

Ernest Stefanik

"NOT TILL THE SUN EXCLUDES"

Back to the hills of Long Island,
broad-hatted Whitman breathed
the good news of the divine average.
When he invited his soul, the Milky Way
split at the Northern Cross,
revealing clusters and nebulae,
cradles of a hundred million suns.

Against the spires of Manhattan,
tousle-bearded Whitman chanted
the body electric in his valved voice.
As stars collapsed in winter
lightning, he paused in the city
lights disappearing--not forever--
into black holes and white space.

Near the yellow dust of Washington,
shirt-sleeved Whitman caressed
puritan souls with springs of lilac.
In the drowse of artillery fire, he saw
crows circle through white feathers,
cawing that the living are the dead,
spiralling in a miracle of air.

Through paper-littered Camden,
open-collared Whitman absorbed
a new language in the orbic flex.
Across sun-burnt fields, he felt
the eagle slip through his gray fingers
as he traced its flight, wingbeat
by wingbeat, to the western hills.

In the one life of the nebulous float,
naked Whitman slouches underground,
a solitary singer, one of the roughs, still.
He tastes the first straws of sunlight,
creates constellations at midday,
never knows the sadness of September
maples darkening under his eyes.