

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1860 edition.

### **CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY.**

<sup>1</sup> FLOOD-TIDE below me! I watch you, face to face;  
Clouds of the west! sun there half an hour high! I  
see you also face to face.

<sup>2</sup> Crowds of men and women attired in the usual cos-  
tumes! how curious you are to me!  
On the ferry-boats, the hundreds and hundreds that  
cross, returning home, are more curious to me  
than you suppose,  
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years  
hence, are more to me, and more in my med-  
itations, than you might suppose.

<sup>3</sup> The impalpable sustenance of me from all things, at  
all hours of the day,  
The simple, compact, well-joined scheme—myself  
disintegrated, every one disintegrated, yet part  
of the scheme,  
The similitudes of the past, and those of the future,  
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights  
and hearings—on the walk in the street, and  
the passage over the river,

The current rushing so swiftly, and swimming with  
me far away,  
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me  
and them,  
The certainty of others—the life, love, sight, hear-  
ing of others.

<sup>4</sup> Others will enter the gates of the ferry, and cross  
from shore to shore,  
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,  
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and  
west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south  
and east,  
Others will see the islands large and small,  
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross,  
the sun half an hour high,

A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred  
years hence, others will see them,  
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring in of the flood-  
tide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

<sup>5</sup> It avails not, neither time or place—distance avails  
not,  
I am with you, you men and women of a generation,  
or ever so many generations hence,  
I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and  
know how it is.

<sup>6</sup> Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky,  
so I felt,  
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one  
of a crowd,  
Just as you are refreshed by the gladness of the river,  
and the bright flow, I was refreshed,

Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with  
the swift current, I stood, yet was hurried,  
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships,  
and the thick-stemmed pipes of steamboats, I  
looked.

<sup>7</sup> I too many and many a time crossed the river, the  
sun half an hour high,  
I watched the Twelfth Month sea-gulls—I saw them  
high in the air, floating with motionless wings,  
oscillating their bodies,  
I saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their  
bodies, and left the rest in strong shadow,  
I saw the slow-wheeling circles, and the gradual  
edging toward the south.

<sup>8</sup> I too saw the reflection of the summer sky in the  
water,  
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of  
beams,  
Looked at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round  
the shape of my head in the sun-lit water,  
Looked on the haze on the hills southward and south-  
westward,  
Looked on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with  
violet,

Looked toward the lower bay to notice the arriving  
ships,  
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near  
me,  
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the  
ships at anchor,  
The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the  
spars,

The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls,  
the slender serpentine pennants,  
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in  
their pilot-houses,  
The white wake left by the passage, the quick trem-  
ulous whirl of the wheels,  
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sun-set,  
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled  
cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,  
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the  
gray walls of the granite store-houses by the  
docks,  
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug  
closely flanked on each side by the barges—the  
hay-boat, the belated lighter,  
On the neighboring shore, the fires from the foundry  
chimneys burning high and glaringly into the  
night,  
Casting, their flicker of black, contrasted with wild  
red and yellow light, over the tops of houses,  
and down into the clefts of streets.

<sup>9</sup> These, and all else, were to me the same as they are  
to you,  
I project myself a moment to tell you—also I  
return.

<sup>10</sup> I loved well those cities,  
I loved well the stately and rapid river,  
The men and women I saw were all near to me,  
Others the same—others who look back on me,  
because I looked forward to them,  
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and  
to-night.)

<sup>11</sup> What is it, then, between us?  
What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years  
between us?

<sup>12</sup> Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and  
place avails not.

<sup>13</sup> I too lived, (I was of old Brooklyn,  
I too walked the streets of Manhattan Island, and  
bathed in the waters around it,  
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within  
me,  
In the day, among crowds of people, sometimes they  
came upon me,  
In my walks home late at night, or as I lay in my  
bed, they came upon me.

<sup>14</sup> I too had been struck from the float forever held in  
solution,  
I too had received identity by my body,  
That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I  
should be, I knew I should be of my body.

<sup>15</sup> It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,  
The dark threw patches down upon me also,

The best I had done seemed to me blank and sus-  
picious,  
My great thoughts, as I supposed them, were they not  
in reality meagre? would not people laugh  
at me?

