

# WHITMAN WALT

THE PATRIOTIC POEMS  
OF WALT WHITMAN

УОЛТ УИТМЕН

# **The Patriotic Poems of Walt Whitman**

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## Содержание

I		7
	THICK-SPRINKLED BUNTING	7
	BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!	8
	CITY OF SHIPS	9
	A MARCH IN THE RANKS HARD-PREST, AND THE ROAD UNKNOWN	10
	COME UP FROM THE FIELDS FATHER	11
	A TWILIGHT SONG	13
	A SIGHT IN CAMP IN THE DAYBREAK GRAY AND DIM	14
	YEAR THAT TREMBLED AND REEL'D BENEATH ME	15
	FIRST O SONGS FOR A PRELUDE	16
	SONG OF THE BANNER AT DAYBREAK	18
	Poet	18
	Pennant	18
	Child	18
	Father	19
	Poet	19
	Child	19
	Father	19
	Banner and Pennant	20
	Poet	20
	Banner and Pennant	21
	Child	21
	Father	21
	Banner	22
	Poet	22
	THE DYING VETERAN	24
	(A Long Island incident—early part of the nineteenth century.)	24
	THE WOUND-DRESSER	25
	1	25
	2	25
	3	26
	4	27
	DIRGE FOR TWO VETERANS	28
	FROM FAR DAKOTA'S CAÑONS	29
	June 25, 1876	29
	OLD WAR-DREAMS	30
	DELICATE CLUSTER	31
	TO A CERTAIN CIVILIAN	32
	ADIEU TO A SOLDIER	33
	LONG, TOO LONG AMERICA	34
II		35
	WEAVE IN, MY HARDY LIFE	35
	HOW SOLEMN AS ONE BY ONE	36
	(Washington City, 1865)	36
	SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE	37

(Washington City, 1865)	37
THE RETURN OF THE HEROES	38
1	38
2	38
3	38
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	40

# **Walt Whitman**

## **The Patriotic Poems of Walt Whitman**

### **America**

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,  
All, all alike, endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,  
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,  
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,  
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,  
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.

## I POEMS OF WAR

### THICK-SPRINKLED BUNTING

Thick-sprinkled bunting! flag of stars!  
Long yet your road, fateful flag—long yet your road, and lined with  
bloody death,  
For the prize I see at issue at last is the world,  
All its ships and shores I see interwoven with your threads greedy  
banner;  
Dream'd again the flags of kings, highest borne, to flaunt unrival'd?  
O hasten flag of man—O with sure and steady step, passing highest  
flags of kings,  
Walk supreme to the heavens mighty symbol—run up above them all,  
Flag of stars! thick-sprinkled bunting!

## BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!  
Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,  
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,  
Into the school where the scholar is studying;  
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with  
his bride,  
Not the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his  
grain,  
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!  
Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of wheels in the streets;  
Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? no sleepers must  
sleep in those beds,  
No bargainers' bargains by day—no brokers or speculators—would  
they continue?  
Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing?  
Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case before the judge?  
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!  
Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,  
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer,  
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,  
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,  
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the  
hearses,  
So strong you thump O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.



## CITY OF SHIPS

City of ships!  
(O the black ships! O the fierce ships!  
O the beautiful sharp-bow'd steam-ships and sail-ships!)  
City of the world! (for all races are here,  
All the lands of the earth make contributions here);  
City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!  
City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling in and out  
with eddies and foam!  
City of wharves and stores—city of tall façades of marble and iron!  
Proud and passionate city—mettlesome, mad, extravagant city!  
Spring up O city—not for peace alone, but be indeed yourself, warlike!  
Fear not—submit to no models but your own, O city!  
Behold me—incarnate me as I have incarnated you!

I have rejected nothing you offer'd me—whom you adopted I have  
adopted,  
Good or bad I never question you—I love all—I do not condemn  
anything,  
I chant and celebrate all that is yours—yet peace no more,  
In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine,  
War, red war is my song through your streets, O city!

