

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

“The Scars We Carve”

Disruptive Bodies in Civil War Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in English

by

Allison Marie Johnson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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“‘The Scars We Carve’: Disruptive Bodies in Civil War Literature” examines the presence of physical forms, marks, and scars in periodical literature produced during and shortly after the war in order to illuminate the ubiquity and significance of bodies in the literary record of the war. Presenting substantial archival evidence of how American civilians and combatants interacted with and represented the physical effects of war, this dissertation focuses especially on the disruptive bodies of injured and maimed combatants, African American soldiers, and war-torn women. The critical consensus on Civil War literature emphasizes the effacement of the individual in sentimental narratives of nationhood, sacrifice, and reconciliation. This study refutes and complicates such readings by demonstrating the rhetorical and discursive power of bodies touched and shaped by war. Though sentimentality did persist and many writers continued to write about war deaths in the same way they wrote about non-war deaths, a large number of Americans resisted reintegrative, reconciliatory, and apologist narratives, underscoring instead the effects of the war on individuals. The destruction and upheaval of war disrupted and complicated traditional ways of understanding and depicting death and wounding;

in many texts created during the war, soldiers' bodies refuse to rest quietly beneath the sod and missing limbs talk and tell of horror and suffering.

The first chapter documents the ubiquity of female personifications of the Union and the Confederacy, examining the ways in which gender and nationality interact and intersect to assert that symbolic femininity is central to both sides' understandings of the conflict and its stakes. The second chapter proposes a new way of reading Whitman's Civil War poetry and prose, asserting that the bodies of dead and dying soldiers fill his pages, refusing to be ignored, silenced, or reintegrated into sentimental and reconciliatory conceptions of death and decay. The bodies of African American soldiers, the subject of the third chapter, disrupt and reject antebellum stereotypes of powerless slave bodies. Beginning with an analysis of literary and artistic depictions of slaves published during the first years of the war, the chapter traces the development of black men from slaves to soldiers to citizens in popular literature and visual culture. The left-handed penmanship contest that forms the focus of the final chapter also provides tangible evidence of the effects of war. Reading contest entries produced by amputees in conjunction with periodical poetry and prose focusing on amputation and its ramifications, this chapter underscores the centrality of the marked and maimed soldier body to the way in which soldiers and non-combatants understood and wrote about military service.

"The Scars We Carve" brings to light a significant body of Civil War literature that disrupts or rejects narratives of reconciliation and records the horrors of war. In numerous poems and stories of the war, the individual body and its component parts, marked by violence or imbued with rhetorical power, testify to the "great evil" of war, the issues at stake in the conflict, and its lasting influence.

The dissertation of Allison Marie Johnson is approved.

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2013

DEDICATION

To my parents, Christopher and Patricia Johnson, for their unwavering support and love.

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Introduction

On June 17, 1863, Frederika Macky White, a native of Virginia, reported in a small bound notebook that the “dear soldiers” had returned.¹ Absent from their ranks was her only son, Benjamin S. White, twenty-one years old and a member of Stonewall Jackson’s famous brigade. “My dear son,” she wrote, “was killed on Sunday, May the 3 1863 at the Battle of Chancellorsville.” Three years after his death, Benjamin S. White’s “precious remains” returned to his mother. On May 3, 1864, White remembered and recorded in the same notebook the death of her “dear and only son...slain in battle.” A “melancholy pleasure,” her son’s homecoming “opened afresh the fountain of [her] grief.” By including the arrival of Benjamin’s bones in her commonplace book, White recorded the physical as well as the emotional and spiritual legacies of the Civil War. For thirteen years, White added entries on the anniversaries of her son’s birth and death, often using the same words and phrases to commemorate her son’s passing. Amidst prayers for strength, White transcribed one of Jackson’s addresses to his troops, a reflection by the reverend and hymn writer John R. MacDuff, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Not Dead,” and other writings White likely found in periodicals. Sprinkled throughout White’s entries are quotations or full transcripts of poems dealing with death, the afterlife, and soldierly sacrifice.

White’s mourning process, one that involves transcribing poems and prose from periodicals and continually reflecting on and writing about loss and absence, reveals the conflict’s lasting influence on an individual mother while also indicating the significant role of popular literature documenting the war’s effects on individuals and their bodies in the national undertaking of recording, understanding, and remembering the war. White draws on an extensive corpus of periodical literature in order to situate her own loss within a community and nation of

¹ Frederika Macky White, Commonplace Book, Frederika Holmes Trapnell papers, Virginia Historical Society.

mourners. However, this larger framework never erases or absorbs her individual loss and the memory of her fallen son. A significant number of poems and short pieces published in periodicals between 1861 and 1865 focus on the war's physical cost and its effects on human bodies in order to record the widespread destruction and devastation caused by the conflict. Like White, Americans both North and South refuse to forget what they lost. Though she prays to write and mean "Thy will be done," White is unable to fully relinquish her son to Heaven or forget that he was (to use the words she writes in almost every entry) "slain in battle." Resisting erasure and forgetting, the remains of soldiers like Benjamin haunt the literary record of the war.

Many critical studies of Civil War literature emphasize the effacement of the individual in sentimental narratives of nationhood, sacrifice, and reconciliation. In some scholarly accounts, White's literary counterparts purposefully cover over the physical and emotional toll of the four-year struggle. Both historians and literary scholars insist on the continued prevalence of antebellum sentimentality. This dissertation complicates such readings by demonstrating the persistent rhetorical and discursive power of bodies, like Benjamin's, touched and shaped by war. Rather than erasing the physical components of war and effacing the individual, many writers focus on the contributions and sacrifices of American individuals by making marked and maimed bodies central to their texts. Beginning with the vulnerable and threatened female bodies of the personified Union and Confederacy and ending with the missing limbs of veteran amputees, this study traces the centrality and ubiquity of bodies in Civil War literature that disrupt narratives of reconciliation and sentimentality.

The widespread bloodshed of the War Between the States and advances in photography and the distribution of information made it nearly impossible to ignore the suffering of soldiers and the devastating nature of war. The war touched most families, sons and fathers falling in

battle or succumbing to disease, and casualty lists in newspapers and on bulletin boards advertised the ubiquity and prevalence of death and injuries. Though it is impossible to know the exact number of casualties produced by the conflict, recent estimates count upwards of 752,000 soldier deaths.² Discussing the reasons for the conflict's high casualties, James M. McPherson underscores "the disparity between traditional tactics and modern weapons."³ West Point alumni and Mexican American War veterans filled the officer ranks on both sides and continued to employ the Napoleonic tactics they had learned in school.⁴ Rifles replaced muskets, relatively inaccurate single-shot weapons, and fired minié balls. Explaining the impact made by the advent of the minié ball, a regimental surgeon wrote,

The introduction of the rifled musket and the elongated or minié ball gave a longer range, more precision firing and greater force to the ball, and more dangerous wounds. A wound from a smooth-bore and a round shot striking the thigh bone was often deflected with no serious injury to the bone. At the same time, a minié ball fired from a grooved musket under similar conditions might not only fracture, but crush two or three inches of the bone.⁵

² J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* LVII, no. 4 (2011): 307. Prior to Hacker's study, the consensus on Civil War casualties hovered around 620,000 deaths.

³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 472. For historical overviews of the conflict, see Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: The Improvised War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), William C. Davis, *The Imperiled Union: 1861-1865* (New York: Doubleday, 1982-3), J.G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1961).

⁴ For a discussion of military tactics prevalent at the outset of the war, see Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 11-17.

⁵ Qtd. in Alfred J. Bollet, *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs* (Tuscon, AZ: Galen Press, 2002), 144.

Despite improvements in weaponry, generals continued to order frontal assaults on entrenched defenders. Such technical advances coupled with antiquated tactics and medical practices produced horrible results.

Though numbers do little to communicate the social, emotional, and cultural effects of the war, Civil War statistics indicate the widespread nature of violence and loss between 1861 and 1865. In his recent recalculation of Civil War casualties, J. David Hacker estimates that “1 in 10 white men of military age in 1860 died as a result of the war and 200,000 white women were widowed.”⁶ He also suggests that as many as 36,000 African American soldiers perished (338). Because the Civil War occurred before important medical discoveries were made concerning bacteria, sterilization, antiseptics, and antibiotics, thousands of soldiers died from infection and disease.⁷ Two-thirds of all Civil War deaths were disease-related and diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid, and pneumonia were rampant in military camps.⁸ Mortality statistics do not include the hundreds of thousands casualties, the scars of which remained visible long after the war. Published in 1869, Benjamin Arthrop Gould’s *Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers*, produced under the auspices of the United States Sanitary Commission, reports that there were 858,000 casualties during four years of war, “or, on average, nearly 18,000 a month.”⁹

⁶ J. David Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead,” 311.

⁷ For information on Civil War medicine and mortality rates, see Richard H. Shyrock, “A Medical Perspective on the Civil War,” *American Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1962), Frank R. Freeman, *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care During the American Civil War* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), Alfred J. Bollet, *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs* (Tucson, AZ: Galen Press, 2002), Harold E. Straubing, *In Hospital and Camp: The Civil War Through the Eyes of Its Doctors and Nurses* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1993).

⁸ Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead,” 332; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 487.

A piece in *Arthur's Home Magazine* titled "Wounded and Killed" expresses the individual and familial suffering hinted at by statistics: "WOUNDED AND KILLED.—It takes but little space in the columns of the daily papers; but O! what long household stories and biographies are every one of these strange names, that we read over and forget!... 'Wounded and Killed!' Every name in that list is a lightning stroke to some heart, and breaks like thunder over some home, and falls a long, black shadow upon some hearthstone."¹⁰ The "columns of the daily papers" informed civilians of the progress of the conflict, detailed the locations and events of skirmishes and battles, listed casualties, and, most importantly for this project, provided literary responses to and representations of the war.

Millions of Americans subscribed to newspapers in the mid-nineteenth century, and with the war's coming many more turned to this source to receive news of the war's progress.¹¹ In his study of Civil War newspapers, Brayton Harris reports that there were nearly 2,500 newspapers when the war began.¹² Newspaper circulations and consumption grew as more and more people relied on journalists' accounts of battles and the bulletin boards provided by newspaper offices to receive updates on the course of the war.¹³ The importance of print in spreading information and knowledge is the subject of the poem "Printing Press."¹⁴ Published in *The Big Blue Union* on

⁹ Benjamin Arthrop Gould, *Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1869; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1869), 9.

¹⁰ "Wounded and Killed," *The Big Blue Union* (Marysville, Kansas) 1, no. 14 (June 1862): 1, reprinted from *Arthur's Home Magazine*.

¹¹ Dorothy Denneen Volo and James M. Volo describe antebellum literacy and newspaper consumption in *Daily Life in Civil War America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 203-211.

¹² Brayton Harris, *Blue & Gray in Black & White* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1999), 9.

¹³ See Alice Fahs' discussion of Civil War print culture in *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*, 19.

¹⁴ "Printing Press," *The Big Blue Union* 1, no. 7 (May 10, 1862): 1.

May 10, 1862, the poem invokes the printing press as “Mind’s railroad” and lauds its “unwearied power” that “sends rays of genius o’er each darkn’d land;/Where memory’s record, changing every hour,/Gives place to truth, stamped by the giant hand.” New periodicals appeared in the South in the initial years of the war as Confederates attempted to make their own records of memory. Despite initial avowals that the Southern people were too busy fighting to write poetry, by the third issue the editors of *The Southern Illustrated News* called for a “National Hymn” for the fledgling nation and underscored the necessity of producing a literary record: “We have eternally separated from the everlasting Yankee nation, and are now engaged in a righteous war for independence. Who will enumerate the horrors of this war—the untold sufferings—the hearthstones that have been made desolate by the loss of some husband, father, son or brother!”¹⁵ Newspapers and periodicals like the Confederate weekly provided civilians with factual information about the war and its effects and were a forum for the creation of a literary record of the conflict.

Illustrated newspapers like *Harper’s Weekly*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, and *The Southern Illustrated News* produced both a literary and a pictorial record of the war. Photographs could not be printed in newspapers, but woodcut reproductions of photographs and sketches produced by field artists provided the public with images of the war.¹⁶ In April of 1861, an article titled “The Only Reliable War Illustrations” appeared on Leslie’s front page.¹⁷ Reporting that special artists had been sent to Charleston and Washington, the article declared

¹⁵ “A Southern Publishing House,” *The Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 3 (September 20, 1862): 4. For initial concerns about the Southern people’s ability to produce poetry during the war, see “Salutatory,” *The Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 1 (September 6, 1862): 4.

¹⁶ Volo and Volo, *Daily Life in Civil War America*, 211.

¹⁷ “The Only Reliable War Illustrations,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* 11, no. 283 (April 27, 1861): 1.

the paper's illustrations "the only authentic and reliable sketches which have appeared." On the same page, Leslie proclaims, "My corps of Artists is unequalled in the country, and correspondents can depend on their sketches, however rough, being produced in the finest style of art." The editor requests that any "gentleman connected with either Army" send sketches of "important events and striking incidents." On September 20, 1862, fourteen days after it commenced publication, *The Southern Illustrated News* advertised for "two competent wood engravers" and offered "the highest price ever paid in this country."¹⁸ During the three years it was published the Confederate illustrated weekly produced engravings of noticeably lesser quality than the Northern weeklies. However, it continued in its attempts to "present more vividly to the reader the grand and imposing events that are happening around us."¹⁹

Though the Civil War was not the first war to be photographed, it was the most extensively photographed war at that point in history. Americans confronted images of wounded and dead bodies that did not fit within antebellum constructions of corporeality and death. The famous photographer Mathew Brady organized a group of photographers, including Alexander Gardner, Timothy O'Sullivan, James F. Gibson, and George Barnard, and assigned each to different areas; these men and other photographers took an estimated one million pictures between 1860 and 1865.²⁰ Describing Brady's exhibition of photographs of Antietam in his New York gallery in 1862, Timothy Sweet writes that it "included the first photographic representations of corpses on the battlefield ever seen by the American (or any other) public."²¹

¹⁸ "Wanted Immediately," *The Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 3 (September 20, 1862): 4.

¹⁹ "Salutatory," *The Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 1 (September 6, 1862): 4.

²⁰ George Sullivan, *In the Wake of Battle: The Civil War Images of Matthew Brady* (Prestel: New York, 2004), 6.

A New York Times reviewer recorded the disruptiveness of the exhibition: “Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards...he has done something very like it.”²² Many Americans purchased “small card photographs and stereographs” depicting battlefield scenes and corpses, remembering and commemorating the dead with the help of photographic documentation of death and destruction.²³ Images of corpses produced by warfare were widely disseminated and changed the way many thought and wrote about the war. Broken, dying, and dead bodies figuratively and literally arrived at Americans’ doorsteps and refused to be ignored.

Representations of dismembered corpses and wounded bodies disrupted antebellum conceptions of death and dying. Before the advent of the war, many Americans hired photographers to produce images of dead family members.²⁴ Though many Americans were accustomed to images of peaceful, reposing, and carefully prepared dead bodies, the photographs of Civil War wounded and dead, their corpses dismembered, bloated, and broken, disrupted the benign tradition of postmortem photography. Americans could read descriptions of battles and view their aftereffects in hundreds of photographs disseminated during and after the war. As the corpse became what Franny Nudelman calls a “journalistic subject,” the American public became acquainted with the realities of war and its effects on the human body.²⁵

²¹ Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 116.

²² Qtd. in Sweet, *Traces of War*, 116.

²³ Sullivan, *In the Wake of Battle*, 7.

²⁴ For a discussion of the relationship of nineteenth-century Americans with death and the role that photography played, see Franny Nudelman’s *John Brown’s Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For specific information on corpse photography, see page 104.

Antebellum texts describe sickness, deathbed scenes, wounds, and the physical attributes of characters. In comparison to twentieth-century literature, however, much of antebellum literature seems censored and sanitized. Critiquing the prudishness of Civil War literature in his tellingly titled *The Unwritten War*, Daniel Aaron notes that “polite literature before and after the war excluded certain kinds of experience, and it is not surprising that the territory of the common soldier should have been placed ‘off bounds’ by America’s cultural guardians.”²⁶ Harold Aspiz similarly argues that “in literature as in the drawing room, the body had to be decorously garbed.”²⁷

In some ways contradicting arguments like Aaron’s and Aspiz’s, multiple scholars make the physical their starting point in studying antebellum literature and culture and trace the body’s significance in determining difference, nationhood, and political discourse.²⁸ Though the body was indeed a literary subject, in most popular antebellum literature the spiritual triumphs over the physical, and the contents of one’s character transcend the physical matter of one’s form—unless, of course, one’s form is not white. The war changes and shapes human forms, and these changes are reflected in literature produced during and after the conflict. Rather than arguing that

²⁵ Franny Nudelman, *John Brown’s Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 105.

²⁶ Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), xvii.

²⁷ Harold Aspiz, *Walt Whitman and the Body Beautiful* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 67.

²⁸ Both Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Carolyn Soriso’s *Fleshing Out America: Race, Gender, and the Politics of the Body in American Literature, 1833-1879* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002) note the importance of the body in antebellum political discourse and conceptions of the nation. In *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Joan Burbick discusses the body’s relation to a successful republic, and Jennifer Putzi’s *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006) underscores the marked body’s role in antebellum culture and society.

the Civil War inserts the body into literature for the first time, I contend that the horrors of war increase the importance of and produce new roles for the body in texts.

After the war began, many of the contributors to popular periodicals continued to work within the antebellum literary tradition, producing what Edmund Wilson disparagingly termed “patriotic journalism.”²⁹ There were many outlets for literature praising the bravery of the soldiers and defending the cause of the Union or the Confederacy. According to Alice Fahs, “from the start of the war an abundance of Northern presses, paper, artists, and engravers made it possible to produce a wide array of periodicals, newspapers, books, and print ephemera related to the war.”³⁰ Though the South was less equipped than the North, it was able to produce newspapers and records of the war. Southerners and Northerners sent poems and prose pieces to newspapers and magazines, inspiring their compatriots to join the fight, commemorating the fallen, or responding to specific engagements and events. Writers and civilians who did not experience the war as soldiers shaped the material provided by newspapers and first-person accounts into literary representations. Responding to the effusive outpouring of poetry, some Southern periodicals began charging those who wished to be printed.³¹ Periodicals reprinted poems from other newspapers and Americans transcribed such poems in commonplace books or cut up newspapers to make scrapbooks.³² Some poems, like “Stonewall Jackson’s Way,”

²⁹ Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 470.

³⁰ Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 42.

³¹ Volo and Volo, *Daily Life in Civil War America*, 214.

³² Daniel Bedinger Lucas, a West Virginian lawyer and poet, transcribed numerous poems in a commonplace book, many of which were initially published in periodicals. During the war, for example, he copied “A Mother’s Prayer,” published in the *Natchez Weekly Courier* 33, no. 37 (September 3, 1862): 1; “Reading the List,” republished from the *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch* in *Advocate of Peace* (Washington, D.C.) (May/June 1863): 278; and “Stonewall Jackson’s Way,” republished from the *Boston*

reportedly found by Union troops on the body of a dead Confederate soldier, appeared both North and South of the Mason-Dixon line during the war.³³ To a certain extent, the Union and Confederacy shared a common literary past and responded to the conflict in similar ways. Fahs argues that “early in the war...patriotic newspaper poetry by ordinary citizens was widely hailed both North and South as an appropriate response to the events of the war” (4). For both sides of the conflict, poetry and the production of literary pieces played an important patriotic role and provided an outlet for feelings created by the war.

As the war progressed and casualty lists grew, these feelings began to be expressed in literature that worked outside established antebellum literary traditions. According to Fahs, “increasingly in the wake of battlefield deaths, both Southerners and Northerners began to produce more somber forms of literature” (89). Fahs quotes an article in an 1864 *Atlantic Monthly* written by a Mrs. Furness: ““When we saw our brave boys, whom we had sent out with huzzas, coming back to us with the blood and grime of battle upon them, maimed, ghastly, dying, dead...we knew that we...had now commenced a record of our own. Henceforth there was for us a new literature, new grooves of thought, new interests”” (93). An important aspect of this “new literature” was the maimed human body.

Scholars like Nudelman and Fahs trace the continued prevalence of antebellum literary practices and overlook the distinct and disruptive qualities of poems and short pieces focused on the marked bodies of soldiers and civilians. Fahs identifies in popular war literature “a sentimental insistence on the importance of sympathy and individual suffering,” arguing that it

Courier in *The Southern Literary Messenger* 37, no. 2 (February 1, 1863): 116. Daniel Lucas Bedinger papers, Virginia Tech Archives.

³³ *The Southern Literary Messenger* published “Stonewall Jackson’s Way” on February 1, 1863, reporting that the *Boston Courier* “says: The following stanzas were found on the person of a rebel sergeant of the ‘Stonewall Brigade,’ recently captured by our troops near Winchester, Virginia.”

“became the most potent mode of discussing and coping with the wounding and killing of soldiers during the war” (94). In Fahs’ formulation, the unprecedented slaughter of the war did little to disrupt antebellum traditions, as “the wounded, dying, and dead bodies of soldiers became the vehicle for a new sentimentalism that fused patriotism and Christianity” (95). It is my contention that the bodies of soldiers disrupt sentimental narratives and antebellum ways of thinking and writing about death. The bodies of black soldiers and women touched and marked by the war also complicate and refute racist and sexist conceptions of citizenship and service.

Other critics have recognized the importance of the body in texts produced during and after the war; however, most insist that Civil War writers sacrificed individuals to universalisms and generalities that cover over bodies destroyed by war.³⁴ Both historians and literary scholars trace the dominance of antebellum ideologies and modes of literary production. In his recent study of America’s “culture of death” in the antebellum period, Mark Schantz insists that “Americans came to fight the Civil War in the midst of a wider cultural world that sent them messages about death that made it easier to kill and to be killed.”³⁵ “What [Americans] read and wrote about death,” Schantz argues, actually facilitated carnage rather than bemoaning or criticizing it. Drew Gilpin Faust also considers antebellum practices regarding death and dying, but underscores the transformative effects the Civil War had on these practices and American culture. However, in her brief consideration of literature, she argues that “the predominant response to the unexpected carnage was in fact a resolute sentimentality that verged at times on

³⁴ See Lisa A. Long’s *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), Jennifer Putzi’s discussion of Alcott’s “My Contraband” in *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Franny Nudelman’s *John Brown’s Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War*.

³⁵ Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

pathos.”³⁶ Cynthia Wachtell claims that “the Civil War, as painted by Stoddard, Larcom, Howe, Randall, Ryan, and so many others, was an idealized war,” noting that “poetry’s adaptability as an antiwar tool...was rarely on display.”³⁷ In her dissertation on sentimental poetry of the war, Marjorie Trapp argues that the war “was written in such a way as to make the war and its sacrificed bodies texts themselves, texts that would be deployed postwar in an effort at reconciliation and bonding through rereading.”³⁸ According to Trapp, sentimental verse “made meaning of the war by translating the inexplicability of war into bounded and (largely) explicable texts” (2). Critics like Trapp overlook the disruptive quality of the myriad bodies crowding the columns of Civil War periodicals.

In a move that is typical of much scholarship on Walt Whitman and other Civil War writers, Franny Nudelman argues that the good gray poet “prescribes silence as the appropriate attitude of the mourner,” and figures Whitman within a tradition of silence and inexpressibility: “Declaring that the Civil War could not be described, writers and politicians implied that public performance of silence was one way that citizens could participate in a regenerated national community” (72). Though sentimentality did persist and many writers continued to write about war deaths in the same way they wrote about non-war deaths, a large number of Americans resisted reintegrative, reconciliatory, and apologist narratives, underscoring instead the effects of the war on individuals. As Whitman’s numerous writings and the literary productions of thousands of Americans evidence, moments of silence were interspersed between disruptive

³⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 194.

³⁷ Cynthia Wachtell, *War No More: The Antiwar Impulse in American Literature, 1861-1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 31.

³⁸ Marjorie Jane Trapp, “Sentimental Poetry of the American Civil War” (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010), 2.

outpourings of grief and the echoes of war. The Civil War is neither unwritten nor characterized by silence on the part of those who experienced it. Rather than serving as a sentimental object in poems that fail to capture the truth of war, the individual human body becomes a new text and testament, disrupting antebellum traditions and insisting on the physical cost of the war and the emotional, psychological, and societal scars that resulted from it.

A survey of periodicals published between 1860 and 1870 reveals a wealth of poems and images centered on the symbolic and monumental body of Columbia, or Lady Liberty, and her Southern counterparts. My first chapter documents the ubiquity of female personifications of the Union and the Confederacy, examining the ways in which gender and nationality interact. I assert that symbolic femininity is central to both sides' understandings of the conflict and its stakes. Defending the nation-state includes sheltering female bodies from rapacious enemies and retaining the purity and structural integrity of national borders and codes of law; both the bodies of women and the monumental limbs of the personified warring nations must be protected and preserved. The various incarnations of Columbia are significant to understanding the differences between the symbolic roles of femininity in the poetry of the war and the actual roles of women in the conflict. By moving the symbolic feminine into the political and physical realm of war, Columbia and her sisters indicate and document the significance of the war for actual American women.

The simultaneously threatened and bellicose forms of female personifications and women on the homefront are closely related to the bodies of Union and Confederate soldiers. Walt Whitman, who interacted with many soldiers and found inspiration in the hospitals of Washington, D.C., is the focus of my second chapter. *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps*,

Whitman's 1865 and 1866 collections of poems, and his prose accounts, *Specimen Days* and *Memoranda During the War*, document his experiences as a hospital nurse, his feelings regarding the conflict, his love and support of the Union, and his unwavering belief in the dignity and sublimity of the human body. In-depth descriptions of soldiers' physical appearances display Whitman's continued interest in the human body as an aesthetic and sensual object, but detailed records of wounds and suffering demonstrate Whitman's growing concern with and his desire to provide evidence of the destructive force of war. I propose a new way of reading Whitman's Civil War poetry and prose, asserting that the bodies of dead and dying soldiers fill his pages, refusing to be ignored, silenced, or reintegrated into sentimental and reconciliatory conceptions of death and decay.

The bodies of African American soldiers, the subject of my third chapter, disrupt and reject antebellum stereotypes of powerless slave bodies. Beginning with an analysis of literary and artistic depictions of slaves published during the first years of the war, I trace the development of black men from slaves to soldiers to citizens in popular literature and visual culture. Between 1861 and 1865, Americans both black and white, unconscious of the coming failure of Reconstruction and the empty promises of freedom, located the justification for African American manhood and citizenship in the dead, wounded, and scarred bodies of black soldiers. The war's violence was the catalyst for the transformation of the black body from object to subject. Physical sacrifice embodied this transformation and provided Americans with a tangible means of understanding the role of black slaves and soldiers in the war.

The left-handed penmanship contest that forms the focus of my final chapter also provides tangible evidence of the effects of war. William Oland Bourne, a philanthropist, Civil War hospital volunteer, and newspaper editor, sponsored two penmanship contests in 1865 and

1866 for veterans who had lost their right arms in combat. Held in the Library of Congress, the collected submissions of the “Left Arm Corps” provide insight into the ways in which maimed soldiers wrote about their service and sacrifice. The missing limbs of the contestants communicate the effects of the war on individual men and by their absence communicate the lasting presence of war’s violence. Poems centered on “empty sleeves” appear in many periodicals during and shortly after the war and indicate the ubiquitous and disruptive nature of Civil War injuries. Amputees and their missing limbs are not easily reintegrated into narratives of reconciliation and forgetting. In the contest entries and in periodical pieces, missing limbs and empty sleeves have the discursive power to disrupt attempts to cover over the destruction of war.

Writing in October of 1864, six months before the end of the Civil War, the anonymous author of “Some Uses of a Civil War” asserts that “war is a great evil.”³⁹ As evidence, the author submits the physical marks made by brothers fighting brothers: “These forms, crushed and torn out of all human semblance, are our brothers. . . . The scars we carve with steel or burn with powder across the shuddering land, are scars on the dear face of the Motherland we love.” The bodies of American citizens and the geographical and symbolic bodies of the American republic are lastingly scarred and shaped by the violence and destruction of the internecine conflict. “The Scars We Carve” brings to light a significant body of Civil War literature that disrupts narratives of reconciliation and records the horrors of war. In numerous poems and stories of the war, the individual body and its component parts, marked by violence or imbued with rhetorical power, testify to the “great evil” of war, the issues at stake in the conflict, and its lasting influence. Though the Civil War ended more than one hundred years ago, its memory and legacy continue in American life and literature. The corpses of soldiers are buried and covered by grass and the

³⁹ “Some Uses of a Civil War,” *The Continental Monthly* 6, no. 4 (October 1864): 361.

passing of time, but their broken bodies speak to us in the lines of poems and stories. Though the wounds no longer bleed, the scars remain.

Chapter 1

Columbia and Her Sisters: Personifying the Civil War

On May 25, 1861, *Harper's Weekly* published a poem by "S. J. A." titled "Not Dead."¹ Taking a "motto on a New York banner" as its epigraph and inspiration, the poem insists, "The Union is not dead but sleeping." Through the "dark night of wickedness" caused by the rebellion, the people of the North must guard both "our Union and our liberty." S.J.A. calls on "each soldier's arm to grasp the sabre," since only the return of "each star by traitor bands disgraced"—each seceded state—will allow the Union to "joyously" awake from her slumber and "never sleep again." The personified Union's slumber promises hope for future reconciliation and reunion, but also warns of her vulnerability and need for protection. Likewise, analogous poems published in Southern periodicals and books depict the Confederacy as a woman or a collection of Southern sisters. While Columbia, an individual woman, represents both the Northern states and the hoped-for reunified nation, a group of Southern sisters embodies a new nation separate from the body politic of the Union.

Patriotic poems calling for renewed determination and dedication to the cause of defeating the Confederacy habitually invoke Columbia, the embattled and all-encompassing female personification of the Union. Traditionally interchangeable with the goddess of liberty, this ubiquitous representative of the United States goes to war in poetry and illustrations of the conflict. Columbia's Confederate sisters, personifications of a fledgling nation and its constituent states and cities, wage a rhetorical war for legitimacy and for the ability to represent embattled femininity. Although published during a time of horrible violence and destruction, these poems depict ostensibly intact and unscathed female bodies. However, Columbia and her Southern counterparts are often vulnerable to attack. Northern and Southern poets imagine female Unions

¹ S.J.A., "Not Dead," *Harper's Weekly* 5, no. 230 (May 25, 1861): 322.

and Confederacies threatened by sexual violation at the hands of treacherous enemies. Invading hordes of soldiers threaten not only the purity of female citizens, but also the political and social structures of the nation. Poets and artists on each side depict the enemy as a destroyer of homes and a victimizer of women, emphasizing the threat that war's violence poses to female bodies and urging men to protect the actual bodies of women and the symbolic body politic. Both vulnerable and belligerent, Columbia and her Southern counterparts encourage action. These poetic personifications prepare for battle, and perform socially acceptable female participation in war. Symbolic women call their nations to a war that only men may fight. Consequently, sexuality and nationalism are closely intertwined—to defend the nation-state is to shelter female bodies from rapacious enemies and to retain the purity and structural integrity of national borders and codes of law.

As a call to arms, "Not Dead" is similar to many poems written at the onset of the war, and its disregard for individual sacrifice and suffering is typical of patriotic paeans. S.J.A. urges American men to "stake [their] lives for truth and victory," but does not mention that, unlike the slumbering Union, they may soon be dead, not sleeping. American women cannot stake their lives for the Union on the field of battle, and this gender imbalance is very clear in poems in which the nation is personified as a female. The female Union can sleep, resting intact until victory allows it to rise again, the poem implies, because women's bodies are separate from the violence of war. The mother of all, the embodied Union sends her children to battle, and awaits the outcome from a safe vantage point. As the war progresses, however, the embodied Union or Confederacy is sometimes physically marked by the progress of war, and the mothers weep as their children are wounded and die. Though female allegories often serve to remove or distance actual women from participation in the public and political realms, the bodies of Columbia and

her sisters, threatened and torn by the war, disrupt this distancing by moving the symbolic feminine body into the physical realm of the war and more closely aligning the symbolic feminine with the physical bodies of American women. Both Columbia and American women are vulnerable to war's violence. This chapter examines the ubiquity of female personifications in the literature and visual culture of the Civil War in order to illustrate the significance of symbolic femininity to both sides of the conflict and to document the various ways in which these personifications were strategically deployed.

Bodies politic

Female personifications of nations have the potential to relegate women's political and social significance to the symbolic realm. In some poems and illustrations produced during the war, the personification of the nation-state allows for the abstraction of individual female bodies and removes actual women from the story of the war. In "Women and Allegory," Barbara Johnson discusses the role of allegory in perpetuating separate spheres of female and male action and influence. "It is as allegory," she argues, "that women have most often been admitted into public art."² In many poems written during the Civil War, women appear as one of the justifications for violence: men must fight to protect their wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. Allegorical personifications of the Union or the Confederacy serve as the focal point of calls to arms and rallying cries, but it is men and not women who are called and rallied. Johnson draws on the work of Paul de Man, who argues, "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its origin" (quoted in Johnson 62). Though female bodies represent the nation, women are removed from the actual process of nation building and nation protecting. According to Johnson, allegory

² Barbara Johnson, "Women and Allegory" in *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 54.

allows for interpretation “through a predicate of embodiment, location, interest, and readability” (73). Embodied and readable, the female form provides a main *casus belli* for both sides of the war. However, Columbia and her sisters often act as both symbol and allegory, allowing for identification with actual American women and for more abstracted ideals of Union and freedom.

Historians, literary critics, and art historians have studied female personifications of countries and of the United States in particular, underscoring the interconnectedness of gender and nationhood. However, there is no extensive study of Columbia and her sisters in literature and illustrations published during the war. Scholars also disagree on the prevalence and purpose of figures like Columbia. Discussing antebellum political culture, Anne Norton emphasizes the masculinization of the North and feminization of the South.³ Basing her generalization on only two collections of Civil War poetry, Norton argues that a “metaphoric disparity” in terms of gender identification exists between representations of the Union and the Confederacy; Southern writers “referred to their native states as ‘she’ and personified them as mother” and Northern poets, in Norton’s formulation, did not (167).⁴ As this chapter will prove, poets both North and South imagined and depicted their states and nations as female and often motherly. Elizabeth Young notes that “Liberty and her sister icon Columbia were potentially militant symbols of the besieged Union” and “Southerners also claimed the idea of Liberty...to authorize secession.”⁵ Significantly, Young asserts, “In many of these metaphors of the Civil War body politic, women

³ Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁴ Norton also argues that “women appear very rarely in any role in Northern poetry” (167), an assertion which a cursory survey of the literary record of the war disproves.

⁵ Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 30, 49.

are central but voiceless. Emblematic women might sometimes be militant sword-carriers, but they were more often disempowered through metaphor” (49). In her study of women in public in the nineteenth century, Mary P. Ryan invokes the same form of silencing: “The political exclusion of women created an opening in civic culture for the Goddess of Liberty and her retinue, who could become benign but decorative vehicles for conveying abstract principles.”⁶ Ryan passes over the Civil War in her study of women in public, and thus neglects important cultural work performed by Columbia and her sisters. It is my contention that Columbia and her sisters disrupt the silencing power of metaphor and allegory through their participation in and vulnerability to war’s violence.

An overview of Columbia’s origins and development demonstrates her adaptability and the interconnectedness of race and gender in the formation of a national identity. In his 1965 article “The American Image as Indian Princess: 1765-1783,” E. McClung Fleming traces the progression of allegorical depictions of America, identifying five stages of representation. From 1575 to 1765, an “Indian Queen with the attributes of a Caribbean culture” represented both North and South America.⁷ This female and native America appears in multiple allegorical representations of the continents, an artform that became popular in the sixteenth century and remained so into the nineteenth.⁸ In his similarly titled study of female representatives of the nation, John Higham argues that “...female symbols provided the chief allegorical device for

⁶ Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 52.

⁷ E. McClung Fleming, “The American Image as Indian Princess,” *Winterthur Portfolio: A Journal of American Material Culture* 2 (1965): 65.

⁸ See E. McClung Fleming’s discussion of the prevalence of personified nations and continents in art in “From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783-1815,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967): 50. For a discussion of female allegories, see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

evoking both the general principles and the specific, indigenous roots of the early American republic.”⁹ While the conquest and colonization of the Americas silenced millions of actual indigenous women, figurative and iconic native women continued to represent North America in European (and a few American) political cartoons and artistic renderings of the continent.¹⁰ According to Fleming, an Indian Princess, the daughter of Great Britain, represented the thirteen colonies from 1765 to 1783, and, after independence, was emblematic of “United States sovereignty” (65).

While European artists continued to depict the New World as native, American artists moved away from a Native America and toward a whiter one. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783, officially severed the political ties between England and the United States. Whites of European descent continued to encroach on native land and Indian place names like Rappahannock and Susquehanna became more abundant than actual Indians. Female figures produced by American artists representing the new nation wore star-spangled robes instead of deerskin and their limbs were lily-white rather than tawny. During the formation of the new republic, writes Fleming, “the Indian Princess gradually was metamorphosed into a Greek goddess” (65). As Americans continued to create a national identity, the iconic native woman was increasingly supplanted by the white Lady Liberty or Columbia.¹¹ Though Joshua Taylor, in his study of artistic representations of America, argues Columbia did not belong to “geography or a particular race, but to the family of personified virtues,” the figure’s transition from dark

⁹ John Higham, “Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America,” *The Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 100, no. 1 (1990): 79.

¹⁰ In his survey, Fleming considers twenty-three English engravings, six American engravings, two Dutch engravings, and one French. My survey of images reflected a similar ratio.

¹¹ According to Higham, “Americans spoke almost interchangeably” of the two figures (63), and this interchangeability is reflected in the pictorial and literary record.

skin to white skin underscores the exclusion of the racial other and the primacy of whiteness in the formation of a national symbol.¹² Drawing on iconographic depictions of the goddess of Liberty, artists and writers combined togas, Phrygian caps, and eagle feathers to produce a new Caucasian personification of the nation.¹³

E. McClung Fleming incorrectly argues that the early nineteenth century “saw both the Indian Princess and the Greek goddess replaced, in popular arts, by the masculine figures of Brother Jonathan and Uncle Sam” (65). Both male figures do appear in Civil War era political cartoons, a medium made possible by improvements in printing techniques, but they in no way supplant or surpass Columbia.¹⁴ In a later essay, Fleming labels the Greek goddess and Columbia, products of the neoclassical revival, “the polite fancies of gentlemen of the genteel tradition.”¹⁵ Writing nearly thirty years after Fleming, Higham notes that, “[t]hanks to a large collection of clippings from popular humor magazines of the Civil War era held at the American Antiquarian Society, it is clear that Columbia or Liberty was the most common personification of the Union” (74). However, in her 1999 collection of Civil War cartoons, Kristen Smith perpetuates Fleming’s argument, explaining that Columbia “symbolized the American people

¹² Joshua C. Taylor, with a contribution by John G. Cawelti, *America as Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 7.

¹³ For a discussion of personifications of the goddess of Liberty, see Maurice Algulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ For information on Civil War cartoons and the differences between Northern and Southern cartoons, see Kristen M. Smith, *The Lines Are Drawn: Political Cartoons of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 1999).

¹⁵ E. McClung Fleming, “From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783-1815.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967): 38.

until the appearance of Brother Jonathan who became Uncle Sam.”¹⁶ Smith’s assertion is wrong on three counts: Columbia represents the nation itself, not the American people; Brother Jonathan and Uncle Sam are separate entities in Civil War cartoons, and the absorption of one by the other is a later phenomenon; and Columbia continues to represent the nation despite the presence of the two male figures.

According to Fleming, the advent of Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan brought “an altogether fresh earthiness and colloquialism” (38) (two traits Fleming associates with masculinity) to the representation of America and “suppl[ied] a missing flexibility, vitality, and robustness to the American image” (66). Fleming’s thinly veiled sexism ignores the robustness and adaptability of Columbia, qualities that are quite evident during the Civil War. In her study of female allegories, Marina Warner differentiates between female and male personifications of the United States and Great Britain: “We can all live inside Britannia or Liberty’s skin, they stand for us regardless of sex, yet we cannot identify with them as characters. Uncle Sam and John Bull are popular figures; they can be grim, sly, feisty, pathetic, absurd, for they have personality.”¹⁷ According to Warner, “the female form does not refer to particular women...and does not even presume to evoke their natures” (12). The Lady Liberties, Columbias, and other female personifications that appear in poems and illustrations of the war participate in and respond to the conflict, just like actual American women. Unlike the Statue of Liberty, Warner’s main focus, they have personality and allow for identification. Alternatingly belligerent, mournful, angry, indignant, and determined, the Columbias who appear on the pages of Civil

¹⁶ Kristen M. Smith, *The Lines Are Drawn: Political Cartoons of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 1999), xviii.

¹⁷ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 13.

War periodicals exhibit “robustness” and “personality,” blurring the line between the abstracted symbolic feminine and the lived experience of American women.

Brother Jonathan, Uncle Sam, and Old Secesh

Despite E. McClung Fleming’s assertions about the fading presence of female representatives of the nation, Columbia remained the main personification of the nation itself. Between 1861 and 1865, Uncle Sam appears twelve times in *Harper’s Weekly* and thirteen times in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. Brother Jonathan graces the pages of the two newspapers sixteen times and seven times, respectively. Due perhaps to editorial preference, and to the smaller number of political cartoons in *Leslie’s*, there is a discrepancy between the number of times Columbia appears in the two publications. While she represents the nation only eight times in four years in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, she appears thirty-one times in *Harper’s Weekly*.¹⁸

When they do appear, Brother Jonathan and Uncle Sam usually represent Union military prowess or industrial might. Winifred Morgan dedicates an entire book to Brother Jonathan, tracing his origins in the founding of the new nation to his disappearance after the Civil War and tying his development to the formation of American identity.¹⁹ Morgan identifies a 1776 political cartoon as the first appearance of the figure and notes that Brother Jonathan appeared on stage in popular comedies in the first three decades of the new republic (12). An “American everyman,” Brother Jonathan embodies the Yankee qualities of industry, common sense, and earnestness.²⁰ Like Brother Jonathan, Uncle Sam is a stars and stripes-wearing Yankee. In his article “The

¹⁸ These statistics are based on my survey of both publications between the years 1861 and 1865.

¹⁹ Winifred Morgan, *An American Icon: Brother Jonathan and American Identity* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988).

²⁰ Morgan, *An American Icon*, 18.

Search for Uncle Sam,” Alton Ketchum provides the biography of the original Sam, a man born in Metonomy, Massachusetts in 1766 who became a successful meatpacker and supplied the American troops during the War of 1812.²¹ The initials U.S. (for United States), stamped on the barrels of meat, came to stand for “Uncle Sam” through the jokes of one of Sam’s butchers (22). “Uncle Sam” soon became synonymous with “United States,” and the bearded old man dressed in the stars and stripes came to represent the government of the nation. According to Ketchum, the first print reference to Uncle Sam appears on a broadside printed in 1813 (23) and the first visual representation of the figure was printed in 1832 (24). Both Morgan and Ketchum note that British cartoonists preferred Brother Jonathan to Uncle Sam, since Jonathan retained a familial connection to John Bull.²² The figure used to represent America often depends on the artist’s political intention.

Despite Jonathan’s kinship with John Bull, his vigorous and powerful frame bears little resemblance to the plump Englishman. Published in the *Harper’s Weekly* for November 8, 1862, a cartoon titled *The Exasperation of John Bull at the News From the U.S.* juxtaposes a red-nosed, rotund, and decrepit John Bull with the virile figure of Brother Jonathan (figure 1.1).²³ His star-spangled shirt rolled up to reveal brawny forearms, Jonathan works with a hammer and anvil to shape a metal band that reads “Constitution” and “Union.” Guns and cannonballs surround the Yankee blacksmith. John Bull’s bottle of port fails to comfort him in the face of Jonathan’s insistence on preserving the Union. A copy of the *New York Herald* clenched in his hand, John Bull roars, “He won’t go to smash—he won’t die—he won’t give up restoring the Union, though

²¹ Alton Ketchum, “In Search of Uncle Sam,” *History Today* 40, no. 4 (1990): 20-26.

²² See Morgan, *An American Icon*, 33 and Ketchum, “In Search of Uncle Sam,” 24.

²³ *The Exasperation of John Bull at the News From the U.S.*, *Harper’s Weekly* 6, no. 306 (November 8, 1862): 720.

I've told him, over and over, that it is no use. What Beasts those Yankees are! Ugh!" The message of the cartoon is clear: despite the blustering and attempts at interference of John Bull, the men of the North will persist in their attempts to restore the Union.



Figure 1.1: *Exasperation of John Bull at the News From the U.S.* (1862)

Another split panel cartoon featuring John Bull and Brother Jonathan appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in December of 1862.²⁴ On the left of the cartoon, a hefty and red-nosed John Bull plies a male figure representing the Confederacy with a bag of cash, a ship, and firearms. "Fit you out a pirate," John Bull tells "Mr. Confederate," "or make you Manacles for Slaves at shortest notice." In the right panel, Brother Jonathan, wearing a starry shirt and striped pants, offers bags of corn and flour to a cowering family of "English workmen." "Starving, eh!" says Jonathan, "Well, your Old Man hasn't behaved like a friend, or you wouldn't have been in this pickle. But I can't see you hungry, so fire away." Employing colloquialisms of American English, the physically impressive Brother Jonathan embodies the generosity valued as a Yankee characteristic. The moral bankruptcy and bloated greed of an England that aids the slaveholding South are in stark contrast to the benevolent strength of the youthful Northern states.

²⁴ *Exasperation of John Bull at the News From the U.S.*, *Harper's Weekly* 6, no. 311 (December 13, 1862): 800.

Often resembling Brother Jonathan, Uncle Sam wears his customary striped pants and beard in most cartoons of the era. However, in an 1861 illustration titled *Uncle Sam Protecting His Property Against the Encroachments of His Cousin John*, Sam wears Union blue and a sword.²⁵ Sam physically removes a similarly militaristic John Bull (with cannons for legs but *sans* rotund belly) from a cotton field, saying, “John, You lost your Non-interfering Principle. I’ll lay it on your back again.” United States military might equals and promises to surpass Britain’s, and Uncle Sam’s merging with a Union soldier communicates the main focus of the federal government. Uncle Sam rejects familial ties with John Bull, revoking the foreigner’s access to cotton because of his encroachment and attempted aid of the Confederacy.

The Civil War divided both actual and symbolic families. Anne Norton notes that “it had been a commonplace, prior to secession, to liken the Union to a marriage” and Elizabeth Young affirms that “the Civil War itself was represented in sustained national allegories that focused on siblings, spouses, and bodies.”²⁶ Brother fought brother, husband battled wife, and personification tangled with personification. In John Tenniel’s *A Family Quarrel*, a cartoon published in 1861 in the English newspaper *Punch*, a male figure with stars on his shirt and stripes on his pants faces off against a woman wearing the stars and bars of the Confederate flag as an apron.²⁷ The angry husband in this tableau wears the clothes and beard of Uncle Sam, but is

²⁵ Edward Stauch, *Uncle Sam Protecting His Property Against the Encroachments of His Cousin John*, 1861, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a17998>.

