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Between Two Truths: Herman Melville's New Patriotism

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by

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The American Civil War sparked an explosion in poetry throughout the Union. In response to the conflict, the masses channeled their enthusiasm into poems full of patriotic fervor for the Northern cause of freedom. For example, William Cullen Bryant's poem "Not Yet" begins,

Oh country, marvel of the earth!
O Realm to sudden greatness grown!
The age that gloried in thy birth,
Shall it behold thee overthrown?
Shall traitors lay that greatness low?
No! Land of Hope and Blessing, No! (Bryant 1-6)

Bryant's rallying language and repetition of the exclamation 'No!' precludes any doubt about the purpose of the Civil War. The Confederacy – deemed "traitors" – were threatening America, the great, free nation, and these rebels must be defeated. Bryant's poem, first published in *New York Ledger* on August 17, 1861 (Barrett 61), addresses the country at large and demands immediate political action. Many poems like Bryant's were invested in the idea of the promised glory of America and rallied the people around the political conflict. Such verse was intended to fuel the populace's nationalistic fervor. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "Words for the Hour" (Barrett 299) similarly evokes an almost frantic voice of necessity:

O Northern men! within your hands
Is held no common trust;
Secure the victories won by blood

When treason bit the dust. (21-24)

Like Bryant, Harper frames the Confederate resistance to the North as “treason” (24) and calls for action. The line “Secure the victories won by blood” (23) commands the men of the North to rise up and fight to defend the Union, the implication being that only through violence can the South’s rebellious nature be quelled.

Bryant and Harper’s poems are explicitly invested in the political and insist on the war as a necessity. Both poets envision war as the sole means of defending the glorious land of America. Harper writes, “This is the nation’s golden hour, / Nerve every heart and hand” (33-34). The immediacy of the war – of the moment – means that everyone must participate. Union poems like Harper and Bryant’s, as Jessica Forbes Roberts argues, were meant to “represent a unified nation even as they enact the process of unification” (180). The distinctly political language of Walt Whitman’s poem “Beat! Beat! Drums!” (Whitman 239) likewise demonstrates the unique role poetry played in kindling the patriotic impulse in reader’s hearts. He writes, “Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow! / Make no parley—stop for no expostulation” (15-16). Whitman’s voice demands the Northern citizen’s certainty; the war must be fought, and the drums must be heeded. Much of the poetry of the North during the Civil War embodied this insistent beat of drums: the language of these poems pulses with the echoing, resounding noise of war.

William Cullen Bryant, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Walt Whitman represent merely three of the multitude of Union poets writing during the Civil War. Poets could be anyone in the populace: soldiers, politicians, orators, or grieving mothers. Public awareness of the violence of war was made possible via newspaper accounts of

battles, letters from soldiers, and poems and photographs. Yet despite the human cost of war everywhere apparent through these media, most poets responded not with despair but with patriotic conviction in the Union's cause. Such literary reactions were published in newspapers or other print sources with circulation to a mass audience. These verses were therefore available to the entire nation. In part due to the sheer abundance of populist verse, the citizens of the Union "treated poems as imaginative acts that not only reflected a new nationhood but actively called it into being" (Roberts 62). Northern poems echoed the populist voice of the time and helped, through their verse, to unite the nation behind the cause of war.¹

Poems of the North used political language to imagine the nation as a single, operating unit. Essentially, poems became tools for creating political unity. Bryant's "Not Yet" poetic voice cries, "Forth goes the battle-cry, and lo! / Hosts rise in harness, shouting, No!" (11-12). Bryant's poem denies multiplicity; there is solely one viewpoint, and that is the patriotic, convicted voice of the North preparing for battle. Although this may strike us as ironic, given that a country at war must necessarily confront various points of view, many poets envisioned such oneness. For example, Richard Henry Stoddard's patriotic voice in his poem "To the Men of the North and West" (Barrett 47) echoes Bryant's. The Confederacy, he declares, hopes to divide men against each other: "They strike at the life of the State" (13). This "life" consists of "laws" (8) and

¹ Edmund Wilson writes in his introduction to *Patriotic Gore*, "The period of the American Civil War was not one in which belles lettres flourished, but it did produce a remarkable literature which mostly consists of speeches and pamphlets, private letters and diaries, personal memoirs and journalistic reports. Has there ever been another historical crisis of the magnitude of 1861-65 in which so many people were so articulate?" (ix). Although Wilson aptly describes the vast multitude of citizens contributing to the political dialogue surrounding the war, his devaluation of the literature neglects the importance of the populist voice during the conflict. As Timothy Sweet puts it, "In his assessment that very little good poetry was produced during the war, Wilson assumes that for poetry to be 'authentic' (fresh, lyric, spontaneous) it must be apolitical. But this assumption dissociates literature from its cultural function in nineteenth-century America" (5).

“freedom” (9), which the South rejects: “They have trampled the laws; / They have stifled the freedom they hate” (8-9). For Stoddard, the Confederacy is a force of division, incoherence and lawlessness. He writes, “They cry, ‘We are two!’ And you? / *We are one!*’ / You must meet them, then, breast to breast” (15-17). According to poets like Stoddard, war is the only way to defend the Union against the threat of political disintegration. Moreover, the poem’s language actively kindles the unity of which it speaks. If readers are convinced that the South is divisive (“We are two!”) and that the Union is a lawful country, perhaps they will rally behind the Northern cause when they might not otherwise do so. In other words, poems like Stoddard’s employed a vigorous rhetoric of political unity in order to generate cohesion. Such poems attempted to unify people through their forceful language of Union strength grounded in oneness.

Herman Melville’s Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War (1866) demonstrates many of the same political themes as other Northern poems. At times, his Civil War poems seem in their patriotism like other Northern populist verse.² However, as a whole, Melville’s Civil War poems do not uniformly embrace the conventions of patriotic Northern poets. Melville published Battle-Pieces as a literary memorial to the participants and events of the war. And although many of his poems praise the Union, Melville withholds an unequivocal celebration of war in 1866. This suggests his poetic struggle to reconcile the idea of war as a mechanism for change – by ending slavery and

² Herman Melville had access to various periodicals of the time, so he would have been aware of the war-time Northern poetic tropes. “Melville had access all through the war to *Harper’s Weekly*... [He] also had access to some of the eleven volumes of the Rebellion Record” (Parker 610). The Rebellion Record contained vast amounts of Civil War documents and poetry, and the various periodicals that Melville’s brother Allan subscribed to would have also been a source of information (506). Parker continues, “No one has demonstrated that he read and was influenced by any of the volumes of poems on the war that appeared before Battle-Pieces... Apparently the only books which were Melville’s major sources were the collections of documents, mainly newspaper stories” (610). Through the amalgamation of these various sources, Melville was undoubtedly aware of the poetic trends of the Civil War period.

reuniting the nation – with his awareness of the human cost of war. Melville’s views on the war do seem to have developed over time, as evidenced by his correspondence with relatives and friends.³ And yet, as the war dragged on – as the suffering increased – his once affirmative patriotic views became tempered by a growing knowledge of the sheer horror of war. At what cost do both North and South suffer so inhumanely? Despite the moments when he validates the cause of the Union, Melville’s vision of America is informed by the human suffering during war and what it produces, both suffering and political change. The war ended slavery and reunited the nation, yet suffering continued in other forms: the Reconstruction-era impoverishment of the South and the economic and political desolation of newly freed slaves (sharecropping and Jim Crow laws).

³ According to Hershel Parker, Melville traveled to Brooklyn in 1861 and boarded the *North Carolina*. On board he saw the body of Captain Ward, “the first Union naval officer to be slain in war. Melville in his journal, only eleven months earlier, had brooded about death as the ‘King of Terrors’ to a mourning mother: ‘Not so easily will his fate be washed out of her heart, as his blood from the deck.’ Now he had a realizing sense that everyone in the North, and the South, was face to face with the King of Terrors” (Parker 476). From the earliest part of war, Melville was aware of the violence enacted upon men’s bodies. Parker’s assertion that Melville saw that both North and South suffered foreshadows Melville’s volume of poetry and the new patriotism of compassion that he asserts throughout it. However, there exist instances in Melville’s experience from 1861-1865 that suggest a complex relationship with the codes of war.

For instance, in a letter written on May 25, 1862 to his brother Thomas, who was currently stationed in China, Melville seems to have imbibed the Northern celebration of impending victory over the rebellious Southerners: “The war goes bravely on. McClellan is now within fifteen miles of the rebel capital, Richmond...But when the *end* – the wind-up – the grand pacification is coming, who knows. We beat the rascals in almost every field, & take all their ports &c, but they don’t cry ‘Enough!’” (Leyda 652). Melville’s emphatic categorization of the Confederate forces (“rascals”) portrays them as impudent, mischievous children. Hershel Parker writes of this letter, “for a man who was to write a book of poetry on the Civil War, he sounded curiously distant” (513).

This distance of which Parker writes dissolves as Melville becomes more aware of the sheer toll of war. Melville even physically confronted the realities of the conflict when he and his brother Allan visited his cousin Henry Gansevoort at the military camp in Vienna, Virginia in April 1864. On April 9, 1864, Melville’s brother Allan writes of the poet’s desire to visit the front, “My brother Herman & I arrived here this morning. He is very anxious to go to the front, but it appears that it is difficult to get a pass...as a literary man he might be favored. As such men should have opportunities to see that they may describe” (Leyda 666). Although there are no journal entries detailing Melville’s reaction to what he saw at the front, his family letters suggest a gross awakening to the realities of war. Catherine Gansevoort writes to her brother Henry on May 3, 1864, “Herman M. is suffering from a terrible attack of Neuralgia after his exposure in visiting the front of Our Army of the Potomac” (668). Curiously, Melville does not causally relate his medical affliction (neuralgia) to the visions of war. In a letter to Henry Gansevoort on May 10, 1864, “I embrace the earliest opportunity afforded by my recovery from an acute attack of neuralgia in the eyes...My friendly regards & best wishes to the Captain & say to him that I hear the neigh of his war-horse in my dreams” (668). He does not say the physical reality of war injured his eyes, yet the neuralgia hit soon after his visit.

Unlike many populist poets, Melville could not simply accept the potential good produced in war without also remembering the destruction enacted upon men's bodies.

Melville's dual knowledge of war manifests itself through the quiet subversion of common Northern poetic tropes of war. Melville inverts poetic methods to question the value system of a democracy of oneness. In essence, he is apprehensive about investing in one dialogue (the political triumph of the Union over its foe) at the expense of the other (the suffering of both North and South). Instead of reinforcing the Northern rhetoric of political unity, Melville offers a new form of patriotism, one that allows for citizens to consider both sides of a national issue and to still be considered patriots: "There seems no reason why patriotism and narrowness should go together," he writes in his prose supplement to Battle-Pieces. In his poems full of misgiving, Melville separates patriotism from considerations of good versus evil or right versus wrong and instead suggests a vision of America that encompasses all "sides" of the conflict. The Union and the Confederacy suffered massive losses during the war, and now they must pick up the pieces of their shattered country and rebuild. As David Reynolds writes, "Melville's special contribution in Battle-Pieces was to appreciate both sides of the conflict, to limn suffering and triumph among both Northerners and Southerners with sympathy" (447).⁴ By proposing a new patriotism, Melville refuses to champion any "blind adherent" (Melville 259) to either cause. If both North and South can see the other side's humanity,

⁴ Reynolds' book John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights briefly investigates Melville's poetic reaction to John Brown. However insightful Reynolds' idea of Melville's vision of universal humanity at the end of war may be, Reynolds argues that the war lent Melville "a kind of solidity and moral certainty" (446). In my analysis of Melville's "The Portent," I argue that the entire poem revolves around the amorphous, ambiguous image of Brown. Hence, Reynolds' argument about Melville's "moral certainty" seems too forceful and neglects the larger poetic work that Melville takes up in his entire volume.

then the nation may emerge renewed and whole. If not, America will never be the country of freedom glorified by Northern poets.