## A MARCH IN THE RANKS HARD- PREST, AND THE ROAD UNKNOWN

A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,  
A route through a heavy wood with muffled steps in the darkness,  
Our army foil'd with loss severe, and the sullen remnant retreating,  
Till after midnight glimmer upon us the lights of a dim-lighted  
building,  
We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted  
building,  
'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an impromptu  
hospital,  
Entering but for a minute I see a sight beyond all the pictures and poems  
ever made,  
Shadows of deepest, deepest black, just lit by moving candles and  
lamps,  
And by one great pitchy torch stationary with wild red flame and clouds  
of smoke,  
By these, crowds, groups of forms vaguely I see on the floor, some in  
the pews laid down,  
At my feet more distinctly a soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding  
to death (he is shot in the abdomen),  
I stanch the blood temporarily (the youngster's face is white as a lily),  
Then before I depart I sweep my eyes o'er the scene fain to absorb it all,  
Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscurity, some  
of them dead,  
Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether, the  
odour of blood,  
The crowd, O the crowd of the bloody forms, the yard outside also  
fill'd,  
Some on the bare ground, some on planks or stretchers, some in the  
death-spasm sweating,  
An occasional scream or cry, the doctor's shouted orders or calls,  
The glisten of the little steel instruments catching the glint of the  
torches,  
These I resume as I chant, I see again the forms, I smell the odour,  
Then hear outside the orders given, *Fall in, my men, fall in;*  
But first I bend to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me,  
Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness,  
Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on in the ranks,  
The unknown road still marching.

## COME UP FROM THE FIELDS FATHER

Come up from the fields father, here's a letter from our Pete,  
And come to the front door mother, here's a letter from thy dear son.

Lo, 'tis autumn,  
Lo, where the trees, deeper green, yellower and redder,  
Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves fluttering in the moderate  
wind,  
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and grapes on the trellis'd vines  
(Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines?  
Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were lately buzzing?),  
Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so transparent after the rain, and with  
wondrous clouds,  
Below too, all calm, all vital and beautiful, and the farm prospers well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,  
But now from the fields come father, come at the daughter's call,  
And come to the entry mother, to the front door come right away.

Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous, her steps trembling,  
She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor adjust her cap.

Open the envelope quickly,  
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name is sign'd,  
O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken mother's soul!  
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black, she catches the main  
words only,  
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast, cavalry skirmish, taken  
to hospital,*  
*At present low, but will soon be better.*

Ah now the single figure to me,  
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all its cities and farms,  
Sickly white in the face and dull in the head, very faint,  
By the jamb of a door leans.

*Grieve not so, dear mother* (the just-grown daughter speaks through her  
sobs,  
The little sisters huddle around speechless and dismay'd),  
*See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon be better.*

Alas poor boy, he will never be better (nor may he needs to be better,  
that brave and simple soul),  
While they stand at home at the door he is dead already,  
The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,  
She with thin form presently drest in black,  
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fitfully sleeping, often  
waking,  
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with one deep longing,  
O that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent from life escape and  
withdraw,  
To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead son.

## A TWILIGHT SONG

As I sit in twilight late alone by the flickering oak-flame,  
Musing on long-pass'd war-scenes—of the countless buried unknown  
soldiers,  
Of the vacant names, as unindented air's and sea's—the unreturn'd,  
The brief truce after battle, with grim burial-squads, and the deep-fill'd  
trenches  
Of gather'd dead from all America, North, South, East, West, whence  
they came up,  
From wooded Maine, New-England's farms, from fertile Pennsylvania,  
Illinois, Ohio,  
From the measureless West, Virginia, the South, the Carolinas, Texas  
(Even here in my room-shadows and half-lights in the noiseless  
flickering flames,  
Again I see the stalwart ranks on-filing, rising—I hear the rhythmic  
tramp of the armies);  
You million unwrit names all, all—you dark bequest from all the war,  
A special verse for you—a flash of duty long neglected—your mystic  
roll strangely gather'd here,  
Each name recall'd by me from out the darkness and death's ashes,  
Henceforth to be, deep, deep within my heart recording, for many a  
future year,  
Your mystic roll entire of unknown names, or North or South,  
Embalm'd with love in this twilight song.

## A SIGHT IN CAMP IN THE DAYBREAK GRAY AND DIM

A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,  
As from my tent I emerge so early sleepless,  
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,  
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,  
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woollen blanket,  
Gray and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.

