis Or "teocallis," singular "teocalli": an Aztec house of worship, "usually consisting of a four-sided truncated pyramid built terrace-wise, and surmounted by a temple" —OED. Prescott's immensely popular (and still thrilling and appalling) *History of the Conquest of Mexico* was published in 1843. Prescott: "The floors and walls of the *teocalli* were then cleansed, by the order of Cortes, of their foul impurities."

1106 *Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.*

winders of the circuit of circuits Itinerant preachers in 19th-century America traveled from church to church, tent meeting to tent meeting, in a circuit and were called, not altogether respectfully, "circuit winders." And there is this couplet in an 1809 English poem: *So when day breaks, I'll tempt my fate no more, / But wind the circuit which I wound before,* which would make one's circuit one's fate. And there are Whitman's own uses of the word. In *Democratic Vistas*: "At best, we can only offer suggestions, comparisons, circuits." And elsewhere in "Song of Myself": "My sun has his sun, and round him obediently wheels, / He joins with his partners, a group of superior circuit."

1113 *How the flukes splash!*

flukes For Webster a fluke is "a flounder," as it was in English in the 16th century, when the barbed ends of an anchor became (by analogy of shape) flukes. OED: "The two parts which constitute the large triangular tail of the whale," a sense probably also developed from the analogy to the anchor. First citation in the OED is 1725.

1117 *The past is the push of you and me and all precisely the same,*

push Webster 1828 supplies this sense of *push* (n.): "Exigence; trial; extremity."

1119 *And what is yet untried and afterward is for you and me and all. afterward* No instance of "afterward" as an adjective in OED.

1121 *Nor him in the poorhouse tubercled by rum and the bad disorder,*

tubercled OED: "Furnished or affected with tubercles; tuberculate" Tubercle was a term, transferred from botany, for swellings—masses of granulation cells—of an organ. Tuberculosis wasn't isolated as a disease until 1839. Not clear whether "the bad disorder" is pulmonary t.b. or venereal disease. The association with rum is apparently a common one at the time.

1128 *Nor the numberless slaughtered and wrecked . . . nor the brutish koboo, called the ordure of humanity,*

koboo The kobo, or kubu, are semi-nomadic forest dwellers who lived, in the 19th century, "primarily in swampy areas near watercourses in southeastern Sumatra, Indonesia." The term has come to be "a generic label used by outsiders for a number of scattered former hunter-gatherers in Sumatra," who currently number, according to one estimate, about 10, 000 people. What and how Whitman knew of them goes to the question of his general knowledge of geography in his time. He was an omnivorous reader and, of course, an editor and journalist. His general knowledge of the world can be glimpsed in "Salut au Monde," where the same term shows up: "You poor kobo whom the meanest of the rest look down upon for all your glimmering language and spirituality." The *Pegudod* visits Sumatra, though not the Kubu, in chapter 87 of *Moby Dick* and Whitman may have know of it also from William Marsden's 1781 *History of Sumatra* or from Cook's *Voyages*.

1129 *Nor the sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in*

sacs "Sac," without a *k*, as a technical biological term came into English at the end of the 18th century and was in wide use in 19th-century science. OED: 1851: "In the sea-star, the stomach is a capacious sac." There is a sense in this line of the 19th-century awareness of the immense variety of life forms into which Darwin would, in a few years, introduce a dynamic sense of order.

1146 *All has been gentle with me I keep no account with lamentation;*

keep no account with Would be lovely to know exactly the provenance of this usage. "With," not "of," suggests it is (OED) "in account with: in business relations that require keeping of an account *with*. 1832, Scott, *Quentin Durward*: 'Oh! Do not reckon that old debt to my account!'"

1148 *I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be.*

acme OED notes that the word was often used as a Greek word and written in Greek letters from Roger Ascham in 1380 to Oliver Goldsmith in 1750. It is a fancy enough word in the late 18th century that Burke italicizes it in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790: "France was by no means at its *acme* in that year."

encloser Whitman may have had in mind the English sense of "enclose." "To fence in (waste or common land) with the intention of taking it into cultivation, or of appropriating it to individual owners." (OED). The notorious Enclosure Acts, giving over communal lands to landlords to raise sheep for the booming wool trade, became law between 1801 and 1845.

1149 *My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs*

apex The Latin word came into English in the Renaissance to mean the tip or highest point of a pyramid or mountain and was figurative as well as technical in the 19th century. Here is Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) on a bouquet: "It formed an apex to a blooming pyramid." **Apices** is the Latin plural.