In order to shed light on Melville's unique contribution to American poetry and patriotism, we must first understand the typical literary strategies and conventions of the Union during the Civil War period. Most poems of the Civil War sought meaning through carnage. Poets reacted to the violence with what Drew Gilpin Faust terms "a resolute sentimentality that verged at times on pathos" (194). Their response signaled patriotic faith in the justness of war. For example, WM. Winter's "After All" (Moore) describes a scene of complete grief. Winter writes,

At the cottage-door the grandsire
Sits pale in his easy chair,
While the gentle wind of twilight
Plays with his silver hair. (5-9)

A young man's grandfather mourns the loss of his beloved boy, but he does not question the war. Despite the "flying blast of trumpet, / And the rattling roll of drum" (15-16), the old man supports the Union cause. He says, "The end no man can see; / But we give him to his country, / And we give our prayers to Thee" (18-20). His trust that God will look out for the Union and its soldiers expresses faith in war. The poem's pathos reaches its apex when both grandfather and grandson die: "The cottage is dark and still; / There's a nameless grave in the battle-field, / And a new one under the hill" (26-28). Winter links the suffering of the young man with the death of his grandfather. Now, the only one who remains of the family is "a pallid, tearless woman" (29) who must live out her days alone. Winter's poem demands empathy for the family, and this sentimental appeal to readers' hearts helps to create bonds of affection across the Union. Many poets produced such scenes of sadness to foster empathy. Sentimental poems such as Winter's create a

community of mourning, which in turn promotes the cause as a national effort (Faust). Solidarity, despite the individual losses, was fundamental to the success of the Union.

Like WM. Winter's poem, Walt Whitman's "Come Up from the Fields, Father" (Whitman 255) focuses on the reaction of a loved one to a soldier's death. In this case, the beloved mother mourns the death of her son. Many sentimental Northern poems neutralized violence by means of a family member's emotional reaction to death, and most followed Whitman's formula. First, news of the man's death arrives home: "Come up from the fields father, here's a letter from our Pete, / And come to the front door mother, here's a letter from thy dear son" (1-2). Importantly, the central focus is the mother's emotional response to her son's death and not his suffering: "Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous, her steps trembling, / She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor adjust her cap" (12-13). Whitman does not investigate the agony of the man's last moments. All that matters is the family's grief, particularly the "stricken mother's soul!" (16). His focus on the mother may strike us as strange, given that it was men and not women going off to war, yet the force of her reaction lends itself to the sentimental exploration of abounding grief. As Faith Barrett writes, "It was mothers... who were imagined in popular poetry to have authority over their sons' enlistment in the war" (108). Hence, Whitman concentrates on the maternal reaction to death:

But the mother needs to be better,
 She with thin form presently drest in black,
 By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fitfully sleeping, often waking,
 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. (30-35)

She mourns in black and cannot eat. Furthermore, her "one deep longing" (33) is to be reunited with her dead son. However, Whitman does not explore the political

implications of death for the cause, nor does he evoke any patriotic faith in the cause. The poem revolves entirely around the mother's "longing" (33) and mourning for her dead son. As in WM. Winter's poem, this image of utter sadness created by war is meant not to engender repugnance for the conflict, but rather to create emotional ties among the citizens of the nation. To react to such a scene renders death more meaningful.

The sentimental poem was immensely popular during the war years, yet it was merely one form of patriotic poetry. Poems that took a counter, even opposite approach, were those that envisioned the soldier, not as an emotional being, but as a body designed to be sacrificed to the state. Human bodies became the suffering vehicles through which the glory of America would be achieved. Lucy Larcom's poem "The Nineteenth of April" demonstrates unquestioning loyalty to the Union by valuing the potential outcomes of war (a unified nation) over the reality of violence (dead bodies). First published in *Boston Transcript* on April 25, 1861 (Barrett 48), it is one of many popular poems that place the cause above any consideration of the human cost of war.

Significantly, it had immediate circulation at a key moment in the war; on April 12, 1861 Confederates attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina. Hence, the poem's emphatic support of the war is meant to excite citizens for the impending conflict. Larcom remembers her audience, a nation recently plunged into the depths of war. She attempts to rally the Union's spirits: "To war,—and with our brethren, then,—if only this can be! / Life hangs as nothing in the scale against dear Liberty! / Though hearts be torn asunder, for Freedom we will fight" (33-35). Larcom substitutes "hearts" (34) for "bodies," a euphemism that obscures the reality of violence. Men's bodies will be destroyed, and "Life hangs as nothing in the scale" (34). This balance system weighs the importance of

war against men's very lives. Larcom echoes the patriotic sentiment of William Cullen Bryant's poem "Not Yet," yet she suggests that soldiers must forgo all earthly concerns for the nation. Her poem echoes a predominant sentiment in Northern culture. As Timothy Sweet writes, "The apparatus of political representation...was reconfigured with the outbreak of the war such that a large number of supposedly free individuals became the property of the military state (soldiers)" (1). The military state, the Union, is fighting for freedom, and Larcom believes that men must cast off their personal liberties in favor of this larger aim.

Larcom does not intend to demand that men should become mere instruments of war, yet her language seems to imply, somewhat ironically to us, that men must become slaves to the Union's cause. They are now bodies by virtue of their sacrifice of personal thought for national action: "No party badges flaunting now, no word of clique or clan; / But 'Up for God and Union!' is the shout of every man" (15-16). Larcom suggests herein the dissolution of parties and factions. She advocates eliminating thought – suggested by her reference to 'party badges' and 'clique or clan' (15) – in order to create universal faith in the cause. Indeed, rather than considering individual freedom, Larcom uses an abstract concept of liberty on a larger, nationwide scale, to legitimate the war. Human suffering does not factor into the war; one must forgo all worldly considerations – family, home, career, and life itself – in favor of fighting for liberty. The lines,

"Oh, peace is dear to Northern hearts; our hard-earned homes more dear;
But freedom is beyond the price of any earthly cheer;
And freedom's flag is sacred; he who would work it harm,
Let him, although a brother, beware our strong right arm!" (17-20)

imply that unconditional loyalty is a requisite part of war. There is no room for "earthly cheer" (18) or "hard-earned homes" (17) when freedom is in peril. Despite such

resounding language, there is a distinctly paradoxical notion of war at work in Larcom's poem. In order for liberty to be achieved, men must kill their brothers ("he would who work it harm"). Freedom is distinctly aligned with a Christian enterprise: "freedom's flag is sacred" (19). Yet that Christian enterprise, rather than promoting universal brotherhood, fractures it, making bodies the foundation of true liberty.

The subordination of one's own life to the national body prevailed in Civil War poetry. Even Herman Melville celebrates the death of young men for the greater good.⁵ He believes in America's potential to be a land of freedom, and he most fervently praises war when writing about the sacrifice of young men's bodies for their nation. Yet unlike most poets of the time, Melville glorifies the specific moments of valor more often than the cause itself. These young men are not vehicles or mere bodies – they are individuals with lives of their own. Melville attempts to humanize soldiers by focusing on their

⁵ Melville's, "Dupont's Round Flight" and "Look-Out Mountain. The Night Fight." do not suggest doubt in the legitimacy of war. For this reason, these two poems differ from the majority of Melville's poems. They are two of the few moments in Battle-Pieces when he does sound like other Northern populist poets. It is important to note the few instances in which Melville writes conventionally, as it makes his divergence from popular Northern poetic modes more apparent. In "Dupont's Round Flight," the Northerners appropriate God's name to their cause:

In time and measure perfect moves
All Art whose aim is sure;
Evolving rhyme and stars divine
Have rules, and they endure. (1-4)

Essentially, Melville establishes a causal relationship between holy cause and ultimate victory: "Nor less the Fleet that warred for Right, / And, warring so, prevailed" (5-6). Melville expresses faith in the rule of law – both God's and the Union's – in this poem.

"Look-Out Mountain. The Night Fight" similarly reinforces the idea that the Union cause is championed by God. A classic battle between good versus evil is underway on a mountain: "There is battle in the Mountain—/ Might assaulteth Might" (9-10). The "Anarch" (11) – the Confederacy – fights the Union. During this "war of Wrong and Right" (14), the men in the valley look on and hope that God will provide the Union with the power it needs to win against the rebel Confederates. By the end of the poem, Melville envisions the Christian idea of reward; the Union wins because it is on God's side:

God glorified the Mountain
Where a Banner burneth bright,
And the armies in the valley
They are fortified in right. (21-24)

The alliance of the Union's "Banner" (22) with God's "glorified" (21) mountain recalls the holy Mount Sinai or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. God's divine purpose for America manifests itself in dawning "Joy" (17) at "the Anarch's plunging flight" (20). These two poems do not foster doubt in war.

individual thoughts and actions. In the section of Battle-Pieces entitled “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial,” Melville devotes himself to the human aspect of war – to the young men’s heroism and suffering. For example, in “An Uninscribed Monument on one of the Battle-fields of the Wilderness,” Melville writes, “Silence and Solitude may hint / (Whose home is in yon piny wood) / What I, though tableted, could never tell” (1-3). Melville deems himself incapable of revealing the truth hidden within the quiet of the woods. Yet despite his admission of the inability of language to evoke the truth of battle, he forges on: “the din which here befell, / And striving of the multitude” (4-5). Melville portrays the gruesomeness and chaos of the battle. He implores the reader,

Take in the import of the quiet here –
 The after-quiet – the calm full fraught;
 Thou too wilt silent stand –
 Silent as I, and lonesome as the land. (12-15)

Nature reflects the reverence that Melville feels in his heart. He cannot effectively represent the sheer destruction of war, and the scene itself merely hints at the horror that these men once beheld. In this poem Melville cannot question the validity of war; instead, he is struck silent by the magnitude of the men’s sacrifice. Rather than focus on language’s capacity to create a living monument to young men, Melville’s reaction is silence. It is important to note this poem as an anti-poem that rejects language as an effective way of portraying war. But Melville cannot promote silence in all of his poems; that would make for a far less effective volume of poems that promote humanity. He must speak, and he must find a way to channel such reverence into poetry.

“Verses Inscriptive and Memorial” abounds with praise for soldiers, but it is not the strength of their bodies that Melville valorizes; it is the strength of their convictions. The individual’s humanity is honored because he follows his true belief in the cause.

Melville's representation of soldiers reflects Ralph Waldo Emerson's assertion that "Self-trust is the essence of heroism. It is the state of the soul at war, and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents" (Cowen 522). Melville marked in his copy of Emerson's essay, "This is noble" (522). Melville's "Verses" humanize the soldier by focusing on his belief that he is dying for a just cause. It is not that Melville espouses the cause in his poems through this celebration of young men's death. His portrayal of young soldiers' dedication to that cause ennobles the soldier. "On the Men of Maine killed in the Victory of Baton Rouge, Louisiana" demonstrates this conception of heroism. Melville elegizes the youth who perish in war: "For her went up their dying prayers: / So vast the Nation, yet so strong the tie" (8-9). America, the "her" (8) of which Melville writes, is a grand nation which embraces all of its citizens ("the tie") and thus invites religious devotion ("For her went up their dying prayers"). Melville unites religion and patriotism and suggests that the bond between men and their country is sacred. The young men do not pray to God; rather, it is the Union to which they pray. Furthermore, despite the abundance of people in the Union, Melville writes that the tie between the individual and the state is strong enough to warrant one's death. Each man is crucial to the nation's health ("so strong the tie"). Melville's poem rejects doubt in the cause when these men die nobly: "What doubt shall come, then, to deter / The Republic's earnest faith and courage high" (10-11). Melville does not pose these lines as a question because he does not end in the interrogative tense. These young men perish with full conviction, with "earnest faith and courage high" (11).

