CHAPTER-V

LOVE

The theme of love dominates the poetry of Whitman. Love in Whitman is that intense emotion of the mystic devotion where the rhythm of the 'I' and the thou flows on in countless channels of metres. It is the enjoyment of a super sensual beauty arising from the aesthetic experience of a feeling of mystery which is at the root of all our delights. For Whitman love is the christian virtue of charitas or agape, inward but of deep humility. It is a noble passion, stirring, dynamic and creative. Whitman comes to at oneness as an effect and as the summit of love. For him this principle of unity is the mystery of all mysteries. For him love is a pure religious emotion in its elemental chastity, sublimity and simplicity without any exaggeration and thus it - implies, confidence, faith, surrender of the will and service.

For him love is the "latent right of insurrection",¹ the "quenchless, indispensable fire".² It

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 12.
² Ibid., p. 12.
is an urge to know and recognize the deep hidden
mysteries of life, in order to arrive at the "Ostensible
realities". It is a "Religion" which provides an
insight into the meaning and purpose of life. Love clears
"one's path ahead endlessly". Love breeds in man a
sense of joy that passes "sprouting alike in broad zones
and narrow zones". It is "immortal". Love is a
process which begins with "kindling a fire" in the
heart of man. Love is likened to "the grass that grows
wherever the land is and the water is". Love is "vivas
to those who have failed". It is "deathless". Love
is "the meaning of all things - Happiness". But it
remains "the puzzle of puzzles". It can "adorn the

parlors of heaven." Love makes man "placid and self-contain'd".

Love enhances and intensifies one's vision of that synthesis of truth and beauty which is the highest and deepest reality. Love is a divine gift. Love is an unspeakable passion which can not be translated into words or actions. It is the fulfilment of heart's desire that leads to the edge of the eternity where individual is merged in the universal:

Whoever degrades another degrades me,
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

Love makes him feel "the afflatus surging and surging" through him.

Whitman believes that "Lover is a seer/passing the hues and objects of the world,/The fields of art and learning, pleasure, sense". He puts in his "chants/

2. Ibid., p. 49.
3. Ibid., p. 43.
4. Ibid., p. 43.
5. Ibid., p. 6
No more the puzzling hour nor day, nor segments.\(^1\)

Love is the 'old, old urge/Based on the ancient pinnacles,
lo, newer, higher pinnacles'.\(^2\). Love provides him an
insight into the abysses and recesses of mind and soul:

We make trial of ourselves and invite men and women
to hear,
We say to ourselves, Remember, fear not, be candid,
pronounce the body and the soul,
Dwell a while and pass on, be copious, temperate,
chaste, magnetic,
And what you effuse may then return as the seasons
return,
And may be just as much as the seasons.\(^3\)

Love is the most precious 'gift'.\(^4\)

I was reserving it for some hero, speaker, or general,
One who should serve the good old cause, the great idea,
the progress and freedom of the race,
Some brave conqueror of despots, some darling rebel;
But I see that what I was reserving belongs to
you just as much as to any.\(^5\)

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Love makes man capable of confronting the vagaries of
"night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs,
"as the trees and animals do."¹ Thus it is an state of
infinite self-delight experienced in the divine light
of love that the poet develops the great humanitarian
feelings:

I will sing the song of companionship,
I will show what alone must finally compact these,
I believe these are to found their own ideal of manly love,
indicating it in me,
I will therefore let flame from me the burning fires that
were threatening to consume me,
I will lift what has too long kept down those
smouldering fires,
I will give them complete abandonment,
I will write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love,
For who but I should understand love with all its sorrow
and joy?
And who but I should be the poet of comrades?²

Love is knowledge. It makes man understand the divine
mystery associated with man's inner being:

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 11.
² Ibid., p. 16.
Each is not for its own sake,
I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky are
for religion's sake,
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough,
None has begun to think how divine he himself is. 1

Whitman believes that:

(Nor character not life worthy the name without religion,
Nor land nor man or woman without religion. 2)

The poet feels "burnt up for religion's sake" 3, love is
"fuel to heat, impalpable flame, the essential life of
the earth" 4. Though it is "a painful thing to love a
man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great" 5.