<sup>16</sup> It is not you alone who know what it is to be evil,  
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,

I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,  
Blabbed, blushed, resented, lied, stole, grudged,  
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,  
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly,  
malignant,  
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,  
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous  
wish, not wanting,

Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness,  
none of these wanting.

<sup>17</sup> But I was a Manhattanese, free, friendly, and proud  
I was called by my highest name by clear loud voices  
of young men as they saw me approaching or  
passing,  
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the neg-  
ligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,  
Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or pub-  
lic assembly, yet never told them a word,  
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laugh-  
ing, gnawing, sleeping,  
Played the part that still looks back on the actor or  
actress,  
The same old rôle, the rôle that is what we make it,  
as great as we like,  
Or as small as we like, or both great and  
small.

<sup>18</sup> Closer yet I approach you,  
What thought you have of me, I had as much of you  
—I laid in my stores in advance,  
I considered long and seriously of you before you  
were born.

<sup>19</sup> Who was to know what should come home to me?  
Who knows but I am enjoying this?  
Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now,  
for all you cannot see me?

<sup>20</sup> It is not you alone, nor I alone,  
Not a few races, nor a few generations, nor a few  
centuries,  
It is that each came, or comes, or shall come, from its  
due emission, without fail, either now, or then, or  
henceforth.

<sup>21</sup> Every thing indicates—the smallest does, and the  
largest does,  
A necessary film envelops all, and envelops the Soul  
for a proper time.

<sup>22</sup> Now I am curious what sight can ever be more stately  
and admirable to me than my mast-hemm'd Man-  
hatta,

My river and sun-set, and my scallop-edged waves of  
flood-tide,  
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in  
the twilight, and the belated lighter;  
Curious what Gods can exceed these that clasp me  
by the hand, and with voices I love call me  
promptly and loudly by my highest name as I  
approach,  
Curious what is more subtle than this which ties me  
to the woman or man that looks in my face,  
Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning  
into you.

<sup>23</sup> We understand, then, do we not?  
What I promised without mentioning it, have you not  
accepted?  
What the study could not teach—what the preaching  
could not accomplish is accomplished, is it not?  
What the push of reading could not start is started by  
me personally, is it not?

<sup>24</sup> Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with  
the ebb-tide!  
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edged waves!  
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your  
splendor me, or the men and women generations  
after me;  
Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of pas-  
sengers!  
Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta!—stand up,  
beautiful hills of Brooklyn!  
Bully for you! you proud, friendly, free Manhat-  
tanese!  
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions  
and answers!  
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solu-  
tion!  
Blab, blush, lie, steal, you or I or any one after us!  
Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house, or street,  
or public assembly!  
Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically  
call me by my highest name!  
Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the  
actor or actress!  
Play the old rôle, the rôle that is great or small,  
according as one makes it!

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in  
    unknown ways be looking upon you;  
Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean  
    idly, yet haste with the hasting current;  
Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large  
    circles high in the air;  
Receive the summer-sky, you water! and faithfully  
    hold it, till all downcast eyes have time to take  
    it from you;  
Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my  
    head, or any one's head, in the sun-lit water;  
Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down,  
    white-sailed schooners, sloops, lighters!  
Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lowered at  
    sunset;  
Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black  
    shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light  
    over the tops of the houses;  
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you  
    are;  
You necessary film, continue to envelop the Soul;  
About my body for me, and your body for you, be  
    hung our divinest aromas;  
Thrive, cities! bring your freight, bring your shows,  
    ample and sufficient rivers;  
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more  
    spiritual;  
Keep your places, objects than which none else is  
    more lasting.

<sup>25</sup> We descend upon you and all things—we arrest you  
    all,  
We realize the Soul only by you, you faithful solids  
    and fluids,

Through you color, form, location, sublimity, ideality,  
Through you every proof, comparison, and all the  
    suggestions and determinations of ourselves.

<sup>26</sup> You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beauti-  
    ful ministers! you novices!  
We receive you with free sense at last, and are  
    insatiate henceforward,  
Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or with-  
    hold yourselves from us,  
We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant  
    you permanently within us,

We fathom you not—we love you—there is per-  
fection in you also,  
You furnish your parts toward eternity,  
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the  
Soul.

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