Just as in “On the Men of Maine killed in the Victory of Baton Rouge, Louisiana,” Melville celebrates men who understand why they die for the Union in “Presentation to the Authorities, by Privates, of Colors captured in Battles ending in the Surrender of Lee.” These titles seem almost ludicrously long, but every detail or circumstance is crucial to promote the specificity of each man’s death. In this poem, Melville writes as if he himself is also a soldier who died for his cause; he is part of this mass of people who believe in America: “We here, the captors, lay before / The altar which of right claims all—/ Our Country” (4-6). God’s holy ordinance for war is evoked by the word “altar” – the young men die justly for God’s nation. Melville lauds their deaths as acts of freedom:

And as freely we,
 Revering ever her sacred call,
 Could lay our lives down—though life be
 Thrice loved and precious to the sense
 Of such as reap the recompense
 Of life imperiled for just cause. (6-11)

The people of the nation “freely” (6) choose to die for the nation’s “sacred” (7) and “just cause” (11). Despite the sanctity of life “thrice loved and precious” (9), citizens die for the Union and for God. They “revere” its call to arms. This formula seems to be affirmed by the poem’s language. Although these men must sacrifice their bodies to the cause, they fully believe in it and die justly. The war reinforces the cause of freedom: “But these flags given, glad we go / To waiting homes with vindicated laws” (15-16). Certain men do return, and they live freely due to hero’s deaths. In the two poems I have just discussed, the soldier’s sacrifice is noble only insofar as he dies with full conviction in his cause. Melville celebrates such death because he believes it is noble for a man to die for what he thinks is right.

In spite of this language that lauds the effort of soldiers, Melville's view of heroism is unique among Northern poets. His focus is secular and human, whereas most poets blended heroic death in war with religion. For example, George Henry Boker's "Sonnet" (Barrett 144) exemplifies this mode by uniting patriotic sacrifice with Christian duty. A man demands of a soldier why he joined the army, and the young man replies that he left "Wife and children, wealth and friends, / A storied house whose ancient roof-tree bends / Above such thoughts as love tells o'er and o'er" (2-4). The soldier does not deny the tenderness of the life he left behind, yet Boker frames the man's death for his country as a necessary aspect of war. The man asks the soldier, "You loved your home, your kindred, children, wife; / You loathed yet plunged into war's bloody whirl!—/ What urged you?" (9-11). Boker allows the soldier interiority – the importance of the life he leaves for war is suggested by the man's hatred for the violence of battle ("you loathed yet plunged into war's bloody whirl") – yet the poem is a celebration of how the man subsumed his identity into the larger whole. Boker writes that the man became a soldier out of "Duty! Something more than life" (11). Individual concerns do not factor into war; a man must give up his life for the Union.

Just as in Lucy Larcom's poem "The Nineteenth of April," the nation's cause is transformed into a religious enterprise in the last lines, further legitimating the young man's loss of identity. He says he was motivated by "That which made Abraham bare the priestly knife, / And Isaac kneel, or that young Hebrew girl / Who sought her father coming from the strife" (12-14). The soldier's sense of his mission blends with the ancient embodiment of sacrifice out of duty to God, Abraham's to God. As Abraham was willing to kill his own son to show his devotion to God, so must Americans willingly

sacrifice their sons for the Union cause. Such an established link between Biblical precedent and contemporary conflict helped cast the Union's cause in a holy light. In order for the state's conflict to appear legitimate, the cause had to be in some way linked to God.

Northern poems did more than simply liken the individual soldier's duty to Abraham's intended sacrifice to God. They often claimed America's entire destiny as part of God's holy plan in order to legitimate war. An example of this sort of poem, one that blends a rigorous call to arms with Christian destiny, is "The Reveille" by Bret Harte (Moore). A beating war drum is an impetus for men to give up their lives for the war.

Harte writes,

Thus they answered—hoping, fearing,
Some in faith and doubting some,
Till a trumpet-voice proclaiming,
Said: 'My chosen people, come!'
Then the drum,
Lo! was dumb;
For the great heart of the nation, throbbing, answered: 'Lord, we come!'. (29-35)

The Americans proclaimed themselves the successors of the ancient Israelites as God's new "chosen people." Now, they are the nation that must heed God's "trumpet-voice" (31). As Daniel Walker Howe writes, "respect for the Bible conditioned national identity" (447). Patriotism and Christian rhetoric blended seamlessly in Northern culture to justify men giving up their lives for the nation. The divine plan for America became inseparable from patriotism as the Christian faith blended with a patriot's relationship to the state. George Henry Boker's "A Battle Hymn," published in 1862 (Barrett 77), echoes Bret Harte's language in "The Reveille." Boker writes of God's support for war,

Now, O God, once more we rise,
Marching on beneath Thy eyes;

And we draw the sacred sword
In Thy name and at Thy word. (29-32)

The young men who die in war fall “at Thy altar dead” (27), an image that recalls Abraham’s sacrificial offering to God. The men willingly die for God’s “holy cause” (23). This celebration of God’s purpose for America blends violence with Christianity (“we draw the sacred sword”). Howe writes, “Like the ancient Israelites, the Americans had wrested their homeland from other occupiers, believing that this action fulfilled a divine purpose” (855). Thus, Americans aligned themselves with the chosen people of the Bible, who similarly had to fight for their land.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his poem “Boston Hymn” (Barrett 105) likewise demands that war fulfill a divine destiny. God ordains that America will be a land free from oppression and tyranny: “My angel, - his name is Freedom, - / Choose him to be your king” (13-14). Emerson celebrates America’s destiny as God’s holy nation. God says,

“Lo! I uncover the land
Which I hid of old time in the West,
As the sculptor uncovers his statue
When he has wrought his best”. (17-20)

America is the beautiful project of his highest aims. However, God continues, warning of swift retribution if his design is not pursued in America:

“My will fulfilled shall be,
For, in daylight or in dark,
My thunderbolt has eyes to see
His way home to the mark”. (85-88)

The words of caution at the end of Emerson’s poem signal the Christian, and abolitionist, belief that God can wreak vengeance upon the nation. Fighting for the Union is not only God’s work, but not to fight, it seems, will invoke God’s wrath.

Poets frequently referred back to the Revolutionary War to flesh out this concept of divine purpose for the nation. They saw the Revolutionary War as the first example of men who died for God and freedom in America. Within this notion of America's past, poets explored the bravery of soldiers who fought for the nation's freedom from Great Britain and melded it with a distinctly Christian rhetoric of manifest destiny. This discourse propagated a mythic dream of American liberty. By recalling why men fought during the war for independence, the Union aligned itself with a notion of divinely sanctioned violence. The Civil War was framed as an extension of the earlier war's struggle for freedom. In the poem "National Fogs" (Moore), E.P. Dyer laments Northern doubt in the cause of liberty: "Had she forgotten Lexington, / And Concord's bloody field?" (61-62). Another writer, with only the initials J.G.I., evokes America's past fight for freedom in his poem "A Patriotic Call for Volunteers" (Moore):

Come, bold sons of your pilgrim sires,
Sons of the brave and free,
Who left to you, their rightful heirs,
This glorious legacy. (17-20)

This "legacy" (20) was the first fight for liberty, and politicians and ordinary citizens alike attempted to situate the escalating political conflict between North and South within an awareness of the importance of the Revolutionary War's pursuit of political freedom. For William Cullen Bryant and many other poets, violence seemed a necessary fulfillment of the founding father's plan for America: "Bled they in vain, or vainly planned / To leave their country great and free?" ("Not Yet" 15-16). He views the violence of the war as essential. How other than through war could the liberty for which the men of the Revolutionary War fought be upheld? Bryant sees war as the only solution to the Union's conflict with the Confederacy. However, Melville does not

always ascribe to this idea of crucial violence. His Christian poems use familiar populist rhetoric, yet they do not ultimately claim that war was the only means of fulfilling America's destiny.

The vast majority of Melville's poems manifest skepticism of Christian language. Unlike most populist Northern poets, Melville rejects the unquestioning Christian rhetoric as a form of effective poetry. Rather than celebrate the Union cause unequivocally, Melville inverts the trope of Christian faith in God's purpose for America. For example, "The Battle for the Mississippi" demonstrates how Melville quietly subverts the unquestioning embrace of the Union cause. He employs the familiar Christian rhetoric of poets like Lucy Larcom and George Henry Boker; he recalls how God favored the Israelites of the Old Testament in war:

When Israel camped by Migdol hoar,
Down at her feet her shawm she threw,
But Moses sung and timbrels rung
For Pharoah's stranded crew. (1-4)

The Israelites were God's chosen people, and he "appears in apt events" (5) of the Bible. Melville uses this familiar trope of America as the new holy land, but he inverts the idea in the lines, "So the strong wing to the muse is given / In victory's roar" (7-8). The chaos of victory is evoked by the "roar" (8), and he implies that people only believe God is on their side when they win. He interrogates the poetic tendency to appropriate the Union's aims to God's holy design: "The Lord is a man of war!" (6). The Lord is in fact an agent of peace and human brotherhood, yet his name has been appropriated by Northerners to justify the war's violence. Whereas poems like Lucy Larcom's assure readers that one must kill even one's own brother for the Union, Melville's poem questions God's support for such acts. The Lord, as a man of peace, cannot be part of a bloody enterprise. In

“The Battle for the Mississippi,” Melville recalls the heavenly fight among the angels: It “made up a war / Like Michael’s waged with leaven” (23-24). This fight is the ultimate battle between good and evil (Satan versus God in heaven). Yet for all this rhetoric of right versus wrong, the poem subtly questions the values of Christian rhetoric through its representation of death.

“The Battle for the Mississippi” demonstrates the desire for meaning in war, but it also portrays a lonely death for soldiers. Many of Melville’s Christian poems do exactly this: they begin with a seemingly emphatic exclamation of Christian ideas that are then subtly undercut. Melville leads readers to an uncertainty about what war produces, and this poem does not skirt around the cold brutality of death. However, once they die, Melville creates an image of death that is just and right for men who die so nobly. The men must die for the right cause, but the war’s Christian undertones do not completely legitimate the bloodshed. His Christian poems demonstrate negative capability⁶ – he

⁶ The concept of negative capability was coined by John Keats in a “Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817, in *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Edward Hirsch (New York: Random House, 2001), 491-92. Michael Warner writes, “Undeception might be seen as a metapragmatic characterization of the lyric itself. Its state of suspended conviction, recalling the dilated sensibilities of John Keats’s “negative capability,” corresponds to the action frameworks of very few activities other than the reading of lyric” (51). This “state of suspended conviction” is present throughout Melville’s Battle-Pieces.

Negative capability can be defined as the capacity to hold two sides of an issue in one’s mind without taking a stand one way or the other. As far as Herman Melville is concerned, he is aware both that war produces needed political change and that it wreaked destruction on men’s bodies. Michael Warner elaborates in his article about Melville that “the war created an unsolvable dilemma. A delegitimizing perception of the war was not easy for Melville or anyone else. It is not entirely sustained in Battle-Pieces, and perhaps the full power of negation in the parenthesis could not be sustained. But as Louis Menand has recently argued, its aftershocks were a defining ethical crisis for many of the intellectuals of the postwar period, for whom the central perception carried forward from the war was horror at the idea of any vision—of fame, of country, as Melville says, but also of justice or freedom—that commits one to violence of this unbearable sort. Menand argues that the project of pragmatism sprang precisely from this challenge to redemptive vision (though again let me note that the devaluation of violence has its own redemptive character—hence the insoluble dilemma). Pragmatism, he notes, opens an unbridgeable gap between belief and its transcendent grounding. It developed the ability to explain everything about ideas except why anyone would die for them, and that limitation was ironically its point” (50).

