CHAPTER III

"Drum-Taps"—A Critical study of Poems

"Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart"—W.W. (p.245)

Whitman's life divides naturally into three distinct segments, and separating these segments are events that affected him profoundly. The event that affected him most profoundly is the Civil War, national crisis in which Whitman became personally entangled.

The two years 1861 and 1875, crisis years for the nation and the poet, divide Whitman's life into three separate parts. These three periods have their own distinct literary activity; the first three editions of LOG (1855, 1856, 1860) appeared in the first; the next two editions (1867, 1871-72) appeared in the second, and some four editions (1876, 1881, 1889, 1891-92) appeared in the last. The significant point, however, is that these three periods mark distinctive steps in the growth of Leaves of Grass. The 1860 edition represented the culmination of the first flush of poetic activity.†
There is abundant evidence that Whitman considered the 1860 edition as final and did not plan extensive revisions. A second burst of creative activity was brought about by the Civil War and culminated in the publication of *Drum-Taps* in 1865. It was not until the edition of 1871-72 that *Drum-Taps*, having appeared merely as an annex in 1867 edition, was integrated into the structure of *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman's impulse to publish the "Drum-Taps" cluster as separate volume and his hesitancy in integrating this cluster into the master volume suggests that he himself was quite aware that it had a unity of its own that would be retained even after its inclusion within the framework of *Leaves of Grass*.

"Drum-Taps" deals directly with the Civil War as a national crisis. Threading its way through the section and tightening the relationship of the poems is the title sound image, 'drum taps.' The image is introduced in the opening poem:

> First 0 songs for a prelude,  
> lightly strike on the stretch'd lymanum  
> pride and joy in my city--(p.222).  

This light, almost delicate, tapping gives way to the more strident alarm--sounding in "Beat! Beat! Drum!"
This penetrating beat is the confident call to arms. As the war progresses and the horrors of war are impressed on the shocked consciousness of the poet, the proud call to arms is abandoned, and in its place appears the slow sad dirge (in "Dirge for Two Veterans"):

I hear the great drums pounding, and the small drums steady whirring, And every blow of the great convulsive drum, Strikes me through and through (p. 249).

Near the end of "Drum-Taps," the image is given its final treatment in "Spirit whose work is Done":

Rousing the land with breath of flame, while you (the spirit) beat and beat the drum, Now as the sound of the drum, hollow and harsh to the last, reverberates round me, As you ranks, your immortal ranks, return, return from the battles (p. 256).

This "hollow and harsh" sound of the drum is a far cry from the light striking of the "stretch'd tympanum" of the opening poem, and the feeling of almost provincial pride in one's city has matured into a pervading conciliatory feeling that embraces the land of the enemy. This important progression in the emotional response to the war embodied in the dominant image provides the chief dramatic development in the poems and makes them an integral unit.
As almost everywhere in Whitman's poetry, the heroic is seen through the eyes of a lyric poet. Most of the poems of this section carry a sensitive lyricism about them. For instance, the inscription on the tomb of the soldier who has been buried somewhere in the woods of Virginia: "Bold, cautious, true and my loving comrade" (p. 243) has an intense lyrical cry.

It will not be out of place here to attempt a critical study of all the 43 poems of "Drum Taps".
"I have nourished the wounded and soothed many a dying soldier, and at intervals, waiting in the midst of camp composed these songs"—W.W. (p. 253)

1. "First 0 Songs for a Prelude" (p. 222)

The first poem of "Drum Taps" is an introductory poem which introduces the title sound image of the section, drum-taps.

First 0 songs for a prelude
Lightly strike on the strech'd tympanum pride
and joy in my city (p. 222)

In the first stanza the poet refers to the change that has overcome in his native city, his "own ... peerl as" Manhattan. He is proud of his city and of the change that has occurred due to the war. He goes on to describe, "how Manhattan drum-taps led." To preserve the national spirit in the hour of crisis, the poet must prelude his Manhattan to emerge "truer than steel," and by throwing off the costume of peace with indifferent hand" (p. 222) change his "Soft-opera music" and march forth to "Drum-taps" to save the motherland from the clutches of the enemy.

The whole city which had only seen glamorous military parades and no actual war is now enveloped
in the hum-drums of the war. Suddenly "at the dead of night" the whole city had been struck with a "shock electric" and all the preparations of the war started.

To the drum-taps prompt
The young men falling in and arming (p.223)

People from all walks of life: the mechanics, lawyers, judges, drivers, salesmen, boss, bookkeepers, porters, all leave 'their jobs' and gather in squads "everywhere by common consent and arm." The young and the old come to the call of the drums with equal rigour. The poet is in love with this teeming army of men from all walks of life. The mother gives her son a parting kiss but "yet not a word does she speak to detain him" (p.223) from going to war.

The streets of the city are full of enthusiastic crowds, cheering their favourites. The artillery also forms the part of the huge procession. It is here in the whole poem that we see a streak of the wrong side of war—of death and destruction.

(Silent cannons, soon to cease your silence,
Soon unlimbered to begin the red business.)
(p.223)
The whole city is arming and is prepared to greet the
"red business" of war. Even the women volunteer for
nurses.

An epic poet of modern America, Whitman glamorises
war by exalting it as something great—something
worth achieving.

It's O for manly life in the camp (p. 224).

In fact Whitman seems pleased at the change in the
behaviour of his own Manhattan—"from mere courtesies
to real, power and wadding." And he also feels that
the city's mate Manhattan, "Old matron of this proud,
friendly turbulent city," too, is happy and smiling at
this change.

Does without saying that in the awakening of the
city of Manhattan in the crisis of war, Whitman
visualizes the awakening of North America in particular
and of American Nation as a whole.

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2. "Eighteen Sixty One" (p. 224)

In "Eighteen Sixty One," Whitman personifies the
year 1861 as a patriotic American soldier, "a strong
man erect" in arms "clad in blue clothes, advancing
carrying a rifle" on his "shoulder," signifying a concern of an average American for the immediate crisis symbolized by the newly started Civil War.