Curious I halt and silent stand,  
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift  
the blanket;  
Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray'd hair, and  
flesh all sunken about the eyes?  
Who are you my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step—and who are you my child and darling?  
Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful  
yellow-white ivory;  
Young man I think I know you—I think this face is the face of the  
Christ himself,  
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

## **YEAR THAT TREMBLED AND REEL'D BENEATH ME**

Year that trembled and reel'd beneath me!  
Your summer wind was warm enough, yet the air I breathed froze me,  
A thick gloom fell through the sunshine and darken'd me,  
Must I change my triumphant songs? said I to myself,  
Must I indeed learn to chant the cold dirges of the baffled,  
And sullen hymns of defeat?

## FIRST O SONGS FOR A PRELUDE

First O songs for a prelude,  
Lightly strike on the stretch'd tympanum pride and joy in my city,  
How she led the rest to arms, how she gave the cue,  
How at once with lithe limbs unwaiting a moment she sprang,  
(O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless.  
O strongest you in the hour of danger, in crisis! O truer than steel!)  
How you sprang—how you threw off the costumes of peace with  
indifferent hand,  
How your soft opera-music changed, and the drum and fife were heard  
in their stead,  
How you led to the war (that shall serve for our prelude, songs  
of soldiers),  
How Manhattan drum-taps led.

Forty years had I in my city seen soldiers parading,  
Forty years as a pageant, till unawares the lady of this teeming and  
turbulent city,  
Sleepless amid her ships, her houses, her incalculable wealth,  
With her million children around her, suddenly,  
At dead of night, at news from the south,  
Incens'd struck with clinch'd hand the pavement.

A shock electric, the night sustain'd it,  
Till with ominous hum our hive at daybreak pour'd out its myriads.  
From the houses then and the workshops, and through all the doorways,  
Leapt they tumultuous, and lo! Manhattan arming.

To the drum-taps prompt,  
The young men falling in and arming,  
The mechanics arming (the trowel, the jack-plane, the blacksmith's  
hammer, tost aside with precipitation),  
The lawyer leaving his office and arming, the judge leaving the court,  
The driver deserting his wagon in the street, jumping down, throwing  
the reins abruptly down on the horses' backs,  
The salesman leaving the store, the boss, book-keeper, porter, all  
leaving;  
Squads gather everywhere by common consent and arm,  
The new recruits, even boys, the old men show them how to wear their  
accoutrements, they buckle the straps carefully,  
Outdoors arming, indoors arming, the flash of the musket-barrels,  
The white tents cluster in camps, the arm'd sentries around, the sunrise  
cannon and again at sunset,  
Arm'd regiments arrive every day, pass through the city, and embark  
from the wharves



(How good they look as they tramp down to the river, sweaty, with  
their guns on their shoulders!  
How I love them! how I could hug them, with their brown faces and  
their clothes and knapsacks cover'd with dust!)  
The blood of the city up—arm'd! arm'd! the cry everywhere,  
The flags flung out from the steeples of churches and from all the  
public buildings and stores,  
The tearful parting, the mother kisses her son, the son kisses his mother  
(Loth is the mother to part, yet not a word does she speak to detain  
him),  
The tumultuous escort, the ranks of policemen preceding, clearing the  
way,  
The unpent enthusiasm, the wild cheers of the crowd for their  
favourites,  
The artillery, the silent cannons bright as gold, drawn along, rumble  
lightly over the stones  
(Silent cannons, soon to cease your silence,  
Soon unlimber'd to begin the red business);  
All the mutter of preparation, all the determin'd arming,  
The hospital service, the lint, bandages, and medicines,  
The women volunteering for nurses, the work begun for in earnest, no  
mere parade now;  
War! an arm'd race is advancing, the welcome for battle, no turning  
away;  
War! be it weeks, months, or years, an arm'd race is advancing to  
welcome it.

Mannahatta a-march—and it's O to sing it well!  
It's O for a manly life in the camp.

And the sturdy artillery  
The guns bright as gold, the work for giants, to serve well the guns,  
Unlimber them! (No more as the past forty years for salutes for  
courtesies merely,  
Put in something now besides powder and wadding.)