²⁶ Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 167; Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 49.

²⁷ John Tenniel, *A Family Quarrel*, *Punch* 41 (September 28, 1861): 127, University of Minnesota Art History, <http://arthist.umn.edu/aict/Tennielweb/PUNCH/610928.html>.

similar to depictions of Brother Jonathan in other cartoons by Tenniel.²⁸ Jonathan grasps one half of a map of the United States while his Confederate wife holds the other. A black man with a large grin tiptoes in the background, and the two combatants seem oblivious to his presence. From across the pond, the escalating conflict between North and South seems little more than a spat between an old married couple—a spat that is closely tied to the place of black slaves in the American family. This somewhat optimistic view of the conflict perhaps seeks to palliate British concerns over the supply of cotton and what continued hostilities will mean for the British economy. If the Confederacy is a belligerent wife who threatens her husband with raised fist and defiant stance, her husband will be able to reprimand his wife and re-establish family relations.

Political cartoons in Northern publications usually depict the Confederacy as a male entity or a collection of male figures. In most Northern artistic imaginings of the Confederacy, the South is represented by “Old Secesh,” a lanky and bearded man, or by Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States. King Cotton also appears as a personification of the South’s most economically and internationally significant crop. While Southerners continued the tradition of nation as female in depictions of their cause, Unionists embodied secession in the fumblingly belligerent Old Secesh and the treasonous and feminized Jeff Davis. Discussing the propensity of Southerners to depict a female Confederacy, Anne Norton argues, “The personification of the South as a threatened virgin mother cast the North in an emphatically masculine and menacing role.”²⁹ By imagining a masculine personification of the seceded states, Northern artists and writers avoid belligerence and violence against a female entity. Old Secesh, usually dressed in a Confederate uniform, unsuccessfully attempts to wage war and gain

²⁸ See John Tenniel, *Political Arithmetic*, *Punch* 42 (February 8, 1862): 55. University of Minnesota Art History. <http://arthist.umn.edu/aict/Tennielweb/PUNCH/620208.html>.

²⁹ Norton, *Alternative Americas*, 170.

recognition from European powers. In the 1861 cartoon *Old Secesh Crossing the Potomac*, the old soldier stands in the middle of the river, up to his neck and unable to move from Virginia to Washington, D.C.³⁰ “If I can keep my Head above Water,” he reflects, “some of my Foreign Friends will recognize me and lend a hand. Meantime, I can go neither Forward nor Backward.” Old Secesh is in a similar predicament in *A Short Blanket*, also published in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1861 (figure 1.2).³¹ Secesh’s lanky body stands in for the geography of the Confederacy: his shoulder reads “VA,” for Virginia, and his feet read “Savannah” and “Charleston.” The short blanket of the title, which represents the Confederate army, fails to cover either his shoulders or his feet. “While I cover my Neck,” Secesh complains, “I expose my Feet, and if I cover my Feet, I expose my Neck. Ugh!” Once again, Old Secesh faces a predicament and seems ill-equipped to rise to the occasion. Despite his suffering, he is not sexually vulnerable and is thus a figure of ridicule rather than being indicative of Northern aggression.



Figure 1.2: *A Short Blanket* (1861)

³⁰ *Old Secesh Crossing the Potomac*, *Harper’s Weekly* 5, no. 251 (October 19, 1861): 672.

³¹ *A Short Blanket*. *Harper’s Weekly* 5, no. 259 (December 14, 1861): 800.

The political leader of the seceding states, Jefferson Davis, also appears inept in Northern political cartoons. Due to his ill-fated attempt to escape Union troops while wearing his wife's shawl, Davis was often depicted wearing petticoats and a bonnet in cartoons documenting the end of the war and the Confederacy's surrender.³² Published in *Harper's Weekly* on May 27, 1865, *Jefferson Davis as an Unprotected Female* reflects the politics underlying Northern depictions of the Confederacy (figure 1.3).³³ Old Secesh and Jefferson Davis, both males, threaten the Union, most often represented by the figure of Columbia. Ridiculing Davis by depicting him in petticoats surrounded by laughing Union soldiers, the cartoon invokes female vulnerability to male sexuality, but does so by feminizing the enemy leader and not by threatening actual female Southerners. Artists and writers on each side of the conflict rely on gender binaries to illustrate the political and cultural situation of war.



Figure 1.3: *Jefferson Davis as an Unprotected Female* (1865)

³² Fitzgerald Brian Brown, "Capture of Jefferson Davis," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org>.

³³ *Jefferson Davis as an Unprotected Female*, *Harper's Weekly* 9, no. 439 (May 27, 1865): 336.

Sisters, Wives, Mothers

In visual and literary representations produced during the Civil War, the female representative of the nation is both motherly and virginal, monumental and in need of protection. The female Union is beset by treason and secession while the Confederate sister states must band together against the encroaching and rapacious Yankees. Female personified forms rhetorically connect American women to the progress of the war by underscoring the vulnerability of actual women to war's violence; however, they also at times emphasize or exaggerate the distance between the battlefield and the home front. It is important to recognize that Columbia and her sisters are deployed for various political, cultural, and literary purposes, some of which connect women to the war and some of which keep female participation in the symbolic realm. Regardless of the setting and rhetorical purpose, the personified female form is white. It is white womanhood that must be protected and, most importantly, shielded from the effects of war. Just as the Indian Princess America became gradually whitewashed, the white female personifications of the Union and Confederacy erase any presence of black women from the narrative of the war.

In Southern literary representations of the Confederacy, the states are sisters, female figures threatened by the masculine violence of the federal army. Discussing depictions of a sexually vulnerable Confederacy, Anne Norton writes, "The South's claim that it preserved an ideological purity which Northern exploitation would sully made the rape metaphor particularly apt" (169). What Norton does not recognize is that female personifications of the Union or its constituent states are also often vulnerable to the rapacious encroachment of traitorous Southerners. For poets and artists on both sides, the symbolic body politic and the actual bodies of female citizens are threatened by the violence and strife of war. The "rape metaphor" powerfully and vehemently indicates the high stakes of the conflict.

Having parted from their Northern brethren, the Southern sister states are vulnerable in their pursuit of liberty. The Confederacy is a new nation founded in state sovereignty and the parts are as significant as (if not more significant than) the whole. Poems featuring female figures representing Confederate states or major Confederate cities are similar to Northern poems about Columbia, Lady Liberty, or individual states of the Union. However, Southern female personifications are more often threatened by degradation, invasion, and defilement. It is the duty of the sons of the South to protect their mother states and the sacred task of the daughters of the Confederacy to sacrifice their men and their time for the cause. Unlike Columbia, the personified Southern sisters do not appear in political cartoons. Lady Liberty appears once in a war-time issue of *Southern Punch*, a periodical modeled on London's humorous newspaper. Published on November 14, 1863, the cartoon *Abduction of the Yankee Goddess of Liberty* depicts Lincoln, portrayed as "the prince of darkness," absconding with Lady Liberty.³⁴ The "goddess" is a Yankee, and does not represent the Confederacy. However, the accusation is clear: the fiendish Lincoln threatens the core values of America. While Southern war literature is full of references to the sister states of the Confederacy, the major publications of the time lack any Southern visual equivalent to Lady Liberty. Some Confederate bills contain female figures dressed in classical flowing robes, but none are clearly identified as personifications of the Confederacy.

One reason for this dearth of artistic representations of the personifications that fill Confederate poetry is that Southern publications, fewer in number and less technically advanced than Northern newspapers and magazines, contain fewer political cartoons than their Union counterparts.³⁵ Political cartoons featuring personifications of the Confederacy appear only three

³⁴ *Abduction of the Yankee Goddess of Liberty*, *Southern Punch* 1, no. 14 (November 14, 1863): 4.

times in the pages of the two major Southern illustrated newspapers, *Southern Punch* and *Southern Illustrated News*. Each time, the citizenry of the Confederacy (as opposed to the Confederacy as a geographical and governmental entity) is personified by a male figure. In *Recognition*, published in *Southern Illustrated News* on September 5, 1863, Louis Napoleon and John Bull look on as a soldier, representing the Confederacy, fights off enemy combatants while shielding a fleeing woman and child.³⁶ Napoleon remarks to John, “that C.S. [Confederate States] holds out well against them.” John Bull advises that neither France nor England recognize the legitimacy of the Confederacy, since both American powers will eventually wear themselves out, thus protecting European interests. In the two other cartoons, a little boy, “Young America,” represents the people of the Confederacy. Also published in September of 1863, *Precocious, Very!* depicts a small boy pointing a rifle at his grandmother.³⁷ Attempting to prove he is “an able-bodied man,” the boy “draw[s] a bead upon her, to show her ‘how he’d pop a Yankee.’” In *Young America Voices an Opinion*, an “affectionate mother” attempts to comfort a small boy who is frustrated by the military setbacks of the Confederate military.³⁸ The prowess of “C.S.” is as ineffectual as the military aspirations of the two little boys.

Unlike the male figures in the above political cartoons, personified female figures in hundreds of Southern poems symbolize the land and government of the Confederacy. Personifications of the Confederacy as a whole appear less often than personifications of states and cities. These states and cities are generally the mothers of their inhabitants and are connected

³⁵ For information about *Southern Illustrated News* and Southern publishing, see J.G. Lewin and P.J. Huff, *Lines of Contention: Political Cartoons of the Civil War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 195.

³⁶ *Recognition*, *Southern Illustrated News* 2, no. 9 (September 5, 1863): 72.

³⁷ *Precocious, Very!* *Southern Punch* 1, no. 6 (September 19, 1863): 4.

³⁸ *Young America Gives an Opinion*, *Southern Punch* 1, no. 16 (November 27, 1863): 4.

to the other states and cities of the Confederacy by bonds of sisterhood. Often, female personifications of Southern states and cities are physically threatened, fettered, or in need of protection. The joint threats of enslavement and degradation hound symbolic females in poem after poem, and serve as a rallying cry to Southern men. Columbia's Southern counterparts, the sister states of the Confederacy require protection in their purity and vulnerability. Beset by rapacious Yankees, they call on Southern men to defend their honor and establish their sovereignty. Espousing the cause of freedom and rejecting enslavement to Northern invaders, these poems rarely mention the actual bondmen of the Confederacy, African American slaves. Of course, white womanhood is at stake and the humanity of slaves is not. Defeat, many poems seem to argue, will be tantamount to the rape of the Southern motherland. Despite their vulnerability, these Confederate sisters are at times just as bellicose as their defenders. Representing the domestic space threatened by the war in their plight, they also permeate the boundary between home front and battlefield by participating in the progress of war. The symbolic bodies of female personifications align the Southern war effort with the protection of female chastity and the cause of freedom in the face of tyranny and also indicate the close relationship many Confederate women had to the conflict.

In response to the tyranny of the North and Lincoln, the sister states of the Confederacy band together and, together with their sons, unleash the dogs of war. Written and published in 1861 and extremely popular throughout the war, James Ryder Randall's "My Maryland" exhibits many of the characteristics typical of Confederate poetry featuring female personifications.³⁹ A secessionist citizen of Baltimore, Randall portrays his home state as a threatened and embattled woman and encourages her and her sons to rise to the occasion.⁴⁰ The poem, which was later set

³⁹ James Ryder Randall, "My Maryland," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 36 (January 1, 1862): 40.

to music, was first published in *The New Orleans Delta* but appeared in many other Southern publications.⁴¹ As is typical of many Confederate poems, Randall's poem invokes the threat of Northern tyranny, beginning, "The despot's heel is on thy shore, Maryland!/His torch is at thy temple door, Maryland!" Appealing as a "wand'ring son" to his "Mother-State," Randall's speaker establishes the familial ties that bind him to his homeland. These ties extend to the states of the Confederacy, and the speaker calls on his mother to join her sisters: "Dear Mother! burst the tyrant's chain, Maryland!/Virginia should not call in vain, Maryland!/She meets her sisters on the plain." It is Maryland's duty, and thus the duty of her sons, to join with the defenders of the Confederacy. As do many poems featuring female personifications, "My Maryland" imagines the state as a bellicose "battle-queen." Defined by "peerless chivalry," Maryland must "gird [her] beauteous limbs with steel." If Maryland fails to resist "the Vandal," she will suffer "crucifixion of the soul." The Northern invaders threaten the purity and chastity of the motherland, but the poem ends optimistically. "She is not dead," Randall's speaker avers, "nor deaf, nor dumb—/Huzza! She spurns the Northern scum!/She breathes—she burns! she'll come! she'll come!" By personifying the state as a threatened yet stalwart female, Randall deploys the symbolic feminine to rally Maryland's sons *and* daughters. Both genders must "spurn" the Northern foe.

Other poems portray the Southern states as sisters to call the Confederacy to collective action. Also published in 1861, "Sic Semper Tyrannis" by William M. Holcombe, M.D.,

⁴⁰ For information about Randall and his composition of the "My Maryland," see John Wilber Jenkins, "The Poems of James Ryder Randall," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 7 (January to October, 1908): 242-247.

⁴¹ Richard E. Mezo, "Randall, James Ryder," American National Biography Online, <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01342.html> (2000). I found the poem in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, *The Jacksonville Republican* (May 23, 1861), and on two broadsides published during the war.

describes how, “when the bloody and perjured usurper called forth/His minions and tools... Virginia awoke from her dream of repose/And rallied her children to grapple her foes.”⁴² In response to Lincoln’s hordes, Virginia “and her brave sisters round her all dauntlessly stood.” Extremely bellicose and belligerent, Holcombe’s Virginia leads her sisters against the foe. Addressing “ye Northmen,” the poem concludes with three lines encapsulating the violent nature of the embattled motherland: “She will write in your blood on the next battle field/That stern threat to tyrants which burns on her shield/Sic Semper Tyrannis.” Less violent than Holcombe’s rendition of the familial bonds that will repel and defeat Northern invaders, “Virginia and Her Defenders,” published in *Southern Punch* in 1864, is a paean to the state and her “children of glory” and imagines both state and sons “rush[ing] to the field, and the cannon’s loud rattle.”⁴³ In the penultimate stanza, the speaker lists Virginia’s sisters: “Virginia! Virginia! in the cannon’s loud rattle,/Carolina and Georgia’s by your side in the battle;/Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana,/ Swell proudly the anthem of victory’s hosanna!” Vowing that “no foe can enslave her,” the speaker insists, “With her sisters she’ll conquer the tyrant invader.”⁴⁴ Though neither poem explicitly encourages actual women to enter the fray, both invoke feminine belligerence as indicative of Southern determination and in doing so align all white Virginians with the waging of war.

While some personifications of Southern states and cities are belligerent and threatening warrior queens, others are in need of protection. It is the duty of Southern sons to free their

⁴² William M. Holcombe, M.D., “Sic Semper Tyrannis,” *The Southern Literary Messenger* 33, no. 4 (October 1, 1861): 303.

⁴³ “Virginia and Her Defenders,” *Southern Punch* 2, no. 15 (June 4, 1864): 3.

⁴⁴ For more poems representing the Confederate states as sisters, see “The Star of Alabama,” *The Southern Soldier’s Prize Songster* (Mobile, Alabama: W.F. Wisely, No. 33 St. Michael St, 1864), 72-3; “The Heart of Louisiana,” *Songs and Ballads of the Southern People, 1861-1865*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: D. Appelton and Co., 1886) 63-4.

mothers in poems that depict Southern states and cities in chains and fetters. Such poems underscore the vulnerability of women to the war and encourage Southern men to protect both the motherland and her female children. “Battle Song” calls on “Freemen” to avenge their homeland: “see your country’s chain!/Will ye view the sight in vain—/Nor to break it rush and gain/Bright immortality.”⁴⁵ The song “Maryland in Fetters!”, published as a broadside, laments the pitiful condition of the “Mother of wretchedness.”⁴⁶ The description of the beleaguered state is in stark contrast to the image printed on the broadside (figure 1.4). The female figure carries a scale, a sword, and an olive branch. At her feet are fasces similar to ones often carried by Columbia. The figure most likely is a combination of Lady Justice and Columbia, and reflects a commonality between Northern and Southern symbolic representation. Despite the presence of a Columbia-like figure, the song is Confederate in sentiment, ending with the decree, “Let Lincoln know his place,/Let black men know their face,/And from our injured race/All wrongs be riven.” One of these “wrongs” is the degradation and enslavement of Maryland herself. Black men, the poem seems to argue, and not the white female personification of the state, should be shackled. Addressing the state, the speaker laments, “The spoiler’s foot upon thee,/His ruthless hand is on thee,/With manacles he’s bound thee,/Hard is thy fate!” Maryland’s “honor’s trampled under” and she must be set free. Her freedom and ideal state, as represented by the image, are directly linked to the continued enslavement of African American slaves.

⁴⁵ “Battle Song,” University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Archives, folder 172, Confederate Papers, Scrapbook Clippings.

⁴⁶ “Maryland in Fetters” (1861), Confederate Broadside Poetry Collection, WakeSpace Digital Archive, <http://hdl.handle.net/10339/164>.



Figure 1.4: *Maryland in Fetters* (1861)

A survey of poems written about Maryland during the conflict reflects the symbolic importance of the state to both sides and the ways in which imperiled white womanhood often overshadows or elides the plight of African American slaves. Poets both North and South often imagine Maryland as an enslaved woman who must be emancipated and redeemed. This tendency results in Southern poems that employ language similar to that used by abolitionists to describe the horrors of slavery. Co-opting anti-slavery rhetoric, these poems align the Confederate cause with freedom from Northern despotism for Southerners, especially women. Written by “Jennie,” a regular contributor to *Southern Illustrated News*, “Maryland, Oh! Maryland” laments the captivity of the state and calls on her to “arise like Samson, strong to smite.”⁴⁷ Addressing the suffering state, Jennie’s speaker declares, “In vain thy sons lie stark and dead,/In bondage vile thou still art led,/Maryland, Oh! Maryland.” The refrain, which provides the title, links Jennie’s poem to Randall’s and communicates that Maryland’s suffering continues, despite the sacrifice of her sons. In a rhetorical move typical of poems featuring shamed Southern states and cities, the speaker avers, “‘Twere better *waste* and *death* should reign... Than live a *slave*, with burning brain,/Led by each tyrant’s galling chain.” The

⁴⁷ Jennie, “Maryland, Oh! Maryland,” *Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 10 (November 15, 1862): 3.

destruction of war—the sons lying stark and dead—is a justifiable price for Maryland’s freedom from Union control.⁴⁸

Poems published in Northern newspapers celebrate the freedom of Maryland’s slaves, underscoring the significance of the state’s 1864 decision to abolish slavery by portraying the state as a woman free of her chains.⁴⁹ The white body of the personified state stands in for the liberated bodies of black slaves, disrupting the strict binary of black and white while also whitewashing the results of emancipation. The speaker of “Maryland is Free,” published in the *Baltimore American* and *The Liberator* in 1864, is a dying Union soldier and a native Marylander.⁵⁰ Surrounded by his fellow soldiers, the speaker asks his captain to read the news again: “We helped to wash away the stain,/And Maryland is free!” The speaker proudly proclaims, “We helped to knock her shackles off,/We helped regenerate,/And wash away the awful sin/Of our dear native state.” For Jennie, the stain on Maryland is the presence of Unionists and federal troops; for the dying soldier, the stain is slavery. The soldier is proud and “satisfied” to die for his “only mother” (his “own is in the grave”) on the day “that Maryland [is] free.” Also echoing Randall’s poem, the final line of the poem is “My Maryland—I’m free!” As the poem ends, so too does the soldier’s life, a sacrifice for his mother and for freedom.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ For more Confederate representations of Maryland in chains, see Rev. John Collins M’Cabe, “Maryland, Our Mother,” *The Southern Literary Messenger* 33, no. 6 (Dec. 1, 1861): 411; Mrs. D.K. Whitaker, “Maryland in Chains” (1861), Confederate Broadside Poetry Collection, WakeSpace Digital Archive, <http://hdl.handle.net/10339/405>.

⁴⁹ For information about the end of slavery in Maryland, see Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ S., “Maryland is Free,” *The Liberator* 34, no. 50 (December 9, 1864): 200. *The Liberator* cites the *Baltimore American* as the source of the poem.

unshackled limbs of the white woman indicate Maryland's redemption and celebrate a non-threatening, symbolic emancipation. During his deathbed monologue, the soldier mentions actual bondmen only once, averring, "I'm glad she said before I died/She'd no more hold a slave." Maryland, the "she" the soldier invokes, is simultaneously former slave owner and emancipated from a state of bondage. The flexibility and rhetorical power of the female personification allows for such a formulation. Aligned with slaveholders and slaves, the personified Maryland works to disrupt strict dichotomies of race while simultaneously removing black people from a celebration of emancipation.

Defending an institution that regularly exposed African American women to sexual violence and coercion, Confederate poets evoke the sexual vulnerability of slaves by depicting Southern states as white women in chains. According to many poems, Northern invaders threaten Southern white women with degradation and defilement. Thus, the South fights to preserve one form of slavery and prevent another. Written in the first year of the war, "Daughters of the Southern Queen" describes the plight of Charleston and calls on the city's citizens to come to her defense.⁵² The safety and purity of the city are linked to the same qualities in the city's female inhabitants. The poem begins by calling on "Aged mothers of our city,/Matrons in the pride of life,/Maidens, like fair roses glowing/In our sunny bowers, and wife/Newly led from holy altar,/Where you gave the plighted vow,/With the orange-blossom trembling/Yet above your virgin brow." The poem's speaker demands of these women, "Hear ye not the wild waves surging,/Onward with their awful roar?/God, the foemen are upon us!/Hark! their footsteps tread

⁵¹ For more Northern poems celebrating the end of slavery in Maryland, see "Maryland Redeemed," *The Liberator* 35, no. 4 (January 27, 1865): 16; George Lansing Taylor, "Maryland Free!" *The Liberator* 34, no. 53 (December 30, 1864): 212.

⁵² C.G.P., "Daughters of the Southern Queen," University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Archives, folder 172, Confederate Papers, Scrapbook Clippings.

our shore!” The threat of invasion is imminent and the frantic voice of the poem asks the “bright and peerless city” if it is “true the fierce invader,/Comes against thee, as a tide/Of polluted waters, rushing,/Dashing onward to defile/Carolina’s fairest daughter,/And her agony revile?” Like the freshly married young women and the aged mothers, the city herself is vulnerable to sexual degradation. Having made the consequences of Northern invasion and conquest frighteningly clear, the poem shifts to optimism in the ability of Charleston’s citizens to form a “living wall” and protect her “ere foul dishonor/Cause [her] matron cheek to glow!” Rather than allowing “the vile intruder” to make “Southern women quail,” the daughters of the South must “seek the temple of [their] God” and wait for His answer. Framing the conflict in terms of the threat of defilement, the poem underscores the sexual and gendered goals of the Confederate war effort. Independence from the North will ensure female purity.

Like Charleston, many Southern cities and states face the threat of dishonor and defilement in poems calling the Southern people to action. In “The Star of the West, or The Reinforcement,” “A Gentleman of South Carolina” writing under the pseudonym “The Outcast” asks his fellow Southerners, “Shall our Sovereign call in vain,/Upon her gallant sons to fight; Where our own Palmetto flag is waiving [*sic*],/Lawless force, and faithless power braving?/Sternly true to her sense of right,/And her honor without stain.”⁵³ Published in 1861, the poem calls on the sons and daughters of South Carolina to protect “our loved,—our native land.” Originally published in *The Richmond Examiner*, “To the Tories of Virginia” also calls on the state’s “sons” to protect her from degradation.⁵⁴ Invoking the storied past of the American Revolution, the poem denigrates Tories, Americans loyal to the British crown, and compares

⁵³ The Outcast, “The Star of the West, or The Reinforcement,” *Southern Odes* (Charleston: Harper & Calvo, Caloric Printers, 1861), 5-7.

⁵⁴ “To the Tories of Virginia” in *Songs and Ballads of the Southern People, 1861-1865*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: D. Appelton and Co., 1886), 49-52.

them to he “that would coldly refuse her fair fame to uphold,/That would basely prove false to his vow.” Underscoring the necessity of protecting the motherland from Yankee invaders and using the language of chivalry, the speaker intones, “A blot on her ‘scutcheon! a stain on her name!/Our heart’s blood should wipe it away.” The blood of her sons will keep Virginia pure and they “should die for her honor.”

According to poems about cities in imminent danger of Yankee takeover, destruction and death are preferable to defilement and degradation. Multiple poems about Charleston advocate her self-immolation or a fiery death at the hands of her sons in the face of defeat. First published in 1862, Paul Hamilton Hayne’s “Charleston!” describes the “warrior Queen” remaining defiant as “her mortal foe draws near.”⁵⁵ In April of 1862, Charleston and Wilmington were the only Southern ports not under Union control.⁵⁶ Though the city was a Yankee military goal, it was not in immediate danger when Hayne published his poem. For that reason, his focus on Charleston’s purity and his insistence on her immolation are extremely telling. Addressing the “empress,” Hayne’s speaker asks, “Wilt thou, whose Virgin banner rose,/A morning star of splendor,/Quail when the war-tornado blows,/And crouch in base surrender?” Charleston led the South in her purity and “stately grace,” but her actions have made her the potential victim of brutal invasion. In the final stanza, Hayne’s speaker instructs the city on how to behave in the event of defeat and invasion: “If strength, and will, and courage fail/To cope with ruthless numbers,/And thou must bend, despairing, pale,/Where thy last hero slumbers/Lift the red torch, and light the fire/Amid those corpses gory/And on thy self-made funeral pyre,/Pass from the world to glory.” In the

⁵⁵ Paul Hamilton Hayne, “Charleston!” Republished from *The Charleston Mercury in Jacksonville Republican* (May 22, 1862): 2.

⁵⁶ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 373.

midst of her dead and dying sons, Charleston must sacrifice herself rather than face dishonor and defilement at the hands of her Yankee foes.

As Sherman's army moved towards Charleston in February of 1865, ten thousand Confederate troops remained to defend the city.⁵⁷ John Dickson Brun's "The Foe at the Gates: Charleston 1865" echoes the sentiments of Hayne's poem, frantically urging the city's sons to come to her rescue.⁵⁸ Brun's speaker calls on the "children of her skies" to "ring round" the city and "shield from wrong the mother who gave [them] birth;/That never violent hand be on her laid,/Nor base foot desecrate her hallowed hearth." "Sons, to the rescue!", the speaker proclaims, clearly addressing the male children of Charleston and tying their manhood to the purity of their mother. It is their duty "to save her proud soul from that loathed thrall/Which yet her spirit cannot brook to name;/Or, if her fate be near, and she must fall,/Spare her—she sues—the agony and shame." Like Hayne, Brun provides instructions: "Heap with kind hands her costly funeral pyre,/And thus, with paeon sung and anthem rolled,/Give her unspotted to the God of Fire." Calling the immolation of Charleston "the last grand holocaust of Liberty," Brun advocates that the children of Charleston offer up their mother as a pure and virginal ("unspotted") sacrifice.

Apparently, some Charlestonians agreed with Brun and Hayne. The remaining troops pulled out of Charleston on February 18 in an attempt to avoid the federal troops marching their way.⁵⁹ Union troops occupying the city put out fires set by retreating Confederates. That Charleston fell without a fight led a reporter in *Harper's Weekly* to critique and ridicule the citizens of the city for their empty rhetoric: "the ignoble fall...of their pride merely shows how

⁵⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 829.

⁵⁸ John Dickson Brun, "The Foe at the Gates: Charleston, 1865," in *Poems of American History*, ed. Burton Egbert Stevenson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 69.

⁵⁹ E. Milby Burton, *The Siege of Charleston, 1861-1865* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 318.

poor is their manhood who in this day and country despise men, and how contemptible is the ‘chivalry’ that will not die for what it calls its dearest honor.”⁶⁰ The ideals and convictions expressed in poems like Hayne’s, the article seems to argue, did not prevent the sons of Charleston from deserting their mother in her hour of need.

Two months after the fall of Charleston, Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, came under federal control. In her poem “Virginia Capta: April, 1865,” Margaret Junkin Preston, one of the most popular Confederate poets and the sister-in-law of Stonewall Jackson, produces a paean to the conquered state. Employing the rhetoric of enslavement, Preston insists that Virginia is defeated yet still victorious. Unlike Hayne’s and Bruns’ immolated Charleston, Preston’s Virginia “live[s] on.” Preston’s poem echoes earlier poems calling on Southerners to protect their states from slavery, but is significantly different in its conclusion. Addressing Virginia, Preston’s speaker apostrophizes: “Unconquer’d captive!—close thine eye,/And draw the ashen sackcloth o’er,/And in thy speechless woe deplore/The fate that would not let thee die!” The speaker proceeds to strip the formerly belligerent state of her armor, replacing “the shield” and “martial rein” with “shackles.” The fears of degradation and defilement present in many of the poems featuring personified states come to pass in Preston’s poem. The “tyrant” is triumphant: “...with his heel upon thy neck,/He holds *thee* prostrate in the dust.” Despite Virginia’s prostration, she must “maintain [her] regal bearing still,” inspired by “conscious pride” that “no grander heroes ever died—/No sterner, battled to the last!” The cause is lost, but the ideology of the Lost Cause is in its ascendancy. “Though forced a captive’s place to fill,” Preston’s speaker instructs the defeated state, “...wear/Thy chains,—*Virginia Victrix* still!” Purposefully invoking the trope of captivity and enslavement, Preston rejects the stigma of

⁶⁰ “Charleston,” *Harper’s Weekly* 10, no. 427 (March 5, 1865): 130.

chains in an attempt to salvage dignity in the face of defeat.

Petulant children

Continuing the tradition of personifying entities as female, some Northern poets refer to Southern states and cities as “her” and “she.” Individual Confederate states are defiant or estranged sisters that resist or betray the family ties that bind the Union together. The familial metaphor allows for the possibility of peaceful reconciliation and the poems’ speakers appeal to their wayward sisters rather than threatening them with violence. Removed from the violence of the battlefield, female personifications allow Northern poets to engage in non-violent apostrophes to misbehaving members of the national family. Brother Jonathan, in one of his rare appearances in poetry, calls on his sister Caroline to return to the family fold. Published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in May of 1861, the month following the bombardment of Fort Sumter, “Brother Jonathan’s Lament for Sister Caroline” is Oliver Wendell Holmes’ rendition of the growing sectional crisis. Employing the conceit of a brother appealing to his delinquent and fractious sister, the poem allows for the eventual reconciliation between siblings. “She has gone,” Brother Jonathan begins, “she has left us in passion and pride,—/Our stormy-browed sister, so long at our side.”⁶¹ The first state to secede, South Carolina is the defiant sister of Holmes’ poem, who “has torn her own star from our firmament’s glow,/And turned on her brother the face of a foe!” By May of 1861, eleven states had followed South Carolina’s lead and seceded from the Union. Commenting on the defiance of the seceding states, Jonathan asserts, “Nature must teach us the strength of the chain/That her petulant children would sever in vain.” Imagining South Carolina as a “hasty” and “rash” female ensures that “there are battles with Fate

⁶¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. “Brother Jonathan’s Lament For Sister Caroline,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 7, no. 43 (May 1861): 613.

that can never be won.” The Union’s children will return to the family and the firmament will have all its stars once again.

Published in *The Liberator* in January of 1862, “Jonathan’s Appeal to Caroline; or, Mr. North to Madam South” by Mary Stoddard portrays a different familial relationship between Jonathan and Caroline.⁶² Jonathan appeals to his wayward wife, chiding Caroline for leaving him and mistreating him. Unlike Holmes, Stoddard identifies slavery as the major cause of contention between North and South. “Think of all I’ve sacrificed,” Jonathan complains, “just for you to keep your slaves.” The betrayed husband has “compromised” and “caught...slaves, when they tried to run away.” Under the guise of family drama, Stoddard critiques the federal government for compromising with slaveholders and enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. Appealing to both Northern and Southern morality, Jonathan proclaims, “Carolina, don’t you see that we both have blinded been/To think God would always smile upon our nation’s sin?” Peace and reunion, Jonathan implies, will come only with the emancipation of the slaves. The blame for the war rests firmly on the wife’s shoulders and she is responsible “for all the sorrow/That now enshrouds all hearts and homes.” As both sister and wife, Carolina stands in for the entire Confederacy and serves the poetic role of making the fractured relationship between two formerly united sections understandable in familial and familiar terms.

Politically, economically, and militarily integral to the Southern war effort, Virginia is also extremely symbolically significant in both Northern and Southern literary depictions of the South. An article entitled “Virginia,” published in the Northern periodical *The Continental Monthly* in December 1863, underscores the state’s importance to both sides of the Mason-Dixon line: “Of all the States, she represents, both in her annals and her resources, her scenery, and her

⁶² Mary Stoddard, “Jonathan’s Appeal to Caroline; or, Mr. North to Madam South,” *The Liberator* 32, no. 4 (January 24, 1862): 16.

social character, the average national characteristics.”⁶³ Though her treason has betrayed her own “hallowed ground,” the article avers, Virginia will be “the scene, not only of Freedom’s sacrifice, but of her most pure and permanent triumph” (702). Though South Carolina and Charleston remain popular subjects throughout the war, Virginia and Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, increasingly appear in many Northern poems about the war.⁶⁴ Published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* in September of 1862, Amanda T. Jones’ “Richmond” warns the city of death and retribution.⁶⁵ Apostrophizing to the personified capital, the speaker intones that “the summer than shines on thy towers/Will tremble and shudder, and turn from her flowers:/Will creep over fields where our strong armies paused,/And die at the sight of the blood thou has caused.” “Thou city of slaves!”, the speaker continues, “For thee and thy sins, earth is teeming with graves.” Like Stoddard, Jones blames the South and its institution of slavery for the destruction caused by the war, invoking “death ghastly and stiff, without coffin or grave;/Death clutching the bayonet, grasping the gun” as the fruit of Richmond’s and the South’s sins. Only when Richmond’s slaves go free will soldiers, both Southern and Northern, cease to die horrible and untimely deaths.

The anonymous poet of “Virginia” also calls on a female personification to free her slaves and “welcome loyal Northmen.”⁶⁶ The poem begins by describing the desolate landscape “from the fatal Rappahannock to Potomac’s fort-crowned shore.” Published in *The Continental Monthly* one month before Lee’s ill-fated invasion of Pennsylvania, the poem invokes the

⁶³ “Virginia,” *The Continental Monthly* 4, no. 6 (December 1863): 690-702.

⁶⁴ For more poems featuring a personified Carolina or Charleston see Henry Timrod, “Carolina,” in *Poems of American History*, 515; J.C. Hagen, “The Doomed City,” *The Liberator* 32, no. 12 (March 21, 1862): 48; Anonymous, “South Carolina 1865,” *The Liberator* 35, no. 15 (April 14, 1865): 60.

⁶⁵ Amanda T. Jones, “Richmond,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* 14, no. 364 (September 20, 1862): 410.

⁶⁶ “Virginia,” *The Continental Monthly* 3, no. 6 (June 1863): 714.

scattered battlefields that scar Virginia's soil. In a rhetorical move that allows for eventual reconciliation and is less accusatory than many Northern poems about the Confederacy, the speaker proclaims, "Wake, Virginia! from thy slumber, from thy wild and traitorous dream." Unlike South Carolina, a hotbed of secession and the first state to secede, Virginia did not secede until after the fall of Fort Sumter. Geographically closer to the Union than the majority of Confederate states, Virginia, at least in the speaker's opinion, is an ideal candidate for rejoining the Union. Upon waking, Virginia will have to "cast aside the clanking fetters that still echo on [her] soil" and learn "that no dishonor clings to manly, honest toil." By emancipating her slaves and rejoining the Union, Virginia's "tree shall blossom, fairer, stronger than before."

Like Virginia and South Carolina, the border states Maryland and Missouri also appear in poems as women in need of redemption. Northern poets call on the loyalists of each state to rise up in support of the Union and celebrate the states' reunion with the United States. In "Belle Missouri," Laura Redden Searing (publishing under the pseudonym Howard Glyndon) calls on Missouri to "wipe out this foul disloyal stain" of rebellion.⁶⁷ "The precious blood of all [her] slain/Arises from each reeking plain," and Missouri's disloyal citizens have "laid [her] glory in the dust." Labeling Missouri "the helpless prey of treason's lust,/The helpless mark of treason's thrust," Searing portrays the beleaguered state, plagued by guerilla warfare, as a sexually vulnerable and sexually assaulted woman.⁶⁸ "Now shall thy sword in scabbard rust?" the speaker asks Missouri, calling the state to action in the face of degradation. Rhyming lust, thrust, and rust, Searing transforms sexual defilement into belligerent action. "She thrills!", the poem

⁶⁷ Howard Glyndon [Laura Redden Searing], "Belle Missouri" in *Idylls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1864), 57-59.

⁶⁸ For a description of Missouri during the Civil War, see Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

continues, “her blood begins to burn!/Belle Missouri! My Missouri!/She’s bruised and weak, but she can turn.” A parenthetical comment before the beginning of the poem informs the reader that “this song has been set to music, and universally adopted by the Loyalists of Missouri, in opposition to ‘My Maryland.’” Like the Confederate poet James Ryder Randall’s original “My Maryland” poem, published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in 1862, “Belle Missouri” calls on the men *and* women of the state to rise up in support of their embattled state by invoking the might of a personified female.⁶⁹ “Now for thy wounds a swift return,” the speaker intones, embodying the casualties suffered by Missourians in the monumental body of a female personification. Like female Missourians, Searing’s Belle Missouri is vulnerable to the degradations of guerilla warfare. As neighbors battle neighbors, war’s violence invades the domestic space and Belle Missouri’s wounded body records this disruption.

Searing imagines an innately loyal Missouri that will soon rejoin her sister states and preserve the Union. Rhetoric linking the South and North together as sisters allows hope for eventual national healing. The 1863 print *The Re-Union of the Home of Brave and Free!* envisions the future reconciliation between North and South (figure 1.5).⁷⁰ Columbia, holding the American flag and the Constitution, stands atop a globe that reads, “God, Liberty, Constitutional Rights”. Backed by the monumental figures of Andrew Jackson and George Washington, Columbia is surrounded by thirty-four young maidens, each holding a crest representing her state. Grasping olive branches, the states look adoringly at Columbia. A Union soldier and a sailor flank the Capitol building, their position marking them as the saviors of the Union. The patriotic song printed below the image articulates the hopes embodied in the image.

⁶⁹ James Ryder Randall, “My Maryland,” *The Southern Literary Messenger* 36 (January 1, 1862): 40.

⁷⁰ Samuel Canty, *The Re-Union of the Home of the Brave and Free!* (New York, 1863), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.00460>.

The chorus reads, “Let empires and monarchies plot as they will,/We are a Union people still,/A Union people, a Union people,/We are Union people still!” Written in 1863, the year that Gettysburg was fought, the repetition of “Union people” becomes a prayer for peace. Though the country remains divided, the white and maidenly personifications embody the hope of reconciliation. Empires and monarchies are the threat in this fantasy, not the slave power or rebellious South.



Figure 1.5: *The Re-Union of the Home of the Brave and Free!* (1863)

Confederate Columbia

Like the individual states that make up the Confederacy, the Southern nation itself is at times personified in Northern poems as a belligerent but ultimately doomed female figure. Defiant and rebellious, the female South is the delinquent sister of the North and must be returned to the family fold kicking and screaming. Poetry depicting the Union and Confederacy as estranged sisters attempts to understand the conflict in familial terms and also invokes the possibility of future reconciliation. Northern artistic representations that refer to Southern states

as divided and disorganized sisters undermine the vaunted unity of the Confederacy against the Union but also allow for eventual reintegration of formerly rebellious siblings. Though personifications of individual states are more common than representations of the Confederacy as a whole in Southern publications, some poems do portray all-encompassing female figures that resemble Columbia. In creating female personifications that are similar to Columbia, Confederate poets lay claim to Lady Liberty, attempting to build both a literal nation and a figurative one. Columbia's Southern twin sister evidences the adaptability of Lady Liberty and the centrality of white womanhood to conceptions of the nation.

On July 5, 1861, *The Liberator* published "Two Pictures of the South," a pair of poems submitted by "G.E.D."⁷¹ G.E.D. sends Garrison a copy of William Gilmore Simms' "Song of the South," originally published as "Oh! The Sweet South" in *The Southern Literary Messenger* on January 1, 1861, and his or her parody of the poem. Simms, a popular writer and editor, produces a paean to "the sunny, sunny South." His loving words establish the "land of true feeling" as his mother and, at times, his lover. "Land forever mine," Simms' speaker declares, "I drink the kisses of her rosy mouth,/And my heart swells." Simms' speaker extols the South's virtues and avers, "She brings me blessings of maternal love." Written before the outbreak of hostilities, Simms' poem imagines a battle-ready South who "feels no tremors when the danger's nigh;/But the fight over, and the victory won,/How, with strange fondness, turns her loving eye/In tearful welcome to each gallant son!" Like Simms' speaker, the South's sons will serve their mother; they "will freely part/With life, hope, heart—/Will die—do aught but fly!"

G.E.D.'s parody mimics Simms' poem formally and uses similar and at times identical language. However, the parody denigrates the South, "Land of slavery, land of wails and wo [sic]." Rather than mothering her children, the South "brings...tears from the maternal eye" and

⁷¹ G.E.D., "Two Pictures of the South," *The Liberator* 31, no. 27 (July 5, 1861): 108.

“sunder[s] kin.” While Simms’ South will remain sunny, G.E.D.’s South has a “dread future” determined “by all the thousand horrors of her sin.” Relinquishing all claim to the area below the Mason-Dixon line, the speaker declares, “She is not mine;—no, no, not mine.” Changing the first line of the second part of Simms’ poem from “Oh! love is hers” to “Ah! Hate is hers,” G.E.D. dedicates the second part of the parody to a topic that remains unmentioned in Simms’ laudatory poem. Affirming that the reason for his rejection of the South and the war against her people is slavery, G.E.D.’s speaker invokes the captive lives and battered bodies of African American slaves: “Oh! by the fate of the unhappy blacks,—/Oh! by the cruel blows, and broken ties,— /And by their groans and lacerated backs,—/By these, and more, that loud for vengeance cries.” The broken bodies of slaves provide stark evidence against Simms’ glowing rhetoric. The South is not sunny; indeed, “Fate’s ominous clouds.../Thick gathering round, proclaim her doom draws nigh!” G.E.D. rejects Simms’ personification of the South as mother, lauding instead “the inclement clime/Where Freedom reigns sublime.” Read together, the two poems illuminate the rhetorical war raging alongside the actual war. The Southern maternal personification, G.E.D. claims, is a mother who brings death rather than life, shadow instead of sunshine. A new birth of freedom, ushered in by Northern victory, will destroy Simms’ South and restore the only true mother, the Union.

In “The Sisters,” published in *Harper’s Monthly* and *The Liberator* during the summer of 1864, two young women compete to represent the true America.⁷² Unlike the conflict framed by G.E.D.’s “Two Pictures of the South,” the strife between the two sisters has the potential to end in reconciliation. “The Sisters” tells the story of the coming of the war through three closely related figures: the Northern sister, the Southern sister, and the Southern sister’s “dusky bondman.” This family drama provides an allegory to explain the reason for estrangement and

⁷² “The Sisters,” *The Liberator* 34, no. 32 (August 5, 1864): 128.

violence. “They both had lands,” the speaker explains, “these sisters two,/Broad in extent, and fair to view.” The “fair” Northern sister possessed fields of “wheat and corn” worked by “her sons” and “her factories hummed with the busy loom.” Under the auspices of the Northern sister, “men and women, early and late/Labored to earn the bread they ate” and “the winds which blew from her snowy hills/Were not more free than her people’s wills.” In stark contrast to her sister, the “dark” Southerner surveys “swelling slopes” of cotton. Alluding to Southern aristocratic tendencies, the speaker describes the Southern sister’s children: “Under the shade of ancestral trees/Her sons and daughters lived at ease.” Her children’s ease was dependent on the bondman, who “toiled in the field the whole day long.” “A modern Samson in strength was he,” the speaker continues, “shorn of his glorious liberty.” As the poetic representative of African American slaves, the bondman is chased by bloodhounds and sold in “the foul market-place.” In response to the bondman’s suffering, “then rose on the air a sudden cry...From the burning lips of the North it came,/Rebuking her sister’s sin and shame.” As “the gathering tempest grew,” the “Northern sister called to her side/A man for his prudence noted wide.” Though unnamed, the prudent man is clearly Lincoln, and his entrance into the family drama leads to war. In the final five couplets of the poem, present tense shifts the focus from the Northern sister and Southern sister to the actual process and progress of war: “Look on those swelling mounds that rise—/These are a nation’s SACRIFICE.” The corpses of “heroes” disrupt the controlling allegory of the poem—they belong to neither sister, but are instead sacrificed to “atone in God’s just sight.” The poem ends with the speaker’s hope that this sacrifice will “kindle in the East a ray,/The dawn of a broader, purer day!” A “broader” day would encompass North, South, and the bondman. Though divided, the American family has the potential to be reunited.

Some Southern poets reject the possibility of reunion and claim Columbia as their own to imagine a future of independence and separation from the North. In “Liberty or Death!”, published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in 1862, Lutha Fontelle claims Lady Liberty for the Confederacy by depicting the North’s betrayal of Liberty and her subsequent repatriation in the South.⁷³ Fontelle expropriates the figure of Columbia in the interest of labeling Southerners as the true sons of Liberty and calling on them to defend her. The poem begins with a traditional invocation of the goddess of liberty, “the peerless, high-born maid,/Nursed in Olympus” who found a home “where rises now a great white dome.” Liberty is forced to flee the capitol when “she [sees] her halls stained with fanatic rage,/That would ‘blot’ Columbia’s brightest page.” Liberty’s Northern sons, it seems, have forgotten “for whom their fathers fought” and have “by base Simony preferment sought.” Fontelle communicates the changing values of the North by describing a symbolic transition: “Her day was past/And ‘Uncle Sam’ was careless, generous, fast,/Sound on the Tariff and the Institution,/And mindful of the North in distribution.” Uncle Sam, lacking Liberty’s classical beauty and Grecian pedigree, concerns himself with business and financial gain and is thus a more fitting personification for the money-grubbing North. “Discrowned and fettered, in a narrow cell,” Liberty is “but a name” in the “Arctic” Northland.

Rather than watch her “recreant children...obliterate her laws,” Liberty “leaves the palace her false votaries raise,/To dwell in hearts that know her righteous ways.” She first arrives in South Carolina “and in St. Andrew’s Hall she pause[s] to rest.” Liberty finds shelter in the hall in which South Carolinians voted to secede from the Union. Delegates “dared to meet and call her; and she came/And gave to History each honoured name.” Southerners, Fontelle argues, became truer sons of Columbia by removing themselves from the Union she represented. In response, the “Northmen” vow to “take the truant back,/And chain her in the capitol.” Fontelle

⁷³ Lutha Fontelle, “Liberty or Death!” *The Southern Literary Messenger* 34, no. 22 (June 1, 1862): 381.

proceeds to blame Northern hatred for the 1861 Charleston fire that destroyed St. Andrew's Hall and describes the destruction of a "noble homestead." Both "master and servants" attempt to save the mansion's treasures, but are unsuccessful. "One faithful, white-haired servant sobs aloud" and mourns the "lubby mansion... *Where us been libbin all our glorus life!*" The slave's grief is intended to "sho[w] the Northmen quite a different leaf/From that their pious, sceptic [*sic*] leaders turn,/Or they from novelists or poets learn." Having co-opted Lady Liberty, Fontelle attempts to undermine prevailing abolitionist rhetoric about the plight of the slave. The succeeding stanza begins, "The Halls are ashes. Freedom lives unharmed." Despite the fire's destruction, master and slave remain content, and the South has become the bastion of Liberty. Gathering around Lady Liberty, the Southerners form "a glorious, living temple." Southern victory is assured, Fontelle's speaker avers, "For Freedom smiles, and our young nation stands,/Inspired with wisdom, serving her commands."

