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WALT WHITMAN

SUN-DOWN POEM

Flood-tide of the river, flow on! I watch you, face to face,
Clouds of the west! sun 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 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.
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, 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 sun-set, the pouring in of the floodtide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-tide.
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 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.
I too many and many a time crossed the river, the sun half an hour high,
I watched the December 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,
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 southwestward,
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 stride 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 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.
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.
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 today and tonight.
What is it, then, between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?
Whatever it is, it avails not – distance avails not, and place avails not.
I too lived,
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.
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.
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 suspicious,
My great thoughts, as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre? Would not people laugh at me?
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, a solitary committer, a coward, a malignant person,
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.
But I was a Manhattanese, free, friendly, and proud!
I was called by my nighest 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 negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,
Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or public assembly, yet never told them a word,
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,
Played the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,

The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like, or as small as we like, or both great and small.
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.
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?
It is not you alone, nor I alone,
Not a few races, not a few generations, not 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.
Every thing indicates – the smallest does, and the largest does,
A necessary film envelops all, and envelops the soul for a proper time.
Now I am curious what sight can ever be more stately and admirable to me than my mast-hemm'd Manhatta, my river and sunset, and my scallop-edged waves of floodtide, 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 nighest 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.
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?
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 sun-set, drench with your splendor me, or the men and women generations after me!
Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!
Stand up, tall masts of Manahatta! – stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!
Bully for you! you proud, friendly, free Manhattanese!
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!

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 nighest name!
Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
Play the old role, the role 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! 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 sun-set!
Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at night-fall! 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!
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.
You have waited, you always wait, you dumb beautiful 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

perfection in you also,
You furnish your parts toward eternity,
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.