

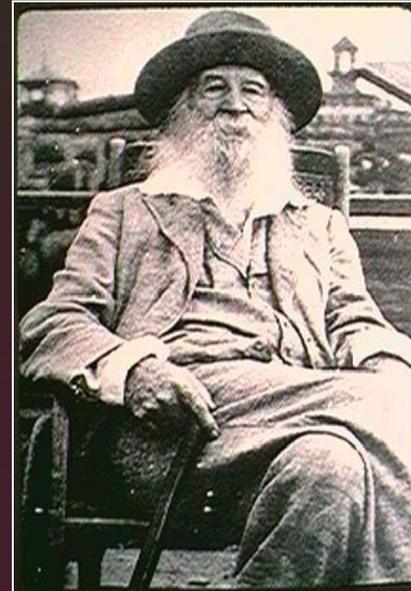


United States History and Literature
11th grade

“WHITMAN, POET OF DEATH”

*The Civil War Poetry
of Walt Whitman*

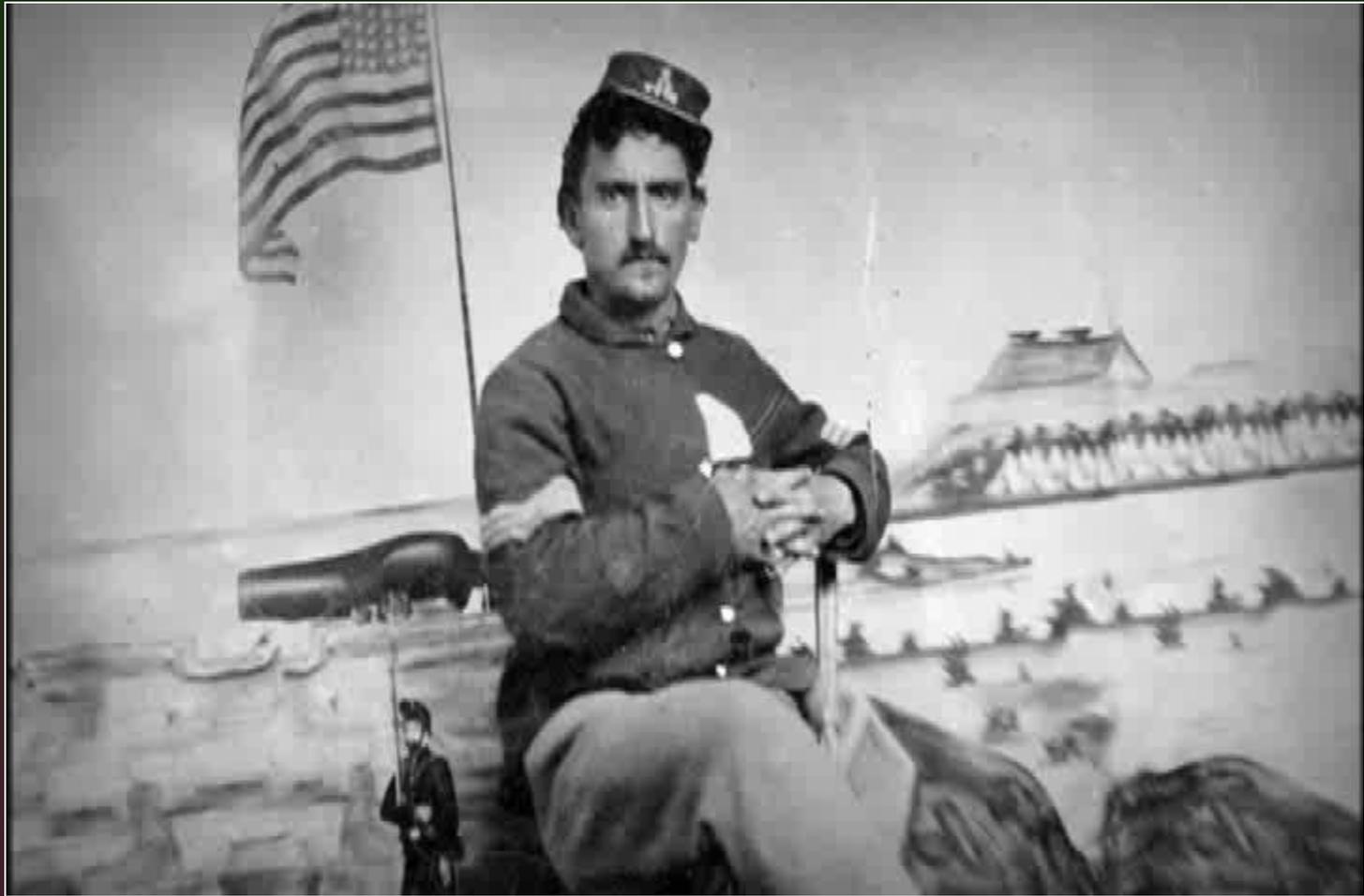
By Mr. Richard Geib



Walt Whitman: War Poet



Walt Whitman: War Poet



“Eighteen Sixty-One”