And you lady of ships, you Mannahatta,  
Old matron of this proud, friendly, turbulent city,  
Often in peace and wealth you were pensive or covertly frown'd amid  
all your children,  
But now you smile with joy exulting old Mannahatta.

## SONG OF THE BANNER AT DAYBREAK

### Poet

O a new song, a free song,  
Flapping, flapping, flapping, flapping, by sounds, by voices clearer,  
By the wind's voice and that of the drum,  
By the banner's voice and the child's voice and sea's voice and father's  
voice,  
Low on the ground and high in the air,  
On the ground where father and child stand,  
In the upward air where their eyes turn,  
Where the banner at daybreak is flapping.

Words! book-words! what are you?  
Words no more, for hearken and see,  
My song is there in the open air, and I must sing,  
With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

I'll weave the chord and twine in,  
Man's desire and babe's desire, I'll twine them in, I'll put in life,  
I'll put the bayonet's flashing point, I'll let bullets and slugs whizz  
(As one carrying a symbol and menace far into the future,  
Crying with trumpet voice, *Arouse and beware! Beware and arouse!*)  
I'll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of joy,  
Then loosen, launch forth, to go and compete,  
With the banner and pennant a-flapping.

### Pennant

Come up here, bard, bard,  
Come up here, soul, soul,  
Come up here, dear little child,  
To fly in the clouds and winds with me, and play with the measureless  
light.

### Child

Father what is that in the sky beckoning to me with long finger?  
And what does it say to me all the while?

## **Father**

Nothing my babe you see in the sky,  
And nothing at all to you it says—but look you my babe,  
Look at these dazzling things in the houses, and see you the money-  
shops opening,  
And see you the vehicles preparing to crawl along the streets with  
goods;  
These, ah these, how valued and toil'd for these!  
How envied by all the earth!

## **Poet**

Fresh and rosy red the sun is mounting high,  
On floats the sea in distant blue careering through its channels,  
On floats the wind over the breast of the sea setting in toward land,  
The great steady wind from west to west-by-south.  
Floating so buoyant with milk-white foam on the waters.  
But I am not the sea nor the red sun,  
I am not the wind with girlish laughter,  
Not the immense wind which strengthens, not the wind which lashes,  
Not the spirit that ever lashes its own body to terror and death,  
But I am that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,  
Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land,  
Which the birds know in the woods mornings and evenings,  
And the shore-sands know and the hissing wave, and that banner and  
pennant,  
Aloft there flapping and flapping.

## **Child**

O father it is alive—it is full of people—it has children,  
O now it seems to me it is talking to its children,  
I hear it—it talks to me—O it is wonderful!  
O it stretches—it spreads and runs so fast—O my father,  
It is so broad it covers the whole sky.

## **Father**

Cease, cease, my foolish babe,  
What you are saying is sorrowful to me, much it displeases me;

Behold with the rest again I say, behold not banners and pennants aloft,  
But the well-prepared pavements behold, and mark the solid-wall'd  
houses.

## **Banner and Pennant**

Speak to the child O bard out of Manhattan,  
To our children all, or north or south of Manhattan,  
Point this day, leaving all the rest, to us over all—and yet we know  
not why,  
For what are we, mere strips of cloth profiting nothing,  
Only flapping in the wind?

## **Poet**

I hear and see not strips of cloth alone,  
I hear the tramp of armies, I hear the challenging sentry,  
I hear the jubilant shouts of millions of men, I hear Liberty!  
I hear the drums beat and the trumpets blowing,  
I myself move abroad swift-rising flying then,  
I use the wings of the land-bird and use the wings of the sea-bird, and  
look down as from a height,  
I do not deny the precious results of peace, I see populous cities with  
wealth incalculable,  
I see numberless farms, I see the farmers working in their fields or  
barns,  
I see mechanics working, I see buildings everywhere founded, going  
up, or finish'd,  
I see trains of cars swiftly speeding along railroad tracks drawn by the  
locomotives,  
I see the stores, depots, of Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, New  
Orleans,  
I see far in the West the immense area of grain, I dwell awhile hovering,  
I pass to the lumber forests of the North, and again to the Southern  
plantation, and again to California;  
Sweeping the whole I see the countless profit, the busy gatherings,  
earn'd wages,  
See the Identity formed out of thirty-eight spacious and haughty States  
(and many more to come),  
See forts on the shores of harbours, see ships sailing in and out;  
Then over all (aye! aye!) my little and lengthen'd pennant shaped like  
a sword,  
Runs swiftly up indicating war and defiance—and now the halyards  
have rais'd it,  
Side of my banner broad and blue, side of my starry banner,

Discarding peace over all the sea and land.

