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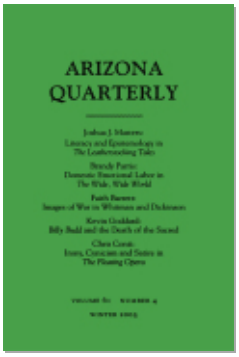

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Addresses to a Divided Nation: Images of War in Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman

"'Sweet Land of Liberty' is a superfluous Carol till it concern Ourselves," Emily Dickinson writes in a warm and expansive letter to Mabel Loomis Todd in the summer of 1885 (*Letters* #1004).[1] Writing to her brother's mistress, who was then traveling in Europe, Dickinson touches on a subject one might not expect to encounter in her writings: the love of one's homeland, her love for America. "I saw the American Flag last Night in the shutting West," she writes, "and I felt for every exile." She signs the letter "America."

In reading Emily Dickinson, we do not expect to encounter a writer who speaks to or for the nation; rather we expect to encounter a writer who lives in internal domestic exile, absenting herself from the political discussions of her day. Yet Dickinson's poetry of the Civil War era raises important questions about speaking to and for "America"; as the ironic stance of the post-war letter to Todd suggests, these questions are invariably raised obliquely. Dickinson's work, I contend, does address the nation, though it does so skeptically and tentatively; simultaneously, her work offers an exhaustive analysis of the risks of that rhetorical platform. Dickinson's speaker thus undercuts her own position, and as a result, readers have been slow to recognize her critical engagement with nineteenth-century political debates. Following the publication of Johnson's complete edition of the poems in 1955, the first generation of scholars who read Dickinson emphasized her intellectual and physical isolation from the outside world.[2] Recent scholarship, however, urges us to consider the ways in which her work addresses both

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her immediate community of family and friends and the wider audience she undoubtedly reached through circulation of her work in correspondence; recent scholarship also urges us to consider the ways in which Dickinson's work addresses political and literary developments in nineteenth-century America.[3] Embracing these recent studies, my approach to Dickinson's address to the nation begins with the premise that we must attend to the ways in which her work is vitally connected to its historical and social context. My argument, however, considers the address to the nation not only as an historically determined and embedded stance, but also as the means by which Dickinson articulates a critique of the limitations of the lyric self.

For Dickinson, as for Walt Whitman, the political crisis of the Civil War raises unavoidable questions about the workings of literary representation. For both poets, the dilemmas of the address to the nation are inseparable from the dilemmas of witnessing wartime violence and suffering. It is a critical commonplace that Walt Whitman is a public poet and Emily Dickinson, a private one: while Whitman's "I" addresses the whole nation, in Dickinson's poems the positing of the lyric self seems to require a privacy of address that excludes the outside world. Such a reading, however, neglects the tensions which underlie Whitman's inclusive apostrophes; it also neglects the ways in which Dickinson deliberately, though skeptically, addresses the nation. Dickinson's work suggests that the stability of the poet's platform in addressing the nation depends upon the speaker's ability to bear witness to the suffering of others; this is a stance which she profoundly mistrusts.[4] Moreover, Dickinson is not alone is displaying this mistrust; the address to the nation is undercut by anxiety and tension in the work of many America writers of the nineteenth century. I contend, however, that Dickinson foregrounds the problems of the address to the nation in a way that no other American poet of this era does. If we read American poetry of the Civil War era through the lens of Dickinson's critique of address, we find that her work illuminates changes in the stances of the lyric self, changes which result in part from the crisis of a nation divided by war.[5]

While Dickinson is invariably skeptical about the address to the nation, Whitman adopts this platform enthusiastically, self-consciously styling himself as America's bard. In order to understand Dickinson's suspicions about address, we need also to consider Whitman's enthu-

siasm for it.[6] An examination of address which juxtaposes Dickinson's Civil War poetry with Whitman's will shed greater light on the range of stances available to all American poets in this period.[7] The analysis that follows then will compare scenes of the address to the nation and scenes of wartime suffering as they are depicted by both Dickinson and Whitman. The first section of this essay considers a pair of poems which explicitly describe the platform of the address to the nation; my reading of each speaker's position attends to the dilemmas such a platform poses when that nation is faced with a Civil War. The second section examines a group of poems which attempt to describe the collective suffering of the nation through depiction of battlefield landscapes. In these poems, both poets explore the limitations of Romantic poetry in representing the horror of war; both also raise urgent questions about poetic and painterly traditions which situate American identity in the wholeness of natural landscapes. Through these comparative readings, I will suggest that for both writers the exploration of wartime suffering leads to profound discoveries about the workings of lyric address: the crisis of a divided nation corresponds to the crisis of a lyric self divided both from the reader and from the suffering soldiers that the poems try to describe. The difficulty of representing the violence of war thus reveals the limitations of the lyric self in each writer's work.

I. LETTERS TO AMERICA

In reading these poets' addresses to the nation, I will take as a paradigm for the Romantic scene of address John Stuart Mill's influential definition of lyric poetry. Mill's definition will serve particularly well for this purpose not only because it continues to be a central model in critical discussions of the lyric, but also because it foregrounds the issue of the lyric speaker's demands on his or her audience; Mill's definition also foregrounds the contrast between lyric poetry and public oratory which at first appears so prominent when we juxtapose Dickinson's stance with Whitman's.[8] Mill's model has exercised a particularly tenacious hold on the field of Dickinson studies. "Poetry and eloquence," Mill writes, "are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling. But if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard" (12). What separates poetry from oratory in Mill's scheme, then, is the kind of reader or listener each creates: in the case of poetry, both the reader and the speaker are supposed to agree

tacitly to ignore that there is any bond between them. More specifically, both parties agree to ignore the fact that the poem is not a spontaneous verbal outcry, but rather a written text. The contract between speaker and reader stipulates that the reader will "eavesdrop" on the speaker's private soliloquy, and both parties agree to uphold this fiction. It is precisely by ignoring the reader that the poet achieves his or her goal of engaging the reader's attention.[9] The orator, by contrast, makes his persuasive aims—and his claims on the audience's attention—explicit.[10] In my reading of Dickinson and Whitman, I will argue that both poets critique Mill's model for the scene of address—though they approach these critiques from very different angles. Because Whitman's work obsessively addresses the reader and because his speaker makes explicit his persuasive aims, he explicitly rejects Mill's definition of poetry. In reading Dickinson's poem, however, I will suggest that she too disrupts Mill's model by pointing insistently to a failed scene of address as a central site of dramatic tension in her work.[11]

In "This is my letter to the World" (F 519), a poem deceptively simple on its surface, Dickinson offers an incisive analysis of the Romantic scene of address.[12] In two brief stanzas, the speaker seems to touch directly on Dickinson's decisions as a writer:

> This is my letter to the World
> That never wrote to Me –
> The simple News that Nature told –
> With tender Majesty
>
> Her Message is committed
> To Hands I cannot see –
> For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
> Judge tenderly – of Me

Boldly declaring the lyric to be a "letter to the World," Dickinson begins the poem by disrupting the Romantic staging of voice and making textuality evident; indeed, the poem as a whole would seem to emphasize the oxymoronic status of the lyric as "written utterance." The opening line already points to the fictional nature of the scene of address by juxtaposing the deictic "this" with the idea of the poem as a "letter to the World"; the deictic foregrounds the idea of the presence and voice of the speaker, even as the "letter" points to the speaker's absence and

the text of the poem on the page. Moreover, in the poem, Dickinson also presents the scene of address as one marked by triangulation: the speaker suggests that her "letter to the World" is in fact nothing more than "The simple News that Nature told – / With tender Majesty," a phrase which occurs in apposition to the "letter." According to these lines then, the speaker's task consists merely of relaying to "the World" the "simple News" told to her by "Nature."

Although the first line declares the poem to be the speaker's "letter to the World," by the second stanza the poem has become "Her Message," a message from Nature, and this message, the speaker explains, has been "committed / To Hands I cannot see –." At this point then, the identity of the recipient of the letter/message becomes unclear: the unseen "Hands" might be those of God or those of the "Sweet – countrymen –" who are subsequently addressed. In either case, the speaker has lost control over the "committ[ing]" of the message. The speaker has been shut out of the circuit of address, and the message is, at this point, definitely a text since it has been "committed" to unseen "Hands." The concluding lines of the poem, however, undercut this emphasis on the poem as text with what is for Dickinson a highly uncharacteristic moment of address. The speaker calls on her "Sweet – countrymen –" to "Judge tenderly – of [Her]," not out of love for the speaker, but out of love for Nature, who is, the speaker insists, the actual source of the poem. In addressing her "countrymen," the speaker thus figures herself as a go-between or messenger from Nature to the World.

Yet while we can read the poem as a critique of the Romantic scene of address, if we keep in mind Franklin's hypothesis that the poem was written in the spring of 1863, it also becomes possible to read the poem as an oblique commentary on the difficulties a woman poet faces in addressing her "countrymen" in a time of war. Such a reading is also supported by the poem's position in fascicle 24, a packet that includes two poems which make explicit reference to the war: "When I was small, a woman died" (F 518) and "It feels a shame to be Alive –" (F 524). Read in this light, "This is my letter to the World" (F 519) describes not only the workings of the Romantic scene of address in general but the particular dilemmas a woman writer faces in attempting to stage such a scene. For, as we have seen, Mill declares that the skill of the poet consists in his being able to conceal the fact that he desires or expects to have a

listener/reader; yet for a nineteenth-century woman poet, the question of what stances one's speakers ought to assume towards an audience is clearly a vexed and vexing one. Mill's ideal poet is too genteel to make any explicit claims on his reader; but a nineteenth-century woman poet who conceals her claims on her audience too effectively may well have no audience at all. "Eloquence supposes an audience," Mill writes; "the peculiarity of poetry seems to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" (12). Indeed, Dickinson's literal withdrawal from the world in her own life presents an almost parodic version of the Romantic scene of address—particularly if we consider those accounts of her preferring not to receive guests directly, but rather remaining in an adjacent room to overhear conversations. Dickinson was herself an eavesdropper, and many of her poems explicitly thematize the fact that other readers will "eavesdrop" on the scenes of address presented in her poems—hundreds of which circulated among family and friends through her correspondence.[13]

"This is my letter to the World" offers a trenchant analysis of the perils of this scene of eavesdropping for a woman writer, implicitly thematizing Dickinson's literal and historical refusal to send her own "letter to the World." The deictic "This" of the opening line refers not to any message within the poem itself, but rather, implicitly, to her entire body of work. "This is my letter to the World/" the speaker declares, "That never wrote to me," and the second line points both to the lack of reciprocity in the scene of the lyric address and—perhaps more bitterly—to the invisibility of the woman writer in the eyes of the world. While the poem points to the tension between "voice" and "text" in the lyric undertaking, it also points obliquely to the difficulties a woman poet faces in trying to get her "voice" heard. In the lines that follow, then, the speaker describes herself as nothing more than an intermediary between "Nature" and the "World," which is, of course, the conventional position of the Romantic poet in the tradition of Wordsworth. Yet, in this poem, the gesture might also be read as one of feminine, self-deprecating modesty: the speaker declares her letter to be nothing more than "the simple News that Nature told." The lines effectively erase the speaker's agency as a writer, making her merely a messenger. And what could be more appropriate for a genteel woman poet—during a time of war and bloodshed, a time when the actual "News" was rarely

"simple"—than to serve as conduit for the transcendent "tender Majesty" of "Nature"?

In the second stanza of the poem, then, this link between the speaker and Nature is made still stronger by means of feminine pronouns which make the speaker Nature's double. "Her Message" replaces the speaker's "letter," and "For love of Her," the speaker pleads with her "countrymen" to "judge" her "tenderly." The second stanza thus also juxtaposes the position of Nature/the speaker (both gendered feminine) with the position of the audience, the "countrymen," a masculine collective.[14] When the speaker declares that she has lost control of her "letter" ("Her Message is committed / To Hands I cannot see –"), she seems in part to allude to the loss of control over her own words which would attend publication—just as Dickinson herself effectively lost control of those few of her poems which were published during her lifetime. One thinks, for example, of Karen Dandurand's account of the 1864 publication of three Dickinson poems in a newspaper raising funds for the Union army—and of the subsequent reprinting of these poems in other publications. The poems which Dickinson allowed Richard Storrs to publish in the *Drum Beat* are universally about the "simple News that Nature told."[15] In "This is my letter to the World," then, Dickinson's speaker assumes an ironic stance towards the many perils of addressing her "Sweet – countrymen –": she writes knowing that she cannot anticipate a reply; she effaces her own position as a writer, figuring herself instead as a mere intermediary between Nature and the World; she acknowledges that her letter has been "committed" to a recipient whom she cannot see; and she worries about the critical judgments that will be passed on her work. At the same time, however, the poem points ironically to Dickinson's refusal to publish her work: just as the speaker is not permitted to "see" the "Hands" which now hold the letter, so too are we the readers not permitted to see the sealed "Message" or "letter" which the poem describes. We are ironically asked to "Judge" what we cannot see.

While Dickinson's speaker figures herself as a self-effacing messenger who has lost control over the transmission of her own textual/epistolary message, Whitman's poems frequently present a speaker who argues, like an orator, for the powers of poetic voice—even as he is at times overcome by the power of his own lyric cries. While Dickinson's

poem insistently points to its own dual status as text and as the staging of a voice, Whitman's poems frequently seek to foreground voice above all else. Examples of the direct address to the nation abound in Whitman, but, in its excesses, the poem "Apostroph" presents a particularly striking example of all that Whitman hopes to accomplish in his poetics of address. The fact that the poem appeared in only the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (though eleven of its lines do appear in the 1867 edition) signals Whitman's ambivalence about the heightened rhetorical stances of the piece. "Apostroph" consists essentially of an extraordinarily inclusive list of dramatic addresses to various persons, groups, individuals, objects and abstractions, each line beginning either with the "O" of the Romantic apostrophe ("O mater! O fils!") or with the "O" of dramatic exclamation ("O I heard, and yet hear, angry thunder") (2: 290–92). Though the poem can only unfold in the suspended temporality of its own apostrophes and dramatic exclamations, it nonetheless maps out a narrative in the present-tense immediacy of the speaker's cries: the speaker calls on various groups to awake (2: 290, ll. 1–12), witnesses a shipwreck (12–15), worries aloud that the whole world might be "a sham, a sell" (16), praises America and freedom as the only "real" thing (17–18), addresses and praises first the North and then the South (21–23; 35–37), declares the union "impossible to dissever" (53), and finally, in the last five lines, both anticipates his own death and calls on "the poets to come" to fulfill his visions for America.

If we read the poem as a whole in light of the last five lines, the drama of the poem seems to consist in the speaker's postponing his own death for as long as possible by means of his own lyric exclamations. "O present! I return while yet I may to you!" the speaker cries, and the line emphasizes the tenacity with which the speaker clings to the suspended present tenses of apostrophic time throughout the poem (64). Likewise the poem reads as an attempt to hold in abeyance the threat of the dividing of the nation: "O Libertad! O compact! O union impossible to dissever!" (53). By means of the address to the nation, the poem aims to hold the nation together. This utopian project of unifying the nation is inseparable from Whitman's aim of using poetic voice to unite objects with their names, signifiers with signifieds, a goal which is clearly evident in "Apostroph."[16] Whitman's poetics thus leads him to privilege voice—with the promise of presence which it offers—over writing, which threatens to insert the reader into symbolic hierarchies

which the poet insistently rejects as oppressive and authoritative.[17] Not surprisingly, Whitman's poetics also explicitly privileges oratory because he values both the immediacy of the orator's voice and the possibility of the efficacy of that voice in the political present. In "Apostroph," then, the "orators" and the "poets" appear to be essentially interchangeable.[18] "O voices of greater orators!" the speaker calls out, implying with the comparative that "the orators" to come will perhaps be even "greater" than the poet himself, "I pause—I listen for you!" (56). The final line of the poem then echoes this grammatical structure, thereby linking orators and poets: "O poets to come, I depend upon you!" (65).

Yet while the poem aims to conjure up the groups addressed and the scenes the speaker exclaims over, the sheer quantity of exclamations in the poem lends the speaker's voice a tone of frenzied anxiety: anxiety about the inefficacy of language, anxiety about the difficulties of addressing another person in a poem, and, perhaps most pressingly, anxiety about a nation divided from and within itself.[19] It is no coincidence that Whitman's poetry moves increasingly away from explorations of address in the aftermath of the Civil War.[20] In his wartime poetry, Whitman must confront head-on the philosophical dilemma which his exploration of the apostrophe leads to: namely, the impossibility of encountering the other—and representing the other's suffering—through the lyric address. In "Apostroph," the tension between naming and loss, between union and division, both propels the poem forward and keeps the speaker suspended in a state of feverish chatter. The proliferation of addressed groups and abstractions only points to the speaker's fear of loss: the incantatory repetition of the poetic "O" which conjures up the sound of the speaker's voice simultaneously suggests the null or zero of the loss of each person or thing named.[21] "O Libertad! O compact! O union impossible to dissever!" the speaker cries: but, writing in 1860, Whitman himself realizes that the three abstractions he addresses in this line can no longer hold true for the United States.

If we juxtapose Whitman's "Apostroph" with Dickinson's "This is my letter to the World," certain contrasts and shared concerns in their explorations of address become apparent. Dickinson's poem focuses on the speaker's status as intermediary between her "countrymen" and "Nature," while the Whitman poem presents the speaker as an intermediary between his readers and their nation. The Dickinson poem, however, erases both the speaker's position as writer and the "Message"

itself, focusing instead on the roundabout circuit by means of which the Message travels. Whitman's poem, on the other hand, does convey the message—"O union impossible to dissever!"—but the voicing of the message is, in and of itself, an anxious attempt to make the message hold true. Moreover, in these poems, the two poets' opposing positions are clearly inflected—in a self-consciously exaggerated fashion—by gender. With feminine modesty, Dickinson's speaker demurs to write her own letter or to write about the war, preferring instead to relay "The simple News that Nature told –." Whitman effectively addresses a masculine figure for himself when he calls on the "bearded roughs" to awake and become "bards" (10); he also addresses "muscle and pluck," calling on a masculine strength to hold the union together (30). Yet, while the speakers' gender positions are polar opposites, what ultimately links these two poems is the implicit meditation each offers on the business of addressing an American audience. For while the Dickinson poem undermines the position of the speaker as writer, it also undermines the position of the reader as audience, by teasingly refusing to relay the short-circuited "Message." "This is my letter to the World," the speaker declares, but as readers we are not given access to it; rather we are only permitted to watch it being handed off. Though the speaker addresses her "Sweet – countrymen," the poem effectively enacts the impossibility of such an address: the poem describes both the impossibility of writing such a letter and the impossibility of receiving it. Dickinson's poem suggests that the circuit of the address to the nation is subject to both slippage and disruption: in the logic of her poem, the writer's "Message" can never travel directly to a waiting reader. In its insistent catalogue of apostrophes, Whitman's poem, like Dickinson's, points to the impossibility of addressing the fictional audience whom it nonetheless posits. Calling out to a nation soon to be sundered, Whitman's speaker tries to invent the kind of poetry audience that might prevent such a catastrophe: "O union impossible to dissever!".[22] But the "bearded roughs" whom he calls on to become "bards" will soon have little time for reading and writing and will instead have to use their "muscle and pluck" in a bloody war (10, 30).

As these readings begin to suggest, the position of the speaker in each of these poems offers a larger statement about each writer's stance towards the task of addressing the nation. The speaker of "This is my letter to the World" promises to address the nation only obliquely,

demurely, and in a roundabout fashion; she will not address her "Sweet countrymen" in a direct apostrophe again. What she will do, however, is serve as a go-between between her "countrymen" and "Nature," and that "Nature," as Dickinson sees it during the years of Civil War, is often a bloody and violent place. Profoundly distrustful of the authoritative posture which the apostrophe requires—and equally distrustful of both the public taste and the institutions of literary publication—Dickinson proceeds to address the nation by indirection.[23] Yet the poems about violence and suffering during the Civil War, many of which circulated among her family and friends, must necessarily be read as addresses to her fellow Americans. The argument which follows will focus on a pair of Civil War era poems which are implicitly addressed to an American readership.

Whitman, however, will take a very different approach to the dilemmas of addressing a nation at war, as the insistent use of the figure in "Apostroph" suggests. Though few of his Civil War poems will use the apostrophe quite so obsessively as this one, Whitman's speaker nonetheless persists in using direct addresses to his audience in his representations of war; the speaker also persists in describing the kind of audience he needs. For Whitman such descriptions are part of the poet's obligations: styling himself as the bard who will chronicle the war for the nation, he attempts to reunite a war-torn country with poetry. When his attempt to hold the Union together with apostrophes fails, Whitman turns his hand to the related task of linking those at home with those on the front-lines, linking the observers of the war with the soldiers fighting and dying in it.

2. LANDSCAPES OF WAR

For Dickinson and Whitman, the task of writing poetry in a time of war leads to a crisis of faith in the imagery and stances of the Romantic lyric poem. In confronting this crisis, their work travels along parallel trajectories of exploration. Both writers present themselves as intermediaries who can represent the violence of war to those not on the front lines; both envision poetry as a place where one might bear witness to the suffering of others. At the same time, however, both rigorously examine the philosophical dilemmas of the intermediary's position and the attendant dilemmas of representing the violence of war—modern

war, in particular. When these poets take up the task of representing death on the battlefield, they also take up the question of whether or not it is possible for poetry to represent another human being's suffering. This question is, for both writers, an ethical one, and it is the central question of their Civil War poems.

In view of their very different approaches to the address to the nation, it is not surprising that they offer very different responses to this question. Just as Whitman persists in addressing the nation even as that nation is on the brink of dissolution, so too will he aim to bind the nation together again—paradoxically—through his depiction of the war's violence. Although Whitman feels he has a moral obligation to render in poetry as accurately as he can the horror of the suffering he has witnessed, he also believes he has a moral commitment—as a poet addressing the nation—to represent that suffering in a way that justifies the violence and the eventual outcome of the war. Faced with the conflict of these two obligations, Whitman most often chooses to argue that the loss of life served the moral purpose of reuniting the nation. At the same time, however, the conflict between these two commitments in his work discloses the inadequacy of poetic language in representing violence; this conflict threatens the stability of the speaker's position as witness—and the stability of the lyric self.[24]

In Dickinson's work, by contrast, the speaker's profound ambivalence about the rhetorical platform of the address to the nation corresponds to a very different approach to the representation of wartime violence. While Whitman's poems display his commitment to envisioning the reuniting of the nation in the aftermath of violence, Dickinson avoids having to connect her depiction of violence to a fixed political position of support for either side by means of the oblique stance from which she describes the war. While Dickinson, like Whitman, believes that a writer has a moral obligation to look unflinchingly at violence and to seek to represent it, her work points insistently to the impossibility of fulfilling that obligation and the inadequacy of poetic language for such a task. While Whitman portrays suffering as part of the heroism necessary to reunite a divided nation, Dickinson insistently represents death and violence as events which must necessarily sunder the bond between the witness and the suffering individual—as well as the bond between the lyric speaker and her audience. In order to examine in more detail each poet's confrontation with the dilemmas of represent-

ing the violence of the Civil War, I will turn next to a group of Dickinson and Whitman poems which offer descriptions of battlefield scenes through detailed descriptions of landscapes and the natural world.

If we choose to read Dickinson's "This is my Letter to the World" as a commentary on the difficulties of being a woman writer during a time of war, then the speaker's insistence that her work conveys nothing but "the simple News that Nature told" takes on a particular irony in light of some of Dickinson's Civil War poems. A number of Dickinson poems which offer descriptions of landscapes simultaneously offer representations of death on the battlefield. In their strangely seamless blending of landscape and carnage, these poems suggest that the "News that Nature told –" could never, at least during the years of the war, be "simple." One strategy that Dickinson adopts then is to write about the war obliquely, so that her war poems will not be immediately recognizable as such. This strategy, however, is not merely an instance of a female writer being coy about her choice of topic; rather, by representing the horror of war through landscape description, Dickinson points to the limitations of the pastoral tradition in both poetry and painting of the nineteenth century.[25]

In Whitman's work, by contrast, the pastoral mode becomes an essential part of the poet's strategy for reuniting the nation;[26] and if at times, the horror of the violence the speaker must represent threatens to destabilize that pastoral structure, the poems nonetheless usually insist on the moral certainties which the recuperative force of the pastoral provides. In their Civil War poems, both Dickinson and Whitman experiment with representing panoramic views of battle, writing poems which offer what might be called "the landscapes of war." In these poems, which showcase contemporary interest in panoramic vistas in literature, painting and photography, both poets grapple with the difficulties of representing the enormous scale of modern warfare.[27] What these poems suggest is that each poet's perspective on the representation of landscape has been irrevocably marked by the Civil War.

Dickinson's "They dropped like Flakes –" (F 545) and "The name – of it –is 'Autumn' –" (F 465) both employ descriptions of pastoral scenes in order to evoke the horrors of war. They do so, however, with very different effects. "They dropped like Flakes –" represents a battlefield massacre by means of metaphors for nature's harmonious cycles;

deliberately rejecting these kinds of metaphoric links, "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" represents natural cycles themselves as inherently violent and destructive. In "They dropped like Flakes –," which Franklin dates in the spring of 1863, Dickinson's speaker begins by likening soldiers falling in battle to falling flakes of snow. In the first stanza, the poem then goes on to change the central metaphor two more times, comparing the falling men to shooting stars and falling rose petals:

> They dropped like Flakes –
> They dropped like stars –
> Like Petals from a Rose –
> When suddenly across the June
> A Wind with fingers – goes – (F 545)

The proliferation of metaphors and the rapidity with which each replaces the one that came before suggests both the speed with which the dying men fall and the speed with which fresh soldiers step in to replace the dead. The stanza suggests both that an infinite number of soldiers will die and that death is an extraordinarily passive process. The sequence of images—from the falling snows of winter to the falling "Petals" of June—suggests that the rapid accumulation of dead bodies is as inevitable as the rapid changing of the seasons. The images used to describe the men—the snow, the stars, the petals—belong to the conventional poetic repertoire for landscape description; yet the vision which they present—of death on a massive scale in the context of modern warfare—is an unsettling match for this repertoire.