1156 *And took my time . . . and took no hurt from the foetid carbon.*

carbon Antoine Lavoisier in a 1789 chemical textbook and Joseph Priestly in an essay the same year introduced this term to French and English Whitman's use of it is up-to-date science, at a time when theologians were uneasy about 19th-century advances in chemistry. The OED cites a text from 1858: Dove, *The Logic of the Christian Faith*: "Is man's body mere carbon?"

1164 *My embryo has never been torrid . . . nothing could overlay it;*

overlay As a general meaning, OED: "To cover the surface (of a thing) with something else spread over it; to deck out." As in Ruskin, 1857: "You may make king's thrones of it, and overlay temple gates with it." Also, therefore "To lie over or upon (a child); so as to suffocate or smother." And it is also a technical printer's term. An overlay was a sheet of paper pasted over the surface of a press to make the impression darker.

1165 *For it the nebula cohered to an orb . . .*

nebula cohered to an orb Immanuel Kant in 1755 and Pierre-Simon Laplace in 1796 had elaborated the theory that the universe was formed from gaseous clouds, nebula, flattened by gravity to form the stars and the planets. For Whitman's astronomical knowledge and enthusiasms, see Beaver, 70–73.

1166 *Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.*

sauroids "Sauria" as a zoological term for reptiles, from the Latin *sauria* for 'lizard,' belongs to the 19th century. OED gives a first use in 1836: "M. Agassiz has already ascertained seventeen genera of sauroid fishes." The word 'dinosaur'—terrible lizard—was coined in 1842. The early 19th century was a period of discovery; the first fossil remains of the giant reptiles to be recognized for what they were occurred in England in 1819. Greenspan remarks: "The reference here is to the belief that [sauroids] carried their unhatched eggs in their mouths," but he provides no source.

1169 *Span of youth! Ever-pushed elasticity! Manhood balanced and florid and full!*

ever-pushed elasticity Hard to imagine who else would invent this phrase. "Elastic" meaning having the property of spontaneously resuming its natural shape after being stretched or dilated by an external force is a 17th-century word. "Elasticity" in the sense of "Energy, vigor, buoyancy of mind" (OED) has a long usage also, and was available in the 19th century. 1815, Scott, *Guy Mannering*: "Nature had given him that elasticity of mind which rises higher from the rebound." And "ever-pushed" has in it Whitman's sense of dynamism.

1177 *Bussing my body with soft and balsamic busses*

buss To kiss. EG cites Robert Herrick: "We buss our wantons but our wives we kiss." OED says it is an archaic or dialect word, and cites Tennyson, 1847: "Nor burnt the grange, nor buss'd the milking maid."

balsamic A balsam was, originally, any aromatic resin, like pine resin, and came to mean "any healthful and preservative oil . . . of a softly penetrative nature" (OED). "Balsamic" in 19th-century usage, was "delicious, fragrant," and/or "having the healing properties of balsam." Longfellow, 1873: "The sweet balsamic fragrance of the pines," and Macaulay's *History*, metaphorically, in 1855: "The balsamic virtue of the royal hand."

1180 *Every condition promulges not only itself . . . it promulges what grows after and out of itself*

promulge Webster 1828: "To promulgate; to publish. [Less common than *promulgate*.]" OED describes it as *archaic* and gives a couple of 19th-century examples. 1882, an encyclopedia of religion: "Fanatics announced visions and promulged prophecies." None of them quite carry Whitman's meaning which seems to lie between "announce" and "beget."

1181 *And the dark hush promulges as much as any.*

dark hush "Hush" is, of course, the audible quiet after a lot of noise is suddenly stilled. Dark hush? Perhaps, death.

1182 *I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems*

scuttle Webster 1828: "A square hole in the roof of a house, with a lid." OED: "Now only U.S." and cites Webster.

1193 *A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span, or make it impatient*

hazard the span OED: "To put (anything) to risk of being lost in a game of chance, or other doubtful manner." Webster cites a general sense of risk, first, "To hazard salvation for temporal pleasure," and risk at a game of chance second, "To hazard an estate on the throw of the dice." Multiple meanings for "span." Originally the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger. Then, the length of a life. And the distance between the abutments of an arch, or walls carrying a roof. Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1858: "Great minds are those with a wide span."

1212 *Shoulder your duds, and I will mine, and let us hasten forth;*

duds Webster 1828: "Old clothes; tattered garments. [Vulgar]." "Shoulder" as a verb meaning carry is cited from 1611.

1214 *If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your hand on my hip,*

chuff Not in Webster or Bartlett with this sense. Or AHD. Nearest is "obs, a cheek swollen or puffed with fat." Seems to mean the meat of the hand.