## **Banner and Pennant**

Yet louder, higher, stronger, bard! yet farther, wider cleave!  
No longer let our children deem us riches and peace alone,  
We may be terror and carnage, and are so now,  
Not now are we any one of these spacious and haughty States (nor any  
five, nor ten),  
Nor market nor depot we, nor money-bank in the city,  
But these and all, and the brown and spreading land, and the mines  
below, are ours,  
And the shores of the sea are ours, and the rivers great and small,  
And the fields they moisten, and the crops and the fruits are ours,  
Bays and channels and ships sailing in and out are ours—while we over  
all,  
Over the area spread below, the three or four millions of square miles,  
the capitals,  
The forty millions of people—O bard! in life and death supreme,  
We, even we, henceforth flaunt out masterful, high up above,  
Not for the present alone, for a thousand years chanting through you,  
This song to the soul of one poor little child.

## **Child**

O my father I like not the houses,  
They will never to me be anything, nor do I like money,  
But to mount up there I would like, O father dear, that banner I like,  
That pennant I would be and must be.

## **Father**

Child of mine you fill me with anguish,  
To be that pennant would be too fearful,  
Little you know what it is this day, and after this day, forever, It is to  
gain nothing, but risk and defy everything,  
Forward to stand in front of wars—and O, such wars!—what have you  
to do with them?  
With passions of demons, slaughter, premature death?

## Banner

Demons and death then I sing,  
Put in all, aye all will I, sword-shaped pennant for war,  
And a pleasure new and ecstatic, and the prattled yearning of children,  
Blent with the sounds of the peaceful land and the liquid wash of the sea,  
And the black ships fighting on the sea envelop'd in smoke,  
And the icy cool of the far, far north, with rustling cedars and pines,  
And the whirr of drums and the sound of soldiers marching, and the hot sun shining south,  
And the beach-waves combing over the beach on my Eastern shore, and my Western shore the same,  
And all between those shores, and my ever running Mississippi with bends and chutes,  
And my Illinois fields, and my Kansas fields, and my fields of Missouri,  
The Continent, devoting the whole identity without reserving an atom,  
Pour in! whelm that which asks, which sings, with all and the yield of all,  
Fusing and holding, claiming, devouring the whole,  
No more with tender lip, nor musical labial sound,  
But out of the night emerging for food, our voice persuasive no more,  
Croaking like crows here in the wind.

## Poet

My limbs, my veins dilate, my theme is clear at last,  
Banner so broad advancing out of the night, I sing you haughty and resolute,  
I burst through where I waited long, too long, deafen'd and blinded,  
My hearing and tongue are come to me (a little child taught me),  
I hear from above O pennant of war your ironical call and demand,  
Insensate! insensate (yet I at any rate chant you), O banner!  
Not houses of peace indeed are you, nor any nor all their prosperity  
(if need be, you shall again have every one of those houses to destroy them.  
You thought not to destroy those valuable houses, standing fast, full of comfort, built with money,  
May they stand fast, then? not an hour except you above them and all stand fast);  
O banner, not money so precious are you, not farm produce you, nor the material good nutriment,  
Nor excellent stores, nor landed on wharves from the ships,  
Not the superb ships with sail-power or steam-power, fetching and carrying cargoes,

Nor machinery, vehicles, trade, nor revenues—but you as henceforth  
I see you,  
Running up out of the night, bringing your cluster of stars (ever-  
enlarging stars),  
Divider of daybreak you, cutting the air, touch'd by the sun, measuring  
the sky,  
(Passionately seen and yearn'd for by one poor little child,  
While others remain busy or smartly talking, forever teaching thrift,  
thrift);  
O you up there! O pennant! where you undulate like a snake hissing  
so curious,  
Out of reach, an idea only, yet furiously fought for, risking bloody  
death, loved by me,  
So loved—O you banner leading the day with stars brought from the  
night!  
Valueless, object of eyes, over all and demanding all—(absolute owner  
of all)—O banner and pennant!  
I too leave the rest!—great as it is, it is nothing—houses, machines are  
nothing—I see them not.  
I see but you, O warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with stripes, I  
sing you only,  
Flapping up there in the wind.