Although the conventional metaphors seem to collide with the poem's content, this collision is not powerful enough to disrupt the soothing, dream-like effect of the poetic imagery. The overall effect of the first stanza is to represent death as part of the cycles and events of the natural world, even though the sheer numbers of deaths involved would seem to undermine such a claim.[28] The falling soldiers are in harmony with the natural landscape which surrounds them. Only in the second stanza does the speaker begin to address death as loss, and even here the vision of death is a redemptive, relatively reassuring one:

> They perished in the Seamless Grass –
> No eye could find the place –
> But God can summon every face
> On his Repealless – List. (F 545)

Just as the images in the first stanza seamlessly wove death into the representation of the landscape itself, so are the individual dead here represented as blending into the "Seamless Grass –." The blades of grass emphasize the abundance of the dead bodies, even as they suggest that each dead man is identical to the next; individual deaths are subsumed into the totality of death on a massive scale. The final two lines of the poem, however, present a God who records and maintains individuality in his tally of the dead. Unlike the human "eye," God can "summon every face." Even as the verb "repeal" in Dickinson's adjective "Repealless" suggests the idea of being "called back" to God, the word "Repealless" simultaneously underlines the irrevocable nature of death: once one's name has been entered on the list of the dead, that entry can never be revoked or annulled. Significantly, the speaker herself seems removed from the perils of the battlefield landscape. Throughout the poem, the speaker's position as witness to the scene seems both authoritative and secure; there is no risk that she herself will be among the fallen.

Where "They dropped like Flakes –" succeeds in making human death seem part of nature's cycles, the poem "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" (F 465), which Franklin assigns to late 1862, makes natural cycles the site of bloody carnage.[29] If "They dropped like flakes" rewrites death on the battlefield as a natural event, "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" rewrites the change of nature's seasons as the scene of a massacre.[30] The poem first appeared (under the title "Autumn") in *Youth's Companion* in September of 1892, where it was presumably read as a description of an autumnal landscape. However, if the poem was written in the fall of 1862, it was written during the same fall in which the battle of Antietam took place, with its massive toll of 26,000 dead and wounded. The poem describes a landscape transformed not by the color of blood, but by blood itself:

> The name – of it – is "Autumn" –
> The hue – of it – is Blood –
> An Artery – opon the Hill –
> A Vein – along the Road –
>
> Great Globules – in the Alleys –
> And Oh, the Shower of Stain –

When Winds – upset the Basin –
And spill the Scarlet Rain –

It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –
It gathers ruddy Pools –
Then – eddies like a Rose – away –
Opon Vermillion Wheels (F 465)

Where "They dropped like Flakes –" erases the gore of death with its array of poetic metaphors, in "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" conventional poetic metaphors repeatedly go awry and always in gory fashion. The opening line of the poem suggests that we ought to read the "Blood" as a metaphor for the "hue" of the autumn landscape, but the details which accumulate around this central metaphor make such a reading untenable. Ultimately, the "Blood" which the poem offers as a metaphor can only be read as literal blood. To describe a landscape in relation to the human body is to follow the English lyric tradition; yet to make the "Artery" and the "Vein" a central part of such a comparison is to emphasize the fragility of the human body and thus the violence which underpins these metaphors. Where "They dropped like Flakes –" links death "Seamless[ly]" with the snow, the "Stars" and the "Grass," "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" points to the violence erased by the other poem's metaphoric links. There is no blood in the former and nothing but blood in the latter.

While "They dropped like Flakes –" describes a battlefield in the terms of a rural landscape, "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" ranges from the battlefield on "Hill" and "Road" to the "Alleys" of the cities and towns—where fighting also took place—to the "Basin" of blood in the hospital and the "Vermillion Wheels" of the trains and wagons which bore the dead and the wounded away from the scene of the fighting. The movement which each stanza describes is the movement of blood, first implicitly through the "Artery" and "Vein," then explicitly with the "Shower of Stain" and the verbs "spill," "sprinkles," "gathers," and "eddies." Stanzas one and three are built around an emphatic use of the pronoun "it," which is set off by dashes in stanza one and which starts the first two lines of stanza three; though the first line of the poem establishes "Autumn" as a referent for "it," the pronoun might also refer to "war" which remains unnamed in the poem. While the

poem includes words which belong to the conventional repertoire for describing the natural world—the "Hill," the "Shower," the "Winds," the "Rain," the "Pools" and the "Rose," for example—the poem consistently disrupts the workings of these images. For example, the strongly alliterative phrase which opens stanza two—"Great Globules"—jars the poem's imagery with its sudden and graphic specificity about the quality of the blood. The dramatic "Oh" in this stanza's second line ("And Oh, the Shower of Stain –") seems to mock the use of the exclamation in lyric poetry: the "Oh" here might be read as an ironic echo of a cry of pain.

In the final stanza, then, the poem's two metaphoric registers, which might be called the poetic and the medical, collide with each other decisively:

> It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –
> It gathers ruddy Pools –
> Then – eddies like a Rose – away –
> Opon Vermillion Wheels –

As part of the conventional poetic register, the word "Bonnets" also introduces a feminine figure—by way of metonymy—into the poem. Yet the two meanings of "sprinkle" allow for two alternate readings of "Bonnets": in the first possibility, it is "Autumn" which scatters red "Bonnets" or leaves across the landscape. In this reading, then, the "Bonnets" have replaced the "Globules" as the central noun of the poem's grammar, which is, at best, a startling substitution. In the second possible reading, however, the "Bonnets" are themselves "sprinkled" or stained with the drops or "Globules" of blood shed in the war: read symbolically, the line might seem to suggest that women, too, have inevitably been touched by the war's violence. The poem then goes on to conclude with a climactic moment of metaphoric disjunction. In the third line of this stanza, Dickinson's speaker introduces a simile for the first time in a poem that has otherwise relied on unstated metaphorical links; the speaker insists that the blood "eddies *like* a Rose" (emphasis added). Yet the explicit statement of the metaphoric link only serves to underline the disconnection of the metaphor's two parts: the simile compares blood to the conventional "Rose," a comparison which seems deliberately and jarringly unsuccessful. While the spilling blood might well "edd[y]," it is

more difficult to imagine an "edd[ying]" Rose. The poem's metaphoric structure founders, and this collapse would ultimately seem to point to the impossibility of rendering such a scene in poetic imagery.

In "This is my letter to the World" (F 519), Dickinson's speaker represents herself as a self-effacing feminine go-between between "Nature" and her "Sweet – countrymen –"; in "They dropped like Flakes" and "The Name – of it – is 'Autumn'," Dickinson's speaker relays "the simple News that Nature told –," innocently offering up landscape descriptions which simultaneously comment on the carnage of war. While "They dropped like Flakes" erases the bloodshed of the war, "The name – of it – is 'Autumn'–" emphatically rejects the possibility of such an erasure, suggesting that poetic imagery is inadequate to the task of representing war's violence. Nowhere does Dickinson's speaker suggest that a woman writer might be too removed from the war to represent it; the "Bonnets" too have been spattered with blood. Rather, read as a pair, the two poems would seem to suggest that conventional poetic metaphors, if not the genre of the lyric itself, are inadequate for the task of representing modern war. Exposing the pastoral vision of "They dropped like Flakes" as fraudulent and deceptive, "The name – of it – is 'Autumn'–" emphasizes both the bloodshed and suffering in war and the impossibility of describing them.

If we look for parallel representations of battlefields in Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, we find that he, too, responds to pastoral models in representing the landscapes of war. Reading *Drum-Taps*, Timothy Sweet argues that the pastoral mode performs significant symbolic work in relation to the representation of violence, providing "a powerful, typifying structure of recuperation" (77). In the poetry of the war years, Whitman's poetics of the pastoral works to erase the political complexity of the dead bodies on the battlefields in order "to legitimate the outcome of the war and provide a vision of the future" (77).[31] Perhaps the most obvious example of this strategy of legitimation in *Drum-Taps* is the poem "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing," which offers the symbolic figure of the "Mother of All," walking the battlefields and mourning the dead even as she calls on the earth to reabsorb and thus to recover their bodies. After the opening frame structure of the first four lines, in which the speaker describes overhearing the Mother's soliloquy, the remaining thirteen lines of the poem are devoted to the Mother's words. The figure's posture is dramatic and her speech, high-literary:

Absorb them well O my earth, she cried, I charge you lose not
my sons, lose not an atom . . .
My dead absorb or South or North—my young men's bodies
absorb, and their precious precious blood . . . .(2: 527)

As so often in Whitman's work, however, an example of a particular stance is accompanied by a counter example. The "Mother of All" is a figure of mourning who makes possible the recuperation of the dead through their reintegration into the natural world. In "Come Up from the Fields Father," however, Whitman describes a mother who cannot accept the loss of her son and whose continued mourning thus disrupts the pastoral idyll described in stanzas two and three of the poem. While I agree with Sweet's claim that the pastoral is fundamentally a recuperative mode in Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, in juxtaposing Whitman's battlefield landscapes with Dickinson's, I want to attend in particular to passages in Whitman where the recuperative force of the pastoral threatens to collapse, undermining the metaphoric link between wartime bloodshed and nature's cycles of autumnal harvest and vernal renewal.

Two short poems from *Drum-Taps* might be read as companion pieces to one another insofar as they depict landscape scenes both before and after battle.[32] In both "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" and "Look Down Fair Moon," poetic gestures collide with journalistic description, and the speaker seems caught between these two stances. The result in each poem is an unresolved tension between pastoral symbolism and journalistic detail. In "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," which first appeared in 1865, Whitman's speaker offers a panoramic and picturesque scene—presumably prior to battle—in which soldiers and landscape seem to blend harmoniously:

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun—
hark to the musical clank,
Behold the silver river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop
to drink,
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a
picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering

the ford—while,
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind. (2: 457)

While the poem at first glance offers a photographic image of a cavalry unit on the march, the image is both carefully framed and artfully presented.[33] The opening line of the poem, "A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands," presumably refers to the lines of soldiers, yet might also be read as referring to the river and its winding tributaries. The first three lines of the poem establish emphatic parallels between the movements and sounds of the soldiers and the movement and sounds of the river itself. The men "take a serpentine course." Their weapons, which "flash in the sun," provide a visual complement to the "silvery river"; their "musical clank" mingles pleasantly with the sound of "the splashing horses." The speaker's stance is that of a journalist insofar as the poem offers a detailed photographic description, yet the harmonious aural and visual blending of the soldiers with the natural world reveals the artistic intervention of the poet-speaker.[34] The imperatives to the reader emphasize that this is a literary presentation of the scene: "hark to the musical clank," "Behold the silvery river," and "Behold the brown-faced men." The imperatives have the paradoxical effect of drawing the reader's attention away from the horsemen, towards the speaker who is not merely witnessing but in fact staging the described scene.

In the poem "Look Down Fair Moon," as in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," poetic imagery collides with journalistic detail. In "Look Down Fair Moon," however, which describes a gruesome night-time scene in the aftermath of battle, the tension between these two registers is more pronounced and the position of the speaker-witness is as a result less stable. I cite the strikingly brief poem in full:

Look down fair moon and bathe this scene,
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods on faces ghastly,
swollen, purple,
On the dead on their backs with arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus sacred moon. (2: 519–20)

The high-literary trope of the address to the moon both opens and closes the poem and thus serves as a framework to contain the horrify-

ing realism of the phrase which is at the poem's core: "faces ghastly, swollen, purple." This reliance on high-literary tropes appears elsewhere in *Drum-Taps*, particularly in the poems of the *Sequel* which Whitman added after Lincoln's death. In reading Whitman's elegies for Lincoln, Justin Kaplan describes the poet's return to a more conventionally poetic diction as evidence of "a retreat from the idiomatic boldness and emotional directness of [his] earlier work" (309–10). The apostrophe in "Look Down Fair Moon" also presents a retreat: transfixed by what he sees, the speaker effectively excludes the reader from the scene. Whitman has abandoned the easy confidence of the imperatives to the reader which we saw in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford."

Although the apostrophe to the moon represents a retreat from Whitman's stylistic innovations, in "Look Down Fair Moon" that retreat does not offer the same kind of resolution it provides in the Lincoln elegies. In "O Captain! My Captain!", for example, Whitman responds to the crisis of Lincoln's death by writing an elegy which reverts to the formal constraints of the lyric tradition both in its metrical regularity and in its repeated use of the apostrophe.[35] The catalogue of poetic techniques employed in "O Captain! My Captain!" has the cumulative effect of erasing the historical specificity of Lincoln's death and inserting the poem into the timeless elegiac tradition of "Lycidas" and "Adonais." The poem thus provides resolution by establishing Lincoln's death as a heroic one through association with the elegiac tradition.

In "Look Down Fair Moon," however, the gesture of the apostrophe seems incommensurate with the scene of carnage which the poem describes. While the speaker calls on the moon to "bathe this scene" with its "unstinted nimbus," the scene which the poem presents is horrifying in its detail and specificity: the "faces" are "ghastly, swollen, purple" and the "dead" are "on their backs with arms toss'd wide." The poem does not capture "night's nimbus floods" softening such a gruesome sight; rather it presents a speaker who, transfixed by the horror before him, calls on the moon to do so. While the speaker in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" insists on representing a harmonious blending of soldiers with the natural world, in "Look Down Fair Moon," the relationship between the natural world and the battlefield is more ambiguous symbolically. Does the speaker call on the moon to shed light on the horror of wartime slaughter? Or does he call on the moon to cast an aura or nimbus of heroism around each dead man's face? Will nature reveal

all the horror of human violence? Or will the moon recreate harmony between the human and natural worlds? While the speaker seems to call on the moon to soften the scene ("Pour softly down"), the poem offers no guarantee that the gesture of the apostrophe will be an effective or redemptive one: rather, the drama of the poem lies in its presentation of a speaker who wields the poetic apostrophe without evident success. The brevity of the poem only heightens the drama of this uncertainty.

In these poems then, Dickinson and Whitman examine the possibilities for representing violence by means of images drawn from the natural world. "They dropped like Flakes –" and "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" offer harmonious visions of heroic bodies merging with a vital and redemptive American landscape; in these poems, the speaker's position as witness is secure and authoritative. In "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" and "Look Down Fair Moon," however, this redemptive perspective is revealed to be fraudulent and deceptive. While "Look Down Fair Moon" relies on the high-literary apostrophe to control the horror of the faces of the dead, the balance the poem establishes between the literary trope and the gruesome description of the dead is a precarious one; the speaker's position is precarious as well. Though the poems in Whitman's *Drum-Taps* frequently rely on pastoral symbolism to imagine reconciliation and harmony after the war, "Look Down Fair Moon" points out that such a reconciliation will require the wholesale erasure of the collective memory of violence and death. In "The name – of it – is 'Autumn'," Dickinson explicitly rejects the possibility of such an erasure. Simultaneously, she suggests that the poetic register of the pastoral is inadequate to representing the horrors of the scene. "Look Down Fair Moon" and "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" suggest both that the American landscape has been drenched with blood and that there is no secure outside position from which the war can be witnessed.

I want to conclude with a brief comparison of the stances of address in these Civil War battlefield poems. In these poems, both writers probe the limits of the lyric speaker's position as witness to suffering; simultaneously through their exploration of the Romantic scene of address, Dickinson and Whitman consider the dilemmas an American writer faces in addressing the nation in a time of war. As I have suggested, the speaker's stance in "Look Down Fair Moon" represents a stylistic retreat for Whitman—a retreat from the easy confidence with which his speaker

commands the reader in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford." In "Look Down Fair Moon," Whitman reverts to the Romantic apostrophe to nature, placing his readers in the position of eavesdroppers as his speaker turns away from the audience. The brevity of the poem speaks both to the speaker's horror at the scene and to Whitman's uneasiness with this speaker's stance. The contrast between "Look Down Fair Moon" and "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" suggests that Whitman is conflicted about whether to continue the bold innovation of his direct addresses to the readers or to return to the Romantic fiction of the solitary lyric speaker who is seemingly unaware of his audience.

Dickinson's two battlefield landscape poems offer an indirect critique of the Romantic scene of address by sustaining the fiction of a soliloquizing speaker who is wrapt in solitary contemplation of nature's wonders: after all, both poems explicitly represent the changing of the seasons. Yet by taking on the subject of the war in these poems, Dickinson calls on her readers to look for her satirical critique both of the Romantic scene of address and of the Romantic repertoire of nature imagery. The contrast between "They dropped like Flakes –" and "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" suggests that a poet of war can no longer observe the suffering of others from a safe distance as the Romantic poet conventionally did; the contrast between the two poems also foregrounds the instability of the lyric self who serves as Dickinson's speaker-witness.

Reading Dickinson's Civil War poetry in relation to Whitman's illuminates both poets' anxiety about their rapport with their readers. While the Civil War prompts an outpouring of American poetry which will be read by a growing American audience, the war also challenges writers to reexamine their obligations to that readership. Both Whitman and Dickinson recognize the impossibility of representing the experience of battle. For Whitman, however, this recognition is trumped by his desire to address the nation and to bind it together again through a poetry which represents death as redemptive and meaningful. Acutely aware of the challenges a woman writer faces both in addressing the nation and in representing war, Dickinson chooses not to publish her work via the conventional print means. This choice gives her the freedom not to compromise her own vision: though she feels obligated to represent war's horrors, she also feels obliged to insist that no poem can

convey the experience of war to its readers.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Nancy Ruttenburg, Susan Schweik, Samuel Otter, and Tenney Nathanson for their responses to earlier versions of this essay.

1. All references to Dickinson's letters are cited from Johnson and Ward according to the letter numbers assigned in this edition.

2. Lynen's position, while strongly stated, is nonetheless largely representative of this first wave of Dickinson criticism. In an article published in 1966, Lynen writes: "Emily Dickinson is a baffling poet because she seems to bear little or no relation to the historical period within which she worked. She stands apart, as indifferent to the literary movements of her day as to its great events" (126). While Lynen's position is representative of much of the criticism from this period, Jay Leyda had already offered a counter-argument, suggesting in his 1960 biography that Dickinson "wrote more *in time*, that she was much more involved in the conflicts and tensions of her community than we have thought" (1: xx). Emphasis on Dickinson's isolation from her nineteenth-century surroundings also appears in more recent scholarship, however. In an article which examines Dickinson's class position, Erkkila argues that Dickinson's comfortable middle-class background allows her the luxury of refusing to participate in the political and literary debates of her day ("Emily Dickinson and Class").

3. Two of these studies analyze Dickinson's work in the context of relationships between and among women. Petrino reads Dickinson's work in relation to that of other nineteenth-century American women poets. Smith examines exchanges of letters and poems between Dickinson and her correspondents, particularly her beloved sister-in-law, and argues that such exchanges are themselves a form of publication. On the subject of Dickinson's response to the Civil War, a recent article by Miller offers an astute analysis of Dickinson's use of the word "liberty" in the context of Republican rhetoric; Marcellin provides a thematic survey of Dickinson's Civil War-related poems ("'Singing'"). For an analysis of Dickinson's political commitments in relation to the war, see Erkkila ("Dickinson and the Art") and Hutchinson. Reading Melville and Dickinson poems comparatively, Lee points out that both writers maintain a skeptical and oblique position in relation to dominant Northern wartime ideologies. To date, the only book-length study of Dickinson's response to the Civil War is Wolosky's, which argues that Dickinson's work offers a philosophical meditation on war's violence; Wolosky suggests that Dickinson's extraordinary rate of productivity during the war years cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. R.W. Franklin's dating of Dickinson's manuscripts would suggest that she wrote an astonishing 937 poems between 1861 and 1865. My approach to Dickinson's representation of the Civil War is deeply indebted to Wolosky's analysis. While

Wolosky begins by examining responses to the war in Dickinson's work, her analysis eventually leads away from the historical context of the war and its attendant problems of audience towards poems which focus on theological and metaphysical questions about language. My account reads the poems which represent the war as poems that are fundamentally about the dilemmas of the address to the nation. In a recent article, Wolosky reframes some of her arguments in more historical terms; noting parallels between "radical experimentation in twentieth-century poetics" and Dickinson's work, she describes the context in which Dickinson wrote as a time when "long-standing traditional assumptions regarding the basic frameworks for interpreting the world [were] challenged"; she asserts, "Dickinson's work is among the first directly to register the effects on poetic language of such a breakdown" (126), and she notes that Dickinson "not only explores her world in her world in her work but also addresses it" (127). Although Dickinson's critique of the address to the nation is not Wolosky's central concern, her claims run parallel to mine.

4. As these opening remarks begin to suggest, my approach to Dickinson's address to the nation fundamentally rejects the premise with which Sanchez-Eppler's analysis begins. Reading a letter which Dickinson wrote near the end of the Civil War, Sanchez-Eppler argues that "Dickinson claims freedom for herself by forfeiting any engagement with the nation, and even more radically, by forfeiting her own body" (105). I claim, on the contrary, that Dickinson does address the nation in her work, but that she does so from an oblique and skeptical position. This oblique position results, I will argue, not from her forfeiture of her body, but rather from her rejection of sentimental models for identification with the body of the suffering other. Sanchez-Eppler's analysis does not address those Dickinson poems which seek to represent the violence of the Civil War, nor does it address those poems in which Dickinson seeks to represent the racialized body in the terms of the abolition debate.

5. In a recent study, Jackson analyzes how twentieth-century critical lenses have classified (and effectively reified) Dickinson's work as lyric poetry; Jackson suggests that our insistence on reading Dickinson's pieces as lyrics works to obscure our understanding of the nineteenth-century context and communities in which the poems were produced. Though we approach the genre of the lyric from different critical angles, my concerns parallel Jackson's insofar as I, too, argue that Dickinson's poems resist and critique the boundaries of the lyric poem.

6. Two important studies of Whitman offer detailed analyses of the rhetoric of address in his work. Larson examines the relationship between Whitman's poetics of address and his political commitments. Nathanson offers a reading of the relationship between voice, writing, and lyric address. Both of these accounts influenced my approach to address in Whitman.

7. Wilson dismisses much of the poetry written during the Civil War as "versified journalism" in which the aims of propaganda were writ large (487); I would argue that Dickinson's Civil War poetry offers a counter example to this claim. For a discussion of a broad spectrum of poets' responses to Civil War ideologies and

rhetoric, see my Introduction in "*Words for the Hour.*"

8. Hosek and Parker offer a number of accounts of the position of Mill's model in contemporary theories of the lyric. See, for example, Culler's argument about the importance of Mill's model. Tucker takes Mill's model as a point of departure in analyzing the relationship between historical time and the lyric moment in Browning's work. Culler also emphasizes the centrality of Mill's model in his influential essay "Apostrophe." For a critique of the shaping influence Mill's model of the scene of address has had on twentieth-century readings of the lyric in general and Dickinson in particular, see Jackson (129–33).

9. Responding to Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*, Bernstein considers the differences between the "absorptive" text and the "antiabsorptive" one, suggesting that "both require artifice, but the former may hide/this while the latter may flaunt/it" (20). Bernstein also notes that "absorption may be a quality that characterizes specifically Romantic works" (13). In the poems in which they address America, Dickinson and Whitman both foreground the artifice of address in ways that disrupt the possibility of an absorptive reading.

10. Whitman's interest in public speaking is often mentioned in critical studies of his work, and his frequent use of dramatic apostrophes lends itself to comparative analyses between poetry and oratory. By contrast, Dickinson rarely uses the figure and uses the apostrophe to a reading public only ironically; her work might seem like an improbable place to look for ideas about the relationship between the lyric and the public speaking circuit. Dickinson's work, however, clearly responds to a range of nineteenth-century oratorical modes. Two recent studies of Dickinson argue for the connections between her poetry and sermon rhetoric. Lease examines the relationship between Dickinson's poetry and Wadsworth's sermons. Doriani explores the relationship between sermon rhetoric and Dickinson's poetics (see in particular Chapter 3). Reading Dickinson's work in relation to contemporary political oratory would no doubt also prove to be a fruitful field of inquiry. Any analysis of the lyric voice in Dickinson's work must, of course, attend to the impact of both religious and political oratory on her poems. Dickinson, like Whitman, writes not only with Emerson's writerly essays in mind, but also with years of public speeches, debates and sermons ringing in her ears. Even before she began in her thirties to keep increasingly to her home, Dickinson would have had the opportunity to hear countless lectures, sermons, talks and discussions at civic and university events in Amherst and South Hadley, at church services, and in her father's and brother's homes. Doriani calculates that Dickinson would have heard "well over fifteen hundred sermons during her period of regular attendance at church" (45).

11. Larson claims that Whitman's work provides a noteworthy exception to Mill's definition insofar as the poetry makes plain its demands on the reader (5–6). I would argue, however, that this claim neglects the extent to which the rhetoric of the apostrophe—throughout the lyric tradition—inevitably disrupts Mill's theory; the apostrophe insistently points to the circuit of communication which links the speaker and the reader. In other words, it is not only Whitman's poetics which dis-

rupts Mill's scheme, but any poetics which emphasizes the scene of address.

12. References to Dickinson's poems are cited from R.W. Franklin's variorum edition using the initial "F" and the numbers assigned by Franklin.

13. Franklin notes that Dickinson sent poems to more than forty people. He estimates that she sent 250 to Susan Gilbert Dickinson, 100 to Higginson, 71 to Louise and Frances Norcross, and 40 to Samuel Bowles (3: 1547). If we assume that some of these poems were circulated among a wider group of readers by their intended recipients (as was common practice with correspondence at this time), then hundreds of Dickinson's unpublished poems could have been read by hundreds of readers. In analyzing the rhetoric of address in nineteenth-century American poetry then, it is essential to consider the influence both of reading practices and of epistolary communities on these writers' poetics: it is essential that we ask how writers and readers might have experienced the idea of lyric voice in a culture in which both poems and letters were routinely read aloud and circulated among friends.

14. In 1863, of course, the phrase "Sweet – countrymen –" would have made a collective whole out of what was in fact a divided nation. Moreover, the line breaks and spacing in the handwritten version of this poem (Manuscript 1: 548) work to heighten the gender divide: the word "men" is the penultimate line. Franklin moves "men" to the end of the preceding line, but the manuscript offers another reading: "For love of her [nature], sweet country, men judge tenderly of me." In this variant, Dickinson's speaker addresses not her "countrymen," but her "sweet country"; her male readers "judge" her "tenderly" because of their love of nature—and for women poets who choose to write about nature.

15. As Dandurand notes, the three poems which appeared in the *Drum Beat* are: "Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple" (F 321), "Flowers – well, if anybody" (F 95), and "These are the days when Birds come back –" (F 122).

16. In his suggestive analysis of the rhetoric of address in Whitman, Nathanson writes: "Performative declarations that suggest the magical efficacy of the word abound in Whitman's early work. At their most dramatic, Whitman's performatives claim to produce actual presences, disposing creatures and objects by intoning their names as easily as the poet conjures up his own presence by declaring it" (7).

17. Pointing to the connection between Whitman's development of the open line and his commitment to the ideal of freedom, Grossman suggests that Whitman's work calls for the rejection of symbolic hierarchies: "The rewriting of hierarchies—soul/body, collective/individual, nation/state—as equalities, and the rewriting of identities as conventional dualities, above all the self and the other, is the task of the 'translator,' whose goal is union as the fraternalization of the community" (194).

