

Staten Island Ferry

by Mike Maggio

Where are you, Walt Whitman, absent amidst these teeming masses on this fine weather day?
Where are you, old master, old poet, as the multitudes from all nations convene as one
as the hosts of humanity move as one, cling as one, like barnacles stuck to this noble craft.

Here on this ferryboat that plies the seas insistent
sailing from borough to borough, from shore to shore,
here are your vibrant multitudes,
here are your thronging multitudes,
merging, swarming, boarding this well-worn vessel, this boat that crisscrosses New York 's
harbor, sailing far and nigh, from this side to that
sailing the same waters that you sailed,
that I sail,
that my children and grandchildren shall sail,
the same waters that rise and roll, that lap and loll, that gather the streams and eddies of this
mighty land
that empty into the oceans that connect all nations,
the same waters that connect all time
that connect all humanity.

In the midst of this metropolis, in this center of commerce, in this skyscraped city
in the hustle and bustle of cars and trains, ferries and bikes
of hips wagging and tongues bragging
where individuals from across the globe meet, converge, unite --
the tourists and residents, the hawkers and hagglers,
the painters, the plumbers, the carpenters, the businessmen and women, the office worker and
janitor --
here is your democracy, here is your all-embracing vision – the flood-tide of humanity, coming
and going, toiling by day and dallying by night
all seeking a vision of equanimity, pursuing a vision of magnanimity, black and white, rich and
poor, immigrant and native.

The center of it all.
The absolute breadth of it all.
The all-embracing magnitude of it all.
A vision that defies all creeds, all philosophies, that defies all time.

For we, too, are witness to your vision.
We, too, embrace the men and women who converge here, who assemble here, who migrate here
who ride this venerable ferry to connect their lives from this shore to that, from here and now to
ever and anon.
We, too, celebrate the flags of all nations.

We, too, assume the tongues of all nations.
We, too, applaud the ships arriving with their manifest
the young and old, the serf and laborer, the Italians, the Arabs, the Germans, the Swedes,
the Mexicans, the Indians, the Koreans, the French, the Chinese, the Irish, the English, the
Scandinavians
and the Native Americans: the Algonquin, the Mohawk, the Iroquois, the Susquehannocks,
those who came before us and those who yet shall come
all great nations, all worthy in their language and culture
all proud in their ways of being
and me in the midst of it all, in your Mannahatta, in this vortex of humanity, of past and present,
of here and there, of those who have ridden and those who will ride
of those who have witnessed and those who shall sail victorious into the future.

These are the tides of humanity.
These are the currents that rise with grace.
These are the galleons that arrive with their treasures.
These are the nations that meld into one.

Walt Whitman, as I behold these seagulls glinting in the evening sun
bowing and bending, swooping and gliding
their wings eclipsing the sky
the sunrays emblazing their path, guiding them as they fly off into the boundless distance
I see you, venerable poet,
halo on the horizon.
I ascend towards you.
I return to you.
I embrace you.
I sing the same song you have so splendidly sung.

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Iris of Spring

by Mike Maggio

Iris of Spring
you sprout luxurious
from your false bed of snow.

Enrobed in your splendid yellow and green,
so soft, so languid,
your willowy arms

outstretched,
your legs, concealed in a curious tangle
Your face, a wisp of woken wonder.

You unfold
quietly, tenderly,
tall and tempting

invite me to gaze, to touch
to linger
in your faint drowsy fragrance.

How came you to be like this?
What did you all winter
lying nestled in your frigid muddle of soil:

the earth, your covetous lover
the sun, feverish with want
the frost, a wicked reminder of your cruel absence.

Iris, I spy you couched in mystery
and yearn to seize you
long to capture your wondrous bloom

snatch you from your bold innocence
place you in a vase to adorn love's altar
to watch and wonder and adore.

Come now, let us not regret the future.
Let us revel in this brief moment.
Let us embrace this elusive season of bliss.

For Spring shall shed its silken sheen
Summer will rise,
then tumble into Fall

and I left here, alone,
as you surrender once again
to Winter's icy grip.

I shall await your resurrection.
Steadfast, I shall remain here,
agonized, canonized

as my longing, like the weeping stars,
endures the cold, bitter night.

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Siren Song

by Mike Maggio

Come, let us go now, to a place beyond dreams.
Let us arise and go now
through the fond, murmuring streets
through the blind, stuttering boulevards
where siren song stills the air
where the minute's wheels wend their way
to that elusive rapturous bliss.

Let us rush now, you and I,
like the honeybee to its hive
to the merry, manic marmalade malls
to the towering halls of swithering tongues
to the glittering temples that mesmerize all:
where those who seek know not what they crave,
yet surrender to pipe and drum and sweet serenade.

There we shall find short solace.
There, castoffs to shores of grief and joy,
like ghosts, like waves dashed upon rock,
we'll drift past glimmering galleons
covet the treasures of shipwrecked men
gripe for beads, for baubles and gems
while all the while we sink and swim,
swim and sink and the siren song
sweetly scuttles our unsoled souls.

Come quickly now, rise up,
submit at once to this hasty urge:
not greed nor grail shall accept one dram
nor glass render reason
nor brass surrender the season we cannot escape.

Let gold and silver release their grasp,
and jewels their hapless, jaded clasp,
yet snow shall not discharge these couriers
nor rain postpone the swift completion
of our most sacred rounds.

Hurry now:
let desire trumpet the way.
Let us in full fanfare not delay.
Let serendipity draw us fast
from these transient, abandoned alleys

to the splendid golden valleys
where tree and grass defy the sky,
where silken flowers in concrete lie.

Let neither spouse nor child obstruct the way.
The time has come to submit and pay.

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The Master Fitter's Apprentice

by Mike Maggio

My master fitter

I've seen your mannequins and pins, the way

a chestnut-stained fabric gently drapes your rigid
arm as you bend and crouch and kneel. Here

in this enchanted room, filled with wicked possibilities,
I've watched you measure and cut, envied the soft cloth

passing through your firm fingers, coveted the barren form's frigid
habit to welcome your tenuous touch. From this dark bitter

corner, where I gaze and await your command, I've furtively followed
the trace of your ring, now sparkling, now dull, a curious truce

between your secret eyes, resting briefly on my brazen shoulder,
and your heavy brow waxed by days and years of wonder and woe.

But for your bobbins, your buttons and lace
as wondrous as a Spanish galleon lost

underwater, crammed with gold and silver, muslin and aged tapestry
I would ask: what of the smile that once graced your face

the golden threads that wove the hushed yearnings bound beyond your distant eyes.
My master fitter, I will bring you bolts of cotton and silk, spools

of dappled velvet and sheer black satin. I will lay rolls of organza at your feet.
I will unfold the soft chiffon on your table and joyfully smooth it out for you

to render the silver stitches, the restive embroidery
that conceals your ruthless charm.

Look, my master: the moonlight, it stains your naked arm.
I feel a tremble rise up through your silken skin, and I fear

the wedding pleats are slowly ungathering