In Whitman's Leaves of Grass love and sex get inter-
penetrated and interanimated with each other. For Whitman

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1 Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 17.
2 Ibid., p. 17.
3 Ibid., p. 17.
4 Ibid., p. 17.
5 Ibid., p. 17.
love finds its fruition in spiritual attachment with the
object of love. The coming together of the bodies even
homosexual relationship creates a sense of fulfilment:

Not he with a daily kiss onward from childhood
kissing me,
Has winded and twisted around me that which holds
me to him.
Any more than I am held to the heavens and all
the spiritual world,
After what they have done to me, suggesting
themes.  

Male and female stand on equal terms so far the
satisfaction of the inner urge is concerned:

And I will show of male and female that either
is but the equal of the other,
And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me,
For I am determin'd to tell you with courageous clear voice
to prove you illustrious,
And I will show that there is no imperfection in the
present, and can be none in the future,
And I will show that whatever happens to anybody it may be
turn'd to beautiful results,
And I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than
death,
And I will thread a thread through my poems that time and
events are compact,
And that all the things of the universe are perfect miracles
each as profound as any. 

2. Ibid., p. 19.
The poet means to convey that a religious fulfillment of sexual urge leaves perfection in the life of both male and female. Whitman exhibits a deep sexual passion for woman and it relieves him of the charge of homosexuality:

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless, It is for my mouth forever I am in love with it, I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, I am mad for it to be in connect with me. ¹

Love makes one's soul "clear and sweet"²:

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age, Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, While they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself. ³

Love leads to inner satiety:

I am satisfied - I see, dance, laugh, sing; As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread, Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty.⁴

The above quoted passages indicate Whitman's keen urge for the glorification of the bodily organs.

Whitman indulges in imaginative sexual love which equally breeds in him a sense of mystery and wonder at the vast and prolific creation:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.
Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.
where are you off to, lady? For I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.
Dancing and laughing alone the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.¹

Love is as deep and unfathomable as sea. It is "unspeakable passionate love"² that makes him resign to its tremendous force and beauty:

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¹ Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 32.
² Ibid., p. 41.
You seal! I resign myself to you also - I guess what you mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me,
We must have a turn together, I undress hurry
me out of sight of the land,
Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you.  

To Whitman love is a "morning-glory" that "satisfies
him (me) more than the metaphysics of books":

To behold the day-break!
The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,
The air tastes good to my palate.

Love creates in man "seas of bright juice". The dawn
of love is likened to "the sun-rise", which is so
"Dazzling and tremendous". Love lifts the spirit of
man above the dins and dust of mundane existence and

makes it soar to the realm of perfect beauty:

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun, we found our own O my soul in the calm and cool of the day-break. ¹

It is the love of the soul, the infinite and the imperishable that makes him a free companion:

I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires, I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself, I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips. ²

Love leads to self-discovery and makes man aware of the more he has yet to be:

Enough! enough! enough! Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back! Give me a little time beyond me cuff'd head, Slumbers, dreams, gaping, I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake. ³

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¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 45.
² Ibid., p. 54.
³ Ibid., p. 59.
Whitman believes that love requires complete and unconditional surrender for only then does a man achieve the highest pinnacle of glory:

Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity, when I give I give myself.1

Love is a mystery. It enables man to have a mystic communion with the inner being - the effulgent centre that radiates light in all directions. Love leads to form, union, plan, the eternal life and ultimately to happiness:

There is that in me - I do not know what it is - but I know it is in me, Wrench'd and sweaty - calm and cool then my body becomes, I sleep - I sleep long, I do not know it - it is without name - it is a word unsaid, It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol. Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on, To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me. Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters. Do you see O my brothers and sisters? It is not chaos or death - it is form, union, plan - it is eternal life - it is Happiness.2

2. Ibid., pp. 72-73.
In *Calamus* poems the word "companionship" is inadequate to express Whitman's full meaning of love. This is a burning, stormy almost alarming love of man for man, and without it, as the poet believes democracy is only a shadow, on illusion. Thus the emotion of love is a necessary pre-requisite for a new and happier society:

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,  
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,  
I will make divine magnetid lands,  
With the love of comrades,  
With the life-long love of comrades.