18. Analyzing voice in Whitman's work, Pease argues that Whitman mistrusts the extraordinary power which the nineteenth-century orator's voice often had over the masses: "For Whitman, any orator who put the masses into bondage to his tropes supported slavery" (147). Pease suggests that Whitman seeks to create a

different kind of oratorical voice in his poetry, not a voice which brings the masses into submission, but rather a voice which expresses "the relation between the individual and the mass" (150). It is this utopian and participatory ideal of oratorical voice which Whitman reaches for in "Apostroph."

19. While such divisions prove anxious ones for the speaker in Whitman's poems, they also, of course, prove to be tremendously productive ones for Whitman's poetic imagination. Responding to both Larson's and Erkkila's (*Whitman*) accounts of the importance of union to Whitman's poetics, Maslan notes that "these critics hesitate to express what their opinions effectively assume: that division is a vital principle of Whitman's poetics" ("Whitman and His Doubles" 136). Maslan continues, "Rethinking division in this manner—as enabling rather than debilitating—would involve reexamining a whole series of relationships in Whitman in which critics have seen union as the organizing principle" (136). Breitwieser makes a similar claim in arguing that Whitman's poems present a dialogue between two speakers, "one timid, gentle, frequently disconsolate, the other large, all-inclusive" (121). Breitwieser contends that "Whitman's great poems . . . are crisis poems that concern themselves with being between these possibilities" (142). Focusing on Whitman's work in Civil War hospitals, Davis suggests that the poet-nurse in Whitman's wartime writings is able to occupy a liminal position, hovering on the boundaries between living and dead and thereby "proposing an alternative concept of Union," one that resists "the binary deadlock of secession and civil war" (6–7).

20. Two analyses argue that the poetry Whitman wrote during and after the Civil War considerably complicates his earlier pronouncements about the poetics of presence in his work. Moon describes how later editions of *Leaves of Grass* complicate the first edition's account of the relationship between the world of the body and discourses of the body. Maslan argues that "the identification of text and body in Whitman requires that the body [itself] become representational" ("Whitman's 'Strange Hand'" 938).

21. Pointing to the power of the apostrophe in Whitman's work, Pease argues: "Whitman experiences language not as a deprivation but as a plenipotential force" (155). "Living apostrophaically," Pease writes, "entails living for the sake of the activity which the apostrophe calls forth. An apostrophe has no existence apart from the activity it motivates. Hence death can have no dominion over it" (153). I would counter that the frenzied list of apostrophes in this poem reveals the speaker's fear of death, his terror at the prospect of the splitting of the nation, and his awareness that the language of the poem cannot prevent that splitting.

22. Analyzing Whitman's vision of the American subject, Altieri points to the limitations of the formulas for describing American identity that dominate contemporary discourses of the left and center. Such slogans, which emphasize both multiculturalism and the ideology of the melting-pot's shared culture, tend to avoid the tensions of difference, Altieri suggests, rather than confronting them. Altieri goes on to argue that Whitman's poetics "can help us both analyze the problem and develop a good deal more intensity of will than we can get from this bureaucrati-

cally seductive formula" (59–60). While Altieri's point is well-taken, his analysis does not address those passages in Whitman's work where the tensions of difference within the nation come to the fore. Altieri does not address Whitman's response to the violence of the war; nor does he examine Whitman's attempts to conceive of America as a nation which includes many races.

23. Wolosky points to the ways in which Dickinson's demurrals are part of a deliberate stance: "Dickinson is an assertive and determined poet . . . whose retirement is a stance of attack, whose timidity is aggressive" (*Emily Dickinson* xiii).

24. Just as the war threatens the stability of the lyric self, so too did it threaten Whitman's own psychic stability, as Aaron argues: "Given his personal expectations and his prophecies of American promise, [Whitman] had to insist on the providentiality of the War and to wring optimistic conclusions from its horrors" (68).

25. Two studies read Dickinson's work in relation to nineteenth-century painting. Farr examines Dickinson's painterly interest in the sublime, and St. Armand reads Dickinson's work in relation to both the Victorian painterly aesthetic of the sublime and popular forms of folk art. Neither study, however, considers Dickinson's painterly depictions of battlefield landscapes.

26. I am drawing here on Sweet, who argues that Whitman's poetics relies on a recuperative aesthetics of pastoralism in order to imagine the reuniting of North and South.

27. The landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, which were enormously popular with the public, offer just one example of the contemporary fascination with panoramic representation. Miller and Parry offer analyses of Cole's work and of American landscape painting. Dougherty examines the ways in which Whitman uses a visual vocabulary to "serve as the base of communion" between the poet and his readers (xiv). Drawing on Martin Buber's formulation of the "I-Thou" relationship, Dougherty's study argues that Whitman's poetics of the visual enables the poet and his citizen readers to share "a common space" (xvi). Dougherty's argument thus relies on a belief in the bond between poet and reader which my argument aims to unsettle. Folsom examines the relationship between Whitman's poetics and the development of photography; his analysis, however, touches only briefly on the dilemmas of representing war.

28. I would thus disagree with the emphasis Wolosky places, in her reading of this poem, on the violence inherent in Dickinson's vision of nature. Wolosky writes: "The comparison of battle to snow and wind, far from making the death of soldiers seem more natural, makes nature seem sudden and frightening" (*Emily Dickinson* 37). I would instead offer the poem "The Name – of it – is 'Autumn'" (F 465) as an instance of Dickinson's reckoning with the violence of nature.

29. Paglia argues that criticism continues to neglect and downplay violence in Dickinson's work. She also notes the frequency with which Dickinson offers descriptions of blood or relies on a palette of reds. Yet while Paglia cites "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" among other examples, she fails to consider the possibility

that the violence of Dickinson's poetics offers a commentary on the violence of the Civil War. In a recent article, Cody reads "The name – of it – is 'Autumn'–" in relation to the Civil War, juxtaposing the poem with possible source texts both from tourist literature and from the Bible.

30. Like "The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –" (F 465), "Whole Gulfs – of Red, and Fleets – of Red –" (F 468) appears in fascicle 22 and clearly responds to the war's violence.

31. Reading Whitman's representation of violence in relation to Lincoln's, Erkkila makes a similar point: "As in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Whitman's urge to naturalize the unnatural bloodiness of the Civil War, by mingling blood and grass in a redemptive teleology, fed willy-nilly the national myth of regeneration through violence that marked, and still does mark, the course of American history" (*Whitman* 210).

32. *Drum-Taps* first appeared as a separate volume in 1865, and this edition included fifty-three poems; these poems were subsequently incorporated as an annex into the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*. In reading *Drum-Taps* in its historical context, it is important to keep in mind, as Asselineau notes, that many of the poems which first appeared in this volume were most likely written before the start of the war or during its first few months; more specifically, many of the poems may well have been written before Whitman became directly involved with the war through his work as a nurse (308–9). See also Chapter 5 in Moon.

33. Sweet agrees with Wilson's characterization of this poem as a realistic "sketch from life" (Wilson 482, Sweet 209 n.3). I would argue, however, that the poem is as deliberately artful in its presentation of detail as any of the poems in *Drum-Taps*.

34. Erkkila notes that the relaxed and casual postures of the soldiers "contradict traditional notions of military order, discipline, and hierarchy, thereby projecting the figure of a democratic army" (*Whitman* 215). The artfully casual posture of the soldiers thus corresponds to the artfully casual air of the reportage provided by the speaker.

35. "O Captain! My Captain!" first appeared in print in the *New York Saturday Press*, November 4, 1865 and was included in the *Sequel to Drum-Taps* of 1865.

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Introduction

An Ahistorical Exposition and a Historicist Argument

The 1876 Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia was, above all, a celebration of America's material progress and prowess. Of the Centennial's ten categories of exhibits, nine were direct manifestations of material culture ("I. Raw Materials," "V. Tools, Implements, Machines, and Processes"); only the tenth, "Objects illustrating efforts for the improvement of the Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Condition of Man," pointed toward other aspects of culture, and there the reference to improvement was a telling one (McCabe 221–23). The nominal subject of any Centennial—the events of a hundred years ago—was here so buried beneath the accumulated stuff that there was an "almost complete absence . . . of any reminder of the event it was designed to commemorate" (Goodheart 55). The Exposition's official accompanying text, J. S. Ingram's *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated,* reiterated this emphasis, consisting of a catalogue of especially impressive items, "a popular presentation of only those things possessing . . . superior attractions" (5), with virtually no discussion of the historical or cultural issues to which those items or their exhibits might relate.[1] And such elision of the past in favor of America's present and future glories occurred not only implicitly in the Exposition's materially focused exhibits but also explicitly in one of its central texts: John Greenleaf Whittier's Centennial Hymn, performed at the May 10 opening ceremonies, expressed the fervent hope that "the new cycle shame the old!" (Cawelti 325–26).[2]

This material and progressive focus exemplified the overall tenor of the year's celebrations and reflections.[3] The most prominent such reflection was a text published late in the year entitled *The First Century of the Republic: A Review of American Progress*. As the Publisher's Advertisement notes, the book focuses not on official affairs of state, but rather on "the part taken by the American people in the remarkable material progress of the last hundred years"; its goal is to "connect the present with the past, showing the beginnings of great enterprises, tracing through consecutive stages their development, and associating with them the individual thought and labor by which they have been brought to perfection" (7–9). The move toward perfection is indeed the book's central image: of its seventeen chapters on subjects as wide ranging as agriculture, jurisprudence, and humanitarianism, nine include the word "progress" in their title and four others the word "development." The point is obvious: the first century has all been prelude to the present pinnacle, and things can only get better from here.

Such an attitude would seem to preclude any sense of the past, any vision of history as a distinct and meaningful entity. Indeed, Michael Kammen, the foremost historian of American cultural memory, argues that the 1876 events "tended to celebrate the present at the expense of the past," and that in such cases "we must be careful not to confuse commemoration with genuine remembrance" (135–37). Yet it is more accurate to argue that a central belief in progress requires a particular construction of history, one which sees the past as part of a reverse linear trajectory and which moves backward from the present's accomplishments to their foundations. This triumphalist take on history's meaning is nicely delineated by Kammen's distinction between commemoration—an act of celebration significantly shaped by present cultural value systems—and the more ostensibly value-neutral concept of remembrance. The commemorative historical construction does not discount the value of nor entirely elide the past—*First Century*'s chapters are full of historical facts, figures, and events—so much as exclude those details which do not fit into the linear progression and portray the rest as almost typological precursors of the present perfection.

My reference to the commemorative model's use of typology is deliberately suggestive of religious historical perspectives; the progressive

historical visions which dominated the 1876 celebrations can be seen as a postbellum reincarnation of a Protestant millennialism that had been essential to virtually every important act of American national self-fashioning, from Winthrop's Arabella sermon to the Prospect Poems to the Gettysburg Address. Apropos of the latter occasion, Ernest Tuveson, whose *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (1968) remains this view's definitive history, argues that the Civil War represented the millenial historical narrative's apotheosis, but adds that, "despite post–Civil War disillusionment, the myth of the Redeemer Nation kept a hold on the deepest feelings of the country, and in critical moments asserted itself" (209). Certainly the first centennial of American nationhood would count as such a critical moment, and the millennial, progressive historical visions expressed at that moment would seem very much a part of an ongoing American religious and philosophical tradition.[4]

Contemporaneous with the millennial vision since the Puritan era, of course, has been a second predominant American historical narrative: the declension model, as exemplified by the jeremiad. That construction of the past, in which historical figures occupy a pinnacle from which the present has fallen and to which the nation is implored to return, would seem directly antagonistic to a progressive perspective; yet as Sacvan Bercovitch and others have demonstrated, the jeremiad has often gone hand in hand with the millennial philosophy in constituting America's national identity. The jeremiad, in Bercovitch's summation, "helped sustain a national dream" (*Jeremiad* xi).[5] As historical narratives, both models are equally linear, and equally unwilling to include past details that complicate that linear vision. Moreover, the jeremiad's conservative nostalgia for those who have come before—like the progressive narrative's commemoration of the past—is often closely tied to particular attitudes and emphases in the present. Despite their superficial opposition, then, the declension and progress models are actually quite similar, and the 1876 celebrations often made them compatible: nostalgically gesturing toward the greatness of prominent historical ancestors and events while continuing to believe in the progressive perfection of America's material existence in the present and in the future. Americans in 1876 "wanted to keep the best of their new industrial and urban surroundings yet return

to the simplicities of the past" (Dee Brown 344), and in the celebrations' combination of nostalgia and material progressivism they found a way to do just that.

Moreover, while scholars such as Bercovitch and Werner Sollors have certainly established the presence of similar unifications of seemingly disparate historical perspectives—whether described as cultural "rituals of consensus" (Bercovitch, *Rites* 29–67) or individual acts of "consent" (Sollors, *Beyond* 6–7)—throughout American history,[6] I believe that such unifications' 1876 recurrence possessed a character distinct from and more forceful than any prior such appearance. There are a number of reasons for that distinctiveness, all related in one way or another to the previous quarter century's polarizing historical events. Most obvious, the scars of antebellum sectional conflict and the Civil War's much fresher wounds were unavoidable reminders of the damage done by division; the presence of those injuries, as Lisa Long documents, led many postbellum Americans to seek cultural "rehabilitation" (*Bodies* 1–7), and one particularly effective treatment was found in historical consensus (such as that constructed by veterans' groups) about those painful memories and the war that had produced them.[7] Also providing impetus for consensus in 1876 were the more recent memories of Reconstruction, and the new visions of nation and history that the period's very name implied; as Kirk Savage argues, "Reconstruction demanded nothing less than that the nation and its people reimagine themselves," and the reimaginings that took place in the public war memorials Savage analyzes provided an ideal vehicle through which to "yield resolution and consensus" about the past (4).[8] And on a broader level, those traumatic and divisive historical experiences produced a generation with a new worldview, "a philosophical foundation for the concept of union" (Dawes 24) that centered on two crucial components: what Anne Rose calls the late Victorians' "resilient humanism built on the sense of personal triumph" from having survived history's traumas (255); and a corresponding shift from a cyclical to a progressive notion of time, in which such traumas could be seen as obstacles to be transcended in the movement toward an evermore glorious future.[9]

For all those reasons, the kinds of consensus about the past, the unifications of nostalgia and progressivism, that the Centennial's commemorations constructed were distinct in both degree and nature from any

that had come before. Those celebrations reached their peak, naturally enough, on July 4; speakers at the Philadelphia Exposition and around the country both honored the past's untouchable grandeur (in the form of the Founding Fathers) and stood entranced at the future's immeasurable heights of material success. "What our fathers were we know. Their life was splendid; their history was registered," intoned Henry Ward Beecher, and yet "there never began to be in the early day such promise for physical vigor and enriched life as there is to-day upon this continent" (Trachtenberg, ed. 69–70). Yet promise was not the only thing evident on that commemorative day: at the Exposition women's suffrage activists staged a protest in the midst of the celebrations; news of General Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn was reaching the East for the first time; and in Hamburg, South Carolina, parading black militiamen refused to cede the street to a white militia and were fired upon, leaving five dead.

Those coincidental July 4 events highlighted some of the less celebratory aspects of American life in 1876, elements of its history that fit much less neatly into the progressive narrative and represented areas on which there was clearly not national consensus; and they were far from isolated occurrences. Throughout the year there were signs of unrest over gender, the frontier, race, and region: in January the New York Women's Suffrage Society went before Congress to protest the Centennial fund, arguing that it "imposed upon a disfranchised and unrepresented sex the enormous burden of half a million dollars" (Nugent 56), and in May the National Women's Suffrage Association met in Philadelphia on the day the Exposition opened; in February the Department of the Interior gave the army full jurisdiction for all Native American lands in the Black Hills, site of an ongoing gold rush, prompting the Sioux reprisals that led to Little Big Horn and the nation's final major Indian war; and November's contested presidential election paved the way for the end of Reconstruction and the spread of segregation and race violence in the South, while Congress continued to debate the question of amnesty for former Confederate leaders and soldiers.

All four of these issues, which I call for simplicity (echoing the period's language) the woman question, the Indian question, the race question, and the South question, were present in some form on the Centennial Exposition's grounds; together they constituted a much more

dialogic vision of American history than those comprised by the Exposition's materialist exhibits or voiced in its ceremonial texts. Women had a chance to address the woman question on their own terms at the Women's Pavilion, which was entirely funded and planned by the all-female Women's Centennial Exposition Committee. That committee explicitly sought to represent American women as a whole, bringing before Congress letters from average women to prove female enthusiasm for the Centennial and secure a spot for the Pavilion. Yet the Pavilion's exhibits offered a particular vision of women's past contributions to and present role in America, one focused on material advancements related to domestic work and crafts. That vision not only complemented the Exposition's overall emphasis on material progress, but also failed to include in any significant way such historical counter-narratives as women's advancements and obstacles in the workplace, the public arts, and politics. And the latter exclusion was one cause of the suffragists' July 4 protest: reading their "Declaration of Women's Rights" from a separate stage near the official one, they articulated an alternative vision of women's histories and futures, highlighting the dialogic nature of and stakes inherent in the question of which histories would be presented and which elided.[10]

Native Americans were likewise given exhibits (if not a pavilion) of their own at the Exposition, but their level of participation drastically differed from the women's. These exhibits were planned and executed by the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of the Interior, with the help of federal Indian agents who "collected" (often through underhanded means) artifacts from a variety of Native American tribes. The Indian question, then, was addressed at the Centennial by the same federal government that was in the process of giving Indian land to the army, and the representations of Native Americans reflected this "great ambiguity" (Trennert 129).[11] While the exhibits apparently contained objects of genuine beauty and power, they also depicted Indians as part of America's history, rather than its present; that image was reinforced by the Smithsonian's textual introduction to the exhibits, which read (in part): "the monuments of the past and the savage tribes of man are rapidly disappearing from our continent" (Rydell, *All* 23).[12] The exhibits thus fit Native Americans into the progressive historical narrative, portraying their seemingly inevitable extinction as a necessary part of that

progress; the alternative vision of separate cultures facing ongoing conquest and brutality, which after decades of neglect was just beginning to be re-voiced at this time by Native Americans and their reformer advocates, was nowhere to be found at the Exposition.[13]

The Centennial's presentation of the race question fell somewhere between these two positions of limited self-expression (the Women's Pavilion) and stereotypical classification (the Indian exhibits). For over a year African Americans fought for the chance to take part in the Exposition on their own (if still progressive) terms, to "claim," as one editor put it, "that [their] labor of the past had added something to the glory of the country" (Kachun 309).[14] That battle yielded two significant but somewhat ambiguous triumphs. First, Frederick Douglass was seated on the main platform at the opening ceremony, although he was almost turned away by overzealous policemen and was not allowed to give a speech. Second, the African Methodist Church led a movement to erect on the Exposition grounds a statue of Bishop Richard Allen, the church's founder and an important abolitionist; the statue was greatly delayed (due to an artistic misunderstanding and a railway accident) but was raised just before the Centennial's closing and became "the earliest successful effort by black Americans to honor one of their own with a commemorative statue" (Kachun 300). The Exposition's inclusion of Douglass and Allen was significant not only because it acknowledged that important Americans could be black but also because it hinted, if only obliquely and (in Douglass's case) silently, at the history of slavery and abolitionism that constituted another alternative to the consensus, progressive vision that dominated the Exposition.[15]

The self-expressed vision of African American history exemplified by the Allen statue, however, had its own alternative within the Centennial grounds. At the statue's dedication, one speaker identified "the South question" as "a central issue for the destiny of the entire nation" (Kachun 317), and the Exposition's most explicit attempt to address that question was a troubling one. Among the many culinary exhibits was a concession called "The South," or "The Southern Restaurant," which attempted to recreate the feel of an antebellum plantation, down to the "band of old-time plantation 'darkies'" which performed at all times (Rydell, *All* 28). This nostalgic vision of Southern and racial history, obviously antithetical to the slavery narrative represented by Douglass and

Allen, was also literally dangerous in its refusal to acknowledge either the historical grounding for or the current realities of the postbellum South. And yet neither did the Southern Restaurant fit smoothly into the consensus historical narrative of the Civil War; to view a plantation as a preferable place to dine would be to differ implicitly from the view that the war was a traumatic but necessary stage in the nation's ongoing upward development. Thus the visions of history constituted by the exhibits concerning these four questions, like the year's current events, undermined the Exposition's unified, progressive historical narrative at the same time that they were often closely linked to it, indicating some of the deep-seated complexities in the nation's past and present in the Centennial year.

Those complexities would only deepen over the next decade, yet the progressive, consensus national historical narrative grew concurrently more unified and more dominant in American cultural life. Part of that developing dominance involved the specific responses to the social questions that frame my next four chapters: the amalgamation of the national and Southern historical perspectives—or, more exactly, conversion of the former to the latter perspective—that I discuss in chapter 4, and the concurrent cooption of African American dialect voices to articulate a nostalgic vision of slavery that frames chapter 1; the rise of a new nationalist narrative of Western American history, one predicated, I argue in chapter 2, on the explicit forgetting and silencing of Native American histories and voices; and, in a quite different but ultimately connected vein, prominent public women's construction of a narrative from their own perspective that began as explicitly alternative to the existing national narrative but that, in its unified presentation of female voice, ended up excluding the variety of women's voices and experiences that I trace in chapter 3. Yet these direct responses to the social questions' dialogic historical narratives were part of a larger process taking place over this period: the development of a powerful new national monologue on America's history and identity, its past and future.

Benedict Anderson, whose *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) remains one of the definitive accounts of nationalism's processes, argues that different kinds of communities (national and otherwise) "are to be distinguished . . . by the

style in which they are imagined" (15). More specifically, Anderson links the rise of nationalist narratives to a new historical imagination, a progressive concept of time, noting that "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through . . . time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) time" (31). The progressive historical vision both expressed at and embodied by the Centennial can thus be seen as an early formation of a nascent postbellum nationalism, and the subsequent decade's consolidations of that vision as the blooming of that nationalist narrative. In the words of Priscilla Wald, such historical consensus is "the task of the official story of the nation": "to enable a smooth transition," to mold a nostalgic narrative of the past with a progressive vision of the future "in order simultaneously to transform and preserve 'us.'" And Wald's definition of such "official stories" as the narratives "through which a nation—'a people'—spoke itself into existence" nicely identifies the centrality of voice to the production of such consensus (1–2). Indeed, what arose over these years can be described as a national historical monologue, one that required for its successful development the concurrent elision or assimilation of the kinds of dialogic histories that undermined any unified sense of the American "us" and that were represented by the social questions.[16]

That monologue's successful development is illustrated by many of the period's cultural trends. Philosophically, two predominant ideas were a rejuvenated patriotism and the newly articulated Social Darwinism; the necessity for a national historical monologue is more obvious for the former, but Social Darwinism too depends on consensus about a progressive movement from past to future, and more exactly about explanations for individual failures that enable the overall belief in progress to remain intact.[17] Significant political policies such as the embrace of corporations and the rise of imperialism (and its concomitant economic, cultural, and religious expansionisms) can be similarly linked to the consensus over a progressive historical narrative; both of those policies depended on an understanding of past economic and expansionist developments as signs of progress in order to justify the further pursuit of such developments, while imperialism also required a view of America as more advanced than the nations it would be civilizing.[18] As for the period's historiographic trends, I have already noted how Civil War me-

morials brought the country together, helping the war become a "central component of the new nationalist mythology" (Grant 206); and a similar consolidation occurred with the founding of the American Historical Association, one of many professions to experience a "consensus of the competent" during these years (Lasch 228–29).[19] While, as I argue throughout this study, much of the period's literary production constituted dialogic complications of the national monologue, there were certainly links between some particularly popular genres and that monologic narrative: dime westerns, for example, tended to feature a heroic lead who vanquished alternative Americans (often Native Americans) to ensure a glorious future; while local color writing allowed for an embrace of regional differences within an implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) unified nation.[20] And even turn-of-the-century movements that might seem diametrically opposed to the monologue can be seen as attempts to build on its essential elements (if with certainly distinct goals): Progressivism, for example, with its emphasis—made overt in the movement's name—on a glorious possible future (often directly linked to a lost past, as in the jeremiad) and on change as an ever-present and generally positive force in American life; or literary naturalism, with its central tenets of determinism (certainly a unifying vision of history and one related to Social Darwinism) and decline (which locates the future in a linear relationship to the past).[21]

As connected to and reflected by those diverse trends, then, the monologic historical narrative was reified in post-Centennial American culture. As I argue in the Conclusion, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago both represented that narrative's apotheosis and pointed toward the imperial ventures that would in the following years become the narrative's next and most sweeping incarnation. Yet I believe that four quite distinct but equally significant 1886 events illustrate how by a decade after the Centennial the monologue had truly taken hold. One such event was the official opening ceremony for the Statue of Liberty, the first pieces of which had been displayed at the Philadelphia Exposition ten years before. The Statue's original idea was provided by French liberal Édouard René de Laboulaye, and was linked not only to the joint American and French traditions of liberty, but also to the specific historical realities of American slavery and emancipation; Laboulaye opposed French alliance with the Confederacy during

the Civil War, arguing that "to intervene in this struggle on the side of slavery would be to deny our past," and he first voiced the Statue idea at a dinner party in 1865, shortly after the war's end (Moreno 57–58, 133–37).[22] Yet when, six years later, he instructed his friend, the sculptor Auguste Bertholdi, to "go to see that country" in order to gain ideas for the sculpture (Leslie Allen 21), Bertholdi responded by focusing entirely on the present and future of what he called, upon arrival in New York, "indeed the New World" (Gilder 12); in no account of his travels is there any indication that Bertholdi investigated issues of African American slavery and freedom.[23] President Grover Cleveland's speech at the 1886 opening cemented the statue's assimilation into the progressive narrative of both past ("We will not forget that Liberty has made here her home") and future ("a stream of light shall pierce the darkness of ignorance and man's oppression when Liberty enlightens the world") [Bell and Abrams 55]. And subsequent popular and scholarly responses to the Statue have fully endorsed this progressive interpretation.[24]

If the Statue of Liberty's incorporation into the progressive national narrative required a revision—or at least an elision of key elements—of Laboulaye's original idea, the man and ideas at the center of the second 1886 event were much more fully in concert with that narrative. That event was the publication of Josiah Strong's best-selling *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis,* a combination of jeremiad and progressive prophecy that linked Protestant millennialism to both a budding imperialism—particularly in chapter 14, "The Anglo-Saxon and the World's Future," in which Strong argues that he "know[s] of nothing except climatic conditions to prevent this race from populating Africa as it has peopled North America" (215)—and the Gilded Age's corporate realities (in the concluding chapter 15, "Money and the Kingdom"). As William Berge argues, the previous fifteen years of Strong's life had been a "period of unrest" in which he "always seemed to be groping for some elusive goal or idea" (167–210); but in 1885 he came to just such an idea, a vision of his era as one of those "great focal points in history toward which the lines of past progress have converged, and from which have radiated the molding influences of the future" (Strong 13).[25] And within the next year Strong expressed that vision in at least three significant ways: not only writing and publishing *Our Country,* but also starting an even more explicitly expansionist sequel, *Our World* (pub-

lished in 1914) and beginning his work as "an ecclesiastical politician involved with the actualities of foreign policy decision-making" (James Reed 232).[26] The late 1890s' connection between and expansion from the national to the imperial progressive narrative were thus already in development in 1886.

