

## Notes on Facing West from California's Shores by Walt Whitman:

Whitman's poem titled "Facing West from California's Shores" is an excellent poem describing not only the Westward expansion and discovery of America directly following the Civil War, but it does a nice job of briefly representing the expansion and discovery of the world in general. Once again, Whitman uses a sort of microcosm of the entire world and society, and this is especially seen when he describes the main character as "I, a child, very old" (Whitman). This basically covers all persons of the world, young and old. Another instance of this style is seen later when Whitman uses the adjective, "inquiring, tireless, and seeking" (Whitman). Except this time, he is portraying the young and developing country of America as it is just beginning to expand and flourish (Huff). Whitman's mentioning of the Asian countries also plays into this factor of the story in a very broad historical sense. If we look back millions of years to the times of Pangea, the land mass containing modern day Europe and Asia essentially spawned the continent of North America when it split off. This is the general topic that Whitman is referencing when he talks about the Asian countries in his poem. However, he also plays the same idea in a different way. When he uses the line "God, the sage, the hero," Whitman effectively sums up hundreds of years of history in countries such as China and India (Huff). This is related to the topic of Whitman's before of saying that they moved from the North to South. In these countries, that is basically what happened over time, a general move from the North of the land mass to the South of the land mass possibly to what he describes as "flowery peninsulas" reminiscent to the islands of Malaysia (Huff). All of this broad history is all wrapped up in this poem in an attempt in exhibiting God in the world. When Whitman uses the line, "God, the sage, and the hero," he is also referencing Christianity over time (Whitman). In the beginning, supposedly God was the start of the entire universe, and literally everything essentially revolved around Him, hence the first phrase of "God." Then, he is describing the evolution of man looking up to God by saying the next phrase of "the sage." It is said that at that time, everyone looked up to God and whole heartedly believed in him and his word which backs up Whitman's phrase or title "the sage." Finally in this larger phrase, we have "and the hero." Overall, this represents man's progressive vies of God and Christianity as what it/He can do for them. He is viewed as a hero because of what he has done for society and what he has done for the population. Finally in this poem, Whitman, or the narrator, is left in deep contemplation after thinking of these ancient Western civilizations. He simply wonders what these people were actually trying to seek this time long ago and why, even today, it does not seem that man has found just whatever they were looking for (Huff). Whitman of course takes joy in pondering things of this nature, and he relates the entirety of the poem to life in general.

### Works Cited

Huff, Randall. "Facing West from California's Shores'." *The Facts On File Companion to American Poetry*, vol. 1. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2007. Bloom's Literary Reference Online. Facts On File, Inc. <http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&SID=5&iPin=CPAP0125&SingleRecord=True> (accessed March 6, 2011).

Whitman, Walt. "Facing West from California's Shores." *The Walt Whitman Archive*. 2011. Web. 6 Mar. 2011.

Author: <http://luke-pphs-blog.blogspot.com/2011/03/analysis-of-whitmans-facing-west-from.html>