Walt Whitman, “Beat! Beat! Drums!” (1861)

Source: *Harper’s Weekly* vol. 5 (September 28, 1861): 623. The Walt Whitman Archive provides the following information about the poem’s publication history: “Although dated 28 September 1861, the issue of *Harper’s Weekly* featuring Whitman’s ‘Beat! Beat! Drums!’ actually appeared one week earlier, on 21 September 1861. . . . The poem also appeared on 21 September in the weekly newspaper the *New York Leader*, though it, too, was dated 28 September 1861. The poem was reprinted in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on 23 September 1861 and the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* on 24 September 1861. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* printing includes the attribution, ‘From Harper’s Weekly.’ In the following weeks, the poem appeared in numerous other newspapers throughout the United States.”

Beat! beat! drums!—Blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through the doors—burst like a force
of armed men,
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;
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace plowing 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—and 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. Recruit! recruit!
Make the very trestles shake under the dead, where they lie in their shrouds awaiting the hearse.
So strong you thump, O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.