The final two noteworthy 1886 events are likely the best known, reflecting as they do the two issues—the rise of corporations and labor conflicts—that have been at the heart of many scholarly assessments of the Gilded Age. Both, however, are also worth revisiting as representations of the progressive historical narrative's dominance. One would be the Supreme Court's May 10 ruling on *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company;* or, more exactly, Justice Morrison Waite's preamble to the ruling, subsequently included as the published decision's first line, in which he stated that "the court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does" (Korten 185–86).[27] This striking revision of the Fourteenth Amendment represented more than just a victory for big business; it was another illustration of how dialogic histories connected to the social questions (in this case, the race question) had by 1886 been assimilated into the national monologue. It would be easy to see the second event, the Haymarket bombing (May 4, the same week as the Supreme Court ruling), as precisely such a dialogic complication; after all, the strikes and protests with which that bombing was connected—like the first national strikes of 1877, or the Pullman conflicts of 1894—were in direct contrast to the Court's position that corporations and people were in a sort of unified consensus.[28] Yet I would argue that those persistent Gilded Age labor conflicts, which unquestionably represented dissent over America's present condition and ideal future, were by the same token part of the developing national consensus on the past. That is, the participants in the debates over labor and corporations tended—with the exceptions of extremists such as the Chicago anarchists, who were usually portrayed by both sides as distinctly outside of America and its narrative—to take for granted interrelated concepts such as the nostalgia for an ideal agrarian past and the potential for a glorious, world-leading future, both core elements of the

progressive historical narrative. Disagreements over the best way to establish continuity with that past and achieve that future, of which there were many, do not necessarily represent distinct historical visions.[29] The past was thus often an assumed starting point from which the respective social or political positions diverged; and as I argue below, many subsequent scholars have unintentionally replicated that assumption with their focus on the period's relationship to its twentieth-century future.

However, if the years between the Centennial Exposition and Haymarket comprised the progressive historical narrative's ascendance, that consensus about the past did not go uncontested. The social questions remained as prominent throughout the decade as they had been in 1876, and the two central and intertwined issues from each question's representation at the Centennial—what histories would be articulated and in whose voices—remained the principal elements of the dialogic historical spaces constituted by the questions. And historical literature in all its forms—the texts centrally concerned with constructing, conveying, conversing with, or complicating visions of the past—provided the best vehicle through which those dialogic possibilities could be voiced and engaged with. Thus over the next five chapters, each of the first four structured around one of the social questions and the fifth focused on a text that includes them all, I analyze works of historical literature from the post-Centennial decade; they construct dialogic historical visions that contest—in multiple forms, to distinct degrees, and with varying effectiveness, but all with complexity that demands close attention—the progressive, monologic national narrative.

In that central argument about the consensus narrative's consolidation on one cultural level and literary texts' contestations on another, my study can and should be seen as part of a long tradition of assessments of the Gilded Age. Those assessments begin with that very name for the period, coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner two years before the Centennial; the term "Gilded" provides perfect shorthand for arguments about the period's dual and divided nature, its polished and attractive surface under which hid the at best tarnished and workmanlike and at worst false and ugly realities. Both the term and its implied analysis have carried over into twentieth-century scholarship; a compilation of primary documents is titled *The Land of Contrasts* (Harris ed.),

and many of the most prominent scholarly engagements with the Gilded Age have focused on variations of one central contrast: between the numerous conscious attempts to construct a unified and coherent vision of American society, usually related to industry and material progress, and the disunified and chaotic realities of an increasingly diverse nation in which many were left out of and behind by that progress. That contrast is found in foundational concepts such as C. Vann Woodward's "reunion and reaction," Robert Wiebe's "search for order" in "a society without a core" (12), and Alan Trachtenberg's "incorporation of America" that "proceeded by contradiction and conflict" (*Incorporation* 7); in more recent analyses including T. Jackson Lears's "complex blend of accommodation and protest" in antimodernism (xv), Lawrence Levine's opposition of "Culture" to "growing fragmentation" in "the emergence of cultural hierarchy" (175–77), Gail Bederman's "discourse of civilization" and its gendered and racial alternatives (5), and Michael Elliott's "culture concept" with its narratives of similarity and difference; and in literary critical arguments like Susan Donaldson's "competing voices" and Kate McCullough's "enabling national fiction . . . masking the amalgamation of other categories that constituted it" (1–4).

I would certainly categorize my study as another such literary critical argument, one grounded in precisely the kinds of historicist perspectives about the era this impressive body of scholarship has constructed over the last half century. Yet I believe that my project differs in two important ways from the majority of those earlier studies, differences that are partly matters of emphasis but that also reflect essential elements of my project that have been underrepresented in Gilded Age scholarship. For one thing, that scholarship has tended to focus on Gilded Age society's links to its future (i.e., twentieth-century America) rather than its past. The title of a recent anthology, *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America* (Calhoun ed.), is a telling piece of evidence for that forward-looking mindset, but more important are the date ranges covered by most individual studies: 1877–1920; 1880–1940; and so forth. Literary critics, perhaps guided by survey courses' penchant to divide at 1865, have likewise tended to connect the era to its future, as exemplified by Jay Martin's seminal *Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865–1914*, and the aforementioned Donaldson (1865–1914) and McCullough (1885–1914) projects. Even historians who focus on Reconstruction and

its immediate aftermath, a subject that would seem deeply grounded in the period's particularities and past—race historians such as Eric Foner and Joel Williamson, Southern historians such as C. Vann Woodward—have also tended to link Gilded Age developments with the twentieth century (as exemplified by Woodward's *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*).

Moreover, two of the essays in a recent *American Literary History* forum on the continuing importance of Trachtenberg's *Incorporation* contend that it is precisely this forward-looking emphasis that both distinguishes the Gilded Age from other periods and characterizes Gilded Age scholarship in Trachtenberg's vein. David Shumway articulates both parts of that position, arguing first that "American culture and society change[d] fundamentally during the late decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, defining the century that would follow," and then that Trachtenberg's book provided a "starting point . . . for a systematic rereading of American culture that focused on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rather than on the mid nineteenth century" (754). And Trachtenberg's own reassessment of his book concludes that a significant element of its continuing value is its ability to explain the manifold ways in which the Gilded Age was "a turning point in US history" ("Incorporation" 759).[30] Despite their many critiques and revisions of the consensus narrative, then, these scholars have in a certain way reified its elision of history and constructed a twentieth-century extension to its focus on the future. And even their revisionist stance has contributed to that construction: when scholars with this forward-looking orientation analyze the role of the past in the Gilded Age, they often focus on the progressive narrative, and thus view the era's visions of history as entirely concurrent with developments of national consolidation and consensus, as part of the problem rather than (at least potentially) part of the solution.[31]

One historian who has written extensively about the era's relationship to the past is Michael Kammen. Part 2 of his *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* covers "Circa 1870 to 1915"; while that date range indicates that even Kammen links the Gilded Age with its immediate aftermath, he is more fully concerned than other scholars with how the era related to and looked back on its history. Moreover, he argues that "between 1861 and 1907,

American memory began to take form as a self-conscious phenomenon," and describes the period as "an age of memory and ancestor worship by design and by desire" (100, 12). Much of Kammen's emphasis here, as his reference to "ancestor worship by design" indicates, is on the nostalgic and self-serving commemorations of the past which fit neatly into a progressive vision of history. But Kammen also mentions memory as an important aspect of the era's vision of history, and his analysis of that concept reveals the dialogic nature of its relationship to the past: "memory is more activated by contestation, and amnesia is more likely to be induced by the desire for reconciliation" (13). Kammen's inclusion of memory in his description of Gilded Age historical visions, then, indicates that the period's sense of the past comprised more than the consensus narrative visible in the nostalgia and progressivism of the official celebrations (as well as in the many other cultural arenas that I have discussed); it is my focus on those multiple historical constructions that differentiates my study from most scholarship on the era. As Trachtenberg (among many others) has noted, many of the Gilded Age's conflicts transcended particular issues to become "controversies over the meaning of America" (*Incorporation* 8); and while most scholars have focused on those controversies' ramifications in the Gilded Age present and for the twentieth-century future, I argue that the controversies themselves, the contested definitions of America's identity and future, were just as closely tied to visions of the past.

Such contestations over the meaning of America and visions of its history were played out in numerous cultural arenas during the post-Centennial decade, but nowhere with more complexity and power than in historical literature. And the second significant differentiation between my critical position and that of much Gilded Age scholarship is precisely in that literary emphasis, in the analytical use to which I put literary texts. In Brook Thomas's introduction to the *American Literary History* (*ALH*) panel, he argues that a salient feature of *Incorporation* was the way in which it "brought literature and material social life together" and demonstrated that in both cases "their role is ideological." For Trachtenberg, Thomas rightly notes, those ideologies are in contrast, with texts and the market "generat[ing] competing senses of reality"; but as Thomas acknowledges, subsequent scholars have taken the ideological premise in a different direction, arguing that literature and ma-

terialism reified the consensus narrative in quite similar ways. Perhaps the pioneer of this reading was Walter Benn Michaels, who explicitly references and diverges from Trachtenberg in his argument that many if not most of the period's literary texts served as "endorsement[s] of consumer capitalism" (17); and this approach, which constructs an either-or framework in which texts either abet or counter dominant cultural or political trends (often with little room for middle grounds), has been extended in a variety of ways since.[32]

Certainly there are literary texts that seem clearly and unequivocally to endorse a particular cultural viewpoint; I reference one such text in chapter 1: Thomas Nelson Page's short story "Marse Chan" (1884), which uses an ex-slave's dialect voice to describe slavery as "good ole times . . . de bes' [he] ever see" (10).[33] Yet identifying individual examples does not provide sufficient rationale for a methodology; and my methodology is instead grounded in analyzing each text's complex engagement with the past on its own terms, rather than deciding into which preestablished category the text might fit. Many scholars of Gilded Age literature take a similar position, but interestingly many argue for that literature's value by constructing a literary historical contrast that mirrors the surface and reality arguments: a conflict between a genteel literature, which in this view tended to ally with the progressive historical vision, and the new realism, which often stressed the realities beneath that vision. George Santayana, who coined the term "genteel tradition," described it as "a survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers," "the back-water" of the era's literary and intellectual work; a recent chronicler of the tradition connects that description more fully to the period's contrasting historical forces, arguing that genteel literature "embodied conservatism in a threatening age" (Tomsich 1, 195).[34] On the other side, realist fiction was described by the early twentieth-century critic Fred Pattee as "teeming . . . with the freshness, the vitality, and the vigor of a new soil and a newly awakened nation" (*History* 18); while there has been famous disagreement on many of the defining characteristics, figures, and attitudes of realism, most post-formalist critics would still agree with Amy Kaplan's claim that "realism's relation to social change" is in "the foreground of [realist novels'] narrative structure" (9).[35] As further evidence of the established critical contrast between these two literary modes and that contrast's connections to Gilded Age historical

forces, one need look no further than the ongoing debates over whether William Dean Howells was a conservative (and thus genteel) or a Progressive (and thus realist).[36]

Such broadly historicist literary criticism is undoubtedly important and necessary, particularly as a response to formalist readings of realism which entirely ignored its relation to its complex social context. And my own readings of the period's historical literature are interconnected with my historicist arguments, both the study's overall analysis of the monologic national narrative and its dialogic complications and the chapters' specific variations on that unifying idea. Yet I could not agree more strongly with Philip Barrish's argument that "in the impulse to make literary works line up with what we already know (or think we know) about broader historical developments . . . we risk moving too quickly past some of the wrinkles and folds that distinguish literature itself" (11). The historians and cultural studies scholars I have referenced throughout this introduction, along with many others, have traced and will continue to trace those broader historical developments in all their complexity; while we literary critics should not pretend that such studies have no relevance for our own projects, neither should we simply seek to duplicate (and inevitably simplify) their work by extending it wholesale to literature. Too often, as Barrish hints, that leads us to treat literary works as mere reflections or extensions of a period's history, rather than as separate and complex entities which demand close and extended attention before their thematic depth and social relevance can be understood. That limiting tendency has been especially pronounced in critical accounts of historical fiction. And my own readings of historical literature, while connected to the cultural issues that I have discussed here (and in my research of which I have attempted to be as thorough and responsible as possible), thus seek, through both their breadth and their reliance on extended formal attention to each text and its many distinct voices, to approach and understand literary constructions of history on their own complex terms.

In discussing the social questions' Centennial presence, I highlighted the interconnections of history and voice. Here I would add the literary historical corollary that such a connection may be particularly apt for Gilded Age texts; many accounts of the period's literary production

have focused on its unique developments in the concept of voice. Two of the earliest critics to consider the vernacular style in American literature, Leo Marx and Richard Bridgman, locate that style's primary development in the late nineteenth century: Marx writes of "a new language" spoken by narrators in the era's texts (112), and Bridgman elaborates the distinction into a full analysis of "the stylistic revolution . . . at the end of the century" (46). The critical question addressed by this new form of literature was "how the ordinary American spoke," and the answer "required the establishment of a characteristic diction (the vernacular) and of a characteristic way of using it (colloquial)" (Bridgman 62). If both Marx and Bridgman focus largely on defining this new literary style, rather than on connecting their readings to themes or historical contexts, Marx's final point that "the vernacular was more than a literary technique—it was a view of experience" (122) points toward such connections.

More recent scholars have followed that lead and connected Gilded Age texts' use of voice to broader questions, while maintaining Marx's and Bridgman's assessments of the late nineteenth century as a period of radical literary change. The narratologist critic Janet McKay, for example, argues in *Narration and Discourse in American Realistic Fiction* (1982) that novelists such as Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain "redefin[ed] the role of the narrator, . . . foreground[ed] the voices of characters, and . . . combin[ed] these two changes to present a variety of perspectives" in their works (4). "Never before in our fiction," she posits, "had discourse been so crucial to the telling of the tale," and she connects this new emphasis to another argument about realism's relationship to social change: the variety of perspectives illustrates the "egalitarian faith" of the novelists in question (191–92).

Other critics complicate McKay's utopian picture of these literary developments, however. Barbara Hochman does so in reader-response terms, portraying the realists' shift in the use of perspective as an attempt to supplant an earlier model of "friendly reading" with a more removed authorial position; a change based not only on new formal ideas and goals but also on nascent anxieties about the constitution and desires of the reading public (29–47). More overtly political analyses of these developments are found in two works by Elsa Nettels: *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells's America* (1988) and *Language*

and Gender in American Fiction: Howells, James, Wharton, and Cather (1997). Nettels's arguments, while comprised of impressive close readings that are sensitive to nuance, in their overarching analyses often echo Michaels's either-or approach: in the former work she claims that Howells had largely democratic impulses but that his use of dialect "emphasize[s] the forces that sever rather than unite humanity" (194); and in the latter she investigates whether the writers "helped perpetuate or subvert their culture's ideology of language and gender" (2). Yet rather than giving in entirely to that binary evaluation, Nettels comes to the conclusion that the writers' use of "conflicting voices [is] suggestive of conflicting sympathies" (*Fiction* 184), an argument that parallels my analysis of historical literature's multivocality and dialogic relationship to the social questions and national narrative.

Perhaps late nineteenth-century literature's most striking stylistic development was the use of dialect, a subject which Gavin Jones thoroughly and impressively explores in his *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (1999). As Jones notes, "this new movement, dubbed 'the cult of the vernacular,' was judged to be the most significant literary event of its generation" (1); his work reiterates that judgment, arguing that "the distinctiveness of late-nineteenth-century American literature lay largely in the generative role of dialect within it" (3). He acknowledges dialect's potential for nostalgia and racism but also traces its ability to "record the subversive voices in which alternative versions of reality were engendered," a Bakhtinian point that connects his individual texts and readings to the larger, "crucial cultural debate in which ideological attempts to forge an ideal America . . . were constantly undermined by new and strange ways of talking" (11–12). And while Jones certainly takes a political side in that debate, "stress[ing] dialect's counterhegemonic, disruptive potential" in preferred writers such as Cable and Dunbar (211–13), he does so in much the same way that I hope to: through a balance of nuanced cultural commentary on the one hand and close and extended attention to particular literary texts' uses of dialect on the other.[37]

Jones's work, then, like many of the texts I have referenced, has much to offer my project, both in its specific argument and individual readings and as a model of the kind of analysis I hope to perform. I would

like to close by reiterating a few of the most salient points. First, my readings of particular texts are not primarily historicist, since I am most interested in each text's voices and historical visions, rather than its contexts; but neither are they entirely formalist, for I link their constructions of history and voice to thematic conclusions about the texts' connections to the four social questions, their dialogic complications of the monologic national narrative, and that narrative itself. Second, my study is not an exhaustive treatment of the decade; my focus on constructions of history has led me away from some presentist or futurist topics—economics and labor, immigration, Howells and the rise of realism—which would be central to such a treatment (and which have been central to cited projects such as Trachtenberg's).[38] Third and finally, what it is: a close reading of how texts written between 1876 and 1886 use a variety of voices to construct visions of history, and a connection of those dialogic historical constructions to the era's social questions and national narrative.

Each of the next four chapters centers on historical literary texts that deal in some central way with one of the four questions: race, Indian, woman, and the South. The particular valences of voice and history vary—dialect and slavery in chapter 1; silence and forgetting in 2; public debates and private experiences in 3; the lure of the Southern voice and history in 4—but in each they connect to this chapter's historical and literary contexts. In chapter 5 I focus on an exemplary case study for my argument: George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880), a novel that I argue is one of the decade's most complex and important literary treatments of voice and history. In a coincidental but fascinating development, its manuscripts contain an additional level of dialogue, in the form of comments by its editor and the two publisher's readers and responses by Cable himself; all four figures use those conversations to articulate, defend, and adjust their own readings of the novel's constructions of voice and history. I believe that an analysis of Cable's novel, first on its own complex terms and then in the context of that historical dialogue, perfectly illustrates and effectively concludes my analyses of history and dialogue in American literature. And if the monologic national historical narrative had gained dominance by 1886 and, as I argue in the Conclusion, reached its apotheosis at the 1893 Columbian Exposition

and in the imperialist ventures foreshadowed there, Cable's novel and all of the decade's dialogic literary contestations of that narrative serve as models on which future historical literature could build and remain powerful and profoundly relevant reconstructions of American histories and voices.

ONE

The Dead and the Living

> And so good-bye to the war. I know not how it may have been, or may be, to others—to me the main interest I found, (and still, on recollection, find) in the rank and file of the armies, both sides, and in those specimens amid the hospitals, and even the dead on the field.
>
> —Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days,* 1882

The long and troubled career of Civil War memory began well before the conflict ended. It took root in the dead and the living. The living were compelled to find meaning in the dead and, as in most wars, the dead would have a hold on the living. In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln referred to the "brave men" who had "consecrated" the ground of that battlefield above the "power" of his words to "add or detract."[1] Implied in the rest of that speech was the notion that the difference between the living and the dead was that the living were compelled to remember, and from the stuff of memory, create a new nation from the wreckage of the old.

On July 3, 1913, a day of withering heat in Washington, D.C., President Woodrow Wilson took a cruise aboard the *Mayflower* down the Potomac River toward Chesapeake Bay. A small party of aides and journalists accompanied a harassed President who was eager to be a historical tourist for a day at the Yorktown Revolutionary War battlefield. The following day, July 4,

Wilson was to address an extraordinary gathering of Union and Confederate veterans at America's most famous battlefield—Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

During his visit to the Yorktown sites, Wilson went almost entirely unrecognized by the variety of local people he encountered. Only a young white girl recognized the President as she offered to be his guide through the house that had served as Lord Cornwallis's headquarters. Neither the clerk at the court house, nor the local sheriff, who had a campaign photograph of Wilson on his own wall, recognized their famous visitor. Most poignantly, as Wilson entered and returned to the wharf he met several blacks who called him "Uncle" but did not recognize the President. According to press reports, a "group of old-fashioned darkies sitting around some equally old-fashioned scales" offered to weigh the tourists. After a jaunty exchange, Wilson consented and tipped the scales at 181 pounds. The next morning at Gettysburg Wilson would weigh in on another matter, speaking to the world about the meaning of the Civil War and of fifty years of the nation's remembering and forgetting. That he had gone virtually unrecognized on either side of the color line in a small corner of Virginia the day before may hardly have mattered much to the President. But perhaps the unnamed, and almost invisible, blacks hanging around a Potomac River wharf near a great historic site of Old Virginia (Wilson's home state) represent an appropriate backdrop for the resounding event that Wilson would visit within twenty-four hours. The ignorance of the clerk and sheriff is remarkable. But it is hardly surprising that rural black Virginians would not know Wilson; since 1904 none of them had been able to vote in the state without passing literacy tests, paying poll taxes, and meeting all but impossible property restrictions. They spent so much of their segregated lives being "disrecognized" by whites that recognizing a President might take special knowledge.[2]

President Wilson had initially declined to appear at the fiftieth-anniversary Blue-Gray reunion to be held in the Pennsylvania town July 1–4, preferring a vacation trip with his family in Cornish, New Hampshire. But circumstances, and the urgings of Congressman A. Mitchell Palmer, made him "constrained to consent to be present at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg," as he wrote to his wife, Ellen. Wilson realized that this reunion "was something we had to take very seriously indeed. It is no ordinary celebration." Wilson privately expressed his awareness of being the first Southerner elected President since the Civil War. "Both blue and gray are to be there," he observed. "It is to celebrate the end of all feeling as well as the

end of all strife between the sections." Wilson was also acutely aware that he followed Abraham Lincoln's footsteps to Gettysburg. "Fifty years ago, almost, also on the fourth of July, Mr. Lincoln was there (in the midst of business of the most serious and pressing kind, and at great personal cost and sacrifice to himself). If the President should refuse to go this time . . . it would be hotly resented . . . it would be suggested that he is a Southerner and out of sympathy with the occasion."[3] Sometime between changing his plans on June 28, when he announced that he would attend the reunion, and July 4, Wilson wrote his own short, restrained Gettysburg address.

The 1913 reunion at Gettysburg was a ritual like none other that had occurred in America. It had been designed to be a festival of sectional reconciliation and patriotism. The states appropriated some $1,750,000 to pay the transportation of any Civil War veteran from any part of the country. The federal government, through Congress and the War Department, appropriated approximately $450,000 to build a "Great Camp" to house and feed the veterans. A total of 53,407 veterans attended the reunion, and as many spectators were estimated to have descended on the town of Gettysburg during the week of the event, all riding the special cars of some forty-seven railroad companies operating in or through Pennsylvania. As it stood in American culture in the early twentieth century, Civil War memory never saw a more fully orchestrated expression than at Gettysburg on the battle's semicentennial.[4]

Once the old men had arrived in their uniforms, decked out in ribbons and graced with silver beards, the tent city on the battlefield became one of the most extraordinary spectacles Americans had ever seen. For most observers, the veterans were men out of another time, icons that stimulated a sense of pride, history, and amusement all at once. They were an irresistible medium through which Americans could envision part of their inheritance and be deflected by it at the same time. They were at once the embodiment of Civil War nostalgia, symbols of a lost age of heroism, and the fulfillment of that most human of needs—civic and spiritual reconciliation.

As bands played, suffragettes lobbied the tented grounds, shouting "votes for women." The recently formed Boy Scouts of America served as aides to the old soldiers, and members of the regular U.S. Army guarded the proceedings. Newspapers gushed with amazement. "You may search the world's history in vain for such a spectacle," announced the *Columbus Citizen* (Ohio). The sense of completeness of the national reunion was especially prevalent in the newspapers. The *National Tribune* (an official organ of the Grand Army

of the Republic, GAR) rejoiced over the "death of sectionalism" and the ongoing "obliterating of Mason and Dixon's line." And the *Confederate Veteran* could declare with full confidence that "the day of differences and jealousies is past." The *London Times* of England marveled that, however pathetic their feebleness, the mingled veterans were "eradicating forever the scars of the civil war in a way that no amount of preaching or political maneuvering could have done." Glorious remembrance was all but overwhelmed by an even more glorious forgetting. "Thank God for Gettysburg, hosanna!" proclaimed the *Louisville Courier-Journal.* "God bless us everyone, alike the Blue and the Gray, the Gray and the Blue! The world ne'er witnessed such a sight as this. Beholding, can we say happy is the nation that hath no history?"[5]

On the third day of the reunion, July 3, the governors of the various states spoke in a giant tent constructed on the field where Pickett's Charge had occurred fifty years earlier. Governor William Hodges Mann of Virginia struck the most meaningful chord of memory: "We are not here to discuss the Genesis of the war, but men who have tried each other in the storm and smoke of battle are here to discuss this *great fight* . . . we came here, I say, *not to discuss what caused the war of 1861–65,* but to talk over the events of the battle here as man to man" (emphasis added).[6] Like the politics of reconciliation, which was several decades old by 1913, this reunion was about forging unifying myths and making remembering safe. Neither space nor time was allowed at Gettysburg for considering the causes, transformations, and results of the war; no place was reserved for the legacies of emancipation or the conflicted and unresolved history of Reconstruction. Because the planners had allowed no space for surviving black veterans, they had also left no space on the programs for a discussion of that second great outcome of the war—the failures of racial reconciliation.

Of course, nations rarely commemorate their disasters and tragedies, unless compelled by forces that will not let the politics of memory rest. One should not diminish the profoundly meaningful experiences of the veterans themselves at such a reunion; the nation, through the psyches of old soldiers, had achieved a great deal of healing. But the 1913 "Peace Jubilee," as the organizers called it, was a Jim Crow reunion, and white supremacy might be said to have been the silent, invisible master of ceremonies. At a time when lynching had developed into a social ritual of its own horrifying kind, and when the American apartheid had become fully entrenched, many black leaders and editors found the sectional love feast at Gettysburg more than they could bear. "A Reunion of whom?" asked the *Washington Bee.* Only those who

"fought for the preservation of the Union and the extinction of human slavery," or also those who "fought to destroy the Union and perpetuate slavery, and who are now employing every artifice and argument known to deceit and sophistry to propagate a national sentiment in favor of their nefarious contention that emancipation, reconstruction and enfranchisement are a dismal failure?"[7] Black responses to such reunions as that at Gettysburg in 1913, and a host of similar events, demonstrated how fundamentally at odds black memories were with the national reunion. In that disconnection lay an American tragedy not yet fully told by 1913, and one utterly out of place at Blue-Gray reunions.