by Walt Whitman

Arm'd year -- year of the struggle,
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year,
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on your
 shoulder,
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at your side
As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the
 continent,
Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great cities,
Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you as one of the workmen, the dwellers in Manhattan,
Or with large steps crossing prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,
Rapidly crossing the West with springly gait and descending the Alleghanies,
Or down the great lakes or in Pennsylvania, or on deck along the Ohio river,
Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at Chattanooga on the
 mountaintop,
Saw I your gait and saw I your limbs clothed in blue, bearing weapons, robust year,
Heard your determined voice launch'd forth again and again,
Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd cannon,
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

“Cavalry Crossing a Ford”

by Walt Whitman

**A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun -- hark to the musical clank,
Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent rest on
the saddles,
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford -- while,
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
The guidon flags flutter gaily in the wind.**

“Bivouac on a Mountain Side”

by Walt Whitman

**I see before me now a traveling army halting,
Before a fertile valley spread, with barns and the orchards of summer,
Behind, the terraced sides of a mountain, abrupt, in places rising high,
Broken, with rocks, with clinging cedars, with tall shapes dingily seen,
The numerous camp-fires scatter'd near and far, some away up on the mountain,
The shadowy forms of men and horses, looming, large-sized, flickering,
And over all the sky -- the sky! Far, far out of reach, studded, breaking out,
the eternal stars.**

“An Army Corps on the March”

by Walt Whitman

**With its cloud of skirmishers in advance,
With now the sound of a single shot snapping like a whip, and now an irregular
volley,
The swarming ranks press on and on, the defense brigades press on,
Glittering dimly, toiling under the sun -- the dust-cover'd men,
In columns rise and fall to the undulations of the ground,
With artillery interspers'd -- the wheels rumble, the horses sweat,
As the army corps advances.**

“By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame”

by Walt Whitman

**By the bivouac’s fitful flame,
A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow -- but first I note,
The tents of the sleeping army, the fields’ and woods’ dim outline,
The darkness lit by spots of kindled fire, the silence,
Like a phantom far or near an occasional figure moving,
The shrubs and trees, (as I lift my eyes they seem to be stealthfully watching me,)
While wind in procession thoughts, O tender and wondrous thoughts,
Of life and death, of home and the past and loved, and of those that are far away;
A solemn and sad procession there as I sit on the ground,
By the bivouac’s fitful flame.**

“I Saw Old General at Bay”

by Walt Whitman

I saw old General at bay,
(Old as he was, his gray eyes yet shone out in battle like stars,)
His small force was not completely hemm'd in, his works,
He call'd for volunteers to run the enemy's line, a desperate emergency,
I saw a hundred and more step forth from the ranks, but two or three were selected,
I saw them receive their orders aside, they listen'd with care, the adjutant was very
grave,
I saw them depart with cheerfulness, freely risking their lives.

Walt Whitman, War Poet



"War On the Body"

“How Solemn As One by One”

by Walt Whitman

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.

“Adieu to a Soldier”

by Walt Whitman

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 maneuver,
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.

“Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night”

by Walt Whitman

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night:

When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your drear eyes return'd with a look I shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you lay on the ground,
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle,
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my way,
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body son of responding
 kisses, (never again on earth responding,)

Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew the moderate night-wind,
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battlefield spreading,
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I gazed,
Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning my chin in your hands,
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you dearest comrade - not a tear,
 not a word

Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my soldier,
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole,
Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your death,
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet again,)
Till at last lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd,
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over his head and carefully under his feet.
And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug
grave I deposited
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and the battlefield dim,
Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten'd,
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

“To One Shortly To Die”

by Walt Whitman

**FROM all the rest I single out you, having a message for you:
You are to die -- let others tell you what they please, I cannot prevaricate,
I am exact and merciless, but I love you -- there is no escape for you.**

**Softly I lay my right hand upon you, you just feel it,
I do not argue, I bend my head close, and half envelope it,
I sit quietly by, I remain faithful,
I am more than nurse, more than parent or neighbor,
I absolve you from all except yourself spiritual bodily, that is
eternal, you yourself will surely escape,
The corpse you will leave will be but excrementitious.**

**The sun bursts through in unlooked-for directions,
Strong thoughts fill you, and confidence, you smile,
You forget you are sick, as I forget you are sick,
You do not see the medicines, you do not mind the weeping
friends, I am with you,
I exclude others from you, there is nothing to be commiserated,
I do not commiserate, I congratulate you.**

“The Wound Dresser” (I.)

by Walt Whitman

I.