"Eighteen Sixty-one," in the words of Maurice Mendelson is one of the most remarkable of Whitman's wartime works. The first year of the war, that "hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year," stands before us as "a strong man erect." It is the armed year--year of a struggle, a fit subject for epic treatment, and seeks no entertainment or pleasure of non-epical "sentimental love verses." The year 1861 has "sunburnt face and hands." Its masculine voice "suddenly sang by the mouth of the round lipped cannon."

Eighteen Sixty one is one of the dwellers in Manhattan. He is a working man, "clothed in blue, bearing weapons--" a soldier in the Northern army. He is advancing with large steps towards South, crossing Illinois, Alleghanies, and Ohio river.

The poet is fully engrossed in the rhythm of the march of 1861 and that of the whole army. The poet who always avoided" dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses" now denounces even more sharply the "lisping" of "some [sentimental] pale poet-ling." (p.224)
In this poem Whitman motivates himself as "a strong man erect" poet who is ready with his "determined voice" to launch forth the epic theme of war in his poetry. If the first poem was a prelude for the American masses, this poem is a poetic prelude for the war poetry of Whitman.

3. Beat I Beat I Drums I (p.225)

The strong man poet who had motivated himself to celebrate the theme of war in "Eighteen sixty one," in the next poem "Beat I Beat I Drums I" now actually launches on his mission.

The drums and the bugles are calling the farmers and city dwellers to leave their peaceful occupations. The poet urges the drums and bugles to beat and blow louder than ever. Their noise should burst like "a ruthless force," and scatter the congregation in the Church. He suggests that the noise should disturb the scholar, the farmer, and the bride groom alike.

So loudly and quickly should the drums and bugles beat and blow that all the din of the city should be drowned in their noise. No one should be heard talking or singing. Neither should anyone dare to sleep in this noise, nor the lawyers attempt to
"rise in the court to state his case before the judge." (p.225)

The war is on. Time does not permit "parley" and "expostulation."

Mind not the timid-mind not the weeper or prayer(p.225). The poet asks the "terrible drums" to thump so strongly and the bugles to blow so loudly that neither the child's voice nor the mother's entreaties be heard. The noise should be such that even the dead, should wake up and walk away instead of waiting for the hearses, to the beat of the drums.

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4. "From Paumanok starting I fly like a Bird" (pp.225-226)

The poet wishes to see America one and united. From the North, like a bird, he flies down to South seeing the United America fleet away under it. He starts his journey from Paumanok:

From Paumanok starting I fly like a bird (p.225) The poet wishes to "sing the idea of all"--that is the song of democracy. Starting from North he passes from each of the states, first singing their individual songs and after being accepted everywhere he wishes to sing the song of United States of America.
Whitman feels that if need be, he can even sing to the "Tap of the War drum" (p. 226). He wants the song of democracy—the idea of all to reign supreme. He wishes to see America "One and inseparable."

In his desire that all states should sing their individual songs first and then participate in the national chorus of war, Whitman indirectly hints at the idea of unity in diversity as implied by the American Constitution wherein each state with its independent sovereignty is required to strengthen the Union.

5. "Song of the Banner at Day Break" (pp. 226-31)

There are three characters in the poem—the father, the child, and the poet, each representing a different attitude to life during the war. The father stands for materialism and as such he does not want the child to look at the banner; on the contrary he wants him to concentrate on material things like the "dazzling things in the houses" and "the vehicles preparing to crawl along the streets with goods" in them. The poet stands for an attitude which is something between materialism and idealism; initially he remains undecided between the attitude of the father and that of the
child but he learns a lesson from the child's attitude and prepares himself for 'idealism' symbolized by the banner and the pennant in the event of 'reality' of war.

In this poem the poet has presented a dialogue between a father and his son. The father and the son present the two aspects of the poet's own mind. The poem contains the romantic image of a "Child" who represents humanity, a "Child" for whom ideals are superior to material interests. This "Child" does not care for money. Above all he loves "the banner"—the symbol of the struggle for exalted aims: "That pennant I would be and must be." (p.229). The child sees the banner and pennant flapping and dancing "in the breeze". He is fascinated by the movement of the pennant. The banner seems to say something to him. The Child asks the father about the meaning of those movements of the banner and the pennant. The father though understanding the meaning tries to direct the child's attention to other things.

The poet observes that the banner is trying to teach the child brave lessons of sacrifice and death. The banner shows to the child a new world—
a world of democracy—a world of people's rule which can be gained only through sacrifice of life and worldly wealth. The father on the other hand tries to allure the child by showing worldly gains. He shows this child the "Dazzling things in the houses and the money shops". The banner and pennant asks—the child to leave everything and join the army procession.

The poet also sees that they are not mere "strips of cloth" but they represent the "jubilant shouts of million of men." The pennant "shaped like a sword" runs swiftly up indicating war and defiance. The broad, blue, starry banner indicates peace over all the sea and land.

The banner and the pennant enclose much larger area than mere worldly riches, seas and rivers, fields and the crops and the fruits, "the three or four millions of square miles, the forty millions of people and much more the banner and pennant stand for."

The child now fully attracted towards the banner and pennant wants to be aloft like them. The father has his own fears. For him to be like that pennant would be too fearful and it would be to gain nothing but risk and defy everything (worldly gains).
The poet is overwhelmed by what the banner and pennant stand for. For the banner not money is so precious, neither the farm produce not the material things. Even if the pennant up there in the mind represents only an idea—an idea of freedom and democracy—still it is more than enough for the poet. The poet above everything, wants to gain, to possess that idea.

6. "Rise 0 Days from Your Fathomless Deep"(p.231-33)

The poem is a call to Democracy by the poet. This poem has three sections: In the first section the poet recalls the peaceful days before the war when he roamed about to satisfy the hunger of his soul. During that period the poet was in contact with nature, seeing and examining it closely. He "travel'd the prairies over and slept on their breast." In fact he "devour'd what the earth gave him." (p.231). He devoured all and satisfied his soul and felt contented, with a result that he had all the knowledge of what the "night of globe" was.