Woodrow Wilson did not likely think of this disconnection between black and white memories as he arrived at the Gettysburg train station on the morning of July 4. Wilson did not come to Gettysburg as a historian probing the past. Whisked in a car out to the battlefield where the great tent awaited with several thousand veterans crammed inside, Wilson, the Virginian-President, stood before the entrance, flanked by a Union veteran in long beard, holding a small U.S. flag, and a Confederate veteran in long mustache, holding a small Confederate flag. Behind him, Governors John K.

On July 4, 1913, Woodrow Wilson, the first Southerner elected President since the Civil War, spoke on the battlefield at Gettysburg during the fiftieth anniversary Blue-Gray reunion and declared the war America's "quarrel forgotten." (Record Group 25, Pennsylvania State Archives)

Tener (Pennsylvania) and William H. Mann (Virginia) followed him into the tent, as the President doffed his top hat. As the assembled throng of old veterans rose on the ground and in high-rise bleachers, Wilson strode to the stage. Wilson stood without a podium, the great beams of the tent arched behind him, the script in his left hand, and began to speak. He had not come to discuss the genesis or the results of the war. He declared it an "impertinence to discourse upon how the battle went, how it ended," or even "what it signified." Wilson's charge, he claimed, was to comprehend the central question: What had the fifty years since the battle meant? His answer struck the mystic chord of memory that most white Americans were prepared to hear:

> They have meant peace and union and vigor, and the maturity and might of a great nation. How wholesome and healing the peace has been! We have found one another again as brothers and comrades, in arms, enemies no longer, generous friends rather, our battles long past, the *quarrel forgotten*—except that we shall not forget the splendid valor, the manly devotion of the men then arrayed against one another, now grasping hands and smiling into each other's eyes. How complete the union has become and how dear to all of us, how unquestioned, how benign and majestic, as state after state has been added to this, our great family of free men! (emphasis added)[8]

Wilson strained to look ahead and not to the past, to call the younger generation to a moral equivalent of war, doing battle "not with armies but with principalities and powers and wickedness in high places." He appealed to a new "host" for a new age, not the "ghostly hosts who fought upon these battlefields long ago and are gone." That new host was the teeming masses of the Progressive era, "the great and the small without class or difference of kind or race or origin; and undivided in interest." Wilson's great gift for mixing idealism with ambiguity was in perfect form. After this sole mention of race, and probably without the slightest thought of Jim Crow's legal reign, Wilson proclaimed that "our constitutions are their [the people's] articles of enlistment. The orders of the day are the laws upon our statute books." After the obligatory endorsement of the valor of the past, Wilson devoted the majority of his fifteen-minute speech to the present and the future. "The day of our country's life has but broadened into morning," he concluded. "Do not put uniforms by. Put the harness of the present on."[9] These were telling words for the future war President who had studied the Civil War with keen interest.

After the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner," Governor Tener immediately escorted Wilson to his car and back to the train station. In all, Wilson had spent less than an hour in Gettysburg; before noon he was on his private car en route to New York City, and eventually on to a New Hampshire retreat with his family. Within fifteen minutes of the conclusion of Wilson's speech, the closing ceremony of the reunion took place. At high noon, all across the town and hillsides of Gettysburg, cooks and generals, Boy Scouts and veterans, journalists and tourists, Congressmen and latrine cleaners, all came to attention. The colors were lowered to half mast at all the regimental or unit headquarters throughout the tent city. A lone bugle played taps, and in the distance a battery of cannon fired intermittently. Then, for the next five minutes, the vast crowd stood in utter silence and paid the "Tribute to Our Honored Dead."[10] As Wilson's train sped away in retreat, and as the fifty thousand assembled veterans tried to look down through what the President had called "those fifty crowded years" to fathom the meaning of the war and its aftermath, the dead and the living, the memories and the sun-baked oblivion, who can know what stories played on their hearts? In collective silence what memories careened back and forth between gleaming monuments and flapping flags? How did the silence of the honored dead speak?

THE FIVE MINUTES of silence to honor the dead on July 4, 1913, was two minutes longer than Abraham Lincoln's famous speech on November 19, 1863, dedicating an unfinished cemetery for more than twelve thousand soldiers (many whose names were unknown) still in the process of being properly reburied. Since the battle nearly five months before, Gettysburg had been a community in shock and a macabre scene. Makeshift graves had been hastily dug all over the fields where men fell; others had been dug up by families looking for loved ones. Serious health hazards had threatened the local population, and hogs had fed on human body parts protruding from the ground. The horror that was the real battle of Gettysburg was to be transformed into something proper, solemn, perhaps even exalted by the carefully planned cemetery to be dedicated in November. The struggle to define the Civil War in America and determine its meaning did not begin at Gettysburg on that late autumn day, but it did receive an important ideological infusion.

Lincoln's brief speech followed the official address—a long funereal oration by one of the nation's premier orators, Edward Everett. Rich in detail

about the battle and its participants, partisan and unflinching in its descriptions of the carnage, Everett's nearly two-hour effort held the audience of twenty thousand in his customary spell. Drawing inspiration from Pericles's funereal oration during the Peloponnesian War, Everett established America's ancient lineage of sacred bloodletting. He laid responsibility for the "crime of rebellion," and therefore, all the death, in the hands of Southern leaders. But no matter how long the war or the scale of death, Everett saw a future of "reconciliation," a revived spirit of Union forged in such apocalyptic and necessary sacrifice.[11]

As Lincoln assumed his function in the dedication (intended to be largely ceremonial), only about one-third of the Gettysburg dead had actually been buried in the new cemetery. Lincoln's address contained no local details of the battle or cemetery preparations. He never mentioned the town of Gettysburg, nor that year's other great document—the Emancipation Proclamation—which had changed the character of the war. Lincoln assumed the task of offering an assessment of the graves' deepest meanings. As President, he would try to explain the war to audiences far beyond Cemetery Hill. It is as if Lincoln, beleaguered by death on a scale he could no longer control, could only discuss *why* it had happened.

Although Lincoln's speech must have seemed abstract to many auditors, an ideological explanation of the Civil War flowed through the brief address. The United States was an idea, Lincoln argued, a republic fated to open its doors, however unwillingly, by one of its founding creeds, the "proposition that all men are created equal." History had caught up with the contradictions to that creed and all but killed the idea. Only in the killing, and yet more killing if necessary, would come the rebirth—a *new* birth—of the freedoms that a republic makes possible. Humankind will forever debate what kinds of ideas men should be asked to die for. But Lincoln did not lack clarity at Gettysburg. The sad-faced Lincoln looked beyond Appomattox to the "unfinished work" of the "living." When he said "the world . . . can never forget what they did here," he anticipated not an endless remembrance of soldiers' valor, not a bloodletting purified and ennobled by extraordinary courage and manly sacrifice alone.[12] He envisioned an ideological struggle over the meaning of the war, a society's tortured effort to know the real character of the tragedy festering in the cold and in the stench of all those bodies awaiting burial. Lincoln seemed to see fitfully that the rebirth would be rooted in the challenge of human *equality* in a nation, ready or not, governed somehow

by and for *all* the people. This was an idea that might make most future orators at monuments, reunions, and memorial days flinch and seek refuge in the pleasing pathos of soldiers' mutual valor. This was an idea so startling that, as the years went by, the forces of reunion would be marshaled in its defiance.

If Garry Wills is at all correct in his exuberant praise of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address as a speech that "revolutionized the revolution" and offered the nation a "refounding" in the principle of equality, then Woodrow Wilson, on his day at Gettysburg fifty years later, provided a subtle and strikingly less revolutionary response. According to Wills, Lincoln had suggested a new constitution at Gettysburg, "giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely." So did Wilson in his very different context of 1913. But that new past at the semicentennial was one in which all sectional strife was gone, and in which racial strife was covered over in Wilson's pose as a Progressive reformer. His moral equivalent of war had nothing to do with the creed of racial equality. Lincoln's "rebirth of freedom" had become in fifty years Wilson's forward-looking "righteous peace." The potential embedded in the idea of the Second American Revolution had become the "quarrel forgotten" on the statute books of Jim Crow America.[13]

Wilson, of course, did not believe he was speaking for or about the ravages of segregation, or other aspects of racial division in America, on his day at Gettysburg. He was acutely aware of his Southernness and eager to leave the mysticism of the reunion to others' rhetoric. He was still negotiating the uneasy terrain of a minority President elected by only 42 percent of the popular vote in the turbulent four-way election of 1912. Educated by events, and compelled to explain the totalizing character of the war, Lincoln had soared above the "honored dead" in 1863 to try to imagine a new future in America. Wilson soared above the honored veterans and described a present and a future in 1913 in which white patriotism and nationalism flourished, in which society seemed threatened by disorder, and in which the principle of equality might be said, by neglect and action, to be living a social death. Wilson's ambiguity paled in the shadow of Lincoln's clarity. But as the *New York Times* reported, "it is a difficult and disconcerting task for any statesman these days to deliver an address on the battlefield at Gettysburg, especially for any President of the United States." The *Times* declared the speech "good," but a "trifle academic in its argument." Wilson was interrupted only twice by "perfunctory" applause. Some observers thought the speech "out of place" for the

occasion.[14] Whether in 1863 or in 1913, Gettysburg haunted American memory, both as a reminder of the war's revolutionary meanings and as the locus of national reconciliation.

FROM WELL BEFORE Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, from the first attempts to recruit black soldiers, from the initial waves of "contraband" slaves who escaped to an increasingly less abstract "freedom" in 1861–62, and simply from an ever-lengthening war that tested the life of slavery as much as the life of the Union, Americans, North and South, white and black, would forever possess and deny an ideological memory of their Civil War. No contemporary Northerner contributed more to the war's ideological meaning and memory than Frederick Douglass. An abolitionist orator-editor with few equals, Douglass had, by 1863–64, waged an all-out propaganda campaign to help foment a holy war on the South and on slavery; he had given his own Gettysburg Address many times over during the war. If Lincoln "revolutionized the revolution" at Gettysburg, if his speech engineered a "correction of the spirit" that cleared the "infected air of American history itself," as Wills boldly asserts, then Frederick Douglass was his stalking horse and his minister of propaganda. On the level of ideology, Douglass was the President's unacknowledged and unpaid alter ego, the intellectual godfather of the Gettysburg Address.[15] The Northern postwar ideological memory of the conflict as a transformation in the history of freedom, as an American second founding, was born in the rhetoric of 1863 fashioned by Douglass, Lincoln, and others whose burden it was to explain how the war's first purpose (preservation of the Union) had transfigured into the second (emancipation of the slaves).

In a speech delivered in Philadelphia only two weeks after Lincoln had dedicated the cemetery at Gettysburg, Douglass made an aggressive appeal for what he repeatedly called an "Abolition War." During the first year and a half of the war, Douglass had been one of Lincoln's fiercest critics among abolitionists, scolding the President on many occasions for his resistance to a policy of emancipation. Much had changed with the Emancipation Proclamation and the recruiting of black troops in 1863. The all-out war on southern society and on slaveholders that Douglass had so vehemently advocated had come to fruition. The war could still be lost on the battlefield, at impending elections, or in political compromise. But Douglass felt confident that history itself had taken a mighty turn. He took the pressure off Lincoln.

"We are not to be saved by the captain," he declared, "but by the crew. We are not to be saved by Abraham Lincoln, but by the power behind the throne, greater than the throne itself." The supreme "testing" of that "government of the people" about which Lincoln had spoken so carefully at Gettysburg was precisely Douglass's subject as well. In language far more direct than Lincoln's, Douglass announced that the "abolition war" and "peace" he envisioned would never be "completed until the black men of the South, and the black men of the North, shall have been admitted, fully and completely, into the body politic of America."[16] Here, in late 1863, he demanded immediate suffrage for blacks. In such expressions of equality, Douglass, too, looked beyond Appomattox to the long struggle to preserve in reality and memory what the war could create.

Douglass's Philadelphia speech took place on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary meeting of the American Antislavery Society, the organization in which his own career began. While reminiscing with his old colleagues, he did not miss an opportunity to invoke the symbol of Gettysburg and tell the story of his first meeting with Lincoln, which had occurred in August 1863. He remembered traveling twenty years earlier to a meeting of the same society "along the vales and hills of Gettysburg," when local antislavery friends warned him to travel only by night, lest he be kidnapped back into slavery across the Maryland border. This year, however, he had journeyed "down there" all the way to Washington, where "the President of the United States received a black man at the White House." Douglass spoke with enormous pride about how he "felt big there" after secretaries admitted him to Lincoln's office ahead of a long line of solicitors strewn through the hallway. The President received Douglass with "a kind cordiality and a respectful reserve." "Mr. Douglass, I know you, I have read about you," said the standing Lincoln. With Douglass at ease, Lincoln remarked that he had read one of the black man's speeches where he had complained about the "tardy, hesitating, vacillating policy of the President of the United States" (toward emancipation). According to Douglass, Lincoln responded with complete sincerity: "Mr. Douglass, I am charged with vacillating . . ., but I do not think that charge can be sustained; I think it cannot be shown that when I have once taken a position, I have ever retreated from it."[17]

The abolitionist had gone to Washington in August to confront Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton about the unequal pay and other discriminations suffered by black soldiers. Lincoln engaged Douglass in a conversation about how the whole idea of blacks in uniform had needed

much "preparatory work." The President unflinchingly told black America's leader that he had feared that "all the hatred which is poured on the head of the Negro race would be visited on his administration." Moreover, Lincoln looked Douglass in the eye and said, "remember this . . . remember that Milliken's Bend, Port Hudson and Fort Wagner are recent events; and that these were necessary to prepare the way for this very proclamation of mine."[18]

In this encounter, narrated to an audience in early December 1863, Douglass constructed his own proud mutuality with Lincoln. However falteringly, by whatever unjust means blacks had to die in uniform to be acknowledged as men, Douglass was determined to demonstrate that his own ideological war aims had now become Lincoln's as well. The "rebirth" they were imagining was one both clearly understood as a terrible ordeal, but one from which there was no turning back. Douglass came away from this extraordinary meeting with the conclusion that Lincoln's position was "reasonable," but more important, that he would go down in history as "Honest Abraham." By invoking the sacred ground of Gettysburg, the symbolic space of the White House, and recounting his direct conversation with Lincoln, Douglass was declaring his rightful place at the new founding. Near the end of his Philadelphia speech, he asserted that "the old Union, whose canonized bones we so quietly inurned under the shattered walls of Sumter, can never come to life again. It is dead and you cannot put life in it."[19] During those last weeks of that horrible year, Douglass and Lincoln seemed to be speaking with the same voice about what had been buried and what was being reborn. Douglass would outlive Lincoln by thirty years and carry the burden of preserving their shared vision.

On December 8, 1863, only four days after Douglass spoke in Philadelphia, Lincoln delivered his Annual Message to Congress. Lincoln still labeled the war in limited terms, calling it an "inexcusable insurrection." But the last five pages of the document demonstrate his understanding of the revolutionary turn in the character of the war. Recounting the past year, "the policy of emancipation, and of employing black soldiers," he declared, "gave to the future a new aspect, about which hope, and fear, and doubt contended in uncertain conflict." Lincoln wrote admiringly of the one hundred thousand "slaves at the beginning of the rebellion . . . now in the United States military service." Emancipation, said the President, had turned the nation's "great trial" into its "new reckoning," and had made the cause of the Union and a "total revolution of labor throughout whole states" one and the same. In the last lines of Lincoln's message, he stressed the iron necessity of the "war

power" and paid tribute to the soldiers to whom "the world must stand indebted for the home of freedom disenthralled, regenerated, enlarged, and perpetuated."[20]

Lincoln's language makes a striking comparison to a speech Douglass wrote sometime late that fall and delivered many times across the North throughout the winter and spring, 1863–64. In "The Mission of the War," Douglass summed up more than two years of his war propaganda, his sense of the Civil War as America's cleansing tragedy and bloody rebirth. However long the "shadow of death" cast over the land, however ugly the "weeds of mourning," said Douglass, Americans should not forget the moral "grandeur" of the war's mission. "What we now want is a country—a free country," said Douglass, "a country not saddened by the footprints of a single slave—and nowhere cursed by the presence of a slaveholder. We want a country which shall not brand the Declaration of Independence as a lie."[21]

The dreamer calling men to die for grand ideas drew upon one of the deepest strains of American mission. "It is the manifest destiny of this war," cried Douglass, "to unify and reorganize the institutions of the country" and thereby give the scale of death its "sacred significance." "The mission of this war," he concluded, "is National regeneration."[22] Douglass spoke as though he and Lincoln had practiced from the same script, albeit one of them with the restrained tones of official state papers and the other in the fiery tones of a prophet. One spoke almost always with an eye on the fickleness of public opinion, and the other as though he were the national evangelist carrying the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" to that public in literal terms. Between them, Lincoln and Douglass provided the passive and the declarative voices of the Second American Revolution at its inception. This revolutionary—*regenerative*—conception of the war launched black freedom and future equality on its marvelous, but always endangered, career in American history and memory. All future discussion of the meaning and memory of this fundamental turning point in American history had to either confront or deflect the words, the laws, and the social realities the war had wrought in 1863.

WORDS ALONE did not give the nation its potential rebirth. To borrow from the word-master supreme, Walt Whitman, perhaps the "dead, the dead, the dead, our dead—or South or North, ours all" remade America. So did thousands of surviving soldiers, liberated freedpeople enduring near starvation in contraband camps, and women on both homefronts who performed

all manner of war work and tried to sustain farms, households, and the human spirit as their men were asked to die for ideas, self-defense, retribution, manly values, or some abstract notion of their community's future. In time, the war itself remade America. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in 1862, "the war is a new glass to see all our old things through," and "our sole and doleful instructor."[23]

There were millions of individual stories unfolding at the end of this transforming war that gave real-life meaning to all the metaphors of death and rebirth. In all the material and human wreckage, in shattered families and psyches, new life was to take form. Countless private memories began to collide, inexorably, with the politics of collective memory. Contrary to Whitman's famous prediction, the "real war" would eventually "get into the books" because historians and writers have learned so much in the twentieth century about unearthing and telling the stories of real people.[24] Americans on both sides had experienced an authentic tragedy of individual and collective proportions. How people of both sections and races would come to define and commemorate that tragedy, where they would find heroism and villainy, and how they would decide what was lost and what was won, would have a great deal to do with determining the character of the new society that they were to build.

The initial task was to find meaning in the war's grisly scale of death. Death was all around in 1865, and no one tried to comprehend its meaning more passionately than the poet from Brooklyn who worked more than two years in soldiers' hospitals. By his own estimation, Walt Whitman, after moving to Washington, D.C., in 1862 to investigate the fate of his brother, George, made some six hundred visits to hospitals and attended to between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand sick and dying soldiers. What Whitman witnessed profoundly shaped and inspired him for the rest of his life. He saw, and one might say, intellectually and emotionally ingested, the horrible results of the "real war." When asked in old age if he ever went "back to those days," Whitman replied, "I have never left them. They are here now, while we are talking together—real, terrible, beautiful days." Whitman spoke the truth when he declared that "the war saved me: what I saw in the war set me up for all time—the days in those hospitals."[25]

In poetry, and especially in prose remembrance, Whitman left a literary testament to the war. In all the shattered limbs and lives, in all the youths he watched as they became voiceless, and then breathless, Whitman found authentic tragedy, as well as his own Homeric sense of self. "The war had much

to give," he later wrote, and it served as the "very centre, circumference, umbilicus, of my whole career." He compared himself to Achilles in Homer's *lIiad* who, when warned not to "act unwisely," declares, "No, let what must, come; I must cut up my capers." As though representing the thousands of veterans who would tell their increasingly sanitized stories to each other, and anticipating the endless obsessions of Civil War buffs in later generations who long for some transplanted, heroic place in the nineteenth century, he concluded, "I would not for all the rest have missed those three or four years."[26] Whitman could mix reality with nostalgia like no other writer; in so doing, he built and illuminated the literary avenue to reunion.

In "A Backward Glance o'er Travelled Roads" (1888), Whitman remembered first reading the *Iliad* on a peninsula at "the northeast end of Long Island, in a sheltered hollow of rocks and sand, with the sea on each side." Nestled in the "full presence of Nature," the young romantic had read the ultimate war book. In old age, though, he quickly converted such a remembrance into a statement of how war became his own great subject. "Although I had made a start before," he wrote, "only from the occurrence of the Secession War, and what it showed me by flashes of lightning, with the emotional depths it sounded and arous'd (of course, I don't mean in my own heart only, I saw it just as plainly in others, in millions)—that only from the flare and provocation of that war's sights and scenes the final reasons-for-being of an autochthonic and passionate song definitely came forth." Believing he spoke for millions (and in some ways he probably did), Whitman understood the war as America's own tragic recreation, a whole people reborn as something new by tearing themselves inside out. Words alone did not remake America, but they were mighty weapons in the myth-making that the Civil War inevitably produced. Whitman's own favorite descriptive word for the Civil War's character, if not its meaning, was "*convulsiveness.*"[27] That "autochthonic . . . song," though, has had many discordant verses.

Whitman was certainly a Yankee partisan, but while he cheered the Union cause, the horror scenes he almost unrelievably witnessed gave rise to his own spirit of reconciliation. Whitman hated the war's capacity to mangle the bodies of young men, but he made few distinctions between the combatants themselves, or between their leaders. "What an awful thing war is!" he wrote home in March 1864. "Mother, it seems not men but a lot of devils and butchers butchering each other." Whitman's letters to his mother about his hospital work are a remarkable example of the very kind of experience (for so many women nurses as well) that demanded resolution over time in Civil

War memory. Writing at the peak of Grant's campaign against Lee in Virginia in June 1864, Whitman described the waves of wounded flowing into Washington hospitals: "We receive them here with their wounds full of worms—some all swelled and inflamed. Many of the amputations have to be done over again." He gave his mother a full picture of the hideous refuse of modern war. "One new feature," he said, "is that many of the poor afflicted young men are crazy. Every ward has some in it that are wandering. They have suffered too much, and it is perhaps a privilege that they are out of their senses." When he came to write in retrospect in *Specimen Days,* Whitman did not sanitize the "hell-scenes." He seemed to relish the descriptions of his soldiers, who were "horribly mutilated . . . groaning and moaning." They could be multiplied, he argued, and lit "with every lurid passion, the wolf's, the lion's lapping thirst for blood—the passionate, boiling volcanoes of human revenge for comrades, brothers slain—with the light of burning farms, and heaps of smutting, smouldering black embers—and in the human heart everywhere black, worse embers—and you have an inkling of this war."[28] In such honest language, a mix of memory and his own raw documentation, Whitman did speak for millions. This was the recurring national nightmare lurking beneath the revolution of black freedom and the quest for reunion. And these were the memories the nation would have to work through in the years ahead.

Whitman's war was rooted in his own brand of mystical Unionism. He almost never called the conflict a "civil war"; it was to him forever the "Secession War."[29] He threw blame for the war's outbreak, which he welcomed, on all those who had ever threatened America's unified destiny. Whitman loathed Southern "fireaters" and Northern "abolitionists" with equal disdain. He nursed, wrote letters for, and admired black troops, but only within the narrowly racist confines of his views on black capacities, and as a peculiar poetic subject. Whitman's "real war" did not ultimately include the revolution in black freedom of 1863; his own myriad uses of rebirth metaphors did not encompass black equality. This poet of democracy, whose work can and has been used to advance an antiracist tradition, never truly faced the long-term implications of emancipation.

During the seven pivotal years after the war, Whitman worked as a clerk in the U.S. Attorney General's office in Washington, D.C. Part of his job was processing the pardons that President Andrew Johnson proffered to ex-Confederates. Politically, Whitman became a devotee of Johnson and his lenient, state-rights approach to Reconstruction policy.[30] Whitman did not be-

lieve blacks capable of exercising the suffrage, and he viewed radical Reconstruction policies with the same contempt he had felt for abolitionists. "The republicans have exploited the Negro too intensely," he wrote to his mother in 1868, "and there comes a reaction." By 1875, Whitman had described Reconstruction racial affairs in words that would become with time the staple mythology of white Southern, and much Northern, comprehension of the aftermath of emancipation. "The black domination," he wrote, "but little above the beasts—viewed as a temporary, deserv'd punishment for their [Southern whites'] Slavery and Secession sins, may perhaps be admissible; but as a permanency of course is not to be consider'd for a moment."[31] Here again, Whitman spoke for a growing consensus. The image of Reconstruction as black domination, radical ideology taken too far, would become one of the deepest strains of American historical consciousness in the next generation.

Walt Whitman's never-ending quest to comprehend the convulsiveness of the Civil War can serve as a mirror of the larger culture's tendencies toward a reconciliation that would postpone, or evade altogether, its racial reckoning. Whitman never absorbed the anti-Southern political feeling of the prewar decade. In 1860 he declared his love of the South's natural beauty and its contradictions:

> O magnet-South! O glistening perfumed South! my South!
> O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse and love! good and evil! O all dear to me!

In such prewar poems as "O Magnet-South," in his war fever poetry of 1861–62, and in his immediate postwar verse, Whitman wrote of a war that would purge and unify the whole nation. Southerners were never really enemies to Whitman; they were family members to be nursed to their necessary deaths or revived to health. His hospital sketches were thoroughly nonpartisan descriptions of a shared agony. "How impressive was the fact of their [soldiers'] likeness," Whitman recorded after the war, "their uniformity of essential nature—the same basic traits in them all—in the Northern man, in the Southern man, in the Western man—all of one instinct, one color, addicted to the same vices, ennobled by the same virtues." In these compelling pictures of common soldiers as the shattered victims of modern war, Whitman depoliticized such suffering. Much partisan hatred dissolved on those cots where lads from Mississippi and Ohio were consumed by the same pneumonia, gangrene, or mercury poisoning. If an American nation was to survive this *civil* war, and if all the rhetoric of "national regeneration" was ultimately

to make sense beyond 1865, then America's own "cult of the fallen soldier" was destined in time to be the basis of a new civil religion, and therefore, of the reunion itself.[32]

One of Whitman's close friends, John Burroughs, described him after the war as "the lover, the healer, the reconciler . . . a great tender mother-man." This notion of the "reconciler," a role forged in the care of dying soldiers of both armies, as well as in the reversal of gender expectations implied in the label "mother-man," makes Whitman representative of the earliest root of sectional reconciliation—the mutuality of soldiers' death and the need to mourn, commemorate, and memorialize all of that death on both sides. In the 1866 poem "Reconciliation" Whitman captured the theme:

> Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
> 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;
> For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
> I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
> Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.[33]

Whitman no doubt never intended one irony embedded in this poem: in the shared divinity—a virtual kinship—of all the "white-faced" dead brothers rested that "beautiful" idea of *reconciliation,* as well as the ultimate betrayal of the dark-faced folk whom the dead had shared in liberating. Whitman's poetry and prose contained an infinity of truths, including those they masked.

