

I cry in the green heart-shaped leaves of the lilacs,
and drown in their perfume,
brushing my hair, a middle-aged woman
finding her love in a dead poet,
someday, there will be an end to daydreams
and we shall be together, listening to the thrush
Goodbye my fancy! until we meet in Paradise.



Judy Light Ayyildiz

JOURNEY WITH WHITMAN

LEAVES OF GRASS is dominated by the metaphor of a ship sailing the mystical, moving seas. Horizons are vast and endless. Walt Whitman's book was written for all who dare the voyage of search for truth upon the mother of life. The seas are the poem of life, and the mariners are the spiritual searchers.

Man must take two journeys at the same time in life: the physical and the spiritual. The land is Whitman's metaphor for the physical; and the sea, the spiritual. Unlike the land, there are no paths on the sea, and it may be wild. The mariner must "go where the wind blows." The mariners are in various states of trying to see through the dark, often sick and lost. The helmsman hears warning bells.

Whitman maintains the greatest joys to be leaving the motionless land and sailing to all ports. LEAVES is a book for the American people. He urges, "Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy." A safe voyage for America means safety and triumph for all nations of the world.

But this voyage of the soul is more than a joyous quest. There are battles and death, the ugly reality of sailors casting lots to "see who will be killed to preserve the lives of the rest." The spirit, like a sailor, may be required to lash itself to terror and death in the midst of a storm for the sake of survival.

Whitman probes the meaning of the ship which sets sail in good weather with great enthusiasm, only to meet with disaster. Are the souls lost in the waves? Does matter only triumph after death? The ship needs a skilled pilot to avoid the bars. His answer is faith that even in death at sea "are all provided for." He concludes that although many have searched the soul for God and failed, and regardless of the fact that the sea is full of skeletons which never reached the distant shores, only death brings satisfaction for "the untold want" which the voyager seeks.

Although the sea may be a demonic force destroying ships in storms, The Poet watches from the crow's nest and pours out the "measureless ocean of love within" in song. But this message of love does not bring total comfort. The cradle of the sea is also the coffin. The waves on the shore have washed away his footprints. The waves have kissed and stung his feet at the same time.

The earth is the fatherland from which we have all come, and by which we are sustained, and to which we return. The sea, in turn, is a "fierce old mother incessantly mourning." From her, life sprang, and yet she continually must consume life. She contains a world of forests, animals, and plants on her floor just as the earth. She is a "crowd," containing many drops, and the souls of mankind make up the volume. She is also like a nurse, strong and enduring, uniting all nations and sailors from all ports.

The tide is the rhythm of eternal birth, and yet it brings upon the shore the drift-wood, and the remainders of all the earth. It was important for Whitman to think of America's shores collecting the drift of the rest of the world. The Poet encourages one who wishes to learn life, who has "long waded holding a plank by the shore," to jump with courage into the midst of the sea. He contemplates how man is governed by the same laws which control the waves which forever seek the shore.

Whitman was fascinated with two outstanding voyagers: Columbus and President Lincoln. Lincoln was the captain of the Ship of Democracy. He won a huge battle. The captain is dead, but more important, the Ship was saved. The Poet walks the Ship, brooding. Even though the good Admiral, Columbus, failed personally on his venture, his purpose succeeded. Whitman projects Columbus wrecked upon a savage shore, wandering on foot, sickened and confused. Despite his former triumphs, now the end looks dismal. But, he realizes the end lies in God. He reflects that even wars may have the purpose of building the earth. The shore becomes an altar, for he has found comfort, and has also become the total self-sacrifice. He has found himself in the good cause, the voyage terminated, and he moves toward God; and in the distance, the new Ship comes to greet him. The soul is the "shipmate;" and when the voyage is over, there is joy in the new life. The final departure will be an "endless cruise for an old sailor."

America was seen by Walt Whitman as the hope of renewal for all the world, and his loved city, Manhattan, a "city nested in bays," sustains a port from which and to which ships from all the world come and go. It is a city of immigrants, of oneness coming together in a very real sense. The Western and Eastern Seas blow their breezes and meet on the prairie in a spiritual understanding.

