from “I Sing the Body Electric”

“A Man’s Body at Auction” by Walt Whitman

A man’s body at auction,
(For before the war I often go to the slave-mart and watch the sale,)
I help the auctioneer; the sloven\textsuperscript{1} does not know his business.

Gentlemen look on this wonder;
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for it,
For it the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one animal or plant,
For it the revolving cycles truly and steadily roll’d.

In this head the all-baffling brain,
In it and below it the makings of heroes.

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white, they are cunning in tendon and nerve,
They shall be stript that you may see them.

Exquisite senses, life-lit eyes, pluck\textsuperscript{2}, volition\textsuperscript{3},
Flakes of breast muscle, pliant backbone and neck, flesh not flabby, good-sized arms and legs,
And wonders within there yet.

Within there runs blood,
The same old blood! The same red-running blood!
There swells and jets a heart, there all passions, desires, reachings, aspirations,
(Do you think they are not there because they are not express’d in parlors and lecture-rooms?)

This is not only one man, this the father of those who shall be fathers in their turns.
In him the start of populous states and rich republics,
Oh him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments.

How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries?
(Who might you find you have come from yourself, if you could trace back through the centuries?)

\textsuperscript{1} an uncultivated person
\textsuperscript{2} courage
\textsuperscript{3} will