In the final months of the Civil War, all participants knew they were living through transformations. This was especially true for blacks. Black soldiers at the front wrote of their palpable expectations of a new future. Full of bravado and Biblical justification, Thomas B. Wester wrote in December 1864 from a camp near Bermuda Hundred, Virginia, that he and his comrades were overthrowing "Pharoah" as "in the days of old." Wester made clear why blacks were fighting. "We are fighting as hard to restore the Union as the white man is," he said. "Why then should we not have equal rights with a foreigner, who comes to this country to fight for the preservation of the Government?" Wester looked ahead and imagined a legacy he would embody: "If we live to have families, we can sit down by the side of our wives, with our

children around us, and relate to them what we have endured and witnessed upon the battlefields, to help restore this now-broken Union. We can recount to them the privations and sufferings endured by both white and black soldiers in the rebellion." Another black soldier, Henry C. Hoyle, wrote from near Richmond, Virginia, on January 15, 1865, looking forward to the day when he and comrades could "surround our cheerful firesides, and relate to our wives and children, parents and friends, what we have witnessed during this struggle for freedom, liberty and equal rights." Black men too expected a soldier's due out of this war—safe firesides, public recognition, and a place in at least some form of reconciliation between blacks and whites. Indeed, both Wester and Hoyle, like the more famous Douglass before them, were convinced that in equal suffering, if not in natural law, the country might discover the roots of equal rights. In this sense, for black soldiers and their future families, *equality* was another word for reconciliation. These black soldiers had no trouble defining the meaning of freedom and the war; they were only beginning the long struggle to protect the memory of their story, one they already considered comparable to the older conquest of "Pharoah and his host."[34] They knew the older story well: Moses did not make it to the promised land, but many of his foot soldiers and his people did.

On the evening of January 12, 1865, in the headquarters of General William Tecumseh Sherman in Savannah, Georgia, an extraordinary meeting took place. All present seemed aware of how unusual and historic the occasion might prove to be. Sherman's famous March to the Sea—the conquest of the Georgia countryside and the destruction of its resources from Atlanta to Savannah—had ended just three weeks earlier with the Confederate evacuation of the coastal city. The march and its wave of property destruction had liberated and displaced thousands of ex-slaves. Sherman faced a tremendous dilemma: what to do with so many refugee freedpeople, and how to begin to define their status. He and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton decided to ask the opinions of the representative black leadership of Savannah and of the very Georgia counties through which Sherman's troops had wreaked devastation. Twenty black ministers, most of whom had been slaves at some time in their lives, and some of whom had achieved freedom only in the past month at the hands of the Union armies, sat in a room together, face to face with Sherman and Stanton. Twelve carefully worded questions were written out and read aloud to the ministers. The answers as well were "written down in . . . exact words" and "read over" by each participant so as to determine

"concurrence or dissent."[35] These words, like the Gettysburg Address, might not remake America, but everyone present seemed to understand that their articulation was a part of that process.

Garrison Frazier, a sixty-seven-year-old Baptist minister, served as the blacks' spokesman. For $1,000 in gold and silver Frazier had bought his freedom and that of his wife in 1857. The interrogatories in this meeting form an enduring testament to the meaning of the revolution of 1863–65; the exchange laid down for all time what would be both cherished and denied in Civil War memory. When asked for his "understanding" of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Frazier delivered a definition in historical context. It had been Lincoln's offer to the "Rebellious States . . . that if they would lay down their arms, and submit to the laws of the United States before the first of January, 1863, all should be well; but if they did not, then all the slaves in the Rebel States should be free henceforth and forever." Asked next for his definition of "slavery" and the "freedom" given by the Proclamation, Frazier spoke from the deep past and to the future: "Slavery is, receiving by irresistible power the work of another man, and not by his consent. The freedom . . . promised by the proclamation, is taking us from under the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom." Asked how the freedpeople could best take care of themselves and assist the government, Frazier provided a motto for the early struggles of Reconstruction: "The way we can best take care of ourselves," said Frazier, "is to have land . . . we want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own." To assist the government in executing this revolution, "the young men should enlist in the service . . . and serve in such manner as they may be wanted."[36]

Frazier's shortest answer came to the query whether there was "intelligence enough" among the ex-slaves to maintain themselves and live peacefully with their neighbors. "I think there is sufficient intelligence among us to do so," he said directly. Then Frazier was asked to examine the "causes and object" of the war itself, and he responded with a poignant history lecture:

> I understand, as to the war, that the South is the aggressor. President Lincoln was elected President by a majority of the United States, which guaranteed him the right of holding the office and exercising that right over the whole United States. The South,

> without knowing what he would do, rebelled. . . . The object of the war was not at first to give the slaves their freedom, but the sole object of the war was at first to bring the rebellious states back into the Union and their loyalty to the laws of the United States. Afterward, knowing the value set on the slaves by the Rebels, the President thought that his Proclamation would stimulate them to lay down their arms, reduce them to obedience, and help to bring back the Rebel States; and their not doing so has now made the freedom of the slaves a part of the war. It is my opinion that there is not a man in this city that could be started to help the Rebels one inch, for that would be suicide.

After several exchanges about the character and degree of black enlistment in the Union armies, Sherman then left the room as Frazier was asked the group's opinion of the general. Frazier declared Sherman "a man in the Providence of God set apart to accomplish this work."[37]

This ceremonial and substantive exchange between the freedmen ministers and the military leadership of the United States was unprecedented. The interview had lasted three hours in all. According to James Lynch, a northern-born missionary and one of the youngest ministers, the colloquy was unforgettable. "We expressed our opinions freely," wrote Lynch, "and dwelt, with interest, upon every word that fell from the Secretary's lips." Lynch described Frazier's performance as "a splendid expression of Southern colored men's opinion of the war and its policy." The meeting had provided an unusual kind of council of war. It represented much of the interior meaning of Sherman's March to the Sea. Earlier in 1864, a report of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission had described the "state of . . . transformation" in some sections of the South that brought former masters and former slaves "face to face in the presence of the great revolution and of the trials to which it summons both." In Savannah, the conflict's greatest symbol of cruel war sat face to face with twenty "colored Georgians," as Lynch put it, hearing in many ways the same summons.[38] The career of Civil War memory over the next fifty years is, in part, the story of how these extraordinary face-to-face encounters gave way to a reunion in which General Sherman, and the soldiers he defeated, would be remembered for their noble fight, and how the Reverend Frazier, and his words, were forgotten. With time, face-to-face encounters between blacks and whites would rarely dwell upon those meanings discussed that night in Savannah.

There can be no mistake, though, that black Civil War memory, as well as national and sectional memories, took deep root in those final months of the war. Much of that memory took hold in the bitter experiences of soldiers bearing up to discriminations and unequal pay and of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who found their first homes in freedom in contraband camps all over the upper South and in regions occupied by Union forces. The hardships in those camps, the struggle to work and survive, to relocate family members, all were to become part of black remembrance. So too would memory rooted in the experience of military laborers building corduroy roads for Union forces in Georgia, or digging canals from the James River in Virginia.[39] Several thousand had labored in the camps and on the fortifications of both armies almost from the beginning of the war.

Other kinds of hardship would be remembered. The Louisiana freedwoman Emily Waters wrote to her husband (who was still in the army in the wake of the war's end) that the master of Roseland Plantation had come home from the Confederate army and threatened to turn the freedpeople on his land "out on the levee" if they did not pay eight dollars per month in "house rent." "I have no money of any account," Waters wrote, "and I want you to get a furlough as soon as you can and come home and find a place for us to live in." Waters was in dire straits: "My children are going to school, but I find it very hard to feed them all." Emily Waters's husband did get a furlough and returned to his home just in time to find a provost guard "at his house for the purpose of ousting his wife and children." "Persecution is the order of the day . . . against the colored race," complained Hugh P. Beach, an officer in Waters's company, to a Freedmen's Bureau agent. As Ezra Adams, an ex-slave in South Carolina, remembered some seventy years later, "dat somethin' called freedom" had to include what people could "eat, wear, and sleep in. Yes, sir, they soon found out dat freedom, ain't nothin', 'less you is got somethin' to live on and a place to call home." Moreover, a Virginia freedwoman, Catherine Massey, wrote to Secretary of War Stanton in July 1865, begging him to find and force her negligent husband to send her money. "I am his lawful wife and he has neglected to treat me as a husband should," wrote Massey. "I think it no more than right than that he should be made to do what he has never yet done and that is to help me support myself as I . . . naturally did support him before he came in the army."[40] For many freedpeople, emancipation meant the struggle to survive in the new, chaotic social order, and it provided few if any occasions for celebration in the short term.

But in other places, especially churches, and at less formal gatherings in contraband camps or at soldiers' campfires, celebration was in order. Northern black churches held official celebrations of the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation as early as January 1865. In New Haven, Connecticut, at the AME Bethel Church (African Methodist Episcopal), religious fervor and patriotism mixed as perhaps never before in that free black community's history. A choir sang the old hymn "Blow Ye the Trumpet Blow," and then after a prayer for the preservation of the Union, it sang several verses of "America." Reverend S. V. Berry made a speech in which he linked the Proclamation and the Declaration of Independence in the same unified history. "As our forefathers fought, bled, and conquered for the Declaration of Independence," declared Berry, "just so hard are we now fighting for the Emancipation Proclamation." To great applause, and just before the singing of "Oh! Be True to Our Flag," Berry concluded with the idea that all present could now entertain: "The time is fast approaching, when we as citizens of the United States, will be respected as such."[41]

On the same day out west, in Chester, Illinois, the AME Church was decorated as never before. "Wreaths and evergreens . . . and the stars and stripes hung from almost every part of the room." The Proclamation, "beautifully framed in gilt, and containing the likeness of President Lincoln," hung above the pulpit. In Chester, they too began by singing "Blow Ye the Trumpet Blow," followed by "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." The Proclamation was then read in full. Following the first oration of the day, the congregation sang the "Battle Cry of Freedom," according to the recorder, "with a will." Speech after speech followed, one of them entertaining the audience with rousing metaphors about the "beast of slavery" being ushered through its stages of death. Similar to New Haven, the Chester celebration ended with a resolution to carry on the war for the "principles" in the Proclamation and the Declaration, including a recitation of Thomas Jefferson's preamble.[42]

In these remarkable commemorations taking place before the war had even ceased, blacks were preparing the script and forging the arguments for a long struggle over the memory of the events they were living through. They could not know how difficult that struggle would be. But in their unblinking medley of Negro hymns and the war-inspired national hymns, in their folding of the Proclamation and the Declaration into one seamless story, they named their text. In their understanding, and here they surely spoke for the Garrison Fraziers and the Emily Waterses in the South, America's rebirth was

one and the same with their own rebirth as "citizens." Words had become deeds, or so they had a right to believe.

FROM THE MOST MOURNFUL EXPERIENCE at the war's ending, Lincoln's assassination, Walt Whitman crafted unforgettable images of life and death on a mutual journey. In "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," the poet gave to grief (his own and the nation's) a mood and a setting. The mood is a calming, depoliticized contemplation of the "fathomless . . . sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death." Whitman imagines a warbling in a secluded swamp singing a solitary "song of the bleeding throat, / Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know, / If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)" The poet speaks for millions of Americans in 1865 who were wondering how to remember and forget: "How shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?" As an offering, Whitman picks a "sprig of lilac" and places Abraham Lincoln's funeral train in the setting of "ever-returning spring" across the vast landscape of America from the East to the prairie:

> Over the breast of spring, the land, amid cities,
> Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray debris,
> Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
> Passing the yellow-speared wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
> Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,
> Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
> Night and day journeys a coffin.

As the bird sings its "carol of death," the poet tries to give words to the music. Yet one senses that even Whitman could not match the warbling's power to deliver "that powerful psalm in the night"—to capture the meaning of the death caused by the Civil War. He is left with visions of "battle corpses . . . debris of all the slain soldiers of the war." The funeral train passes by all the images the poet can muster and he is left to say: "The living remained and suffer'd."[43] Whitman leaves his sprig of lilac in the dooryard and takes hope from the fragrance of spring.

"Lilacs" is not a poem about victory through death. It is more of a contemplation, a psalm about Lincoln's death at the nation's new beginning. But the nation is the land, and redemption comes from nature, not so much from the people or their politics. Whitman wrote a victory/death poem of a sort in "O Captain, My Captain." But the mood and the setting of "Lilacs" may best represent the numbed horror that so many Americans (Northerners and blacks at least) felt at Lincoln's murder. This was profound mourning without politics; the warbling, the lilacs, and the fields of grass gave the best eulogies.[44]

That April, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, as in a thousand other places, a large crowd of ex-slaves, in silence and tears, gathered in front of a store window that contained a photograph of Lincoln. A black correspondent from Chicago tried to characterize the scene of Lincoln's funeral procession in that city. "The grandeur was beyond description," he remarked. "The colored citizens turned out in full force, and were well-received . . . We can only look on in breathless silence, and think of the great change." A month after the assassination, a black Union soldier, Corporal William Gibson of the Twenty-eighth U.S. Colored Troops, wrote from City Point, Virginia, worrying that his home state of Indiana might not remove its old "Black Laws" from its statute books. Gibson seemed flushed with hope and anxiety over the "rights" he believed his "old 28th" had earned. "We ask to be made equal before the law," said the veteran, "grant us this, and we ask no more. Let the friends of freedom canvass the country on this subject. Let the sound go into all the earth." The politics of rebirth mixed with all the mourning that could be felt, if not explained. With Whitman, the nation had "the knowledge of death as walking one side of me, / And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me, / And I in the middle . . . as holding the hands of companions."[45] But the new nation awaiting rebirth also had the thought of black equality on one side, the knowledge of sectional reunion on the other side, and no muse yet in the middle holding their hands.

CHAPTER 1

DYING

"To Lay Down My Life"

"Dying—annuls the power to kill."

EMILY DICKINSON, 1862

No one expected what the Civil War was to become. Southern secessionists believed northerners would never mobilize to halt national division or that they would mount nothing more than brief and ineffective resistance. South Carolina senator James Chesnut boldly promised to drink all the blood that might be shed as a result of the Confederate declaration of independence.[1] When military confrontation began to seem inevitable, northerners and southerners alike expected it to be of brief duration. The North entered the First Battle of Bull Run in the summer of 1861 anticipating a decisive victory that would quash the rebellion; Confederates thought the Union would quickly give up after initial reverses. Neither side could have imagined the magnitude and length of the conflict that unfolded, nor the death tolls that proved its terrible cost.

A number of factors contributed to these unanticipated and unprecedented losses. The first was simply the scale of the conflict itself. As a South Carolinian observed in 1863, "The world never saw such a war." Approximately 2.1 million northerners and 880,000 southerners took up arms between 1861 and 1865. In the South, three out of four white men of military age became soldiers. During the American Revolution the army never numbered more than 30,000

men.[2]

Changing military technology equipped these mass armies with new, longer-range weapons—muzzle-loading rifles—and provided some units, by the latter stages of the war, with dramatically increased firepower in the form of breech-loading and even repeating rifles. Railroads and emerging industrial capacity in both North and South made resupply and redeployment of armies easier, extending the duration of the war and the killing.

Yet for all the horrors of combat, soldiers dreaded dying of disease even more. Death from illness, one Iowa soldier observed, offered "all of the evils of the battlefield with none of its honors." Twice as many Civil War soldiers died of disease as of battle wounds. The war, Union surgeon general William A. Hammond later observed, was fought at the "end of the medical middle ages." Neither the germ theory nor the nature and necessity of antisepsis was yet understood. A wave of epidemic disease—measles, mumps, and smallpox—swept through the armies of volunteers in the early months of war, then yielded precedence to the intractable camp illnesses: diarrhea and dysentery, typhoid and malaria. Nearly three-quarters of Union soldiers suffered from serious bowel complaints in every year of the war; by 1865 the sick rate for diarrhea and dysentery was 995 per thousand. Contamination of water supply from camp latrines was a key cause of these illnesses, as it was of typhoid. "The camp sink," one 1862 description of an all-too-typical Union bivouac reported, "is located between the tents and the river. It is covered with fresh earth twice a week…The men, however, generally make use of the ground in the vicinity." Ether and chloroform had made military surgery a more plausible and widespread response to wounds, but lacking an understanding of antisepsis, physicians routinely spread infection with unclean instruments and dressings. After the Battle of Perryville in 1862, water was so scarce that Union surgeons performing amputations almost around the clock did not wash their hands for two days. Gangrene was so commonplace that most military hospitals had special wards or tents for its victims.[3]

Civil War soldiers had many opportunities to die and a variety of ways in which to do so. A war that was expected to be short-lived instead extended for four years and touched the life of nearly every American. A military adventure undertaken as an occasion for heroics and glory turned into a costly struggle of suffering and loss. As men became soldiers and contemplated battle, they confronted the very real possibility of death. They needed to be both willing and ready to die, and as they departed for war, they turned to the resources of their culture, codes of masculinity, patriotism, and religion to prepare themselves for what lay ahead. This was the initial work of death.

Milton Wallen, Company C, First Kentucky Cavalry, in a prison hospital. "Dying of Gangrene." Watercolor by Edward Stauch. National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

"Soldier," a Confederate chaplain reminded his troops in 1863, "your business is to die."[4] Men in Civil War America went to war talking of glory and conquest, of saving or creating a nation, and of routing the enemy. But at the heart of the soldier's understanding of his

duty rested the notion of sacrifice. E. G. Abbott was far from alone when he explained his motivation for entering the Union army. "I came into this war," he wrote, "to lay down my life."[5] As a Confederate soldier prayed, "my first desire should be not that I might escape death but that my death should help the cause of the right to triumph."[6] The rhetoric of service—to nation, to God, to comrades—rationalized the violence of this devastating war by casting it as the instrument of both nationalist and Christian imperatives: soldiers would die for God and Country. "I did not go to war to murder. No! and…Our dear Lord knows it and he will stand by me," wrote John Weissert of Michigan, describing how "my hair stood on ends" as he surveyed the gruesome aftermath of battle.[7] Focusing on dying rather than on killing enabled soldiers to mitigate their terrible responsibility for the slaughter of others. As men saw themselves mirrored in the faces of those expiring around them, they struggled to come to terms with the possibility and the significance of their own annihilation. Dying assumed clear preeminence over killing in the soldier's construction of his emotional and moral universe.

Civil War soldiers were, in fact, better prepared to die than to kill, for they lived in a culture that offered many lessons in how life should end. But these lessons had to be adapted to the dramatically changed circumstances of the Civil War. The concept of the Good Death was central to mid-nineteenth-century America, as it had long been at the core of Christian practice. Dying was an art, and the tradition of *ars moriendi* had provided rules of conduct for the moribund and their attendants since at least the fifteenth century: how to give up one's soul "gladlye and wilfully" how to meet the devil's temptations of unbelief, despair, impatience, and worldly attachment; how to pattern one's dying on that of Christ; how to pray. Texts on the art of dying proliferated with the spread of vernacular printing, culminating in 1651 in London with Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying.* His revision of the originally Catholic *ars moriendi* proved not just a literary achievement but an intellectual triumph that firmly established the genre within Protestantism.[8]

By the nineteenth century Taylor's books had become classics, and the tradition of the *ars moriendi* was spread both through reprints of earlier texts and through more contemporary considerations of the Good Death. Often these more modern renditions appeared in new contexts and genres: in sermons that focused on one or two aspects of the larger subject; in American Sunday School Union tracts distributed to youth across the nation; in popular health books that combined the expanding insights of medical science with older religious conventions about dying well; and in popular literature, with the exemplary deaths of Dickens's Little Nell, Thackeray's Colonel Newcome, or Harriet Beecher Stowe's Eva. So diverse and numerous were these representations of the Good Death that they reached a wide spectrum of the American population at midcentury, and they would become a central theme within the songs, stories, and poetry of the Civil War itself. By the 1860s many elements of the Good Death had been to a considerable degree separated from their explicitly theological roots and had become as much a part of respectable middle-class behavior and expectation in North and South as they were the product or emblem of any particular religious affiliation. Assumptions about the way to die remained central within both Catholic and Protestant faiths, but they had spread beyond formal religion to become a part of more general systems of belief held across the nation about life's meaning and life's appropriate end.[9]

The Good Death proved to be a concern shared by almost all Americans of every religious background. An overwhelming majority of Civil War soldiers, like Americans generally in the 1860s, was Protestant, and Protestant assumptions dominated discussions about death. But the need for wartime unity and solidarity produced an unprecedented level of religious interaction and cooperation that not only brought Protestant denominations together but to a considerable degree incorporated Catholics and Jews as well. The war encouraged a Protestant ecumenism that yielded interdenominational publication societies, common evangelical gatherings, and shared charitable efforts, like the Christian Commission, through which thousands of volunteers ministered to both spiritual and bodily needs of Union

soldiers. But Civil War ecumenism extended beyond Protestantism. Catholic chaplains in both Union and Confederate armies remarked on the effective cooperation among pastors and soldiers of differing religious affiliations. In one incident that became legend, Father William Corby offered a ceremony of general absolution to a brigade of Union troops before their engagement at Gettysburg. “Catholic and non-Catholic,” Corby wrote, “showed a profound respect, wishing at this fatal crisis to receive every benefit of divine grace that could be imparted.” The chaplain added generously that “general absolution was intended for all…not only for our brigade, but for all, North or South, who were susceptible of it and who were about to appear before their Judge.”[10]

Even Jewish soldiers, who constituted less than three-tenths of a percent of Civil War armies, joined this common religiosity. Michael Allen, Jewish chaplain of a Pennsylvania regiment, held nondenominational Sunday services for his men, preaching on a variety of topics, including proper preparation for death. Although we today tend to assume sharp differences between Jewish and Christian views of death, and particularly the afterlife, these contrasts appeared far less dramatic to mid-nineteenth-century Americans. Drawing on traditions stretching back at least to Maimonides, Jews of the Civil War era shared Christians’ anticipation of what one condolence letter called “a better life” to come. Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia could comfort her sister-in-law that her son, killed at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek, and his distraught father “shall be united in another world.” Civil War death thus narrowed theological and denominational differences. The shared crisis of battle yielded a common effort to make the notion of a Good Death available to all.[11]

Americans North and South agreed upon death’s transcendent importance. A tract distributed to Confederate soldiers by the Presbyterian Church warned that “death is not to be regarded as a mere event in our history. It is not like a birth, or a marriage, or a painful accident, or a lingering sickness.” It has an “importance that cannot be estimated by men.” Death’s significance arose from its absolute and

unique permanence. “Death fixes our state. Here [on Earth] everything is changing and unsettled. Beyond the grave our condition is unchangeable.” The moment of death could thus offer a glimpse of this future. “What you are when you die, the same will you reappear in the great day of eternity. The features of character with which you leave the world will be seen in you when you rise from the dead.” How one died thus epitomized a life already led and predicted the quality of life everlasting. The *hors mori,* the hour of death, had therefore to be witnessed, scrutinized, interpreted, narrated—not to mention carefully prepared for by any sinner who sought to be worthy of salvation. The sudden and all but unnoticed end of the soldier slain in the disorder of battle, the unattended deaths of unidentified diseased and wounded men denied these consolations. Civil War battlefields and hospitals could have provided the material for an exemplary text on how not to die.[12]

Soldiers and their families struggled in a variety of ways to mitigate such cruel realities, to construct a Good Death even amid chaos, to substitute for missing elements or compensate for unsatisfied expectations. Their successes and failures influenced not only the last moments of thousands of dying soldiers but also the attitudes and outlook of survivors who contended with the impact of these experiences for the rest of their lives.

Perhaps the most distressing aspect of death for many Civil War Americans was that thousands of young men were dying away from home. As one group of Confederate prisoners of war observed in a resolution commemorating a comrade’s death in 1865, “we…deplore that he should die…in an enemys land far from home and friends.” Most soldiers would have shared the wishes of the Georgia man whose brother sadly wrote after his death in Virginia, “he always did desire…to die at home.” Death customs of the Victorian era centered on domestic scenes and spaces; hospitals housed the indigent, not respectable citizens. As late as the first decade of the twentieth century, fewer than 15 percent of Americans died away from home. But the four years of civil war overturned these conventions and

expectations, as soldiers died by the thousands in the company of strangers, even enemies. As a South Carolina woman remarked in 1863, it was "much more painful" to give up a "loved one [who] is a stranger in a strange land."[13]

Civil War soldiers experienced an isolation from relatives uncommon among the free white population. The army, moreover, segregated men from women, who in the nineteenth century bore such significant responsibility for the care of both the living and the dead. As a hospital volunteer remarked of the Army of the Potomac, "of this hundred thousand men, I suppose not ten thousand were ever entirely without a mother's, a sister's, or a wife's domestic care before."[14]

Family was central to the *ars moriendi* tradition, for kin performed its essential rituals. Victorian ideals of domesticity further reinforced these assumptions about death's appropriate familial setting. One should die among family assembled around the deathbed. Relatives would of course be most likely to show concern about the comfort and needs of their dying loved one, but this was ultimately a secondary consideration. Far more important, family members needed to witness a death in order to assess the state of the dying person's soul, for these critical last moments of life would epitomize his or her spiritual condition. The dying were not losing their essential selves, but rather defining them for eternity. Kin would use their observations of the deathbed to evaluate the family's chances for a reunion in heaven. A life was a narrative that could only be incomplete without this final chapter, without the life-defining last words.[15]

Last words had always held a place of prominence in the *ars moriendi* tradition. By the eighteenth century "dying declarations" had assumed—as they still retain—explicit secular importance: a special evidentiary status excepting them from legal rules excluding hearsay. People believed final words to be the truth, both because they thought that a dying person could no longer have any earthly motivation to lie, and because those about to meet their maker would not want to expire bearing false witness. As sermonizers North and South reminded their

congregations: “A death-bed’s a detector of the heart.”[16]

Last words also imposed meaning on the life narrative they concluded and communicated invaluable lessons to those gathered around the deathbed. This didactic function provided a critical means through which the deceased could continue to exist in the lives of survivors. The teachings that last words imparted served as a lingering exhortation and a persisting tie between the living and the dead. To be deprived of these lessons, and thus this connection, seemed unbearable to many nineteenth-century Americans left at home while their sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers died with their words unrecorded or even unheard.