The second section has the germs of war inside it. The soul now fully prepared to face anything, is ready
"to receive what the earth and the sea [of the first section] never gave us." The chaos and the confusion of war overpowers the American continent. And in this confusion the poet sees "Democracy [who] with desperate vengeful post strides on." Torrents of men seem to pour in from the North West America to receive Democracy with open arms. They even take up arms to preserve democracy and abolish the slave system.

In the third section the poet welcomes the democratic spirit that emerges victorious. Whitman asks democracy to "strike with Vengeful stroke." The days of peace, having been restored, should now attain newer heights. The soul of the poet, well prepared by the nature, "absorbs ... immortal strong nutrient." But he also admits that during the days when he lived in the lap of the nature, a doubt always troubled him. No doubt, he relished what nature gave him but he never felt fully satisfied. But now the poet is free from all such doubts, and says:

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\begin{align*}
\ldots & \ldots & \text{I am fully satisfied, I am glutted} \\
\ldots & \ldots & \text{I have lived to be hold man burst forth} \\
& \text{and warlike America rises,} \\
& \text{Hence I will seek no more the food of the} \\
& \text{northern solitary wilds,} \\
& \text{no more the mountains rove or sail the} \\
& \text{stormy sea. (p.233)}
\end{align*}
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Thus the first section of the poem deals with the poet's early experiences in the midst of nature; the second section hints at 'something' (war) which his early experiences failed to give him. Now that, with the reality of the Civil War, a new theme has been added to his earlier experiences, in the third section he expresses his satisfaction at the fulness of his experience.

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7. "Virginia--The West" (p. 233)

In this poem, Whitman tries to present picture of the conflict between the North and the South America. The Southerner landlord, "the noble sire fallen on evil days," has risen up, with his "insane knife" drawn, to stab "the mother of All," including his own. He has forgotten old memories of his mother, her love, and faith.

On the other hand is the image of the noble son--the northern side—who is nimbly trying to find his way to save mother America from the horrible clutches of this terrible giant. This son is advancing steadily "cut of the land of prairies "crossing Ohio's waters and
Indianas." The son is dressed in blue—the dress of the American army—and is carrying trusty rifles on his shoulders. The son is all set to rescue the "Mother of All" from this giant who is bent on destroying her.

Lastly, the poet sees the "Mother of All" addressing this stalwart giant. She speaking with a calm voice, asks him the reason for his antagonism. She asks this rebellious son of hers the reason for being after her life and the reason for rising against her in such an angry mood. She reminds him of his duty and the time when he always stood up to defend her. She also reminds him that it was he who provided her with Washington and should now be ready to provide her new Democratic states.

The pictorial quality of this poem is noteworthy.

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8. "City of Ships" (p.233)

Whitman is invoking his native Manhattan in this poem. He addresses it as "city of ships." During peace, the poet had enjoyed the scenic beauty of the land and now he describes the fierce and black ships
of Manhattan. There are "beautiful sharp--bow'd stern-ships and sail-ships." Manhattan is not only a place which has a variety of ships but Manhattan also has a variety of people. People from all parts of the world, belonging to different races are here and even the land of Manhattan has assumed different shapes--there are mountains, plateaus, plains and sea-shores; but still they all belong to Manhattan.

But most of all it is a city of sea. It is a city of "hurried and glittering tides." The foam of the sea forms different patterns as the tides rush and recede. Manhattan has beautiful buildings of marble and iron. The poet describes the city as proud, passionate, mad, and extravagant, and asks the city to rise up not for peace alone but also for war. Indeed, the poet asks the city now to be war--like and fearless, submitting to no other models than its own.

The poet asks the city to become one with him. He had accepted all that this city gave him--be it good or bad. And now the poet expects the city to become what he wants. The poet never rejected any
of the proposals, set up by the city. Never questioning good or bad, he has loved each and everything belonging to the city. He chants and celebrates all that belongs to the city. During peace he was for peace but now he is for the drum of war. As he says:

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 (p. 234)

9. "The Centenarian's Story" (pp. 234-38)

With America's victory in the 1776 war of Independence and consequently with the declaration of Independence in 1776, a new democratic nation was born. Now eighty five years later America is in for another war—the Civil-war. The young poet of "Drum-Taps," Whitman, does not find any difference between the old war and the new war.

The poem "The Centenarian's Story," presents a dialogue between an old Revolutionary, a man of "hundred and extra years" and a young volunteer of 1861-62. This young soldier, in view of asking the
old man his experience of the war of Independence (1776), takes the centenarian to a battle-field
where an army drill is taking place. On hearing
the beat of the drill-drums the old man becomes
agitated. The young volunteer asks:

Why what comes over you now old man?
Why do you tremble and clutch my hand
so convulsively? (p. 234)

The old centenarian, who is himself a symbol of
American democracy and who has seen all that has
happened in the eighty five years after independence,
tells the young soldier of the war that he himself
took part in eighty-five years ago, on "this same
ground" and in this "time in summer". The old man
(America) recollects the past as he says: "I remember
all, I remember the Declaration." He remembers also
how in 1776, English troops arrived in large numbers
as "a veteran force furnished with good artillery."
(p. 235).

The centenarian then narrates one particular incident
which poignantly stresses the death and destruction
connected with the war. He tells of a merciless
slaughter, of the "brigade of the youngest men, two
thousand strong," by the enemy troops. Their general
could only wring his hands in anguish for the "dared
not trust the chances of a pitched battle" (p. 236).
Tired and defeated, the General ordered a retreat. Everyone was filled with gloom and many thought of capitulation. But the centenarian could see "something different from capitulation" in the General.

As the centenarian ends his story, the poet commentator, under the Terminus of the poem, steps in to see that past and present get blended in the common theme of war. It is the 'war' that connects past and present, and thus we can see that the bard of modern America, Whitman highlights the epic theme of war.