Love breeds joy and a sense of fulfilment:

And when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way coming,  
O then I was happy,  
O then each breath tasted sweeter, and all that day my food nourish'd me more,  
and the beautiful day pass'd well,  
And the next came with equal joy, and with the next at evening came my friend,  
And that night while all was still I heard the waters roll slowly continually up the shores,  
I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me whispering to congratulate me,

2. Ibid., p. 95.
3. Ibid., p. 99.
"Breast-sorrel"¹ and "pinks of love"² create a land of beauty, loveliness and charm:

Breezes of land and love set from living shores to you on the living sea, to you O sailors!
Frost-mellow'd berries and Third-month twigs offer'd Fresh to young persons/wandering out in the fields When the winter breaks up,
Love-buds put before you and within you whoever you are,
Buds to be unfolded on the old terms,
If you bring the warmth of the sun to them, they will open and bring form, color, perfume, to you, If you become the aliment and the wet they will become flowers,
Fruits, tall branches and trees.³

Nothing is "greater"⁴ than the quality of "love"⁵ since it leads "the rest"⁶.

Walt dedicates his tenderness to no single lover but to a collectivity of about thirty million souls, the American

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2. Ibid., p. 100.
3. Ibid., p. 100.
4. Ibid., p. 105.
5. Ibid., p. 105.
6. Ibid., p. 105.
church, for whom he was writing a Bible. In the course of the great illumination at the heart of Leaves of Grass it seems that Walt had leaps directly from his discovery of identity and vocation to a conspicuously ample stage of generativity, and he has done this, without having experienced sustained intimacy with any one person.

Live Oak with Moss records a perception of possibilities — and a crisis of intimacy, auguring a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption — with which Whitman must come to terms.

"Burning for his love whom I love"¹, as he writes in the opening poem, he compares himself in the second to the Louisiana live Oak:

Uttering joyous leaves all its life, without a friend, a lover near,
I know very well I could not.²

He goes on to make a series of contrasts between success, as he had first thought of it, and a newly discovered kind

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¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 100.
² Ibid., p. 102.
of happiness:

For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under
the same cover in the coal night,
In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face
was inclined toward me,
And his arm lay lightly around my breast—
And that night I was happy.¹

Yet these exquisitely tender and simple commemorations are
also fearful. The poet who had once declared it was enough
for him 'to strike up for a New-world'² and spend his
life singing them now says his lover is jealous of these
songs 'and withdraws me from all but love, and they never
'separate again'³.

He strikes through his 'impassive exterior'⁴.
He wishes to be remembered 'ages hence'⁵ as one:

Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless Ocean of love/within him – and freely pour'd it forth, Who often walk'd lonesome walks, thinking of his dear friends, his lovers, Who pensive, away from one he lov'd, often lay Sleepless and dissatisfied at night, Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the One he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him.

He tells of sullen and suffering hours when he fears that his lover is lost to him. His lover may little know:

.....the subtle electric fire that for your sake is playing within me.

and that threatens the poet himself:

For an athlete is enamour'd of me– and I of him, But toward him there is something fierce and terrible in me,/eligible to burst forth, I dare not tell it in words – not even in these songs.

This embodies the amative love of woman – the same live oak leaves do the passion of friendship for man. The new cluster – **Enfantsd Adam** in *Leaves of Grass* and later,

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Children of Adam — is often lacking in felt emotion. In an athletic, impersonal, even ideological way, these poems celebrate the act of procreation which is a logical consequence of love:

A woman waits for me — she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture/of the right man were lacking....

