

**FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT:
MALCOLM COWLEY'S SUGGESTED NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF "SONG OF MYSELF"¹**

CHANTS ²	LINES	CONTENTS
1-4	1-72	introduction: Whitman as poet/hero introducing himself to us.
5	73-89	"the ecstasy": union of the poet and his soul described in terms of sexual union
6-19	90-387	the grass: the central image of the poem, "symbolizing the miracle of common things and the divinity (which implies both the equality and the immortality) of ordinary persons" (xvii-xviii); "The keynote of the sequence . . . is the two words "I observe" (xviii).
20-25	388-583	"the poet in person"
26-29	584-646	"ecstasy through the senses"--especially hearing and touch
30-38	647-971	"the power of identification": "Since everything emanates from the universal soul, and since his own soul is of the same essence, he can identify himself with every object and with every person living or dead, heroic or criminal." (xix)
39-41	972-1047	"the superman": he feels superhuman and omnipotent
42-50	1048-1306	"the sermon":
42	1048-1089	"society is full of injustice, but . . . the reality beneath it is deathless persons" (xix)
43	1090-1130	accepts all religions but looks beyond them
44	1131-1166	"I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be" (line 1146)
45	1167-1195	"our final goal is appointed" and God is the waiting lover (xx)
46	1196-1228	"he tramps a perpetual journey and longs for companions, to whom he will reveal a new world by washing the gum from their eyes--but each must then continue the journey alone" (xx)
47	1229-1259	"he is the teacher of men who work in the open air" (xx)
48	1260-1278	"Be not curious about God" (line 1269); "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least/Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself." (line 1272-3)
49	1279-1296	promise of rebirth
50	1297-1306	Cowley thinks that the poet is looking back to a period after one of his ten thousand deaths and asserting "form, union, plan" (line 1306, Cowley xx)
51-2	1307-1334	"the poet's farewell": Having finished his sermon, the poet prepares for death and the next incarnation.

¹Malcolm Cowley, introduction, *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (New York: Penguin, 1959), vii-xx.

² In later editions of the poem, Whitman broke the poem into chants. These numbers refer to the breaks in the later editions.