"The Centenarian's Story" has a miraculously inspiring effect on the agonised eagle in Whitman to take a "terminus" and to muster up his spirits, to ascend anew as he says:

Though, the centenarian's story ends,
The two, the past and present, have interchanged,
I myself as connector, as chansonnier of a great future, am new speaking (p.238)

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10. "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" (p.238).

In "Cavalry Crossing the Ford" Whitman paints a beautiful picture of a cavalry crossing the ford of a river. It is a purely picturesque poem in which
the poet describes the view of an cavalry regiment crossing the ford.

The cavalry is passing through a river. The soldiers form a very long line, which winds itself between green trees. Their weapons flash in the sun and the poet make us listen to the "musical clank" of the muskets.

The river appears as if it were made of silver and the horses of the cavalry stop to drink the silvery water. The poet asks the reader to behold the "brown-faced men" wherein each group and each person forms a different picture. Some soldiers have crossed the river already while others are just entering the ford. The beautiful flag of the regiment, which is scarlet, blue, and white, gaily flutters in the wind.

The picture of the cavalry crossing the ford displaying swords and other weapons of the soldiers reminds us of several such scenes of epic poems wherein horses are shown marching, displaying their weapons to charge on their enemy. Whereas on the one hand this poem makes us abreast with Whitman's pictorial quality, at the same time it serves the requirement of a modern epic as Leaves of Grass decidedly is.
12. "An Army Corps on the March" (p.239)

"An Army Corps on the March" forms a simple narrative describing the passing of the army corps.

The dust covered soldiers are marching on, "toiling under the sun." Like a swarm of bees the soldiers walk on clinging to their guns and rifles. Now and then a single shot can be heard to organise the soldiers. Artillery corps also accompany with tanks and guns being carried on carriages. The low rumble of the wheels can also be heard. The horses sweat as a result of the hard work, and, one after another, the regiments pass on. The poem has excellent pictorial quality and depicts excellently the war time activity of soldiers at arms, and, is ample proof of Whitman's acumen of painting pictures.

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13. "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame" (p.239)

The poet sets out to describe the procession of thoughts that winds through a soldier's mind. In an army encampment at night a sentry is sitting on guard. He watches the outline of army tents and the
silhouette of an occasional person moving across seems us if some phantom is walking through. The trees and the shrubs of the surrounding woods and the fields seem to be keeping a stealthy watch over the night guard. Here nature is a silent spectator of the human activity. Various thoughts—a procession runs through the mind of the guard, "Tender and wondrous thoughts/Of life and death, of home and the past and loved, and of those that are far away." These thoughts form a solemn and slow procession. In the still of the night all the past memories seem to become alive in the mind of the poet (guard) as he sits on the ground "by the bivouac's fitful flame."

14. "Come up from the Fields Father" (p. 239)

The poem "Come up from the Fields Father" tells us of a youthful farmer called Pete who gave his life to ensure the North's victory. Just a few words demonstrate the heroism of the dying youth—to the very end he hides from his mother the hopelessness of his position.

The bitter sadness of the occurrence is conveyed mainly through the image of Pete's inconsolable mother. With the agony of a son, the poet exclaims:
Ah now the single figure to me,  
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all  
its cities and farms,  
Sicily white in the face and dull in the head,  
very faint,  
By the jamb of a door leans...  
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.  
(p.240-41).

The poem begins with a daughter's call to her father  
to "come up from the fields" and listen to the letter  
that has been just delivered. His son, the only son,  
had left all the golden riches of the farms and joined  
the army. At the time, when the letter arrives it is  
autumn and the orchards are laden with fruit. The sky  
is calm and transparent after the rain and below also  
all is calm.

"The farm prospers well." Still the son had joined  
the army. The mother is always worried about her only  
son who is away in the battle field. The daughter  
summons her father and mother before reading out the  
letter. The mother is anxious and apprehends some bad  
news. She does not wait to "Smooth her hair nor adjust  
her cap."

She looks at the letter and is worried at not seeing  
her son's handwriting. Still the letter is signed in
her Pete's name. All Ohio Swims before her eyes and black shadows form before her. Faintly she hears about her son being shot in the breast.

The poet says that the "sickly white face" of the mother's fills the whole atmosphere. The just grown daughter tries to assure her mother between sobs, that Pete would be better soon. But the poet tells us that the boy will never be better again as he is already dead.

But the mother needs to be better. She has been the mother of a brave and simple soul. But now she never eats her meals and often wakes up at night and weeps. She now has just one longing, a desire to "withdraw unnoticed." She wants to live no longer but to be with her brave dead son.

The poem paints a tragic and pathetic picture of a mother whose only son stands sacrificed to the cause of the nation.

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15. "Vigil Strange I kept on Field One Night" (p. 241)

In the poem "Vigil strange I kept on the field one Night" we find the image of a brave soldiers who has perished in battle, the image of "my son and my comrade."

The poem is a dramatic monologue, the "speaker" a soldier in battle, the "listener" the soldier's dead comrade. As the army advances, the soldier's comrade falls from his side:

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night,
When you my son and my comrade dropped at my side that day,
One look I gave which your dear eyes returned with a look I shall never forget. (p. 241)

The opening lines of the poem establish a rhythm that reinforce the pervading tone of overpowering emotion held manfully in restraint.

After the soldier has been dismissed from the advancing line, he returns to search for his comrade. Just as the look and touch in the opening lines characterized symbolically the depth of the relationship of soldier and comrade, so, when the soldier returns to his dead friend and gazes upon his body, he "remembers most vividly his physical existence and presence--" son of responding kisses."
The physical world seems to retreat, the spiritual world ever more subtly present. The cryptic element introduced in the title (the strange vigil) is reintroduced as the poem's central "meaning"; there is some transfiguring presence in this vigil for the dead that makes unnecessary the usual tears and sighs.