Even when his cadences are at their most passionate he seems to be addressing a lover who is not so much a woman as she is a prospect of history:

Through you I drain the pent-up rivers of myself,  
In you I wrap a thousand onward years,  
On you I graft the grafts of the best — beloved of me and America.

Whitman combines as few poets have combined, a love of both the gentler and the wilder aspects of nature. The quiet pastoral country of New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, and the boundless Prairies and treeless mountains of the

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 84.  
2. Ibid., p. 85.
west were equally attractive to him. Born and bred on a large island, with clover and winding lanes and cow-processions about him and the moody ocean rolling its waves to the shore almost within hearing distance, he learned to love both pastoral and wild nature. The farmer constantly reappears in his poetry, and often enough A Farm Picture little inferior to the following—

Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
A sunlit Pasture field with cattle and horses feeding
And haze and vista, and the far horizon fading away... ¹

Which is at once quietly colored and skilfully composed. But however often the land—gentle or mountainous—is celebrated in Leaves of Grass, the sea unquestionably receives the chief emphasis and casts its spell over the whole book. Not forgetting Longfellow and Swinburne, one may perhaps assert that among Anglosaxon poets Whitman stands foremost and well-nigh alone as an ardent lover of the ocean. When Whitman, in his collection of poems on

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 223.
comradeship, desires to present ideal friendship in ideal surroundings, he has recourse to the sea:

......the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health, refresh'd, singing, inhaling the ripe breath of autumn,
When I saw the full moon in the west grow pale and disappear/in the morning light,
When I wander'd alone over the beach, and undressing bathed Laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun-rise.¹

Whitman is magnetically drawn to human beings, for instance—likes to join hands with friends when he talks, enjoys feverishly at times the feeling of proximity, celebrates not only the love of the sexes but the love of comrades in terms of bodily contact — but how largely the sense of touch is concerned is by no means clear. "The float and odor of hair",² involving two other senses, is a phrase that suggests the part played in this connection by senses other than touch. The song of the thrush may be enjoyed by only one sense but the touch of human beings, "the mousse upon me of my lover the sea, as I lie willing and

2. Ibid., p. 38.
"naked"\(^1\), the whir and pressure of the wind as one races "naked along the shore\(^2\), certainly involve other senses. In any event, however, it is obvious that Whitman responds powerfully to the touch of flesh on flesh, the heat of the sun that is soothing, the gentle caress of the wind touching face and hand, and the amorous weight and curious liquidness of sea waves. "To touch my person to someone else's is about as much as I can stand"\(^3\), he says in *Song of Myself*:

> Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity—
> My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike
>
> What is hardly different from myself,\(^4\)

Until the fellow—senses seem to slip away "bribed to swap off with touch"\(^5\), and is at the mercy of one sense:

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2. Ibid., p. 146.
3. Ibid., p. 47.
4. Ibid., p. 47.
5. Ibid., p. 47.
You villain touch? What are you doing? My breath is tight in its throat,
Uncleench your floodgates, you are too much for me.¹

Love leads to cosmic vision. This desire to have all parts of universe filter into his body is due to Whitman's mystical conception of the unity between man and nature, together constituting God. The universe is a "nebulous float"², indestructive, eternal, and divine even unto the trees in the ground and the weeds of the sea. He himself is "effusing and fluid"³ in this divine solution—a phantom curiously floating. Sometimes he asserts that objects are merely the symbols of the unseen; such is his tenor when most deliberate. But elsewhere he proclaims, as in his Song for Occupations that "objects gross and the unseen soul are one"⁴, and certainly in practice he embraces every object passionately, as if it were of final and infinite excellence. Objects have what he has,