Melville’s “pragmatic” approach to his own perception of war manifests itself not just in “Shiloh: A Requiem.” Warner restricts his argument to that poem alone, but to expand my analysis of Melville’s

desires meaning from the war but cannot forget the horror of the carnage. In this particular poem, he explores the reality of soldiers' deaths in war. Instead of beauty surrounding these young men, they inhabit "the undisturbed abyss" (54). This image recalls the desolate landscape to which Satan awakens after his fall from heaven: "He views / The dismal Situation waste and wilde, / A Dungeon horrible" (Milton 1.59-61). Silence surrounds these soldiers, and their bodies cannot be recovered: "But Death's dark anchor secret deeps detain" (Melville 52). Melville describes "captains and the conquering crews / Humble in their pride in prayer" (47-48), which recalls the fall of Satan and his fellow rebellious angels due to his own pride. And yet, the Northern soldiers that Melville describes are not the rebel Confederates. Does he therefore mean to suggest that men who fight in battle are somehow Satan-like? Or does he rather wish to condemn war itself as evil?

Melville's poem is a complicated exploration of death in war. The utter desolation of violence suggests evil, but the men "pray" (49) after victory. Also, heavenly glory "slants her shaft of rays" upon the bodies of the dead soldiers. Such divine kindness to dead men affirms that these men are noble and deserve a world better than the current one: "There must be other, nobler worlds for them / Who nobly yield their lives in this." However, Melville does not state that there are other worlds, simply that there should be for those who die in war. He has misgivings that such reward exists, unlike many Northern poets who celebrate a heavenly existence for these soldiers. As Michael Warner argues, state violence in Civil War poetry neutralized death and

volume, Keats' concept of negative capability is crucial. Melville can be seen to "challenge redemptive vision," but Warner rightly points out that to do so presents an "insoluble dilemma." Melville cannot too explicitly lambast the Northern violence because the war did end slavery, but the destruction in war cannot be too completely celebrated.

envisioned heavenly redemption for the young men: “suffering is seen as compensated, remediated, even meritorious” (46).⁷ Melville’s poem ultimately does envision redemption for these men as a means of promoting their individual sacrifices as human beings, but the desolation of the landscape around them hints at a great sadness present even in the glory of their deaths. The men are not mere bodies to him.

Northern poets did not rely solely on Christian aspiration to legitimate the war and obscure the reality of violence. Another Union poetic trope that likewise expresses faith in the North’s cause of freedom is pastoralism. In pastoral poems, nature rejuvenates after bloodshed. Essentially, the pastoral masks the effects of violence in an exaltation of beauty and rebirth. Although young men’s blood stains the earth, the natural world will bloom as the destruction of battle clears away. Importantly, Union poets tend to focus on the beautiful landscape more than on individual soldiers. The corpses and suffering bodies do not figure prominently in the celebration of natural rebirth. Nathaniel Graham Shepherd’s “Roll Call” (Barrett 100) exemplifies this faith in the revitalized pastoral world. The Union orderly calls the names of the members of the battalion: “‘Cyrus Drew!’ – then a silence fell –” (5). Shepherd’s roll call reveals a fear about the loss of identity in warfare. Cyrus Drew’s body has been lost, and, consequently, his individuality dissolves in the silence and quiet of death: “Only his rear man had seen him fall, / Killed or wounded, he could not tell” (7-8). His fate, however, does not truly matter. He is one of a collective, and the roll call continues. When two brothers are separated in battle through death, “the sad wind sighed, / And a shudder crept through the cornfield near” (27-28). It is important to note that Shepherd does not

⁷ Michael Warner is critical in his article “What Like a Bullet Can Undeceive” of this poetic method. He reads Melville’s “Shiloh: A Requiem” as a rejection of the idea of reward for suffering. However, it is important to note that many of Melville’s poems do seek some sort of redemption for young men.

deny the reality of death: “’Twas a victory – yes; but it cost us dear” (37). However, the human cost of war is secondary to nature’s response to the cruelty of battle (“a shudder crept through the cornfield”). The fact that nature reflects the sadness of the men who fought in battle makes the loss seem more bearable. By creating this pastoral response to human death, Shepherd inscribes the bloody landscape with beauty. As Warner writes, “Pastoralism...is an attitude toward war that becomes easier to assume as the distance between the perceiver and the war increases and “Death” becomes an abstraction rather than a concrete reality” (191). Instead of discussing the reality of the men’s deaths through to the end of the poem, Shepherd chooses to focus on the more abstract idea of the natural world sympathizing with the struggles of man.

The pastoral mode did not simply affirm that nature would reflect the sorrow in men’s hearts. It was also a force of inspiration. “Spring at the Capital” by Elizabeth Akers Allen (Barrett 110) demonstrates the power of the natural world to foster faith that the Union will win and America emerge glorious once more. Nature’s beauty inspires Union citizens to believe that the war will ultimately produce similar harmony in the political world. Allen describes a bounteous scene of poplars, flowers, sun, and bees, but she separates this natural abundance from war: “How far remote the streaming wounds, the sickening scent of human blood!” (9). The carnage of battle is entirely removed from nature. This language suggests the unnaturalness of violence. She writes, “For Nature does not recognize / This strife that rends the earth and skies” (10-11). Rather than lament nature’s obliviousness to the “strife” of the Union against the Confederacy, Allen celebrates the fact that the earth is still beautiful despite such destruction: “When blood her grassy altar wets, / She sends the pitying violets / To heal the outrage with their

bloom, and cover it with soft regrets” (16-18). The violence of war is described as a violation (“outrage”) of the codes of nature. Moreover, the violets that heal the earth are imbued with sacred significance (“her grassy altar”). Nature is sanctified, and the blood sacrifice of young men is part of a larger holy scheme of God.

Allen, like many Northern poets who used the pastoral mode, expresses faith in America without focusing on individual soldiers. She relies on abstraction and not on the reality of death. The soldiers emerge from the war within “A dawn beneath whose purer light all guilt and wrong shall fade away” (39). This pure light comes from the heavens above which will bless all the land. Allen posits that this blessing is only available through nature’s ability to inspire peace. She writes, “Help us to trust, still on and on, / That this dark night will soon be gone, / And that these battle-stains are but the blood-red trouble of the dawn” (34-36). It is the “sweet confidence and patient faith” (33) that “are hidden in your healing leaves” (33) which helps the Union fight on. America will “break its bands, / And, silencing the envious lands, / Stand in the searching light unshamed, with spotless robe and clean white hands” (40-43). The war will help the nation emerge “spotless” and “clean,” but it is only through nature’s power to heal that it is possible. The beauty of the landscape is unresponsive to the violence of war, but Allen’s poem shows that it is through this bounty that nature derives its full potential to heal the nation.

Walt Whitman’s poem “Reconciliation” (Whitman 271) likewise affirms the rejuvenation of nature as a sign of war’s temporary consequences. Unlike the previous two pastoral poems, Whitman does create a scene of human sorrow. Nevertheless, he focuses on the beauty of the landscape reflecting itself in the soldier’s body and not on the individual humanity of the man. He writes, “Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of

carnage, must in time be utterly lost; / That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly / wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world" (2-4). The carnage of war will be forgotten because nature will "wash" the "soil'd world" (4). Whitman does not deny that the world has been marred by violence, but he finds comfort in nature's restorative power. Indeed, the rejuvenation of nature reflects the reconciliation of the nation: "Word over all, beautiful as the sky!" (1). The "word" is reconciliation – the reunion of North and South and the reestablishment of brotherhood. Whitman does not completely neglect the reality of the human corpse. He writes, "For my enemy is dead" (5), but Whitman does not maintain a divide between his Northern self and the dead Southerner. Instead, "I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin" (7). Within this scene of nature rejuvenating and becoming once more beautiful, Whitman places a moment of reunion. Yet it is important that the "white face" (7) is an abstraction and not an individual face. He maintains distance from death. Whitman's poem demonstrates the Northern trope of faith in the pastoral rebirth of the world after war. Through the beauty of nature – and its ability to erase all memory of violence – death becomes meaningful.

Herman Melville balances a reflection on the beauty of nature with an awareness of the individual soldier. Most populist poets focused solely on beauty and not on the agony of death. Melville, by contrast, concentrates on the individual soldier in a beautiful landscape.⁸ The landscape serves as a backdrop to the necessary reality of war:

⁸ "The Mound by the Lake" is one poem that appears to be much like the poems I have just discussed in terms of the pastoral landscape. It depicts a world in which nature honors the fallen soldiers of the Union. Melville writes, "The grass shall never forget this grave" (1). If nature remembers death, then the nation will as well. However, this grave is not surrounded by melancholy nature (clouds or rain). The "sun" (2) shines over those who come to honor the young man, and "evergreens shaded, to regale / Each travel-spent and grateful one" (8-9). Nature reflects the reverence of those who visit the grave. Interestingly, the

the loss of young men. For example, “The Armies of the Wilderness” focuses on the horror of soldiers’ deaths surrounded by the natural world:

In glades they meet skull after skull
Where pine-cones lay—the rusted gun,
Green shoes full of bones, the mouldering coat
And cuddled-up skeleton. (50-54)

The men’s bodies are decaying and violated. Melville seamlessly blends the desire for beauty in nature (“glades”) with the reality of the destruction of war (“skeleton”). He subverts the Northern tendency to seek beauty in nature by focusing on the human cost of such violence and thus promotes a vision of the humanity of all soldiers.

By focusing on individuals rather than on beauty, Melville emphasizes the young men’s foundational role in the nation. They are fighting for liberty, and they must not be lost in the glorification of natural splendor. “Shiloh: A Requiem” demonstrates Melville’s balance of violence with beauty. The world surrounding the dead soldiers is magnificent and peaceful: “The swallows fly low / Over the field in clouded days, / The forest-field of Shiloh” (2-4). The natural world is calm and seems capable of healing the young men. Melville describes “the field where April rain / Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain” (5-6). However, instead of glorifying the natural landscape, Melville uses it to surround the scene of pain: “While over them the swallows skim” (18).

Although the nearby church “echoed” (11) with the sound of “many a parting groan / And natural prayer / Of dying foemen mingled there” (11-13), the center of the poem rests entirely on the men’s suffering and their bodies. Unlike Walt Whitman’s

“grass” becomes a maternal, anthropomorphic figure: “So warm her heart – childless – unwed, / Who like a mother comforted” (10-11). The scene of the grave is not a mother in the true sense, but it does “comfort” (11) soldiers and mourners of the dead. Melville suggests that if nature is beautiful, it will console the nation that mourns its losses. Melville’s use of the pastoral is not exemplified by “The Mound by the Lake.” It is a rare moment in Battle-Pieces that describes the rejuvenation of nature.

“Reconciliation,” there is a movement toward a new, heightened awareness of war. These men have been deceived, and as the bullet tears through their bodies, they become aware of the horror of battle and of killing others. The men are no longer enemies as they die. Melville writes, “Foemen at mourn, but friends at eve” (14). The day’s agony has transformed them, and once the chaos of battle clears away, they can see clearly. This clarity is mentioned parenthetically, as if Melville can merely hint at the true revelation that comes with death in war: “(What like a bullet can undeceive!)” (15). As Michael Warner writes about this poem, the moment of enlightenment on the battlefield is pivotal to uncovering deeper truths: “Undeception is a movement governed by a kind of ethics of belief, a subjectivity enriched to the point of sanctity by distrust of conviction’s transcendent objects. Properly undeceived, we would distrust not only fame and country but any comparable motivating framework” (53). This undeception becomes possible through the men’s deaths. The cause and the idea of right versus wrong disappears when they realize that they are together in their suffering.

