

Patriotic Poetry

Julia Ward Howe (1819 ~ 1910)

The hard times, human carnage and suffering of the American Civil War also inspired poetry in the form of literature of feminism and social protest, as can be seen in the work of Julia Ward. She was born in New York City, into a strict Episcopalian Calvinist family. Her mother died when she was young, and Julia was raised by an aunt. When her father, a banker of comfortable but not immense wealth, died, her guardianship became the responsibility of a more liberal-minded uncle. She herself grew more and more liberal -- on religion and on social issues.

At 21 years old, Julia married the reformer Samuel Gridley Howe, a radical Unitarian and a Transcendentalist and an opponent of slavery.

Julia became a Unitarian Christian. She retained until death her belief in a personal, loving God who cared about the affairs of humanity, and she believed in a Christ who had taught a way of acting, a pattern of behavior, that humans should follow. She was a religious radical who did not see her own belief as the only route to salvation; she, like many others of her generation, had come to believe that religion was a matter of "deed, not creed."

Julia attended church, she wrote poetry, and it became harder for her to maintain her isolation. The



Julia Ward Howe

marriage was increasingly stifling to her. Her personality was not one which adjusted to being subsumed in the campus and professional life of her husband, nor was she the most patient person. She studied philosophy on her own, learned several languages — at that time a bit of a scandal for a woman — and devoted herself to her own self-education as well as the education and care of her children. She also worked with her husband on a brief venture at publishing an abolitionist paper *The Commonwealth*, and supported his causes.

In 1861 she wrote the words to *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, which became the recognized theme song of the Union during the Civil War. After the war Howe continued writing, became active in the woman's suffrage movement and advocated world peace. In 1908 she became the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Mother's Day was originally started after the Civil War, as a protest to the carnage of that war, by women who had lost their sons. Here is the original Mother's Day Proclamation from 1870.

Mothers' Day Proclamation: Julia Ward Howe, Boston, 1870

Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether our baptism be that of water or of fears!

Say firmly:

"We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says, "Disarm, Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."

Blood does not wipe our dishonor nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace.

DISCUSSION

1. How does Julia manifest her religion in the *Mother's Day Proclamation*?
2. What does the *Mother's Day Proclamation* tell us about the American society in the time in which it was written?

The Battle Hymn of the Republic

Julia Ward Howe

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He has loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnish'd rows of steel,
"As ye deal with my contemnors, So with you my grace shall deal;"
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.