## THE DYING VETERAN

**(A Long Island incident—early part of the nineteenth century.)**

Amid these days of order, ease, prosperity,  
Amid the current songs of beauty, peace, decorum,  
I cast a reminiscence—(likely 't will offend you,  
I heard it in my boyhood)—More than a generation since,  
A queer old savage man, a fighter under Washington himself  
(Large, brave, cleanly, hot-blooded, no talker, rather spiritualistic,  
Had fought in the ranks—fought well—had been all through the  
Revolutionary war),  
Lay dying—sons, daughters, church-deacons, lovingly tending him,  
Sharpening their sense, their ears, towards his murmuring, half-caught  
words:  
"Let me return again to my war-days,  
To the sights and scenes—to forming the line of battle,  
To the scouts ahead reconnoitering,  
To the cannons, the grim artillery,  
To the galloping aids, carrying orders,  
To the wounded, the fallen, the heat, the suspense,  
The perfume strong, the smoke, the deafening noise;  
Away with your life of peace!—your joys of peace!  
Give me my old wild battle-life again!"



## THE WOUND-DRESSER

### 1

An old man bending I come among new faces,  
Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,  
Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love me  
(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,  
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,  
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead);  
Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,  
Of unsurpass'd heroes (was one side so brave? the other was equally brave);  
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,  
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us?  
What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,  
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains?

### 2

O maidens and young men I love and that love me,  
What you ask of my days those the strangest and sudden your talking recalls,  
Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and dust,  
In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the rush of successful charge,  
Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a swift-running river they fade,  
Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not on soldiers' perils or soldiers' joys  
(Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the joys, yet I was content).

But in silence, in dreams' projections,  
While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,  
So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off the sand,  
With hinged knees returning I enter the doors (while for you up there,  
Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart).

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,  
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,  
Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,

Where their priceless blood reddens the grass, the ground,  
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd hospital,  
To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return,  
To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss,  
An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries a refuse pail,  
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd again.

I onward go, I stop,  
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds,  
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,  
One turns to me his appealing eyes—poor boy! I never knew you,  
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would  
save you.

### 3

On, on I go (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)  
The crush'd head I dress (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away),  
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I  
examine,  
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life  
struggles hard,  
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!  
In mercy come quickly).

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,  
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and  
blood,  
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side-falling  
head,  
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody  
stump,  
And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,  
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,  
And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,  
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so  
offensive,  
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,  
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,  
These and more I dress with impassive hand (yet deep in my breast a  
fire, a burning flame).

**4**

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,  
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,  
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,  
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,  
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad  
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,  
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips).

## DIRGE FOR TWO VETERANS

The last sunbeam  
Lightly falls from the finish'd Sabbath,  
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking  
Down a new-made double grave

Lo, the moon ascending,  
Up from the east the silvery round moon,  
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,  
Immense and silent moon.

I see a sad procession,  
And I hear the sound of coming full-key'd bugles,  
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding,  
As with voices and with tears.

I hear the great drums pounding,  
And the small drums steady whirring,  
And every blow of the great convulsive drums,  
Strikes me through and through.

For the son is brought with the father  
(In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,  
Two veterans, son and father, dropt together,  
And the double grave awaits them).

Now nearer blow the bugles,  
And the drums strike more convulsive,  
And the daylight over the pavement quite has faded,  
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,  
The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumin'd  
('Tis some mother's large transparent face,  
In heaven brighter growing).

O strong dead-march you please me!  
O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!  
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!  
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,  
And the bugles and the drums give you music,  
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,  
My heart gives you love.

## FROM FAR DAKOTA'S CAÑONS

June 25, 1876

From far Dakota's cañons,  
Lands of the wild ravine, the dusky Sioux, the lonesome stretch, the  
silence,  
Haply to-day a mournful wail, haply a trumpet-note for heroes.