Melville does not favor the pastoral as a poetic trope, and he utterly rejects the pastoral mode in favor of a more realistic description of war in “An Apparition,” whose once “pastoral green” (2) landscape is replaced by destruction and horror. He writes, “A goblin-mountain was upheaved / (Sure the scared sense was all deceived), / Marl-glen and slag-ravine” (3-5). The destabilization of all beauty in nature is made manifest by a volcanic eruption. Melville describes, “ere the eye could take it in, / Or mind could comprehension win, / It sunk! – and at our feet” (8-10). The mountain containing “the unreserve of Ill” (6), an abundance of despair and pain, collapses before the spectator’s very eyes. As Timothy Sweet writes,

The war, like an eruption, is incomprehensible and any attempt to recuperate the meaning of the war, especially by means of naturalizing tropes, is subject to the disruption figured here. Second, despite appearances, a war or some other violence – lurks in America’s future. (197)

No one can be revitalized by the collapse of this ominous mountain; Melville asserts that instability everywhere, from the very foundation of the earth to the world above. He writes,

So, then, Solidity’s a crust –
 The core of fire below;
 All may go well for many a year,
 But who can think without a fear
 Of horrors that happen so? (11-15).

Melville portrays herein the uncertainty inherent in a newly reunited nation after war. America may be “solid” (11) now, but there is “fire” (12) in men’s hearts and dissension between North and South. War does not immediately dissolve the disunity in men’s political convictions. Furthermore, Melville implies that the “horrors” (15) of war should not be easily forgotten. Who indeed can think without fear of the carnage? Here more than in any other poem, Melville renders postwar America’s uncertain future. It has seen destruction unimagined, and it is not an easy task to repair such a fractured nation. He implicitly criticizes poetic efforts to create meaning out of natural imagery. Pastoral rejuvenation is too unquestioning, too certain. America may not be able to fully heal. Sweet writes of “An Apparition” that “is devoted wholly to a critique of pastoralism” (196). The changeability of fortune, and of the landscape, reinforces an awareness of the true cost of war: death. One cannot recall the dead nor easily forget how much war destroyed. “An Apparition” reflects Melville’s own struggle to come to terms with the violence of the war and how its aftermath may complicate the prospect of peace.

Pastoralism often focused on the beauty of the landscape as a sign of the capacity for renewal in America. I have shown how many poems of the time justified war through these tropes. They obscured the violence of war in order to promote the Union's aims. However, I have not yet discussed how Northerners conceived of the political failings of the past. Namely, why did Northerners believe in the necessity of war, and why were Northerners so keen on legitimating it? Union writers did not rest with an evocation of the founding fathers' fight for freedom and with God's purpose for America. They broadened the concept of the struggle for liberty to encompass the abolitionist movement in their rhetoric. Indeed, slavery became the go-to issue during the war. The freedom of slaves would herald the liberty that would embrace all in a new country of glory and majesty. The abolitionists extended the idea of freedom to encompass both blacks and whites in their vision of a new America. Once slavery was ended, the country could truly be a land of the free.

As the Civil War approached, radical abolitionists claimed that violence was the sole means of ending slavery. Because slavery had not yet been abolished – and it did not seem any amount of political talk would do the trick – war was the answer. However, even at the time of Nat Turner's slave uprising of 1831, anti-slavery activists like Turner accused America of having committed a great sin by perpetuating the enslavement of human beings. Nat Turner claimed that "He heard the Spirit tell him to 'proclaim liberty to the captives' and 'the day of vengeance of our God' (Isaiah 61:1-2)" (Howe 447). God ordains freedom for the slaves and promises punishment if he is not heeded. The language of God's impending vengeance would be repeated endlessly by Northern poets during the war. As John Stauffer writes, "Radical abolitionists saw themselves as God's

disciples, receiving His instructions to disseminate Bible politics and to combat all sin” (12). These missionaries of God were not peace-loving. Men committed anti-slavery acts of violence in order to bring about political change and usher in a new America of liberty for all. This may strike us today as ironic – what is suggested by the violence of these abolitionist men is that only through the sacrifice of men’s bodies can other bodies be freed. Stauffer asserts that “Violence became the bridge connecting their perfectionist vision of America with the present, sinful reality” (18).⁹ As discussed earlier in reference to Lucy Larcom’s poem “The Nineteenth of April,” the seemingly incongruous concepts – brotherhood and violence – were unified in a cohesive idea of transforming America through war. Abolitionists combined the two in their vision of America, but the need for bloodshed was soon assimilated into a larger, Northern discourse on the justness of the war.

The fusion of violence with Christianity was nowhere so powerful as in poetic representations of John Brown. His raid at Harpers Ferry and subsequent execution provoked an outpouring of poems during the war as Northerners grappled with the

⁹ Freeman Frederick Douglass aligned himself with such a radical view for redeeming America’s past. During a speech in Salem, Ohio, Douglass was questioned by Sojourner Truth. Stauffer writes that Truth asked, “Frederick, is God dead?” ‘No,’ Douglass responded, ‘and because God is not dead slavery can only end in blood’” (172). Abolitionists like Douglass affirmed that God was wrathful toward America for its complacency regarding the end of slavery. Douglass later wrote, “It is good to think that in Heaven, all injustice, all wrong, all wars, all ignorance, and all vice, will be at an end; but how incomparably better is it, to wage a vigorous war upon these blighting evils and drive them from the present, so that the will of God may be done on earth as in heaven” (249). In this statement, Douglass asserts that the purgation of the country’s sins will arise in a physical way. Once “vigorous war” destroys men’s bodies, heavenly peace will descend upon the earth. By envisioning a less abstract concept of heavenly reward for suffering – by asserting that men can be rewarded on this earth rather than in some notion of an otherworldly future – the violence is part of the immediate, present America.

The abolitionist McCune Smith took a more stringent line: “That holy love of human brotherhood, which fills our hearts and fires our imagination, cannot get through the...thick skulls of the Caucasians, unless beaten into them” (252). The image of white skulls needing to be caved in order to make men brothers seems paradoxical. And yet, abolitionists saw violence and brotherhood as integral to each other. Without war – and the destruction of white men’s bodies – men would never see how wrong it is to enslave other bodies.

political implications of his death. Most Union poets portrayed him as the exemplary martyr for the cause of freedom. His death – in the public mind – seemed to reconcile Christianity and violence. This is not to suggest that all Northerners unequivocally supported Brown. As Rosanna Warren writes, “For a figure who assumed mythic proportions, Brown provoked wildly varying reactions, even among Northerners.” Brown was divisive because he was so radical. An example of this divergence of opinion appears in Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s reactions to his death: “Emerson was quoted as saying his execution would ‘make the gallows as glorious as the Cross’; Hawthorne responded, in his essay ‘Chiefly about War Matters, by a Peaceable Man,’ ‘Nobody was more justly hanged. He won his martyrdom fairly, and took it firmly.’” (Warren). Despite the varying opinions concerning his death, Brown became an emblem of the need for violence to change the nation. For example, in Louisa May Alcott’s “With a Rose, That Bloomed on the Day of John Brown’s Martyrdom” (The Antislavery Literature Project), Brown’s death transcends mere earthly considerations of duty and becomes a Christian reminder of holy action. The lines, “His memory sounds forever more, / A spirit-stirring psalm” (35-36) suggest that Brown’s martyrdom is suffused with sacred importance. Through such language, his execution was transformed into the sacrifice for American freedom – the men who died in the ensuing war followed in Brown’s footsteps to heaven.

John Brown embodied the concept of crucial violence that became so fundamental to the Northern views of war. Radical abolitionists such as John Brown “followed Christ’s example in their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their cause” (Stauffer 12). Death became seen as necessary to change America. On his way to the

gallows, John Brown passed a note to a guard: “I John Brown am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty, land: will* never be purged *away*; but with Blood. I had *as I now think: vainly* flattered myself that without *verry much* bloodshed; it might be done” (260). He does not allow for any other method of achieving a glorious nation – it is war or nothing.

Brown was the most famous abolitionist to expound the idea that violence was the only way to change America, and his fame helped kindle fervor for war. Edmund Clarence Stedman’s “How Old Brown Took Harpers Ferry” (The Antislavery Literature Project) captures the spirit of the need for violence: “May spring up a vengeful Fury, hissing through your slave-worn lands!” (142). God’s fury – kindled by slavery in America – follows in the wake of Brown’s death; soon, the entire land will be drenched in blood. In poetic renderings of Brown’s death, his execution is linked with blood. As Stauffer writes, “Equality and human brotherhood would ultimately be achieved by battling and beating one’s enemies” (252). The violence of war was needed to achieve freedom and John Brown, the forerunner of the bloodbath that followed. Orpheus Kerr’s “Avenged!” (Moore) portrays Brown as a prophet figure foreshadowing death:

He cried to the land, Beware, Beware
Of the symbol’d Curse in the Bondman there!
And a prophet’s soul in fire came down
To live in the voice of old John Brown. (40-44)

Like Saint John the Baptist or earlier Old Testament prophets, Brown is represented as pointing his finger at the sin of the land and warns of impending doom (“Beware, Beware”). The violence of war is prefigured in the image of “a prophet’s soul in fire” (43) that descends and inhabits Brown’s body. The descent from heaven seems to suggest that the passion and fervor in Brown’s soul is derived from God and his prophets.

Furthermore, Kerr asserts that God has foreordained the violence; the line “the symbol’d Curse in the Bondman” (41) indicates that America’s slavery merely signals a deep-rooted sin against God that will be ended through war. Like Orpheus Kerr, T. Hulbert Underwood (Moore) insists on God’s curse on the nation:

They bandied honeyed words with Crime,
And made expediency of sin;
They left a curse to after-time –
A curse that worketh NOW within (25-28).

The political sins of the past have culminated in the violence now being enacted on American soil.

As the war began, many Union poets aligned John Brown’s execution with Christ’s death on the cross. Such a promise of redemption through violence – as Christ’s death promised eternal life to all – asserted the righteousness of Brown’s death. He may have murdered men at Harpers Ferry, but it was holy violence. Union poems did not simply focus on the implications of Brown’s death to end slavery. They linked the sacrifice of his body with young men’s sacrifice of their bodies for the cause. The promise of human brotherhood – which would blossom once slavery was abolished – melded with violence. As Brown died to bring about freedom, so these young men must also die. Mary H.C. Booth writes in “I’m Dying, Comrade” (Barrett 163) of a young man who in his death throes explores a vision of heaven that awaits him. He says, “A hundred thousand soldiers / Stood at the right of God; / And old John Brown, he stood before” (25-27). Soldiers have gone to heaven before this young man, and they were all rewarded for their deaths. He affirms the justice of his death for the Union through his vision of redemption:

And now I’m dying, comrade,

And there is old John Brown
 A standing at the Golden Gate,
 And holding me a crown. (33-36)

Brown is surrounded by “God, and Christ, and all” (31), and above all these holy persons “the banner waved in air” (32). This soldier believes in the cause of the Union because he has died for God’s holy cause like John Brown. In fact, coded within this poem is the idea that it is right to kill others as John Brown did because God condoned his action and will likewise honor these men’s acts. The act of crowning the young man (36) seems to signify this contract. Indeed, the Union flag itself becomes a symbol of God’s holy covenant with America. If men die to end slavery, they will be rewarded for fulfilling their duty to God as John Brown was before them.¹⁰

Despite the importance of John Brown to Northern poetic conceptions of violence, Herman Melville writes just one poem about him: “The Portent.” Nevertheless, “The Portent” opens Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, and serves as a pivotal first moment in which Melville represents his vision of America. Here, John Brown is a markedly different man from other Northern poetic representations of him. He is not a prophet or a Christ figure, and, interestingly, Melville does not portray Brown’s humanity as he does every soldier at war. Instead, Brown is bodiless – an amorphous being:

Hanging from the beam,
 Slowly swaying (such the law),
 Gaunt the shadow on your green,
 Shenandoah! (Melville 1-4).

¹⁰ It is important also to remember that one of the most popular songs in the North during the war was “John Brown’s Body.” Brown is envisioned as an active spirit who inhabits Union soldiers’ bodies. The song begins, “John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; / His soul’s marching on!” Brown’s soul has fled its fleshly confines and, through this process of disembodiment, finds new residence in the souls of all Union soldiers: “He’s gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord!” John Brown becomes not only a mythic spiritual being who died for God, but he also actively participates in the Union cause. “John Brown’s Body” thus creates a role for John Brown in which he inhabits the tangible world after his death. This vision of Brown’s importance was simultaneously a powerful song for Union soldiers and a monument to Brown’s pivotal role in Northern culture during the war.