Like Fontelle, Mary Walsingham Crean invokes both Columbia and slavery; however, she rejects Columbia and vows that Southerners will continue to live as free men.⁷⁴ The rhetoric she uses in "The Blue Cockade" illustrates a popular trope in Confederate literature—slaveholders, the sons of freedom and liberty, will never be slaves themselves. Crean's poem is a paean to "the laddie, who wears the blue cockade" who has "gone to fight the battles of our darling Southern land." The poem's speaker describes the shifting of loyalties forced upon the laddie: "He was true to old Columbia, till more sacred ties forbade—/Till `twere treason to obey her, when he took his sword in hand;/And God be with the laddie, who was true in heart and hand,/To the voice of old Columbia, till she wronged his native land!" Southerners, Crean argues, were loyal to the Union until the Union betrayed them, their land, and their way of life.

⁷⁴ Mary Walsingham Crean, "The Blue Cockade," in *Songs of the Southern People, 1861-1865*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1886), 83-5.

The “sacred ties” that bind the laddie to his homeland are both familial (his “weeping mother” and “aged father” send him off to war) and political. The laddie “loved the aged Union, and he breath’d no taunting word;/He would dare Columbia, till she swore herself his foe—/Forged the chains for freemen—when he buckled on his sword.” Whether the choppy poetics are indicative of Crean’s skill or communicative of the causal relationship between Northern betrayal and Southern belligerence, the message is clear: when Columbia, representing the federal government, threatened state sovereignty and thus the institution of slavery, she attempted to enslave Southern men; it is now their sacred honor and duty to defeat “the foes” serving Columbia. “They may nobly die as freemen,” the poem concludes, “they can never live as slaves!” Crean’s rhetorical rejection of Columbia mirrors the Confederacy’s rejection of the Union and the federal government. The “aged” personification no longer serves the new Southern nation and must be discarded.

Awakening Columbia

On June 8, 1861, *Harper’s Weekly* published *Columbia Awake at Last*, a political cartoon in which Columbia, garbed in the stars and stripes and backed by the spirit of George Washington, collars a diminutive man representing “secession” and “treason” (figure 1.6).⁷⁵ The man, with an American flag and a palmetto tree (the state tree of South Carolina) protruding from his hat, has torn a piece of the Constitution from the stately Columbia’s grasp. A man with a skull and crossbones flag stuck in his hat and a man sporting a matching palmetto tree, representatives of the other seceded Southern states, creep away from the incensed and intimidating woman. All three men carry knives, instruments clearly intended to injure and dismantle the Union. Roused by the firing upon Fort Sumter, Columbia is “awake at last” to the

⁷⁵ *Columbia Awake At Last*, *Harper’s Weekly* 5, no. 232 (June 8, 1861): 368.

threat posed by secession. Though the seceding Southern states are armed, Columbia stands firm and appears ready to physically bring them back into the Union. The Southern states are male but scrawny and shrink from the physically impressive Columbia. In numerous cartoons and illustrations published during the war, the figure of Columbia represents the Union, serving to align the symbolic feminine and actual Northern women with the progress of the war, the horrible cost of widespread violence, the promise of emancipation, and the triumph of victory.



Figure 1.6: *Columbia Awake At Last* (1861)

While Brother Jonathan represents the male citizens of the nation and Uncle Sam personifies the functioning of the government in political cartoons during the period of the Civil War, Columbia or Lady Liberty reigns supreme in poetry and artistic representations of the nation. Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan appear almost exclusively in political cartoons, while Columbia features prominently in cartoons, full-page illustrations, and hundreds of poems

published during the war.⁷⁶ The symbolic mother of American citizens, Columbia plays several roles in art and literature produced during the war. Before the commencement of hostilities, Columbia attempts to keep the nation together by pacifying her fractious children. At the outset of the war, Columbia calls her sons to action, often demanding their sacrifice for the Union cause, and valiantly opposes threats to the nation. As the war progresses, she mourns her fallen children. She is both closely aligned with emancipation and representative of the hope for an eventual reconciliation between North and South. With the coming of peace, Columbia works toward reunification and mourns her dead. She symbolically and publicly performs the duties of Northern (and at times Southern) women, thus emphasizing the effects of the war on women and the ways in which war disrupts the boundary between home front and battlefield.

Prior to the onset of war, Columbia watches with dismay as her children fight and divide into sections. As the mother of both halves of the country, her intact body invokes the relationship common to all Americans and the nation's vulnerability to division and fragmentation. In *Miss Columbia Calls Her Unruly School to Order*, Columbia appears as a schoolmarm towering over her misbehaving children.⁷⁷ Divided into North and South by a line labeled "Mason-Dixon," the classroom is full of men reading the Constitution. Holding a switch and wagging a finger, Columbia admonishes the men, many of whom seem to be ignoring her lesson. One of the men in the Southern section writes "Let us alone" on the wall. The cartoon, published in early 1860, responds to the growing sectional crisis in a fashion that underscores

⁷⁶ Brother Jonathan calls on his defiant sister Caroline in the poems "Brother Jonathan's Lament for Sister Caroline," *Atlantic Monthly* 7, no. 43 (May 1861): 613, and "Jonathan's Appeal to Caroline," *The Liberator* 32, no. 4 (January 4, 1862): 16. Both Jonathan and Uncle Sam appear in James Russel Lowell's "Jonathan to John" (1861), in *Poems of American History*, ed. Burton Egbert Stevenson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 430-1, and A.D. Gillette's poem "The Old Broadsword," *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 2 (February 1868), mentions Uncle Sam.

⁷⁷ *Miss Columbia Calls Her Unruly School to Order* (1860), in *Lines of Contention: Political Cartoons of the Civil War*, eds. J.G. Lewin and P.J. Huff (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 12.

Columbia's symbolic importance in conceptualizations of the nation. She represents the nation as a whole and the importance of keeping the Union intact. Significantly, Columbia is the only woman in the room; only male students squabble over the future of the nation. However, the symbolic feminine invokes the mothers of the nation—the women whose children will fight the quickly approaching war—and the investment of American women in the outcome of the sectional conflict. Columbia both indicates the absence of women from the halls of Congress and resembles the politically active women of the abolitionist and temperance movements. As the personification of the nation, Columbia crosses the line between the domestic and the public in her efforts to bring together a nation divided by the Mason-Dixon line.

Columbia's effort to keep the Union together is sometimes represented by her mending a damaged or ripped map of the United States. The cartoon *Soon to Be Out of a Job*, published in *Vanity Fair* in 1860, portrays Columbia as the lady of the house informing "Biddy Buchanan" that her services will not be needed "after next March."⁷⁸ Depicted as an Irish maid, President James Buchanan faces Columbia who is backed by an unnamed man resembling Uncle Sam. Columbia stitches the two pieces of a map of the United States, one half labeled "North" and the other "South." As the wife and mother in this American family, Columbia is in charge of the domestic help, and she has deemed Buchanan unfit for office. Buchanan's Irish heritage and his inefficacy in the face of the sectional crisis make him fair game for the kind of ridicule often heaped on Irish Americans in the nineteenth century. The matronly "Mrs. Columbia," sitting beneath a bust of George Washington, attempts to do what Buchanan could not—hold the nation together. Published prior to the 1860 election, the cartoon outlines the role of the next President:

⁷⁸ *Soon to Be Out of a Job* (1860), in *Lines of Contention: Political Cartoons of the Civil War*, eds. J.G. Lewin and P.J. Huff (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 29.

it will be his job to aid Columbia in reuniting the country. The image domesticates the political, placing the symbolic feminine in charge of the future of the national house.

One of Thomas W. Strong's anti-secession "Dime Caricatures," published in early 1861, also depicts Columbia in a position of authority by invoking the society the Union hopes to defeat. *South Carolina Topsey in a Fix* features a young slave girl, Topsey (a misspelling of the name of the character in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), being brought to task by Columbia, appearing here in the guise of plantation mistress.⁷⁹ Holding the American flag on her lap, Columbia chastises Topsey: "So, Topsey, you're at the bottom of this piece of wicked work—picking stars out of the sacred Flag! What would your forefathers say, do you think? I'll just hand you over to the new overseer, Uncle Abe." Topsey stands in for South Carolina, the first state to secede from the Union and thus the focus of Columbia's wrath. Topsey claims she never had a mother or a father and blames her actions on her innate wickedness. Though the caricature ostensibly blames South Carolina for the sectional crisis, it also labels African American slavery as one of the main reasons for the conflict between North and South. Columbia relies on Uncle Abe, the newly elected President, to "fix" South Carolina and put the stars back in the flag. Columbia can identify the problem, but the "overseer" must defend her nation.⁸⁰ The image implicitly combines and compares the plantation system and the federal government—the overseer and the president are in charge of controlling fractious slaves or states and Columbia, the plantation mistress, watches over all.

⁷⁹ John H. Goater, *Strong's Dime Caricatures no. 3, South Carolina Topsey in a Fix* (New York, T.W. Strong, 1861), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g13522>.

⁸⁰ For another example of a political cartoon featuring Columbia attempting to hold the Union together prior to the war, see *Little Bo-Peep and Her Foolish Sheep* (Lewin, *Lines of Contention*, 18).

And loud her clarion trumpets blow

Schoolmarm, plantation mistress, or seamstress, Columbia is adaptable and deployable. As a ubiquitous trope, Columbia blurs the boundaries of gender. Both belligerent and peaceful, strong and in need of protection, Columbia is warrior queen and doting mother. Columbia's multiple personalities indicate the complicated relationship between the symbolic roles of femininity in the poetry of the war and the actual roles of women in the war. Her versatility allows her to underscore the contributions and sacrifices of real women to the war effort in some poems and images and to restrict women's roles to the domestic sphere in others. The poem "Our Fatherland," published in *The Liberator* in 1862, illustrates a uniquely gendered personification of the nation.⁸¹ Within the space of the first stanza, the nation is both masculine and feminine: "We love our glorious fatherland,/The master-work of Freedom's hand;/Yea, thou of every land the trust,/We love her very stones and dust./Oh! let Thy love to her flow down,/And be of liberty the crown!" Both father and mother, the nation defies categorization. However, men and God are responsible for her well-being. "Our moon is Peace," the speaker proclaims, "our *rising* sun/The Liberty our fathers won" (italics in original). Men of the past secured her liberty and men of the contemporary moment, under the auspices of God, "[their] Sovereign and [their] Rock," must continue to protect it.

The divide between the female symbolic role and the masculine active role seems clear in "North and South," published in both *The Continental Monthly* and *The Liberator* in February of 1864.⁸² However, the poet illustrates the equally important divide between the ideal and real in representations of the war. The nation, Freedom, Slavery, and the North and South are all

⁸¹ Crammond Kennedy, "Our Fatherland," *The Liberator* 32, no. 4 (January 24, 1862): 16.

⁸² "North and South," *The Continental Monthly* 5, no. 2 (February 1, 1864): 241; *The Liberator* 34, no. 7 (February 12, 1864): 28.

personified, grounding the poem in the symbolic realm common to many poetic renditions of the conflict. Beginning with the symbolic and ending with the actual effects of war, the poem illustrates the stark realities of war and the importance of representing them. Comprised of rhyming couplets, the poem commences with a call to war that reaches both North and South. With martial language the poem continues, “Hosts contending, marshaled foes/Battle while the red blood flows.” The hosts are “two great armies whose Ideal/Bursts into the earnest Real.” The “ideals twain” are Freedom and Slavery and they battle on the symbolic realm. With a series of exclamations, the poem shifts the focus to the physical combatants, the soldiers who bleed and die: “Look upon the Nation’s dead!/Lo, the blood of martyrs shed!/Dying that our Country may/Know her Resurrection Day!” Soldiers’ bodies are real reminders of the physical results of a war of ideals. Male soldiers die so a female nation may rise again.

As the poem progresses, two monumental “Brothers” represent the two sides of the conflict. The “Right” sings the nation’s “triumph song” while the “Traitor” gains only “undying pain.” This shift to the ideal realm allows for the future reconciliation of North and South: “These two Brothers now at strife/Make one heart, one soul, one life!/This at last will be their song: ‘One forever, free, and strong.’” Having promised reunion through the ties of brotherhood of two ideals, the poem ends by returning to the realm of the real. It is the duty of “Northmen” to deal with the results of the war: “There are hearts uncomforted,/Weeping o’er the battle-dead./There are wounded brave ones here...Freedmen shiver at your gate—/Let them not forgotten wait!/Bind the wounded heart that bleeds;/Mould your *speeches* into *deeds*!” Moving from the ideal to the real, from words to actions, the poem communicates the duties of men in the aftermath of war.

“A Song of Freedom,” published anonymously in *The Continental Monthly* in January of 1862, also stages the gendered relationship between the personified female figure and those who will fight for her.⁸³ The poet can no longer tell of “legends old” and “deep thoughts must burn in warlike rhyme,” because “Freedom, with a mighty throe,/Rouses from sleep to active life,/And loud her clarion trumpets blow,/To summon *men* to join the strife” (italics in the original). Though it is “Freedom’s thrilling battle-cry” that provides the call to arms, it is men who will answer. Shifting from feminine Freedom to cultivation, the second and final stanza of the poem invokes “the seed, which long ago was sown.” This “seed,” masculine in its connotations, is “in noble vigor grown” and “casts branches o’er the Southern hills.” Masculine victory will follow feminine inspiration.

An engraving entitled *Check-Mate!* illustrates the solely symbolic role of the feminine in many popular conceptions of the war (figure 1.7).⁸⁴ Columbia appears along with Jefferson Davis and Uncle Sam in the cover illustration for the June 3, 1865 issue of *Harper’s Weekly*. The illustration mimics Moritz Retzsch’s 1837 engraving *The Game of Life or The Chess-Players*, a depiction of a young man playing chess with the devil. The accompanying text explains that Davis, “the Spirit of Treason,” is “playing with Uncle Sam for his Life.” Uncle Sam, “the type of calm, self-possessed manhood,” faces the “Prince of Rebellion” with a “countenance expressive of triumph tempered by amiability.” Dressed like the Devil in Retzsch’s engraving, Davis embodies “all the rapacity of a Tiger and all the cruelty of a Hyena.” The description continues:

Between the two players, somewhat in the back-ground, stands a gentle, lovely angel-form, with white and outspread wings—the GODDESS OF LIBERTY, the protecting

⁸³ “A Song of Freedom,” *The Continental Monthly* 1, no. 1 (January 1862): 76.

⁸⁴ *Check-Mate!* *Harper’s Weekly* 9, no. 440 (June 3, 1865): 337.

spirit of Uncle Sam, but not seen by him. She looks in rapture down upon the victorious termination of the struggle. But now let us look again at the game itself. (337)

A silent and invisible presence, Liberty is removed from the actual contest—a separation made even more evident by the rhetorical return to the “game itself.” Grant is the king on Uncle Sam’s side and “the Queen is COLUMBIA, a lofty, majestic figure, unfurling her vindicated flag.” Her position on the board “supports the more active officers.” Even though Columbia is part of the game, she is not an active officer, and it is Uncle Sam (the representative of the government) that moves her around the board. The illustration, celebrating Davis’ downfall, encapsulates the figurative presence of women in narratives and illustrations of the war. Removed from the actual process and progress of war, the figures of Columbia and Liberty invoke the allegorical significance of femininity but also reflect the common exclusion of actual women from depictions of the war.



Figure 1.7: *Check-Mate!* (1865)

The 1864 engraving *Columbia Leading On Her Sons to Victory* also depicts the divide between symbolic female inspiration and physical male action.⁸⁵ Flying above the clouds and trailing an American flag behind her, Columbia gazes down at a battalion of Union soldiers. She points with a sword to the battlefield, urging on her soldier sons. Almost directly beneath her, a Union officer on horseback holds up his sword, encouraging his troops. While Columbia is the inspiration for the troops, she takes no part in the actual battle. Her role and her sword are solely symbolic. “The Captain of ’63 to His Men,” a poem published in 1863, imagines the words of an officer like the one depicted beneath Columbia.⁸⁶ “Come to the field, boys, come!” he shouts, “Yonder’s the foe to our country’s fame,/Waiting to blot out her very name.” The captain rallies his men by asking “who would see her shame?”, sequentially calling on them to “come,” “form,” “charge,” and, finally, “die.” The personified nation is the impetus for the soldiers’ actions, as are their “wives and mothers.” In the engraving and the poem, the feminine provides inspiration but does not participate in the action of war.

Freedom Bleeds

Poems portraying Columbia as physically threatened, stained by the sin of slavery, and in need of protection and redemption indicate the primacy of ending slavery to the Union war effort. Columbia is betrayed by the South and menaced by treason. Her female form is often in danger of violation—the act of secession threatens her body with dismemberment and degradation. It is the duty of her Northern sons to arm for war and to sacrifice their bodies so that she remains intact. Employing the terminology of slavery and abolition in their depictions of Columbia, poets invoke the plight of African American slaves but do so through the omission or

⁸⁵ *Columbia Leading On Her Sons to Victory*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* 18, no. 451 (May 21, 1864): 136-137.

⁸⁶ “The Captain of ’63 to His Men,” *The Continental Monthly* 3, no. 3 (March 1863): 315.

deemphasizing of actual black bodies. Suffering the fetters and yokes of slavery, Columbia is emancipated by Northern victory. She performs a whitewashed form of freedom, thus allowing Northerners uncomfortable with the implications of abolition and emancipation to celebrate the end of the peculiar institution. However, numerous poems celebrate the emancipation of black bodies and the body politic as represented by Columbia. The mother of the nation watches over her children, regardless of race or prior condition of servitude.

Published in *The New South*, a Unionist paper in Port Royal, South Carolina, Charles A. Barry's "Columbia's Invocation!" depicts Columbia "washing out with tears/And hero-blood, her only shame."⁸⁷ The beleaguered nation, menaced by "gathering foes," addresses "her flag of eighty years," asking it to "wave o'er [her] people as they rise/To win [her] back [her] fame again." Barry's speaker calls on "freemen," urging them to "smite to kill" in defense of their suffering nation. "See!", the speaker exclaims, "Freedom bleeds!/She calls you with her stifled breath:/Rebellion to her Temple speeds—/March on, to Victory or Death!" The bleeding form of Freedom, broken by treason, is the central image in this and many other calls to action. Implicit in Columbia's suffering is the threat to actual women, those who are vulnerable to the encroaching conflict or are asked to sacrifice their sons, brothers, and husbands.

At once virginal and motherly, Columbia is threatened by the stain of treason and made impure by the taint of slavery. William Cullen Bryant invokes the embattled body of a female nation in two calls to arms, "Our Country's Call" and "Not Yet."⁸⁸ In each, the nation is threatened by invading foes and the violence of war. "Our Country's Call" tells the men of the

⁸⁷ Charles A. Barry, "Columbia's Invocation," *The New South* 1, no. 6 (September 13, 1862): 1.

⁸⁸ William Cullen Bryant, "Our Country's Call," in *Poems of American History*, ed. Burton Egbert Stevenson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 410-411. Originally published in *New York Ledger* (November 2, 1861). William Cullen Bryant, "Not Yet," *The Liberator* 31, no. 34 (August 23, 1861): 136; *The Smoky Hill and Republican Union* [Junction City, Kansas] (September 12, 1861).

North to “lay down the axe” and pick up a rifle. The pitiable state of the Union necessitates the transformation from farmer to soldier. “See,” Bryant’s speaker instructs his readers, “from a thousand coverts—see,/Spring the armed foes that haunt her track;/They rush to smite her down, and we/Must beat the banded traitors back.” Preyed on by her enemies, the nation is vulnerable and in need of male protection. In “Not Yet,” Bryant rejects the notion of dissolution and disunion, declaring that those loyal to the Union will save her. Bryant asks and answers a series of rhetorical questions that lead up to a final negation. “Shall we,” his speaker questions, “like cravens stand apart,/When those whom thou hast trusted aim/The death-blow at thy generous heart?” Traitorous Confederates, seeking to kill their motherland, impel “hosts [to] rise in harness, shouting, No!” The “sleeping ashes” of the founding fathers also reject the breaking of “gentle ties which long/These sister States were proud to wear.” Invoking motherland, founding fathers, and sister states, Bryant urges his readers to band together to protect the American family. Northern men must come together to once again form “the arm that gave/The victory in our fathers’ days,/Strong, as of old, to guard and save.”

Published two months after Bryant’s “Not Yet,” T. Hulbert Underwood’s “Now” is an answer to Bryant’s poem and an indictment of Columbia’s association with slavery. Mirroring Bryant’s poem in form and content, “Now” asserts that the nation has already been brought low. However, her suffering is not solely due to traitorous Southerners. “The traitor’s arm has laid her low,” but her own “statesmen” must also be held accountable for her sorry state. It is they who failed “to ‘tear’ from Slavery its mask,/And drive it from its cherished lair.” Allowing the “dragon” of slavery to grow strong, America’s leaders “left a curse to after-time.” Underwood twice depicts the nation as physically marked by the sin of slavery and the war fought to end it. “A stigma rests upon her frame” and “the fire of civil war to-day/Has charred upon the Nation’s

brow/A brand no tears can wash away.” For past sins, the nation and her people suffer the wrath of God. This wrath is evident in the Potomac’s “ensanguined flow” and on the figurative form of Columbia.

In “The Legend of Our Victories,” Laura Redden Searing portrays the Union as a Hester Prynne-like figure, physically marked by wrongdoing: “Too long this fair young kingdom,/The Empire of the West,/Had borne a blasting stigma/Upon her virgin breast!”⁸⁹ Despite Searing’s soaring rhetoric that labels the democracy both monarchy and empire, the symbolic importance of the Union’s virginity is clear. The Union army’s victories remove the stain of sectional strife and keep the Union pure. Searing expresses a similar sentiment in “Union Forever,” a poem that addresses the “men of America,” calling on them to “press to [their] standard.”⁹⁰ After impelling the men of the Union to stand firm against “the demon of inward dissension,” Searing’s speaker invokes Columbia: “How art thou fallen, O Daughter of Promise!/From the throne of thy lofty and virgin estate/When thy children are drunk with the blood of thy suffering,/And traitors are ringing the knell of thy fate!” Besmirched by treason and dissension, the Union must be restored by “a band of the staunch and devoted,—/Men whose integrity never was bought.” In both poems, Searing employs the language of sexual purity to call the sons of the Union to action.

Published in *Douglass’ Monthly* in 1863, Gerrit Smith’s article “Another Proof that the Nation is Ruined” identifies slavery as the cause of Columbia’s impurity.⁹¹ Instead of the threat of secession and invasion, the country faces a monster of her own making. The country “is

⁸⁹ Howard Glyndon [Laura Redden Searing], “The Legend of Our Victories,” in *Idylls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1864), 27-32.

⁹⁰ Howard Glyndon [Laura Redden Searing], “Union Forever,” in *Idylls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1864), 48-52.

⁹¹ Gerrit Smith, “Another Proof that the Nation is Ruined,” *Douglass’ Monthly* 5, no. 6 (June 1863): 845.

annoyed and angry at the charge of being ruined. Nevertheless she has been ruined for more than forty years. From the sad hour, when Slavery triumphed over Freedom in the Missouri Compromise, down to the present no [sic] sadder hour she has never ceased to be a ruined nation.” Smith blames the nation’s lack of action during the beginning of the secession crisis on her ruined state, labeling her “drugged and debauched by Slavery.” The nation is a loose woman deprived of her virtue by her relationship with slavery. However, Smith writes that he has “never despaired of her recovery.” He places his faith in the soldiers of the Union army, averring that they should be allowed to vote by proxy since they “are periling their lives for her.” Whether with the rifle or the ballot, it is the duty of soldiers to purify and protect the Union. Fighting to end slavery, the Union army redeems their ruined mother.

The struggle to restore the Union led to the emancipation of black bodies, but it is the white female body of Columbia that figures prominently in many poems about slavery’s significance to the war. In some poems, Columbia suffers for the national sin. She is torn and wounded by a war waged to end slavery, an evil that flourished and grew under her auspices. In Mary G. Harpine’s “Our Country’s Guilt,” Columbia does penance for the nation’s sin of slavery. Addressing the personified nation, Harpine’s speaker intones, “Before His dread and awful throne, the Righteous and the Just,/Do thou, my bleeding country, lay thy forehead in the dust.” Brought to God’s tribunal, Columbia must doff her “starry crown” and “the haughty ensigns of [her] power” and wrap herself in “sackcloth.” “Columbia,” the speaker continues, “low in the dust bewail thy sins that day!” The poem moves from the penitent Columbia to the people she represents, describing Americans’ allowance of “the curse of slavery.” Brought low by her sins, Columbia’s “tall and stately head” is transmuted into “our forehead.” All citizens of

the Union must do penance along with Columbia. Then, the speaker promises, “He [God] will turn to us again.”

In multiple poems, Columbia’s suffering is closely linked to slavery. Published in *The Continental Monthly* for May 1863, “National Ode: Suggested by the President’s Proclamation of January 1, 1863” celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation by invoking its significance in terms of its effects on Columbia’s figurative form.⁹² Freedom for the slaves (those slaves living in rebellious states only) galvanizes the nation and proves wrong those who think her dying or dead. Secession and slavery threaten the physical well-being of the nation, but the Emancipation Proclamation promises their downfall. The poem begins with an invocation of January 1, asking that the “bright day of dedicated birth...a mighty nation’s heart awake,/Her self-enwoven fetters shake,/And vivify the pulses of the land!” The third stanza lists the potential effects of the war on the nation: “Our country’s glory slain!/Her kingdom rent and torn in twain!/Her strong foundations crumbling into dust!” The speaker then calls on the nation to deny her detractors by rising and proclaiming her “star-immortal fame”: “Speak thou, Columbia, in thy might,/Unharmd by thy false children’s hate and lust./Arise—no more betrayed/By fears too long obeyed...” Triumphant and still intact, Columbia is rid of “the serpent cherished in [her] breast...For with a groan/Falls Slavery from his throne.” Previously endangered by both her disloyal children and the “slimy coils” of slavery, Columbia is purified and reinforced by Freedom. The poem also personifies “Conspiracy,/With Treason linked and Anarchy,” avowing that they shall no longer dig “their country’s grave.” Previously, the three entities injured the nation, but “no more [her] waning cheek shall pale,/ [Her] trembling limbs with terror fail,/ [Her] bleeding wounds Heaven’s balsam vainly crave.” Wounded and afraid before, Columbia can

⁹² “National Ode: Suggested by the President’s Proclamation of January 1, 1863,” *The Continental Monthly* 3, no. 5 (May 1863): 554.

now rise against her foes who wish “to shed [her] lovely limbs dismembered o’er the plain.” Significantly, the poem focuses on the endangered body of a figurative white female, referencing the “black, blank faces” of the slaves only once.

Columbia’s suffering, however, is closely tied to the plight of the slaves. Poets describing the nation as shackled and fettered echo abolitionist poems describing the horrors of slavery and thus connect the body of the Union to the bodies of the slaves. “Written for and sung at the Anti-Slavery Celebration at Framingham (Mass.) July 4th, 1862” and published in *The Liberator*, “Our National Visitation” by William Lloyd Garrison takes its melody from the “John Brown Song.”⁹³ The chorus “our cause is marching on” celebrates the conflict as a war for the abolition of slavery. Like many abolitionist texts, Garrison’s poem invokes the role of God in the deliverance of the nation and the enslaved; it is His wrath that the nation suffers. “For her manifold transgressions,” the third verse begins, “is our nation scourged and torn;/She has forged the galling fetter—doomed a helpless race to mourn;/And now she writhes in anguish, of her pride and glory shorn—/For God is marching on!” It is not secession or her traitorous children that betray and wound Columbia. Instead, it is the national sin of slavery that causes her suffering. Her “sinful compromise” with the slave power must end in order for the “visitation” of the war to end. The poem relies on the threatened white female body for its rhetorical power rather than depicting “scourged and torn” slave bodies and in this way blurs the boundary between black and white (a white body can be fettered) while reinforcing the racial hierarchy.

Despite her symbolic complicity in the rise and spread of slavery, Columbia is closely associated with emancipation in many poems and illustrations. Often interchangeable with the personifications of Liberty and Freedom, Columbia appears as the champion of the freedmen and the arbiter of justice. The illustration *The End of the Rebellion in the United States, 1865* gathers

⁹³ William Lloyd Garrison, “Our National Visitation,” *The Liberator* 32, no. 28 (July 11, 1862): 112.

together the female personifications Justice, Liberty, and Columbia in an allegorical depiction of the end of the war.⁹⁴ Columbia and Liberty stand upon an altar while Justice leads a vanguard of Union soldiers headed by Grant and preceded by Andrew Jackson. In the forefront of the illustration are an African American soldier and a freed slave. The latter kneels in front of the altar, gazing up at the two figures upon it. Columbia, her eyes on the black soldiers, gestures to the freed slave, seemingly displaying to the soldier the results of his service. The only female figures in the image, Columbia, Liberty, and Justice represent the ideals protected and promulgated by the soldiers of the Union and the martyred President Lincoln. Only the symbolic feminine is present in this representation of the end of the war; women whose lives were touched by the war and African American women are absent.

Columbia's role as emancipator is made even more evident in two poems published in 1864, "The Promise Must Be Kept" by George Lansing Taylor and "November 8, 1864." Published in the *New York Tribune* and *The Liberator*, the former is an answer to opponents of the Emancipation Proclamation seeking to revoke the promise of freedom.⁹⁵ A series of rhetorical questions echoes the Proclamation's detractors. "Degrade the Proclamation?" is answered by an image of the freedom-wielding nation: "See on her sacred shore Columbia stand,/While broken chains lie 'round her on the strand,/And hear her cry to every down-trod land:/'BEHOLD A NEW CREATION!'" The motherland brings to life a new being: freedom for the slaves. It is unclear if the chains around her once bound her, but she is obviously responsible for their broken state. The war, "endured to save the nation," has preserved Columbia and

⁹⁴ Charles Kimmel, *The End of the Rebellion in the United States, 1865* (New York: Kimmel and Foster, 1866), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Collection, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a15123>.

⁹⁵ George Lansing Taylor, "The Promise Must Be Kept," *The Liberator* 34, no. 8 (February 19, 1864): 32.

enabled her to give birth to emancipation. “November 8, 1864” celebrates the re-election of Abraham Lincoln, a “civil triumph” which ensures the emancipation of the slaves.⁹⁶ The speaker describes a vision inspired by the election: “I see bold Freedom with a giant’s stroke/Hurl to the earth the bondman’s heavy yoke;/I see her strike from off his horny hands/The galling chains and fetters where he stands.” Columbia, personified in this iteration as Freedom, is the agent of emancipation. Her monumental form is closely associated with the representative “bondman.” She breaks his chains, the harbinger of eventual Union victory.

Also published in 1864, “The Statue of Freedom” by Mrs. P.R. Woodbury celebrates the addition of the statue of Freedom atop the Capitol building.⁹⁷ Designed by Thomas Crawford in 1855, the statue was installed on December 2, 1863.⁹⁸ Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War in 1855, rejected Crawford’s initial intention of depicting Freedom wearing a liberty cap since the cap was associated with emancipation. Instead, Freedom wears a feathered headdress, thus harkening back to early depictions of the nation.⁹⁹ Despite Freedom’s headgear, her significance in 1863 is clear. An excerpt from the *New York Tribune* precedes the poem and ties Freedom to the course of the war and the emancipation of the slaves: “During more than two years of our struggle, while the national cause has seemed weak, she has patiently waited and watched below; now that victory crowns our advances, and the bond are being freed, she comes forward, her hand outstretched as if in guaranty of National Unity and Personal Freedom.” Both the excerpt and the poem underscore the presence of black men in the construction of the statue. Philip Reid, a slave

⁹⁶ “November 8, 1864.” *Harper’s Weekly* 8, no. 413 (November 26, 1864): 754.

⁹⁷ Mrs. P.R. Woodbury, “The Statue of Freedom,” *The Liberator* 34, no. 3 (January 15, 1864): 12.

⁹⁸ “The Statue of Freedom,” Architect of the Capitol, <http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

working at a foundry in Washington, D.C., oversaw the casting of the bronze statue.¹⁰⁰ “The uncouth ponderous mass,” Woodbury writes, “that black man’s arm did raise,/Has, bolted by his hands,/Called forth our nation’s praise.” Woodbury’s poem celebrates both emancipation and the slave who helped raise a monument to freedom. Still standing atop the Capitol building, the statue illustrates the continuing influence of the figure of Columbia and the enduring promise of freedom.

Kneel, Motherland!

As national mother, Columbia watches over emancipated slaves and soldiers who fought a war that led to emancipation. In numerous poems produced during the conflict, Columbia appears as the patron saint of soldiers and as the chief mourner of her fallen sons. Her sadness is representative of her children’s grief and her tears symbolize the mourning of the nation. In multiple illustrations and poems, a mourning Columbia embodies the collective sorrow of the nation at the assassination and death of President Lincoln. However, in many poems and illustrations, Columbia continues to urge her sons to continue the war against Southern treachery. Despite her anguish, Columbia persists in her calls to arms. Her pain, these texts imply, will be somewhat assuaged by Confederate defeat. Symbolic femininity encourages further bloodshed by indicating the necessity of the destruction of the South. After the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Columbia represents peace through victory and the salvation of the Union, but she continues to mourn her dead. Resembling the grieving mothers of the nation, Columbia publicly mourns her fallen sons and demands retribution and recognition. The mother of the country makes mourning, a usually private and domestic undertaking, public and, at times, political. Her

¹⁰⁰ Eugene Walton, “Philip Reed: Slave Caster of Freedom,” *The Examiner* [Washington] (March 1, 2005), republished in *Chicken Bones: A Journal for Literary and Artistic African-American Themes*, <http://www.nathanielturner.com>.

presence on or near the battlefield and her role as national mourner reduces the distance between the war and the home front, indicating the close relationship of many American women to the conflict.

Two certificates, one published in 1861 and the other in 1863, closely associate Columbia with the defenders of the Union. The 1861 version, titled *In Defence of the Union and the Constitution*, certifies that the recipient of the award fought “in support of the Government to suppress the rebellion of 1861.”¹⁰¹ *The Union Defenders Certificate* acknowledges the recipients service in defense of the “government, the Union, and the Constitution.”¹⁰² Both certificates predominantly feature Columbia, portraying her as the representative of the Union the soldiers fought to save and the patron saint of the men who fought and died for her. On the first certificate, Columbia holds two laurel wreaths over a soldier’s head and extends her star-spangled robe to shelter a woman crouching with her children. Columbia rewards the soldier and looks after his family. The second certificate displays Columbia in the forefront of the image, raising the American flag and pointing to a battlefield. She looks over her shoulder, urging the viewer to recognize the service and sacrifice of her defenders.

As the mother of fallen soldiers, Columbia demands recognition of the horrible violence of the war. In two political cartoons, a belligerent and infuriated Columbia confronts Lincoln regarding the deaths of her soldier sons. Published in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1863, *Columbia to Lincoln* features an intimidating and accusatory Columbia pointing her finger at the President.¹⁰³ “Where are my 15,000 sons, murdered at Fredericksburg?”, she demands, and rejects the joke

¹⁰¹ Peter S. Duval, *In Defence of the Union and the Constitution* (Philadelphia: P.S. Duval and Son, 1861), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.03676>.

¹⁰² Ehrgott, Forbriger, & Co., lithographer, *The Union Defenders Certificate* (1863), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b37096>.

¹⁰³ *Columbia to Lincoln*, *Harper’s Weekly* 7, no. 314 (January 3, 1863): 16.

offered by the notoriously wise-cracking President. In the 1864 cartoon *Columbia Demands Her Children!*, a pointing Columbia demands that Lincoln “give [her] back [her] 500,000 sons.”¹⁰⁴ At Lincoln’s feet lies a signed request for 500,000 more volunteers. Unfazed by Columbia’s wrath, Lincoln offers to tell her a story. In both cartoons, Columbia protects the interests of her sons, rejecting the horrible and avoidable slaughter at Fredericksburg and Lincoln’s call for more men.

Sometimes belligerent in her protectiveness, Columbia is more often mournful and grief-stricken. Her weeping form, draped over soldiers’ caskets and the coffin of Abraham Lincoln, invokes the many sacrifices required to save the Union and calls on loyal citizens to honor the fallen. Standing in for thousands of grieving mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters, Columbia acts as the chief mourner. Thomas Nast’s 1863 engraving *Honor the Brave* features a mourning Columbia typical of representations of the grieving nation as its centerpiece. Her head bowed, Columbia rests an arm holding a laurel wreath on a flag-draped coffin.¹⁰⁵ The American eagle perches on the fasces at Columbia’s feet, attempting to comfort her. The border surrounding Columbia depicts soldiers and sailors, the “brave” “on land” and “at sea” who fight to protect the central figure. Beneath the main title are the words “The Union must and shall be preserved.” The illustration establishes both the importance of saving the Union and the severe cost of doing so. Columbia simultaneously honors her children who have sacrificed their lives to defend her and calls on her sons to continue the fight.

“The Soldier’s Grave,” published in a Unionist paper in Kansas in 1862, imagines a more intimate scene in which Columbia mourns an individual soldier’s death.¹⁰⁶ Addressing the

¹⁰⁴ J.E. Baker, *Columbia Demands Her Children*, (Boston, 1864), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.15768>.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Nast, *Honor the Brave*, *Harper’s Weekly* 7, no. 356 (October 24, 1863): 680-1.

soldier, the poem's speaker informs the young man that his country mourns specifically for him: "Rest, soldier, rest! thy country comes,/With tender love and true,/Freely to deck thine honored head—/Her banner o'er its turf to spread,/And on thy lonely grave to shed/Fond memory's pearly dew." As the chief mourner of the nation, Columbia grieves for each individual soldier who dies to protect her, just as actual women grieve the loss of their family members and husbands. Hoping to encourage other young men to make the same sacrifice, the speaker requests that the soldier throw his "mantle from the sky" so a "rising race" of American men will come to the country's defense "and in Jehovah's armor strong,/Her life, her Union save!"

Though Columbia mourns her fallen sons, she continues to call her children to arms. In multiple poems, her grief is further proof that the war must be won and the Union must be saved. Published anonymously in both the *United States Service Magazine* and *The Soldier's Journal*, Edward A. Washburn's "The Burial at Gettysburg" invokes the grief of Columbia in order to urge her sons to continue fighting to save the Union.¹⁰⁷ The poem begins with a description of the battlefield, once active and now a "city of the dead." The second stanza calls of Columbia to enact her grief: "Kneel, motherland! in broken prayer,/To kiss the dear, the holy ground;/See strong men weep like children, there,/Spelling in vain each nameless mound." Columbia's grief is closely associated with the mourning of her children. Far from the battlefield, "the gray sire dreams...of one who comes not home again." Columbia mourns for the thousands of sons who will never return home, but cries, "No Peace, No Peace, till Treason die!" It is not yet time for "the Requiem sad"; instead, "the war-song clear and high" must continue the work of those "who died to keep a nation's spotless name."

¹⁰⁶ "The Soldier's Grave," *Freedom's Champion* [Atchinson City, Kansas] (September 20, 1862): 1.

¹⁰⁷ Edward A. Washburn, "The Burial at Gettysburg," *The Soldier's Journal* 1, no. 4 (March 9, 1864): 25; *United States Service Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1864): 24-5.

Columbia's "spotless name" is endangered by compromise with the South or peace without victory. Thomas Nast's famous illustration *Compromise with the South*, published two months before the election of 1864, portrays the dire results of voting Democrat.¹⁰⁸ Columbia kneels weeping in front of a grave "in memory of the Union heroes who fell in a useless war." A Union veteran with an amputated leg bows his head as he shakes the hand of a Confederate soldier. The Confederate's boot is upon the grave. To his rear, a family of slaves are chained together. The message of the illustration is clear: a Democratic victory will lead to the betrayal of every Union soldier who died or was wounded to protect the Union, the degradation of Columbia, and the continued enslavement of African Americans. Columbia's mourning calls on Americans to reject compromise with Copperheads and Peace Democrats, and to continue the war until total victory is achieved.

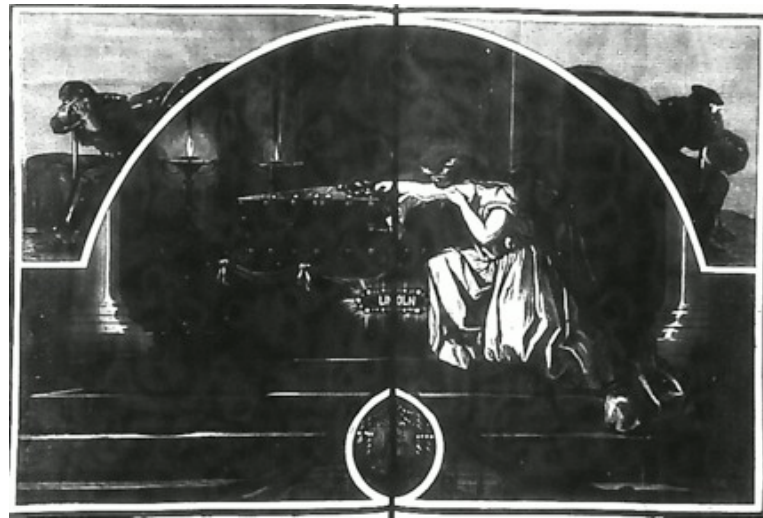


Figure 1.8: *Abraham Lincoln's Coffin* (1865)

Columbia grieves for her sons and the nation's father, Abraham Lincoln. Countless poems lament his passing and laud his defense of the Union. The outpouring of sadness following Lincoln's death is often embodied in the mourning form of Columbia. Bent with grief,

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Nast, *Compromise with the South*, *Harper's Weekly* 8, no. 401 (September 3, 1864): 572.

Columbia weeps for her martyred son and protector. An illustration published in *Harper's Weekly* on April 29, 1865 portrays Columbia kneeling in front of Lincoln's coffin, placing a laurel wreath on top of the President's resting place and covering her face with her hand (figure 1.8).¹⁰⁹ To the left and right of Columbia, divided from her by a white border, a soldier and a sailor bow their heads in grief, covering their face in a gesture that matches Columbia's. Columbia's mourning figure symbolizes the collective grief of the nation. Having protected the Union, the soldier and sailor mourn their fallen leader. The tableaux memorializes Lincoln and the salvation of the Union, inextricably linking the President to the cause.

Columbia appears in multiple poems commemorating the life and death of the President, usually serving as the chief mourner. "A Dirge—April 15, 1865" establishes Columbia's central role in the process of mourning Lincoln.¹¹⁰ The poem begins with a description of the nation's response to the President's death: "There's wailing from a million hearts—there's gloom on every hearth;/The shouts of victory are dumb—hushed is the sound of mirth." In the midst of this collective outpouring "the Nation, in black robes of woe, sits watching by her Dead!" Watching along with Columbia is "that dusky race, whose chains of slavery/He broke." Lincoln, the savior of the nation and the emancipator of the slaves, undergoes an apotheosis in this poem and many others. Watched over by Columbia, his body takes on symbolic significance. Underscoring this process of transformation, the poem's speaker urges the country to "follow where LINCOLN's footsteps led." Readers should also follow Columbia's example by mourning the fallen president and remembering his sacrifice.

¹⁰⁹ *Abraham Lincoln's Coffin*. *Harper's Weekly* 9, no. 435 (April 29, 1865): 267-8.

¹¹⁰ "A Dirge—April 15, 1865," *The Liberator* 35, no. 9 (May 12, 1865): 76.

In a sonnet titled “The Mourning Nation,”¹¹¹ Lincoln is “a common friend” rather than an exalted and symbolic figure. The speaker experiences the death of the President “as if in troubled visions, on [his] bed.” He sees “a nation to the sepulcher/Come mourning.” A “solemn stir” arises, and the speaker compares the procession to a “household” carrying away its “Head.” The unnamed President’s funeral is depicted in terms of a family burial as Columbia loses the leader of her household. “Even with such rites,” the speaker continues, “a nation did inter/That form resigned to earth, and lost to her!” Though Columbia is the chief mourner, a “wide grief” surrounds her. Asking what has caused such woe, the speaker is answered by a “universal voice”: “We bury thus a common friend, most dear,/And follow him, thus weeping, to the grave!” At once intimate and all-encompassing, the poem enacts the process of mourning the President. The presence of the personified nation allows for the grief to be both personal and universal.

Columbia Victrix

As Northern victory became more certain, poets celebrated by sending laudatory verses to newspaper. Many of these poems feature the triumphant figure of Columbia. Her strong and intact body symbolizes the victory of Union forces and the eventual reunion of North and South. Sometimes scarred but largely unscathed by the four-year conflict, Columbia represents the possibility of reconciliation between the two sections of the country. Columbia looks toward future peace without forgetting the war and the suffering it caused. As the mother of the nation, Columbia must bind her children’s wounds and reconcile them to living in the same national house. Mourner, peacemaker, and bearer of the memory of the war, Columbia enacts the duties of American women in the aftermath of Northern victory, Southern defeat, and the abolition of slavery.

¹¹¹ “The Mourning Nation,” *The Liberator* 35, no.12 (May 26, 1865): 84.

Thomas Nast's illustration *Our Arms Victorious*, published in *Harper's Weekly* on June 24, 1864, celebrates Union victory, honors Grant and Lincoln, and commemorates the fallen.¹¹² In the center of the illustration are five figures gathered around a bust of Lincoln upon a pedestal. Justice holds her scales and sword while Victory places a laurel wreath upon Columbia's head. Sheathing her sword, Columbia rests her foot upon a cowering male figure draped in a robe labeled C.S.A. Perched next to Columbia is a freedman, a broken shackle at his feet. A border listing the major battles of the war surrounds the figures, memorializing the heroics of the army and navy. The "conquering hero" Grant appears at the top of the page. The illustration relies on both allegory and representations of the real results of war. Columbia is strong and unscathed, but a drawing of corpses on a battlefield is below her, invoking a "victory dearly won." The illustration underscores Columbia's symbolic significance in representations of the war and its outcome. More than any other figure, Columbia stands for the victory of the Union.