In the following lines of the poem the poet narrator attempts to convey some of the significance of the complex emotion he feels on the death of his comrade—an acute sense of terrible loss gradually transfigured in the "vigil" into reconciliation to a spiritual bond. These "immortal and mystic hours" are a "vigil of silence, love, and death." In the silence, the sorrowing soldier achieves insight—a recurring theme in LGC into the fulfilment of spiritual love in death, an insight affirmed when the soldier says, "I think we shall surely meet again." The hours of the vigil are sweet because they are the first fulfillment in this new mystic relationship between soldier and comrade.

The vigil over, the night passed and the day appearing on the horizon, the soldier performs the ritualistic act of burial:

Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and carefully under feet,
An there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited. (p.241)
The act of wrapping the dead soldier in his blanket is the final act of farewell into the ritual of mourning and becomes, as the passage progresses and the act is repeated in memory, a symbolic act of spiritual preservation. The body of the dead soldier, "bathed by the rising sun" comes to symbolize immortality of a life which has been illuminated by a heroic deed.

The poem is full of elegic elements in which a father soldier mourns the death of his young soldier son. The dead soldier's burial and the narrator's desire to "meet" him "again" indicates the theme of resurrection of the subject, the central theme of a typical elegy.

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16. "A March in the Ranks March-prest, and the Road Unknown" (p.242)

This poem along with two succeeding poems ("A Sight in camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," and "As Toilsome I wandered Virginia's woods") constitute the point of greatest emotional intensity. These poems represent a discovery on the part of a poet who was, only a short time before, so anxious to beat the martial drum. These are poems of discovery of the real meaning of war-death.
"A march in the ranks Hard-press, and the Road Unknown" is ironic in that the scene of sickness and death is a "large old church at the crossing roads" (p.242). This place of the worship of heaven has been degenerated into some kind of a hell:

Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscenity, some of them dead,

Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether, the odor of blood,(p.242).

Whitman speaks of "crowds, groups of forms" on the floor and "death-seam." But he does not restrict himself to the horrors of war. Even in the most tragic scenes we always, sense the poets awareness of man's light and heroism. Never before had Whitman expressed with such simplicity and power his feelings, his perturbation and shock.

Amidst the dead and dying soldiers the poet sees young men shot in the abdomen. He lies on the floor bleeding to death. The poet's regiment halts for some moments at the "improptu hospital" before resuming the march. Before going on at the commander's order, the poet sees the young lad embrace death with a half-smile. The poet goes on, "speed forth to the darkness/Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching," on an unknown road.

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"A Sight in camp in the Day break gray and Dim"
memorializes three dead soldiers, one, an elderly "man"; another, a "sweet boy," and the third:

'... a face nor child new 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,
Dear and divine and brother of all, and here again as he lies."

The poet sees all the three soldiers as they are brought and laid down outside the tents. Curious to find who the dead are he lifts the blankets from their faces one by one.

The poem represents genuinely and deeply felt emotions, emotions as universal as they are personal. With the vision of Christ in the face of the dead soldier comes the realization that war is not a "merely love in the camp" but a life of human suffering and agony as terrible as it is senseless, as personally tragic for the foe as for the friend. In comparing the dead soldier's face with that of the Christ himself Whitman tries to show the greatness of the cause for which both laid down their lives—betterment of human life. Here Whitman can be seen as a poet.
of equality who thinks that a soldier who lays down his life for democratic ideals is as great as the Son of God.

"...I. "...As Toilsome I wand'red Virginia's woods"(p.2-5)

Almost everywhere in Whitman's poetry, the hero is seen through the eyes of the lyric poet. There is a distinctive lyricism, in the inscription on the tomb of the soldier who has been buried somewhere in the woods of Virginia, "Bold, Cautious, true, and by loving courage," in the poem "As Toilsome I wand'red Virginia's woods."

The poem portrays the poet as a volunteer soldier who happens to be upon the grave of a soldier and discovers the "inscription rude." He is roaming in the Virginia's woods in autumn. The leaves rustle under his feet creating a soft music, when suddenly he discovers the grave of a soldier, who was "mortal'd and buried on the retreat," at the foot of a tree. Still in the great rush of the retreat a "tablet [was] scriv'l'd and nail'd on the tree by the grave." The poet is struck with wonder to find such
inscription in the middle of the ruthless war. The poet carries with him this wonderful memory of the war and often recollects it when he feels alone in the crowded streets.

19. "Not the Pilot" (p.244)

In this short poem "Not the Pilot" the poet says that he has made more efforts to see the states united than the first fore-fathers of America. The pilot who first set his feet on this continent must have faced a lot of difficulties. Many times his ship must have been beaten back, baffling him. The path finder must have penetrated "inland weary and long, by deserts, parch'd snows chill'd, rivers wet ... till he reaches his destination" (p.244).

But the poet has charged himself even more than the pilot. He has taken up the job to rouse the nation to the call of democracy through his poetry. He says that if the need arises he can even rise to take up arms at a battle call not only now but even "years, centuries hence" (p.224).
20 "Year that Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me" (p.244)

In "Year that Trembled and Reel'd Beneath Me," Whitman talks about one of the years of the war. At the start of the war Whitman was very elated in spirits. With the beat of the drums Whitman’s spirits also rose. But along with the war came death and destruction. The air was filled with the stench of the dead and the dying. The atmosphere became so dull and heavy that in the middle of summer the poet breathed the air which froze him. The air of despair and gloom filled everywhere.

Whitman too is moved by the sight of amputated limbs and dying faces. He sets out to muse about his earlier excitement about the war. After seeing so much death and destruction he asks himself:

Must I change my triumphant songs? . . .
Must I indeed learn to chant the cold dirges of the baffled?
And sullen hymns of defeat? (p.244)

But, perhaps the answer is 'no.'


"The Wound-Dresser" tells the story of an old man doctoring the body and the soul of wounded young people. Undoubtedly the image is autobiographical.
"The wound dresser winds up crushed heads, washes away "the matter and blood," bandages wounds. But he does something even more difficult and important.

The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand, I sit by the restless all the dark night ... (Many a soldiers loving arms about this neck having cross'd and rested, Many a soldiers kiss dwells on these bearded lips (p.245).

