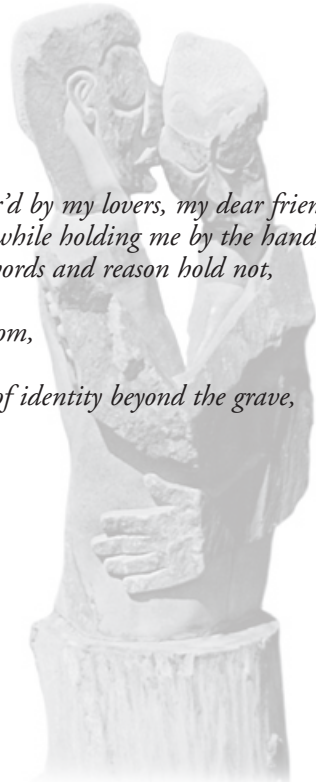


## Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances

WALT WHITMAN

*Of the terrible doubt of appearances,  
Of the uncertainty after all, that we may be deluded,  
That may-be reliance and hope are but speculations after all,  
That may-be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful fable only,  
May-be the things I perceive, the animals, plants,  
men, hills, shining and flowing waters,  
The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms,  
may-be these are (as doubtless they are)  
only apparitions, and the real something has yet to be known,  
(How often they dart out of themselves as if to confound me and mock me!  
How often I think neither I know, nor any man knows, aught of them.)  
May-be seeming to me what they are  
(as doubtless they indeed but seem)  
as from my present point of view, and might prove  
(as of course they would)  
nought of what they appear, or nought anyhow,  
from entirely changed points of view;  
To me these and the like of these are curiously answer'd by my lovers, my dear friends,  
When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand,  
When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words and reason hold not,  
surround us and pervade us,  
Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom,  
I am silent, I require nothing further,  
I cannot answer the question of appearances or that of identity beyond the grave,  
But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,  
He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me.*



*Regarded as one of the greatest of American poets, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) was a controversial figure in his time. One of the creators of “free verse”, he scandalized formalists with his style, his sexuality, and his telling commentary on the human condition.*