W.J. Linton's poem "Columbia Victrix" has at its center a triumphant Columbia typical of many poems celebrating the end of the war.¹¹³ Only two stanzas, the poem first invokes the flag of the Union, averring that its "slavish stripes" should be removed now that the war is over and the slave power is defeated. "God bless Columbia," the second stanza begins, "Free from the stain,/Rid of the curse of old,/Saved by her pain!" Columbia has been cleansed in the crucible of war and Union triumph has ensured that slavery will end. Linton's Columbia is not unscathed by the conflict. "After the battle-storm," the speaker predicts, "Peace [will] heal her scars." Having passed through a trial by fire, the nation will rise stronger than before. Bayard Taylor expresses similar statements in his poem "Comments."¹¹⁴ Having divested herself of any association with

¹¹² Thomas Nast, *Our Arms Victorious*, *Harper's Weekly* 9, no. 443 (June 24, 1865): 392-3.

¹¹³ W.J. Linton, "Columbia Victrix," *The Liberator* 35, no. 24 (June 16, 1865): 96.

slavery (“the Evil, on its falling throne”), Columbia is “Free, and for Freedom now she stands a giant/To shield her own.” Refusing to be cowed by her enemies, Columbia “stands erect, majestic on her mountains—/SHE WILL NOT DIE.” Both Linton and Taylor embody the nation’s survival and success in the monumental limbs of Columbia.

Two poems published in the same issue of *The Liberator* in 1865 celebrate emancipation and reunion by portraying a purified and renewed Columbia. Augusta Cooper Kimball’s “Shout” and Mrs. E. A. Kidder’s “Peace Jubilee” exultantly cheer the reconciliation of North and South and the coming of freedom. The sentiments they express are similar to those portrayed in an illustration published in *Harper’s Weekly* at the end of 1865. *National Thanksgiving* is comprised of multiple representations of the coming of peace and reconciliation.¹¹⁵ Two of these representations feature Columbia as a bringer of peace and reunion. In a panel labeled “Peace and Unity,” Columbia hovers over a Confederate soldier and a Union soldier, blessing them as they shake hands. Interestingly, none of the representations portrays freedmen. In both “Shout” and “Peace Jubilee,” however, the emancipation of African American slaves is central to Union victory and national reconciliation.

In “Shout!”, Kimball describes “a nation renewed!/That moults the old garment that bound her,/That rises with evil eschewed.”¹¹⁶ “With purpose of Justice imbued,” the nation rids herself of the curse of slavery. “Shout,” Kimball’s speaker urges, “that a creature of God,/Long known as our national ban,/And reckoned a thing, as a beast,/Is counted and titled a man!” Formerly enslaved, the black man has proved his manhood by facing the enemy “with a courage as high and serene/As any of Liberty’s sons!” The freedmen are now part of the national family,

¹¹⁴ Bayard Taylor, “Comments,” *The Liberator* 34, no. 29 (July 15, 1864): 116.

¹¹⁵ *National Thanksgiving*, *Harper’s Weekly* 9, no. 467 (December 9, 1865): 776-7.

¹¹⁶ Augusta Cooper Kimball, “Shout!” *The Liberator* 35, no. 29 (July 21, 1865): 116.

a family that is no longer divided by sectional strife. Americans must also shout, the speaker intones, “for the States coming back!” Rather than spurning former traitors, Northerners must “draw them so near, it will seem/One heart only throbs in the Union!” In “The Peace Jubilee,” Kidder makes clear why this happy reconciliation is possible.¹¹⁷ Once again, Columbia is the agent of victory, freedom, and reconciliation. “Fair Columbia,” Kidder’s speaker proclaims, “resplendent with beauty,/From the fiery baptism comes forth;/She hath cancelled, by doing her duty,/The sins of the South and the North.” Having survived the war and promulgated freedom, Columbia allows for the reconciliation of two formerly belligerent entities.

A cartoon published in *Harper’s Weekly* in May of 1865 encapsulates Columbia’s role in narratives of reconciliation and Reconstruction. Titled *The Return Home*, the cartoon portrays a youthful Columbia addressing a Union soldier on his way home from the war (figure 1.9).¹¹⁸ “Tell me, Soldier,” Columbia says, “did you not pass a Wayward Sister of mine on the road?” A female figure carrying luggage heads toward the pair, walking on a path marked “to the U.S.” “I did,” replies the soldier. “I fetched her a good part of the way myself, but she says she didn’t require my services any more now; and here she comes over the hill.” The soldier has done his duty and it is now up to Columbia to bring her errant sister back into the family fold. The cartoon seems to imply the process might be difficult. Depicted as Columbia’s sisters or her children, the Southern states would not return willingly.

¹¹⁷ Mrs. E.A. Kidder, “The Peace Jubilee,” *The Liberator* 35, no. 29 (July 21, 1865): 116.

¹¹⁸ *The Return Home*, *Harper’s Weekly* 9, no. 438 (May 20, 1865): 320.



Figure 1.9: *The Return Home* (1865)

Dainty and adolescent, the Columbia in *The Return Home* is no longer the fierce and bellicose figure of the war years. However, she also no longer suffers the threat of dismemberment and degradation. More than Brother Jonathan or Uncle Sam, Columbia embodied the Union for Civil War Americans. Extremely popular in artistic and literary narratives of the war, Columbia aligned the symbolic feminine with the waging of war, the process of emancipation, and the horrible effects of violence. Though the allegorical representatives of the Union and the Confederacy threaten to obscure the fact that women served non-symbolic roles in the conflict and suffered real and lasting wounds, they also insert the feminine into the public and political realm of the war. Leading men to battle, breaking the shackles of slaves, and mourning the fallen, Columbia and her sisters fill the pages of Civil War periodicals and perform important roles in the process of war, the recording of loss, and the promise of victory.

Chapter 2

The “Body Electric” Goes to War: Whitman’s Union and the Individual

“The war is over—yet never over....out of it, we are/born to real life and identity.” “Song of the Banner at Day-Break”¹

In the 1871-2 and 1876 editions of *Leaves of Grass*, four lines of poetry precede the section titled “Drum-Taps,” Whitman’s verse record of his experience of the war.² Later inserted into the first verse paragraph of “The Wound-Dresser,” the lines encapsulate the trajectory of Whitman’s war:

Arous'd and angry,
I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead.³

Whitman’s speaker, like many of his fellow Americans, is at first caught up in the patriotic fervor at the outset of the war. In poems like “Beat! Beat! Drums!”, Whitman urges the North to war, the preservation of the Union foremost in his mind. However, as the war begins in earnest and Whitman witnesses its effects, his tone changes and the plight of the individual soldier becomes as important as the struggle for the Union. In the four-line epigraph, Whitman traces his progression from a poet calling his countrymen to action to a quiet and stoic nurse. The transition is written on his body, his hands and face testifying to the changes wrought by his interaction

¹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Washington, D.C., 1872), 326, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1871/whole.html>.

² For the publishing history of *Leaves of Grass* and *Drum-Taps*, see the Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves of Grass*, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: Norton, 1973). For information on the first poem of *Drum-Taps*, see pages 279-281.

³ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1872), 261.

with the harvest of war—the corpses, wounds, and piles of limbs that once belonged to the “good gray” poet’s beloved soldier boys. The “body electric”⁴ of Whitman’s antebellum poetry goes to war in *Drum-Taps*, and is marked and marred by battle. Broken, decomposing, wounded, dying, in the prime of life, or dead, soldiers’ bodies are an archive of the war’s progress, a testament to sacrifice and suffering, and proof that the individual human life can never be completely effaced or forgotten.

Many critics invoke Whitman’s role as the poet of the Union, one who abstracts individual suffering and relies on organic metaphors of decay and reintegration to support the North and work for reconciliation. Timothy Sweet discusses Whitman’s writings in conjunction with the photography of Gardner and Barnard, asserting that “in their representations, the wounds of war disappear into a rhetoric of nature and necessity.”⁵ “If death in war is natural,” Sweet avers, “then war itself, and the politics of war, may be regarded as natural” (9). Describing Whitman’s poetic project, Sweet writes, “In *Drum-Taps* Whitman attempts to make sense out of the violence of war, in terms of political representation, by mobilizing rhetorical topoi which detach wounds and deaths from the body (often, without explicitly acknowledging them) and attach them to the discourse of the state” (15). Franny Nudelman writes, “Whitman’s wartime poetry and prose at once renders wounded and dead bodies in detail and uses the figure of the anonymous or unknown soldier to abstract them.”⁶

⁴ Though the phrase “body electric” first appears in the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*, I use it to describe Whitman’s antebellum insistence on the primacy of physical being and the dynamic qualities of the body politic and body social of the United States.

⁵ Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 165.

⁶ Franny Nudelman, *John Brown’s Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 72.

Both Sweet and Nudelman insist that Whitman participates in the abstraction of individual suffering to serve the greater purpose of the Union. Similarly, Luke Mancuso asserts that Whitman's "desire for undifferentiated Union glazed over any lingering doubts about the vast human cost."⁷ However, Mancuso notes that ghosts in Whitman's poems "preclude any such totalized personal, social, or cultural memory" (291). Despite this acknowledgement, Mancuso avers, "Whitman shores up nostalgic voices and revisionist memorialization to justify the Union cause" (300). Christanne Miller compares the original version of *Drum-Taps* to the 1871 incarnation of the poems, arguing that "individuals are celebrated as sacrificial martyrs, not as beings spiritually alive in every particle of their being."⁸ However, martyrdom removes individuality, as living beings become dead sacrifices to a larger cause. The soldiers in Whitman's poems retain individuality in the face of obliterating violence and the promise of national reunion. Though Whitman believes in and supports the integrity of the Union, he never allows the individual soldier—the solitary human body, marked by war—to be completely effaced or forgotten.

The "shock electric" of War

Listing in *Specimen Days* the "sources of character" that shaped his life, Whitman includes his "experiences afterward in the secession outbreak."⁹ His verse and prose accounts of the war document the conflict's shaping influence on both the man and his work. Born in New York, Whitman was a child of the North and of his beloved Manhattan, and laudatory words for

⁷ Luke Mancuso, "Civil War," in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 291.

⁸ Cristanne Miller, "Drum-Taps: Revisions and Reconciliation," *Walt Whitman Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 185.

⁹ Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, in *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia, 1892), 21, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/other/CompleteProse.html>.

the Union soldiers he encounters display his deep ties of loyalty to the North and its cause in the Civil War.¹⁰ Mentioning his personal connection to the war and the event that began his first hand experience of the war, Whitman explains in *Specimen Days*, “in 1862, startled by news that my brother George, an officer in the 51st New York volunteers, had been seriously wounded (first Fredericksburg battle, December 13th), I hurriedly went down to the field of war in Virginia” (16). Whitman found his younger brother at Falmouth Camp and discovered that he had only suffered an unthreatening wound on his jaw.¹¹

Soon after arriving, Whitman began visiting hospitals and writing letters for soldiers.¹² Beginning work as a copyist, he dedicated the rest of his time to tending the wounded.¹³ Living in Washington, D.C., Whitman witnessed the overwhelming presence of the living, wounded, and dying bodies of soldiers. In *Memoranda During the War*, Whitman writes that he “commenced at the close of 1862, and continued steadily through ’63, ’64, and ’65, to visit the sick and wounded of the army, both on the field and in the hospitals in and around Washington city.”¹⁴ Whitman recorded his observations of this “side of the war” in “lurid and blood-smutched little notebooks.”¹⁵ Out of the scribblings “arise active and breathing forms,”

¹⁰ For biographical information on Whitman, see Roy Morris, *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹¹ M. Wynn Thomas, “Fratricide and Brotherly Love: Whitman and the Civil War,” in *Cambridge Companion to Whitman*, ed. Ezra Greenspan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 480.

¹⁴ Walt Whitman, *Memoranda During the War* (Camden, NJ, 1875), 3, <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/other/memoranda.html>.

¹⁵ Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007), 225n.

reminders of the broken, wounded, and dying human bodies Whitman includes so often in his poetry.¹⁶

In *Specimen Days*, Whitman juxtaposes the parades and processions of regiments through the capital with the baggage trains carrying the wounded back into the city. It is not just the presence of soldiers in Washington, D.C. that is overwhelming, but also the presence of the thousands of dead bodies produced by the war. The dead are everywhere, Whitman writes: “there they lie, strewing the fields and woods and valleys of the South—Virginia, the Peninsula, Malvern Hill...the terraces of Fredericksburg...the grisly ravine of Manassas...the infinite dead.”¹⁷ The bodies are unavoidable, and, though dead, continue to assert their presence. Throughout the course of his prose work, Whitman produces “specimens” of what he witnessed during his time as a hospital attendant. Though the word “specimen” connotes scientific delineation, the human element of the suffering soldier is always present. Part of Whitman’s literary project is documenting and praising the individual soldiers fighting and dying for the Union (and, in some cases, the Confederacy). In “The Poem of Many in One” (1856), he evinces his focus on and belief in the individual: “Underneath all are individuals,/I swear nothing is good that ignores individuals!/ The American compact is with individuals.”¹⁸ Whitman’s “compact” and contact is also with individuals, and he endeavors to serve well, both in life and in literary representation, the soldiers he meets. This service involves faithfully portraying the suffering, dying, and bravery of his patients and of the soldiers filling the streets and hospitals of Washington.

¹⁶ Whitman, *Memoranda During the War*, 4.

¹⁷ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 79.

¹⁸ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1856), 197, <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1856/whole.html>.

As Whitman catalogues the cases he tends to, he expresses a love for the suffering patients and their “fine large frames” that is alternately fatherly and erotic.¹⁹ Describing the wounded from the battle of Chancellorsville, Whitman writes, “some have their legs blown off—some bullets through their breast—some indescribably horrid wounds in the face or head, all mutilated, sickening, torn, gouged out...”²⁰ He labels the sights indescribable, but sets himself the task of describing as much as he can. This documenting of the horrors he witnesses is one of the ways he serves his beloved Union and his beloved soldiers.

In recounting the events of his first visits “among the camp hospitals in the Army of the Potomac” in *Specimen Days*, Whitman describes a scene that embodies the disruption, destruction, and unnaturalness of the war: “outdoors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, etc., a full load for a one-horse cart” (26). Recording the same sight in a notebook, Whitman includes more horrific details: “...at the foot of a tree, immediately in front, a heap of feet, legs, arms, and human fragments, cut, bloody, black and blue, swelled and sickening—in the garden near, a row of graves.”²¹ The “full load” of amputated limbs weighs heavily on the poet, and he carries it with him during and after war. Directly witnessing war’s work and harvest, the poet catalogues the fragments of the body he knows and loves so well. A survey of Whitman’s prose writings, including letters and journal entries, reveals his focus on the physical evidence of war’s destructive nature, and his insistence on the relevance of every individual involved in the war.

¹⁹ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 32.

²⁰ Whitman, *Memorandum During the War*, 15.

²¹ Quoted in Charles Glicksberg, *Walt Whitman and the Civil War: A Collection of Original Articles and Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 69-70.

Though *Memoranda During the War* (1876) and *Specimen Days & Collect* (1882) were published after *Drum-Taps* and its sequel, they provide important insights into Whitman's poetic project and document the interactions and experiences that inspired the poems. *Memoranda During the War* consists of pieces that later formed *Specimen Days*, including five articles that were published in the *New York Times* and six articles that appeared in the *New York Weekly Graphic*.²² Whitman published *Memoranda During the War* himself, but found a publisher for *Specimen Days*.²³ "I kept little notebooks for improptu jottings," he explains at the beginning of *Memoranda During the War*, "In these I brief'd cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bedside, and not seldom by the corpses of the dead" (3). These "little notebooks" also provide the material for *Specimen Days*, a text Whitman decides will at least be "the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book ever printed" (8). The fragments—amputated limbs, sights of Lincoln, snippets of conversations with soldiers—come together to provide a testament to Whitman's formative experience during the war, and underscore the ubiquity of death, dying, and the broken human body. Writing years after the war, Whitman describes the little notebooks, noting how "they summon up, even in this silent and vacant room...not only the sinewy regiments and brigades, marching or in camp, but the countless phantoms of those who fell and were hastily buried by wholesale in the battle-pits."²⁴

Whitman cannot conjure up every soldier he tended, but he includes the names of some individuals and describes the suffering, noting the specific wounds and ailments, of many. Ever conscious of his inability to fully represent his experiences and convey the sacrifices of every

²² Martin Murray, "Specimen Days," in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 553.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Whitman, *Memoranda During the War*, 3.

soldier, he addresses the reader, inviting them into the hospital ward and guiding them among the wounded. “I wonder if I could ever convey to another,” Whitman muses, “to you, for instance, reader dear—the tender and terrible realities of such cases (many, many happen’d) as the one I am now going to mention.”²⁵ He continues, describing how Stewart C. Glover, “company E, 5th Wisconsin,” was shot in the knee by a sharpshooter while attempting to help clear the wounded from a battlefield. “Consequence, amputation and death,” Whitman succinctly reports, recognizing Glover’s individuality while relating him to countless others who suffered similar fates. Never able to forget the anguish and heroism he witnessed, Whitman records the lasting influence of the war and his continued awareness and remembrance of those who fought it.

A passage in *Specimen Days* that describes the inauguration ball of 1865 reflects the weight of the wounded and dead on Whitman’s mind, and underscores the centrality of the body to his conception of the war’s cost:

I have been up to look at the dance and supper-rooms, for the inauguration ball at the Patent office; and I could not help thinking, what a different scene they presented to my view a while since, fill’d with a crowded mass of the worst wounded of the war... Tonight, beautiful women, perfumes, the violins’ sweetness, the polka and the waltz; then the amputation, the blue face, the groan, the glassy eye of the dying, the clotted rag, the odor of wounds and blood, and many a mother’s son amid strangers, passing away untended there, (for the crowd of the badly hurt was great, and much for nurse to do, and much for surgeon.). (66)

Though he writes in “As I Sat Alone By Blue Ontario’s Shores” (1872) of “[t]he war—that war so bloody and grim—the war I will henceforth forget,” he recognizes “the war... was you and

²⁵ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 52.

me,” and remembers and records it until his death, never allowing his love of the Union to efface his need to honor the individuals who died for her (324).

Whitman’s earliest documented reference to *Drum-Taps* appears in a letter to his mother written in 1863.²⁶ Whitman sent fifty-three poems, “put together by fits and starts, on the field, in the hospitals, as [he] worked with the soldier boys,” to press in May of 1865.²⁷ Several of the poems in the first edition appeared in periodicals during the war, including “Beat! Beat! Drums!,” which ran in the *Harper’s Weekly* for 28 September 1861. The same poem received space in the *New York Ledger*, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, and the *Boston Daily Transcript*.²⁸ Because *Drum-Taps* was published in May of 1865, Whitman was only able to include one poem about Lincoln’s assassination. “When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d,” Whitman’s elegy for the fallen president, begins the *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, a collection of 18 poems published in October of 1865.²⁹ Both *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* were bound in the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In subsequent editions, the poems not pertaining to the war appear in different sections. Twenty-nine of the original fifty-three poems and nine of the eighteen poems in the *Sequel* remain in the 1881 “Drum-Taps” section.

²⁶ For publishing information on *Drum-Taps*, see the Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves of Grass*, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: Norton, 1973), 278n.

²⁷ Quoted in *Leaves of Grass*, eds. Bradley and Blodgett, 278n.

²⁸ The Whitman Archive (<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00055>) provides transcripts and publication dates for all of Whitman’s published poems.

²⁹ For publishing history of *Sequel to Drum-Taps* see F. DeWolfe Miller, *Walt Whitman’s Drum-Taps (1865) and Sequel to Drum-Taps (1866)* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1959), xlviii.

Though the work received little attention and only a small number of unfavorable reviews, Whitman believed *Drum-Taps* a better work than *Leaves of Grass*.³⁰ In a letter to a friend composed in January of 1865, Whitman writes,

I am perhaps mainly satisfied with Drum Taps because it delivers my ambition of the task that has haunted me, namely, to express in a poem (and in the way I like, which is not at all by directly stating it), the pending action of this *Time and Land we swim in*, with all their large conflicting fluctuations of despair and hope, the shiftings, masses, and the whirl and deafening din, (yet over all, as by invisible hand, a definite purport and idea) with the unprecedented anguish of wounded and suffering, the beautiful young men in wholesale death and agony, everything sometimes as if blood-color and dripping blood.³¹

Paralleling the times, the book is “unprecedentedly [*sic*] sad,” but also “has blast of the trumpet and the drum pounds and whirrs in it, and then an undertone of sweetest comradeship and human love threads its steady thread inside the chaos and is heard at every lull and interstice thereof.”³² Sanguinary and populated by the wounded and the dead, Whitman’s poems foreground the soldier’s body, rejecting sentimental conceptions of painless heroic death and unqualified total victory.

In “Three Years Summ’d Up,” a section of *Specimen Days*, Whitman surveys his years as a volunteer in Washington hospitals, and declares that the time he spent there “arous’d and brought out and decided undream’d-of depths of emotion” (78). His experiences have “given [him] [his] most fervent views of the true *ensemble* and extent of the states” (78). The true

³⁰ *Leaves of Grass*, eds. Bradley and Blodgett, 279n.

³¹ Quoted in F. DeWolfe Miller, *Walt Whitman’s Drum-Taps (1865) and Sequel to Drum-Taps (1866)*, xxviii.

³² *Ibid.*

togetherness of the Union, central to Whitman's conception of the United States, manifests in *Drum-Taps* in invocations of a unified and corporeal body politic. Whitman begins *Drum-Taps* with the "shock electric" of war.³³ The poem "Drum-Taps" inaugurates the collection, acting as a "prelude" (5) and establishing Whitman's focus on the corporeal. The body in this poem is the personified Manhattan, "the lady of this teeming and turbulent city" who gathers her "million children around her" and "le[ads] the rest to arms" (5). Whitman personifies both Manhattan and the Union, and the majestic forms of both embody the might of the North and a unified entity in the midst of disunity and fragmentation.

American Poetry

"The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem," Whitman writes in his prose introduction to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*.³⁴ As a body and as individual states, the Union represents to Whitman an epic poem that "awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it" (iii). Whitman believes that he can "treat" it—that he is the American Poet Emerson called for. From the first version of *Leaves of Grass* to the last, the body politic of the United States and the individual bodies of Americans are central to Whitman's writing of the nation. It is the duty of the American poet, he argues, to "incarnat[e] its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes" and to embody a nation "with veins full of poetical stuff" (iv).

Often portraying the United States as a maternal figure, Whitman praises and extols the fecund and nurturing body of America. It is this body that gives rise to his poems, and he proclaims, "Take my leaves, America!/Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring" (8). The states of the Union and inanimate forms of nature become corporeal in

³³ Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps* (New York, 1865), 5, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/other/DrumTaps.html>.

³⁴ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1855), iii, <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/whole.html>.

the introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, and the human body takes on a grand stature and substance. “Dismiss whatever insults your own soul,” Whitman advises his readers, “and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body” (vi). Again and again, Whitman invokes and underscores the body as a significant and sublime poetic subject.

His fixation on the body stems in part from his dedication to fully representing American existence. Early in his career, Whitman sets himself the task of singing an American song, including all the varied notes and sounds of American life. In a letter to Emerson he includes in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes, “Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and The States face to face, to confront them with an American rude tongue; but the work of my life is making poems” (346). Acknowledging the continuous and assured call for more of his poems, Whitman avers he will “say the word or two that has got to be said, adhere to the body, step with the countless common footsteps, and remind every man and woman of something” (346). His “rude tongue” will continue to illuminate the immortal significance of every aspect of American life, and in “adhering” to the American body, he will reveal the American soul. Answering Emerson’s call, Whitman, the self-proclaimed Poet who fulfills the requirements set forth in “The Poet,” establishes his place in the “founding [of] a literature” (347) for the United States. Whitman addresses America, “grandest of lands in the theory of its politics, in popular reading, in hospitality, breadth, animal beauty, cities, ships, machines, money, credit,” and insists that it must break away from “that huge English flow” (348). “The most robust bard” will sing the songs of the land and ensure that the nation “will have true heirs, begotten of yourself, blooded with your own blood” (348). “What is to be done,” avows

Whitman, “is to withdraw from precedents, and be directed to men and women—also to The States in their federalness; for the union of the parts of the body is not more necessary to their life than the union of These States is to their life” (350).

For Whitman, the Union and the body are inextricable, and the broadness and soundness of one reflect the health of the other. Literature itself is corporeal, representing and represented by the body. An American literature reliant on European forms is “a fine gentleman” whose “flesh is soft” (352). The “strong poems of America” (353) must be grounded in the “the sturdy living forms of the men and women of These States” (354). American poems should not deny the body or sex, the aspect of life Whitman addresses before ending his letter with a prediction of national identity and character and a paean to the work already done by Emerson and the work that remains to be done. “Infidelism of sex” saps the strength of literature and makes it “tepid” and “diluted” (355). “I say,” Whitman tells Emerson, “that the body of a man or woman, the main matter, is so far quite unexpressed in poems; but that the body is to be expressed, and sex is” (356). Noting Whitman’s innovation and daring, Alfred Kazin, in his introduction to *Specimen Days*, describes Whitman as “a kind of lightning conductor to things in the universe that, in the suffocatingly moral universe of so many Americans in the nineteenth century, they were to get only through him.”³⁵ Whitman’s determination to be a conductor of the body is evident in 1860 when he writes, “I will report...sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me—For I am determined to tell you with courageous clear voice, to prove you illustrious” (10). Existence depends on sex; sex depends on the body; and American literature must embrace and express both.

From the first 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass* to the deathbed edition, the individual body is central to Whitman’s poetic project, his ideas about what poetry can and should be, and

³⁵ Alfred Kazin, “Introduction,” *Specimen Days* (D.R. Godine: Boston, 1971), xxii.

his conception of the United States. Averring in the 1855 preface that “[t]he greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is” (vi), and “the attributes of the poets of the kosmos centre in the real body and soul” (ix), Whitman insists on the primacy of the body and its relation to the soul, forming the future of American literature from what has existed and will continue to exist. “Welcome is every organ and attribute of me,” Whitman writes, “and of any man hearty and clean,/Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest” (14). Though Whitman delights in “large, turbulent, brave, handsome” (40) bodies, he also accepts and canonizes “malformed limbs” (21), “venereal sores” (x), “the gashed bodies on battlefields” (71), and “the white features of corpses” (71).

Many of Whitman’s leaves celebrate and catalogue the myriad aspects and types of the human body. Through the many rewritings and reorganizations of *Leaves of Grass*, images of powerful, weak, active, and inactive bodies persist. The “beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the sea” (73) of 1855 continues to swim in 1891, epitomizing the athletic and aesthetic possibilities of the body in his struggle against and eventual defeat by “ruffianly red-trickled waves” (73). The “divine nimbus” (81) surrounding the female form continues to “exhal[e]” (81) in the pages of each edition. Whitman continues to “help the auctioneer” display the wonders of a slave’s body, the poet’s fascination with the structure of “tendon and nerve” (81) overriding moral and ethical considerations. “If life and the soul are sacred,” Whitman argues, “the human body is sacred” (82). The bodies of all humans, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality, fill the pages of *Leaves of Grass*, advertising Whitman’s project and announcing a new way of representing the physical. In what will later become “Song of Myself,” Whitman declares, “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul” (26). “Be not afraid of my body,” he tells his readers in “As Adam Early in the Morning” (1867), and in

doing so evokes a world in which the human body is not shameful or something to be hidden, but something to be praised and revealed.³⁶

The “kosmos” of the Body: Corporeality and the Individual

Whitman acknowledges and praises the bodies of his readers, and forms a connection with them through the shared experience of corporeality. Throughout the different versions of *Leaves of Grass*, he insists on the role of the body in the identity formation of the individual and the community. In “Crossing From Brooklyn Ferry” (1860), Whitman writes, “I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,/I too had received identity by my body,/That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I should be, I knew I should be of my body.”³⁷ “All comes by the body—only health puts you rapport with the universe,” he avers, connecting the health of the body to the health of the soul and the mind.³⁸ In “Proto-Leaf” (1860), Whitman directs his readers’ attention to their own bodies and announces a new literary subject: “Behold! the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern—and includes and is the Soul;/Whoever you are! how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it” (17). He also makes his body a poetic subject, underscoring his physical attributes in his introduction of himself: “Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos,/Disorderly fleshy and sensual eating drinking and breeding,/No sentimentalist no stander above men and women or apart from them no more modest than immodest” (29). Continually singing, modestly and immodestly, his own body and the bodies of others, Whitman figures corporeality as central to existence, selfhood, and literary representation.

³⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York, 1867), 117, <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1867/whole.html>.

³⁷ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 383, <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1860/whole.html>.

³⁸ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1860), 108.

Because selfhood is closely tied to the body, interacting physically with others allows for spiritual and emotional communion. Whitman develops his belief in the importance of bodily acknowledgement and contact, and its spiritual ramifications, before the war, and relies on it in his dealings with and depictions of soldiers. Before the war, Whitman's poetic voice inhabits and acknowledges multitudinous identities on the basis of physical identification and interaction. In "Poem of Salutation" (1856), Whitman answers the question, "what widens within you?" (103). Listing what he hears and sees, Whitman spurns none, proclaiming, "I see ranks, colors, barbarisms, civilizations—I go among them, I mix indiscriminately,/And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth" (116). He salutes the "Austral negro," the "Hottentot with clicking palate," the "dwarfed...Lapp," and the "plague-swarms in Madras" (119), noting that his "spirit has passed in compassion and determination around the whole earth, [he has] looked for brothers, sisters, lovers and found them ready for [him] in all lands" (120). Focusing on the physical attributes of the people he names, Whitman establishes a global community of bodily beings. Through the power of the poetic voice, a transmutation of the poet's body into his subjects' bodies occurs. To those who can read his poems, he advocates a physical interaction with his text. In "Come Closer to Me" (1855), the poet explains, "I pass so poorly with paper and types I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls" (57). Because of this, the reader must "push close...and take the best" (57). Urging his readers to come closer in 1860, Whitman announces, "This is no book,/Who touches this, touches a man" (455).

Attempting to produce tangible verse, to make flesh words and words flesh, Whitman insists on the poet's ability to interact both spiritually and physically with the reader. In the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's speaker assures his readers, "If you have become degraded or ill, then I will become so for your sake" (58). The Poet can perform such a transformation since he

sees and knows all, and is able to “wander all night in [his] vision” (70). A Morpheus-like figure, the speaker relates his nightly wanderings: “I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,/And I become the other dreamers” (70). Whitman’s poetic presence infuses itself into his subjects, and allows him to participate in and appreciate the lowest and highest realms of existence. Unknowingly foreshadowing his hospital work during the Civil War, Whitman describes the poetic presence soothing “the worstsuffering and restless,” “pass[ing] [his] hands soothingly to and fro a few inches from them” (71). Witnessing the “newborn emerging from gates,” Whitman’s “I” becomes part of death and dying: “A shroud I see—and I am the shroud . . . I wrap a body and lie in the coffin” (72). Whitman’s antebellum poetic communions with whole and broken bodies, the dying and dead, ideally suit him to interact, both literally and figuratively, with the bodies of soldiers. In the poems that arise out of the conflict, Whitman’s focus shifts from the bodies of his readers to the bodies of soldiers.

Translating the “uncut hair of graves”: Death as a Poetic Subject

The self-proclaimed “poet of the body,” Whitman is also the poet of death. Noting that “decease calls [him] forth,” he meditates on existence and its end, the life of the soul and the death of the body.³⁹ Critics like Sweet and Nudelman read Whitman’s Civil War poems in conjunction with his antebellum conceptions of death, and fail to note subtle differences in his representations of non-war dead and war dead. In the editions of *Leaves of Grass* published prior to the war, Whitman imagines and invokes the reintegration of corpses and power of the life cycle to heal wounds. Meditating on the nature of grass in 1855, he decides, “it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves” (16). “Tenderly will I use you curling grass,” he promises, for “it may be you transpire from the breasts of young men. . . It may be you are from old people and from women” (16). Sprouting between his toes and called to life by his hands, leaves of grass

³⁹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1860), 455.

embody Whitman's dedication to understanding and celebrating death. "I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women" (16), he writes, and attempts to do so in many of his poems.

Part of this translation is the recognition of continuing life and natural patterns or rebirth and growth. Announcing the fate of the dead, Whitman avers "they are alive and well somewhere;/The smallest sprout shows there is really no death...All goes onward and outward...and nothing collapses,/And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier" (17). Death, in Whitman's formulation, is not an end, but merely a migration through integration from one space to another. In "Poem of Wonder at the Resurrection of the Wheat" (1856), Whitman's speaker ponders the effects of thousands of corpses filling the soil. "How can the ground not sicken of men?," he wonders, "How can you be alive, you growths of spring?" (202). "Distempered corpses" fill the earth, and "every continent [is] worked over and over with sour dead" (202). Not turning up any "foul meat" with his plow, the speaker has an epiphany: "Behold!/This is the compost of billions of premature corpses,/Perhaps every mite has once formed part of a sick person,/Yet Behold! The grass covers the prairies" (202). Grass, green and growing hair, rises up from even the most putrid decomposing bodies. "What chemistry!," Whitman writes, invoking the natural process that "gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last" (205). Whitman never loses his belief in the power of natural processes. However, critics do him a disservice by reading his war poetry in the terms of his antebellum poems that celebrate the peaceful and pure reintegration of dead bodies into nature. The war disrupts natural processes, divides the body of the motherly Union, and sends young men to unmarked graves. Though disintegration and reintegration occur in *Drum-Taps*,

Whitman encounters deaths and ways of dying that cannot and should not be easily covered over by leaves of grass.

In *Drum-Taps, Sequel to Drum-Taps*, and his other writings concerning the war, Whitman focuses on the disunion of the body politic and the destruction of bodies. Closely tied to the bodies of soldiers is their mother, the Union. In the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman announces “a programme of chants” (7), both “Democratic” and “Native American,” and begins with new leaves that incorporate the main ideas of previous versions but look forward to broader possibilities. Disunion is clearly one of these possibilities. In “Proto-Leaf,” the introductory poem, Whitman ponders the future and his place in it. He will make “a shrill song of curses on him who would dissever the Union” (10). “I too,” he declares, “following many, and followed by many, inaugurate a Religion—I too go to the wars,/It may be I am destined to utter the loudest cries thereof, the conqueror's shouts,/They may rise from me yet, and soar above every thing” (11). This is his duty, as formulated in 1856, for “in peace, out of him speaks the spirit of peace,” but “in war he is the best backer of the war—he fetches artillery as good as the engineer's, he can make every word he speaks draw blood” (189). Whitman’s Union is fully blooded, the fierce “Libertad” of dynamism, growth, and power. Having already proclaimed his role as the American Poet, Whitman announces his role as protector of the Union. The poet is a constitutive force, since “by great bards only can series of peoples and States be fused into the compact organism of one nation” (115). Having once fused the disparate parts—gathering together the separate leaves of grass—he must prevent its dissolution and, when that fails, work for its salvation. Whitman can neither heal the severed Union nor save every soldier he nurses, but he can document the struggle that brings Libertad to her knees, and ensure that the individuals who served her will not be forgotten.

The body of the nation is most evident in the veins and brawn of her strong young men. Inspired by his interactions with the workingmen of Manhattan and Brooklyn, Whitman announces one of the main subjects of his work in his 1856 letter to Emerson: “In poems, the young men of The States shall be represented, for they out-rival the best of the rest of the earth” (347). It is these young men who will fight for the Union, fall during battle, and fill the hospitals of Washington. Their brawny and tanned bodies will be broken by war, and Whitman will continue to “represent” their inherent corporeality and connection to the Union. It is his duty, he tells Emerson and his readers, to “express the full-sized body, male and female” (347). It is this full-sized body that fills the pages of the 1855 and 1856 versions of *Leaves of Grass*, and this body that will bear the markings of war in *Drum-Taps*. Prior to the war, Whitman sang the praises of the human body and introduced an open discussion of sexuality and sensuality into the American literary tradition. With the advent of the war, Whitman, a fervent Unionist, transforms his discussion of “the body beautiful” into a portrayal of the destructiveness of war and the resilience of the human spirit as it is manifested in individuals.

The greatest poet, avers Whitman in the introduction to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), “drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet . . . he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you” (vi). In *Drum-Taps* and its sequel, he portrays the coffinless dead, recording the present of the war so it can “walk before” those who read of it after it is past. In-depth descriptions of soldiers’ physical appearances display Whitman’s continued interest in the human body as an aesthetic and sensual object, but minute accounts of wounds and suffering demonstrate Whitman’s desire to provide evidence of the destructive force of war.

Whitman describes the hospitals’ influence on him in a letter written in 1863:

These Hospitals, so different from all others—these thousands, and tens and twenties of thousands of American young men, badly wounded, all sorts of wounds, operated on, pallid with diarrhea, languishing, dying with fever, pneumonia, &c. open a new world somehow to me, giving closer insights, new things, exploring deeper mines than any yet, showing our humanity...tried by terrible, fearfulest tests, probed deepest, the living soul's, the body's tragedies, bursting the petty bonds of art.⁴⁰

Whitman's previously established conception of poetic transmutation now occurs with soldiers' bodies, as he "sometimes put[s] [him]self in fancy in the cot, with typhoid, or under the knife."⁴¹ The "new worlds" he encounters require new forms of art and the inclusion of new poetic subjects. The "infinite dead" and their bodies, the "new things" that must be communicated and portrayed, fill the pages of Whitman's wartime prose and poetry, refusing to be ignored, silenced, or reintegrated into pastoral conceptions of death and decay.

In *Drum-Taps* and its *Sequel*, poems invoking the whole and powerful body of the Union follow poems that document the broken bodies of those fighting for her. This juxtaposition reflects Whitman's continuing preoccupation with the cost of war and contradicts claims that he effaces individuals in his paeans to the Union. Though Whitman has faith in the Union and imagines its victory and continued prosperity, he also remains faithful to the soldiers who earn the victory with their lives. "Come Up From the Fields Father," a poem that documents the effects of a soldier's death on his family, precedes "City of Ships," an ode to Manhattan and a call to action. Addressing the "proud and passionate city," the speaker requests, "incarnate me, as

⁴⁰ Walt Whitman, *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman. The Correspondence, Vol. 1: 1842-1867*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

I have incarnated you” (41). Incarnating the city aids Whitman in his song of “war, red war” (41). The most prevalent form of incarnation in *Drum-Taps*, however, involves the reincarnation of the dead, dying, and wounded. In “Shut Not Your Doors to Me Proud Libraries,” he addresses “Libertad,” the embodiment of the Union, proclaiming, “you will feel every word” (8). But it is not for Libertad that he writes his book. Rather, he dedicates that “which was lacking...yet needed most” (8) to the soldiers who fought the war and inhabit his poems and memory. “A book I have made,” Whitman writes, “for your sake, O soldiers” (8).

In *Specimen Days*, Whitman dubs his years in the hospitals “the most profound lesson of [his] life” (82) and identifies the most important aspect of his education: the soldiers. “I can say,” he writes, “that in my ministerings I comprehended all, whoever came in my way, northern or southern, and slighted none” (82). In his prose and verse works, Whitman endeavors to “comprehend all,” focusing on the individual in the midst of mass death and suffering. “The Million Dead, Too, Summ’d Up” follows “Three Years Summ’d Up” in *Specimen Days* and catalogues the different forms of death and casualty prevalent during the war. Whitman seems most troubled by the “*strayed* dead,” those soldiers who died alone and unidentified.⁴² Numbering the war dead, he lists places of death and the remains of the dead: “somewhere they crawl’d to die, alone, in bushes, low gullies, or on the sides of hills—there, in secluded spots, their skeletons, bleach’d bones, tufts of hair, buttons, fragments of clothing, are occasionally found yet” (83). The physical evidence of the dead remains, though they were “taken from us,” but the “camp graves” and “single graves left in the woods or by the roadside” are often unmarked and sometimes “obliterated” (83). “Vast trenches [and] depositories of slain” are identified only by “the significant word *Unknown*” (84).

⁴² Whitman’s italics.

In language that seems to indicate his reliance on and belief in narratives of regeneration, Whitman writes of “the infinite dead (the entire land saturated, perfumed with their impalpable ashes’ exhalations in Nature’s chemistry distill’d, and shall be so forever, in every future grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows, and every breath we draw” (84). However, though Whitman imagines the lasting presence of the war dead, he does not do so to comfort himself or his readers. Rather, he insists that such “chemistry” is not enough and must be combined with the intangible monument of memory. Whitman’s invocation of the “significant word *Unknown*” follows his meditation on the “impalpable ashes’ exhalation,” a reminder that the work of memory must continue as the bodies “crumble” (84). “A national monument has been put up here,” he writes of a battlefield in Salisbury, North Carolina, “but what visible, material monument can ever fittingly commemorate that spot?” (84).

In *Drum-Taps* and its sequel, the bodies of soldiers become literary monuments intended to memorialize and honor the dead. While war obliterates individuals and creates thousands of “unknowns,” Whitman focuses on recuperating the individual body and ensuring that the soldiers he loved so well will not be forgotten. Though he avers in *Specimen Days* that “the real war will never get in the books” and that “the actual soldier of 1862-’65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his fierce friendship...and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp...will never be written—perhaps must not and should not be,” Whitman does his part to ensure that the “fervid atmosphere and typical events of those years” are not “totally forgotten” (85). In poems that underscore the physical nature of war, poems about individual soldiers, journalistic poems intended to transport the reader to scenes of war, and poems focusing on the aftereffects of battle, Whitman communicates the cost of keeping the Union intact and mighty, focusing on the bodies of those who fight. Whitman indeed

sees himself as the poet of the Union cause, but he grounds his writings in the corporeal, memorializing and mourning bodies and presenting the destruction of war in all its gore and agony.

In “Song of the Banner at Day-Break,” Whitman’s Poet announces a “new song, a free song,” one that does not rely on “book-words” but instead “is there in the open air...with the banner and pennant a-flapping.”⁴³ The war requires new language, and the poet avers, “I’ll put the bayonet’s flashing point—I’ll let bullets and slugs whizz;/I’ll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of joy.” Fully blooded and corporeal, Whitman’s language and verse answer the banner’s “ironical call and demand.” “Ironical” because the flag is inanimate and “insensate,” the banner’s demand insists on a faithful representation of the states, in their peaceful condition and in “terror and carnage also.” The exuberant language is typical of Whitman’s poems concerning the beginning of the war, but is tempered by references to death and destruction and by the following poem in the collection.

Different in tone, “By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame” records the musings of an individual, who seems to be a soldier, surrounded by “tender and wond’rous thoughts/Of life and death” as he stares at a campfire.⁴⁴ While Whitman must infuse his words with blood to sing war’s song, he must also employ meditative and cerebral language to fully portray the experiences of individual soldiers. The juxtaposition of “Song of the Banner at Day-Break” and “By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame” is indicative of a common occurrence in *Drum-Taps*: poems excitedly lauding the Union and the nascent power of her people precede poems depicting extreme suffering and individual sacrifice. For this reason, it is important to read *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* as collections, rather than isolating poems and defining Whitman’s poetic project

⁴³ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 9-14.

⁴⁴ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 16.

on the basis of one or two exuberantly patriotic paeans to the Union. Whitman's war is corporeal and defined by suffering and sacrifice, and its effects are written on the bodies of those who experienced it.

Following "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame," "1861" indicates Whitman's corporeal focus and continues his antebellum celebration of "well-gristled bod[ies]" and physical strength.⁴⁵ The strong marching form of a soldier embodies the first "terrible year" of the war, his "sonorous voice ringing across the continent." An "arm'd year," 1861 is both defined by a call to arms and personified in the bodies of those who answer it. The year is no "pale poeting" fit for "dainty rhymes," but "a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on [his] shoulder." With "sinewy limbs, clothed in blue," the year is a Union soldier with a "determin'd voice." "I repeat you," Whitman writes, "hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year," and acknowledges sadness in the midst of exuberance. Similar embodiment occurs in "Rise O Days From Your Fathomless Deeps," as Northern cities prepare for war and rise up "deadly and savage."⁴⁶ Martial Manhattan "advanc[es] with menacing front" and Cincinnati and Chicago are "unchain'd." The cities rise in support of "DEMOCRACY," who, "with desperate vengeful port strides on." While "warlike America rise[s]," the speaker is distracted by "a mournful wail and low sob...heard through the dark,/In a lull of the deafening confusion." Placed in a parenthetical comment, the wail detracts from the resoundingly martial tone of the poem. Democracy will "strike with vengeful stroke," but will receive many deathblows in return. Despite the "springy gait" of the year and the "cities electric," 1861 begins a period of mass death and suffering, and Whitman does not allow his joy in strong bodies to efface the cost to individuals.

⁴⁵ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 17.

⁴⁶ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 35-7.

Though clearly dedicated to the Union, Whitman insists on the continued primacy of the individual. In “Quicksand Years that Whirl Me I Know Not Whither,” the poet avers that “schemes, politics, fail” and “[o]nly the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd soul, eludes not.”⁴⁷ “One’s-self, must never give way,” he continues, “that is the final substance—that out of all is sure;/Out of politics, triumphs, battles, death.” Out of battle and death, totalizing forces that often erase identity, the individual remains and must be recognized. Whitman could be invoking the physical remains of the individual as well as the spiritual. The bodily remains of a soldier testify that the dead once lived and that the “quicksand years” occurred. The individual must not and cannot be effaced or forgotten, and the poet who sings “one’s self” must sing the selves of others.

Drum-Taps and its sequel contain poems that depict the remains of individuals, anonymous soldiers who bleed and die in Whitman’s memory and on the page. In “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim,” three men are sacrificed to the forces of war and violence.⁴⁸ Using the trope of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, Whitman portrays a young anonymous soldier as a sacrificial victim. In Christian ideology and iconography, Christ’s dying, dead, and resurrected body has the same level of agency as his living body. Represented in paintings, imagined in sermons, and displayed on crucifixes, Christ’s wounded body serves as the impetus for reflection, worship, and belief. By linking the corpse in his poem to the body of Christ, Whitman displays the continued power of dead bodies in the minds of those who are alive. Working within the Christian tradition of sacrifice and martyrdom, he marks the soldier’s corpse as a sacrificial victim to violence and hatred.

⁴⁷ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 30.

⁴⁸ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 46.

Though dead, the three corpses present in the poem retain some form of agency in serving as the impetus for the speaker's thought process. Whitman's speaker describes "three forms" laid on an "ample brownish woolen blanket." "Folding, covering all," the blanket resembles the soil that will soon cover the three corpses. Lifting the blanket, the speaker sees an "elderly man" and a "sweet boy." One young and "blooming," and the other old and "gaunt," the two figures display the spectrum of soldiers that served in the war. The third figure, with "face nor child nor old," is familiar to the speaker. "Young man I think I know you," the speaker states, and declares, "this face is the face of the Christ himself." Sacrificed to violence, the corpse is "dead and divine and brother of all." By likening the third corpse to Christ and writing "here again he lies," Whitman places the fallen soldier in a progression of human sacrifices to violence, hatred, and war. By implying that in fighting the Civil War the United States has re-crucified Christ, Whitman communicates the horrific nature of war. Though Whitman constantly supports the soldiers and the cause of the Union, poems like "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim" reveal how troubled he is by the overwhelming violence and sacrifice involved in fighting the war.