The battle-bulletin,  
The Indian ambuscade, the craft, the fatal environment,  
The cavalry companies fighting to the last in sternest heroism,  
In the midst of their little circle, with their slaughter'd horses for  
breastworks,  
The fall of Custer and all his officers and men.

Continues yet the old, old legend of our race,  
The loftiest of life upheld by death,  
The ancient banner perfectly maintain'd,  
O lesson opportune, O how I welcome thee!

As sitting in dark days,  
Lone, sulky, through the time's thick murk looking in vain for light,  
for hope,  
From unsuspected parts a fierce and momentary proof  
(The sun there at the centre though conceal'd,  
Electric life forever at the centre),  
Breaks forth a lightning flash.

Thou of the tawny flowing hair in battle,  
I erewhile saw, with erect head, pressing ever in front, bearing a bright  
sword in thy hand,  
Now ending well in death the splendid fever of thy deeds  
(I bring no dirge for it or thee, I bring a glad triumphal sonnet),  
Desperate and glorious, aye in defeat most desperate, most glorious,  
After thy many battles in which never yielding up a gun or a colour,  
Leaving behind thee a memory sweet to soldiers,  
Thou yieldest up thyself.

## OLD WAR-DREAMS

In midnight sleep of many a face of anguish,  
Of the look at first of the mortally wounded (of that indescribable  
look),  
Of the dead on their backs with arms extended wide,  
I dream, I dream, I dream.

Of scenes of Nature, fields and mountains,  
Of skies so beauteous after a storm, and at night the moon so unearthly  
bright,  
Shining sweetly, shining down, where we dig the trenches and gather  
the heaps,  
I dream, I dream, I dream.

Long have they pass'd, faces and trenches and fields,  
Where through the carnage I moved with a callous composure, or away  
from the fallen,  
Onward I sped at the time—but now of their forms at night,  
I dream, I dream, I dream.

## DELICATE CLUSTER

Delicate cluster! flag of teeming life!  
Covering all my lands—all my seashores lining!  
Flag of death! (how I watch'd you through the smoke of battle pressing!  
How I heard you flap and rustle, cloth defiant!)  
Flag cerulean—sunny flag, with the orbs of night dappled!  
Ah my silvery beauty—ah my woolly white and crimson!  
Ah to sing the song of you, my matron mighty!  
My sacred one, my mother!

## TO A CERTAIN CIVILIAN

Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?  
Did you seek the civilian's peaceful and languishing rhymes?  
Did you find what I sang erewhile so hard to follow?  
Why I was not singing erewhile for you to follow, to understand—nor  
am I now;  
(I have been born of the same as the war was born,  
The drum-corps' rattle is ever to me sweet music, I love well the martial  
dirge,  
With slow wail and convulsive throb leading the officer's funeral);  
What to such as you anyhow such a poet as I? therefore leave my works,  
And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with piano-  
tunes,  
For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me.



## ADIEU TO A SOLDIER

Adieu O soldier,  
You of the rude campaigning (which we shared),  
The rapid march, the life of the camp,  
The hot contention of opposing fronts, the long manoeuvre,  
Red battles with their slaughter, the stimulus, the strong terrific game,  
Spell of all brave and manly hearts, the trains of time through you and  
like of you all fill'd,  
With war and war's expression.

Adieu dear comrade,  
Your mission is fulfill'd—but I, more warlike,  
Myself and this contentious soul of mine,  
Still on our own campaigning bound,  
Through untried roads with ambushes opponents lined,  
Through many a sharp defeat and many a crisis, often baffled,  
Here marching, ever marching on, a war fight out—aye here,  
To fiercer, weightier battles give expression.

## **LONG, TOO LONG AMERICA**

Long, too long America,  
Travelling roads all even and peaceful you learn'd from joys and  
prosperity only,  
But now, ah now, to learn from crises of anguish, advancing, grappling  
with direst fate and recoiling not,  
And now to conceive and show to the world what your children en-  
masse really are.  
(For who except myself has yet conceiv'd what your children en-masse  
really are?).