2. Ibid., p. 346.
3. Ibid., p. 306.
4. Ibid., p. 176.
a body and soul strangely blended, and the separateness, or "identity", of each object is only an appearance, for any identity may be "of one phase and of all phases". All individuals and all objects are thus at once microcosm and macrocosm. Love is the greatest unifying force in the universe. Love breeds a passionate sympathy, by which all objects are, as it were dissolved in the "eternal float of solution". This love is the sympathy which one feels in moving the hand over one's naked body; it is the flooding emotion which comes to one in a gathering of fellow men and women; it is the refreshing solemnity or the primitive joy one has in contemplating the clouds roving silent in the blue sky. This force, which radiates and transfuses the whole cosmos, makes life, all life, any manner of life, an endless blessing. It obliterates values, causes the here and now—no matter how mean or pitiful if judged conventionally—to be utterly glorious. "All goes onward and outward", there is no pause in the

2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 130.
4. Ibid., p. 29.
everlasting, accumulating procession of the world's excellences.

Whitman yearns for human love which affects him, he says, like the primal sanities of sun and wind. In *Leaves of Grass* he announces: "I am he that aches with love." He feeds upon people, as bees upon flowers; they must be, like flowers, natural, simple, not exceptional— the plain people, boatmen, stage-drivers, day laborers, not the intellectual classes, men of letters, learned men, professional men he regards with a lurking suspicion even when they accept his gospel; his affection is by no means all-inclusive. Best of all he loves uneducated persons whom he could hold by the hand or kiss on the cheek with his bearded lips. Love leads to spiritual humanitarianism. If quantity were all, the humanitarianism of Whitman would merit all that has been said of it by his followers, to many of whom he is the Christ of the modern world. There are, however, not only degrees but kinds of humanitarianism, and Whitman's kind is not the highest love for Whitman's is a peculiarly

human, or divine principle in all men. Whitman is all content with the generous doctrine that love is a prayer.

A second type of humanitarianism is economic, practical—affection for men based, not on self-control and the love of God, but on a sense of humanity's material needs and rights. Although it is a mighty force in modern life, directed and organized by wonder-working natural science and the democratic polity, economic humanitarianism is essentially unstable, ignoring as it does the basis of true social justice.

The twist that Whitman gives to the Christian law—love thy neighbour as thyself, is patent in his gospel for the modern world as expounded in *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic vistas*. Setting aside the amative love of the poets, and disregarding altogether the spiritual love of platonism and christianity, he calls for a new adhesive love—

The institution of the dear love of comrades. ¹

¹ Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 103.
destined to offset the vulgarity and materialism of democratic America. Yet this fraternity is not his real goal; repeatedly he states that we are to conceive adhesive love, not as an end in itself, but as a means, without which the ultimate object would be impossible. This ultimate object is individuality, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself—identity—personalism. In the end, man must become a law unto himself. Gone is the external authority of religion, gone the feudal ideal of man; democracy awaits a new vision of the human law.

Love implies a new beginning. In section 49 of Song of Myself the Whitman persona marvels at a body that can know the acute sensory experience of giving birth, pain merging into the pleasure of explosion, the ultimate orgasm, as the persona watches a childbirth. He lies next to the woman, close, in a way like present-day practice in which the male shares in the birthing experience as much as he can. The persona speaks:
I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors, 
And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

To a reader familiar with Whitman's images and the valorization of the concepts that these images inscribe, the terms 'doors', 'sills' and 'flexible' signal concepts and characteristics that coalesce into primary motifs in his work - the possibility of beginning a new and the strength gained through an inclusive or expansive point of view. Here, female genitalia image these concepts, the phrase 'sills of the exquisite flexible doors' possessing an evocative power that critics have not usually associated with Whitman's images of female sexuality. The word vulva has as one of its derivations the leaf-door, i.e., the flexibility of a folding door. The persona marvels at this leaf-door from the vantage point of the 'sills', which in turn evokes the image of a threshold, a verge, a beginning, and also a level of pain, the threshold of pain. Marveling at childbirth, at a body that has tensile strength - a ductile anchor? - that dilates to expel new life, the

persona addresses death and staves it off. Section 49 begins abruptly:

And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, 
it is idle to try to alarm me.¹

