

**John Tritica**

**THE FIRST AND LAST READING**

*Get yer Walt Whitman program here.  
Photos and paintings of Walt  
a centerfold broadside pull-out  
of 'The Dalliance of Eagles'  
& 'To A Stranger.'*

We'd been waiting all summer  
for this reading—Daniel camped out  
two nights for the tickets.

I drove bullet speed  
north on the Harbor Fwy,  
dodging the cars.

*Whitman posters here  
at Dodgers Stadium.  
Get yer souvenirs.*

As we pass the turnstile,  
the chant erupts:  
*Walt, Walt, Walt, Walt*

I see a woman selling  
bobbing head ceramic Whitman dolls—  
(imagine them in the back  
of Chryslers & Lincolns,  
& on the dashboards  
of guerrilla VW buses).

\*

We have box seats:  
all the seats are packed  
(including the infield),  
fans waving banners  
others with walkmans  
on their heads or

transistors to their ears,  
& some screaming ghetto blasters  
in the aisles tuned to Vin Sculley's

pre-recital commentary.  
We catch the tail end of his interview  
with Galway Kinnell  
whose reading of "Song of Myself"  
last year in New York  
moved Allen Ginsberg to satori.

Suddenly, hoisted above the crowd  
on a stretcher by four men  
resembling Goliaths, Walt emerges  
from the left field bull pen,

dressed in a loose cotton white suit,  
matching his flowing white beard.

He holds a huge scroll, smiles,  
waves to all his fans.

Slowly  
they wade through this sea  
of women, children, men,  
Walt slapping high five  
with cheering young men & women,  
a roaring rushing high-pitched  
frenzy: HERRRAAH HERRRAAH

When they approach the infield  
fireworks explode overhead  
& Walt clasps his hands together  
shaking them over his head.

\*

They let Walt down on the pitcher's mound  
& he adjusts the microphone:

"Thank you L.A." is all he says  
& unrolling the scroll, breaks into the first line

of CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY:

*Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!*

Only Walt's cadenced voice  
defines the sudden hush,  
whole sections of the poem  
bounding from his lungs.

At the end of section eight  
he is showered with plumeria  
& hibiscus petals.

                  He shuffles  
around the mound, gathers energy,  
commences the final part:

*Flow on, river! flow with flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!  
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!  
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me, or  
the men and women generations after me!*

& in the midst of the epiphany, the sun sets  
beyond the dancing palm trees & the moon rises  
in the east, a perfect alchemical conjunction  
as a nimbus envelops the mound & he sings the  
final shattering line:

*You furnish your parts toward eternity,  
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.*

The score board explodes into bardic smithereens!  
A young woman whispers hot poetry in my ear;  
the audience chants: PASSAGE, PASSAGE, PASSAGE

Walt raises his hands and waves them like a cosmic quarterback  
& the crowd calms down as he steps up  
to the microphone, silent, in command,  
releasing the words with joy:

*Singing my days  
Singing the great achievements of the present . . .*

The electric hand of exhilaration seizes us all,  
as Walt gets into the rhapsody, roaming the world  
(as a rivulet running . . . a ceaseless thought),  
assimilating all our voyages, adventures, inventions.  
We follow him through Venice, Byzantium, Persia, China,  
bathing in the Euphrates, the Ganges,  
while hanging out with the likes of Tamerlane, Alexander & Polo.

*Passage to more than India!  
Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!*

Then, glowing in the final sunset splendor,  
he pitches *Leaves of Grass* into the audience, proclaiming

*Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long  
enough?*

The dithyrambic ecstasy stuns us out of bodies and minds  
(for a moment, into one communal body).

Walt beams sweetly, receives a garland of roses,  
is hoisted into the air, above the crowd  
a steep star singing.