Unclear from the start is what exactly hangs from the beam. Surely it must be a corpse based on the color (“gaunt”) its shadow casts on the otherwise pastoral landscape of Shenandoah (“green”). As Franny Nudelman writes, “There is no subject in these opening lines, no noun or pronoun to realize the body’s presence in language” (34). The reader only gains access to the executed figure through parentheses two lines later: “(Lo, John Brown)” (Melville 6), as though his identity and individuality are secondary to the political and social impact of his death. And yet, the line “(such the law)” (2) suggests a subtle interrogation of the circumstances surrounding Brown’s execution. Whose law is it that necessitated Brown’s execution: God’s or the state of Virginia’s? If it is God’s law, then Brown’s death was just – a Christian man is sacrificed to inspire Northerners before the great scourge of war. But if it is Virginia’s law, Melville may be implying lawlessness outside the structures of divine order. Northern poems throughout the war represented the South as evil, so Melville may be foreshadowing this rhetoric if he is indicting the South for wrongly executing Brown.

Melville does not call Brown a Christ figure, nor does he envision him in heaven. He rejects the trope in favor of a broader view about redemption. He is uncertain about what many Northern poets asserted as surety: John Brown is a holy messenger of God. Brown may have signaled the beginning of Civil War violence, but Melville favors abstraction over an unequivocal celebration of Brown’s death. Hence, instead of categorizing Brown as a holy figure of war like other Union poets, Melville names him parenthetically: “(Lo, John Brown)” (6). “The Portent” presents Brown as an abstract force of change: “the meteor of the war” (14). This image of a meteor – a supernatural event – flashes ominously at the end of the poem. Throughout, Melville distances the

images from corporeal reality: “Hidden in the cap / Is the anguish none can draw; / So your future veils its face” (8-10). One cannot even see Brown’s expressions (“anguish”), and the idea of a “veil” (10) over Brown’s future denies the other poets’ certainty that Brown resides in heaven. The uncertainty throughout “The Portent” is indicative of Melville’s unspoken doubt about America’s future.¹¹

Melville’s poem “Misgivings” immediately follows “The Portent” and similarly rejects the populist poetic tendencies of the time. Although he does not deny his patriotic affiliation with the nation, (he calls America “my country” (5)), “Misgivings” is a poem full of murky landscape and pending destruction: “When ocean-clouds over inland hills / Sweep storming in late autumn brown, / And horror the sodden valley fills” (1-3). The pastoral scene of nature’s bounty has been replaced with this portrait of darkness at the beginning of war. Even the work of mankind will be destroyed as “the spire falls crashing in the town” (4). America’s promised destiny collapses in this scene of confusion that inverts the trope of Christian aspiration. The spire, a sky-scraping architectural feature of many cathedrals designed to reach toward the heavens, tumbles to the cursed earth.

In “Misgivings,” Melville criticizes the desire to see only the good that can come from war: “A child may read the moody brow / Of yon black mountain lone” (10-11). Even an innocent child cannot ignore America’s impending doom. And yet, despite the

¹¹ Melville’s attitudes toward abolitionism and race are pertinent to this ambiguous poem about rendering John Brown. Andrew Delbanco writes, “Melville regarded slavery... as a crime not only against one subjugated race but against humanity (a ‘sin it is, no less; - a blot, foul as the crater-pool of hell,’ he wrote in *Mardi*), yet he was not sure where to place responsibility for it or how to begin to redress it” (157). This uncertainty reflects Michael Warner’s idea of negative capability – a state of suspended conviction. Melville abhors slavery, yet he will not easily choose one solution over another. Northern depiction of Brown as a redeemer of slavery through violence leans too far to one side and proposes a seamless solution to a difficult political issue. Perhaps death will merely perpetuate death.

image of the church spire, the country's violations are not simply religious. The country is at risk, and religion has failed to prevent the evil. Melville therefore concentrates on the secular mistakes of the nation: "I muse upon my country's ills" (5). America has failed to live up to its promises of liberty and freedom in the world at large (hence, "ills"), and God is nowhere in this picture of America at the beginning of war. America must stand alone as "the world's fairest hope" (7) "linked with man's foulest crime" (7). Slavery, a "crime" against humanity, is intricately woven into America's history. And it seems inevitable that war must be the result of such "ills": "Nature's dark side is heeded now" (8). The death that will ensue is not a moment of glory for Melville. The blackness of death is reflected in the natural world: "The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel" (14). This war brings destruction, and the dark fear of the land merely hints at the utter desolation of war. Melville does not promise redemption or beauty. Rather, "Misgivings" demonstrates Melville's own misgivings – his awareness that the war brings with it much suffering. He refuses to celebrate any enterprise that ushers in fear, destruction and carnage.

The America of "Misgivings" has been plunged into a violent conflict that destroys human bodies and pits people against one another. And although war may be the sole means by which America's destiny as a great and free nation may be achieved, Melville's "The March into Virginia" maintains an apprehensive viewpoint about the potential for America to reach an ideal peace. Violence perpetuates itself and obliterates men's bodies. In its investigation of the consequences of war, the poem focuses on the limits of young soldiers' understanding of why they die. Importantly, the poem's structure does not implicate the soldiers in its portrayal of carnage. It is the codes of war

that the poem condemns. Melville writes that the young men go off to war with expectations of beauty and pleasure: “In Bacchic glee they file toward Fate.../ Expectancy, and glad surmise / Of battle’s unknown mysteries” (22, 24-25). There is a complete dissonance between what the men think they are going to see and what they actually do experience in battle. These soldiers are mere children. Melville creates a dichotomy between youth’s “ignorant impulse” (4) and the wisdom of elders who know the true nature of war: “All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys, / The champions and enthusiasts of the state” (6-7). In this case, the Union construct of war that requires young men to die for it is called into question. These youths cannot help their innocence: “All they feel is this: ’tis glory, / A rapture sharp, though transitory, / Yet lasting in belauled story” (26-28). The codes of honor inscribed in their minds by the cultural regime, by the necessity of dying for the cause of the Union, has prompted these young men to believe that war is not a dangerous, destructive event. They have been taught that to die for one’s country is the greatest deed of all. But war necessarily fractures their human spirit and transforms them into bodies designed to destroy or be destroyed.

“The March into Virginia” therefore laments the cultural construct of crucial violence. As in “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial,” the young men who die in war are individuals, human beings who do not deserve to perish in war. His poems of heroism glorify the young men who selflessly give their lives for what they truly believe in, but the soldiers’ personal motives are violated by a cause that enforces violence. War is a transgression against man’s essential humanity. Melville’s focus in this poem and others on this aspect of violence separates him from other poets who may admit the horror of

war's destruction but devote their poems to redeeming this violence. As Drew Gilpin Faust writes of Northern populist poets,

Southerners and Northerners alike elaborated narratives of patriotic sacrifice that imbued war deaths with transcendent meaning. Soldiers suffered and died so that a nation – be it the Union or the Confederacy – might live; Christian and nationalist imperatives merged in a redemptive vision of political immortality. (189)

Unlike these poets, Melville does not embrace the “imperatives” of war. In another poem, “Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Flight,” Melville writes that “warriors / Are now but operatives” (27-28). They are unthinking men, mere machines, “operatives” (28) – not heroes. He will not glorify this transformation of men into mere stuff to be disposed of. Melville celebrates soldiers’ deaths based on their humanity. Machines cannot be lauded because they are unthinking. In “The March into Virginia,” these young men are only boys. The limits of their understanding of war reinforce their innocence. These men are too young to understand that the cause may not totally justify their deaths. Melville chillingly ends the poem with a revelation for those who die in battle:

But some who this blithe mood present,
As on in lightsome files they fare,
Shall die experienced ere three days are spent –
Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare (31-34).

The utility of such awareness is questionable; if the men have perished, what purpose could it possibly serve that they now know what war is? Melville offers no solution. These men die, and that is their enlightenment.

Although Melville aims to humanize the soldiers in his poems, they appear to have given up their very selves. Men die for a cause which they do not fully understand, and the nation continues on despite the carnage. One poem that captures his own

revelations about the inhumanity of war is “The College Colonel.”¹² At first, the poem seems more in keeping with “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial”: a heroic young man dies for his country. He disregards bodily concerns in favor of unbridled valor. Melville writes, “One slung arm is in splints, you see, / Yet he guides his strong steed – how coldly too” (3-4). Any earthly constraints, in this case physical discomfort, do not matter to a man prepared to die for his country. The young man has “lived a thousand years / Compressed in battle’s pain and prayers” (15-16). Yet Melville suggests that he does not yet fully comprehend the true nature of what he undertakes in war. His very aloofness suggests an utter detachment from his own self:

It is not that a leg is lost,
It is not that an arm is maimed,
It is not that the fever has racked –
Self he has long disclaimed. (22-25)

Melville implicitly attacks the state’s command that men sacrifice their bodies and very selves to its cause. He hints that for all the man’s valor, his complete unconcern for himself in favor of the Union’s cause does not represent a mental clarity conducive to awareness of the truth.

A man who detaches himself from his own consciousness cannot be said to exist in reality. This becomes clear in the last lines of the poem: “Lean brooding in Libby, there came – / Ah heaven! – what truth to him” (30-31). He, like the soldiers who die in “The March into Virginia,” becomes aware of death. Melville creates a tension between the illusion of valor and fame through bravery and the true cost of sacrificing one’s soul and body for a nation. The exclamation “Ah heaven!” insists on the sheer magnitude of such a revelation for the young man – it constitutes a rebuke of all that has been taught

¹² “The College Colonel” was first published in Berkshire County Eagle on Aug. 27 1863.

him by the Union, by his family, and by the very codes of war. Despite his seeming ability to remove himself from earthly concerns, the carnage of war “deep in the Wilderness grim, / And in the field-hospital tent, / And Petersburg crater” (27-29) cannot be completely ignored even by such a stoic man. Melville radically diverges from accepted patriotic norms in the form of personal thought, an awakening meant to promote further awareness of war for readers. “The College Colonel” refutes the codes of valor meant to inspire men for battle. Melville presents the young man’s denial of selfhood as a negative product of war. The man cannot be a hero until he understands why he is dying for the cause. This man may never be a valorous soldier, but at least he finally comprehends the horror of war.

Melville’s vision of postwar America demands the dissolution of political division between North and South in favor of a universal awareness of common suffering and humanity. The poems that follow in the remainder of this thesis deal solely with post-war issues. Both the Union and the Confederacy have suffered massive losses, but now that war has ended, all people must embrace their former enemies and work toward the American ideal of freedom for all. In his prose supplement to Battle-Pieces, Melville writes, “Patriotism is not baseness, neither is it inhumanity” (263). The war has ended, and now the American flag reigns supreme. However, not all Northerners embrace the South; the divisive language of many Northern poets suggests an undercurrent of hatred and abhorrence for Southerners that must disappear if America is to survive. Melville is averse to the idea of the Union being right and the Confederates being wholly wrong and evil. He may sometimes affirm God’s cause in the Union, but he more often rejects it based on the sheer carnage of war. The men who die in war may be fighting for the other

side, but they are still human beings. Melville writes, “The clouds of heroes who battled for the Union it is needless to eulogize here. But how of the soldiers on the other side?” (260-261). This is the essence of Melville’s new patriotism – a recognition of both “sides” of war: the sufferings and sacrifice of both North and South, an awareness of the great potential and the massive cost of war.