Almost as if in fear, the persona abruptly shifts focus, ceasing his direct address to death, and begins instead to describe the birthing process. The poet persona moves from the bravado of his direct address to death to a tone more akin to awe:

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes, 
I see the elder-hand pressing, receiving supporting,²

As the persona staves off death, he returns to direct address and negates (nervously scoffs at?) the threat of a corpse:

And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, / but that does not offend me.³

¹ whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 72.
² Ibid., p. 72.
³ Ibid., p. 72.
And as before, bravado is followed by images of female fecundity:

I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.\(^1\)

Whitman's identification with the sleepers is not the incorporation of a Jivan-Mukta into bodies called into existence by the mere force of his will, but a far more spiritual union with all living beings; he becomes them. But the identification with the supreme soul of the philosophic passage and the identification with the universal soul of Whitman's lyric passage are not very different. Incidentally, of the other kind, the wondrous performance of the Jivan-Mukta, one may hear a faint echo in these lines of *Song of Myself*:

I find I incorporate gneiss and cool and long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots. And am stucco'd with quadruped and birds all over, And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons, But call anything back again when I desire it.\(^2\)

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To return to *The Sleepers*: like the Vedantic soul's identity in sleep with the supreme soul, Whitman's identity with that of the several or all beings and things in the world is also temporary. He will "stop only a time with the night"\(^1\), and "rise betimes"\(^2\) and even as the Vedantic soul again in sleep returns to the supreme so does Whitman's return to the night and "love"\(^3\) it:

> I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her in whom I lay so long. I know not how I came of you and I know not where I go with you, But I know I came well and shall go well.\(^4\)

Hence the feeling of bitterness due to sex-frustration, or deprivation of the pleasures of sex. The fact that the previous lines ecstatically dwell upon the touch of the sex act supports such an assumption. Perhaps, in the lyricism

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of poetic imagination, he is releasing the pent-up personal anger at his disappointment, and cursing those, whoever they are, who refuse to return his love. In an 1860 poem called *Sometimes with One I Love*, he does suggest such a rage:

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage
for fear I effuse unreturn'd love,
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love,
the pay is certain one way or another,
(I loved a person ardently and my love was not return'd,
Yet out of that I have written these songs).¹

Into *Song of Myself*, we notice a lyric orgy of sexual emotions, but also an underlying assertion that in the ecstasy of touch is the supreme wisdom attained. In other words he does more than glorify sexual emotion poetically; he is poetically indulging in it, or reveling in it as if to seek the exalted state is the object of love.

As a love poet Whitman experiences three types of visions. The first type is one in which he is outside his body, in a state half way between sleeping and waking. In this state he could feel and communicate with all other spirits. Such is the mystic state of the narrator in The Sleepers. The soul of a man in Europe could lie next to the soul of an Asian. In the spirit world of vision there is an unhampered flow. There is a similar unrestricted flow of spirit in the final section of The Sleepers where:

The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed, They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west/as they lie unclothed, The Asiatic and African are hand in hand,/the European and American are hand in hand....

Here is, instead, a purified singer. The following two short pieces of Children of Adam, are in essence farewells to love.

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Out of the rolling ocean, the crowd, came a drop gently

to me,

Whispering, I love, you, before long I die,
I have travel'd a long way, merely to look on you,
to touch you,

For I could not die till I once look'd on you,
For I fear'd I might afterward lose you.
''(Now we have met, we have look'd, we are safe;
Return in peace to the ocean, my love,
I too am part of that ocean, my love— we are not
so much separated,

Behold the great rondeur— the cohesion of all, how

perfect!

