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“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”

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.
Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes! 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 meditations, than you might suppose.

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things, at all hours of the day;
The simple, compact, well-join'd 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, hearing of others.

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.

3

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.

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 refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow,
I was refresh'd;
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-stem'd
pipes of steamboats, I look'd.

I too many and many a time cross'd 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.

I too saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light around the shape of my head
in the sun-lit water,
Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and southwestward,
Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,
Look'd 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 tremulous 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 flank'd 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.

—Walt Whitman



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