The “Battle of Stone River, Tennessee” suggests Melville’s abhorrence of division. At first it seems that God can only be on one side in the war; he roots for whoever would rightly promote his Christian legacy:

Our rival Roses warred for Sway –
 For Sway, but named the name of Right;
 And Passion, scorning pain and death,
 Lent sacred fervor to the fight. (11-14)

Melville describes a fight for God’s favor, yet the North and South are like petulant children bickering over who is preferred by their parent. The line “named the name of Right” (12) asserts that both sides claim God as their holy protector. And yet, the war does not indicate whether the North or South is ultimately favored. Although the North won the war, victory alone does not mean divine sanction for violence. Both sides lost men in vast numbers. Furthermore, Melville’s word “Passion” (13) recalls Christ’s own death on the cross, which similarly scorned “pain and death” (13). Thus, Melville complicates his representation of battle when he writes that it is imbued with “sacred fervor” (14). The poem suggests that the sacredness of the conflict is merely a figment of the men’s imaginations. Their fervor for the war does not mean that God endorses it. Both the Union and the Confederacy wrongly appropriate God to assert the rightness of their cause.

Melville's language in "Battle of Stone River, Tennessee" does not offer patriotic faith in God's vision for Union victory. He writes of both sides: "Each lifting up a broidered cross, / While crossing blades profaned the Sign" (15-16). In these lines, he implies that war itself is an aberration. Melville recalls the Northern poetic blending of violence with the promise of peace through the image of the cross. Christ's violent death for humankind seems an apt comparison based on other poets' conceptions of the necessity of war. Melville's idea that the North and South both "profane" the Cross emphatically denies the legitimacy of the war based on Christian ideals. Like Melville, Severn Teackle Wallis writes in "A Prayer for Peace" (Barrett 128),

The very name of Jesus, writ upon
Thy shrines beneath the spotless, outstretched wings
Of Thine Almighty Dove, is wrapt and hid
With bloody battle-flags. (6-10)

As in Melville's poem, both the Union and the Confederacy appropriate and pervert the name of Jesus for their separate causes ("wrapt and hid / With bloody battle-flags"). The dove and Jesus are embodiments of peace, and Wallis laments the appropriation of Jesus' legacy to a bloody enterprise. Both Melville and Wallis critically interrogate the prevailing belief of the time: that God was on one side and not the other.

Melville's poems that glorify heroic individuals cross Union lines and also laud Confederates. Indeed, the images of a stoic, valorous man transcend divisive language when he describes commanders from both Union and Confederate forces. Northerners and Southerners, despite their separate causes, are united in their common suffering in war. Melville particularly honors Ulysses S. Grant and Stonewall Jackson. Grant is pictured in "Chattanooga" standing on cliffs, smoking "as one who feels no cares; / But mastered nervousness intense / Alone such calmness wears" (16-18). His outward self

displays no emotion, and one can only guess at his inmost thoughts. Grant's stoic acceptance of duty is testimony to his true faith in the Union, and Melville praises this. Melville likewise celebrates Stonewall Jackson for fighting honestly and bravely. Jackson possesses a "Roman heart" ("Stonewall Jackson: Ascribed to a Virginian" 8). Melville writes, "A stoic he, but even more: / The iron will and lion thew / Were strong to inflict as to endure" (9-11). His calmness mirrors Grant's. Yet what is even more provocative than Melville's praise of Jackson's stoicism is his denial that it is he in fact who is lauding him. The title, "Stonewall Jackson: Ascribed to a Virginian," attributes this poetic celebration to a man from the Confederacy. However, it cannot be denied that Melville himself wrote it. Perhaps the poem is an attempt at showing that Southerners, too, are concerned with honoring their dead. They too are dying and must be glorified for their sacrifices, even if Northerners believe that the Southerners "stood for Wrong" ("Stonewall Jackson. Mortally wounded at Chancellorsville" 4).

The Union is habituated to criticizing the South and therefore demands to know how such a great man could have fallen so valorously for the wrong side. In "Stonewall Jackson: Ascribed to a Virginian," Melville portrays a nation "puzzled by Stonewall's star" (51). Melville writes of this uncertainty, "O, much of doubt in after days / Shall cling, as now, to the war; / Of the right and the wrong they'll still debate" (48-50). The divisive rhetoric of Northern poems merely perpetuates confusion. And yet, the people of the Union should not forget that there were heroes of the South: "'Fortune went with the North elate,' / 'Ay, but the South had Stonewall's weight, / And he fell in the South's vain war'" (52-54). Despite the victory of the Union, and the assertion of the South's "vain war," Melville does not wish to forget Stonewall Jackson's valor. Implicit within

this poem is a refusal to accept the rhetoric of right versus wrong. The Southern assertion at the beginning of the poem that no one can deny Jackson's greatness ("One man we claim of wrought renown / Which not the North shall care to slur" (1-2)), reinforces the conviction that his heroism cannot be criticized. Melville will not deny Jackson's, and, by association, the South's, humanity.

Melville's poetry demonstrates a new patriotism, one that encompasses all. Throughout Battle-Pieces, Melville uses soldiers as poetic spokesmen for this vision. For example, "A Meditation" describes a Northern soldier's awakening at the end of war to point of view much like Melville's own. The young man gazes upon the bodies of dead soldiers from both North and South and realizes their common humanity. Melville portrays in this poem the ideal moment in every soldier and citizen's heart – all people unite in brotherhood at the end of the war. The war has ended, and the men look about them with glances of "sacred tenderness" (8). The "sacred" love of God descends upon the soldiers. Melville's poem laments the war's ability to sever the bonds of countrymen; they feel "a strange remorse" (10) which "Rebelled against the sanctioned sin of blood, / And Christian wars of natural brotherhood" (11-12). Their "remorse" is unanticipated; it is strange and unreal to them. What is "natural" is the tie of humanity ("natural brotherhood"), but war fractures and destroys the natural bonds between all people. Melville suggests a riot of the heart against the tenets of war in the idea of a rejection of the "sanctioned sin of blood" (11).

"A Meditation" idealizes a form of patriotism that knows no bounds between North and South. All of the exclusionary language of war dissolves once the violence ceases. The soldiers feel sadness unintended, which Melville describes as a "god within

the breast" (13). This force rises up at war's end and is imbued with sacred significance (a "god"). The poem celebrates the aspect of divinity inherent in all people, and it links the rejection of the divisionary rhetoric of war to sacred knowledge. "A deep misgiving" (15), of which Melville wrote in "Misgivings," reappears in an ideal reunion of both sides around forgiveness: "Of North and South they recked not then, / Warm passion cursed the cause of war" (19-20). The tenderness and warmth in their hearts rebels against the gross carnage as in "Shiloh: A Requiem." The cause of war, slavery, cannot be justified in the wake of such destruction: "Can Africa pay back this blood?" (21). Melville's poem suggests that further bloodshed does not offer recompense for slavery. Melville moreover writes that no amount of doubt in war would have stopped the fighting: "Yet doubts, as pangs, were vain the strife to stay" (23). The war was a fiery force of mankind, unstopped even by God. But such regret seems ultimately irrelevant. All that remains is the potential for forgiveness and mutual love.

Throughout "A Meditation," Melville asserts that there were moments of bonding between North and South during war, thereby reinforcing what the war could produce if men remember that the other side is human. The vengeful attitude of the victor – the North – toward the vanquished was raging and furious. This poem attempts to remind the Union that even during war, men united around their common suffering. In one particular moment, he describes a scene in which the opposing camp welcomes a messenger from the other side: "the herald from the hostile one, / A guest and frank companion there" (26-27). Even if this friendly companionship never occurred, it is irrelevant to the poem's tone of optimistic faith that men will now treat each other as friends. Nevertheless, the reconciliation of North and South is coded in an awareness of

the violence that wrecked the lives and bodies of both sides. But it is this destruction that now necessitates love. Melville chastises the men who cry, "*The South's the sinner!*" (52), as if the Confederacy alone is culpable for the blood that has been shed. He will not accept such language: "Well, so let it be; / But shall the North sin worse, and stand the Pharisee?" (53-54). The North may "sin worse" by being entirely un-Christian and unforgiving. If in fact it does not show mercy, it will be like the ancient Pharisee in the New Testament who did not see that Jesus was the Messiah. The Pharisee followed the letter of the law, but such strict adherence to law may not be the best course for an attempt at reconciliation. Melville rejects the alienating discourse of right versus wrong. The poem favors a "new agreement" (50) between both sides. Because neither the North nor the South has emerged unharmed, they must be friends in their common bonds of loss. Both have suffered, now they must heal. He envisions the ideal brotherhood, which sadly was not achieved in Reconstruction. Melville's vision of the purpose of Reconstruction is built within the language of the poem. Melville speaks through the Northern soldier of his own vision of post-war America, one in which Union men cast off their anger and give "mercy due" (58) to the other side. The curious unity of forgiveness with manliness ("manful soldier-view") suggests an aspect of masculinity grounded in mercy. The war demanded one side of men – the powerful, destructive soldier – and now Reconstruction requires a gentler approach to others. It is time to lay down the sword and the cruel dichotomy of good versus evil.

"Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh: A plea against the vindictive cry raised by civilians shortly after the surrender at Appomattox" is directed toward the Northern celebration of their victory over the Confederates. It also echoes the elegiac mood of

“Shiloh: A Requiem.” The tension between honor of the dead and chastisement of the living lends the poem its power as a key manifestation of Melville’s new patriotism of common humanity and kindness. The Confederates at Shiloh may be “martyrs for the Wrong” (10), but Melville categorizes them as men, not evil or misguided zealots. He directs the poem at those in the Union who insist merely that the Confederacy fought against the North and therefore must be punished. He subtly undermines the black-and-white distinction between good and evil present in the populist poetic discourse of the Union:

Perish their Cause! but mark the men—
Mark the planted statues, then
Draw trigger on them if you can. (11-13)

The Confederacy’s “Cause” may die, but Melville insists on the Confederates as “men” (11), and not living embodiments of a failed endeavor. They, like the soldiers of the North, upheld their fight and died just as gruesomely. They have “courage rare” (20) as they stand before the victorious Union soldiers, helpless against whatever the North may inflict upon them. Their bravery and honor even to the last is a “challenge” (20) to the Union’s desire to punish, and the leader of the Northern men cannot open fire upon them. He sees their “courage defenseless” (21), which “Never could tempt him” (22) to punish them. The Confederates have been utterly defeated and now can only stand bare in front of the North. But Melville condemns any retaliation that might be intended upon the South. He recalls Shiloh, Chickamauga and other battles full of death and human suffering, writing, “*Now shall we fire? / Can poor spite be?*” (31-32). The poem’s power resides in Melville’s assimilation of the Northern divisive language concerning the Confederacy’s “Treason” (29). Few Northerners would heed the poem’s plea for mercy

and rejection of retaliation if Melville did not use at least a part of the Northern populist language. However, the poem subtly undermines any desire to indict the Confederacy: “Shall nobleness in victory less aspire / Than in reverse?” (33-34). What the poem suggests is quietly subversive and also hints at Melville’s own uncertainty about America. Can the victorious Union show mercy to the Confederacy? The Confederates have done their part as courageous vanquished foes, and now the Union must step up and do right. In the last lines, Melville invokes Grant’s kindness to Lee at Appomattox and proposes such noble mercy as the requisite model of behavior for all of the North. The poem’s invocation to “think how Grant met Lee” (35) may not be effective at changing men’s minds. Northerners may not do what the poem pleads, but Melville’s poem attempts to change their patriotic framework.

Melville’s poems also demonstrate the potential absence of empathy and understanding in a postwar America. Although he champions a form of patriotism that crosses the lines between North and South, Melville’s misgivings about America’s ability to achieve true human kindness and liberty are made manifest in poems like “Magnanimity Baffled.” After the chaos of battle clears away, a Northern soldier reaches out in friendship to a Confederate. However, the poem creates an undercurrent of uncertainty about the North’s ability to be truly kind to the South, for the soldier cannot see that the man is already dead. He approaches the body with the conviction that they must be friends now that the war is over: “I honor you; / Man honors man” (7-8). And yet, he only attempts kindness “now the fight is done” (2). Melville suggests in this poem that an attempt at comradeship between sides is somehow futile. So many men have perished in the war, and those who have died can never be brought back. The

Northern soldier continues to reach across the divide, but the boundary between him and the Confederate can never be breached. He boldly grasps the man's hand: "'Nay, then, I'll have this stubborn hand!' / He snatched it—it was dead" (15-16). This cold truth of war interrupts the bravado of the victor. He believes that he must be friends at all costs, but what is the use when a man is dead? The scene ends with this surprise. Melville's poem inverts Whitman's reconciliation trope as a reminder of the cost of war. Although North and South should be kind to one another, the dead can never be brought back. The poem insists on the destruction of war, and whatever good may come (reconciliation) is undermined by the Confederate soldier's cold hand.

