

J. Lawrence Lembo

WALT WHITMAN BREATHE HERE

"Be not too certain but I am now with you." -- W.W.

The Shapes Arise!

The sweet and potent energy of me
among you now pervading.

It is I, Walt Whitman --
again I tread the streets after
two thousand years,
I pass from the lumber forests of
the North,
and again to the Southern plantation,
and again to California.
I tramp a perpetual journey
(come listen all).

I refuse to lie on a dusty bookshelf
(unopened) -- I thrust myself
upon you this moment, that you may
ponder my message anew.
The promises I made, I resume!
I sing the song of the Universal
(of yourself, myself, the God-self).

I am not content to have my name
grace your institutions merely,
I effuse myself in every atom of you
again, until you understand me.
I appear only at intervals
(when I am needed) -- other times
look for me sauntering in the mountain
air or dwelling in regions of divine
love.

It just may be that you will not
find me unless you learn my lesson
complete.

I emerge from the roots of a live-oak
healthy and free -- where I grow
in the regions of your mind, dear reader.

I shall tear at your heart, yet
tenderly embrace you when you need me most.
O America, black or white,
you have been asleep too long --
I pry open your slumbering eyelids
and tenderly kiss your brow.

Singing in the West -- I strike up
for a New World
where poetry stands up to the light.
Again, I chant the song eternal
(the Brahmin Song) -- the song
of brotherly and sisterly love the same.

I come forthwith in your midst
(I remain your poet) --
my thoughts escape from exile.
Not till the sun excludes you
do I exclude you.
O you unseen buds of me
I water you now -- I implore you
to burst open exuding your sweet
nectar (scattering it freely as ever)
along the Open Road.

To you, who thought you knew me
(the untold latencies of me)
I merely change my name and catch you
blushing before me.
Do you tremble as you read these lines?
(I tremble as I write them.)

I ascend from the womb, O Mother!
Too long have I been empty in darkness.
The mystic kiss -- the poets kiss
I vouchsafe to thee.
We are not so separated,
I grasp your cold and sweating hand
and place it on my beating heart.

I am not to be denied!
What you thought was all maya, illusion,
is now made manifest to thee.
Perhaps these lines sound familiar
(for isn't all life familiar?)
Do you think that I could write this
poem in any other manner?

So now we traverse the garden
O sons and daughter of my native land.
I whisper my delicious words close to
your ear.
I do not ask you to remember me --
I merely ask that you discover me.
Walt Whitman breathes here.