**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 the 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?**

“The Wound Dresser” (II.)

by Walt Whitman

II.

**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 of the hardship, 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
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 row 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 could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you.

“The Wound Dresser” (III.)

by Walt Whitman

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.)

“The Wound Dresser” (IV.)

by Walt Whitman

IV.

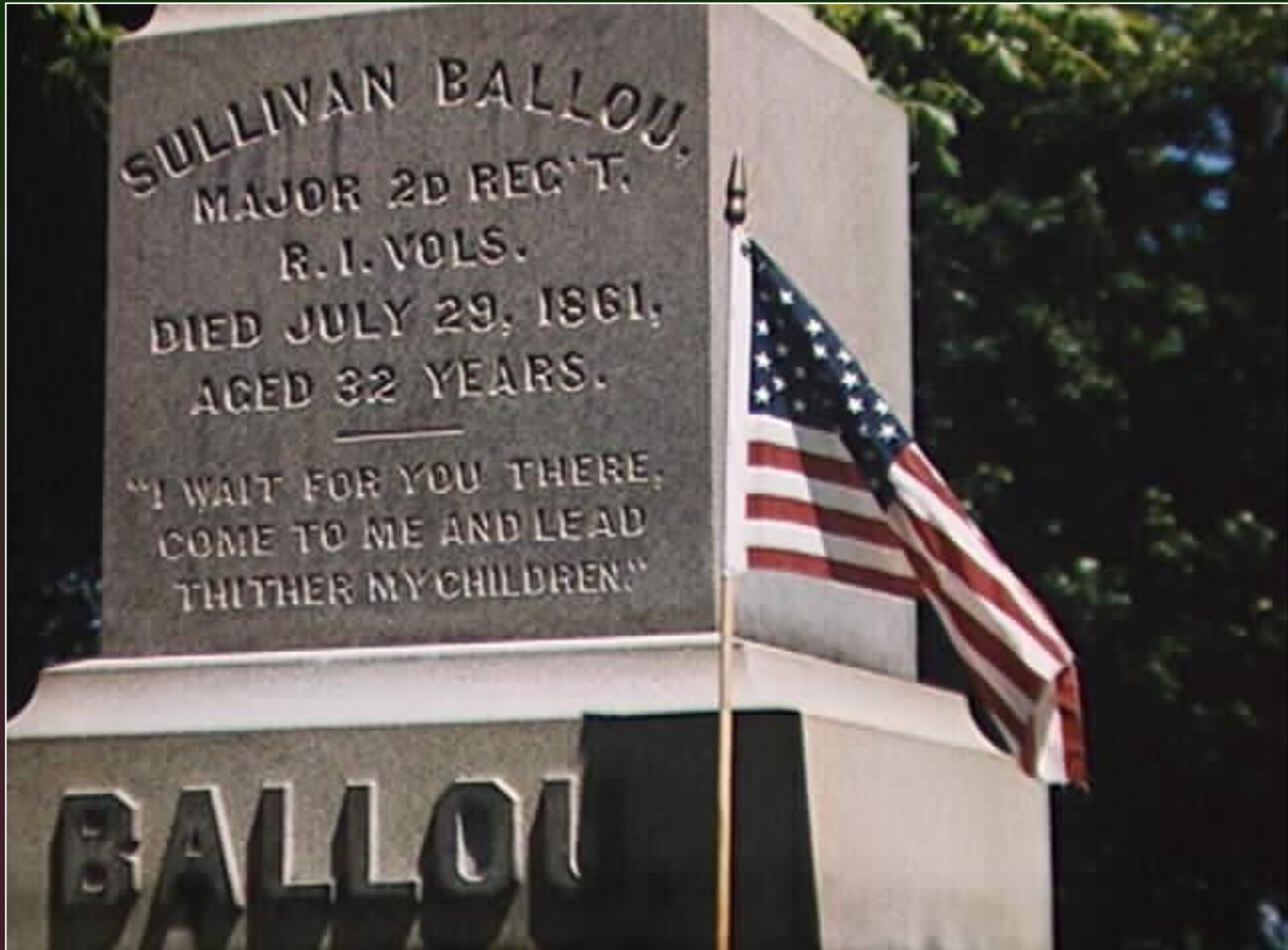
Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
Many a soldier's loving arms about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

Walt Whitman, War Poet



"Drum Taps"

Major Sullivan Ballou



SULLIVAN BALLOU,
MAJOR 2D REG'T,
R. I. VOLS.
DIED JULY 29, 1861,
AGED 32 YEARS.

"I WAIT FOR YOU THERE,
COME TO ME AND LEAD
THITHER MY CHILDREN."

BALLOU