

A SONG OF MYSELF
(*My Ages and Stages*)

I

As a child, my life was playing,
 Like the dance of honey bees
In a field of flowers swaying
 To the gentle springtime breeze,
From the dawn that woke to glories
 Of the sun and golden beams
Till at night the bedtime stories
 And the silver starlight streams
 Brought sleep and dreams.

But at five there was a tearing
 Like a finger nail from flesh,
And a horrid face stood staring
 Through a future-veiling mesh,
For the family was moving:
 The unknown that once had smiled
Was now scowling, as though proving
 How to drive young terrors wild.
I'm still that child.

II

As a boy, life was an outing
 To explore the great outdoors,
Filled with hunting, fishing, scouting,
 And with baseball games and scores.
Like a homing pigeon soaring
 With a flock it joins awhile,
When my comrades went exploring,
 I would join their rank and file
 To trek a mile.

Then at thirteen came a turning,
 And the pigeon left the rest;
With a new and inward yearning,
 It went winging home to nest.
Like a monk inside his cloister,
 I forsook the *hoi polloi*
For a pearl within an oyster
 And the gems that thoughts enjoy.
I'm still that boy.

III

As a youth I was awakened
 When a distant music played,
And the soul in me was shaken
 By the melody it made.
But the singing and the strumming
 That I heard were incomplete
Till the rhythm of the drumming
 With its syncopated beat
 Had moved my feet.

And at sixteen years I parted
 From the way my father went;
Though it tore us both, I started
 On a path of lone ascent.
And the lonely way seemed endless;
 Yet in solitude was truth,
For when true to self though friendless,
 I would cut a wisdom tooth.
 I'm still that youth.

IV

The young man in me would study
 All the world's philosophies,
With my spirit strong and ruddy,
 Like a captain of the seas.
As I sailed across the ages
 And I trod on foreign land
In my travels through the pages
 Of the volumes held in hand,
 I took my stand.

I was twenty-four and grieving,
 For the one I loved had left;
And the decade since her leaving
 Would not heal the heart she cleft.
Year thirty-four was trying,
 Till her journey back began
A brain tumor left her dying
 —And me, too—in one year's span.
 I'm still that man.

V

The adult in me finds jarring
That though time may heal all wounds,
Time's healing leaves a scarring
As the mark of its harpoons.
Yet the balms of tender healing
At the fingers of my wife
Have begun to soothe the feeling
Where infection still is rife,
To ease my life.

With the labors love must weather,
A life's labor should have love,
For the two fit best together,
Like a hand inside a glove.
Through my forties I went drudging
Without seeing much result,
Like a man who keeps on trudging
Though his course is difficult.
I'm that adult.

VI

But why spend time reviewing
My life's work before it's done?
There are deeds enough for doing
And long races yet to run.
If the doing was for having,
I had everything but me,
As though all my things were salving
All the pain from which I flee:
To sit and be.

Oh, what folly, this, that destines
One for fifty years to prize
The stock answers to his questions
And imagine he is wise?
Such a certitude was cancer,
Such disease the textbook rule,
I now question every answer
In my idiotic drool.
I'm that wise fool.

VII

The old man I'll be is aging
 In my body's telling signs,
Like the war that I am waging
 In my face's battle lines.
Though I fight for the resistance
 If I stand or if I crawl,
Still, in spite of my persistence,
 By the final bugle call
I, too, shall fall.

If my falling is a sowing
 And my body is the seed,
If my death is but the growing
 Of the wings that I shall need,
I can almost feel already
 How I'll spread them out full span
When I soar to God, held steady,
 If such flight is but his plan.
I'm that old man.