1216 *For after we start we never lie by again.*

lie by Webster 1828: "To rest; to intermit labor. We lay by during the heat of the day."

1219 *And my spirit said No, we level that lift to pass and continue beyond*

level that lift "Level": To make level, presumably. And "lift" as a noun with the technical meaning of "the distance or extent to which anything rises" (OED). Of canals, 1840: "The difference between levels is called the *lift* of the *lock*." Feels like it has some such meaning as a term of some art or craft.

1227 *You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life*

habit yourself Webster 1828: "To dress; to clothe; to array. 'They habited themselves like rural deities.'" OED gives an 1866 use, "To habit herself as she deemed suitable for the journey," and also describes another sense, "to accustom, familiarize" as obsolete.

1238 *First rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye*

first rate Bartlett, 1848: "Of the first class or order; superior; superexcellent. An expression now in very common use, applied, as most superlatives are in the United States, with very little discrimination. It was formerly said of large and important things, as 'a *first rate* ship.' Now we hear of '*first rate* pigs,' '*first rate* liquors,' '*first rate* lawyers.' It is also used adverbially; thus if we ask a person how he is, he replies, 'I am *first rate*,' i.e. in excellent health, very well. 'The *first rate* importance of the subject, and the real merits of the work, are deserving of a portion of our space.' —*Westminster Rev.* July, 1847. 'A young woman wants a situation as a chambermaid. She is a *first rate* washer and ironer, and plain sewer.' —*Adv. in N. Y. Tribune.*"

bull's eye The first use of "bull's eye" to mean "the center of a target" the OED gives is 1833 in a cavalry manual. Dickens in 1840: "This is wide of the bull's eye."

1239 *Preferring scars and faces pitted with smallpox over all latherers and those that keep out of the sun.*

latherers Nothing in Webster or Bartlett. OED gives from *Westminster Gazette*, 1899: "Boys employed as latherers in barber's shops." But this must be men foppishly clean-shaven.

1250 *The maul the oar and the handsaw second my words.*

maul A heavy hammer, typically a shipwright's tool.

1265 *And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral, dressed in his shroud*

furlong Webster 1828: "A measure of length; the eighth part of a mile; forty rods, poles or perches."

1266 *And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the earth*

the pick Webster, 1828: "Choice; right of selection. 'You may have your pick.'" OED gives a usage as early as 1755, but quotes George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, 1872: "Mama, I wish you would not say 'the pick of them,' it is a rather vulgar expression."

1282 *To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,*

accoucheur Webster 1828: "A man who assists women in childbirth." So Whitman wasn't using a fancy foreign word. According to one history (*Birth: The Amazing Story of How We are Born*, by Tina Cassidy, 2006), Louis XIV began the fashion of male midwives by choosing a man rather than a woman to deliver the babies of his mistresses. By the early 19th century it was a male medical practice. The *Accoucheur's Vademecum: or Modern Guide to the Practice of Midwifery* was published in London in 1840 by Thomas Travers Burke. The term "obstetrics" came into use in 1821.

1283 *I see the elderhand pressing receiving supporting,*

elderhand See the note to line 83. Whitman used this phrase, apparently of his own invention, twice in the poem. In a subsequent revision he cut the first use and here changed the spelling to "elder-hand." So the hand here belongs not to the accoucheur but to nature or divinity.

1293 *Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soothing twilight,*

soothing This venerable bit of onomatopoeia is not in Webster. OED, more evocatively than usual: "A rushing, or murmuring, sound as of wind, water, or the like, esp. one of a gentle or soothing nature." Geoffrey Chaucer, 1382: "Of sykys hoot as fuyr I herde a swow that gan aboute renne." Emily Brontë, 1847; "The evening calm betrayed alike the tinkle of the nearest stream and the sough of the most remote."

1295 *Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.*

gibberish Webster 1828: "Rapid and inarticulate talk; unintelligible language; unmeaning words." The word goes back to the 1550s in England and is related to "jabber."

1298 *And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small*

debouch Webster 1828: "To issue or march out of a narrow place, or from defiles, as troops." For the OED it is also first a military term, but gives a geographical instance—Bayard Taylor, *El Dorado*, 1850: "The ravine finally debouched upon the river at the Middle Bar"—and a figurative one from the *London Times*, 1839: "M. Labouchere debouches upon the cabinet."

