

## **Investigate this Document Further#1: Tourgee’s Civil War poem to his wife: “The Wounded Soldier to His Bride”**

### **Background:**

Throughout history, poetry has been a literary vehicle for expressing and sharing emotions and experiences of those caught up in armed conflicts. From the ancient Hindu epic poems of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, to contemporary war poems coming from those immersed in conflicts around the globe, the horror and heroism of war have always played a significant role in defining individual and national moods in war and peace.

Students should explore war poems in their historical context to help them better understand and identify the defining themes in war poems as well as the point of view of the poet in the context of the conflict. In this activity students can use poems to try to gain a better understanding of the people involved directly in a war, those left behind at home, the victims of war, the impact of changing technologies, and of the war itself.

### **Lesson objectives:**

Give students opportunities to learn about types of literature related to the theme of war, with poetry as one example;

Give students opportunities to learn about poetical devices using war poems as a thematic focus;

Give students opportunities to learn about primary and secondary sources that help construct an understanding of war

Give students opportunities to learn about wars in history from multiple perspectives

### **Questions for Investigation:**

What would be important to know about Albion Tourgee in order to gain a good understanding of why he wrote this poem and the perspective he writes from?

What are some common poetic devices used in this poem, and how are they used to present the author’s point of view?

Does the poem present images or use terms to describe a “good soldier?” Do we see the same kind of imagery used in other war poems?

How does Tourgee’s poem compare to other reports or documents created at the time during which he wrote this poem (see: the Tullahoma or Middle Tennessee Campaign as part of the Battle of Chickamauga: <http://www.artcirclelibrary.info/Reference/civilwar/1863-07.pdf>)

*Examples:* Battle reports (July 1, 1863, p. 3; July 2, 1863, p. 9), letters from soldiers (July 1, 1863, Frank Guernsey to Fannie, p. 5) and newspaper articles (July 2, 1863, *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, p. 17)

Compare Tourgee's poem to that of Archibald Macleish, *The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak* (written ca 1948, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mff.004013>) and discuss how soldiers might feel before joining a conflict and how they might feel after the conflict.

**Sources:**

The Literature of War (lesson): <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/17109>

Charles Bernstein's "Poem Profiler": [http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Bernstein-Charles\\_Poem-Profiler.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Bernstein-Charles_Poem-Profiler.html)

Modern War Poetry and Poems of the First World War: <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/>

Purdue Online Writing Lab: Writing About Poetry: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/615/1/>

PBS Classroom Activity from "The Civil War" series: Walt Whitman, Patriot Poet: [http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson\\_whitman.html](http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/lesson_whitman.html)

Tennessee Civil War Sourcebook: <http://www.artcirclelibrary.info/Reference/civilwar/1863-07.pdf>

Library of Congress, "Civil War Song Sheets" at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amsshtml/amsshhome.html>

\* From a search of "war poems" at Library of Congress Digital Collections site

Written July 5th, 1863 on the field where Gen. Negley's Division encountered the Rebel Cavalry under Col. Webb, near Allisona Tenn.

THE WOUNDED SOLDIER TO HIS BRIDE

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I loved thee first, my Darling,  
When the heart of Youth was warm,  
And each happy hour endowed thee,  
With some new and sweeter charm;  
And the moments floated o'er me,  
As I watched Love's dawning beam,  
And thy whispered love-words thrilled me,  
Like the music of a dream.

Then, the days seemed winged angels,  
Sent to bring me only joy,  
And the nights were gems of Eden,  
Without shadow of alloy;  
For the cares of Life reflected,--  
But the sunlight of thy love,  
And the goodness of the Father,  
Who e'er watcheth from above.

And the years almost unheeded,  
Passed me in their mystic flight;  
For to each thy dear love ~~xxxxxxx~~ added,  
Some before unknown delight;  
Till I stood on Manhood's threshold,  
Ready for the toils of life,  
Waiting for the blissful moment,  
When my lips should whisper, "Wife!"

Then there came a <sup>dreadful</sup> ~~awful~~ shadow,  
Clouding all our peaceful land:  
One embrace! Thy white lips whispered,  
"Go! our country needs thy hand!"  
O'er us swept the battle-tempest!  
Stricken by its might, I cried,  
In my anguish to the Father,  
"Would, oh, would that I had died!"

And then came thy love, my darling,  
With its tender, holy spell,  
And it saved me from the shadow,  
That upon my spirit fell.



(2)

We were wedded when Wars wild tumult,  
Filled each breast with dire alarms.  
Few the moments that I lingered,  
Fetter'd by thy thy clinging arms,  
For a soldier's duty called me,  
To the field of toil and strife,  
And thy patriot-love was stronger,  
Than the yearnings of the wife.

Now, upon the field of conflict,  
While the light of setting day,  
Casts its farewell glances faintly,  
O'er the victims of the fray,--  
Lighting eyes which seem appealing,  
To the darkening sky in vain,  
For the dawning which shall give them,  
Back the light of life again;--

Here beside War's fearful altar,  
Where his sacrifices bleed,  
I would thank thee for the memories,  
Which my fainting spirit feed;  
For I love thee better, Darling,  
Than when peaceful Summer's night,  
And the flaming meteor saw me, ~~see me~~,  
Pledge my youthful lover-plight."

What is this? I am not fainting!  
Has the darkness come so quick?  
And my brain is growing dizzy!  
And the air is getting thick!  
But he said there was no danger,--  
That the wound was not severe,  
That he'd fix the bandage tightly,  
And would soon again be here!

Yet one look--ere coming darkness,  
Hides the face I love so well,  
Yes! Thou still art smiling on me!  
Kiss me!--Good night--Isabel!

And the surgeon found him sleeping  
Calmly on the bloody field,  
Pressing still the senseless picture,  
Unto lips which Death had sealed.