The mental reassurance that the 'wound dresser' provides to the ailing soldiers does more than what my medicine could do.

This poem shows the change in the attitude of the poet towards the war from the ideal of jubilation to the reality of death and destruction closely associated with war:

Aroused and angry, I thought to beat the alarm, and urge relentless war! But soon my fingers failed me, my face drooped, and I resign'd myself, To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead (p.245).

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22. "Long, Too Long America" (p. 247)

In this poem the poet hails his motherland--America During peace America learned from the lessons of joy and prosperity only. But now after passing through a severe Civil War, America seems to turn out sadder
and wiser. It has learnt from "cries of anguish, advancing, grappling with direst fate and reconciling not" (p.247).

Now America has to reorganise itself and show to the world the power of the people 'en-masse'--the power of democracy. So far, only Whitman had conceived what America's "Children en-masse really are." And now it is the turn of the world to know what strength it is when people unite on the principle of democracy.

23. "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" (p.247).

In the poem "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" the poet expresses a public sentiment favouring vigorous prosecution of war. In this poem Whitman describes the everyday life of industrial America with great warmth.

Whitman no doubt, like Wordsworth had romantic tendencies and praised nature in his poems. But in his works written during the war, realistic tendencies are considerably stronger. It is significant that Whitman consistently opposed the typical romantic tendency to emphasise the superiority of nature over the city and over civilization in general.
While many of Whitman's precursors exhibited a distrust for the big city, depicting it as a concentration of everything repulsive and foul, almost a symbol of evil, Whitman, in his "Drum-Taps" describes it with love. In the towns there live thousands of freedom loving Americans, ready to go to battle against the slave owning south. In these very towns man's magnificence is strikingly obvious.

The poet first sings of nature, the "splendid" sun, autumn orchards bursting with the juice of ripe fruits, fields where the "unmow'd grass grows," and then says that there is something even more beautiful, even more satisfying. This is the city, where the crowds move endlessly along the pavements. Further on Whitman speaks ecstatically of the soldiers who march through the streets of Manhattan on their route to the front. He exclaims:

Manhattan crowds, with their turbulent musical chorus,
Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me (p. 249).
24. "Dirge for Two Veterans" (p. 249)

"Dirge for Two Veterans" describes the funeral for two soldiers, father and son. The poet meticulously avoids sentimentality by focusing not on pathos but on the details of setting.

The poet describes the setting sun in the sky with its last sunbeam falling on "new-made double grave" (p. 249). Up from the east the moon starts ascending and after some time its silvery, phantom light seems to cover the house-tops.

At this twilight hour the poet sees a sad procession and hears mixed voices of "full-key'd bugles" and the tearful mourners. It is the death procession of "two veterans son and father dropt together" (p. 249).

Earlier in "Drum-taps" the penetrating beat of the drums (in "Beat! Beat! Drums!") was the. The confident call to arms. As the war progressed and the horrors of war were impressed on the shocked consciousness of the poet, the proud call to arms is abandoned and in its place appears the slow, and dirge:

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 (p. 249).
Though at first the poet seems disturbed by the two deaths but towards the end of the poem he starts to calm down. The silvery faced moon soothes the poet. The poet is satisfied that he too is giving the soldiers what he has. The moon provides the dead soldiers with its silvery light, the bugles and drums gives them the music, and the poet's kind heart gives them love. In the burial of the father and the son together we may see a symbolic merger of past and present.

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25. "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic A Voice."(p.250)

In the first section of Leaves of Grass, "Inscription," Whitman had said that he shared three greatesses—love, democracy, and Religion ("Starting from Paumanok" section 10, 11.3-5).

In "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic A Voice," Whitman emphasizes on two of these greatesses—love and democracy. He talks about equality of all the "sons of the Mother of All" and tells us that only 'love' can bind them together.

The poet is confident that "affection shall solve the problems of freedom." He feels that only love
can make the Americans invincible. Men from
different parts of Columbia will love each other
and preserve each other more preciously than "all
the riches of the earth." Only love can make the
companions feel liberated and equal. The bond of
love is stronger than the "hoops of iron." Neither
lawyers nor an agreement on a paper, nor armed forces
can make the people of America cohere so well as
"manly affection" can.

26. "I saw old General at Bay" (p.251)

This is a small poem describing how happily the
soldiers volunteered to risk their lives during the
war. The poet sees the old General of a regiment. The
small group of soldiers that he had, was completely
engaged in the "red-business" of war. On his asking
for some volunteers to go up to the enemy lines, about
a hundred young men step forth. The General selects
only two or three and gives them his orders aside.
The soldiers listen silently with care and then depart
cheerfully, "freely risking their lives." (p.251.)
27. "The Artilleryman's Vision" (p. 251)

By a poem like "The Artilleryman's Vision," Whitman tries to suggest the complexity of lasting effects of war, and, incidentally, reveals an understanding, in advance of his time, of the psychological results of participation in battle.

The poet anticipates a situation, in which the war being over the soldiers have returned back to the normal and serene domestic life. An artilleryman also has returned home but he is at uneasy rest amid a scene of quiet and peace.

While my wife at my side lies slumbering
And the wars are over long,
And my head on the pillow rests at home,
And the vacant midnight passes,
And through the stillness, through the dark,
I hear, just hear, the breath of my infant
(p. 251).

But from the complacent domestic scene the artillery man is plunged back in time, into the midst of battle. The memories of the war still haunt the soldier:

There in the room as I wake from sleep
This vision presses upon me,
The engagement opens there and then in
Fantasy unreal,
The skirmishers begin, they crawl cautiously
Ahead, I hear the irregular snap! snap! (p. 251)

The unreal fantasy takes on the proportion of a nightmare as the artillery man relives the tense moments of battle.

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28. "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (p.252)

In this poem the poet presents a picture. He
shows an old and worn out dusky woman. The woman
is Ethiopia—the African country from where the slaves
were brought to America.

