

SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE

Walt Whitman

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(America! I do not vaunt my love for you;
I have what I have.)

The axe leaps!
The solid forest gives fluid utterances;
They tumble forth, they rise and form,
Hut, tent, landing, survey,
Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,
Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, jamb, lath, panel, gable,
Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition-house, library,
Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, shutter, turret, porch,
Hoe, rake, pitch-fork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw, jack-plane, mallet, wedge,
 rounce,
Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,
Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not,
Capitols of States, and capitol of the nation of States,
Long stately rows in avenues, hospitals for orphans, or for the poor or sick,
Manhattan steamboats and clippers, taking the measure of all seas.

The shapes arise!
Shapes of the using of axes anyhow, and the users, and all that neighbors them,

Cutters down of wood, and haulers of it to the Penobscot or Kennebec,
Dwellers in cabins among the California mountains, or by the little lakes, or on
 the Columbia,
Dwellers south on the banks of the Gila or Rio Grande—friendly gatherings, the
 characters and fun,
Dwellers up north in Minnesota and by the Yellowstone river—dwellers on coasts
 and off coasts,
Seal-fishers, whalers, arctic seamen breaking passages through the ice.

The shapes arise!
Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets;
Shapes of the two-threaded tracks of railroads;

Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches;
Shapes of the fleets of barges, towns, lake and canal craft, river craft.

The shapes arise!

Ship-yards and dry-docks along the Eastern and Western Seas, and in many a
bay and by-place,
The live-oak kelsons, the pine planks, the spars, the hackmatack-roots for knees,

The ships themselves on their ways, the tiers of scaffolds, the workmen busy
outside and inside,
The tools lying around, the great auger and little auger, the adze, bolt, line,
square, gouge, and bead-plane.

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The shapes arise!

The shape measur'd, saw'd, jack'd, join'd, stain'd,
The coffin-shape for the dead to lie within in his shroud;
The shape got out in posts, in the bedstead posts, in the posts of the bride's bed;

The shape of the little trough, the shape of the rockers beneath, the shape of the
babe's cradle;
The shape of the floor-planks, the floor-planks for dancers' feet;
The shape of the planks of the family home, the home of the friendly parents and
children,
The shape of the roof of the home of the happy young man and woman—the roof
over the well-married young man and woman,
The roof over the supper joyously cook'd by the chaste wife, and joyously eaten
by the chaste husband, content after his day's work.

The shapes arise!

The shape of the prisoner's place in the court-room, and of him or her seated in
the place;
The shape of the liquor-bar lean'd against by the young rum-drinker and the old
rum-drinker;
The shape of the shamed and angry stairs, trod by sneaking footsteps;
The shape of the sly settee, and the adulterous unwholesome couple;
The shape of the gambling-board with its devilish winnings and losings;
The shape of the step-ladder for the convicted and sentenced murderer, the
murderer with haggard face and pinion'd arms,

The sheriff at hand with his deputies, the silent and white-lipp'd crowd, the
dangling of the rope.

The shapes arise!
Shapes of doors giving many exits and entrances;
The door passing the dissever'd friend, flush'd and in haste;
The door that admits good news and bad news;
The door whence the son left home, confident and puff'd up;
The door he enter'd again from a long and scandalous absence, diseas'd, broken
down, without innocence, without means.

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Her shape arises,
She, less guarded than ever, yet more guarded than ever;
The gross and soil'd she moves among do not make her gross and soil'd;
She knows the thoughts as she passes—nothing is conceal'd from her;
She is none the less considerate or friendly therefor;
She is the best belov'd—it is without exception—she has no reason to fear, and
she does not fear;
Oaths, quarrels, hiccupp'd songs, smutty expressions, are idle to her as she
passes;
She is silent—she is possess'd of herself—they do not offend her;
She receives them as the laws of nature receive them—she is strong,
She too is a law of nature—there is no law stronger than she is.

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The main shapes arise!
Shapes of Democracy, total—result of centuries;
Shapes, ever projecting other shapes;
Shapes of turbulent manly cities;
Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,
Shapes bracing the earth, and braced with the whole earth.