During his service in the hospitals, Whitman wrote many letters for soldiers, sending news of their health and often of their deaths to their families and loved ones. In "Come Up to the Fields Father," Whitman gives a dead soldier a name and dramatizes his family's learning of his death, imagining the effects of a letter such as the ones he wrote.⁴⁹ A sister of the soldier calls for his father and mother, announcing "a letter from our Pete." Whitman invokes a region separate from the fighting, where "the trees, deeper green, yellower and redder,/Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages." It is autumn and time for the harvest, but notice of war's sinister harvest disrupts the farm that "prosperes well." The daughter's call, "But now from the fields

⁴⁹ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 39-40.

come, father,” disrupts the “calm, all vital and beautiful,” as Whitman lyrically parallels the interrupting force of the news.

The import of the poem is centered in the bodies of the dead son and the bereaved mother, as war claims two more victims. The mother and father notice that “a strange hand writes for [their] dear son,” and hear in “sentences broken” the reason their son cannot write for himself: “*gun-shot wound in the breast, cavalry skirmish, taken to hospital.*” Pete is, according to the letter, “*at present low, but will soon be better.*” The focus of the poem moves from Pete’s chest wound to “the single figure” of the mother, “sickly white in the face and dull in the head, very faint.” Though daughters comfort the mother, the speaker knows what she does not: “Alas, poor boy, he will never be better...While they stand at home at the door, he is dead already;/The only son is dead.” The letter travels to the family as, if they are lucky, Pete’s remains will, and they are forever changed by it. The mother, “with thin form,” her body and spirit broken by the news of her son’s death, wishes “she might withdraw unnoticed—silent from life, escape and withdraw,/To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead son.” The news and progress of war affect individuals, disrupting and ending lives. Though the poem reenacts a scene that occurred in thousands of households, Whitman focuses on individual suffering and loss. “Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio,” the “single figure” of the mother mourns her son, loss inscribed on her body and her mind.

Many of the bodies in *Drum-Taps* and its sequel become texts that can be read. Aware of the seeming impossibility of representing the war, Whitman attempts to get as close to faithful representation as language will let him. An important aspect of this attempt is the move from generalities or large groups to specificities and the individual. In “A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown,” Whitman acknowledges the failings of mimesis, but also depicts

individual suffering in the midst of widespread strife, underscoring the importance of the individual body in understanding the effects of the war.⁵⁰ His army “foil’d with loss severe,” the speaker is part of the “sullen remnant retreating.” Reaching an “old church” after trekking through “a heavy wood, with muffled steps in the darkness,” a landscape that reflects the uncertainty that follows battle and defeat, the speaker enters the “impromptu hospital.” Though he remains “but for a minute,” he “see[s] a sight beyond all the pictures and poems ever made.” The results of battle are both different from anything yet pictured or written, and beyond the possibilities of representation. Despite his avowals of impossibility, the speaker proceeds to relate the “sight.” In acknowledging the difficulty of accurately portraying the scene in the hospital, Whitman underscores the newness and strangeness created by the war—occurrences and sights that must be documented since they never have been before. Even if representation fails, the attempt is worthy and honors those who suffered that which cannot be communicated.

The speaker’s description of the scene begins with a broad view of the hospital, and Whitman’s verse parallels the process of tired eyes adjusting to a dark room. The hellish room contains “[s]hadows of deepest, deepest black, just lit by moving candles and lamps/And by one great pitchy torch, stationary, with wild red flame, and clouds of smoke.” Peering through the smoke, the speaker “vaguely” sees “crowds, groups of forms...on the floor; some in pews laid down.” In a move that mirrors an important aspect of Whitman’s poetic project, the speaker’s gaze travels from an undifferentiated mass of suffering to an individual soldier. “At [his] feet more distinctly, a soldier” lies, a “mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death, (he is shot in the abdomen).” “Staunch[ing] the blood temporarily,” the speaker interacts with the one soldier in the midst of countless suffering others.

⁵⁰ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 44-5.

As an attendant in the hospitals, Whitman was drawn to certain individuals, and often had to choose which patients to help, since not every soldier could be attended to at once. In “A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown,” Whitman chooses one soldier to focus on, asserting the individuality of the soldier while also acknowledging his representative identity. The speaker is just as concerned with representation as Whitman is, and before he leaves the hospital he “sweep[s] [his] eyes o’er the scene, fain to absorb it all.” Employing the listing trope that characterizes his antebellum work, Whitman describes the scene in its parts, attempting to depict a coherent whole.

Moving the poem from the particular to the more general, the speaker enumerates “faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscurity, some of them dead;/Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether, the odor of blood.” “O, the crowd of the bloody forms of soldiers,” the speaker intones in language that resembles Whitman’s *Specimen Days* descriptions of hospital wards, “—the yard outside also fill’d; Some on the bare ground, some on planks or stretchers, some in death-spasm sweating.” Though the majority of the poem is in the present tense, the phrase “these I resume as I chant—I see again the forms, I smell the odor” places the description of the hospital in the realm of memory. The combination of memory and the present tense reflect the continued presence of the past. Continuing to “chant,” the speaker responds to his commander’s call. Before falling in, the speaker, again moving from the general to the specific, “bend[s] to the dying lad,” whose half-smile and last moments persist in the space of memory and of the poem. He will continue to die and the speaker will continue to march the “unknown road.” Insisting on the significance of the individual, Whitman depicts the continued importance of the fallen, centering his poem in the body of a young soldier.

“Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night” also depicts an intimate interaction between a soldier speaker and a dying young man.⁵¹ Both homosocial and homoerotic, the relationship between the speaker and the dying “boy” illuminates the deep bonds formed on the battlefield and the pain of losing beloved comrades. The “boy of responding kisses” inhabits a liminal space between day and night, life and death, “son” and lover. The ambiguous nature of his relationship with the speaker underscores his individuality and difference from the dying soldiers of countless Civil War poems. Whitman’s speaker keeps a “vigil strange,” recalling the “brave boy” he “faithfully loved...and cared for...living.” Harold Aspiz notes that the inspiration for the poem “may have been an account of the death of William Giggee on September 18, 1862, told to Whitman by a hospitalized soldier.”⁵² The dying soldier and the soldier who watches him die are individuals in an intimate setting, and the loving gaze of the speaker disrupts any abstracting or universalizing.

Though lately the sight of chaotic violence, the battlefield where Whitman’s speaker keeps his vigil is transformed at night. Gone are the clouds of smoke, the cries of the wounded and dying, the pounding of artillery. In the cool, “moderate night-wind,” the only reminder of the carnage of the day is the body “in death so cold” of the fallen comrade. However, the “stars aloft” and the “fragrant silent night” are ephemeral, and the speaker must bury his fallen comrade and end his “vigil of night.” The speaker buries his “comrade swiftly slain” in “his rude-dug grave,” the “chill ground” offering no hope of regeneration or solace. Until Whitman’s speaker buries his “brave boy,” he addresses him as “you.” With the coming of the morning, the vigil ends, and the speaker subsequently refers to the fallen soldier in the third person. The sun rises, but the boy is dead, and there is only the promise that they “shall surely meet again.” Though the

⁵¹ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 42-43

⁵² Harold Aspiz, *Whitman and the Body Beautiful* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1980), 87.

vigil is “wondrous” and “sweet,” the war that brought the boy a “swift” death is not. The boy “dropt at [the speaker’s] side,” falling quietly and ingloriously, and war removes all possibility of a quiet wake in the family home. The poem ends with the body of the soldier “deposited” in the ground, his cold corpse mute testament to the results of the “even-contested battle.” Emphasizing an interpersonal relationship between two soldiers, the abrupt end to their relationship, and individualizing one corpse out of the many that “fell” on the battlefield, Whitman problematizes notions of peaceful and heroic death for a glorious cause.

Most “son[s] of responding kisses” died far away from their families and were often buried in unmarked graves. Whitman is well aware of the disconnect between many of his readers and the battlefields of the war. Part of his poetic project is communicating the scenes and senses of war, and journalistic poems capture moments and moods not witnessed or felt by those who do not fight. Defined by physicality, the war is corporeal in its action and its effects, and it is the poet’s duty to textually embody this corporeality for non-participants. Intended to transport the reader to a world devoid of sentimental notions of chivalry and noble sacrifice, Whitman’s descriptive poems center on individual bodies and *corps* of soldiers.

Whitman enacts similar transportation in *Specimen Days*, piecing together fragments of his experiences in the hospitals to provide examples, or specimens, of life during the war. In “An Army Hospital Ward,” Whitman “specialize[s] a visit” (31) to Campbell Hospital, and uses it to exemplify conditions in multiple hospitals. “Let us go into ward six,” he writes, directing the readers’ attention to “eighty or a hundred patients, half sick, half wounded” (31). “You walk down the central passage,” he explains, and directs the reader to “view the whole edifice and occupants...at once” (31). “Unendurable suffering” fills the ward, and the patients are mostly quiet, “but the pallid face, the dull’d eye, and the moisture on the lip, are demonstration enough”

(32). Whitman's firm belief that the body is "demonstration enough" pervades *Drum-Taps* and its sequel, imbuing the broken bodies, disfigured corpses, and bleeding wounds with agency and communicative power. Central to Whitman's poems, the body resists reintegration and rhetorical silencing. Directing the reader to "look at the patient and mute manner of our American wounded" (32), Whitman figures the soldiers and their bodies as the central issue of the war, one that must be recognized and represented.

Journalistic poems such as "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" and "An Army on the March" foreground the corporeal nature of war, serving as snapshots or close-ups of groups, or bodies, of soldiers.⁵³ In language that mirrors that of a *New York Times* article describing a cavalry procession, Whitman presents "a line in long array" that takes "a serpentine course" in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford."⁵⁴ Directing the readers' attention to the forms of the soldiers, he writes, "Behold the brown-faced men—each group, each person, a picture." Whitman enacts photographic representation through verse, producing a tableau that replicates the calm before battle. Paralleling engravings in popular newspapers, "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" attempts to reproduce a scene from war for those at home. The poetic voice has pictorial potential and abilities, and foregrounds the bodies of soldiers, "negligent[ly rest[ing]]" or moving dynamically during a march. While the cavalry travels leisurely across a ford, the troops in "An Army on the March" move relentlessly forward, the group's physicality highly evident as it "resistless advances." Consisting of seven lines, the poem encapsulates the fervor and energy of battle, but resists romanticizing by foregrounding the "swarming ranks" of "dust-cover'd men." There is no

⁵³ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 8; *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (Washington, D.C., 1865-6), 20, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/other/DrumTapsSequel.html>.

⁵⁴ See Ted Genoway's discussion of the article in "Civil War Poems in 'Drum-Taps' and 'Memories of President Lincoln'" in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 527.

glory, only tireless “press[ing] on.” The sounds of “a single shot” and “an irregular volley” surround the undifferentiated men as they advance, heralding the dehumanization that comes with battle and underscoring the confusing and relentless nature of war.

Unlike “Cavalry Crossing a Ford” and “An Army on the March,” “The Veteran’s Vision” is narrated by a soldier.⁵⁵ Though told from the perspective of a time long after the war, the poem is journalistic in its immediacy. Both the veteran and the reader return to the battle as a “vision presses upon” the veteran. Time collapses as the veteran remembers, and the war returns in present tense. “All the scenes at the batteries themselves raise in detail before me again,” the speaker narrates, and proceeds to recreate the sounds, sights, and smells of battle. Noting the “pride of men in their pieces,” the speaker describes different types of ammunition, but also invokes the results of “great shells” and “grape”: dismembered bodies. Feeling once again the “devilish exultation, and all the old mad joy,” the veteran callously overlooks men in their pieces: “(The falling, dying, I heed not—the wounded, dripping and red, I heed not—some to the rear are hobbling).”

Relegating the dead and dying to a parenthetical space in the speaker’s memory, Whitman underscores the “tumultuous” nature of war and its ability to turn men into monsters and soldiers into killers. Intending the reader to feel, smell, and hear battle, Whitman recreates and remembers the process and results of war. Transported to both the calm before battle and the procession of war, the reader experiences lyrically what they cannot experience first hand. Though “Cavalry Crossing a Ford,” “An Army on the March,” and “The Veteran’s Vision” portray situations before and during battle, the majority of Whitman’s poems focus on the aftermath and the effects of violence on individual bodies. Having taken his readers to war,

⁵⁵ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 55-6.

Whitman brings them to the hospital room and the quiet of the battlefield after the guns have ceased.

In “The Dresser,” later published as “The Wound-Dresser,” Whitman uses his experiences as a hospital attendant to return the speaker and the reader to the hospital wards.⁵⁶ Instructing “you up there,/Whoever you are” to “follow [him] without noise, and be strong of heart,” the old man leads the young children who ask for stories into “dream’s projections.” Cataloging the numerous wounds he has attended to, Whitman’s speaker displays the horrors and the lasting effects of war on those who witness and participate in it. In *Whitman and the Body Beautiful*, Harold Aspiz argues that the wound dresser’s “words seem to be spoken, as if from the grave, by the spirit of the dead poet to the generations of living Americans” (91). According to Aspiz, “the mythic wound dresser has been charged with a solemn duty: forever to rekindle these grim memories in the hearts of his countrymen” (92). By preserving his experiences in verse, Whitman ensures that those who read his poems will understand the horrible cost of war.

Whitman’s speaker is “an old man...looking backward” to answer the questions of “young men and maidens” regarding “those armies so rapid” and the “hard-fought engagements” of the war. Asking the old man to tell them about “furious passions” and “unsurpass’d heroes,” the disembodied voices of the youths speak of war in language used by those who have not participated in battle. “While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,” and young people think of war in romantic terms, Whitman’s speaker uses wounds to introduce reality into the discussion of the war. Though the speaker states that “so soon what is over [is] forgotten,” it is clear that he remembers his experiences and that his life has been shaped by those memories. Following the speaker on his journey through memory, the reader witnesses “clotted rags and blood” and sees, hears, and smells the “hospital tent.” Elaine Scarry argues that “the

⁵⁶ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 31-34.

wound...becomes a way of articulating and ‘vivifying’...the idea of the strategic vulnerability of an armed force.”⁵⁷ As Whitman’s speaker enumerates the wounds he tended to, the vulnerability of the human body in war becomes apparent.

Images of a “crush’d head,” “the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,” the wound “with a gnawing and putrid gangrene,” and “the fractur’d thigh” all serve to communicate the effects of war on the human body. In his study of American war poetry, James Dawes writes, “soldiers become increasingly less human as they are increasingly identified by their wounds.”⁵⁸ This loss of humanity connotes the dehumanizing effect of war and the loss of agency the wounded body experiences. When the speaker begins to describe the wounds he has dressed, the wounds belong to identifiable bodies, but as the poem continues the wounds are entities in themselves. “The stump of the arm” and “the wound in the abdomen” replace the “cavalry-man” and the “soldier.” “In dreams’ projections,” the wound dresser remembers the horrors of war and cannot keep himself from “returning [and] resuming” his duties in the hospital. Through the course of the poem the speaker’s memories become manifest for his audience and the reader, and the stumps and gangrene do not allow for a romantic image of war or the easy covering up of broken bodies.

Rather than insisting on regeneration and reintegration, Whitman underscores the disruptive quality of violence and denies traditional narratives of peaceful death. In the short four-line poem “Look Down Fair Moon,” Whitman juxtaposes “the dead on their backs” with the “fair moon.”⁵⁹ Asking the moon to “bathe this scene” in the first line, Whitman’s speaker seems

⁵⁷ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1985), 71.

⁵⁸ James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the United States From the Civil War Through World War II* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 2002), 49.

to be introducing a beautiful natural image in the tradition of Romantic poetry. Instead, “faces ghastly, swollen, purple” interrupt the flow of “night’s nimbus floods.” Luke Mancuso argues that “the lunar light on the battlefield pacifies the excessive cost to the slain soldiers without burial.”⁶⁰ However, the grotesque and bloated corpses disrupt the tranquil atmosphere presented in the first line, and undercut the beautiful image of the “sacred moon.” Splayed on their backs “with arms toss’d wide,” the corpses are Christ-like sacrificial victims to violence. Though the speaker calls on the moon to caress the corpses, the dead soldiers are no longer receptive to its benevolent rays. The corpses resist reintegration, and there is no comfort in the traditionally benevolent moonbeams. Instead of bathing the scene in warm and comforting light, the moon reveals the carnage produced by war. Disrupting the scene of nature, the corpses illustrate the unnatural process of war.

Breaking away from traditional representations of war as heroic and productive, Whitman instead grounds his portrayal of war’s violence in the human corpse. Franny Nudelman argues that, though some writers used idealized portrayals of soldiers’ bodies to glorify the war, often “the corpse—contorted, dismembered, unrecognizable—could not be idealized.”⁶¹ However, Nudelman also avers that “Whitman was determined to give death a transcendent purpose that is very much in keeping with the interests of the state” (72). Though Whitman imagines the decomposition and reintegration of the corpse in some of his writings, several of his poems contain corpses that cannot be reconstituted. Unlike most of the poems in *Drum-Taps*, “Pensive On Her Dead Gazing, I Heard the Mother of All” is narrated by Mother Nature, a figure closely

⁵⁹ Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 66.

⁶⁰ Luke Mancuso, “Civil War,” in *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 306.

⁶¹ Nudelman, *John Brown’s Body*, 2.

connected to Columbia, not Whitman's traditional poet-speaker.⁶² Nature asks that her dead be "absorb[ed]—my young men's beautiful bodies absorb[ed]," but Whitman seems to acknowledge that forgetting through complete absorption is impossible.

In "Old War Dreams," first published in the 1872 version of *Leaves of Grass* under the title "In Midnight Sleep," Whitman's speaker communicates the lasting influence the war and memories of corpses have on him.⁶³ Though long buried, "the dead on their backs" return to haunt the speaker as he attempts to sleep. The corpses lie "with arms extended wide," crucified by the horrible violence of war. Death in war destroys identity and humanity, and corpses of humans become "the heaps." All humanity is gone and human beings become inanimate objects that must be "gather[ed]." The violence and horror of war are evident in the "heaps" of dead bodies, but are also present in the speaker's psychological journey in relationship to the corpses. Having once "moved with callous composure" through "carnage" and "away from the fallen," he now can no longer escape the memory of what he saw. The speaker implies that he has been hardened by the conditions of war, able to view dead human beings as "heaps." Through the conflicted feelings of the speaker towards the corpses of "the fallen," Whitman suggests that those who survive war are also physically and psychologically damaged by its violence.

In portraying soldiers' corpses as disruptions in nature, Whitman works against prevalent tropes of decomposition and reintegration. According to Nudelman, "during the war the body's decomposition emerged as a powerful figure for the subordination of identity, indeed the sacrifice of life itself, in the name of national community" (6). Nudelman writes that many politicians and artists imagined "that the battlefield dead nourished the earth as they decayed,"

⁶² Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, 71.

⁶³ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1872), 27.

and thus created “a potent figure for the process through which death creates life” (2). Such portrayals worked within antebellum views of death, and did not reflect the reality of war. While Nudelman argues that Whitman “celebrat[es] the decay of the soldier’s corpse” (6), Whitman’s statement in *Specimen Days* that “the infinite dead” are “distill’d...in every future grain of wheat or ear of corn, and every flower that grows” (79) can be interpreted as portraying the lasting effects of the violence of war. The United States was forever changed by the Civil War, and Whitman acknowledges this by communicating the presence of the war dead in every “breath we draw.” Instead of “celebrating” the violent deaths he describes earlier in the passage, Whitman seems to seek reassurance in the continuing processes of nature, which cannot be stopped by mass slaughter and war. The decay of soldiers’ bodies does not justify the war or the sacrifice caused by it, but instead displays the lasting influence of war on the physical, emotional, and psychological landscape of the United States.

Whitman’s poems of decay and regeneration should be read together with his poems in which the bleeding, dying, and dead bodies of soldiers cannot be reintegrated. In several poems, Whitman does imagine the “chemistry” of reintegration; however, though these poems seek solace in natural processes, they do not excuse or erase the loss and destruction caused by the war. Rather, they underscore the ubiquitous presence of dead and dismembered bodies, and seek some form of solace that does not involve forgetting or misremembering. Instead of effacing the individuality of the soldiers he loves so well, Whitman insists on recognizing their personhood and memorializing their sacrifice. Exemplifying this search for solace and for fitting memorialization is “When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom’d,” the elegy for Lincoln that begins *Sequel to Drum-Taps*.

“The large sweet soul that has gone”

Deeply affected by Lincoln’s death, Whitman mentions the president throughout *Specimen Days*, recording his impressions of the man during the war and mentioning Lincoln’s physical appearance multiple times. He avers that “none of the artists or pictures has caught the deep, though subtle and indirect expression of this man’s face,” a face he describes as “dark brown...with the deep-cut lines, the eyes, always...with a deep latent sadness” (43). Describing Lincoln’s second inauguration, Whitman writes, “He...look’d very much worn and tired; the lines, indeed, of vast responsibilities, intricate questions, and demands of life and death, cut deeper than ever upon his dark brown face; yet all the old goodness, tenderness, sadness, and canny shrewdness, underneath the furrows” (66). The strife of leading during wartime and the weight of holding the Union together are writ on Lincoln’s face and form—a form that Whitman feels drawn to, adding parenthetically that he “never see[s] that man without feeling that he is one to become personally attach’d to, for his combination of purest, heartiest tenderness, and native western form of manliness” (66).

For Whitman, Lincoln represents “UNIONISM” and “seal[s] it with his life.”⁶⁴ In language that seems to confirm Whitman’s devaluation of the individual in his dedication to the Union, Whitman writes of Lincoln’s death, “He was assassinated—but the Union is not assassinated—*ça ira!* One falls, and another falls. The soldier drops, sinks like a wave—but the ranks of the ocean eternally press on. Death does its work, obliterates a hundred, a thousand—president, general, captain, private—but the Nation is immortal.”⁶⁵ French for “it will be fine,” *ça ira* is part of a refrain in a song popular during the French Revolution, and is thought to have

⁶⁴ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

originated in Benjamin Franklin's answer to questions about the American Revolution.⁶⁶

Somewhat flippant, Whitman's inclusion of the phrase seems ironic, as do the sentences that follow. He is almost callous in denying the power of death to defeat the nation, and, were it not for his many expressions of sadness and mourning, this statement would confirm Whitman as a Union apologist who neglects individual suffering.

In "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Whitman contradicts the strangely blithe language of the passage in *Specimen Days*.⁶⁷ Whitman's belief in the importance and significance of the Union allows for recognition of the individual. According to Luke Mancuso, "Whitman's idealization of the beatific memory of thousands of war dead mobilizes the text as an apology for the work of war's wheels" (306). However, the Whitman of *Drum-Taps*, its sequel, and subsequent versions of *Leaves of Grass* is not as comfortable with "Death's work" and the obliteration of thousands as he appears to be in the passage written during the aftermath of the assassination. Mourning the "the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands," Whitman produces a chant for the "dead [he] loved so well," proving that, while the Union remains, that which was lost should be remembered and cherished. "I mourn'd," Whitman writes, "and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring." Though "ranks of the ocean eternally press on," so too do memory and love.

Very aware of Lincoln's body before the president's death, Whitman makes the fallen leader's corpse the centerpiece of his elegy. Describing the weather during the last months of the war in *Specimen Days*, a few sections before discussing Lincoln's death, Whitman notes "many a

⁶⁶ "ça ira," *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles. (Oxford University Press, 2006), *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e1198>.

⁶⁷ Whitman, *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, 3-21.

remarkable, many an unprecedented expression of the subtle [*sic*] world of air above us and around us” (65). One of these expressions occurred “as the President came out on the capitol portico” (65). “A curious little white cloud,” Whitman explains, “the only one in that part of the sky, appear’d like a hovering bird, right over him” (65). Also, the “Western star, Venus, in the earlier hours of evening, has never been so large, so clear; it seems as if it told something, as if it held rapport indulgent with humanity, with us Americans” (66).

In the eighth stanza of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Whitman’s speaker addresses the “Western star,” averring, “Now I know what you must have meant, as a month since we walk’d...As I saw you had something to tell, as you bent to me night after night.” Full of woe, the star resembles the somber Lincoln of *Specimen Days*. Addressing both the star and the president, Whitman underscores the significance of Lincoln’s existence and invests his body with continued agency and meaning. Just as the fallen captain’s body of “O Captain! My Captain!,” another poem inspired by Lincoln’s death, is the focal point of mourning and memory, Lincoln’s casket represents the man and the thousands of individuals who fought in the war.⁶⁸

The arrival of lilacs in the first stanza of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” also marks the “early droop[ing]” of “a great star...in the western sky.” In the second stanza, Whitman’s mourning speaker invokes the “powerful, western, fallen star” and laments its falling. Exemplifying what Whitman terms in *Specimen Days* “the western form of manliness” (64), Lincoln becomes the fallen star in the poem, mourned by the speaker and by a “shy and hidden bird,” a thrush that must sing lest he die. The lilac, the star, and the thrush, the “trinity” spring brings, provide the setting for Lincoln’s casket as it makes its way “over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities.” Whitman’s speaker, closely aligned with the thrush producing “Death’s

⁶⁸ Whitman, *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, 13.

outlet song of life,” meets the coffin, saying, “I give you my sprig of lilac.” The speaker mourns not only the individual in the casket—the “sane and sacred death”—but also brings “blossoms and branches green to coffins all.” As ever, Whitman invokes all of the Civil War dead, his poems “roses and early lilies” for “the coffins all of you, O death.”

Just as he struggled with how to best represent and “sing” the experience of war, Whitman agonizes over producing a sufficient and fitting song for Lincoln’s death: “O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?/And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?” Amid signs of spring, the casket reminds the speaker of death and his poetic responsibility. The star and the lilac “hold” the speaker, insisting that he remember and record. As the speaker surveys his immediate surroundings and the American landscape, a cloud, reminiscent of the one in *Specimen Days* that Whitman sees attending Lincoln shortly before his death, interrupts his listing of ongoing life: “lo! then and there,/Falling among them all, and upon them all, enveloping me with the rest,/Appear’d the cloud, appear’d the long black trail;/And I knew Death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.” Once white, the cloud is now black with mourning.

For the remainder of the poem, the speaker walks with “the knowledge of death” and the “thought of death.” Still listening to the bird’s song, his sight opens to “long panoramas of visions.” The first is “the vision of armies,” in which “hundreds of battle-flags,” recalling the progress of Lincoln’s coffin, are “borne through the smoke of the battles, and pierc’d with missiles...and carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody.” The corporeal flags, like Lincoln’s body, carry the markers of strife and war, as do the “battle-corpses, myriads of them,/And the white skeletons of young men” that fill the speaker’s vision next. Again, Whitman creates a poetical trinity—the flag, representative of the broken nation; Lincoln’s

corpse, defined by “Unionism” and marking its survival in his body; and the “debris and debris of all dead soldiers,” the bones and blood that saturate the ground and shape the future. All parts of the trinity pass into the past, and “the living remain[er] and suffer[er].”

Walking with the “knowledge of death” and the “thought of death,” the speaker recognizes the dead are “not as was thought”—there is some comfort in understanding they no longer suffer, but mourning and remembrance must continue. The speaker recognizes that continuing the song is “to the tally of [his] soul.” Though he wonders if he “must leave” the lilac and his song, he decides he will keep “the tallying chant, the echo arous’d in [his] soul.” “Yet each I keep, and all,” the speaker avers, “Comrades mine, and I in the midst, and their memory ever I keep—for the dead I loved so well.” The dead he loves so well, Lincoln and the myriad soldiers who fought and died, remain as long as the lilac continues to return in the spring. The Union is “immortal,” as Whitman insists in *Specimen Days*, but so is his song. Though the dead no longer suffer and Lincoln is buried in his grave, the memory of the war and “the sweetest, wisest soul of all [the speaker’s] days and lands” are “twined with the chant of [his] soul.”

Whitman describes this chant in the 1872 version of “Shut Not Your Doors to Me, Proud Libraries.”⁶⁹ Originally published in *Drum-Taps*, the poem announces “forth from the army, the war emerging—a book.” To the 1872 version, Whitman adds that the book is not

felt by the intellect,/But you, ye untold latencies, will thrill to every page;/Through Space and Time, fused in a chant, and the flowing, eternal identity;/To Nature, encompassing these, encompassing God—to the joyous, electric All,/To the sense of Death—accepting, exulting in Death, in its turn, the same as life,/The entrance of Man I sing.” (118)

Whitman adds to the 1872 version of “Song of the Banner at Day-Break” the lines, “The war is over—yet never over....out of it, we are/born to real life and identity” (352). The “entrance of

⁶⁹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1872), 117-8.

Man” parallels this new birth, heralding a world shaped by the war. Whitman’s chant is also born out of the war, and continues to sing its lasting significance.

Central to his song is the body, as many of his contemporaries noticed and sometimes criticized. In the first biography written about Whitman, John Burroughs’ 1867 *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, Whitman’s close friend discusses *Leaves of Grass* and writes, “The human body...receives indeed a treatment which may well strike society with wonder, and which, from the conventions of the day, it is not easy to penetrate or comprehend.”⁷⁰ Burroughs suggests that Whitman “seems to gaze in a mood of awe and worship upon the mere material human body” (30), and that “the purity of the Body in its juices and vascular and vital attributes, and all its organs, is, in fact, one of the lessons, if not the chief lesson of the book” (31). Considered indecent by many, Whitman introduced the human body as a valid and important literary subject, and responded to the war by insisting on the significance of every individual involved in the war, and the effects of the war as they are written on human bodies.

In “As I Sat Alone by Blue Ontario’s Shores,” Whitman reflects on the end of the war and the future of the nation. In the 1867 version, Whitman writes, “I have sped to the camps, and comrades found and accepted from every State,/I am willing to wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of myself,/I reject none, I permit all” (16-17). In 1872, Whitman adds four lines after “from every State”: “(In war of you, as well as peace, my suit is good, America—sadly I boast;/Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean'd, to breathe his last;/This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourish'd, rais'd, restored,/To life recalling many a prostrate form)” (322). In *Drum-Taps* and its sequel, Whitman recalls many a soldier’s form, “rejecting none,” remembering and honoring all.

⁷⁰ John Burroughs, *Notes on Walt Whitman, as Poet and Person* (1867), (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971), 30.

Chapter 3
“The bones of the black man”: From Slave to Soldier to Citizen

Benevolent and framed by corn tassels, an African American slave smiles on the front of an envelope printed in 1861. Created in Cincinnati, Ohio, the envelope places the black man next to a map of the “Seat of War,” a labeled diagram of the Chesapeake Bay (figure 3.1).¹ The words “I’se De INNOCENT CAUSE Ob All Dis War Trubble” appear beneath the illustration of the slave. Printed in the first year of the war, the envelope communicates the inextricable relationship between African American slaves and the Civil War. While many Americans spoke of states’ rights and the eternal oneness of the Union as justification for war, poems, newspaper accounts, and images produced between 1861 and 1865 document slaves’ central importance to both sides of the conflict. Enclosing the letters of Americans highly conscious of the significance of the war, the envelope foregrounds a non-threatening, benign black man as both cause of and innocent non-participant in civil strife. Another envelope, also printed in 1861, depicts a small slave child attempting to blow up a bag labeled “treason” (figure 3.2).² “We is de innocent root ob dis yere trubble, Mass’ Jeff,” the child says, “but its [*sic*] gwine to take all us poor niggas’ breff away to keep de wind in it.” In this incarnation, the slaves are both the cause of the secession crisis and integral to the Southern war effort. Speaking in plantation dialect and featuring large eyes and wooly heads, the stereotyped slaves have no place in the actual waging of war.

¹ *Map of the Seat of War*, (Cincinnati: James Gates, 1861), Archive of Americana, American Broad-sides and Ephemera, Series 1 n. 26313, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>. A similar envelope, also printed in 1861, features the same illustration and dialogue but lacks the map: *I’se De Innocent Cause Ob All This War Trubble*, American Broad-sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 25223, Archive of Americana, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

² Untitled envelope (Cincinnati: J.R. Hawley, 1861), American Broad-sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 25224, Archive of Americana, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

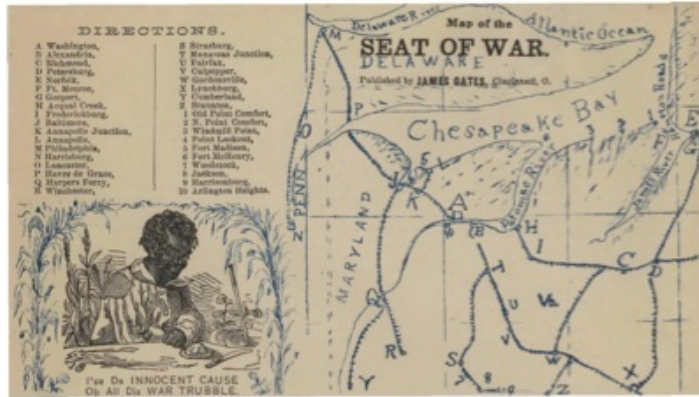


Figure 3.1: *Map of the Seat of War* (1861)
By permission of the American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 3.2: Untitled envelope (1861)
By permission of the American Antiquarian Society.

Four years later, another African American man smiles in a cartoon labeled *A Man Knows a Man*, published in *Harper's Weekly* (see figure 3.3).³ Dressed in a Federal uniform, a black soldier shakes the hand of a white veteran. Both men use crutches and lack left legs. One soldier says to the other, “Give me your hand, Comrade! We have each lost a LEG for the good cause; but, thank GOD, we never lost HEART.” Having participated in the war and sacrificed a limb for the Union, the black man is on an equal footing (in this idealized instance only, unfortunately) with his white comrade. Unlike the innocent and powerless slaves of the

³ *A Man Knows a Man*, *Harper's Weekly* 9, no. 434 (April 22, 1865): 256.

envelopes, the black soldier has earned both citizenship and manhood through physical service and sacrifice. The soldier's missing limb embodies his agency and subject position. Between 1861 and 1865, Americans both black and white, unconscious of the coming failure of Reconstruction and the empty promises of freedom, located the justification for African American manhood and citizenship in the dead, wounded, and scarred bodies of black soldiers. The war's violence was the catalyst for the transformation of the black body from object to subject. Physical sacrifice embodied this transformation and provided Americans with a tangible means of understanding the role of black slaves and soldiers in the war.



Figure 3.3: *A Man Knows a Man* (1865)

The powerless and enslaved black body is central to images and literature produced during the war. However, the powerful and free black body, marked and mangled by war, contradicts predominant and ubiquitous images of the black body as enslaved and innocently responsible for yet distant from the war. This chapter examines how the weak and objectified body of the slave is transformed into the battle-hardened body of the citizen-soldier in poems,

articles, letters, and images published in popular periodicals between 1861 and 1865. The black male body was broken and bled by the war, but this breaking and bleeding was symbolically different from the mangled and scarred black bodies of slaves in abolitionist literature. Beginning with a survey of representations of slaves' bodies in poems and images produced during the initial years of the war, the first part of this chapter documents the central importance of slaves' bodies to both sides' conceptions of the war. The main focus of the chapter, however, is the representation of African American soldiers' bodies in periodical poetry published during the war. Numerous poems, articles, and soldiers' letters equate black service in the war with manhood, citizenship, and racial redemption. While the earlier section establishes slaves' bodies as inextricably connected to the coming of the war, the main section insists on the centrality of black soldiers' bodies to the Northern white public's and African Americans' understanding of the effects of the war. The transformation of the black body from object to subject, from slave to soldier, is one of the central tropes of Civil War literature and should be recognized as integral to the literary history of the conflict.

This chapter seeks to illuminate a significant body of texts depicting the service and sacrifice of African American soldiers during the Civil War and to insert these texts into the literary canon of the war. Because letters written by black soldiers and published in periodicals have been collected and anthologized, this chapter focuses predominantly on poems printed during the war and largely ignored after.⁴ In her study of Civil War sentimental poetry, Marjorie

⁴ For collections of letters written by African American soldiers, see Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *A Grand Army of Black Men* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Noah Andre Trudeau, ed., *Voices of the 55th: Letters from the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers, 1861-1865* (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1996); R.J.M. Blackett, *Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1989). For discussions of African American soldiers in post-Civil War literature, see Don Dingleline, "'The Whole Drama of the War': The African American Soldier in Civil War Literature," *PMLA* 115, no. 5 (October 2000): 1113-7; Jennifer C. James, *A Freedom Bought with Blood: African America War Literature from the Civil War to World War*

Trapp incorrectly argues that “there is almost no mention of blacks at all in either section’s mainstream poetry.”⁵ Poems linking the causes and stakes of the war to slavery, verse depicting the plight of slaves, and articles about black regiments appear in many popular publications, both abolitionist and mainstream.

Literary scholars have examined the role of manhood and the body in African American soldiers’ participation in the conflict; however, literature published during the war is almost completely absent from these studies. An important exception is Alice Fahs’ *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*. Fahs notes the appearance of African Americans in “popular literature including popular songs, envelopes, stories, poems, and cartoons, and novels [which] embraced changes in African Americans’ status during the war—although usually only if they seemed to benefit the condition of Northern whites.”⁶ Central to Fahs’ reading of popular literature depicting black soldiers are “representational strategies” used to “den[y] blacks full membership in the nation” (166). Fahs argues that “heroic death became a dramatic and also convenient way of celebrating black manhood without a sustained imagining of mixed-race society” (172). Fahs focuses primarily on short fiction, a move that allows her to underscore the high death rate of black soldier characters. However, Fahs also recognizes that Northern periodicals increasingly “embraced changes in the status of African Americans...[and] embraced a new diversified nationalism in the public space of popular literary culture” (194). By

II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007). Neither Dingledine nor James looks at literature produced during the war.

⁵ Marjorie Jane Trapp. “Sentimental Poetry of the American Civil War.” PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010. 8.

⁶ Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2001), 151.

inserting poetry published in popular periodicals into the discussion of representations of African American soldiering and its implications for black manhood, this chapter expands on Fahs' work and illuminates ways in which the bodies of black soldiers disrupt narratives of inferiority and powerlessness and resist circumscription and containment. Some of the poems this chapter examines depict the dead bodies of black soldiers, but most imagine a future of freedom and citizenship for African Americans in the post-war United States.

In her work on marked bodies in nineteenth-century literature, Jennifer Putzi argues that, since "American audiences were trained by abolitionist rhetoric to respond to scars with sympathy rather than respect or admiration," the Civil War failed to produce "a progressive redefinition of black manhood" (123). However, Putzi acknowledges that the war "did provide the foundation for a reconsideration of masculinity within both the African American community and the larger United States" (123). I argue that the effects of war's violence are different from the effects of slavery, both in application and in symbolic significance. While abolitionist texts relied on sympathy-inducing depictions of scarred backs, literature and art documenting the service of African American soldiers provide bullet wounds and amputated limbs as proof of a country served and citizenship earned. The texts this chapter analyzes demand respect for black bodies rather than pity by focusing on the transformative force of violence in battle, thus disrupting antebellum conceptions of African American manhood and demanding the reconsideration Putzi describes. An examination of literature produced and published during the war, supplemented by a survey of articles written by Frederick Douglass and other proponents of African American freedom and equality, reveals an important transformation: the free or recently freed black soldier's body, marked by war, demands respect, vindication, and equal rights.

Historical studies underscore the close relationship between soldiering and black manhood. Leean Whites submits that the war provided black men with an opportunity to achieve manhood and Margaret Humphreys argues that “the decision to enroll black men into northern armies was made amid a complex discourse about the black body and its capacity for full manhood.”⁷ According to Humphreys, many white northerners were reassured by the “the mantra of slave to soldier to citizen” (37). Black soldiers could be “civilized and controlled” along with their newly freed brethren. However, Humphreys notes, the “mental weakness” stereotypically associated with black bodies prevented black men from achieving full manhood in the eyes of many white Americans (37).

The century after the end of the war witnessed the proliferation of the rhetoric of what Humphreys terms African American “junior manhood” (37). However, in the moment of the war, many black and white writers believed that the service of black soldiers could and would secure full citizenship and manhood for all African American men. By sacrificing their bodies for the Union cause, black men could vindicate their race and earn an equal place in American society. This chapter inserts poetry published during the war into the critical discussion of black soldiers in the Civil War. Wartime poems and articles closely align the war’s effects on black bodies with changing definitions of black manhood. This alignment opens up a poetic space in which equality for African Americans is not only possible but also assured. Freedom and manhood, these poems and articles suggest, depend on the ability of the individual to control his own body. In his record of the service and sacrifice of black troops, William Wells Brown, the African American author of *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* (1853), includes “a

⁷ Leeann Whites, “The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10; Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2008), 10.

contraband's poetical version of the President's Emancipation Proclamation": "So now we'll pick de cotton/So now we'll broke de corn:/De nigger's body am his own/De bery day he born."⁸

Thousands of black men chose to serve in the Union army, proving that their bodies were their own.

Earning the right

In March of 1863, Frederick Douglass published one of his many calls to arms in his eponymously titled abolitionist monthly. Republished in April of 1863, "Men of Color, to Arms!" calls on African American men to join the cause of freedom and defend the Union.⁹ In Douglass' writings on the war, his conviction that the war will determine the future of American slavery and American slaves never wavers. Though disappointed by the unequal pay received by black soldiers, the seeming unwillingness of the government to protect black soldiers from rebel atrocities, and the barring of black men from officer commissions,¹⁰ Douglass maintains his belief in the necessity of black men fighting to end slavery and echoes the claim made most eloquently in a speech in August of 1863: "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and musket on his shoulder and bullets in his

⁸ William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), 280.

⁹ Frederick Douglass, "Men of Color, to Arms!" *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 10 (March 1863): 801; 5, no. 11 (April 1863): 826-7.

¹⁰ For contemporary commentary on the issues of unequal pay and commissions, see Frederick Douglass, "The Enlistment of Colored Men." *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 851-2; Frederick Douglass, "Letter to Major Stearns." *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 849; "The Government and the Colored Troops." *The Liberator* 34, no. 19 (May 6, 1864): 1; "Duty of Colored Men." *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 850; "A Gross Injustice." *Harper's Weekly* 8, no. 372 (February 13, 1864): 98. For Douglass on prisoner exchange, see Frederick Douglass, "Letter to Major Stearns." *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 849.

pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.”¹¹

Many historians have documented the process of black men getting eagles on their buttons and muskets on their shoulders, while others have traced African American participation in the Confederate war effort.¹² Free blacks in the North enthusiastically volunteered as soldiers at the outset of the war but were initially turned away; others signed on as laborers, wagon drivers, and cooks.¹³ Slaves served their Confederate masters by working the crops that fed the Southern armies, building fortifications, and going to war as servants to their soldiering owners.¹⁴ As more and more slaves flocked to Union lines, the U.S. military and government had to decide how to handle the influx of self-liberated people. Benjamin Butler famously declared the fleeing slaves “contraband of war” and refused to return them to their owners.¹⁵ Numerous newspaper accounts record the service of slaves and contrabands to the Union effort. In “Fast-Day at Tigerville,” published in *The Soldier’s Friend* in 1865, a Union soldier recreates the sermon of an old slave preacher: “Nebber turn you’ back on de Linkum sojers! Run an’ do all de errands fur dem; gib dem to shar’ whatsomebber you’ m got fur to eat an to drink, nuss dem when

¹¹ Frederick Douglass, “Enlistment of Colored Men.” *Douglass’ Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 852.

¹² See James McPherson, *Marching Toward Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1968); James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966); Benjamin Quarles, ed., *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968); Ervin L. Jordan, Jr. *Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

¹³ McPherson, *Marching Toward Freedom*, 12.

¹⁴ See Ervin L. Jordan Jr.’s chapter on slaves as body servants for Confederate soldiers in *Black Confederates and Afro-Yankees in Civil War Virginia* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 185-200.

¹⁵ See Benjamin Quarles, ed., *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 59-60.

dey'm done sick! Pray fur dem ebbery day an' night, my poo' brudd'rein and sistern!"¹⁶ An illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in November, 1861 depicts a group of contrabands marching with picks and shovels (figure 3.4).¹⁷ Directed by a Union soldier on horseback, the contrabands are "under the pay and direction of the U.S." A few years later, many contrabands would trade their shovels for muskets.

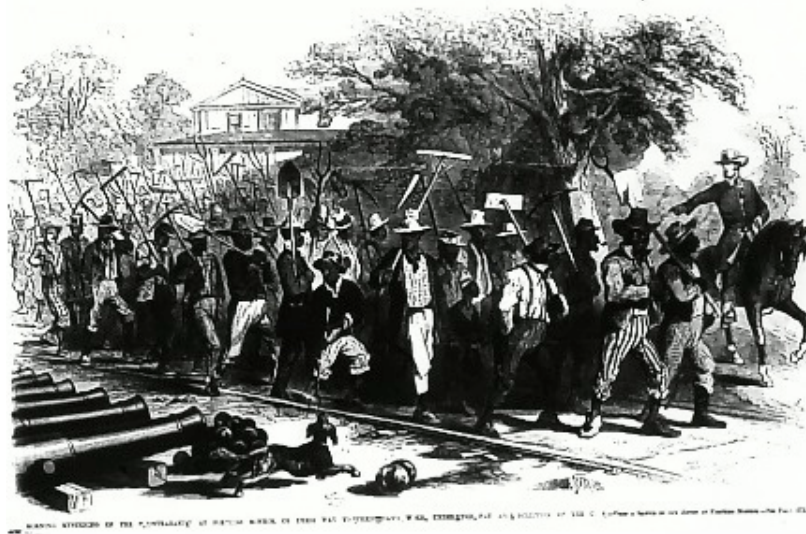


Figure 3.4: *Morning Mustering of the "Contraband" at Fortress Monroe (1861)*

Though the numbers are inexact, around 179,000 African American men served in the Union army.¹⁸ Beginning in 1862, black men signed on as laborers and received less pay than

¹⁶ Col. A.J.H. Duganne, "Fast-Day at Tigerville," *The Soldier's Friend* 1, no. 2 (January 1865): 1. For more accounts of slaves helping Union soldiers, see "Services of Colored Men," *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 2 (July 1862): 675; "Our Corps d'Afrique," reprinted from *Correspondence of Boston Christian Register* in *The Liberator* 34, no. 6 (February 5, 1864): 1. For accounts of contrabands serving the Union, see "What Contrabands Are Good For," *The Liberator* 32, no. 25 (June 20, 1862): 1; "The Army and the Negroes," *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 6 (April 1863): 821-3.

¹⁷ *Morning Mustering of the 'Contraband' at Fortress Monroe*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 12, no. 310 (November 2, 1861): 373.

¹⁸ John David Smith, "Introduction," in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xiii.

white enlisted men.¹⁹ When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863, freeing only those slaves living in rebelling states, he included a provision allowing freedmen to “be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.”²⁰ According to John David Smith, “military necessity, the need to fill depleted units, the need to employ the 500,000 to 700,000 fugitive slaves who had entered Federal lines, and the need to deprive the Confederates of vital manpower convinced Lincoln in late 1862...to free the Confederacy’s slaves and to arm blacks, North and South” (23). Though the majority of black men who served had spent most of their lives in servitude, free blacks from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line joined.²¹ Regiments of the United States Colored Troops served in major battles, often receiving praise for valor and dedication in abolitionist newspapers and more neutral publications like *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News*. Despite their famous contributions at Fort Wagner, Fort Hudson, and Olustee, black soldiers received less pay than their white counterparts until the summer of 1864.²² In her study of the health of black soldiers, Margaret Humphreys reports that over 33,000 died while serving the Union (6-7). In spite of the doubts of a majority

¹⁹ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 789

²⁰ Quoted in John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful that We Have Colored Troops that Will Fight,” in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

²¹ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful that We Have Colored Troops that Will Fight.” *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 8.