The poet asks this "ancient, hardly human" form,
who she is. Her hair is all white and she wears a
colourful turban of yellow, red, and green, the colours
of the Ethiopian flag, round her head. She is all
bones and no flesh. Still she stands by the roadside
to greet the passing regiments. She too is aware that
at last there is someone to free her from the chains
of captivity.

Old Ethiopia tells the poet that a hundred years
ago she was torn apart from her motherland. She was "a
little child" then and they caught her as "the savage
beast is caught." The cruel slavers "brought her here"
in America across the sea.

She say no further but lingers by the roadside the
whole day long, wagging her turban bound head. Is it
because she sees:

that is it fateful woman, so bland, hardly human?
why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red,
and green?
Are the things so strange and marvellous you see
or have seen?(p.252)
In this tripartite question of the poet's instruction is that Euporia which is the personification of the institution of slavery could never have expected to see the 'strange and marvelous' ideal of freedom, which American Democracy has translated into reality through the Civil War.

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13. "Not Youth Pertains to Me" (p.253)

The poet says that youth does not belong to him nor do the youthful activities. He cannot "beguile the time with talk." Neither can he go to the clubs to enjoy dance. Also he is not comfortable among the coterie, who sits constrained and still. He says that neither beauty nor knowledge belongs to him.

"Yet there are two or three things inure to him."

These two or three things are:

I have nourished the wounded and sooth'd many a dying soldier
And at intervals waiting or in the midst of camp,
composed these songs (p.253).

This small piece indicates how the poet who in the beginning hailed war as an 'ideal' is now deeply concerned about its effect in the 'reality' of death and destruction connected with it. He is no longer
a youthful poet of adventure but a full grown bard whose one and the only concern now is to nourish the wounded and the dying soldiers and to report his experiences with them in his songs.

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30. "Race of veterans" (p. 253).

"Race of Veterans," marks the starting of a group of songs in which Whitman can be seen greeting the retreating, Northern regiments after their victory over the slave owning South.

The poet hails the retreat of the "race of victors." This is the race which took up arms to preserve the Union, a "race of the conquering march." They had shown great courage in the battle field and now they should have courage enough to build their own laws based on democratic principles. The "race of passion and the storm" as it has been should now "thunder on with democratic strides."

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31. "World Make Good Notice" (p. 253)

A short poem indicating the change that came over America during the war. America which before the war
seemed like a bright star surrounded by a milky hue, now on the commencement of war seems to be like a fading star. The milky hue that surrounded it now seems to be detaching from the star. The once peaceful and serene America is now after the war "baleful and burning." Now the scarlet hands of warning wave off the American shores indicating to the world that America has paid a great price to abolish slavery, and will now make efforts to see the slaves free all over the world.

32. "O Tan-Faced Prairie Boy" (p.253)

"O Tan-faced Prairie Boy" shows Whitman's love for his comrades and fellow Americans.

The poet is happy to find his comrade arrive back safely after the war. When the war began, he had met this tan-faced young soldier in an army camp and had immediately developed deep bonds of love and friendship with him. Now when the war is over to see him back safe and sound means more than all the joys of the world to the poet. This victory in the Civil War and the abolition of slavery resulting therefrom is "more than all the gifts of the world," that the poet could receive.
33. "Look Down Fair Moon" (pp. 253-254)

In this poem the poet uses the moon to transfigure death and diminish its horror. The dead lie on their backs with arms toss'd wide.

All around there are ghastly, purple faces of the dead. These are all the signs of the destruction that the war causes. But at the same time the poet makes the moon to shower its cool and soothing moonlight on the suffering souls. He asks the sacred moon to "pour down its unstinted nimbus" everywhere, and calm down the agony of the ailing.

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34. "Reconciliation" (p. 254)

A poem not only about "reconciliation" but of a realization on the part of the poet that "man divine as myself is dead." This word reconciliation is as beautiful as the sky for the poet. The poet has seen enough of death and destruction and now he feels that its is a good thing that war and all the sufferings related to it "must in time be utterly lost," though he knows that night and death must occur continuously in this world. As the poet identifies himself with his
enemy, he bends down to kiss the white face in the coffin, his enemy's face. In this act of spontaneous love and sympathy we can see that the mystic, that Whitman is, identifies himself with all the soldiers who died in the war, be they Blue or Gray.

At this time, the robust enthusiasm for war has become transfigured into a relief at the oblivion into which war must pass. And the cause for the transformation is the realisation that in war there must be an enemy, and the enemy must be human.

35. "How Solemn As One by One" (p. 254)

In this poem Whitman has repeated the philosophy of Bhagwat Gita, that only bodies die but souls never die. They only change bodies just as we can change our old or dirty clothes. As the poet sits in a camp watching the worn and sweaty ranks return, he studies the face of each and every soldier. He finds that these faces are in fact masks for the actual being—the soul. His thoughts and mind can see and reach out to the souls of all the soldiers. He knows that "the bullet could never kill" the soul, "nor the bayonet stab." the real
being. The soul of every soldier is the greatest and the best. Therefore, he advises the soldier to be content and not fear the bullet or the bayonet with which they have killed their enemy.

"As I lay with my head in your lap Comrade..."

"As I lay with my head in your lap Comrade" is a confession on the part of the poet, who like a soldier goes on doing his Karma (composing poems) without knowing his destination. He never knows whether he is in for a victory or defeat.

The poet confesses that he, through his poems depicting the death and destruction, has made many people "restless". His words are weapons full of danger, full of death." (p.254). Many people were against him as he favoured the war, and cautioned and ridiculed him. But he regardless of the good or bad urged himself onward—on his mission. To him:

... the terror of what is called hell is little or nothing to me,

And the lure of what is called heaven is little or nothing to me." (p.255).
37. "Delicate Cluster" (p.255)

"Delicate Cluster" refers to the cluster of stars on the American flag representing the states of the American Union. War being over, these states are now teeming with life. During the war the American flag had held its head high defiantly, through the smoke of guns and muskets, but now the sunny, blue Union flag has dappled the dark night of death with bright patches of life and hope. The poet sings the song of this "woolly white and crimson" flag. He feels elated to sing the song of the "mighty nation"—America, that his motherland is.