Americans thus sought to manage battlefield deaths in a way that mitigated separation from kin and offered a substitute for the traditional stylized deathbed performance. Soldiers, chaplains, military nurses, and doctors conspired to provide the dying man and his family with as many of the elements of the conventional Good Death as possible, struggling even in the chaos of war to make it possible for men—and their loved ones—to believe they had died well. Spiritual wounds demanded attention as powerfully as did those of the flesh. Battle deaths belonged to those at home as well as those in the field. The traditions of *ars moriendi* defined civilians as participants in war’s losses and connected soldiers to those behind the lines. Both parties worked to ensure that soldiers would not die alone.[17]

Soldiers endeavored to provide themselves with surrogates: proxies for those who might have surrounded their deathbeds at home. Descriptions of battle’s aftermath often remark on the photographs found alongside soldiers’ corpses. Just as this new technology was capable of bringing scenes from battlefield to home front, as in Brady’s exhibition of Antietam dead in New York, more often the reverse occurred. A dead Yankee soldier at Gettysburg was found with an ambrotype of three children “tightly clasped in his hands.” The ultimately successful effort to identify him created a sensation, with magazine and newspaper articles, poems, and songs celebrating the

devoted father, who perished with his eyes and heart focused on eight-year-old Franklin, six-year-old Alice, and four-year-old Frederick. But Amos Humiston was far from the only man to die clutching a photograph. Denied the presence of actual kin, many dying men removed pictures from pockets or knapsacks and spent their last moments communicating with these representations of absent loved ones. “I have often thought,” William Stilwell wrote to his wife, Molly, in Georgia, “if I have to die on the battlefield, if some kind friend would just lay my Bible under my head and your likeness on my breast with the golden curls of hair in it, that it would be enough.”[18]

Amos Humiston dies holding an ambrotype of his three children. “An Incident at Gettysburg.” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, *January 2, 1864*.

In military hospitals, nurses frequently cooperated in the search for substitute kin, permitting delirious soldiers to think their mothers, wives, or sisters stood nearby. In a famous lecture she delivered across the country in the years after the war, Clara Barton described

her crisis of conscience when a young man on the verge of death mistook her for his sister Mary. Unable to bring herself actually to address him as “brother,” she nevertheless kissed his forehead so that, as she explained, “the act had done the falsehood the lips refused to speak.”[19]

Perhaps Clara Barton was familiar with some of the popular Civil War–era songs that portrayed her situation almost exactly: the plea of the expiring soldier requesting his nurse to “Be My Mother Till I Die,” or even the lines of the nurse herself:

Let me kiss him for his mother,

Or perchance a sister dear;

……

Farewell, dear stranger brother,

Our requiem, our tears.

This song was so widely sung it prompted a reply, which was published as an “answer to: Let Me Kiss Him for His Mother.” Written in the voice of those who remained at home, the ballad expressed gratitude to the women caring for the wounded at the same time that it sought to reassure wives and mothers that their loved ones were not dying alone.

Bless the lips that kissed our darling,

As he lay on his death-bed,

Far from home and 'mid cold strangers

Blessings rest upon your head.

……..……..

O my darling! O our dead one!

Though you died far, far away,

You had two kind lips to kiss you,

As upon your bier you lay

……..……

You had one to smooth your pillow,

You had one to close your eyes.[20]

The original song and its “answer” represented an interchange, a nationwide conversation between soldiers and civilians, between men and women, as they worked together to reconstruct the Good Death amid the disruptions of war, to maintain the traditional connections between the dying and their kin that defined the *ars moriendi.* The inability to witness the last moments of a brother, husband, or child shattered expectations about an appropriate earthly conclusion to these important human connections. A father who arrived to find his son just hours after he died of wounds received at Fredericksburg wrote feelingly of his disappointment—and described his vision of how his son’s life should have ended. “If I could have got to our child, and spoken loving and encouraging words to him, and held his dear hand in mine, and received his last breath: but it was not so to be.” Yet denied his deathbed role, the parent had at least achieved one of his purposes: he had acquired definite knowledge of his son’s fate.[21]

Because no effective or formal system of reporting casualties operated on either side during the war, it became customary for the slain soldier’s closest companions at the time of his death to write a letter to his next of kin, not just offering sympathy and discussing the disposition of clothes and back pay but providing the kind of information a relative would have looked for in a conventional peacetime deathbed scene. These were condolence letters intended to offer the comfort implicit in the narratives of the *ars moriendi* that most of them contained. News of a Good Death constituted the ultimate solace—the consoling promise of life everlasting.[22]

Some soldiers tried to establish formal arrangements to ensure the transmission of such information, to make sure that not just the fact but a description of their death would be communicated to their families. In 1862 Williamson D. Ward of the 39th Indiana made a pact with several members of his company to provide this assurance for one another. “We promised each other” that if any were wounded or killed, “we would see that they were assisted off the field if wounded and if dead

to inform the family of the circumstances of death." In the Union prison at Fort Delaware, captured Confederate officers formed a Christian Association with a similar purpose. The group's minute book recorded their resolution, passed on January 6, 1865, "making it the duty" of the organization "to ascertain the name of every Confederate off[icer] dying in this prison and the attendant circumstances, and to transmit the same to their nearest friends or relatives."[23]

But even without the formality of such resolutions, soldiers performed this obligation. After Gettysburg W. J. O'Daniel informed Sarah Torrence of the death of her husband, Leonidas, explaining that the two of them "went into battle side by side," promising each other "if one go[t] hurt to do all we could for him." The letter represented the final fulfillment of that obligation. William Fields wrote to Amanda Fitzpatrick about how her husband had passed his last hours in a Richmond hospital at the very end of the war: "As you in all probability have not heard of the death of your husband and as I was a witness to his death I consider it my duty to write to you although I am a stranger to you." Duty similarly motivated I. G. Patten of Alabama to respond with "Aufaul knuse" to a letter that arrived in camp from I. B. Cadenhead's wife almost two weeks after his battlefield death. Another Confederate castigated himself for not stopping in the aftermath of an 1863 battle to record an enemy soldier's last words and transmit them to his family. In retrospect, this seemed to the young rebel a far more egregious failure than not providing water to the thirsty man.[24]

Remarkably similar North and South, condolence letters constitute a genre that emerged from the combination of the assumptions of *ars moriendi* with the "peculiar conditions and necessities" of the Civil War. These letters sought to make absent loved ones virtual witnesses to the dying moments they had been denied, to link home and battlefront, and to mend the fissures war had introduced into the fabric of the Good Death. In camp hospitals nurses and doctors often assumed this responsibility, sending the bereaved detailed descriptions not just of illnesses and wounds but of last moments and last words. Some hospital personnel even played the role of instructors

in the art of dying, eliciting final statements and cueing their patients through the enactment of the Good Death. When Jerry Luther lay wounded in 1862, a physician urged him to send a last message to his mother. Another soldier, asked by a doctor for his last words to send home, responded by requesting the doctor to provide them. "I do not know what to say. You ought to know what I want to say. Well, tell them only just such a message as you would like to send if you were dying." The expiring soldier clearly regarded the doctor as an expert in *ars moriendi* as well as in medicine. This was a ritual the physician must understand far better than he. The war encouraged not just the performance of the traditions of *ars moriendi* but their dissemination. Chaplains North and South saw this instruction as perhaps their most important obligation to the soldiers in their spiritual charge, a duty Catholic father William Corby described as "the sad consolation of helping them…to die well."[25]

Sometimes soldiers would attempt to eliminate intermediaries and narrate their deaths directly. Many carried letters to be forwarded to loved ones if they were killed. Sergeant John Brock of the 43rd U.S. Colored Infantry described men bidding each other farewell as they awaited battle near Petersburg. "One corporal from the state of Maine," he reported, "handed me a letter, together with his money and watch. 'Write my wife,' said he, 'in case that anything should happen to me.'"[26]

Some men managed to write home themselves as they lay dying, speaking through pens instead of from the domestic deathbeds war had denied them. These letters are particularly wrenching, in part because last words of more than a century ago appear seemingly unmediated on the page, speaking across the years, serving as a startling representation of immortality to a twenty-first-century reader. Jeremiah Gage of Mississippi wrote his mother after Gettysburg, "This is the last you may ever hear from me. I have time to tell you I died like a man."[27]

Bloodstains cover James Robert Montgomery's 1864 letter from

Spotsylvania to his father in Camden, Mississippi. A private in the Confederate signal corps, twenty-six-year-old Montgomery reported that a piece of shell had "horribly mangled" his right shoulder. "Death," he wrote, "is inevitable." But if the stained paper makes his wounds seem almost tangible, his assumptions about death emphasize the years that distance him from our own time. "This is my last letter to you," he explains. "I write to you because I know you would be delighted to read a word from your dying son." His choice of the word "delight" here—a term that seems strikingly inappropriate within our modern understanding—underlines the importance accorded the words of the dying. Even as his father faced the terrible news of his son's death, Montgomery expected him to have the capacity to be delighted by the delivery of his son's last thoughts. And even in extremis Montgomery followed the generic form of the Civil War death letter. By the middle of the 1864 Wilderness campaign, Montgomery may well have had a good deal of practice at writing such letters to other families. Now he could use this proficiency in composing his own.[28]

Montgomery died four days later. His close comrade Ethelbert Fairfax wrote to confirm his death and to describe James's last moments to his family. "I have never witnessed such an exhibition of fortitude and Christian resignation as he showed. In this sad bereavement you will have the greatest of all comforts in knowing that he had made his peace with god and was resigned to his fate…He retained consciousness to the last…His grave is marked." Marked but never found. Montgomery's family never realized their hope to bring his body home to Mississippi.[29]

Letters describing soldiers' last moments on Earth are so similar, it is as if their authors had a checklist in mind. In fact, letter writers understood the elements of the Good Death so explicitly that they could anticipate the information the bereaved would have sought had they been present at the hour of death: the deceased had been conscious of his fate, had demonstrated willingness to accept it, had shown signs of belief in God and in his own salvation, and had left

messages and instructive exhortations for those who should have been at his side. Each of these details was a kind of shorthand, conveying to the reader at home a broader set of implications about the dying man's spiritual state and embodying the assumptions most Americans shared about life and death.[30]

Condolence letters invariably addressed the deceased's awareness of his fate. It was, of course, desirable for the dying man to be conscious and able to confront his impending demise. Only if he was facing death's inevitablity would he clearly reveal the state of his soul in his last utterances. One of the Civil War's greatest horrors was that it denied so many soldiers this opportunity by killing them suddenly, obliterating them on the battlefield and depriving them of the chance for the life-defining deathbed experience. Letter writers were honest in reporting such unsatisfactory deaths, explaining to loved ones at home that they were not alone in being deprived of the last words of the departed.

Sudden death represented a profound threat to fundamental assumptions about the correct way to die, and its frequency on the battlefield comprised one of the most important ways that Civil War death departed from the "ordinary death" of the prewar period. When two soldiers calmly eating dinner in a tent in South Carolina were instantly and unexpectedly killed by a shell lobbed from nearby Sullivan's Island, Samuel A. Valentine of the legendary Massachusetts 54th wrote that although he had seen many comrades die, this incident was especially upsetting, and he declared that he had "never had anything to rest on me so much in my life." The suddenness, the lack of preparation, made these deaths a particularly "awful sight."[31]

Readiness was so important in determining the goodness of a death that soldiers often tried to convince themselves and others that even what appeared to be sudden had in fact been well prepared. The soldier unable to speak after being wounded on the field had, letter writers frequently reassured kin, expressed his faith and demonstrated his anticipations of salvation in the days or weeks before his fatal

encounter. When John L. Mason was killed just outside Richmond in October 1864, a comrade wrote to his mother to explain he "died almost instantly without speaking or uttering a word after being struck." But the letter went on to assure her that there still remained "much for consolation" in his death, for even though Mason had been unable to say so, there was evidence that he was "willing and ready to meet his saviour." The preceding summer he had told his comrades that he "felt his sins were forgiven & that he was ready and resigned to the Lord's will & while talking he was so much overjoyed that he could hardly suppress his feelings of delight."[32]

A sermon delivered in honor of a deceased New York soldier gave this paradox of prepared unpreparedness theological foundation. Reverend Alexander Twombly reminded the assembled congregation that no such thing as sudden death exists in God's eyes, that the length of a human life is exactly what God intends it to be. "God's time in taking every Christian home, is the full harvest time in that soul's earthly course." Such words served as both consolation and exhortation: if God is ready, we had better be too. As an 1863 obituary discourse for a Michigan soldier admonished, "Sinner, Procrastinate not. Let his sudden death be to thee a warning."[33]

An anticipated death could never be sudden, and thus soldiers' premonitions came to play an important role in their work of preparation. Many letters announcing the deaths of comrades commented on the deceased's forebodings that a particular encounter would indeed prove fatal. These men provided themselves with time for the all-important spiritual preparation one could use effectively only when face-to-face with unavoidable death. Sure knowledge—even of death—seemed preferable to persisting uncertainty, for it restored both a sense of control and the possibility for the readiness so central to the *ars moriendi.* On the night before his last battle in Virginia in 1862, Willie Bacon had told his comrades of his conviction he would die. "Strange and mysterious," remarked the preacher who delivered his funeral sermon, "is the fact that God so often permits the shadow of death to be thrown upon us, that we may prepare ourselves for his

coming." L. L. Jones anticipated that he would be killed in the fighting in Missouri in the summer of 1861 and so provided his wife with his dying sentiments before he went into combat. "I wish you to have my last words and thoughts," he wrote. "Remember me as one who always showed his worst side and who was perhaps better than he seemed. I shall hope to survive and meet you again…but it may not be so, and so I have expressed myself in the possible view of a fatal result." He was killed in his first battle. Early in the war W. D. Rutherford of South Carolina remarked to his fiancée upon "how we find ourselves involuntarily longing for the worst," so as simply not to be caught unaware. Rutherford confronted three more years of such uncertainty and "longing" before he was killed in Virginia in October 1864.[34]

Wounded or sick soldiers who knew they had not long to live were explicit about being prepared, articulating their acceptance of their fate. J. C. Cartwright wrote with sadness to inform Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Lovelace of Georgia that their son had died in April 1862 in Tennessee. But, he reassured them, "he was conscious all the time and expressed a willingness to die." T. Fitzhugh wrote Mrs. Diggs to report the death of her beloved husband in June 1863. He lived "but a short while" after being shot by the Yankees, but "he was in his right mind at the time of his death" and "was perfectly resigned." A nurse in a Virginia military hospital informed the mother of a deceased patient that he had been "conscious of his death and…not afraid but willing to die," which she reassuringly interpreted as "reason to believe that he is better off" now than in this world of woe.[35]

Witnesses eagerly reported soldiers' own professions of faith and Christian conviction, for these were perhaps the most persuasive evidences that could be provided of future salvation. As T. J. Hodnett exclaimed to his family at home after his brother John's 1863 death from smallpox, "Oh how could I of Stud it if it had not bin for the bright evidence that he left that he was going to a better world." Hodnett was deeply grateful that John's "Sole seme to be…happy" as he passed his last moments singing of a heaven with "no more triels and trubble nor pane nor death." Captain A. K. Simonton of North Carolina and

Isaac Tucker of New Jersey fought on different sides of the conflict, but both died with the words “My God! My God!” on their lips. Tucker was not a “professed and decided follower of Jesus,” but his regular attendance at church, his calm in the face of death, and his invocation of the divinity at the end suggested grounds for fervent hope about his eternal future. Simonton’s presentiment of his end, his attention in the weeks before his death to “arranging his business for both worlds,” indicated that he too was ready to greet his maker, as he indeed did with his last words.[36]

“The Letter Home.” Charcoal and graphite drawing by Eastman Johnson, 1867. Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

When soldiers expired unwitnessed and unattended, those reporting their deaths often tried to read their bodies for signs that would reveal the nature of their last moments—to make their silence somehow speak. Their physical appearance would communicate what they had not had the opportunity to put into words. Many observers believed, as one war correspondent put it, that the “last life-expression of the countenance” was somehow “stereotyped by the death blow” and

preserved for later scrutiny and analysis. A witness to the death of Maxcy Gregg wrote to the general's sisters that "the calm repose of his countenance indicated the departure of one, at peace with God." In words meant to offer similar assurance to grieving relatives, a Confederate soldier reported the death of a cousin in 1863: "His brow was perfectly calm. No scowl disfigured his happy face, which signifies he died an easy death, no sins of this world to harrow his soul as it gently passed away to distant and far happier realms." Clearly such a face could not be on its way to hell. A Michigan soldier, however, found just such evidence in the appearance of some "rebels" already many hours dead. "Even in death," he wrote, "their traits show how desperate they are and in what situation their conscience was. Our dead look much more peaceful." Witnesses eagerly reported any evidence of painless death, not just to relieve the minds of loved ones about the suffering a soldier might have had to endure but, more importantly, because an easy death suggested the calmness, resignation, and quick passage to heaven that the bereaved so eagerly hoped for as they contemplated the fate of their lost kin.[37]

Peaceful acceptance of God's will, even when it brought death, was an important sign of one's spiritual condition. But if resignation was necessary for salvation, it was not sufficient. Condolence letters detailed evidence of sanctified behavior that absent relatives had not been able to witness. When Henry Bobo, a Mississippi private, died of wounds received near Richmond in the summer of 1862, his cousin wrote from the field to assure Henry's parents that their son had a better chance of getting to heaven than they might think. There had been, he reported, a "great change" in Henry's "way of living" in the months just before his death. Although he had never actually become a professed Christian, Henry had quit swearing and had begun to lead a Christian life. I. B. Cadenhead's sergeant tried similarly to reassure the soldier's widow after her husband's death outside Atlanta in the summer of 1864. "I have had several conversations with him upon the subject of death he sayed to me their was one thing that he was sorry for & that [was] he had not united himself with the church before he left home." When Asahel Nash was killed in the fall of 1862, his parents

wrote their nephews, who had served in the First Ohio with their son, to secure information about his life as well as his death. “We want you to write all you can about Asahel…How were his morals?” The army, they feared, was “a poor place to improve good habits.”[38]

Perhaps Walter Perry had succumbed to the temptations of camp life, for his brother Frank reported that the soldier expressed great anxiety about his past behavior as he lay dying after Antietam. Frank wrote his family in Georgia that Walter at first “said that he hoped he was prepared to meet his God in a better world than this,” but he knew “he had been a bad, bad, very bad boy.” Frank hastened to assure the dying man that Christ had come to save such sinners. And when Walter failed to mention any of the family by name in his last hours, Frank emphasized that he had nonetheless addressed them implicitly by repeating “Good by, *Good by to you all.*” Striving to fit his brother’s life and words into the model of the Good Death, Frank Perry consoled his family with a report of Walter’s expressed hope to “meet *us all in Heaven.*” But hope in this case seemed to fall considerably short of certainty.[39]

In a letter to his wife informing her of her brother George’s death in 1864, Frank Batchelor worked hard to transform the deceased into a plausible candidate for salvation. Batchelor admitted that George “did not belong to the visible body of Christ’s Church,” but cited his “charity,” “his strong belief in the Bible,” and his rejection of the sins of “envy hatred and malice” to offer his wife hope for her brother’s fate. Batchelor confirmed himself “satisfied” that George was “a man of prayer” and had no doubt at last “found the Savior precious to his sole” before he died. “This being so,” Batchelor happily concluded, his wife could comfort herself with the knowledge she would meet her brother again “in the green fields of Eden.”[40]

Just as the bereaved looked for persuasive evidence of salvation, so too were they eager for last messages from dying kin. Reports of parting communications to loved ones appeared in almost every condolence letter. Sanford Branch wrote his mother in Georgia after

the First Battle of Bull Run to say his brother John's last words were "about you." After Private Alfred G. Gardner of Rhode Island was shot at Gettysburg, he charged his sergeant to tell his wife he died happy. T. J. Spurr of Massachusetts expired uttering the word "Mother" Wiley Dorman "asked for his Mother the last word he spoke." Fathers often exhorted children to complete their education, help their mothers, and say their prayers. With these words dying soldiers brought the names and spirits of absent loved ones to their deathbeds and left their survivors with wishes and instructions that outlived their source. For those at home, news of these final messages reinforced the sense of connectedness to lost kin. Neither family nor soldier was left entirely alone, for these deathbed invocations of absent loved ones worked in some measure to overcome separations. Home and battlefront collaborated in the work of managing the unprecedented realities of Civil War death.[41]

Soldiers' efforts to provide consolation for their survivors altered the traditions of the *ars moriendi.* New kinds of death required changed forms and meanings for consolation. When Civil War condolence letters enumerated evidence of the deceased's Christian achievements, designed to show his eligibility for salvation, the writer often included details of the soldier's military performance, his patriotism, and his manliness. "Tell my mother," one soldier said, "I have stood before the enemy fighting in a great and glorious cause." In a letter to the widow of a comrade who had died the preceding day, T. Fitzhugh reported all the customary information: her husband had been resigned to death, was conscious of his fate, and sent his love to his wife and children. But he also added that the soldier had "died a glorious death in defense of his Country."[42]

The image of the Christian soldier encompassed patriotic duty within the realm of religious obligation. But in some instances patriotism and courage seemed to serve as a replacement for evidence of deep religious faith. After Ball's Bluff, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. lay severely wounded, wondering if his religious skepticism was going to put him "en route for Hell." A "deathbed recantation," he

believed, would be "but a cowardly giving way to fear." With willful profanity, he declared, "I'll be G-d'd if I know where I'm going." But he urged his physician to write home in case of his death to say that he had done his duty. "I was very anxious they should know that."[43]

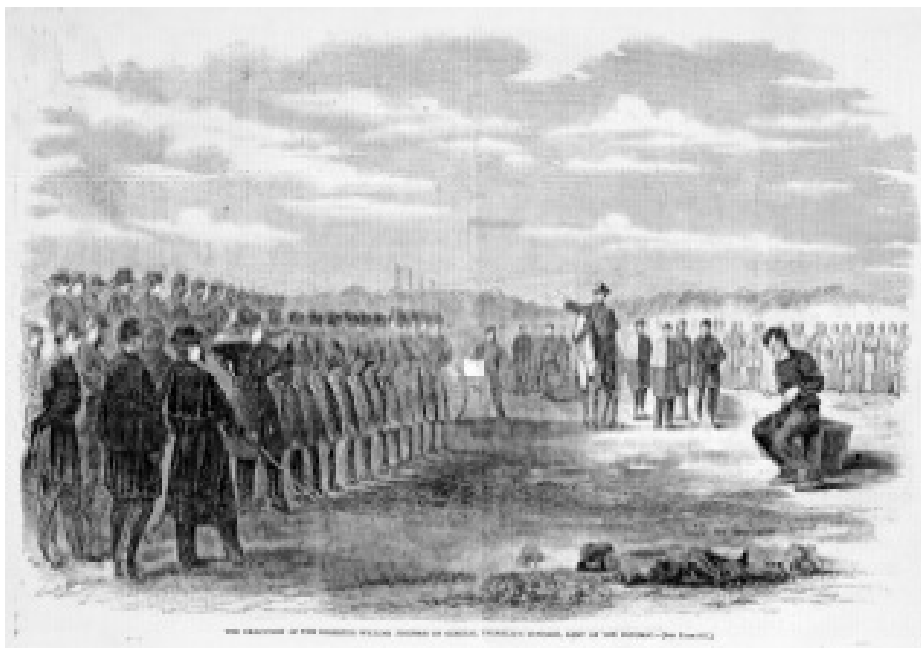
Holmes's worried acknowledgment of his failure to conform to expected belief and behavior ironically affirms the cultural power of the prevailing Christian narrative. Some nonbelievers hoped that patriotism would substitute for religious conviction in ensuring eternal life. A dying Confederate asked a friend, "Johnnie if a boy dies for his country the glory is his forever isn't it?" He would have found the views of David Cornwell of the Eighth Illinois reassuring. "I couldn't imagine," he mused, "the soul of a soldier who had died in the defense of his country being consigned to an orthodox hell, whatever his opinion might be of the plan of salvation."[44]

Cornwell's views, widely held in both armies, seemed to many Protestant clergy an unwarranted theological departure generated by earthly needs rather than transcendent truths. As the *Army and Navy Messenger,* published in Virginia by the interdenominational Evangelical Tract Society, warned in 1864, patriotism was not piety. "It is not the blood of man, but *'the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth from all sin.'*"[45]

Despite clerical efforts, the boundary between duty to God and duty to country blurred, and dying bravely and manfully became an important part of dying well. For some soldiers it almost served to take the place of the more sacred obligations of holy living that had traditionally prepared the way for the Good Death. Letters comforting Wade Hampton after his son Preston was killed in the fall of 1864 emphasized this juxtaposition of military and Christian duty and sacrifice. William Preston Johnston urged Hampton to remember that his son's "heroism has culminated in martyrdom," which should serve as a "consolation for the years he might have lived." James Connor's letter to Hampton structured the imperatives of Christianity, military courage, and masculinity into a hierarchy of solace. "Your best

consolation will I know my dear Genl," he wrote, "be drawn from higher than earthly sources[;] still some alleviation of the sorrow is to be drawn from the reflection that Preston died as he had lived, in the path of duty and honor. Young as he was he had played a man's part in the war."[46]

Although Christian principles remained paramount, considerations of courage and honor could also offer "some alleviation of the sorrow" and thus came to play a significant role in Civil War conceptions of holy living and holy dying. A letter written from North Carolina in 1863 to inform William K. Rash that "your son R. A. Rash is no more" is striking in its deviation from the conventional model. It includes no mention of God or religion, simply reporting the ravages of "the Grim monster Death." All the more significant, then, is its invocation of the only comfort available in the absence of appeal to the sacred: "But one consolation he died in full discharge of his duty in the defence of his home & Country." Patriotism and piety converged in what was at once a newly religious conception of the nation and a newly worldly understanding of faith.[47]



A Bad Death. "The Execution of the Deserter William Johnson." Harper's Weekly, *December 28, 1861*.

