

# From anxiety to power: grammar and crisis in crossing brooklyn ferry

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In the article “ FromAnxietyto Power: Grammar and Crisis in Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, by Roger Gilbert, he talks about Walt Whitman’s poem “ Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”. Gilbert feels that this poem is odd for Whitman because he “ never speaks directly of death” (339). He says that “ Whitman’s tone remains resolutely ebullient” (341), even though death is also present throughout the poem. Whitman’s struggle with death is figured in the poem to be a struggle with writing and to cross out of writing and into speech. He wants to start writing about life and power, not death and absence. Whitman really thought out the title of the poem.

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” is a crisis poem because of his need to “ overcome the deathliness of writing and to return to the spoken idiom that is Whitman’s truest mode” (342). Gilbert feels that the crossing carries the poet from the “ face of death” to “ a renewed sense of his own power”. In the poem, Whitman uses a second person pronoun, which is rare to see. The article asks why Whitman uses the phrase “ face to face”. Gilbert says the answer is because “ objects have become people, people in turn have become objects” (343). This allows them to be mastered by Whitman, but also the passengers let him know that he isn’t impervious to death.

When Whitman says the word you in his poem, he in the end talks about “ the future commuters” (344). As you read more into the poem, you see that the poet is “ metamorphosed from a me” to a scheme that no longer goes with the object-world. Towards the end of the poem, Whitman becomes more passive, which is very uncharacteristic of him. When he says “ The current rushing so swiftly andswimmingwith me far away”, he hints that he is

disappearing from the scene. Also after Whitman talks about the sunset and falling back to sea, you can see how prominent death is in the poem. In my opinion, Gilbert does a good job of interpreting Whitman's poem.