38. "To a certain Civilian" (p.255)

This poem starts with the poet asking a few questions from a certain civilian, who could not follow any of the songs of the war the poet had been singing so far. The poet asks if the civilian had expected "alleged rhymes of peace" from him. Then he says that he had not been singing for the civilian to follow, to understand; nor is he now singing for the civilians.
The poet feels that he and the war, both have a common origin. That is why the beat of the war-drums seems sweet music to him and he loves the "martial dirge." He can calmly confront the "slow wall and convulsive throb" leading the officer's funeral. He tells the civilian that he is not the poet for civilians that he is not the poet for civilians, therefore he should leave his work and lull himself with what he can understand, and "with piano tunes."

Those common civilians who expect of Whitman, the poet of "Drum-Taps," sing for them songs of romantic unduties or soothing lullabies are not qualified to read and understand his poetry. The poet censures all such readers thus:

And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with pianotunes,
For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me.

(9.255).

59. "Po, Victress on the peaks" (9.255)

In this poem, the war seems to be over and the democratic America has won and she stands on the high peaks of victory. The poet embraces this "victress on
the peaks," who is now regarding the world with her mighty brow. The world (South America) had conspired against the spirits of democracy in vain. Many attempts to besiege this spirit had been made but all have been thwarted.

But now a dazzling ray surrounds the dominant victress. Now this attractive self-free democratic America is secure in, "immortal soundness and bloom." She is enjoying" these hours supreme.

But the poet still retains the horrible memories of war. To this victress, the poet cannot sing any proud poem, nor chant "Mastery's rapturous verse." What he can present is the "pale's of the dead." Nothing about a cluster containing night's darkness, death and "blood dripping wounds." (p. 256).

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40. "Spirit whose work is done" (p. 256)

The war is over but a spirit still hovers in the mind of the poet.

The poet in "Spirit whose work is done" talks about the spirit of war, of battle, and of rage. It is the spirit of the "dreadful hours." The poet says that before leaving for ever the spirit should wipe the poet's eyes o'" of all the scenes of battle. It should fade "from my eyes your forests of bayonets."
During the five years of war this spirit of gloomiest years and dover's had overpowered each and every soul. But now, the war over this "timeless phantom" has finally settled down to rest. This spirit roused the whole land with treath of flames with each beat of the drum. But now as the tired ranks return from the battle field, the sound of the last drum beat reverberates around the post. The young soldiers, with muskets and bayonets on their shoulders, approach and pass on, returning homeward. Ever while they return with their steps keeping time, they march in unison.

The poet asks this spirit who sich blood and death, to:

Leave me your pulse of rage—bequest them to me—fill me with currents convulsive, (p.276)

This spirit should become one with the poet so that when it is gone, people may find its traces in the song of Whitman. This spirit should pass on to future to drive people towards progress with the same vigour and force as it drove them towards the war. This poem underlines the 'waryA spirit of the poet.
41. "Adieu to a Soldier" (p. 256)

The poet bids adieu to the soldiers and the "manly life" in the camps. The poet recapitulates the "rude campaigning" which he and his comrades shared. He talks about "the rapid march and life in the camp." He also remembers the battle tactics and the blood filled "terrific game" of war. He says that the soldiers will not forget the "war" and war's expression for a long time.

The mission of the soldier is fulfilled, the war being won, so the poet bids him farewell. But the poet's mission is still incomplete. The poet and his "contentious soul" are "still on [their] own campaigning bound." They will tread on roads untired and will face the ambushes set up by the opponents. They will pass through sharp defeat and many a crisis but will still march on, though often baffled. They will go on forever giving expression "to fiercer, weightier battles," as symbolized by the Civil War.

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In "Turn of Libertad" the poet wrote that the war over, the country should turn toward the future. The free and democratic America should not look at the past now. The spirit of freedom and democracy is creeping the world. The proofs of the past should not be thought about. The country should turn away from the "singers that sing the trailing glories of the past." The country should rise up "from the chants of the feudal world, the triumph of kings, slavery, caste." She should turn to the world of future and "give up that backward world."

The country should leave the trailing past with singers and step forward into the future. The past is gone and the wars to come are for the future America.

Therefore, America—the Libertad—should now turn; it should look forward:

To where the future, greater than all the past, is swiftly, surely preparing for you (p. 297).

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43. "To the Heaven'd Soil they Tread" (p.259)

This is a poem about the returning troops which tread upon a changed soil. The land of America went under many changes during the war. The poet while "untying [his] tentropes, in the freshness of the fore noon air" looks around and views the land now restored back to peace. He looks across the fields and "endless vistas," to the South and the North. The "heaven'd soil" of the western world stands as an evidence that peace has set its feet in America now.

The poet sings new songs of peace and renewed joy to the rocks and trees in the woods. He sings to the war heroes now returning home, to the prairies and the "far off sea with its unseen winds." They all answer back, "but not in words."

Waltman now sees the country symbolically reunited:

The prairie draws me close, as the father to bosom broad the sea,
The Northern ice and rain that began
Nourish me to the end.
But the hot sun of the South is so fully
Risen my songs (p.259).

But still, the poet has to nourish the wounds of the South.

............
The above interpretative study of all the forty-three poems of "Drum-Taps" gives a sufficient strength to the fact that Whitman was deeply moved by the reality of the Civil War. Though each of these poems has an independent entity yet at the same time each gives force to the other in such an organized manner that the entire unit of forty-three poems conveys a unified structure. We find to our amazement that all the forty-three poems, in their present order, acquaint us with a systematic evolution of the poet's mind during his occupation with the theme of war.

Since it was not possible for the dissertator to trace this evolution in the course of interpreting all the poems, one after the other, it will not be out of place here to consider some of these poems, to draw a graph of his thought to see how his mind moves between the beginning and the ending of the Civil War. Hence, follows, the next chapter (IV) "Drums Taps': the idea of all."