

The Unknown Soldier

by Angela Morgan

[Sidenote: November 10, 1921] *This poem was read by the author over the casket of the Unknown Soldier, at the special memorial exercises held in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington.*

He is known to the sun-white Majesties
Who stand at the gates of dawn.
He is known to the cloud-borne company
Whose souls but late have gone.
Like wind-flung stars through lattice bars
They throng to greet their own,
With voice of flame they sound his name
Who died to us unknown.

He is hailed by the time-crowned brotherhood,
By the Dauntless of Marathon,
By Raymond, Godfrey and Lion Heart
Whose dreams he carried on.
His name they call through the heavenly hall
Unheard by earthly ear,
He is claimed by the famed in Arcady
Who knew no title here.

Oh faint was the lamp of Sirius
And dim was the Milky Way.
Oh far was the floor of Paradise
From the soil where the soldier lay.
Oh chill and stark was the crimson dark
Where huddled men lay deep;
His comrades all denied his call—
Long had they lain in sleep.

Oh strange how the lamp of Sirius
Drops low to the dazzled eyes,
Oh strange how the steel-red battlefields
Are floors of Paradise.
Oh strange how the ground with never a sound
Swings open, tier on tier,
And standing there in the shining air
Are the friends he cherished here.

They are known to the sun-shod sentinels
Who circle the morning's door,
They are led by a cloud-bright company
Through paths unseen before.

Like blossoms blown, their souls have flown
Past war and reeking sod,
In the book unbound their names are found—
They are known in the courts of God!

O Captain! My Captain!

by Walt Whitman

[Sidenote: April 15, 1865] *Abraham Lincoln was killed by John Wilkes Booth, almost exactly four years after the first shot was fired at Fort Sumter.*

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead!

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here, Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will:
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won:
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Sources:

Morgan, Angela. "The Unknown Soldier." *Poems of American Patriotism*. Ed. Brander Matthews. Electronic.

Whitman, Walt. "O Captain! My Captain!." *Poems of American Patriotism*. Ed. Brander Matthews. Electronic.