## **II POEMS OF AFTER-WAR**

### **WEAVE IN, MY HARDY LIFE**

Weave in, weave in, my hardy life,  
Weave yet a soldier strong and full for great campaigns to come,  
Weave in red blood, weave sinews in like ropes, the senses, sight weave  
in,  
Weave lasting sure, weave day and night the weft, the warp, incessant  
weave, tire not  
(We know not what the use O life, nor know the aim, the end, nor really  
aught we know,  
But know the work, the need goes on and shall go on, the death-  
envelop'd march of peace as well as war goes on),  
For great campaigns of peace the same the wiry threads to weave, We  
know not why or what, yet weave, forever weave.

## HOW SOLEMN AS ONE BY ONE

(Washington City, 1865)

How solemn as one by one,  
As the ranks returning worn and sweaty, as the men file by where I  
stand,  
As the faces the masks appear, as I glance at the faces studying the  
masks  
(As I glance upward out of this page studying you, dear friend, whoever  
you are),  
How solemn the thought of my whispering soul to each in the ranks,  
and to you!  
I see behind each mask that wonder a kindred soul,  
O the bullet could never kill what you really are, dear friend,  
Nor the bayonet stab what you really are;  
The soul! yourself I see, great as any, good as the best,  
Waiting secure and content, which the bullet could never kill,  
Nor the bayonet stab O friend.

## **SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE**

**(Washington City, 1865)**

Spirit whose work is done—spirit of dreadful hours!  
Ere departing fade from my eyes your forests of bayonets;  
Spirit of gloomiest fears and doubts (yet onward ever unfaltering  
pressing),  
Spirit of many a solemn day and many a savage scene—electric spirit,  
That with muttering voice through the war now closed, like a tireless  
phantom flitted,  
Rousing the land with breath of flame, while you beat and beat the  
drum,  
Now as the sound of the drum, hollow and harsh to the last, reverberates  
round me,  
As your ranks, your immortal ranks, return, return from the battles,  
As the muskets of the young men yet lean over their shoulders,  
As I look on the bayonets bristling over their shoulders,  
As those slanted bayonets, whole forests of them appearing in the  
distance, approach and pass on, returning homeward,  
Moving with steady motion, swaying to and fro to the right and left,  
Evenly, lightly rising and falling while the steps keep time;  
Spirit of hours I knew, all hectic red one day, but pale as death next day,  
Touch my mouth ere you depart, press my lips close,  
Leave me your pulses of rage—bequeath them to me—fill me with  
currents convulsive,  
Let them scorch and blister out of my chants when you are gone,  
Let them identify you to the future in these songs.

## THE RETURN OF THE HEROES

### 1

For the lands and for these passionate days and for myself,  
Now I awhile retire to thee O soil of autumn fields,  
Reclining on thy breast, giving myself to thee,  
Answering the pulses of thy sane and equable heart,  
Tuning a verse for thee.

O earth that hast no voice, confide to me a voice,  
O harvest of my lands—O boundless summer growths,  
O lavish brown parturient earth—O infinite teeming womb,  
A song to narrate thee.

### 2

Ever upon this stage,  
Is acted God's calm annual drama,  
Gorgeous processions, songs of birds,  
Sunrise that fullest feeds and freshens most the soul,  
The heaving sea, the waves upon the shore, the musical, strong waves,  
The woods, the stalwart trees, the slender, tapering trees,  
The liliput countless armies of the grass,  
The heat, the showers, the measureless pasturages,  
The scenery of the snows, the winds' free orchestra,  
The stretching light-hung roof of clouds, the clear cerulean and the  
silvery fringes,  
The high-dilating stars, the placid beckoning stars,  
The moving flocks and herds, the plains and emerald meadows,  
The shows of all the varied lands and all the growths and products.

### 3

Fecund America—to-day,  
Thou art all over set in births and joys!  
Thou groan'st with riches, thy wealth clothes thee as a swathing  
garment,  
Thou laughest loud with ache of great possessions,  
A myriad-twining life like interlacing vines binds all thy vast demesne,  
As some huge ship freighted to water's edge thou ridest into port,

As rain falls from the heaven and vapours rise from the earth, so have  
the precious values fallen upon thee and risen out of thee;  
Thou envy of the globe! thou miracle!  
Thou, bathed, choked, swimming in plenty,  
Thou lucky Mistress of the tranquil barns,  
Thou Prairie Dame that sittest in the middle and lookest out upon thy  
world, and lookest East and lookest West,

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