²² McPherson, *Marching Toward Freedom*, 123

of white Americans, black soldiers responded to the common question “Will the negroes fight?” with a resounding and historic affirmative answer.²³

As early as 1867, William Wells Brown produced a record of the military service of black men in previous American conflicts and, most significantly, the recent war. Brown’s *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* provides an exhaustive account of the arming of black men and the battles in which black soldiers participated.²⁴ Brown’s account ends with a resolution written at the end of the war by the white officers of the Sixth Regiment United States Colored Troops:

1. *Resolved*, That, in our intercourse with them during the past two years, they have shown themselves to be brave, reliable, and efficient as soldiers; patient to endure, and prompt to execute.
2. That, being satisfied with their conduct in the high position of soldiers of the United States, we see no reason why they should not be fully recognized as equals, honorable and responsible citizens of the same.²⁵

It is important to note that Brown uses the words of white officers to valorize and validate black manhood and citizenship. In much of the literature produced about black soldiers in the Civil War, white men and women declare the manhood of the black race. Such declarations omit the contributions of African American women to the war effort (as do many accounts produced by

²³ For contemporary newspaper articles addressing the question of black men’s ability to serve, see “Will the Negroes Fight?” reprinted from the *Harwich Republican* in *The Liberator* 33, no. 26 (June 26, 1863): 1; “Will the Contrabands Fight?” reprinted from the *Washington National Republican* in *Douglass’ Monthly* 4, no. 9 (March 1862): 618.

²⁴ William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), 379-380. The highest position available to black soldiers serving under these officers was that of sergeant, since African American men could not receive commissions.

black writers) and in many ways maintain the black body in a mediated and non-threatening space. Despite these limitations, literature produced during the war that documents the participation of black men in the military does important cultural work; writers, both white and black, focus on African American soldiers' bodies as sites of manhood, citizenship, and racial redemption.

The very stomach of this rebellion

Though deeply divided in myriad ways, Southern and Northern writers and artists portray slaves as symbolically and physically linked to the sectional conflict. Two political cartoons published in the year of emancipation, 1863, one above the Mason-Dixon and one below, personify African American slaves in the form of specters haunting the white men with whom they are associated. Lacking corporeality, these slaves are not physically threatening; instead, they represent the “Negro problem” at the center of the Civil War. Published in *Harper's Weekly* in May of 1863, *The Slave Owner's Spectre* (figure 3.5) takes Poe's “The Raven” as its inspiration.²⁶ A beleaguered white man sits at his desk and stares up at a black bird with a semi-human face perching on a bust of Horace Greeley, a leading abolitionist and publisher of the *New York Tribune*. A map of the Confederate states lies next to a spittoon labeled “CONSTITUTION” on the floor, indicating the man's affiliation with the traitorous enemies of the Union. The bird, with the large lips and dialect typical of many contemporary white authors' depictions of African American speech, utters, “Nebermore.”²⁷ The poem accompanying the cartoon reads

²⁶ *The Slave Owner's Spectre*, *Harper's Weekly* 7, no. 335 (May 30, 1863): 352.

²⁷ For a discussion of black dialect as represented by abolitionists and by African American authors, see Albert Tricomi's “Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs' *Autobiography* and Other Slave Narratives,” *Callaloo* 29, no. 2 (2006): 619-633.

And the Nigger never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
 On that horrid bust of HORACE just above my chamber-door;
 And his lips, they have the snigger, of a worthless freeborn Nigger,
 And he swells his sombre figger, when I ask him, with a roar,
 “Will you blacks again be Cattle, as you used to be before?”
 Cries the Chattle, “Never more!”



Figure 3.5: *The Slave Owner's Spectre* (1863)

Though the speech bubble attached to the caricature's mouth replaces the v in the famous refrain with a b, the poetic voice of the slave rings out in Standard English, thus undercutting the stereotypical implications of the image. In the familiar cadence used famously by the leading Southern antebellum man of letters, the anonymous poet both invokes the past of slavery and imagines a new world created by the war and emancipation. Published in an anti-slavery periodical, the cartoon reflects the ubiquity of racial stereotypes in the arts and literature; more importantly, however, the cartoon illuminates the complex role of the black body in

representations of the war and its potential to perpetuate or disrupt racist narratives of African American inferiority. Though defiantly opposed to further bondage, the figure of the slave is still “chattel.” Though winged, the animalistic slave remains perched in his former master’s chamber.

While *The Slave Owner’s Spectre* ridicules Southern masters’ dependence on slaves, a cartoon published in the October 1863 *Southern Illustrated News* featuring a slave specter implies that emancipated slaves will henceforth be the burden and responsibility of the North. A rough copy of a cartoon originally published in the *London Punch*, *Brutus and Caesar* depicts Abraham Lincoln as Brutus and a black man as the ghost of Caesar.²⁸ Upon seeing the ghost enter his tent, a provincial Brutus/Lincoln exclaims, “Wall, now! Do tell! Who’s you!” The ghost responds, “I am dy ebil genus, massa LINKING. Dis child am awful Inimpressional.” Labeled the “American edition of Shakespeare,” the cartoon draws on Roman history and the bard to diagnose the situation of the United States after emancipation. The main implication is that Lincoln has burdened and “link[ed]” himself and the nation with “inimpressional” freedmen who must be civilized and made into citizens; however, the artist also implies that in freeing the slaves, Lincoln has betrayed them and the United States. The artist perhaps plays on the fact that many slaves were named after figures from classical history, a practice that often ironically underscored the bondage of black men. Unlike the assassinated emperor, the African American ghost in the cartoon has agency only in his dependence on the great emancipator. Though the Emancipation Proclamation applied only to slaves living in seceded states, the cartoon predicts a disastrous outcome for the entire nation. Lincoln has killed slavery and thus must deal with its ghost.

²⁸ *Brutus and Caesar*, *Southern Illustrated News* 2, no. 17 (October 31, 1863): 136. The cartoon was originally published in the *London Punch* on August 15, 1863.

In both cartoons, African American men embody the cause of sectional strife and inhabit a liminal space between agency and powerlessness. A similar figure appears in “Abra’s Vision,” published in *The Liberator* in September of 1863, nine months after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and *Arthur’s Home Magazine* in March 1864.²⁹ Written in heroic couplets to emphasize the epic nature of both the Proclamation and the subject matter, the poem onomastically portrays the President as a father of biblical proportions. “Abra Ham Lincoln—may his tribe increase!” is both Abraham, the father of faiths and the inheritor of the Promised Land, and Ham, the son of Noah and purported progenitor of Africans. The father of the nation and of the freedmen, Lincoln wakes one night and sees “a grinning negro, black, grotesque, and old.” Speaking in language befitting a Shakespearean ghostly encounter, Abra Ham asks the “phantom,” “What wantest thou?” “I want to know, old Mars,” the phantom responds, “What you be gwine to do wid dis ere chile?” The phantom’s new master, the President intones, “‘Tis written in Heaven, and this is my decree:/Both you are yours henceforward must be free./My word is given; and now, old man, depart.” Upon Lincoln’s pronouncement, the “black and old” man becomes a “fair angel, with his locks of gold/Radiant as morn...” Invoking ideas often expounded by abolitionists, the angel informs the astounded President, “I am the soul of that soil’d earthly thing/Thou saw’st but now.” A white soul lurks beneath the blackest skin, the poem implies, and advocates emancipation on the grounds of shared salvation.

Unlike the haunted slave owner, Lincoln is visited only temporarily. However, the poem, which concludes with Lincoln pacing “all night in thought his chamber floor,” depicts the “grotesque” black body of the slave as a pressing issue that must be resolved. As the father of his country, Lincoln’s freeing of the slaves recognizes, in this poem’s formulation, the potential

²⁹ Henry Peterson, “Abra’s Vision,” *The Liberator* 33, no. 38 (September 18, 1863): 152; *Arthur’s Home Magazine* 23 (March 1864): 162.

whiteness of African Americans' souls. At the spiritual level, the poem implies, the blackest man is white and thus worthy of salvation; instead of rejecting the stigma attached to black skin, the poem depicts the black body as the phantom that haunts American society and politics.

Problematic in many ways, this poem epitomizes the role of black bodies in many poems about the Civil War: black, often grotesque, and fully dependent on "old Mars," slaves' bodies are problems that the conflict must solve.

The "figger" of the slave looms large in many representations of the conflict. Often portrayed as the innocent catalysts for war, slaves are far removed from the contest that will decide their fates. In poems published during the conflict, the emotional, spiritual, and physical suffering of slaves serves as justification for the war. The blood of young white men must be spilled in order to cleanse the nation of its sin. As Jennifer Putzi notes, the scarred slave body in antebellum abolitionist texts serves to inspire both sympathy and anti-slavery action in white readers (102). In texts written during the war, the marked bodies of slaves both silently suffer and loudly call on white men to fight against the slaveholding South. When in 1861 Frederick Douglass claimed that "the very stomach of this rebellion is the negro in the form of a slave," he communicated the centrality of slaves' bodies to the Civil War.³⁰ It is necessary to establish the ubiquity of the powerless and suffering slave body in literature produced during the war in order to understand what literary depictions of black soldiers answer and contradict.

"I cant help dat"

Writing in January of 1861, three months before the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Thomas Hamilton, the editor of the *Weekly Anglo-African* addresses the "impression...that the present strife in the country is on account of the colored man."³¹ Hamilton underscores the

³⁰ Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 354.

removal of black men, and slaves in particular, from the political machinations of the sectional crisis, averring that the black man's "claims are ignored by the political parties which are seeking rather their own particular interests." Since the major participants seem unconcerned with "the cause of the colored man," black men should not be called the "cause of the country's troubles." Hamilton emphasizes the powerlessness of the slaves in the national arena by labeling black men "miserable tools, who have for the last quarter of a century, been playing into the hands of the enemies of the country." Though a member of the group he labels "miserable tools," Hamilton insists that "the advance of the black man is as much indebted to his own positive progress, as to anything else." The Union must espouse the black man's cause and black men must cease being the innocent and powerless objects of Southern tyranny.

In a rhetorical move that matches Hamilton's diagnosis of black men's removal from the process and progress of war, the writer of an article published in the September 19, 1864 issue of *Southern Punch* erases actual slaves from the equation of Southern nationhood and independence.³² Responding to a claim that "the people of the South are not fighting for slavery, but for independence," the anonymous author asserts that this "heresy" is against the interests of the Confederacy. Did not, the author demands, the firing on Fort Sumter "vindicate the right of separate State secession, and did not secession take place because we all felt that if we remained in the Union an abolition President and an abolition Congress would...jeopardize our great institution slavery?" Typically, the article does not mention slaves, focusing instead on the necessary and noble institution. Followed by a report of the fall of Atlanta, the article expresses the desperation of an embattled mindset. The author ends the article by asserting the

³¹ Thomas Hamilton, "The Cause of our Country's Troubles," *Weekly Anglo-African* (January 5, 1861), Black Abolitionist Archive, <http://research.udmercy.edu/>.

³² "The New Heresy," *Southern Punch* 2, no. 24 (September 19, 1864): 2.

Confederacy's doctrine, a doctrine that is based on the dehumanization of slaves and the perpetuation of violence against slaves' bodies: "WE ARE FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE THAT OUR GREAT AND NECESSARY DOMESTIC INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY SHALL BE PRESERVED." That this declaration is necessary reveals an important aspect of Southern rhetoric about the war—an aspect that would grow stronger and more ubiquitous after the war and in the heyday of the Lost Cause: Confederates fight for independence; continuing the brutal and violent subjugation of African Americans is secondary to the goal of a Southern nation.

Unlike the propaganda criticized in the Southern editorial, many articles, poems, and songs published in Northern periodicals depict slavery and slaves as inextricably bound to the sectional crisis and war. However, the majority of these texts portray slaves as uninformed and unthreatening. Published in the border state of Kentucky in 1862, the song "I Cant Help Dat, 'Taint My Fault," allegedly "written by somebody, composed by nobody, and sung by everybody," exemplifies the common literary and pictorial figure of the innocent, powerless, and ignorant slave.³³ Blithely uninformed of the purpose and process of the war, the smiling slave is both the cause of the conflict and blissfully removed from it. A black man dressed in raggedy coat and tails graces the cover of the song sheet, a simple smile on his face. Written from an imagined slave's perspective, the song attempts to replicate black speech by replacing "this" with "dis" and employing eye dialect, which Albert Tricomi describes as "spelling substitutions that do not change at all the pronunciation of the words themselves" (629). The slave speaker's "sum" and "enuff" mark him as inferior and encourage white singers to participate in a circumscribed and unthreatening blackness. "De white folks say," the song begins, "dis mighty fuss, am gittin wuss and bigger, An sum folks dey am mad enuff to say it am de Nigger." The

³³ "I Cant Help Dat, 'Taint My Fault," (Louisville: D.P. Faulds, 1862), Brown Digital Collection Online, <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/>.

chorus, meant to be sung as a harmony by multiple voices (most likely a group of minstrel performers), is the slave's answer to those who blame the slaves for the war: "But I can't help dat! 'Taint my fault; You kin plainly see, De more dis war dey prosycute De wuss it am for me." It is "de white folks [who] sot de triggers," and the slaves are collateral damage.³⁴ The slave serves as a mouthpiece for Southerners and Northerners who believe slavery is a benevolent institution, the existence of which is necessary for the well being of African Americans.



Figure 3.6: *Venus and Napoleon* (1861)

In *Venus and Napoleon*, a cartoon published in *Harper's Weekly* in April of 1861, two slightly more informed slaves discuss the sectional conflict (figure 3.6).³⁵ Bending over her washing, Venus begins the conversation: "You say dey's fitin', 'Poleon." Lighting his pipe, Napoleon responds, "Yes, Marster say dey is, 'cause dey can't get no Coppermise." Venus,

³⁴ The song "Come Back, Massa, Come Back" is similarly sung from a slave's perspective. (New York: Wm. Hall & Son, 1863), Brown Digital Collection Online, <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/>.

³⁵ *Venus and Napoleon*, *Harper's Weekly* 5, no. 226 (April 27, 1861): 272.

believing that a “coppermise” is a tangible item that can be purchased, responds, “Well, my Lor! sooner en’ to fite, dey better git de Coppermise, ef it cos’ a Hundred Dollar; dis ting of Brudderin’ fitin’ is agin de Scriptur.” Relying on information from their master, the two slaves speculate on the sectional crisis and seem ignorant of the fact that the war has anything to do with them. Basing its humor on the purported ignorance of slaves and their simple religion, the cartoon depicts a widely held belief that slaves were ignorant of the significance of the war. The mass migration of contrabands to Union lines would soon make clear that thousands of slaves indeed understood the implications of a war fought for the Union and against slavery. Despite substantial evidence to the contrary, slaves remained the ignorant and innocent cause of the war in many texts and images produced during the conflict.

Though the slave speaker in “Men Ob de Norf,” published in *The New York Independent* and republished in *The Liberator*, is fully aware of the significance of the war for him and his fellow slaves, he and his brethren must rely on Northern white men to “come along” and free his people.³⁶ The anonymous poet creates a non-threatening and faithful “brack man” whose plaintive refrain is “MEN OB DE NORF! oh! oh! come along,/Come along, come along, oh, come along!” “We’s bin a waiting dese many years,” the speaker explains, “Wid patient hearts, but bitter tears;/We’s bin a waitin’ in griefs and pains,/For de break ob day an’ de break ob chains.” Though the speaker repeatedly calls on the white men of the North to come to the rescue, he emphasizes his people’s patience: “We don’t belieb in murder, an’ we don’t belieb in crime...But we’s bin a keepin’ quite, an’ a waitin’ on de Lord,/For we knowed dat our bondage was accordin’ to His word.” Through the poem’s rhetorical machinations, the slave can advocate for freedom without invoking fears of insurrection or black violence. Relinquishing all agency to white soldiers, the speaker provides an answer to one of the main questions of emancipation

³⁶ “Men Ob de Norf,” *The Liberator* 32, no. 29 (July 18, 1862): 116.

(what will the freedmen do to support themselves?) with a plan for life after the day of “juberlee.” “...We’ll work for de white folks de same as before,” the speaker promises his audience, adding only the stipulation that “dey sha’n’t sell our chil’ren and our wives any more.” The bodies of slaves, especially those of women and children, appear often in poems published during the war, encouraging white men to defeat the slaveholding South and rescue powerless black bodies.

As being yourselves also in the body

In many of his speeches and writings about the war, Frederick Douglass underscores the physical effects of slavery, connecting the body to the soul and identifying abolition as the cure for both. Discussing the enlistment of black men in August of 1863, Frederick Douglass rejects both Southern and Northern notions that the war, now in its third year, has not always been about slavery: “View it in any way you please, therefore, the rebels are fighting for the existence of slavery—they are fighting for the privilege, the horrid privilege, of sundering the dearest ties of human nature—of trafficking in slaves and the souls of men—for the ghastly privilege of scourging women and selling innocent children.”³⁷ Employing a common abolitionist technique, Douglass invokes the violence of slavery against the bodies of black women and children. The war, according to Douglass, will determine whether or not the bodies and souls of slaves will continue to suffer the debasing cruelties of bondage. Like Douglass and other antebellum abolitionists, artists and writers active during the war call for the end of slavery and the destruction of the slaveholding South by highlighting the physical ramifications of forced servitude.

Two envelopes printed in the first year of the war provide visual reminders of the pernicious corporeal effects of slavery. Like Douglass, the creators of the envelopes foreground

³⁷ Frederick Douglass, “Enlistment of Colored Men,” *Douglass’ Monthly* 5, no. 15 (August 1863): 850-2.

slave bodies, producing calls to action on behalf of the physically vulnerable. Published in Philadelphia in 1861, one envelope depicts a black man tied to a pole (figure 3.7). A whip, wielded by someone outside the space of the envelope, menaces the cowering slave's back.³⁸ Labeled "the persuasive eloquence of the Sunny South," the image emphasizes the bodily suffering of the slave, but also calls attention to the slave's humanity through the man's mournful gaze. Slaveholders, the envelope implies, rely on violence and dehumanization as their main means of expression. Southern rhetoric is brutally etched onto slaves' backs. The other envelope copies the familiar kneeling female slave with shackled arms uplifted (see figure 8).³⁹ Bare to the waist, the supplicant woman is vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. The prophetic words of Thomas Jefferson ("I tremble for my country, when I remember that God is just") are printed beneath the slave, invoking the idea of slavery as the national sin that must be atoned for. Also reproducing a quotation from Hebrews 13.3 ("Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them"), the envelope calls on the beholder to follow the instructions of the biblical epistle, that urges readers to remember "them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."⁴⁰ Far removed from the cotton fields and canebrakes of the South, Douglass' audience and the senders and recipients of the envelope are encouraged to transport their bodies to a space of extreme vulnerability and danger. Though this form of bodily identification with shackled slaves

³⁸ *The Persuasive Eloquence of the Sunny South* (King & Baird: Philadelphia, PA, 1861), American Broadsides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 25226, Archive of Americana, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

³⁹ *Remember Them That Are in Bonds* (c. 1861-1865), American Broadsides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 25225. A similar figure appears on an English abolitionist badge from 1827. "Heb. 13. 3" is printed beneath the image. National Maritime Museum website. <http://www.rmg.co.uk/visit/exhibitions/atlantic-worlds/?item=254387>.

⁴⁰ Hebrews 3.13, *Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1851), 1179.

may have been impossible or undesirable for most white Northerners, abolitionist appeals grounded in the effects of slavery on black bodies are quite common in poems published during the war and encourage white audiences to, in the words of Thomas Hamilton, align their cause with the cause of the black man.

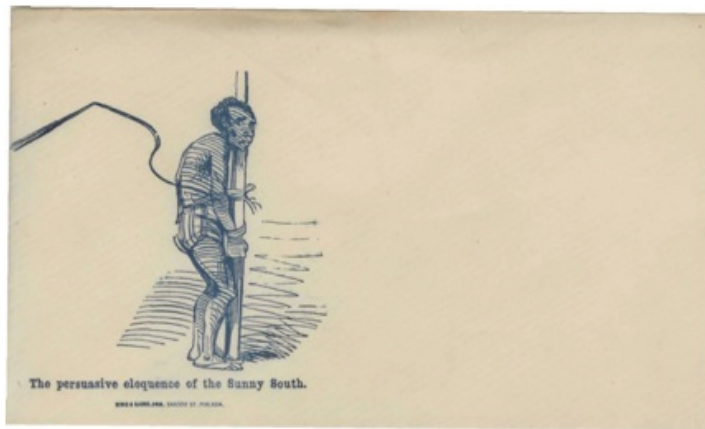


Figure 3.7: *The Persuasive Eloquence of the Sunny South* (1861)
By permission of the American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 3.8: *Remember Them That Are in Bonds* (c.1861-1865)
By permission of the American Antiquarian Society.

Published in *The Continental Monthly* in December of 1864 as “The Vision” and in *The Liberator* in March of 1865 as “The Picture,” George B. Peck’s poem addressed “to teachers to contrabands in the South” documents the physical and spiritual effects of slavery, identifying the

suffering of slaves' bodies as the main cause of the war.⁴¹ Alternating lines of tetrameter and catalectic tetrameter create a hallucinatory rhythm, mirroring the dream-like urgency of the speaker's two related visions but also indicating, through truncation, the disturbance created by these visions. First, the speaker sees "a million broken chains/Lying cankered with old blood-drops/Which had oozed from tortured veins,/Reddening the fleecy cotton/Snowed upon the Southern plains." The instruments of slavery, encrusted with evidence of torture and torment, presage the arrival of "hosts of wasted, haggard forms." Rising from "graves of vengeance," the "spectred horrors" of tortured slave bodies overwhelm the speaker, affecting him physically as his "weak knees smote together." As the speaker's vision influences his physical being, the phantoms "with outstretched arms...c[o]me rushing in thick swarms." Though described as specters, the figures in the vision invoke the "swarms" of contrabands who flocked to federal lines. In this way, the slave specters are both reminders of the "deeper horrors" of slavery and intangible representatives of the very literal needs of thousands of freedmen. The speaker witnesses "backs left gashed and harrowed,/Where the lash for life-blood yearned" and stands aghast as "gaunt and frenzied mothers/With wan children in their arms" suffer "auction blocks and hammers." Calling on God as his "blood congeal[s]," the speaker hears God's answer: "Hark! my war-blast/Dealing sin a staggering blow!" In response, the speaker acknowledges that "the chains [are] broken" by the force of war but insists "the wounds remain...`neath the body in the spirit!" Both the physical wounds and the spiritual scarring of slavery must be healed by "saintly self-denying" white Northerners. Peck's speaker envisions a benevolent influx of men and women "from where all are always freemen," imagining them coming "as flowers come in spring-time...to renew the Southern land." Peck's depiction of the physical effects of slavery and

⁴¹ George B. Peck, "The Picture," *The Liberator* 35, no. 11 (March 17, 1865): 44; "The Vision." *The Continental Monthly* 6, no. 6 (December 1864): 620.

their remedy is typical of many poems published during the conflict; black suffering inspires the war and white agency breaks the chains. Slaves' bodies are the impetus for action and the white man's burden.

"For What Are We Coming?", written by Mrs. Lydia Baxter and published in *American Baptist* and *The Liberator*, places suffering slave bodies at the center of the poem and the struggle.⁴² As in Peck's poem, powerless black bodies must be saved by powerful white men. Invoking the popular "We Are Coming, Father Abraham, Three Hundred Thousand More," a song responding to Lincoln's call in July of 1862 for 300,000 volunteers, Baxter's poem identifies the plight of African American slaves as the main impetus for waging war. "Promptly responding" to the President's call, "brothers and sires" journey to the land of the "Upas," the poison tree of slavery, to "smother" the national conflagration. Prostrate and on the brink of death, the slaves in the two central quatrains call for help from God and from the white men of the North. Under the "domain" of the Upas tree, "the poor bleeding slave, still quivering in death/ Neath the lash of his master must yield up his breath." The spondaic "Hark! hark!" that begins the stanza following the description of the dying slave vehemently urges loyal Unionists to heed the call of the "Angel of Mercy" who beckons from "Washington's grave." Since the "sorrowing captives" cannot help themselves, it is the duty of white men to "lift from our country its *curse* and its *shame*."

Numerous poems published during the war depict the sectional conflict as punishment and retribution for slavery's effects on the souls and bodies of black folk. The rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets of "The Mills of God," published in *The Big Blue Union* of Marysville, Kansas, in September of 1862, sonically replicate the systematic and repetitive grinding of

⁴² Lydia Baxter, "For What Are We Coming?" *The Liberator* 32, no. 38 (September 19, 1862): 152.

slaves' bodies the poem imagines.⁴³ Appealing to God, the speaker laments that white Americans, "with impious will,/Have made these NEGROES turn Thy mill! Their human limbs with chains we bound,/And bade them whirl Thy mill-stones round." Invoking both the crops harvested by slaves and the proverbial mills of God that exact punishment and bring retribution, the poem positions the bodies of slaves at the center of American industry, history, and fate. The poem also invokes John the Baptist's prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ as it is recorded in Luke 3:17: "he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable..."⁴⁴ The resolution of the slavery problem, the poem implies, will separate the wheat from the chaff; the war will determine whether the nation is saved or damned. "With branded brow and fettered wrist," slaves, bearing the mark of Cain and the burden of servitude, turn the mills of God. "With servile souls this mill we fed," the speaker claims, further complicating the analogy. Slaves at once set the mill in motion and are themselves ground by the mill. The nation itself is "ground with Slavery's grist" and the suffering of slaves is baked in "our CHILDREN'S BREAD." "While Samson still in chains we bind," the speaker intones, "the mill grinds on!" The war and its bitter harvest of "blood-red grain" are retribution for "Slavery's gyve and Slavery's scourge." War's harvest will "test the grain," determining both the future of the nation and the place of black bodies in America.

Usually powerless and objectified, the slaves in poems like "The Mills of God" resemble the "tools" the editor of the *Weekly Anglo-African* identifies. Used by Southerners for their physical labor and by poets for their symbolic power, slaves' bodies are the powerless agents of

⁴³ A.J.H. Duganne, "The Mills of God," *The Big Blue Union* 1, no. 25 (September 13, 1862): 1. Also published in *The Liberator* 32, no. 29 (July 18, 1862): 116. *The Liberator* credits the *New York Tribune* as the source.

⁴⁴ Luke 3.17. *Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1851), 995.

war. Though the latter use causes no actual physical damage, in most cases it keeps black bodies in positions of weakness and objectification. As the second part of this chapter will demonstrate, literature depicting the military service of black men seeks to transform the objectified black slave body into a powerful and redemptive subject. The ubiquitous images of slaves' whipped and scarred bodies and suffering souls in both abolitionist and non-abolitionist periodicals reveal that many Americans understood that the war would determine whether African Americans would continue to be enslaved—if their bodies would be the objects of slavery's violence or forever unfettered.

The person of a poor fugitive

Moving from cotton fields to battlefields, black men underwent a significant physical transformation that had symbolic and political ramifications. Union blue covered scarred backs and slaves became soldiers. Free blacks served a country that made them second-class citizens in the hopes of earning respect and equality. This transformation was recorded and, in some instances, rejected in the popular periodical press. While abolitionist papers and Republican publications ran articles describing the process of arming contrabands and lauding the heroic service of the United States Colored Troops, Southern periodicals and some Northern anti-war and anti-Republican newspapers ridiculed and critiqued the enlisting of black men. Central to both side's depictions of black military service is the black body and the ways in which war transforms it or fails to transform it.

An envelope most likely published in the North during the war uses the same image of a slave man and woman published as *Venus and Napoleon* in *Harper's Weekly*.⁴⁵ In this version, Dinah (the erstwhile Venus) asks, "What is you gwing to fite' for?" Pompey, only slightly less

⁴⁵ Untitled envelope (1861), American Broadside and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 24741, Archive of Americana, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

grandly named in this iteration, responds, “Dat’s what dis chile can’t find out, Massa says *he* don’t know.” A survey of political cartoons and ephemera produced during the Civil War reveals that recycling images was a common practice. Captions change but the slaves remain in bondage. Pompey and Dinah, once Venus and Napoleon, retain their occupations, their ignorance, and their removal from the conflict. It is unclear whether Pompey is going to fight for the Union or the Confederacy; his reference to his master is ambiguous and his feelings about becoming a soldier are ambivalent. “Dis chile” comically represents the uninformed (and soon to be uninformed) slave, perpetuating the popular image of the black male slave as childlike and non-threatening. Though Pompey “can’t find out” what he will fight for, thousands of black men consciously fought for freedom, citizenship, manhood, and the redemption of their race.



Figure 3.9: “A Typical Negro” (1863)

While Pompey remains a slave removed from the war, two former slaves undergo a visible change in the pages of *Harper’s Weekly*. On July 4, 1863, the paper published “three portraits, from photographs by McPherson and Oliver, of the negro GORDON, who escaped

from his master in Mississippi, and came into our lines at Baton Rouge” (figure 3.9).⁴⁶ The first portrait depicts Gordon “as he entered our lines,” dressed in ragged clothes and barefoot. The central and largest portrait shows “Gordon under medical inspection,” his back bared to his waist. The copy accompanying the image notes that Gordon’s back is “furrowed and scarred with the traces of a whipping administered on Christmas-day last.” The third image, placed to the right of Gordon’s scarred back, is of “Gordon in his uniform as a U.S. soldier.” The layout of the images underscores both the physical effects of slavery and Gordon’s transition from slave to soldier. Jennifer Putzi argues in her discussion of the images that “Gordon is ultimately labeled a slave *because of his scars*, no matter what the smaller representations of him as contraband and Union soldier do to dispel that label” (100).

“By way of illustrating the degree of brutality which slavery has developed among the whites in the section of the country from which this negro [Gordon] came,” the article accompanying the images of Gordon devotes more space to an extract from a letter to the *New York Times* “recounting what was told by the refugees from Mrs. Gillepsie’s estate” than to a discussion of Gordon’s personal history. Responding to the *Harper’s* article, the *Southern Illustrated News* reprints and focuses on the graphic descriptions of brutality, not Gordon’s metamorphosis, simply adding, “A more palpable falsehood was never published in any Yankee paper.”⁴⁷ Using the original title for its reprinting, *Southern Illustrated News* rejects Gordon’s ability to represent all slaves. However, the original article works to apply Gordon’s physical suffering to the bodies of all slaves, a move which supports Putzi’s claim that the depiction of Gordon’s body participates in the established antebellum abolitionist rhetoric of the scarred slave body. However, Gordon is also atypical; the article notes that “this negro displayed unusual

⁴⁶ “A Typical Negro,” *Harper’s Weekly* 7, no. 340 (July 4, 1863): 429-430.

⁴⁷ “A Typical Negro,” *Southern Illustrated News* 2, no. 3 (July 25, 1863): 19.

intelligence and energy” and Gordon becomes more than his scarred back when he dons a uniform and is “bearing a musket and prepared for duty.” In the central image, Gordon bares his marked back to the view of the reader and serves as a specimen of slavery. Though Putzi argues that these scars continue to denote Gordon’s “liminality” (100) despite his new status as a soldier, the uniformed Gordon faces the viewer, ready to enter his body into the realm of battle. Bullets do not distinguish between black and white skin—they tear the flesh of men like Gordon and men the color of his former owners. Covered by Union blue, Gordon’s back will be subjected to a new type of violence. It is this violence and its effects, depicted in poems, articles, and illustrations published during the war, which transforms slaves into men and scars into signs of service and citizenship.



Figure 3.10: *The Escaped Slave* (1864)

Published in *Harper’s Weekly* one year later, “The Escaped Slave in the Union Army” visually represents one man’s progress from slave to soldier (figure 3.10).⁴⁸ Unlike the images of Gordon, the two portraits of the unnamed “escaped slave” are equal in size. Like Gordon, however, the man, “who fled from Montgomery, Alabama to Chattanooga, for the express

⁴⁸ “The Escaped Slave and the Union Soldier,” *Harper’s Weekly* 8, no. 392 (July 2, 1864): 422 (copy), 428 (image).

purpose of enlisting in the army of the Union,” represents more than just his own transformation from slave to soldier. “Can we not,” the article accompanying the images asks,

have faith in that heroism which has been so gloriously illustrated at Wagner and Olustee and Petersburg, and which, in the face of the Fort Pillow massacre, yet offers itself afresh in the person of a poor fugitive, who, from the heart of the enemy’s country, gives himself, at the risk of death or of a torture worse than death, to a cause simply because it is inevitably associated with the problem of his freedom? (422)

While Gordon’s body represents the physical suffering of slaves, the unnamed escaped slave embodies the heroism exemplified by the service and sacrifice of black soldiers at Fort Wagner, Olustee, and Petersburg. The “person” of the fugitive is transformed when “endowed for the first time with his birth-right of freedom, and allowed the privilege dearer to him than any other—that of fighting for the nation which is hereafter pledged to protect him and his” (422). The second image depicts “this same negro,” the article insists, underscoring the significance of the metamorphosis.

This half of the chapter focuses on literature documenting this transformation. Letters written by black combatants, articles documenting the valorous service of United States Colored Troops, and poems praising the physical sacrifice of African American soldiers form a corpus of literature that rejects the ubiquitous figure of the powerless, ignorant, and less-than-human slave. The bodies of black soldiers, tested in the crucible of war, become sites of racial redemption, incipient citizenship, and American manhood. Writing to African American periodicals and other Northern newspapers, black soldiers assert their military service as proof of their rights to citizenship and manhood. Black leaders like Frederick Douglass call black men to arms, assuring their audience that freedom, rights, and equality will result. Numerous poets, named and

anonymous, focus on physical sacrifice, portraying the bodies of black soldiers as proof of African Americans' rights to freedom and citizenship. Rejecting the ubiquitous image of the male slave as powerless and removed from the war, a significant body of literature creates a new version of black manhood: the black soldier who dedicates his body to his country, to freedom, and to the redemption of his race.

“A real Union nigger”

Letters written by members of the United States Colored Troops to abolitionist and African American periodicals eloquently articulate the hope and determination of black soldiers dedicating their lives and sacred honor to their country and their people. Literate and, at times, literarily-inclined, these soldiers and their writings stand in stark contrast to the popular image of the uneducated, illiterate, and uninformed slave. Since many slaves were unable to record their experiences and comment on the meaning of the war to African Americans, and because the caricature of the feckless, unlettered, and lazy “coon” was widespread during and after the war, it is extremely important to read the written contributions of African American soldiers. More than any other source, their letters illustrate the ways in which black men understood their participation in the war. The often frustrated and disappointed tone of many of the letters indicates the hostile environment and the disrespect and resistance black soldiers faced on the front lines and in the popular press.

Published in *The Christian Recorder* on April 15, 1865, the day the great emancipator passed into eternity, a letter written by William Waters, Company K, 26th United States Colored Troops, indicates the high stakes of African American participation in the Union army. Referencing a ubiquitous query of the early years of the war, Waters writes, “We have often heard it said, that the negro would not fight, - would not stand fire, - was only intended to stand

behind the white man's chair.”⁴⁹ “I deny the assertion,” Waters affirms, adding, “Has not the negro proved to be a true soldier? Has he not done the task assigned him? Who won the battles of Port Hudson, Miliken's Bend, and Olustee? Was it not the negro? Yes, my fellow countrymen, the negro will fight. It has been proved. I defy either whites or blacks, to deny it.” That Waters feels compelled to make such an assertion indicates the derision, doubt, and scorn directed towards black soldiers and recorded in the periodicals of the time. Central to the transformation of slave into soldier into citizen is the repudiation of the black race’s purported weakness, degradation, and unsuitability for combat. Poems and articles lauding the military contributions of African American men take on greater significance when read in conjunction with literature and images ridiculing and deriding black soldiers.

Jokes involving ignorant slaves, political cartoons depicting ragged but cheerful freedmen, and anecdotes recounting the humorous statements of wily contrabands regularly appear in Northern and Southern periodicals published during the war. As comic objects, black men are rendered powerless and physically non-threatening. Comic depictions of black soldiers work in the same way to remove the threat of black men armed with guns and governmentally sanctioned to commit violence against white men. Two images published in the North in 1861 exemplify a popular view of the Union army’s use of black men as exploitation little better than enslavement. On an envelope published in Philadelphia, a slight Union soldier perches on the shoulders of a large black man and looks through a telescope (figure 3.11).⁵⁰ Titled “Taking an Observation from a Dark Point,” the illustration portrays one possible use for black men in the Union army. Beneath the image are the words of the “Negro”: “Dis child is a real Union niggar,

⁴⁹ William Waters, “Letter from the 26th U.S.C.T.” *The Christian Recorder* 5, no. 15 (April 15, 1865).

⁵⁰ *Taking an Observation from a Dark Point* (Philadelphia: Magee, 1861), American Broadside and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 24742, Archive of Americana, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

and no mistake.” Taking the place of a horse, the black man is proud of his position in the military and his affiliation with the Union cause. A political cartoon published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* in the same year reduces black bodies to the level of inanimate objects with an ostensibly comic suggestion for making “the contrabands useful” (figure 3.12).⁵¹ Grinning contrabands with cannons strapped to their backs happily serve in the “dark artillery,” blissfully ignorant of their highly dangerous position. Initially employed as physical laborers, black soldiers had to prove that their bodies were good for more than digging trenches, burying white soldiers, and serving as cannon fodder.



Figure 3.11: *Taking an Observation from a Dark Point* (1861)
By permission of the American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 3.12: *Dark Artillery; or, How to Make the Contrabands Useful* (1861)

⁵¹ *Dark Artillery; or, How to Make the Contrabands Useful*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* 12, no. 309 (October 26, 1861): 368.

A common critique of black enlistment in the Union army was that military service was little better than servitude. An unnamed contraband in a poem published in the *Boston Post* wants nothing to do with the war and misses his life on the plantation. Labeled “a parody,” “The Abolitionist and the Contraband” is a poetic dialogue between the two titular figures.⁵² The poem takes its epigraph from a report made by the Sanitary Commission: “Many of them sigh for their old servitude.” Righteously indignant and overzealous, the abolitionist seemingly responds to this statement, asking, “Can you desire ever to go back to them?/Have you not tasted the sweetness of freedom,/Heard us discourse on human equality,/Read Sumner’s speeches?” Referencing popular anti-slavery tactics, the abolitionist asks, “Have you no terrible story to tell us,/No back to photograph, covered with gashes,/No little children, white as the lily,/We can exhibit?” *Harper’s Weekly* famously published Gordon’s scarred back in July of 1863 and later published an engraving based on a photograph of freed slaves entitled *Emancipated Slaves, White and Colored* in January of 1864.⁵³ *The Liberator*, which republished “The Abolitionist and the Contraband” as an example of Northern resistance to black enlistment, frequently printed slaves’ accounts of their experiences in bondage.

The unhappy contraband’s body cannot be co-opted by an abolitionist narrative and resists the sentimentalizing and sensationalizing aims of the abolitionist. Instead, the contraband responds to the abolitionist’s demand for an account of “numberless horrors” by asserting, “I know no horrors;/I’se no back to show, nor lily-white children; I was but kindly treated, down on the river,/On the plantation.” Wishing to “go back again to the old master,” the contraband

⁵² “The Abolitionist and the Contraband,” republished from the *Boston Post* in *The Liberator* 34, no. 19 (May 6, 1864): 73.

⁵³ “A Typical Negro,” *Harper’s Weekly* 7, no. 340 (July 4, 1863): 429-430; *Emancipated Slaves, White and Colored*, *Harper’s Weekly* 8, no. 370 (January 30, 1864): 71.

blames the Union troops for his “foodless and homeless” state and declares he has no wish “to be shot in battle.” Thwarted by the contraband, the abolitionist takes on the role of cruel master, ordering the “Contraband to be torn from his wife and children, and ‘conscripted.’” Service in the military, the poem implies, is a new form of slavery.

Though published in Boston, a hotbed of abolitionism, “The Abolitionist and the Contraband” resembles Confederate depictions of black military participation. When they appear in Southern newspapers, black soldiers are objects of derision and evidence of Yankee hypocrisy. *A Change of Masters*, a political cartoon published in *Southern Punch* in 1863, exemplifies an argument popular both North and South regarding the Union army’s use of black men.⁵⁴ Two freedmen approach a Yankee officer with their hats in their hands. The officer, called Jonathan and most likely a militarized version of Brother Jonathan, the personification of the people of the United States, represents the Union army and the policy of the federal government by declaring “No more slavery in Louisiana” and offering the men “sixty cents a week” to work the plantation, the produce of which belongs to the officer. If the freedmen do not like the situation, they can join the Union army and, they fear, be shot by their former master. The Union army, the cartoon implies, seeks to exploit the labor of freedmen or use former slaves as cannon fodder.

Another cartoon, published in *Southern Illustrated News*, depicts one possible result of enlisting black men in the Union army as soldiers. Labeled *An Illustration of the New Yankee Doctrine About the Darkey*, the cartoon portrays a “corporal” from a Massachusetts regiment named Cuffee “advancing rapidly to the rear during an engagement.” Responding to a white officer who attempts to stop his retreat, Cuffee says, “No, sah! can’t go back dar—dis chile too

⁵⁴ *A Change of Masters*, *Southern Punch* 1, no. 6 (September 19, 1863): 8.

‘*motional* for dat sorter thing.’⁵⁵ Both subject to unmanly emotions and fleeing from the battlefield, Cuffee is inherently unsuited to the soldiering life. You can take the slave from the plantation, the cartoon implies, but you can’t take the plantation from the slave. Wide-eyed and “‘motional,” Cuffee lacks the courage to fight and is a “chile” instead of a man.

Figures like Cuffee perpetuate racial stereotypes traditionally applied to male slaves, refitting the powerlessness of the slave to black soldiers’ ineffectual bodies. Though Frederick Douglass insisted on the significance of black bodies dressed in Union blue, it took more than clothes to make black soldiers men. Like William Waters, poets and writers invoke the valorous service of African American soldiers at Port Hudson, Olustee, Fort Wagner, and Milliken’s Bend to affirm the manhood of former slaves and freemen. Refuting comic and derisive depictions of black soldiers, poems and articles documenting the service of black regiments insist on the manhood of African American soldiers who dedicate their lives and bodies to the Union cause. The bodies of black soldiers become the down payment on African Americans’ rights of freedom, citizenship, and humanity.

The bones of the black man

In a letter written in December 1864 and printed in the *Christian Recorder*, an African American newspaper published in Philadelphia, Thomas B. Wester, Orderly Sergeant for Company I, 43rd United States Colored Infantry, ridicules Confederate attempts to enlist slaves.⁵⁶ In spite of rebel lies, Wester notes, “Some of them are now in our army, fighting side-by-side with the white men.” Wester bases his demand for equal rights on the physical proof of military

⁵⁵ Casey, *An Illustration of the New Yankee Doctrine About the Darkey*, *Southern Illustrated News* 3, no. 20 (June 11, 1864): 160.

⁵⁶ Thomas B. Wester, Letter 93 in *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letter from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, ed. Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 216-218. Originally published in *Christian Recorder* 5, no. 1 (January 7, 1865): 2.

service: “The bones of the black man are at the present time whitening the battle-fields, while their blood simultaneously with the white man’s oozes into the soil of his former home” (218). The bones of black and white soldiers are equally white and are both sacrifices to the Union cause. Because black men have offered up their bodies to the United States, Wester “hope[s] that the day is not far distant when we shall see the colored man enjoying the same rights and privileges as those of the white man of this country” (218). Wester’s insistence on the whiteness of black soldiers at first seems like an attempt at deracialization, a move that would support Fah’s argument that the death of black soldiers does not allow for a “sustained imagining of mixed-race society”; however, Wester hopes for a future in which the “*colored* man” is equal to the white man and bases this hope on the deaths and wounds of men whose brothers will participate fully in the society created by the war. Men who bleed together, implies Wester, should vote together. William H. Watson, a sergeant in Company K, 25th USCI, also bases his claims for equality on the dead bodies of black soldiers.⁵⁷ “Come with me, ye victims of prejudice,” he intones, “where the grave of the white and the black soldier lie side by side, and tell me which is the colored man and which is the white, and which of the two you would rather be? Would you base your answer upon color?” (154-5). Death, as ever, is the great equalizer; death in war for the Union, both Wester and Watson argue, should be the greatest equalizer in American history.

Like Wester and Watson, some white soldiers understood black military service as an indication of African American equality and entitlement to the rights of citizenship. Many white combatants recognized that a war for the Union was a war against slavery.⁵⁸ Some white Union

⁵⁷ William H. Watson, Letter 94 in *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letter from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, ed. Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 216-218. Originally published in *Christian Recorder* 5, no. 12 (March 18, 1865): 41.

soldiers, fighting in the same battles as black regiments, recognized the significance of black military service in terms of black men's physical sacrifice for the rights of citizenship. A letter written by "A Colored Private" of the renowned 54th Massachusetts regiment indicates the range of white soldiers' opinions on the issues of emancipation and equality. Addressing William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist and editor of *The Liberator*, the private writes,

I thought you might be pleased to know that your principles were strongly represented in the department that loaded the 100-pounder gun that threw the first three shells at Charleston city, S.C. No. 1 is a strong abolitionist and has worked well among the soldiers...No. 2 is now in favor of emancipation, though he don't think the negro is his equal. No. 3 was an old emancipationist years ago, always took your paper. And the gunner is a Republican. The other members seem to go with the strongest party, but believe in extirpating slavery from the land at the present time.⁵⁹

Like "No. 2," many Americans were uncomfortable with the idea of full equality. Literature documenting the military service and bodily sacrifice of African American soldiers in part attempts to convince white Americans that black men have redeemed their race and earned the blessings of liberty.

The changing views of Captain Charles A. Edmonds of Company H, 17th Regiment Michigan Volunteers reflect both the recognition of African American entitlement to citizenship based on service in war and the eventual failure of the promises made by the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments. Producing a poem for the left-handed penmanship contest

⁵⁸ James M. McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) is a helpful study of the motivations of Civil War soldiers. See 117-130 for McPherson's discussion of Union soldiers' views on emancipation.