For some, even the reassurance of manly duty bravely accomplished remained unavailable. Commanding officers, chaplains, nurses, and friends did all within their power to cast each death as good, to offer grounds for hope to the bereaved. As one postwar chronicler explained, the Catholic Sisters of Mercy who nursed eighteen-year-old David Brant "wrote to his father the least painful account possible of the poor son's death." Indeed, attendants of the dying may not have simply waited to report a Good Death but worked instead to compel it by demanding courage and calmness from the moribund or even, as Catholic nurses and chaplains frequently reported, winning consent for last-minute baptisms. These observers were struggling to manage and mitigate some of the horror of the slaughter they encountered daily.[48]

But sometimes what one Confederate chaplain called "fond and comforting hope" was all but impossible. Hugh McLees, a missionary to South Carolina regiments, noted that "the deathbed of an impenitent and unpardoned sinner is a very awful place yet it is the one where I have been often called to stand." To stand—but not to describe, for there was little motivation to communicate such distressing information to survivors. But depictions of Bad Deaths could serve as "edifying" examples. Reports of painful, terrifying deaths offered powerful warnings. Father Louis-Hippolyte Gache, a Confederate chaplain, found Freemasons especially likely to die badly, obstinate in rejecting faith to the end. Gache described a man who cursed both him and the church in his "last agony" and thus left his family with a "twofold bereavement: they mourned his physical, and with much more grief, his spiritual death."[49]

Perhaps the most widespread version of the Bad Death appeared in the narratives of soldiers' executions that can be found not only in newspapers and religious publications but in almost every surviving soldier's diary and every substantial collection of soldiers' letters. Punishment for desertion or for crimes like murder or rape, executions

were more frequent in the Civil War than in any American conflict before or since. They were rituals customarily staged before assemblies of troops and were designed to make a powerful impression and serve a distinct disciplinary purpose. The *Charleston Mercury* described soldiers seized by "uncontrollable emotion" as their division formed three sides of a square to witness the execution of ten deserters. Soldiers who sat on their coffins as they awaited the firing squad or stumbled up the steps to the gallows served as an unforgettable warning to those who would die well rather than in shame and ignominy. An execution compelled its witnesses literally to confront death and to consider the proper path toward life's final hour. In the case of execution of deserters, the ceremony offered a particularly pointed contrast between the Good Death in combat and the disgraceful end meted out to those seeking to escape battle's terrors.[50]

Executions provided more than just negative examples. The condemned served in many cases as exemplars of hope, for chaplains worked to save these unfortunates from "the second death" and to use them to transmit a compelling educational message. Calm resignation, last-minute expressions of repentance, the enactment of elements of the Good Death even at the foot of the gallows, sometimes even an address from the prisoner urging his fellow soldiers to "beware of his untimely fate"—all provided indelible messages about both good living and good dying, ones that witnesses took very much to heart. These deaths, remarked Catholic chaplain William Corby, "were harder on the nervous system than the scenes witnessed in the middle of a battle, where there is rattle, dash, and excitement to nerve one up for the occasion." As a Confederate private remarked in a letter to his wife, seeing a man die this way was "awful"—at once horrible and inspiring of awe. Almost any soldier could have written the words penned by one witness to an execution in 1863: "I don't think I shall ever forget the scene."[51]

Military executions made a forceful statement about the need to be prepared to die. As the condemned prisoner scrambled to change his

eternal fate with a last-minute conversion or repentance, he reinforced the centrality of readiness to the Good Death. Spiritual preparedness was of course the essence of dying well, but men often demonstrated readiness in more temporal ways. Many popular renditions of the *ars moriendi* emphasized the importance of settling one's worldly affairs. A man who arranged for a burial plot on a furlough home was clearly contemplating his mortality, disposing of earthly preoccupations so that his death might bring a satisfactory conclusion to life's narrative.

Many soldiers recognized their precarious situation by composing wills. "Knowing the uncertainty of life & the uncertainty of death," Private Edward Bates of Virginia proceeded to arrange for the disposition of his twenty-five dollars of personal property. David Coe of Clarke County, Virginia, composed a will at the very occasion of his enlistment at the Berryville Post Office in June 1861. Calling for pen, ink, and paper, he conscripted postal patrons to serve as witnesses. "As I am about to leave home in these war of the Sothren Confedersey, I leave all I am worth…to my wife." Thomas Montfort of Georgia found it "sad and melancholy" to see men before battle "preparing for the worst by disposing of their property by will" at the same time the surgeon sharpened his instruments, soldiers readied lint for bandages, and men scattered sand around artillery emplacements, "not for health or cleanliness, but to drink up human blood." As his unit awaited a Union attack on Savannah's Fort Pulaski, Montfort passed his time "witnessing wills" for comrades.[52]

Although the affluent were more likely to prepare wills, many soldiers of lesser means also sought to specify the distribution of their assets, perhaps to try to exert some control over a future in which they would play no part. Attendants in military hospitals often solicited oral declarations from dying soldiers in order to know what to do with their effects. John Edwards's dying wishes, recorded as his "Noncuptative Will," by Mr. Hill at the hospital of the 53rd Virginia in April 1862, requested that the forty dollars in his possession be sent to his sister because he knew he was "bound to die."[53]

Soldiers' personal possessions often took on the character of *memento mori,* relics that retained and represented something of the spirit of the departed. Burns Newman of the Seventh Wisconsin Volunteers undertook the "painful duty" of informing Michael Shortell's father of his son's death near Petersburg the preceding evening. "Enclosed," he continued, "send you some trinkets taken from his person by my hand. Think you will prize them as keepsakes." A Bible, a watch, a diary, a lock of hair, even the bullet with which a son or a brother had been killed could help to fill the void left by the loved one's departure, and could help make tangible a loss known only through the abstractions of language.[54]

In a more figurative sense, condolence letters reporting the details of soldiers' deaths served as *memento mori* for kin working to understand wartime loss. Survivors rewrote these narratives of Good Deaths using the condolence letter as a rough draft for a range of printed genres designed to impose meaning and purpose on war's chaos and destruction. Obituaries often replicated the structure and content of condolence letters, frequently even quoting them directly, describing last moments and last words and assessing the likelihood of a deceased soldier's salvation. William James Dixon of the Sixth Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers, his obituary reported, had not entered the army as a believer, though he had always "maintained a strictly moral character." Several battles, however, impressed him with "the mercy of God in his preservation," so that before his death at Chancellorsville he had "resolved to lead a new life." His loved ones could, the *Daily South Carolinian* assured them, safely "mourn not as those who have no hope" and could be certain "that their loss is his eternal gain."[55]

Civil War Americans worked to construct Good Deaths for themselves and their comrades amid the conditions that made dying—and living—so terrible. As war continued inexorably onward and as death tolls mounted ever higher, soldiers on both sides reported how difficult it

became to believe that the slaughter was purposeful and that their sacrifices had meaning. Yet the narratives of the *ars moriendi* continued to exert their power, as soldiers wrote home about comrades' deaths in letters that resisted and reframed war's carnage.

Men did so not simply to mislead the bereaved in order to ease their pain—a ruse that historian Jay Winter attributes to the self-consciously deceptive letters from the Western Front in World War I. As Roland Bowen of the 15th Massachusetts responded to a friend's request for "all the particulars" about a comrade's death at Antietam, "I fear they will do you no good and that you will be more mortified [devastated] after the facts are told than you are now. Still you ask it and wither it be for the better or worse not a word shall be [kept] from you."[56]

Although the authors of Civil War condolence letters did try their utmost to cast the deaths they described in the best possible light, their efforts are striking in their apparent commitment to honesty, their scrupulousness in reporting when a deceased soldier's faith had been suffused with doubt, when his behavior had been less than saintly. Civil War soldiers seem themselves desperately to have wanted to believe in the narratives they told and in the religious assumptions that lay behind them. The letters may have served in part as a way of reaching across the chasm of experience and horror that separated battle and home front, as an almost ritualized affirmation of those very domestic understandings of death that had been so profoundly challenged by circumstances of war, as a way of moving symbolically out of the meaningless slaughter back into the reassuring mid-nineteenth-century assumptions about life's meaning and purpose. Narratives of dying well may have served as a kind of lifeline between the new world of battle and the old world at home.[57]

In the eyes of a modern reader, men often seem to have been trying too hard as they sought to present evidence of a dead comrade's ease at dying or readiness for salvation. But their apparent struggle provides perhaps the most eloquent testimony of how important it was for them to try to maintain the comforting assumptions about death and

its meaning with which they had begun the war. In face of the profound upheaval and chaos that civil war brought to their society and to their own individual lives, Americans North and South held tenaciously to deeply rooted beliefs that would enable them to make sense out of a slaughter that was almost unbearable. Their Victorian and Christian culture offered them the resources with which to salve these deep spiritual wounds. Ideas and beliefs worked to assuage, even to overcome the physical devastation of battle. And yet death ultimately remained, as it must, unintelligible, a "riddle," as Herman Melville wrote, "of which the slain / Sole solvers are."[58] Narratives of the Good Death could not annul the killing that war required. Nor could they erase the unforgettable scenes of battlefield carnage that made soldiers question both the humanity of those slaughtered like animals and the humanity of those who had wreaked such devastation.

Stephen Crane: The Hero as Victim

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We picture the world as thick with conquering and elate humanity, but here, with the bugles of the tempest pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamor of wonder to these lice, which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. (*The Blue Hotel*, Chapter 8)

By the late nineteenth century the heroic ideal, though noisily encouraged in romantic fiction and by the popular press, had become harder and harder to sustain. For the myth of heroism was dependent on free will. But what Mendel and Ricardo and Marx and Darwin and Freud and Malthus had seemingly taught was that man was trapped; that he was the unsuspecting victim of genetic and economic and political and evolutionary and psychological forces, including an ever-spiralling population growth. The myth of heroism, moreover, depended on a vision of an integrated society with its own economic and sexual hierarchies, its own natural and supernatural controls. But, by the end of the century, the whole universe, it seemed, had disintegrated into a chaos of competing and anarchic forces, receding ever faster to a state of entropic collapse. Such forces, by definition, were beyond human control. No counter-attack, however defiant, could be waged by an individual alone.

By collective action, perhaps: 'The mode of production of material life', Marx had written in his preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*, 'conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life'. Or, as the American Henry George put it, 'the idea that man mentally and physically is the result of slow modifications, perpetuated by heredity, irresistibly suggests the idea that it is the race life, not the individual life, which is the object of human existence'.[1] Such was the gospel of *Progress and Poverty* (1879). But the authorship of books was hardly ever collective; it was indifferent to progress; and by the late nineteenth century had become even more inturned, if anything, to individual 'human existence'. The overriding task remained, as always, one of composition. That alone, in a decomposing universe, made the writer's role potentially heroic.

Stephen Crane was among the most self-conscious of this new breed of heroic writers. Henry Adams, his fellow American, chose to confront the

[1] *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), translated by S. W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow, 1971); *Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1879), 'Conclusion'.

intellectual responsibility of opting for anarchy.[2] Crane chose to confront the *moral* responsibility (amid 'the bugles of the tempest pealing') of reeling through the blizzard. For it was as if a blizzard had struck the old American certainties. The new forces of Hegelian idealism and Darwinian biology and economic determinism — of evolution, class warfare, and heredity — were peculiarly stacked against the old Jeffersonian belief in personal self-control. Romantic individualism quickly soured, in the decades after the Civil War, to a documentary pessimism. Even before 1860 a brilliant minority of American writers, which included Hawthorne and Melville, had opted for pessimism. But now there were mass deserters. By 1900 the cleft between high art and 'pop' art was complete. It opened a chasm between serious fiction and fun, or escapist uplift, in westerns and athletic 'profiles' of which we are the inevitable heirs. For it was in this generation that the moral rewards of capitalism were first subverted; that Horatio Alger's call of 'rags to riches', 'Log Cabin to White House', was finally undercut by the new Naturalist Novel. The hero of self-improvement, U.S.-style, was shown, for good or ill, to be a mere victim of circumstances and/or his own illusions.

One native response was to ask: 'So what?' 'What, in short', in the words of William James, 'is the truth's cash value in experiential terms?'.[3] But pragmatism was of little use to men who felt already doomed; for whom both Christianity and the promise of the Greek Revival had failed; who felt excluded from both the old religious and the Homeric appeals to personal glory. Like Dante, the young Stephen Crane awoke to find all confused, all lost. 'He had long despaired of witnessing a Greeklike struggle.'[4] He aimed to fight his way out of that modern *selva oscura*, or Darwinian jungle. *The Red Badge of Courage* was to be his report from the jungle.

It appeared in 1895, a year after Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, four years before Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Crane was still only twenty-four years old. His subject was that of the hunters and the hunted, of the predators and the victims (much as that of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* tales) in a savagely destructive world. But his literary talent lay far from vernacular or folk tale. It comprised, above all, a split-second marksmanship in stalking his prey, nicknamed by contemporary photojournalists the 'snapshot'. This new heroic style was to rival Homer's for clarity. This new American *Iliad*, too, was subdivided into twenty-four parts. Had not the war, which it commemorated, been won by Ulysses S. Grant? Had not the artist, who first commemorated it, himself been called Winslow Homer? Like that American Homer's, Crane's theme was to be read as neither the romance of heroism, nor the triumph of heroism, but the quandary of heroism in an unheroic age,

[2] See *The Education of Henry Adams* (Washington, 1907), especially Chapters 33–34.
[3] 'What Pragmatism Means', *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York, 1907), Chapter 2.
[4] *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York, 1895), Chapter 1.

or rather (to use the title of one of his own later stories) the 'Mystery of Heroism'.

For the Darwinian metaphor, red in tooth and claw, had been miraculously turned inside out on that battlefield to become a scenario for this 'naturalist', or reportage-like, fiction. Here Crane could study the human condition, in all its turbulence, with the most exacting details of historical research. In this, too, he proved himself to be profoundly American. However realistic his setting, or his tone, he was still writing 'romances', like his great contemporary, Henry James. What Puritan New England had been for Hawthorne, the Virginian landscape of the Civil War was to be for Crane. Instead of the meeting-houses and custom-houses, the colonial wilderness and the Indians of the North, he would present the pine barrens, in mist and gunsmoke, of the South. Instead of a *Scarlet Letter*, he would depict a *Red Badge* of shame. Only the meaning shifts. Hawthorne's 'letters of guilt' would here turn to 'red letters of curious revenge'. For the theme was no longer that of lust, or some Faustian perusal of sin on a black-and-white frontier, but the psychological backlash of fear.

Just as Hawthorne, furthermore, had studied John Mason and William Hubbard and Cotton and Increase Mather (his seventeenth-century sources for the Indian Wars), so Crane pored over the *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*,[5] Harper's *History*, the drawings of Winslow Homer, and the photographs of Mathew Brady. Their battle scenes became for him a kind of ritual test, a crisis of identity even. He had missed the Great War. He belonged to a post-war generation, guiltily hankering for some extreme engagement in a commercial and prosaic age. He studied the plans of the attacks and counter-attacks of the battle of Chancellorsville (2–4 May 1863). He mentally reconstructed that wilderness, ten miles west of Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock River, in which Sedgwick and Hooker were forced back across the river by Lee's bluff, and the brilliant fifteen-mile flanking attack, in which Stonewall Jackson was mortally wounded. This was Lee's last great victory, leading to his invasion of the North in the Gettysburg Campaign. It becomes the visual and tactical source for *The Red Badge of Courage*.

For the fictional exercise came first. The emotional rehearsal came first. As with many young writers, Crane's career seems curiously inverted, though what began as a purely literary experience eventually took him to Mexico, and to Cuba and Greece to cover the Turkish War as a war correspondent. Later, when he came to write *The Open Boat*, his text recreated the context of his own life. But when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* his text had to follow another's text. It was from Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, from Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches* and the great Borodino scenes, as viewed by Pierre in *War and Peace*, that Crane learnt to use his single

[5] *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War; being for the most part contributions by Union and Confederate officers; based upon 'The Century War Series'*, edited by the editorial staff of *The Century Magazine*, 4 vols (New York, 1884–87).

incoherent angle of vision. For the confusion of soldiers and cavalry charges, the roar of guns and crackle of rifles, the whole mad inconsequence of war were for Crane hugely symbolic of all terror, all uncertainty, all ultimate loneliness. Everything is questioned: the battle, the wound, the heroism, the resolution and self-respect reassembled out of doubts and lies. Crane's Chancellorsville is revealed as a cosmic trap, an absurd non-event. In the final chapter, the regiment finds itself winding back to the river it had originally crossed a few days earlier, as if nothing had happened.

For nothing, in a sense, had happened. Nothing ever happens. Everything becomes part of the antics of non-communication, which was to become Crane's final symbol (in *The Open Boat*) for the existential void in which his actors prate and strut and cower and flee; and sometimes survive; and sometimes face death with a steady dignity and calm. Battle lust is directly compared to a mad religion; the Civil War, to a sectarian conflict — as if fought by lapsed Methodists to the tune of:

> Fight the good fight with all thy might,
> Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;
> Lay hold on life, and it shall be
> Thy joy and crown eternally . . .
>
> Faint not nor fear. His arms are near,
> He changeth not, and thou art dear;
> Only believe, and thou shalt see
> That Christ is all in all to thee.[6]

'Well, God reigns, and in his hands we are safe, whatever awaits us', was his father's habitual refrain. Again and again (in *Maggie*, in *George's Mother*, in *The Blue Hotel*, in *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*) Stephen Crane seems to confront his father's snug Methodism, while simultaneously questioning the American demand for aggression, the American pride in the predatory toughguy, the Bowery kid with patent-leather shoes 'like weapons',[7] or Westerners with guns on their hips. The attack is two-pronged.

For *The Red Badge of Courage* is charged with religious imagery: the *Ecce Homo* of the 'dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree'; the notorious red sun 'pasted in the sky like a wafer'. Yet the communion of modern warfare proves a camaraderie of the absurd. The sacrifice of Jim Conklin (another J.C.) turns to a pointless *danse-macabre*, like the 'devotee of a mad religion, blood-sucking, muscle-wrenching, bone-crushing'. The red badge of courage itself proves to be panic-stricken and self-inflicted. Self-discovery and personal salvation turn out inevitably to be a patched lie in a meaningless war. Even to bear the colours, that sacred trust, is merely to feel 'the daring spirit of a savage religion-mad'.[8] All

[6] John Samuel Bewley Monsell, 'Fight of Faith', *Hymns of Love and Praise for the Church's Year* (London, 1863).
[7] *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (New York, 1893), Chapter 5.
[8] Chapters 7, 9, 23.

attempts to shape a moral vision are ultimatly reduced to madness in an amoral universe. For 'secular and religious education had' by no means 'effaced the throat-grappling instinct', nor 'firm finance held in check the passions'.[9] From Crane's desperate vision runs a direct line to Hemingway's nihilist litanies.

H. G. Wells was right when he wrote that Crane's writings suggested not so much Tolstoy, or Conrad's *Lord Jim*, as Whistler. Wells praised him for his 'impressionism'.[10] We might prefer to use 'expressionism' for those suns and wounds entangled in a single obsession, like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, or Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. Brown, red, yellow, blue, grey, green, are laid on with a pointilliste discretion, learnt from the emotive spectrum of Goethe's *Colour Lore*. Even in his titles: *The Red Badge of Courage*; *The Black Riders*; *The Blue Hotel*; *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*. His snapshot vision has the terrible, often hallucinatory, clarity of dream:

> Once he found himself almost into a swamp. He was obliged to walk upon bog tufts and watch his feet to keep from the oily mire. Pausing at one time to look about him he saw, out at some black water, a small animal pounce in and emerge directly with a gleaming fish.
>
> The youth went again into the deep thickets. The brushed branches made a noise that drowned the sounds of cannon. He walked on, going from obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity.
>
> At length he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine needles were a gentle brown carpet. There was a religious half light.
>
> Near the threshold he stopped, horror-stricken at the sight of a thing.
>
> He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip. (*The Red Badge of Courage*, Chapter 7)

Concentrate. Focus. Advance. After the 'pounce', a 'trundling': and the 'gleaming fish' reemerges a 'dead fish', while those primary reds and blues are dissolved, in alliteration, to a foggy yellow and pervasive green.

Such shifts of mood and their ironies constitute the pattern of Crane's work. Though capable of explication, like the symbolism of Van Gogh's canvases, they ultimately resist — must resist — a reductive interpretation into patterns of moral and spiritual significance. In this Crane is not like

[9] This whole passage stands as a deliberately misleading signpost at the opening of *The Red Badge of Courage*: 'From his home his youthful eyes had looked upon the war in his own country with distrust. It must be some sort of a play affair. He had long despaired of witnessing a Greeklike struggle. Such would be no more, he had said. Men were better, or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions' (Chapter 1). 'The Education of Henry Fleming', as it were, was precisely to learn that contemporary man (himself included) was neither better, nor more timid.

[10] 'Stephen Crane from an English Standpoint', *North American Review*, 171 (August 1900), 233–42.

Hawthorne, nor fundamentally, I think, like Melville. Henry Fleming ('the youth' of *The Red Badge of Courage*) can never be wholly educated out of his illusions, his fantasies, his flickering shifts of mood. Crane did his best to impose an ending:

> Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them.
>
> With the conviction came a store of assurance. He felt a quiet manhood, nonassertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man. (*The Red Badge of Courage*, Chapter 24)

But that seems rather pretentious, strained. He tried rewriting it several times. For just as Henry had fled from battle, in pursuit of a squirrel skittering into the trees, so the blind rage that turns him into a hero, a flag-bearer in the end, is mere animal rage. Man is out of control: that is the burden of Crane's message. Far from reason or courage, it is illusion and impulse, again and again, that twitches and throws us.

The Red Badge of Courage reads like some zany inscrutable allegory of *non-sense*. Crane's soldiers are seldom named: 'the youth' (Henry Fleming), the 'tall soldier' (Jim Conklin), the 'loud soldier' (Wilson), the 'spectral soldier', the 'tattered man', the man with a 'cheery voice', the man with a shoeful of blood who 'hopped like a schoolboy in a game', who 'was laughing hysterically'. A decade earlier, in *Specimen Days*, Whitman had written of the unknown dead, 'The Million Dead':

> (In some of the cemeteries nearly *all* the dead are unknown. At Salisbury, N.C., for instance, the known are only 85, while the unknown are 12,027, and 11,700 of these are buried in trenches. A national monument has been put up here, by order of Congress, to mark the spot — but what visible, material monument can ever fittingly commemorate that spot?)[11]

It was Crane who composed that 'visible, material monument'. Long before the multiplication of Tombs of Unknown Warriors throughout the world, Crane had revealed that warrior, with his schoolboy hop and hysterical laugh, as the scared and impotent victim. Long before Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, Crane had confronted the chauvinism, the imperialism, the patriotic humbug of a bellicose decade that gloried in the honour and self-sacrifice of war. In modern wars, he taught, it is the victims who are greeted as heroes.

For death, he realized, *exposes* man. It is the final betrayal of lives mercifully protected by shame, concealment, lies. Like the paper-thin torn soles of the shoes on the feet of a fallen soldier: 'it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he

[11] 'The Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up', *Specimen Days & Collect* (Philadelphia, 1882).

had perhaps concealed from his friends'.[12] Wounds, however, may strangely glorify a man. As he declared in 'An Episode of War':

> A wound gives strange dignity to him who bears it. Well men shy from his new and terrible majesty. It is as if the wounded man's hand is upon the curtain which hangs before the revelations of all existence — the meaning of ants, potentates, wars, cities, sunshine, snow, a feather dropped from a bird's wing; and the power of it sheds radiance upon a bloody form, and makes the other men understand sometimes that they are little.[13]

Crane himself, throughout his short career, seems a wounded man, a suicidally haunted man, in his far-ranging quest for wars from Cuba to Turkey. At the time of writing *The Red Badge of Courage* he had come no closer to war than Philoctetes. Like Hemingway, his heir, he seems a ready-made case-book study for Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow*. All his fiction, whether set in the Bowery or in the Virginian or Western wilds, seems to fashion his own psychological skirmish, in tougher and tougher engagements, with the amoral, aggressive, commercial, bourgeois jungle of the 1890s.

How does one plot a meaningful life? How plot a meaningful life in such a meaningless universe? Man cannot be wholly predetermined, he seems to say. Economic and social and hereditary environment cannot be all. Men *must* be seen as first movers. Men *must* retain the illusion of free will, to operate in spite of their environment. Against the sins of pride and self-delusion, the sycophantic faith in society's codes and the dogmas of God, must be asserted the moral responsibility of self-definition. 'In a story of mine called "An Experiment in Misery"', he wrote, 'I tried to make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice. Perhaps I mean a lack of ambition or to willingly be knocked flat and accept the licking'.[14] Crane viewed the bums of the Bowery flophouses uncompromisingly. Cowards are those who cannot confront the question of self-definition. Heroes can and do. Cowards are those who fall prey to social delusions, from whom Crane abdicates all responsibility as a writer. Cowards are those who fail to stand up against the 'collaboration of sin', like the Easterner in tacit alliance with the card-sharper (of *The Blue Hotel*) versus an outsider. The iron bars of tradition and of the law in which man travels Crane called 'a moving box'.[15] The problem is that of living without bars, without order, outside dogmas or codes, in a blizzard of whirling and competing forces. The question is one of decomposition with dignity in a decomposing universe. Not only the roles but the writing must be disintegrated to reassert our inherent worth and dignity as men.

[12] *The Red Badge of Courage*, Chapter 3.
[13] *Last Words* (London, 1902).
[14] Crane writing to Catherine Harris on 12 November 1896: *Stephen Crane: Letters*, edited by R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (New York, 1960). p. 133.
[15] *The Red Badge of Courage*, Chapter 3.

The ultimate question is that of heroism: not the passionate heroism of Crane's pseudo-heroes — rushing to save, to kill, to prop the flag — but the stoic restraint of a Jim Conklin (in *The Red Badge of Courage*) or the correspondent (in *The Open Boat*). Neither the Swede fuelled on Scully's whisky (in *The Blue Hotel*), nor black Henry Johnson rushing into a blazing laboratory (in *The Monster*), nor Fred Collins recklessly crossing noman's land for some water (in 'A Mystery of Heroism'), nor Henry Fleming in his final berserker fury, is a hero. All are 'blindly led by quaint emotions'.[16] All, even at best, are masters merely of their own visionary worlds. As Emily Dickinson once put it:

> A coward will remain, Sir,
> Until the fight is done;
> But an *immortal hero*
> Will take his hat, and run![17]

True heroes act with a nervous integrity: 'as deliberate and exact as so many watchmakers', as Crane wrote of the Cuban conflict.[18] In his final writings (in 'The Veteran', 'The Price of the Harness', *Wounds in the Rain*, the Spitzbergen tales) Crane dealt increasingly with such cool deliberation. Theirs is the dignity of self-possession. Heroes are those who can go forward, alone; who accept moral responsibility for themselves and others; who can accept isolation; who remain committed to life; who stand up to the 'collaboration of sin'. Though they too, of course, must die. They too, like Jim Conklin, may at any moment collapse with an animal-like kick of death.

Crane's heroes cradle their wounds in careful self-support, grabbing their left arm with their right hand, or holding their right wrist tenderly as if it were 'made of very brittle glass'. For Crane saw through the dignity to the fragility and the pathos of self-possession. He was still only twenty-eight years old when he died. It was of tuberculosis that he died. Within a generation his fragile dignity was reduced to a mere code, a moral shorthand for stoic self-definition and self-control. That is often called Hemingway's code.

Yet Hemingway also delivered Crane's finest epitaph. 'What about the good writers?', asks a German in *Green Hills of Africa*. 'The good writers are Henry James, Stephen Crane and Mark Twain', Hemingway replies. 'That's not the order they're good in. There is no order for good writers'. And what happened to Crane, the German asks. 'He died. That's simple. He was dying from the start.'[19]

[16] 'A Mystery of Heroism', *The Little Regiment* (New York, 1896).
[17] Written in 1852: *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), Number 3.
[18] *Wounds in the Rain* was a fictional adaptation of Crane's own adventures with the American forces in Cuba, 1898.
[19] *Green Hills of Africa* (New York, 1935), Part 1, Chapter 1.