Melville's portrayal of Abraham Lincoln's death and its ramifications in "The Martyr" similarly reflects his misgiving about post-war America. He may use Christian language of good versus evil, but Lincoln himself pled for mercy to the South. And in fact, much of the poem is skeptical about what good can come from swift retribution against Southerners for the assassination. Melville writes, "Good Friday was the day / Of the prodigy and crime" (1-2). He situates the crime within a Christian context and therefore aligns Lincoln with Christ and his passion ("Good Friday"). Moreover, he calls the Southerners "they," seemingly reinforcing a division between North and South as "us" versus "them." Despite this language, the poem rejects a strict divide between the two newly reunited countries. It exemplifies, even in its forceful language, Lincoln's dream for an America of forgiveness. First of all, he writes that Lincoln meant to be kind to the South: "When with yearning he was filled / To redeem the evil-willed, / And, though conqueror, be kind" (6-8). The Confederates ("evil-willed") rebelled against his intended mercy by killing him. Indeed, "they killed him in his kindness, / In their

madness and their blindness” (9-10). This language hardly promotes the mercy which Lincoln so desperately craved. Melville forswears any allegiance to this sort of merciless retribution. For instance, the inscription at the beginning of the poem, “Indicative of the passion of the people on the 15th of April, 1865,” suggests that this is not a reflection of Melville’s views on the death of Lincoln. Rather, he is an outsider who points at the chaos and vengeance brewing in the country: “Beware the People weeping / When they bare the iron hand” (16-17). He does not associate himself with this Union “they”— he is an observer of what unfolds in the aftermath of Lincoln’s death. If he had wished to include himself in the Northern desire for revenge, he would have written “we.” Thus, despite the poem’s accusatory language against Southerners, it also indicts Northerners.

Through Melville’s subtle refusal to align himself with the Union, he rejects its merciless “iron hand.” Melville writes of the Confederates, “They have killed him, the Forgiver—/ The Avenger takes his place” (20-21). Lincoln, “the Forgiver,” exists no more. This swift fury of the North recalls the language of Northern poets like Ralph Waldo Emerson who warned of God’s vengeance if slavery were not abolished. This “Avenger” “who in righteousness shall do / What the heavens call him to” (23-24) implies that God seems to condone retribution for Lincoln – the martyr’s – death. However, the vengeance of the North bodes ill for the future of America. So what exactly is Lincoln a martyr for? He may have died in the spirit of forgiveness, but Melville implies that Lincoln’s death will not change men’s hearts: “The parricides remain; / For they killed him in his kindness” (25-26). This language of retribution for crime recalls the Northern poets’ idea of the South’s alliance with evil, yet Melville does not embrace such division. In fact, even as he uses the language of populist poets, he

inverts their ideas to suggest his uncertainty about America's ability to ever fundamentally change for the better. "Parricides remain" (25), and the poem warns of a futile, endless cycle of violence.¹³

Melville's new patriotism affirms that America should not be rebuilt around ideas of right and wrong. Upholding such values rejects any possibility of understanding others and means that the violence will merely perpetuate itself. For all of Melville's celebration of common humanity through images of Confederate and Union soldiers, he is nowhere so eloquent about Southern heroes than in "Lee at the Capitol." He uses Robert E. Lee as a spokesman for his own vision of patriotism in America at the end of the war. Lee echoes Lincoln's desire for peace and mercy, and this poem follows soon after "The Martyr." Forgiveness is necessary; nothing else can help America fulfill its destiny of freedom. Melville writes, "A voice comes out from these charnel-fields, / A plaintive yet unheeded one: 'Died all in vain? both sides undone?'" (135). This seems to be Melville's own voice that reaches out of the natural world, unheeded and unsought. It questions the legitimacy of war and is skeptical about the political climate of the nation. If people perished for a country that crushes its vanquished enemy, it is questionable whether or not their deaths were just. Lee insists "Push not your triumph" (136). He heeds the small, quiet voice of reason and humanity. Without kindness, America will never be great: "Shall the wound of the Nation bleed again?" (194). It will if the Union

¹³ Michael Paul Rogin argues that *Battle-Pieces* sacrificed human brotherhood to the state: America's "war promoted a technical, mechanical institutional hierarchy, made that structure organic, and blessed it" (267). Rogin seems to ignore the entire purpose of the volume as a celebration of Lincoln's vision of forgiveness and brotherhood. The organic structure of war necessitates the sacrifice of men's bodies, and Melville far from "blesses" such violence. It seems particularly salient to explore this counterpoint to my argument in relation to Melville's vision of unending violence. "The Martyr" particularly argues that without human brotherhood, the cycle of carnage will merely continue. As Timothy Sweet writes, "Rather than providing a stable ideological foundation for the restoration of the American state, the war merely prefigures its own endless repetition" (165).

exerts “tyranny” (200) over the South. No one in the Capitol mocks Lee, but neither do they applaud his reasoned vision of America: “His earnestness unforeseen / Moved, but not swayed their former mien; / And they dismissed him” (201-203). He is a noble man, and they do not completely reject him. However, they do not ultimately heed him.

Melville laments the futility of Lee’s endeavor: “Brave though the Soldier, grave his plea” (208). He proudly, and honestly, begs for forgiveness and mercy. He fought for the cause of his convictions, and the politicians in the Capitol do not completely deny this.

Melville ends “Lee at the Capitol” with an optimistic vision of America emerging renewed and whole based on Lee’s speech. How strange, in fact, that he presents the Capitol as moved but unyielding, but then sees fit to create a millennial hope in the country’s divine destiny. He writes, “Heaven shall the end ordained fulfill, / We march with Providence cheery still” (212-213). Can America be the great nation God envisioned in the poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other populist Northern poets? Melville’s poem hints that it is possible, but only if people remember Lee’s nobility and see it as indicative of the dignity of the entire South. The Confederate soldiers and citizens were “True to the home and to the heart, / Throngs cast their lot with kith and kin” (182-183). They felt their blood ties and fought to defend them. Lee asks, “Was this the unforgiveable sin?” (185). Now the North must similarly remember its common bond with the South as a whole nation. It must not be un-Christian in its refusal to forgive. But despite such pleading language, the poem expresses hope that the North will not confirm Lee’s own doubts about America’s potential. Lee warns against vindictiveness as a sign of America’s downfall:

Shall the great North go Sylla's way?
 Proscribe? prolong the evil day?
 Confirm the curse? infix the hate?
 In Union's name forever alienate? (187-190)

Lee suggests that the North will merely perpetuate the evil before and during the war if it does not show mercy. Sylla, in classical mythology, epitomizes the rigorous upholding of one point of view to the detriment of the other. Lee reinforces Melville's idea of negative capability, of holding both the negative and positive effects of war in one's mind. All people suffered, and all are affected by the war's end. Without such broad capacity for seeing all facets of the issue, America will simply reinforce the idea of God's curse on America for slavery and will propagate hatred and division. The language of Northern poets during the war did just this, and Melville subtly jabs at their own rhetoric of anger and vengefulness. A new point of view is necessary at the end of war. If a Southerner like Lee can see what will happen if people do not heed those who, like Lincoln, call for friendship and forgiveness, then the South must deserve compassion.

Melville's poems at the end of Battle-Pieces caution against the vengeful language of Northern poets. Finally, in his prose supplement, he reinforces the form of patriotism that he expounded throughout the volume of poetry, one based in mutual suffering and common humanity.¹⁴ It is only here in Battle-Pieces that he speaks entirely for himself and not through the voice of other soldiers or points of view. Melville describes his relationship to the war as a patriot who questioned the rhetoric of war. He is not a "blind adherent" (259) to the cause; rather, he promotes the patriotism of which

¹⁴ One reviewer, in the Times wrote that the prose supplement used "treasonable language" (Parker 616). Conversely, in the New York Herald, the supplement "completes it, and converts it into what is better than a good book – into a good and patriotic action" (617). One conception of proper patriotic action necessitates the unequivocal celebration of the North; anything other than complete conviction in the cause of the Union constitutes "treason." The Herald review sees Melville's aim as part of "patriotic action."

he writes in all of his poems. The South cannot be punished unjustly because the men who fought were just like those of the North, even if they might have championed a different cause. Now, the South has lost and must be reunited with the Union. It is the time to reclaim America's destiny as a strong and free nation:

It is enough, for all practical purposes, if the South have been taught by the terrors of civil war to feel that Secession, like Slavery, is against Destiny; that both now lie buried in one grave; that her fate is linked with ours; and that together we comprise the Nation. (260)

The South may have wrongly seceded and unjustly fought for slavery, but the end of war is not the time to forget the essential brotherhood of all people. His poetic task of honoring the fallen on both sides reaches its apex in what may be read as a eulogy on the importance of remembering the dead through forgiveness and mercy. He insists on the bravery of the Southern soldiers, of which he wrote throughout Battle-Pieces: "In personal character, also, not a few of the military leaders of the South enforce forbearance" (261). Melville cannot here unequivocally write of the courage of all Confederates. He must begin with small concessions so that others may heed his larger point. The North must concede the heroism of the Southern soldiers in the future: "is it probable that the grandchildren of General Grant will pursue with rancor, or slur by sour neglect, the memory of Stonewall Jackson?" (262).

Melville sees that the poems of the North during the war do not concede the common humanity of all people. His vision is unique among Union writers, and the prose supplement aims to sum up what he has been accomplishing throughout the volume. Reconstruction "demands little but common sense and Christian charity" (260). Nevertheless, Melville sees that his idea of broad mercy is not upheld by most Northerners. He writes that the forgiveness required in the North may never be

envisioned by others. The Union wishes to punish and make the South pay, and although Melville may see that the South has already paid much, others wish to inflict still more suffering. The new patriotism that is required is one of kindness and mercy that grows out of an ability to see that both North and South endured immense losses:

The mourners who this summer bear flowers to the mounds of the Virginian and Georgian dead are, in their domestic bereavement and proud affection, as sacred in the eye of Heaven as are those who go with similar offerings of tender grief and love into the cemeteries of our Northern martyrs. (263)

He insists on the suffering of the South as a mirror of the North's own pain, but writes, "And yet, in one aspect, how needless to point the contrast" (263). He must point out the South's similarity to the North because it seems that no one in the North realizes it.

Melville's work in Battle-Pieces proposes a form of patriotism that must be adopted in order for America to achieve its dreams of greatness. Without more people who, like Melville, envision a new nation of forgiveness, the Southerners as exemplars of bravery and honor will be forgotten in postwar America. He may "have been tempted to withdraw or modify" (263) some of his poems out of fear of how they would be received, but he ultimately does not. Melville sees the importance of his work. He ends the prose supplement with an invocation of mercy:

Let us pray that the terrible historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity; and may fulfillment verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity. (272)

The war must never be forgotten, but it must also not have been in vain. America can emerge renewed and whole. But it can never do so unless others see the South as Melville does. America must evolve and become a land of true freedom and forgiveness. If more citizens of America begin to believe in a broader viewpoint, one of negative

capability, America will change. The ability to see the generative and destructive effects of war, as well as the humanity of all people in the war, will create a new land of understanding and empathy. In Melville's vision of patriotism, there is hope yet that the Civil War may have been the impetus for the nation to achieve its highest ideals.

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