⁵⁹ "A Colored Private," Letter 26 in *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letter from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, ed. Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65-66. Originally published in *The Liberator* 34, no. 29 (July 15, 1864): 114.

held by William Oland Bourne (which I discuss at length in another chapter), Edmonds narrates his personal experiences with black soldiers and his views on the significance of black military service. After sending an initial version to the contest judges in September of 1865, Edmonds sent a second version in December, noting, “I think it would be a good plan to destroy my first specimen.”⁶⁰ Though Edmonds claims the first version is faulty because of mistakes, the most significant difference between the two poems is his discussion of African American suffrage. Using the racist language of the time, Edmonds describes “Nigger Sambo’s” transition from slave to freeman to soldier. Edmonds concludes with a diagnosis of the current political problem: “Now the question ‘What of Sambo?’/Echoes to us; from our Statesmen:/Some are saying ‘Let us make him/Equal to the Whites in voting.’/Some say, ‘No, our country never/Was intended for the Nigger:’/Still they clamor for the Rebels,/And they say they are entitled/To their rights within the Union,/For it is the ‘Constitution.’” In answering this question, Edmonds draws on his experience as a soldier:

I have been a Union Solider;
 Fighting, side by side with Sambo;
 We have fought the “Rebs” together;
 I for Country, he, for freedom;
 Fighting to maintain the Union
 Rebels fighting to destroy it.
 Now, the Rebels they are conquered,
 And, the time of “Reconstruction”
 Has arrived, when we must settle
 What the status of the Rebel
 What the status of poor Sambo.
 I’m in favor, now of giving
 Hemp to all the leading Rebels,
Freedom and the right of Voting,

⁶⁰ In his analysis of the contest, Brian Matthew Jordan discusses Edmonds’ first entry only, using it as evidence of white soldiers’ ability “to set aside skin color when measuring the worth of a comrade” (147). It is necessary to read both of Edmonds’ entries to achieve a fuller understanding of his opinions about black soldiers and their rights. For Jordan’s discussion, see “Union Veteran Amputees and the Embodied Memory of the Civil War,” *Civil War History* LVII, no. 2 (2011): 121-152.

To the true “American citizens of African descent,” who have nobly dared, so freely bled to aid the Union cause, and to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and to posterity forever.

In September of 1865, Edmonds breaks the sometimes halting meter of his verse to assert his belief that African Americans, having bled for their country, are entitled to the rights of citizenship. Having lost his right arm in the conflict, Edmonds bases his argument on the physical cost of war and the importance of rewarding loyalty and punishing treason.

Two months later, Edmonds focuses on the rights of the “Rebs” and removes all traces of black suffrage and rights. “I’m in favor, now of giving,” Edmonds concludes, “Freedom and the right of voting,/In the South, to all the loyal/Who can read the Constitution/And can write as good as I can!!” In its second iteration, Edmonds’ poem implicitly excludes former slaves from the vote, foreshadowing the literacy tests purposely intended to keep African Americans from voting. It is unclear why Edmonds changed his tune so rapidly and dramatically. Perhaps, as he became more removed from the war and his experiences “fighting, side by side, with Sambo,” Edmonds became less concerned with the fate of African Americans and more concerned with the reconciliation of North and South. Whatever the cause, Edmonds’ changing opinions are indicative of the forces in American politics and culture that would enable the failure of Reconstruction and a narrative of sectional reconciliation predicated on mutual whiteness at the expense of black Americans.

The first version of Edmonds’ poem resembles hundreds of poems written during the war in its emphasis on the military service of black soldiers and the citizenship to which this sacrifice entitles them. Central to many of these poems are the bodies of black soldiers, dressed in Union blue and marked by war. Newspaper accounts of the valor of regiments of the United States Colored Troops and poems which celebrate this valor resist the silencing that occurs in

Edmonds' revised version and in narratives of sectional reconciliation produced after war. More importantly, this literature places African American soldiers' bodies at the forefront of wartime debates over black citizenship and manhood. In stark contrast to the ubiquitous image of the ignorant and powerless slave, the figure of the powerful and heroic black soldier demands recognition and rights.

The long dusky line

Drafting a letter to a War Democrat in 1864, Lincoln defended his decision to use "the Emancipation lever" to wage war against the South. Removing emancipation from the equation, he insisted, would be a betrayal of the thousands of black soldiers fighting on the Union side. Justifying his logic in moral terms, Lincoln wrote, "There have been men who have proposed to me to return to slavery the black warriors of Port Hudson & Olustee... I should be damned in time & in eternity for so doing. The world shall know that I will keep my faith to friends & enemies, come what will."⁶¹ In Lincoln's formulation, and in the opinion of many black soldiers, poets, and writers publishing accounts of African American bravery, the service and sacrifice of black soldiers entitled them and their people to freedom and citizenship.

On June 27, 1863, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* printed on its first page an account of the 2nd Louisiana United States Colored Troops' actions at the battle of Port Hudson. The siege of Port Hudson in late May 1863 included a frontal attack by the first black regiments to engage in a military assault.⁶² Though unsuccessful, this assault, according to the article, proved the dedication and bravery of black soldiers. The article begins with "The question of whether negro soldiers will fight if properly led" and provides an answer by quoting General Nathaniel Banks'

⁶¹ Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 769.

⁶² For a description of the battle of Port Hudson and the participation of two Louisiana black regiments, see Hondon B. Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 1988), 131-139.

description of the regiments' service: "They answered every expectation. Their conduct was heroic. No troops could be more determined or more daring." Banks notes that the regiments "suffer[ed] very heavy losses" and provides his endorsement for the continued use of black troops:

Whatever doubt may have existed heretofore as to the efficiency of organizations of this character, the history of this day proves conclusively to those who were in condition to observe the conduct of these regiments, that the Government will find in this class of troops effective supporters and defenders. The severe test to which they were subjected and the determined manner with which they encountered the enemy leave upon my mind no doubt of their ultimate success.⁶³

Banks' affirmation of black soldiers based on their dedication and their sacrifice is somewhat tempered by his insistence that "they require only good officers, commands of limited numbers, and careful discipline to make them excellent soldiers." Black men can fight, but they must be painstakingly formed and disciplined by white officers; Banks made sure this would be the case by removing black officers from command.⁶⁴

While Banks' description is not a ringing endorsement of full equality, George Henry Boker's "The Second Louisiana," published beneath Banks' words, portrays the assault on Port Hudson as not only the first trying of black men as soldiers but also the test of the black race's claims to freedom.⁶⁵ A Philadelphian poet and dramatist, Boker produces a paean to the black

⁶³ "Battle of Port Hudson," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* 16, no. 404 (June 27, 1863): 209.

⁶⁴ Hondon B. Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in Blue* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1988), 86.

⁶⁵ George H. Boker, "The Second Louisiana," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* 16, no. 404 (June 27, 1863): 209-210. Broadside version: "The Second Louisiana" (Philadelphia: Union League of

regiment, aligning the service of African American troops with the cause of freedom and manhood.⁶⁶ Central to his depiction of the black regiment is the transformation of the slave body into the soldier body. Written in rhyming trimeter couplets that mimic the rhythmic beating of drums, the poem was disseminated in broadside form in English and German. Translated as “Das Zweite Louisiana Regiment,” the German version celebrates “das schwarze regiment” and underscores one major role of poems documenting the service of black troops.⁶⁷ The circulation of Boker’s poem involved the circulation of a new version of black manhood, one that insisted on freedom and citizenship on the basis of blood spilled and bodies sacrificed to the Union.

Boker’s poem begins with a tableau of soldiers “dark as the clouds of even,/Ranked in the western heaven.” Like a “dread mass” of storm clouds, the soldiers await “the breath that lifts.../Tempest and falling brand/Over a ruined land.” Aligning the soldiers with a storm of vengeance overtaking the South, Boker underscores the momentousness of the assault and inserts dark soldiers into the epic narrative of the war. Waiting for the storm of war to begin, the soldiers are “so still and orderly,/Arm to arm, knee to knee.” “Waiting the great event,” the first stanza concludes, “Stands the black regiment.” Each subsequent stanza ends with a variation on the refrain, the last three words always “the black regiment.” Though the soldiers carry the same “bright bayonet[s]” as white soldiers, Boker reiterates their blackness; soldiering, the poem suggests, does not extirpate racial difference, but instead removes the stigma of servitude and powerlessness from black male bodies. The second stanza invokes the stereotypical antebellum

Philadelphia, 1863), *American Broadside and Ephemera*, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 11388, *Archive of Americana*, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

⁶⁶ Claudia Durst Johnson. "Boker, George Henry," *American National Biography Online*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-00142.html> (2000).

⁶⁷ George H. Boker, “Das Zweite Louisiana Regiment” (Philadelphia, 1863), *American Broadside and Ephemera*, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 11387, *Archive of Americana*, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

image of the slave, describing how “down the long dusky line/Teeth gleam and eyeballs shine.” Though the poem relies on stereotypical images of harmless slaves with wide eyes and white teeth, it soon transfers its focus to the “bright bayonet...[that] flashe[s] with a purpose grand”; it is this purpose that transforms slaves into men.

Marked by their “dusky” skin, the black soldiers wait for the drum to tell them “their time [has] come” and “what work [is] meant/For the black regiment.” At the beginning of the third stanza, the flag-sergeant defines this “work”: “Though wounds or death betide,/Let the whole nation see/If we are fit to be/Free in this land; or bound/Down, like the whining hound—/Bound with red stripes of pain/In our old chains again!” The marks of war are far preferable to the marks of servitude; the black soldiers expose their bodies to the wounds and death of war so that the bodies of their people will no longer be subjected and sacrificed to slavery. The fourth and fifth stanzas, set apart by their length (sixteen and eighteen lines, respectively, as opposed to the ten lines of the other stanzas), describe the charge and its results and underscore the symbolic significance of the assault. “The bondmen” driving “their lords like chaff” harvest the deaths of their former masters as “down they tear man and horse.” Triumphant in the fourth stanza, the soldiers fall heroically in the fifth, “glad to breathe one free breath,/Though on the lips of death.” Beginning with their “battle-cry” of “Freedom!” the fifth stanza aligns the black regiment with the cause of freedom. “Ah! and they meant the word,/Not as with us is heard,” the speaker explains, aligning himself with the white public to whom this poem is addressed. For the black soldiers, freedom is not “a mere party-shout.” “On the gory sod,/Rolled in triumphant blood,” the black soldiers embody the cause of freedom; as they “fall” they experience a “burst to liberty.” In this formulation, the bodies of black soldiers take on greater symbolic meaning than the

bodies of white soldiers. While white soldiers fight for the Union, black soldiers fight for the Union and their freedom.

As the poem ends, so to does the bodily transformation of the black soldiers. “Hundreds on hundreds fell,” the speaker intones, “But they are resting well;/Scourges and shackles strong/Never shall do them wrong.” In death, the black regiment is free; the bodies resting beneath the ground have purchased liberty and the end of slavery. Boker’s poem imagines glory for the black regiment that extends beyond death and has bearing on the ongoing lives of African Americans in a world shaped by war. In life, the black regiment should be “hail[ed] as comrades tried.” The poem instructs its white readers to “be just, and give their meed” to the living “captives freed.” “Das Zweite Louisiana Regiment” advises its audience, which most likely included the large number of Germans and German-Americans in Union blue, “Räpft mit ihm Seit’ bei Seit’!” “Fight with them, side by side,” the English version concludes, “Never, in fields or tents,/Scorn the black regiments!” The black regiment of the poem becomes representative of all black troops and, through courageous bodily sacrifice, demands recognition and respect.

Laura Redden Searing, writing under the pseudonym Howard Glyndon, also addresses a white audience in her poem “Butler’s Black Brigade.”⁶⁸ Like Boker, Searing identifies the war as the means by which slaves will become men. The poem begins “So they will not fight!”, and Searing’s speaker repeats the statement as a question three times throughout the poem. By the end of the piece, the answer is clear: former slaves will fight and their military service will redeem their race. The “branded men” of the poem’s first line are defined and circumscribed by their “dusky skin”; however, Searing systematically invokes and then dismisses widespread doubts about the suitability of black men for soldiering. “You have crushed them long/They’ve

⁶⁸ Howard Glyndon [Laura Redden Searing], “Butler’s Black Brigade,” *Idylls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1864), 142-144.

forgotten the way to turn!/They have brains, and yet they remember not;/And hearts, but they never burn!”, the speaker scolds, blaming slavery, not innate racial inferiority, for the purported weaknesses of black men. Possessed of the same organs and faculties as white men, black men retain their humanity despite centuries of bondage. This humanity was betrayed, the speaker implies, “last July.” Searing’s footnote identifies the event as the New York draft riots in July of 1863.⁶⁹ “They had done no wrong,” the speaker asserts, “but their skins were black,/’T was fitting that they should die!” With biting irony, Searing rejects the victimization of black men, women, and children during the riots as proof of the inability of black men to be soldiers. The men who reportedly “cowered” in July “stand to-day/As stanchly as fairer men.” “They are helping you on to your triumph now,/Who were hunted and tortured then,” Searing’s speaker reminds her audience. Righteously indignant, the speaker apostrophizes: “Oh, ye will not take in a kindly clasp,/The hand that is darker than yours!/. . . Oh, shame for your senseless and narrow creed!/And shame for your savage hate!” A bigoted creed and illogical hate mark black minds and bodies as inferior and prevent the cooperation of two races against the common foe of the Union.

The final stanza of Searing’s poem invokes the titular general, identifying Benjamin Butler as the herald of black equality. Butler, “the grim old man,” the speaker asserts, “Will tell you another tale.” Both famous and infamous for his occupation of New Orleans and his decree that slaves were contraband of war, Butler was the first Union general to enlist African American soldiers.⁷⁰ According to John David Smith, Butler, like the audience Searing addresses, initially

⁶⁹ For information on the riots, see Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

doubted “the necessity and quality of African American troops” (22). Butler’s “tale” warns of retribution for Fort Pillow, the “St. Bartholomew” of black Americans. On April 12, 1864, 1,800 Confederate cavalry under the leadership of Nathan Bedford Forrest, who would later found the Ku Klux Klan, launched a final assault on Fort Pillow. Of the 600 Federal troops garrisoning the Fort, 280 were killed. Newspapers reported on the barbarity of the Confederate troops who targeted white officers of black regiments and killed surrendering Union soldiers.⁷¹ Equating murdered black soldiers with massacred French Huguenots, Searing asserts the humanity of the black race and the historical significance of African American participation in the war. “Perhaps,” the speaker concludes, “when they hallow this common cause/With their thousands of nameless graves,/Your selfish hearts will proclaim at last,/They are men, and they are not slaves!” Though dead, the soldiers live on in memory; their sacrifice immortalizes them and influences the present and the future of their race in the United States. By arguing that the “nameless graves” must be recognized by white Americans, Searing centers the redemption of a race in the bodies of its soldiers.

By their blood, that land was bought

Countless poems published during the war describe blood-soaked battlefields, rivers dyed red, and life-blood seeping from wounded soldiers. A common trope in Civil War literature, blood serves as a marker of sacrifice and of a connection between all soldiers: Union or Confederate, black or white, all combatants bleed. Poems about bleeding and dying black soldiers invoke the common humanity of all those who suffer or die for the Union. The

⁷⁰ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful that We Have Colored Troops that Will Fight,” in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 22.

⁷¹ For more information on the Fort Pillow massacre, see Richard L. Fuchs, *Unerring Fire: The Massacre at Fort Pillow* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002).

transformative power of shedding blood was immortalized by Shakespeare's Henry V: "For he to-day that sheds his blood with me/ Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,/ This day shall gentle his condition" (4.3.61-63). In a speech given at a meeting of "colored citizens" in Boston in 1863, a man identified as "Judge Russell" urges his audience to form a regiment. Russell insists on the symbolic, political, and cultural significance of shedding blood: "[T]he day that dawns upon a great battle-field in which your blood is mingled with that of other regiments, fighting side by side with you, that same day will see every prejudice against your race washed out and obliterated."⁷² Though Russell's words would unfortunately be proven wrong, an extant poetic corpus documenting the service and sacrifice of black soldiers insists on the historical importance of black blood mingling with white on the "great battle-field." In death, these poems insist, slaves turned soldiers are free. Their blood "gentle[s] [the] condition" of their people, promising freedom for those who live on.

Published in *The Liberator* in March of 1864, "The Heroic Black" immortalizes "a colored soldier in Tennessee."⁷³ According to an explanatory epigraph, the "mortally wounded" soldier "told his officer that he could not live, but would die fighting for the flag of liberty; and continued to discharge his rifle until he fell dead on the field of glory." Written in ballad stanzas and set to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne," the poem self-consciously inserts the heroic figure of an individual black soldier into the history of the war and the heroic tradition of patriotic sacrifice. Like many poems about dying white soldiers, "The Heroic Black" performs an apotheosis of the "brave and loyal heart." The first stanza describes the soldier's plight, beginning with the battle's effect on his body. "The ball ha[s] crush'd a vital part" but the brave young man continues to

⁷² "The Negro Regiment—Meeting of the Colored Citizens," *Douglass' Monthly* 5, no. 10 (March 1863): 809.

⁷³ F.M. Adlington, "The Heroic Black," *The Liberator* 34, no. 11 (March 11, 1864): 44.

fight “till his life-blood cease[s] to flow.” The second stanza perpetuates the poem’s focus on the soldier’s physical form, noting that “his skin was of the ebon hue,” but also asserting “his heart was nobly brave.” The blackness of the soldier’s skin is not incompatible with his trueness to “country, flag, and freedom.” Though the poem uses language common to many elegies written about heroic white soldiers, the soldier is not whitewashed by his sacrifice—he is both “ebon” and “brave” and is predominantly defined by his refusal to “live a slave.” The fifth and final stanza underscores the symbolic power of the soldier’s sacrifice, which is still centered in the physical form of the fallen hero: “Though low in earth the martyr lies,/Still rings his battle-cry—/From hill to hill the echo flies—‘Fight on for liberty!’” A martyr for freedom, the dying, dead, and buried body of the black soldier is a rallying site for the continued “righteous cause.” Marked by the violence of war and not by the cruelty of slavery, the soldier’s body is powerful in life and death.

Similarly written in ballad stanzas and published in *Colored American* in December of 1865, Sarah E. Shuften’s “Ethiopia’s Dead” celebrates and memorializes the black soldiers “who have fallen in the great struggle for liberty and independence.”⁷⁴ Shuften, the wife of the editor of *Colored American*, the first African American newspaper in Georgia, illustrates the ubiquity of black bodies and their symbolic significance in the recently ended conflict.⁷⁵ Shuften mimics hundreds of poems eulogizing white soldiers and, in doing so, insists on the rightful place of black soldiers in the literary history of war’s destruction. The first three stanzas describe the corporeal cost of war: “brave Ethiopia’s dead” remain “on hills, in vallies [*sic*]” and “on every field of strife, made red/With gorey [*sic*] victory.” “Their bones bleach on the Southr’n hill,” the

⁷⁴ Sarah E. Shuften, “Ethiopia’s Dead,” *Colored American* 1, no. 3 (December 30, 1865): 4.

⁷⁵ For biographical information on Shuften, see brief biography in Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller, *Words for the Hour”: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 391.

speaker intones, “By brook, and river, lake and rill,/And by the roaring main.” The fourth stanza communicates the significance of this physical loss: “The land is holy where they fought,/And holy where they fell;/For by their blood, that land was bought/That land they loved so well.” Not only do black soldiers redeem their race; they are also the “saviors of the land” of their birth and bondage, their blood freeing them and cleansing the nation’s sin. The final five stanzas of the poem identify the historical and global significance of “that valiant band.” Shifting from the landscape of death to the geography of history, Shuften’s speaker proclaims, “From east to west, from hill to vale,/Then be their names adored—/Europe, with all thy millions, hail!/The Peace bought by their sword.” The people of Europe, “Asia, and Africa” will no longer be called on to pity the plight of the powerless slave; rather, they shall “celebrate in varied tongues/Our *free* and happy land.” Deserving attention on the global stage, the sacrifice and service of black soldiers ushers in a new day in which “man shall meet in every face,*A brother and a friend.*”

And not this man?



Figure 3.13: *Pardon and Franchise* (1865)

On August 5, 1865, *Harper's Weekly* published two full-page engravings by Thomas Nast, the popular cartoonist and advocate for black equality (figure 3.13).⁷⁶ *Pardon*, the first engraving, depicts a disgruntled Columbia gazing disgustedly down on Robert E. Lee and other entreating former Confederates. In the caption that accompanies the image, Columbia poses the first part of an important question in post-war politics and society: "Shall I trust these men..." Next to the Southern general kneels Jefferson Davis, holding out a paper that reads "Pardon." In the second engraving, entitled *Franchise*, Columbia stands with her hand on the shoulder of a black veteran. One leg missing, the black soldier's body communicates his service to the Union.

Standing on a raised platform, Columbia and the soldier look out on an invisible audience; significantly, it is Columbia who entreats in this image, her left hand gesturing towards the corporeal proof of black manhood, dedication, and bravery. The caption completes Columbia's question: "...and not this man?" The answer, in Nast's formulation, is abundantly clear. The nation has two choices: pardon the traitorous rebels who sought to destroy the Union or enfranchise the black men who fought to save it. Written on the representative soldier's body, the service of black men entitles them and their brethren to the rights of citizenship. Like Nast's engravings, a significant body of literature produced during the war celebrates and records the military service and physical sacrifice of African American men. Though the failure of Reconstruction and the selective memory of reconciliation betrayed and elided the heroic participation of the United States Colored Troops, the bodies and souls of black soldiers march on in literature produced during the time, providing a significant and necessary counterpoint to images of the powerless black body ubiquitous in both ante- and postbellum America.

⁷⁶ Thomas Nast, *Pardon and Franchise*, *Harper's Weekly* 9, no. 449 (August 5, 1865): 488-489. For biographical information on Nast, see Brooks D. Simpson, "Nast, Thomas," *American National Biography Online*, <http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-00616.html> (2000).

A letter accompanying a poem published in *The Liberator* on February 5, 1864 asks Garrison to “give publicity” to the “spontaneous gushing of a black girl’s soul, who has felt the influence of slavery and the blighting breath of prejudice too long to keep silent.”⁷⁷ The product of this gushing, “The Black Heroes,” poses a question central to all discussions of the service of black soldiers in the Civil War. Inspired by the famous charge of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment at Fort Wagner, the girl poet asks, “O, must they calmly die at last,/Those heroes black and brave,/With prejudice still clinging fast—/O, must they die as slaves?” Numerous poems published during the war answer with a resounding “no.” However, “The Black Heroes” foreshadows the eventual failure of the Civil War and emancipation to erase prejudice in the United States. The poem ends with a final question: “And must such noble deeds/Our fetters stronger bind,/Or shall they to fair Freedom lead,/And make us *all* mankind?”⁷⁸ Sadly, the young girl writing in 1864 would most likely live to see the failure of the Civil War to ensure the recognition of the humanity of *all*. Nonetheless, the military participation of black soldiers was integral to the abolishment of slavery and produced a large body of historically significant literature that imagined and advocated a United States in which black men would be full citizens.

⁷⁷ “The Black Heroes,” *The Liberator* 33, no. 6 (February 5, 1864): 24.

⁷⁸ Italics in the original.

Chapter 4

“Empty sleeves that speak”: Missing Limbs and the Experience of War

Sometime in 1864, in General Hospital in New York City, a sergeant named F.L. Mahan wrote his name, regiment, and hometown on a page of a reminiscence book belonging to William Oland Bourne, a hospital volunteer, abolitionist, newspaper editor, and poet.¹ Beneath the soldier’s entry, Bourne, an attendant in the hospital, wrote, “The above was written with the left hand. Mr. Mahan lost his right arm in the battle of Resaca, Ga. 15th May, 1864, under Genl Hooker” (figure 4.1).² Mahan’s shaky scrawl is tangible evidence of his service to the Union—proof that he served his country and was marked by his service. Also included in Bourne’s reminiscence book is Burritt Stiles, a veteran who received a prosthetic arm at the General Hospital and later submitted a sample of his left-handed writing to Bourne and other members of a contest committee. Inspired by his interactions with maimed veterans, Bourne organized two penmanship contests for soldiers who had lost their right arms. Bourne also disseminated the testaments of members of the so-called “Left Arm Corps” by publishing their poems and descriptions of the war in his newspaper, *The Soldier’s Friend*.

According to the reward committee’s report, the “leading purpose” of the competition was “placing before the disabled men of the country incentives to a worthy ambition to become self-reliant, and to fit themselves for positions of honor and usefulness.”³ Asked to record their experiences of the war, hundreds of soldiers sent in entries displaying their best penmanship.

¹ Biological information on Bourne from obituary: “Death List of a Day,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1901): 9. Bourne published *Poems of the Republic* in 1864.

² Civil War reminiscences by soldiers and sailors in Central Park Hospital, New York, New York, William Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³ “Exhibition of Left-Hand Penmanship,” Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Submitting prose and verse accounts of their service, contestants inserted their personal experiences and interpretations of the conflict into the literary record of the war. Reading contest entries in conjunction with periodical poetry and prose focusing on amputation and its ramifications, this chapter underscores the centrality of the marked and maimed soldier body to the ways in which soldiers and non-combatants understood and wrote about military service.

A photograph of a handwritten note on a piece of paper. The text is written in cursive and reads: "Sargt W. Mahan", "Co 6 102nd Regt N.Y. Inf.", "Jerusalem South Long Island N.Y.", "The above was written with the left hand. Mr Mahan lost his right arm in the battle of Raccoon Gap, 15 May, 1864, under Gen Hooker. W. S."

Figure 4.1: Civil War reminiscences by soldiers and sailors in Central Park Hospital.

In his letter to Caleb Fisher, recipient of a \$50 prize bestowed by William Tecumseh Sherman, the general who famously remarked that “war is hell” wrote,

Whilst we have been accustomed to regard the loss of the right arm as almost fatal to a useful and consequently happy life, these samples show how nature substitutes wisely and well our other arm; and I hope and trust that you may enjoy a long life, crowned by the contentment which the sacrifice of the best part of your body to your country’s flag and safety is calculated to give.⁴

⁴ William Tecumseh Sherman, Letter to Caleb Fisher, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Also published in *The Soldier’s Friend*. “Left-Hand Writing by Disabled Soldiers and Sailors of the War: The Prizes Awarded,” *The Soldier’s Friend*, January 1868.

Sherman articulates a prevalent way of understanding the sacrifice of life and limb in the war for the Union: soldiers died and lost parts of their body in order to make the Union whole. Though thousands of men relinquish “the best part[s] of [their] body,” the Union remains intact; this equation allows for a substitution that does not disrupt patriotic narratives of service and national redemption. In many poems produced during and shortly after the war, maimed bodies and missing limbs appear in synecdochal relationship to the cause of both Union and Confederacy. Limbs are lost, but the country (or the hope for or memory of an independent Southern nation) lives. However, as this chapter will show, not all amputees and wounded veterans allow for their loss to be absorbed into the body politic. Indeed, a large body of literature produced by both combatants and non-combatants resists the effacement of the individual into the collective; in numerous poems and stories published during the war, soldiers’ marked bodies and missing limbs record and communicate the horrible cost of war for individual soldiers, families, and communities. These poems resist the narratives of reconciliation, absorption, and forgetting prevalent in most studies of Civil War literature.

Beginning with an examination of the ways in which veterans who participated in Bourne’s contests understood and portrayed the effects of the war on their bodies, this chapter looks at poetry and short fiction produced by Northern and Southern soldiers and civilians intent on creating lasting testaments of service, sacrifice, and suffering. Many poems and prose pieces underscore the necessity of recognizing the bodily sacrifice of thousands of soldiers without allowing individual loss to be redeemed and absorbed by the salvation of the Union or service to the Confederacy. Such testaments are integral to understanding the ways in which Civil War Americans documented the war and its effects. As poetic objects, the empty sleeves of the contest entrants disrupt sentimentalizing narratives. The sleeves demand recognition, not pity.

The missing limbs of Confederate veterans, lost to a lost cause, cannot be reconstructed or reconciled with a restored Union. Though Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Confederate empty sleeves signify the blighted hopes for an independent Southern nation while also proudly proclaiming the bearers' previous rebellion. Highly visible absences on the streets and in the homes of post-war America, the empty sleeves and pant legs of veterans embody the violence and loss caused by the war. Where there is an empty sleeve, there is incontrovertible proof of the war's cost.

Many critical examinations of literature produced by soldiers follow Sherman's lead in underscoring the "contentment" of soldiers with bodily loss and trace the participation of both combatant and non-combatant writers in the creation of a literary record of the war that obscures individual loss and upholds the primacy of the Union cause and the Lost Cause. Insisting on a lack of ambiguity in the submissions of left-handed veterans, Frances Clarke argues "there is...little evidence among these manuscripts to support claims...that disillusionment resulted from such massive suffering, or that sentimentality was diminished by the brutal nature of war."⁵ Clarke's formulation of the contest does not allow for narratives of individual suffering that reject or complicate antebellum sentimentality and participation in "a larger story of voluntarism and sacrifice" (377). In his study of the contest, Brian Matthew Jordan claims that "'empty sleeves' used their injured bodies to mythologize the truth and substance of Union victory. They did not lose their arms, they maintained, but sacrificed them with 'alacrity' and 'zeal.'"⁶ While

⁵ Frances Clarke, "'Honorable Scars': Northern Amputees and the Meaning of Civil War Injuries," in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*, eds. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 391.

⁶ Brian Matthew Jordan, "'Living Monuments': Union Veteran Amputees and the Embodied Memory of the Civil War," *Civil War History* LVII, no. 2 (2001): 125.

some participants produced what Jordan calls “sanitized tales celebrating the war” (123), others insisted on depicting the horrors of war and its effects on their bodies.

Similarly, in his article on Bourne’s contest and John William De Forest, Benjamin Cooper claims that “‘Left-Handed Penmanship’ can be seen as symptomatic of a larger cultural tendency immediately following the war that symbolically wanted to undo the trauma of the conflict through a mnemonic sleight-of-hand.”⁷ “If,” Cooper contends, “a right arm *could* be replaced by a left arm as the contest suggested—then it was the larger, healthier narrative of marching forward together that mattered, not the acutely personal and painful circumstances of the individual’s past” (42-43). Insisting that the contest entries’ “full significance within the literary history of Civil War narrative will remain forever obscure,” Cooper includes the contest winner’s name in his title but does not quote Franklin H. Durrah’s submission or any of the submissions, choosing instead to examine De Forest’s novel *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion From Secession to Loyalty*. Participating in the very process he critiques, Cooper allows for the testimony and suffering of individuals to be obscured by an overarching narrative of national healing.

Poems and short stories that depict the plight of wounded and maimed soldiers seek to bring the reality of the battlefield into the homes of non-combatant Americans. Newspaper descriptions of battles, engravings, and photographs like those produced by Matthew Brady and Alexander Gardner disseminated information about the war’s progress and its effects. Verse and short fiction, however, provided more familiar and intimate forms of accessing and interpreting the unfamiliar horrors of war. That many Americans wrote and read poems and fiction that

⁷ Benjamin Cooper, “Franklin H. Durrah, John William De Forest, and the Varieties of Military Experience,” *Arizona Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 42.

formally resembled antebellum literary productions has led some scholars to read Civil War literature as continuing sentimental traditions.⁸ The capacity of readers to identify with the suffering of others is central to sentimental fiction; in her study of “sentimental wounding,” Marianne Noble notes that sentimental authors “attempt to communicate through the presence of physical and emotional feelings, rather than through abstract detachment from the body.”⁹ Amputation creates an absence unfamiliar to those unscathed by war’s violence. Most readers on the home front had not experienced the life of the camps, the horrors of the battlefield, or the suffering of field hospitals. Newspaper accounts and literary representations provided access points to carnage and destruction but also illuminated the impossibility of fully comprehending the war and its process.

While many of the penmanship contest entrants describe their injuries and amputations, poets and writers removed from the battlefield tend to omit the intimate details of violence’s effects on the body. However, missing limbs and empty sleeves often prove impossible to fully sentimentalize and abstract. Poems like “The Cripple at the Gate,” published in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1862, rely on sentimental conventions to depict amputees as objects of pity and call on non-combatants to financially and socially support the wounded.¹⁰ A civilian observer describes the plight of “the cripple,” a man who happily sacrificed his limb for his country but is unable to return home in his destitute state. Highlighting the social repercussions of amputation (the soldier left behind a “wife and four little girls”), the poem leaves out the process of wounding and even

⁸ See Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2001), Marjorie Jane Trapp. “Sentimental Poetry of the American Civil War.” PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010.

⁹ Marianne Noble, “The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 10, no. 2 (1997): 295.

¹⁰ “The Cripple at the Gate,” *Harper’s Weekly* 7, no. 301 (October 4, 1862): 634.

refrains from naming which limb the man lost. Beginning and ending with a description of the bustling and elegant life of a city far removed from the battlefield, the poem emphasizes the power of the maimed veteran's body to disrupt illusions of separateness from the effects of war. "I gaze no more on the joyous train," the speaker intones after giving the begging man money, "For my eye is fixed with a steadfast strain/On the tattered soldier's halting stride."

Sentimentalism can encourage civilians to financially support the wounded but it cannot fully erase the lasting legacy of total war. Forever bereft of a limb, the "cripple" disrupts the healing power of sympathy. Though the speaker thanks God that the veteran will no longer have to beg, he remains focused on the physical proof of the man's sacrifice. This focus on the corporeal evidence of loss shapes many poems about amputees and brings the war home to those physically removed from it.

The unprecedented violence and suffering of the Civil War disrupted traditional sentimental narratives of easily contextualized deaths and "sentimental wounds." Jane Tompkins describes the sentimental power of deaths like Little Eva's: such deaths "enact a philosophy, as much political as religious, in which the pure and powerless die to save the powerful and corrupt, and thereby show themselves more powerful than those they save."¹¹ The soldiers who died for the Union and the Confederacy were not powerless and died to "save" the Union or the hope of an independent Southern nation. Unlike Northern amputees, maimed and scarred Confederate veterans carried the marks of defeat on their bodies long after the war. Physical signs of a lost cause, their bodies are not easily deployed for action in the sentimentalized and romanticized Lost Cause. The war created wounds and physical absences that resisted sentimentalizing; poems depicting wounds or centered on missing limbs call on readers to recognize, not relate to, the cost

¹¹ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 128.

of the war and to support the bearers of the struggle's physical markers and burdens. Tompkins categorizes sentimental literature as that which "blots out the uglier details of life and cuts experience to fit a pattern of pious expectation."¹² Though many poems about wounded soldiers focus on the redeeming sacrifice of heroic soldiers and elide the process of wounding, a significant number communicate the "uglier details" of war and underscore both the symbolic significance of missing limbs and the realities of the war's physical effects and legacy.

A survey of poetry written by soldiers during and shortly after the war reveals an important counterpoint to critical narratives of forgetting and suppression. Reading submissions to Bourne's competition in conjunction with literature written and published by soldiers and civilians between 1861 and 1870 allows for a more nuanced view of how Civil War Americans responded to and wrote about bodily loss and the experience of war. Soldiers, including many of the contest entrants, simultaneously laud the Union or Confederate cause while documenting physical sacrifice and the horrors of war. Though the submissions to Bourne's contest were never published in anthology form, a large number of poems and prose accounts of the war written by soldiers appeared in newspapers during and after the war. Non-combatant writers (or poets who did not provide their names or present themselves as soldiers) supplied newspapers with thousands of poems focusing on the dying, dead, or maimed bodies of soldiers. Such texts deserve recognition as an integral part of the literary record of the war; insisting on the centrality of the suffering of individual soldiers, these poems resist absorption into a narrative of national redemption and underscore the war's physical effects.

¹² Ibid. 151-2.

The united production of several hundred left-armed veterans of the battle-field

Northern amputees who sent specimens of their penmanship to the contest were not alone in their condition. Veterans with missing limbs were ubiquitous during and after the war. In their study of amputation during the Civil War, Laurann Figg and Jane Farrell-Beck estimate that 60,000 amputations were performed between 1861 and 1865.¹³ Advances in weaponry coupled with the absence of antiseptics led to high levels of infection that in turn necessitated amputation.¹⁴ Contrary to popular belief, Civil War surgeons were not impulsive butchers who amputated indiscriminately. Professor of surgery at the Medical College of South Carolina and a surgeon in the Confederate army, J. Julian Chisolm published *A Manual of Military Surgery, for the Use of Surgeons in the Confederate States Army* in 1864. In his discussion of primary and secondary amputations, Chisolm argues that “the constant flourish of the amputating knife is not the way to obtain the greatest number of surgical victories in times of war. Amputations must, however, ever remain a surgical necessity.”¹⁵ Chisolm provides tables of primary amputations (surgery before infection sets in) and secondary amputations (surgery after infection sets in) performed between June 1, 1862 and February 1, 1864, noting that many more cases were reported, but were unverifiable and thus not counted. Of 1,149 primary amputations, 315 resulted in death, producing a 27% mortality rate. 51% of the 546 soldiers who received secondary

¹³ Laurann Figg and Jane Farrell-Beck, “Amputation in the Civil War: Physical and Social Dimensions,” *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 48 (October 1993): 454.

¹⁴ For more information on Civil War medicine, see Frank R. Freeman, *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care During the American Civil War* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998); Alfred Jay Bollet, *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs* (Tucson, AZ: Galen Press, 2002).

¹⁵ J. Julian Chisolm, M.D. *A Manual of Military Surgery, for the Use of Surgeons in the Confederate States Army; with Explanatory Plates of all Useful Operations*, 3rd ed. (Columbia: Evans and Cogswell, 1864), 358.

amputations did not recover. The Union army reported a 26.3% fatality rate.¹⁶ Despite high mortality rates, a large number of amputees survived and faced similar challenges to those the contest entrants grappled with and wrote about.

In 1868 *The Soldier's Friend* reported that “the number of persons who have availed themselves of the provisions of the act of Congress giving artificial limbs to maimed soldiers amounts to 5971. Of these, 3784 were supplied with legs, 2134 with arms, 44 with hands, and 9 with feet.”¹⁷ Noting that the estimated number of amputees is 50,000 (not including an estimated 25,000 Confederates), the author of “Our Maimed Soldiers” writes that “various reasons” have prevented other “sufferers” from receiving artificial limbs. Reasons for not receiving government-provided artificial limbs included the unreliability of many prosthetics, discomfort caused by ill-fitting artificial limbs, and inability to travel to a producer of artificial limbs.¹⁸ In his study of Confederate amputees, R.B. Rosenberg describes the situation of maimed veterans in the South: “With the fall of the Confederacy it was up to other private charities and individual states to aid ex-soldiers who were incapable of caring for their families and who were not otherwise eligible for Federal pensions.”¹⁹ Virginia, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Mississippi passed legislation to provide artificial limbs to veterans.²⁰ Former Confederate states dedicated a substantial portion of their budgets to prosthetics for amputees; Rosenberg

¹⁶ For a detailed chart, see Figg and Farrell-Beck, “Amputation in the Civil War: Physical and Social Dimensions,” 459.

¹⁷ “Our Maimed Soldiers,” *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 11 (November 1868): 2.

¹⁸ Figg and Farrell-Beck, “Amputation in the Civil War: Physical and Social Dimensions,” 464.

¹⁹ R.B. Rosenberg, “‘Empty Sleeves and Wooden Pegs’: Disabled Confederate Veterans in Image and Reality” in *Disabled Veterans in History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000): 207.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

notes that Mississippi “devoted a fifth of its entire 1866 revenue to artificial legs” (208). That both the Federal government and individual Southern states dedicated significant funds to providing amputees with limbs and other forms of support illustrates the ubiquity of maimed soldiers and the symbolic power of their bodies. According to Rosenberg, “the empty sleeve was a badge of courage, and the disabled veteran stood as testimony to the violence and pain caused by the war” (213). Megan Kate Nelson argues that the “disembodied limbs and dismembered bodies” of soldiers “represented the destructive nature of war and became sites on which Americans inscribed a range of social anxieties.”²¹ Each soldier who survived amputation became living evidence of the horrible cost of war. Some chose to write about their experiences.

On July 29, 1865, the *New York Times* ran an article titled “Left-Handed Penmanship.” The article describes a contest intended to produce “fresh pleasure or benefit for the soldiers,” sponsored by Mr. William Oland Bourne. Bourne, the article informs the reader,

now offers premiums amounting to five hundred dollars for the four best specimens of penmanship by “left-armed soldiers of the Union.” Any man who has lost his right arm in the service may compete. He may write an original or selected article upon a patriotic theme, and he must write not less than two nor more than seven pages upon fine letter paper of ordinary size, leaving an inch margin at the sides, top, and bottom of the paper. The writer must also give his name in full; his regiment, company, and rank; the list of battles in which he was engaged; the place where he lost his arm, and his post-office address.²²

²¹ Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 161.

²² “Left-Handed Penmanship,” *Harper’s Weekly* 10, no. 448 (July 29, 1865): 467.

Similar notices appeared in *The Soldier's Friend* and identified the main purpose of the competition. Cash premiums served as an “inducement to the class of wounded and disabled soldiers...to make every effort to fit themselves for lucrative and honorable positions.”²³ \$1,000 was divided into prizes ranging from \$20 to \$200. A second competition held in 1867 offered ten \$50 prizes.²⁴ The list of entrants for the first competition names 270 veterans, including 30 commissioned officers, 52 non-commissioned officers, 185 privates, and two members of the United States Colored Troops.²⁵ The committee that decided which entries deserved awards for “literary merit” and “ornamental penmanship” included William Cullen Bryant, poet and president of the Sanitary Commission, and Theodore Roosevelt, Sr. 113 veterans sent submissions to the second competition and ten received \$50 premiums and autographed letters written by celebrated Union officers such as Ulysses S. Grant, David Farragut, and Philip Sheridan.²⁶ Directions for the second competition instructed entrants to submit signed affidavits affirming their disability and encouraged the submission of photographs.²⁷

Broadsides and invitations, some bearing slogans like “Disabled, But Not Disheartened!” and “The Left Arm Corps again in the Field!” (figures 4.2 and 4.3) announced the “Grand Exhibition of Left-Hand Penmanship, by Soldiers and Sailors Who Have Lost their Right Arms during the War,” an event organized by the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Union and held at Seaton Hall

²³ “Premium \$500 to the Left-Armed Soldiers of the Union,” *The Soldier's Friend* 1, no. 7 (August 1865): 2.

²⁴ William Oland Bourne, “Left-Hand Writing by Disabled Soldiers and Sailors of the War,” *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 1 (January 1868): 4.

²⁵ “List of Contributors,” *The Soldier's Friend* 2, no. 3 (March 1866): 2-3.

²⁶ “List of Competitors for the Prizes for Left-Hand Penmanship,” *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 1 (January 1868): 2; William Oland Bourne, “Left-Hand Writing by Disabled Soldiers and Sailors of the War,” *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 1 (January 1868): 4.

²⁷ “To the Left-Armed Corps of the Union,” *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 6 (June 1867): 2.

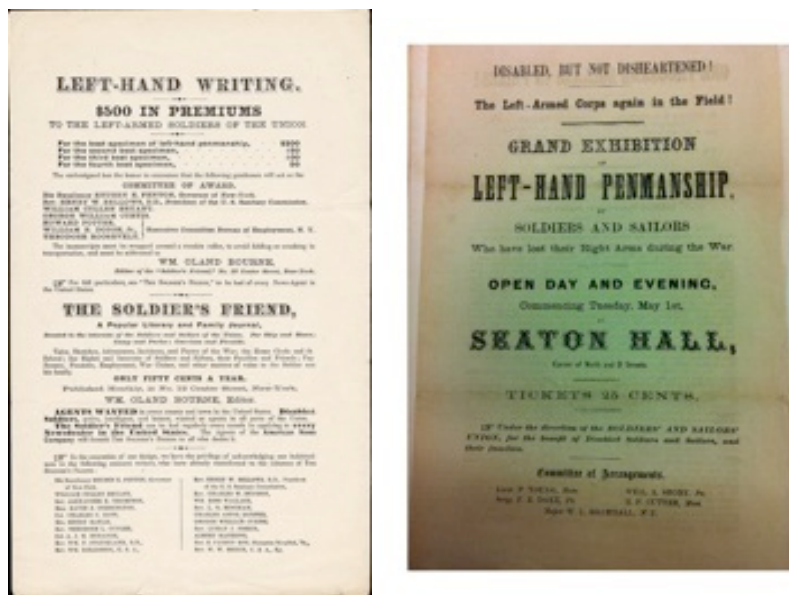
on May 1st, 1866.²⁸ One advertisement prints “What Fanny Fern Says” about her viewing of the exhibition. “As a moral lesson,” the “accomplished authoress” avers, “I would have had every boy and girl in the land taken there to see the power of the mind over the body.” Fern promotes the exhibition as a uniquely American endeavor and lauds the collection “as a legacy to every American child that shall be born to the end of time—or the end of our Republic, which is one and the same thing.” She also expresses her gratitude for a collection which confirms “that an American soldier is still wide awake and hopeful, though he may be so hacked and hewed to pieces that not half his original proportions remain.” In Fern’s account, the veterans, “fearing nothing, hoping all things, since they have helped to save the nation,” produce evidence of American ingenuity and resilience. In his speech at the exhibition, General Nathaniel P. Banks argued that the collection, “unparalleled in the history of the world,” should have an educational effect on the American people: “The people should take a lesson from this exhibition, and faithfully discharge the debt they owe to the soldier.”²⁹ Both Fern and Banks insist on the ability of veterans to participate effectively and productively as American citizens in the Union they helped to save.

While organizers and commentators focused on the post-war status and position of disabled veterans, the veterans themselves document what Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. famously dubbed “the incommunicable experience of war.” Holmes’ 1884 Memorial Day speech encapsulates the present-ness of the conflict in the minds and literary productions of soldiers. “We have felt,” Holmes averred, “we still feel, the passion of life to its top.”³⁰ “Touched by fire,”

²⁸ Handbills, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁹ “Speech of General Banks,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 2, no. 6 (June 1866): 2.

Holmes and other literary veterans produce records of sacrifice and suffering, insisting on lasting recognition of individual contributions.



Figures 4.2 and 4.3: Handbills advertising the competition and exhibition.

Though the central question asked by the competition committee was “which of the competitors excelled in business penmanship?”, a number of entrants submitted self-consciously literary “specimens.” By writing poems about losing limbs, veterans participate in the formation of an artistic record of the war. Evidencing both professional competence and creative talent, poetic specimens display a concept reflected in the periodical poetry published during the war: the war and, most importantly, its effects on the human body are important poetic subjects. Writing about the competition in 1865, Bourne expresses his belief that “a rich literary *entertainment* is in course of preparation for the public.”³¹ By 1866, Bourne had plans to publish a “memorial volume, containing the sketches, tales, poems, and war narratives of the Left-Armed

³⁰ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. “Memorial Day,” in *The Essential Holmes: Selections from the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions, and Other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*, ed. Richard A. Posner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 86.

³¹ William Oland Bourne, “Left-Hand Writing,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 1, no. 10 (October 1865): 2. Italics in original.

Corps, in one handsome octavo volume of five hundred pages.”³² Promising an introduction by William Cullen Bryant, illustrations, and specimens of penmanship, Bourne calls on subscribers to support what he believes “will be one of the best literary contributions to the history of the war, as well as the memorial of an entirely new feature in literature—the united production of several hundred left-armed veterans of the battle-field.” Though the volume was never published, the collection of submissions provides valuable insight into how veterans understood the war and its effects. As a literary “united production,” the contest entries also demonstrate various ways in which Civil War Americans wrote about and portrayed the conflict and its lasting influence.

In September of 1868, Bourne re-printed an article titled “Left-Hand Penmanship” from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* (figure 4.4).³³ The article praises the competition and provides specimens of left-handed writing from O.O. Howard, the famous one-armed general, and two contestants. The third specimen displays the “legible and superior business penmanship” of Franklin H. Durrah, the recipient of the “first premium of \$200.” Shortly after winning the contest, Durrah, most likely suffering from what is now termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, entered the insane asylum in which he would die.³⁴ Though his penmanship served as a marker of survival and as a promise of success, Durrah soon became another casualty of the war. Arguing that the contest entries are “genuine testimony to the character of our volunteer soldiers,” the article echoes Bourne in his hopes that the contest will provide disabled veterans with evidence of their ability to live full and successful lives as American citizens. Durrah’s

³² “An Attractive Book. Battle Memories of the Left-Armed Corps,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 2, no. 9 (September 1866): 2.