But as for me, for you, the irresistible sea is to

separate us,

As for an hour, carrying us diverse— yet can not carry

us diverse forever;

Be not impatient— a little space— know you, I
Salute the air, the ocean and the land,

Every day, at sundown; for your dear sake, my love.¹

I heard you, solemn— sweet pipes of the organ, as

last sunday morn I pass'd the church;
Winds of autumn, as I walk'd the woods at dusk,
I heard your long— stretch'd sighs, up above,
so mournful,
I heard the perfect Italian tenor, singing at the opera,
I heard the soprano in the midst of the quarter
singing;

......Heart of my love! you too I heard, murmuring low,
through one of the wrists around my head;
Heard the pulse of you, when all was still, ringing

little bells/last night under my ear.²

¹. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 88.
². Ibid., p. 90.
This most harmonious voice of Whitman swells magnificently in the bird's songs of Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking and in When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd. In the first poem, the mocking bird sings three times to the listening boy, who learns of earthly happiness and earthly tragedy by identifying himself with the bird. The most lengthy of the three arias in the lament, a despairing carol of frustrated, "'lonesome love'"¹, which is sung against a background of the beach, the white spray, the "'low-hanging moon'"², the "'rising stars'"³ and the whistling wind. The song communicates the bird's grief directly to the boy, and it suggests, though the boy is not conscious of it, the force of love that will finally resolve the grief.

O madly the sea pushes upon the land, with love, with love.
O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?
What is that little black thing I see there in the white?⁴

2. Ibid., p. 205.
3. Ibid., p. 205.
4. Ibid., p. 204.
In *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* love and death are interlink. The poet hears the carol of the hermit thrush while he stands in the "deep secluded recesses"¹ of "shadowy cedars and ghostly pines"². This is a hymn to the beauty of death, the "Dark mother"³, who brings love's fulfilment and final joy:

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Prais'd be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,  
And for love, sweet love— but praise! praise! praise!  
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.⁴
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The poet offers "glad serenades"⁵ and "dances"⁶ to death which comes "unfalteringly"⁷ to leave completion in life:

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Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?  
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,  
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.⁸
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The poet therefore "saluting"\(^1\), "adornment"\(^2\) and "feastings"\(^3\) for death. He believes that "the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting"\(^4\) background for death. Likewise "the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night"\(^5\) are be fitting the glory of death. The "night in silence under many a star"\(^6\) and the "ocean shore and the husky whispering wave"\(^7\) whose "voice"\(^8\) is known to the poet provide smoothe passage to "the soul"\(^9\) turning to the "vast and well-veil'd death"\(^10\). And the body is seen "gratefully nestling"\(^11\) close to death. Hence the poet's assertion:

I float this carol with you, with joy to thee O death.\(^{12}\)

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2. Ibid., p. 265.
3. Ibid., p. 265.
4. Ibid., p. 265.
5. Ibid., p. 265.
6. Ibid., p. 265.
7. Ibid., p. 265.
8. Ibid., p. 265.
9. Ibid., p. 265.
10. Ibid., p. 265.
11. Ibid., p. 265.
12. Ibid., p. 266.
It is to "the tally"\(^1\) of his soul that "the gray-brown bird"\(^2\) keeps up with "pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night"\(^3\). Death thus provides him with "long panoramas of visions"\(^4\).

Death brings peace and solace to man torn and tormented by the agonies of life. The sight of the "debris of all the slain soldiers of the war"\(^5\) does not evoke any sense of pain or remorse in his heart. It is because the soldiers themselves are "fully at rest"\(^6\):

they suffer'd not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.\(^7\)

It is the spirit of love that makes "death's outlet song"\(^8\), a "victorious song"\(^9\). It may be "low and wailing"\(^10\)

2. Ibid., p. 266.
3. Ibid., p. 266.
4. Ibid., p. 266.
5. Ibid., p. 266.
6. Ibid., p. 266.
7. Ibid., p. 266.
8. Ibid., p. 266.
9. Ibid., p. 266.
10. Ibid., p. 266.
Yet the notes are always clear "rising and falling, flooding the night". It may again be "sadly sinking and fainting". Yet again "bursting with joy". It seems:

Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,  
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses.

Thus Whitman pictures love in its varying shades and moods and brings to our view the force and intensity of the divine power of love.

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