1306 *Perhaps I might tell more Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.*

Outlines Mysterious word here. Webster 1828: "Contour; the line by which a figure is defined; the exterior line." The meaning you would expect, but what does Whitman mean? It may connect to his work as an editor and printer. OED: "A sketch or drawing in which an object is represented by lines of contour without shading. 1868, *Freehand Drawing*: 'The outlines and finished views of these casts are given separately.' And 'A rough draft or general sketch in words; a description, giving a general idea of the whole, but leaving the details to be filled in. 1865: 'I have given a bare outline of the contents of this passage.'"

1310 *And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.*

fold Webster 1828: "1. A pen or inclosure for sheep; a place where a flock of sheep is kept, whether in the field or under shelter." And "1. The doubling of any flexible substance, as cloth; complication; a plait; one part turned or bent and laid on another; as a fold of linen. 2. In composition, the same quantity added; as two fold, four fold, ten fold, that is, twice as much, four times as much, ten times as much." EHM: "'Fold' is a notable word in Whitman with its maternal connotations obvious in the line 'unfolded out of the folds, man comes unfolded, and is always to come unfolded' where the syllable is repeated almost like an *idée fixe*." (p. 135)

1312 *Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,*

snuff the sidle "Snuff" is clear enough; though Webster 1828 gives it only as a noun, meaning "1. The burning part of a candle wick, or that which has been charred by the flame, whether burning or not" and "2. A candle almost burnt out." OED gives the transitive verb, "To free (a candle, wick, etc.) from the snuff by cutting this off." There were tools called snuffers for the purpose. For the general sense of "extinguish, put out," OED instances Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 1841: "Slight yellow specks that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out one by one." For Webster "sidle" is only a verb: "1. To go or move side foremost; as, to sidle through a crowd. 2. To lie on the side." OED defines the noun—"An act of sidling; a sidelong or oblique movement"—and gives two instances, both from the 19th century and both nautical. 1853: "Turning the sidle into a stately sail." 1883: "The final sidle up to the dock was a very inglorious effort of poling." By 1900 the noun had moved to land: "Susan coming forward with a coquettish sidle." The image seems to be of a lordly extinguishing of the day, a sunset.

1321 *The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me he complains of my gab and my loitering*

spotted hawk Most immature hawks have spotted breasts. Our candidate for this bird's sound and appearance is the red-tailed hawk, *buteo jamaicensis*,

which might very well have been seen over the rooftops of Brooklyn in the mid-19th century, though this bird's cry more closely resembles a red-shouldered hawk's or an osprey's. Red-tails, perhaps descendants of Whitman's bird, nest in Prospect Park to this day.

gab Webster 1828: "The mouth, as in the phrase 'the gift of gab,' that is, loquaciousness. But the word is so vulgar as rarely to be used." OED dates "conversation, talk, twaddle, prattle" from 1790.

1323 *I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world*

yawp The cries of the red-tailed hawk, the red-shouldered hawk, and the osprey are about equally shrill, piercing and exultant. William Dean Howells, who met Whitman when the poet was an older man, had this to say about him: "The apostle of the rough, the uncouth, is the gentlest person; his barbaric yawp, translated into the terms of social encounter, was an address of singular quiet, delivered in a voice of winning and endearing friendliness."

1324 *The last scud of day holds back for me,*

scud Webster 1828: "1. A low, thin cloud, or thin cloud driven by the wind; 2. A driving along, a rushing with precipitation." This latter meaning comes from the verb form and the weather eye of seamen: "In seamen's language, to be driven with precipitation before a tempest." OED gives "hurried movement. 1853: 'The scud of the clouds before the wind.'" And "Light clouds driven before the wind. Scott, 1814: 'The darkening scud comes on.'" Pretty clearly a cloud here, which the speaker in the poem is becoming.

1328 *I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.*

effuse Webster 1828: "To pour out as a fluid, to spill, to shed." Old associations with the flow of blood. More recent ones with weather. Hawthorne: "The same gentle shower had been effusing itself all morning." And with emotion: Shenstone, 1750: 'T'was his fond hart effus'd the melting theme.'

jags Webster 1828 gives the verb "jagg": "To notch, or to cut into notches or teeth like those of a saw" and for "jagged": "Notched, uneven; having notches of teeth; cleft; lacinate; as jagged leaves." *Lacinate* is interesting, from the Latin for "hem," because it picks up on "lacy." OED also gives "A shred of cloth, in plural rags or tatters. 1800, Maria Edgeworth: 'Black jags of paper littering the place.'"

1333 *And filter and fibre your blood.*

fibre (v) According to OED a botanical term but *rare*. "To form or throw out fibres. 1869: 'The plant is sufficiently strong to fibre as prodigally as it likes.'" (Not a bad sentence with which to end this slightly mad catalogue.)

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