³³ “Left-Hand Penmanship,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 4, no. 9 (September 1868): 1.

³⁴ For more information of Franklin Durrah’s post-war life, see Jalynn Olsen Padilla, “Army of ‘Cripples’: Northern Civil War Amputees, Disability, and Manhood in Victorian America” (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2007), ProQuest (3277826), 57-58.

story complicates narratives of recovery and reconciliation; his handwriting reflects how the war changed both his body and his life, and is tangible testimony of physical disfigurement. Durrah’s writing and the other “specimens” embody the effects of the war; the “forward slope” and “back-hand” letters of amputees connect literary production to maimed bodies, recording suffering and calling on the nation to “stimulate, encourage, and reward our disabled volunteers.” “The collection of Left-Hand Papers,” the article concludes, “embraces between four and five hundred manuscripts...It is the first and only collection of this kind, and is worthy of preservation as one of the peculiar illustrations of our great conflict.” Unique in its foregrounding of bodily loss, the contest illustrates the violence and loss inherent in the “great conflict.”

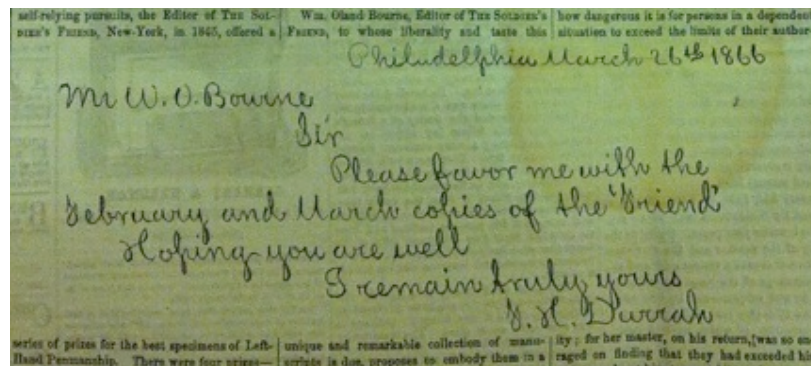


Figure 4.4: Selection from “Left-Hand Penmanship” (1868)

Bourne’s paper published regular updates about the progress of the competition and printed letters to the editor written by members of the so-called “Left-Armed Corps.” Writing in regards to the second competition, a “one-armed soldier in Wisconsin” expresses his appreciation for “those who feel for the crippled soldiers a heartfelt gratitude and remembrance, instead of sinking him into a mere citizen, or even into oblivion.”³⁵ Poems by maimed soldiers resist post-war narratives of national healing and forgetting. The missing right limbs of the Left-

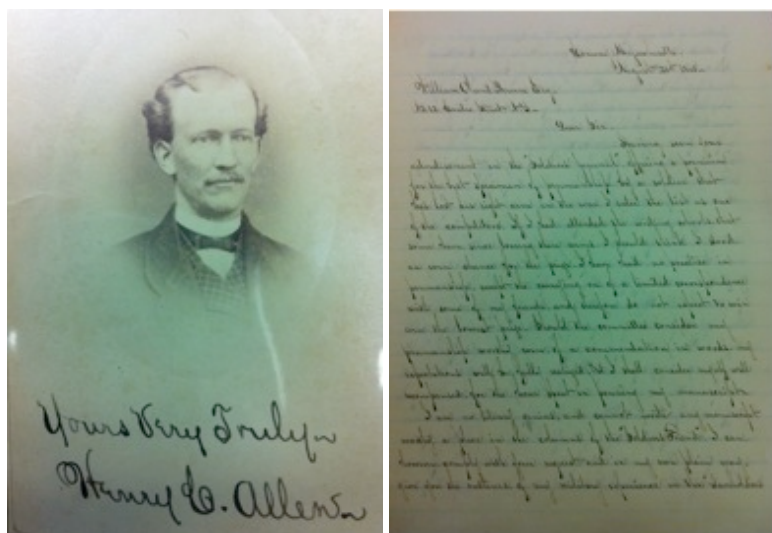
³⁵ “Extracts from Letters,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 3, no. 10 (October 1867): 6.

Arm Corps lie buried beneath the Southern sod, but their literary counterparts persist and provide a lasting testament of individual loss and suffering.

An honorable scar that speaks plainer than words of deeds gone by

By requiring a signed affidavit verifying the disability of each entrant, the penmanship contest emphasized the relationship between the maimed soldier body and literary production. Submissions were only valid if the contestants could prove their disability. Signed by local officials and often accompanied by photographs, the affidavits legally certified statements of experience. Many of the contestants recognize their missing limbs as testaments to their service and bodily affidavits of their legitimate rights to record their individual stories of sacrifice and loss. Henry C. Allen, a former private in Company E, 1st Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry, received a twenty-dollar prize for literary merit (figures 4.5 and 4.6). A veteran of the battles of South Mountain, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Manassas Gap, Allen admits that he is “no literary genius,” but proposes that he can “comply...and in [his] own plain way, give you the outlines of [his] military experience in the ‘Slaveholders’ Rebellion’ or the war for Union, Justice, and Liberty.”³⁶ Deprived of his right arm at Rapidan River, he insists, “None can say, that Allen was a coward, and hid from danger.” As proof of this, Allen submits both written and bodily evidence: “I have written recommendations from my officers: but better than those, I have an honorable scar that speaks plainer than words of deeds gone by.” Like Allen, many of the entrants recognized the rhetorical power of their maimed bodies and insisted that their missing limbs were proof of service and sacrifice.

³⁶ Henry C. Allen, Contest Entry, 1st Series, no. 15. Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figures 4.5 and 4.6: Photograph of Henry C. Allen and first page of his submission.

In her study of the contest, Jalynn Olsen Padilla divides the entrants into two categories: “heroes” and “cripples.”³⁷ According to Padilla, heroes “boasted about their military adventures and wrote as if disability had no impact on their lives whatsoever. In fact, they claimed to wear their empty sleeves proudly as symbols of their bravery.” In contrast, cripples “represented themselves as...victims of the cruel war; they claimed that their new disability had robbed them of loving relationships, financial freedom, and social status.” This bifurcation ignores significant complexity in the collection of texts. Participants in the contest simultaneously mourn the loss of their limbs and celebrate their role in achieving Union victory. Though some of the entrants are confident in their ability to survive and thrive as one-armed men, they record the pain of losing their arm and the suffering of themselves and their fellow soldiers. Ever present in the thoughts and writings of many of the veterans are the men who lost more than the use of their right arm; frequent references to brother soldiers resting in hastily dug graves disrupt hopeful plans for the future with memories of the horrible cost of war. The ways in which the entrants respond to their

³⁷ Jalynn Olsen Padilla, “Army of ‘Cripples’: Northern Civil War Amputees, Disability, and Manhood in Victorian America” (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2007), ProQuest (3277826), 21-22.

injuries should not be easily categorized. What does unite many of the submissions is the focus on the individual experience of loss and the belief that wounded bodies have rhetorical and symbolic power.

Henry W. Palmer, twenty years old in 1865, apostrophizes to his missing limb: “Lost right arm! thou wert a member of a perfect body, given to Country in her day of trial, and while Virginia’s soil is enriched by thy decay, the remnant of that Soldier body is reserved for such further duties as Country may demand.”³⁸ Though Palmer imagines his arm fertilizing the Southern sod and portrays his loss as a gift to the imperiled nation, he also describes a macabre scene in which he searches for his lost member: “Among the limbs amputated, I sought my own right arm...strange sensations are those of him standing beside the grave of a member of his own body__strange communings between the quick and the dead.” Palmer portrays his right arm as a testator that “bequeath[s] unto the left arm, all the properties of which it died seized and possessed.” The young veteran understands the loss of his arm in legal terms: “The seal of this last Will and Testament was the blood seal of amputation. Patriotism, love of Country, and Equal Rights were the subscribing witnesses to the Instrument.”

Removed from the battlefield and from the ghastly pile of limbs, Palmer reflects quite sanguinely on losing his arm in his first battle. Despite his good humor and hope for the future, Palmer narrates his individual suffering and records the manner in which he lost his arm. Though a “minie ball penetrated the center of the bone, pulverizing it to a powder,” Palmer insists that he can still serve his country since his left arm is the “Devisee of all...the right arm possessed.” Palmer sent a photograph with his submission, expressing his hope that it “may find a place among the likenesses of those who, in defending our Country from Treason’s grasp received

³⁸ Henry W. Palmer, Contest Entry, 1st Series, no. 73, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

those outward marks which tell of devotion to that Country.” Palmer’s body and the bodies of his wounded “brothers” bear “outward marks” of inner devotion, but also communicate the lasting presence of the war and its violence.

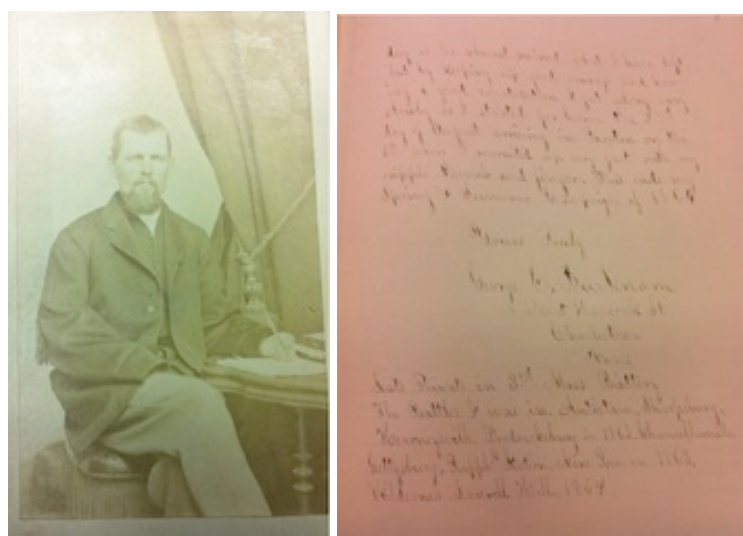
Like Palmer, George Bucknam, 3rd Massachusetts Battery, describes how he was wounded; however, he goes into much greater detail about the process that deprived him of his right hand, underscoring his individual experience of pain.³⁹ Entrants like Bucknam, who focus more on their wounds and less on patriotic sentiments, disrupt narratives of bodily and national reintegration; the war is over and the Union is saved, but Bucknam will always bear the marks of his experience. A veteran of Antietam, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and many other battles, Bucknam was wounded during the Battle of the Wilderness in May of 1864. He explains, “Through the carelessness of one of our own men, my gun prematured, as I was driving out my sponge staff after ramming a 12-lb. shot in the gun, and blowed my right hand off above the wrist, and three fingers of my left hand.” Bucknam details the effects of the explosion: “[It] burst the drum of my left ear, and burnt my face, and knocked me down, and jarred me considerable, but left me sensible, so I got up and walked off the field.”

Bucknam methodically describes the process of his wounding and does not shy away from revealing graphic elements of his suffering under “the splendid accomadations [*sic*] that [the] army afforded.” When Bucknam reached the rear, “the Doctors began their butchering the same as they were used to and [he] was soon a man with a few hands and less fingers than [he] had 2 hours before.” “Perhaps you can imagine my feelings,” Bucknam continues, “for the first twenty four hours after I was wounded thinking I should have to part with the remaining thumb and finger.” Bucknam calls on the committee of the award to think about what it actually feels

³⁹ George Bucknam, Contest Entry, 2nd Series, no. 47, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. In this quote and in others, I retain original spelling and grammar.

like to be wounded; he refrains from waxing patriotic and instead presents the facts of his ordeal. Upon reaching Washington, Bucknam's wounds, which had not been dressed for four days, "were so full of vermin so they very near frightened some of the Milk and Water Doctors." On Bucknam's insistence, the doctors went to work: "it took three docs three hours, to get the vermin all off." Another doctor's knife was "so handy that he kept cutting a little every day," but "by keeping up good courage" Bucknam was able to recover and head home in August.

Accompanying Bucknam's submission is a photograph that shows him seated at a desk (figures 4.7 and 4.8). Unlike some veterans, Bucknam chooses to display his marked body; an empty sleeve rests on his knee and his two-fingered left hand grasps a pen that hovers over paper. The image is both a reminder of Bucknam's experience during the war and an assertion of his survival. Closely tied to his survival is his ability to write and create a record of his loss. Bucknam titled his submission "Narrative and Experience of a member of the 3rd Mass. Battery in the marching and fighting from May 1st to May 8th, 1864," identifying himself as an individual within a collective. By recounting his experience, vermin and all, Bucknam insists on the significance of his war and his wounds.



Figures 4.7 and 4.8: Photograph of George M. Bucknam and final page of his submission.

Like Bucknam, Alfred D. Whitehouse submitted a photograph of himself and provided the graphic details of his wounding.⁴⁰ The photographer (or perhaps Whitehouse himself) added pink to the veteran's cheeks but did not attempt to disguise his missing arm. A member of the 8th New York militia, Whitehouse enlisted in 1859 and was wounded in the first battle of the war. He submitted specimens to both contests and won a prize for ornamental penmanship. His first entry consists of a prose account of his military experience and his second reveals that his penmanship skills far exceed his poetical ones. After listing the casualty numbers for the Battle of Bull Run, Whitehouse describes his ordeal:

I was wounded about 3 P.M. in the right arm by a rifle ball near the shoulder and after remaining upon the battlefield about six days among my wounded, and dyeing [*sic*], comrades, till my shattered arm was full of maggots, then I was put, with many others, on board of dirty Cattle Cars, without even straw to cover the manure.

On the journey from Manassas to Richmond, "from three to five died in each car...as prisoners, sutch [*sic*] was rebel humanity." Born in London, England, Whitehouse lost his arm to amputation in Richmond before being sent under flag of truce to Baltimore. Whitehouse closes his account by thanking God for sparing his life "to see Victory, and Peace, although at a terrible sacrifice, dawn upon our beloved Land once more." Whitehouse celebrates the salvation of the Union but refuses to omit his own personal experience of loss. Maggots, cattle cars, and dying comrades are all part of the experience communicated by Whitehouse's missing arm.

⁴⁰ Alfred D. Whitehouse, Contest Entry, 1st Series, no. 163, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 4.9: Alfred D. Whitehouse's second entry.

Whitehouse's second submission connects his missing right arm (and the missing limbs of other veterans) to the redeemed Union (figure 4.9).⁴¹ A short poem announces, "The right arm's gone,/the Nation yet remanes,/Tho many perished yet we are saved,/The right will triumph over wrong/Tho it leave us but one left arm strong." Rather than erasing individual loss, the poem creates an inverse relationship in which the right arm is absent because the Union survives and the Union survives because the right arm is absent. The poem concludes, "The Pen is mightier than the sword, and can be wield from right, to left with great efect [*sic*]." Whitehouse's clumsy and at times unmetrical lines detract from the "efect" of his poetry but connect what is written "from right, to left" with the body parts that do the writing. Despite the ornamental quality of Whitehouse's chirography, his choppy verses demonstrate that the move from right to left is not easily documented. Though a significant percentage of entrants produced neat and elegant handwriting specimens, the spidery and sloppy writing of a number of the contestants

⁴¹ Alfred D. Whitehouse, Contest Entry, 2nd Series, no. 73, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

confirms what Whitehouse's poem implicitly communicates. Nonetheless, his efforts underscore the importance of producing records of the process by which the United States survived due to the sacrifice of thousands of lives and limbs. Whitehouse labels himself a member of the "Left Arm Corps" and calls this collection of marked veterans "The Right, and Left, Arm of the Nation's Defense." The right arms of Whitehouse and his comrades are gone, but not forgotten.

Another, most likely unrelated, Whitehouse named Phineas left a poetic message expressing his gratitude for friendship in Bourne's hospital reminiscence book and later submitted a poem titled "My Crippled Arm" that won him a \$25 prize for literary merit.⁴² A corporal for the 6th New Hampshire Volunteers, Phineas P. Whitehouse sent a description of Fredericksburg, his first battle, along with his poem. Whitehouse's relationship with Bourne and *The Soldier's Friend* continued after the contest; in February of 1867, the newspaper published a biographical sketch of another soldier written by Whitehouse entitled "A True Patriot."⁴³ Describing his march toward the battlefield at Fredericksburg, Whitehouse writes, "Scenes pitiful and shocking met our gaze, as we neared the field of battle. The returning wounded, with powerless arms, shattered legs, or bloody and fearfully disfigured face, were objects dreadful to look upon, as to cause the bravest soldier to tremble." Though the corporal survived the battle unscathed (he lost his arm later in the war at the battle of Spotsylvania), he finishes his account by identifying the lasting influence of the destruction and death at Fredericksburg: "In many a household among the pines of Maine, the granite peaks of New Hampshire, the green fields of Vermont...and the fertile prairies of the West, the battle-field of Fredericksburg will long be

⁴² Phineas P. Whitehouse, Contest Entry, 1st series, no. 136, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴³ Phineas P. Whitehouse, "A True Patriot," *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 2 (February 1867): 1. I have found in *The Soldier's Friend* poems by two other contestants: John Bryson, "Lines," *The Soldier's Friend* 2, no. 7 (July 1866): 1; Joseph F. Stage, "Company A," *The Soldier's Friend* 2, no. 6 (June 1866): 1.

remembered as the place where a loved one lay down to die!” Along with his own personal experience of loss, Whitehouse insists on recording the war’s horrific effects on soldiers’ bodies.

In pentameter quatrains, Whitehouse makes his right arm a poetic subject, producing an ode to his once “strong” and now “crooked” limb. A crippled and withering version of Keats’ Grecian urn (also apostrophized in pentameter), Whitehouse’s arm is a repository of the past and a reminder of the war’s lasting influence. “‘Twas hardy once, and strong for manly labor,” Whitehouse writes, recalling that his arm was “a faithful servant.” “But Fortune frowned,” the poem continues, “A rebel bullet’s madness/Shattered that arm on Spotsylvania’s field,/And many hours of pain and days of sadness/In gloom succeeded ere the fracture healed.” A personified bullet destroys the right arm and makes it “a weak and feeble patient.” The violence of war fragments the speaker’s relationship to his body; he “watch[es] to find it stronger” and “look[s] upon the tender, child-like fingers,” but the “shapeless arm” and “rough scar” refuse to heal. Though shapeless and “feeble,” the arm does not resist interpretation or obscure meaning; for Whitehouse, the arm is a constant reminder of the war and his poem ensures that it will not just be a personal “burden.” Before Whitehouse ends his poem with the hope that, with the help of Heaven, his remaining arm will “a final victory see,” he directly addresses the reader: “I look at this, the feeble thing before me--/The piteous wreck of what was once an arm--/And can you wonder if a cloud comes o’er me?” Indicating the ongoing and overwhelming influence of the “rebel bullet,” the cloud pervades the poem and threatens to come “o’er” the reader. To paraphrase Melville, nothing undeceives like a bullet, during war and after. Whitehouse’s arm will never heal and thus disrupts narratives of post-war recovery and forgetting.

John Blanchard, a private in the 1st Regiment Ohio Light Artillery, also inserts his personal experience of amputation into the literary record of the war.⁴⁴ In unrhymed free verse that at times slips into blank verse, Blanchard describes himself waking with “a dim and dizzy brain” and asking, “Quick surgeon with your work. What is it off?” “Ay,” the surgeon replies, “even so, there lies your arm.” Punctuated by blank verse moments of clarity and regularity, the speaker’s stream-of-consciousness narration replicates the waking moments after amputation. “Float[ing]/On pinions from [his] shoulders newly grown,” the soldier hovers above his own body. Seeing his disembodied arm, the speaker must come back to earth and confront his changed circumstances. A separate entity, it is “the hand that long ago [his] mother held” and the arm that clasped “Madeline Dubray.” Blanchard appeals to Madeline: “Pray God you do not turn away when one poor hand/With halting awkward gestures seek your own.”

Like other entrants in the contest, Blanchard expresses fear over whether his marked body will adversely affect his familial and romantic relationships. Blanchard and other contestants implicitly link concerns about being disabled to impotency and fear that losing an arm or a leg has made them less of a man. Lisa Marie Herschbach argues that “the ‘empty-sleeve’ was both a badge of courage and a mark of permanent disability; of manly heroism and effeminate dependency; of patriotic sacrifice and inability to care for family.”⁴⁵ In his study of United States military culture and disability, David Serling asserts that during the Civil War “the concept of unconditional physical health, without duplicity, was concomitant with patriotism and moral dedication to the Union.”⁴⁶ According to Serling, “disability or disfigurement, particularly

⁴⁴ John Blanchard, Contest Entry, 1st Series, no. 75, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵ Lisa Marie Herschbach, *Fragmentation and Reunion: Medicine, Memory and Body in the American Civil War* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1997), ProQuest (9810667), 91.

if it derived from duplicity or concealment, was concomitant with a failure to perform one's civic or national duty" while "the amputation stump, the artificial limb, or any other overt physical evidence of injury became shorthand for military service."⁴⁷ Highlighting the "queerness" of amputees' bodies, Serling argues that "by being no longer whole, those veterans whose bodies manifested physical damage—prima facie evidence—were men for whom disability suggested a certain level of incompetence."⁴⁸ Many of the contestants attest to amputation's effects on their ability to engage in what Phineas P. Whitehouse calls "manly labor": farming, taking care of livestock, and performing other household chores. Blanchard's "awkward gestures" will be a detriment at the "farmhouse" he mentions and potentially in his continued relationship with Madeleine. Blanchard's fears and the concerns of many of the contestants about their ability to be full men underscore the connection between physicality and notions of manhood. The surgeon's knife removes limbs and threatens to socially and psychologically castrate the amputees. Bidding goodbye to his right arm, Blanchard remains uncertain about his future as an incomplete man.

Like Blanchard, Thomas Perrine of the 140th Pennsylvania Volunteers produces a poem that records the war's effects on his body, his identity, and his personal relationships. Perrine's tongue-in-cheek humor cannot fully obscure his connected fear of incompetence and the threat of impotence. Perrine titled his submission "Sinistra Manuscripta" and provided "Sinister Manuscript" as a translation.⁴⁹ Combining the Latin words for "left" and "handwritten,"

⁴⁶ David Serling, "Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in U.S. Military Culture, 1800-1945," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 9.1-2 (2003): 160.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 160-1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 161.

Perrine's title invokes negative connotations regarding left-handedness and closely ties his written product to his bodily condition. Perrine takes the first line of Virgil's *Aeneid*, "Arma Virumque Cano" (I sing of arms and of a man), for the title of his poem, slyly elevating the story of losing his arm to the epic realm. Perrine further asserts the value of his account by employing the ballad stanza. "Twas in the year of Sixty three," the poem begins, thus inserting one man's story of a shell fragment striking his "Humerus vein" into the literary and historical record of the war. Poetic license allows Perrine to lose his arm on "May-day" and also lose the love of "Miss May Dey." "To accept my hand she had agreed," the speaker explains, "But when I lost my hand, she said,/The bargain didn't hold."

Perrine's body humor and puns on the words "right" and "left" throughout the poem underscore the close relationship between his text and his corporeal self—each communicates the lasting presence of the war and its destruction. "O woful day!" Perrine's speaker laments, "that took away/My arm and sweetheart too:--/An empty sleeve, an empty heart—/'Twould make a Darkey blue." Perrine equates his body's maiming and his subsequent loss and emasculation with the marks of race by comparing his plight to that of the recently freed slaves: "'These negroes all,' Judge Taney said,/'A white man's rights do lack':/The rebels left not right to me—/I might as well be black." The amputee body both disrupts and reaffirms categories of racial difference: physical wounding can reduce a white soldier to the level of disenfranchised former slaves, but that soldier remains white. Significantly, Perrine does not claim he is like a black person; rather, he says he "might as well be." In Perrine's formulation, and in the accounts of other contest entrants, amputation has physical, emotional, interpersonal, social, and political ramifications.

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Perrine, Contest Entry, 1st Series, no. 50, Wm. Oland Bourne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Empty sleeves that speak

One month before the 1868 presidential election, *The Soldier's Friend* printed an article entitled "Empty Sleeves."⁵⁰ Reprinted from an unnamed paper, the article succinctly illuminates the symbolic and rhetorical power of missing limbs in the post-war United States. "In our streets," the article begins,

in our offices, on our farms, everywhere we meet "empty sleeves;" sleeves the wind blows against broken ribs, whips about crippled bodies; sleeves whose emptiness tells of arms blown off in battle; of arms lost in strife for the life of a nation; of arms shattered with flag in hand. Empty sleeves that speak more eloquently than tongue or type of patriotism, of courage, of faith in the right, of hope in Justice; empty sleeves that tell of honor upheld, of a nation saved, of homes defended, of valor, of daring.

This synecdochal representation both obscures individual identity and underscores the suffering and sacrifice of thousands of men. "Empty sleeves" becomes a category that subsumes men with empty pant legs, soldiers retaining limbs but crippled for life, and veterans bearing scars. Empty sleeves were slightly more common than empty pant legs and, as this article makes evident, more symbolically significant.⁵¹ They "speak," "proclaim," and "tell," "rebuk[ing] those who did their utmost to make Slavery national and Freedom sectional." The "wearers" of empty sleeves are "living reminders of Libby, of Andersonville, and those other hells in which Union soldiers who fought for the old flag of Liberty against the rebel flag of Slavery were tortured." Absent arms are present in every town and on every street, politically powerful and insisting on the lasting legacy of the war. The author of "Empty Sleeves" insists that the bearers of empty sleeves will,

⁵⁰ "Empty Sleeves," *The Soldier's Friend* 4, no. 10 (October 1868): 1.

⁵¹ Figg and Farrell-Beck note that "one-and-a-half times more men survived the War with upper extremity amputations than lower extremity amputations" (460).

“if they believe that they fought on the right side,” vote for Ulysses S. Grant. Along with violence and sacrifice, political affiliation and loyalty are written on soldiers’ bodies.

Dealing with often incomprehensible and incommunicable aspects and results of war, writers rely on the discursive potential of wounded bodies; words may fail, but empty sleeves eloquently communicate the effects of violence. Portraying destitute and woebegone veterans, some non-combatant writers rely on readers’ sympathetic and sentimental response to objects of pity. Often, however, the empty sleeve disrupts the sentimental space with demands for recognition and respect as the telltale sign of war’s violence that no amount of sympathy will erase.

Also published in *The Soldier’s Friend*, Rev. M.G. Hansen’s “Lo! The Crippled Soldier” articulates the communicative and disruptive force of missing limbs.⁵² Riding on a ferryboat, Hansen witnessed an “ex-soldier” of the Union make “mute appeal[s] for charity.” Hansen understood that the man was a veteran in part because of the “soiled and worn” uniform he wore. More importantly, “the mutilated limb, amputated a little above the knee, and the crutch supporting the shoulder from which the stump of an arm hung suspended, expressed more eloquently than language could the sad tale of battles fierce, and wounds, pains, and groans.” The war is over but the veteran’s arm carries its legacy into the present and speaks on behalf of its bearer. Despite the soldier’s “eloquent” form, some of Hansen’s fellow passengers ignored his plea. However, “the female portion of the passengers” was more willing to provide assistance and sympathy, recognizing in the veteran’s “maimed and halting” form their own lost sons and mutilated brothers.

⁵² Rev. M.G. Hansen, “Lo! The Crippled Soldier,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 2, no. 10 (October 1866): 4.

Like Hansen, other contributors to *The Soldier's Friend* bemoaned the plight of armless and legless veterans, insisting that the government and the American people support and succor the men who sacrificed their bodily well-being to save the Union. In a letter published in 1867 and entitled "Our Disabled Veterans," J.M. Letts bases his plea for "these precious heroes who have laid their limbs and their lives upon the altar of patriotism" on their defeat of the South.⁵³ "Who stayed the parricidal arm?" Letts asks, quickly identifying the answer: "See that lad just entering the street-car. Note his pale, wan visage—the hectic flush on his cheek. See his *armless sleeve*. 'Twas he! Yes, 'twas he! He parried that deadly blow, but the poisonous miasma and the fatal bullet have done their work upon *him*."⁵⁴ The "lad's" service and the heavy cost of saving the nation are written on his body; by directing attention to the living reminders of the war, Letts advocates the continued support of wounded veterans in peacetime.

William Oland Bourne also encouraged his readers to respect and provide work for wounded veterans on numerous occasions; his "school dialogue," titled "The Crippled Soldier" and performed at the "Christmas Festival of the First Methodist Protestant Sunday School," features a veteran with a wounded leg conversing with two young boys.⁵⁵ After talking to the soldier of his plight and hearing his graphic description of Chancellorsville ("The ground was covered with the dead and wounded. Arms and legs and bodies all torn to pieces"), the young boys give the soldier their pocket money and help him find work. The veteran, forever marked by his service, dislikes begging and instead looks for "steady work." Before leaving the boys, the soldier becomes a mouthpiece for Bourne's ideal form of philanthropy: "That's the way to help us cripples. Give us work that we can do—and let us have a chance to live." The interaction

⁵³ J.M. Letts, "Our Disabled Veterans," *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 9 (September 1867): 4.

⁵⁴ Italics in original.

⁵⁵ William Oland Bourne, "The Crippled Soldier," *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 1 (January 1867): 4.

models the way of dealing with maimed soldiers advocated by many poems and periodicals published during and shortly after the war: the wounded or missing limb records the soldier's service and inspires readers to remember the heavy cost of the war and support those who paid it with work and respect instead of charity and pity. "We say the war is over," writes "a lady" to Bourne, inquiring about "the numerical strength of *The Left-armed Corps*," "but let us not forget that thousands of those who in vigor and strength faced the foe on the field, are *in consequence* fighting to-day in a weary struggle with weakness, shattered health, and enfeebled powers."⁵⁶ Those who continue to struggle are at the forefront of literature documenting and remembering the physical and emotional effects of the war.

Like the specimens of handwriting in Bourne's contest, poems and articles published in periodicals foreground the maimed soldier body as a central literary trope; the absence of missing limbs becomes a significant literary presence that records the physical and emotional effects of mass violence on individuals. Odes to amputated limbs and stories portraying the plight of legless and armless veterans document the pervasive influence of the war on soldiers' bodies and the social and cultural impact of widespread destruction. Poets and writers employ techniques similar to those exemplified by members of the Left Armed Corps. Like Henry C. Allen, numerous writers insist on the rhetorical power of the wounded body, presenting scars that speak of deeds. Others like Henry W. Palmer and Phineas P. Whitehouse apostrophize missing appendages or reveal the graphic details of the process of wounding and amputation in texts similar to the entries of George Bucknam and Alfred D. Whitehouse. Depicting the social and cultural repercussions of wounding, poets and writers resemble John Blanchard and Thomas

⁵⁶ A Lady, "The Left-Armed Corps," *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 4 (April 1867): 2.

Perrine in their accounts of the effects of amputation on individuals' lives and relationships. These texts are a significant and under-read part of the body of Civil War literature—scholarly studies that focus on sentimentalized patriotic paeans of willing sacrifice and the sublimation of broken bodies remove from the corpus of war literature poems and stories that record and mourn the physical cost of war by disrupting sentimental narratives of redemption and reconciliation.

Saddest traces of the fight

Confronting unprecedented violence and death, many Civil War Americans focused on the difficulty of recording the true nature of the struggle. Combatants and civilians alike echoed Whitman's famous avowal that the real war would never "get in the books." However, missing limbs, empty sleeves, and maimed bodies, ubiquitous during and after the war, serve to embody the effects of the war and provide a way of recording what can be known about the conflict. Soldiers witnessed the bodily maiming of their comrades or went under the surgeon's knife; civilians welcomed home wounded family members—brothers, fathers, sons, and lovers forever marked by the war—and learned about battles from articles written by special correspondents. The physical effects of the war can never be fully assimilated into sentimental narratives of sacrifice; numerous poems underscore the importance of recognizing both service and suffering, refusing to obscure or elide the wounded bodies of soldiers in favor of celebrating the Union or the Confederacy. By insisting on the rhetorical power of missing limbs and empty sleeves, writers find ways to communicate the incommunicable.

In August of 1867, *The Soldier's Friend* published a poem by Brevet Colonel Augustus H. Penn titled "A Story of the War."⁵⁷ "'Tis but a common story I shall to you unfold," the poem begins, establishing the representative nature of the story of an individual soldier. Rather than abstracting the suffering of individual soldiers, however, the poem insists on the importance of

⁵⁷ August H. Penn, "A Story of the War," *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 9 (August 1867): 1.

acknowledging and recording the effects of the war on the men who served: “`tis no less important because so often told.” Focusing on a “humble soldier” who “bears today the scars,” Penn calls on “men of wealth and station...whose lot is power and plenty” to support and honor those who “in freedom’s fight went down.” Penn calls on the sympathy of his readers by describing the plight of the soldier but emphasizes the distance between the veteran’s physical condition and the comfortable lives of many readers. “Shall I tell you of my soldier, and the motley life he led?” the speaker asks, allowing for the reader’s lack of experience and indicating that the central figure of the poem is probably not familiar to readers ensconced in comfortable drawing rooms. As a military officer and a poet, Penn bridges the gap between the soldier’s experience and the imagined reader’s inexperience. The poem relates “the story told by thousands—daily, hourly it is told;/But its interest gains by telling and it never can grow old.” Though the speaker invokes the maimed bodies of thousands, he provides the particulars of the soldier’s wounding: “across his strong breast clotted lay a thick dark mass of gore,/And the shattered arm beside him ne’er could hold a rifle more.” Without his arm, the soldier “trusts the gratitude of others, finds it but a broken reed,” and cannot support “wife and babies.” Embodied by his horrible wound and destroyed limb, the soldier’s physical condition demands gratitude and recognition, not pity or sympathy. A haunting presence, the soldier’s “shattered arm” inspires the speaker to tell its story and invades the imagined domestic space in which the story is told.

Despite multiple references to the factitious nature of the poem and its story, the speaker insists his narrative is based in fact, indicative of the plight of many veterans, and inspired by the bodily maiming of thousands of men. The final stanza begins with an affirmation of the reality of wounded soldiers’ plight: “Is it, then, a fancy picture I have painted for you here?/ One which

has no real being?” Answering his rhetorical question, the speaker exclaims, “Oh! I would to Heaven it were!/But a spectre stands beside me, that will never leave me more!” The “spectre,” resembling the “humble soldier” at the center of the poem, is both ghostly and corporeal and serves as the impetus for poetic creation: “It will enter all unbidden, though I close and bar the door;/It is silent, ne’er repining, but its armless coat sleeve speaks/Louder than the pealing thunder, when the drifted storm-cloud breaks.” Central to the “story” is the communicative power of the empty sleeve; the soldier the poem describes has been silenced by war’s violence and the cruelty of uncharitable others, but his body is eloquent. The poet-speaker feels it is his duty to document and give voice to the “armless coat sleeve.” Recognizing the rhetorical power of soldiers’ wounded bodies, the speaker hopes that others will respond: “I would that voice which thrills me might go forth throughout the land,/Till this mighty, blood-saved nation should both hear and understand.” To fully comprehend, the reader must learn to interpret the soldier’s empty sleeve not as a receptacle for pity but as proof of service. The empty sleeves and shattered limbs of thousands of veterans speak, and it is the duty of American citizens to heed them.

In his 1862 poem “The Empty Sleeve,” Dr. G.W. Bagby, editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger* and later the state librarian of Virginia, addresses “Tom,” a veteran who has lost his right arm.⁵⁸ Half of a conversation between the speaker and his soldier friend, the poem brings the reader into the intimate space of Tom’s loss and its emotional, personal, and social repercussions. Throughout the poem, Tom speaks once; his words are filtered through the voice of the speaker. However, the poem identifies Tom’s empty sleeve as an eloquent and powerful communicator. Seeking to rally the spirits of his friend, Bagby’s speaker tells Tom, “The arm

⁵⁸ Dr. G.W. Bagby, “The Empty Sleeve,” *The Southern Illustrated News* 1, no. 14 (December 13, 1862): 5. Biographical information on Bagby from *New York Times* review of “The Negro Race: Lecture by Dr. George W. Bagby, of Virginia—Its Destiny to Gradually Dwindle Away—The Signs of Decadence,” *New York Times* (April 21, 1875); Benjamin Blake Minor, *The Southern Literary Messenger, 1834-1864* (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1905): 209-230.

you lost was worth to me/Every Yankee that ever died.” This equation both dismisses the deaths of thousands of Union soldier and elevates Tom’s limb and the loss of it to a place of high honor and significance.

Following this pattern, Bagby’s poem records the devastating effect of losing a limb while remaining optimistic about armless men’s abilities to survive and be husbands, fathers, and citizens of the Confederate nation. Despite the speaker’s avowal that Tom “do[esn’t] mind it all” and admires his “beautiful stump,” he soon notices Tom’s “trembling lip” and exclaims, “I do believe/The fellow is going to cry!” The speaker responds to Tom’s distress, caused by his worry that the woman he loves “deserves a perfect man,” by emphasizing the transformative force of the lost arm and the symbolic power of the soldier’s empty sleeve.” “Tom!” he explains, “the arm that has turned to clay/Your whole body has made sublime;/For you have placed in the Malvern earth/The proof and pledge of a noble life—/And the rest, henceforward of higher worth/Will be dearer than all to your wife.” Given “freely, for Freedom’s sake,” Tom’s arm, figured in the poem as a separate entity even when attached to Tom’s body, dies to redeem both Tom and the Confederacy. Imagining a happy future for Tom, the speaker depicts the veteran at the wedding of his daughter. “Guests linger, loth to leave/The house of him in whom they pride,” their respect in large part inspired by the absence of the arm that lies buried near the battlefield of Malvern Hill. Written before the defeat and dissolution of the Confederate States, Bagby’s poem is secure in the hope of Southern success; not tempered by the loss of the war, the poem displays the empty sleeve as a powerful marker of sacrifice for Southern freedom.

War removes arms, marks bodies, and transforms sleeves into icons. Like Bagsby, the pseudonymous author of “Empty Sleeves” insists on the transformative and symbolic process of losing an arm in battle. Published in 1868 in *The Soldier’s Friend*, “Empty Sleeves” by

“Britomarte” illustrates the representative power of the eponymous items.⁵⁹ “Empty sleeves—O sad reminders/Of that long and dreary night,” the poem begins, establishing the absence of limbs as an important presence and poetic subject. “Mournful tokens of the battle,” empty sleeves are “saddest traces of the fight;/Telling us how heroes suffered/For their country and the right.” Empty sleeves serve as reminders, tokens, and traces—seemingly insubstantial and ephemeral items that, through the crucible of war and throughout the course of the poem, become substantial, significant, and transformative. Composed on December 14, 1867, the poem describes how “soldiers’ graves are thickly scattered/O’er the valley and the lea;/They are sleeping on the mountain,/They are sleeping by the sea.” “Sad they are indeed,” the speaker says of the graves, “but sadder/Are those empty sleeves to me.” Two years after the war, the graves are covered with grass and survivors continue life in a “rescued country.” Veterans’ empty sleeves, in their ubiquity and presentness, are more symbolically powerful than the scattered graves of soldiers. “By their own life blood,” the wearers of empty sleeves stemmed “the awful tide of treason” and “bought their country’s freedom,/Sealed with blood and bitter pain.” Having laid “their manhood’s strength and glory” on “their country’s altar,” their bodies are living reminders of their sacrifice and suffering. Just as Tom’s entire body was “made sublime” by its loss, “those empty sleeves are hallowed/By the grace the battle leaves.” Receiving this grace includes the paradoxical feelings of “mournful pride and saddest glory”; rather than erasing the destruction and loss of war, giving “honor to those empty sleeves” (the ending instruction of the poem) ensures that the cost of war will not be forgotten.

⁵⁹ Britomarte, “Empty Sleeves,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 4, no. 2 (February 1868): 8.



Figures 4.10-4.12: *The Empty Sleeve* (1866); *The Empty Sleeve* (c. 1870); illustration accompanying David Barker's "The Empty Sleeve" (1863).

"The Empty Sleeve" by David Barker appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* in 1863, *The Crutch* in 1865, and *The Soldier's Friend* in 1867.⁶⁰ Copy, most likely written by William Oland Bourne, precedes the poem in *The Soldier's Friend* and reminds the reader, "We have already noticed the charming steel engraving by J.C. Buttre, from the original drawing by Miss A.R. Sawyer" (figure 4.10).⁶¹ "The author of the following poem," Bourne continues, "has given a beautiful tribute to 'The Empty Sleeve,' worthy of its place at the side of the portrait." *The Soldier's Friend* implies that the engraving inspired the poem; however, a description of the image in the *Ladies' Repository* indicates that the engraving was first printed in 1866, three years after the appearance of the poem in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News*. "Its very name," the *Ladies'*

⁶⁰ David Barker, "The Empty Sleeve," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* 16, no. 399 (May 30, 1863): 149; *The Crutch* 2, no. 70 (May 6, 1865): 1, Archives of Maryland Online, <http://aomol.net>; *The Soldier's Friend* 3, no. 9 (September 1867): 8.

⁶¹ John C. Buttre, *The Empty Sleeve* (Boston: N.Y. & B.B. Russell & Co., 1866), Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries, DeGolyer Library Collection, <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/civ/id/424>.

Repository reports of the engraving, “will send a thrill through many loyal and loving hearts, and it will find a place in many homes.”⁶² The relationship between the image and the poem indicates how images and literature interacted in the creation of a record of the war; photographs of the battlefield and newspaper engravings of sketches by artists embedded with troops provided the raw material for poetic creation while popular poems inspired artists to produce accompanying illustrations or independent pieces. Anthologies of war poetry and engravings like “The Empty Sleeve” served as household reminders of the conflict.

The engraving depicts a veteran sitting with a cherubic child in his lap. The child examines the sleeve and attempts to look into it while the veteran stares stonily into the distance. A post card printed in the 1870s resembles the earlier engraving; this time, however, an actual armless veteran, Henry H. Meacham, author of *The Empty Sleeve: Or the Life and Hardships of Henry H. Meacham in the Union Army*, holds a child in his lap (figure 4.11).⁶³ As in the engraving, the photographed child examines the empty sleeve. The illustration accompanying the poem in *Frank Leslie’s* printing of Barker’s poem shows two children in conversation with an older veteran (figure 4.12). In this image, as in the engraving and the photograph, curious children confront the evidence of war and attempt to understand it. The three images foreground interpretation—what is the child to make of the empty sleeve? The description in the *Ladies’ Repository* surmises that the soldier is “thinking of the solemn Past when he contended for the Right on the battle-fields of Freedom” while the child asks why the sleeve is empty. Childish innocence confronts the physical evidence of war, looking for an arm that will never return. The

⁶² “Literary and Artistic Items,” *Ladies’ Repository* 36, no. 20 (October 1866): 316.

⁶³ G.P. Critcherson, *The Empty Sleeve* (1870), Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries, DeGolyer Library Collection <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu>. *The Railsplitter: A Journal for the Lincoln Collector* identifies Henry H. Meacham as the soldier in the image, <http://www.railsplitter.com/sale10/imprints.html>.

absence of the man's arm connotes the presence of the war even in the domestic space of peacetime and the child's inquiring gaze communicates the ongoing struggle to comprehend the war and its effects.

Written prior to the publication of the engraving, Barker's poem provides a way of interpreting and understanding the empty sleeves produced by the war. The first two seven-line stanzas of trochaic pentameter end with a rhyming triplet, emphasizing both an absence and a presence; there is no eighth line to complete the series of rhyming couplets, just as the "one-arm man" at the center of the poem is incomplete. The missing line, like the missing arm, communicates the presence of violence—a presence that the second two nine-line stanzas illustrate. By manipulating traditional heroic couplets, Barker presents the "simple song of a one-arm man" to the "gazing throng," elevating his "tale devoid of an aim or plan" to the level of the epic. Like the children in the illustrations, the "gazing throng" attempts to interpret the marked body of the soldier. Despite the speaker's denial of intention, the poem unequivocally defines the symbolic significance of the empty sleeve. The war, with its transformative force, made the empty sleeve into "a tell-tale thing." "Till this very hour," the speaker asserts, "I could ne'er believe/What a tell-tale thing is an empty sleeve,/What a weird, queer thing is an empty sleeve." The "hour" of the war lends the sleeve meaning; even after the hour passes, the sleeve will continue to tell its tale.

"Weird" and "queer," the empty sleeve of Barker's poem disrupts but also embodies the sentimental narrative of "a country's need and a country's call;/Of a kiss and a tear for a child and wife." "It tells in a silent tone to all" of the domestic space in which the soldier bids farewell to his family in order to save his "nation's life." In the third stanza, the poem, like the soldier, makes a "hurried march" away from the space of the home. The family scene gives way to what

else the sleeve “tells”: “It tells of a battle-field of gore,/Of the sabre’s clash, of the cannon’s roar;/Of the deadly charge, of the bugle’s note,/Of a gurgling sound in a foeman’s throat;/Of the whizzing grape, of the fiery shell,/Of a scene which mimics the scenes of hell.” The empty sleeve signifies both the dystopic hellscape of war and the survival and return home of the “one-arm man,” serving as a lasting reminder of violence and suffering, but also promising eventual victory. In the final stanza, the poem attempts to move beyond the horror of grape and shell, averring that, “Though it points to a myriad wounds and scars,/Yet it tells that a flag with stripes and stars/In God’s own chosen time will take/Each place of the rag with the rattlesnake;/And it points to a time when the flag shall wave/O’er a land where breathes no cowering slave.” Calling on the “throng” to “heave/One proud huzza for the empty sleeve,/For the one-arm man and the empty sleeve,” Barker’s poem illustrates the ability of the empty sleeve to operate within sentimental narratives of familial love and heroic sacrifice while simultaneously disrupting such narratives with the stark reality of war’s destruction.

“The Empty Sleeve,” a song inspired by Buttre’s engraving and published in 1866, celebrates Union victory while also identifying what the sleeve “tells.”⁶⁴ Text accompanying the song describes the engraving, noting that “the little fellow” on the soldier’s lap “with natural curiosity and childish inquiry takes ‘the empty sleeve’ and looks wonderingly for the lost arm.” Though the child looks for the arm, the song focuses on the sleeve; the child, the song promises, will soon learn to invest the sleeve with meaning. Though the veteran will tell his son the story of his loss, his sleeve speaks for itself. When his father and the empty sleeve are gone, the son “shall tell how bravely fought/His sire on Freedom’s side.” The song teaches the generations

⁶⁴ Mrs. P.A. Hanaford (words) and Rev. J.W. Dadmun (music), “The Empty Sleeve” (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1866), Johns Hopkins University, Levy Street Music Collection, box 087, Item 139, <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/25685>.

who did not fight in the war how to maintain the rhetorical power of the empty sleeve and remember and pass on the meaning of the war.

Written to be sung in harmony, the song encourages the dissemination of this meaning; those who sing the chorus will, like the child, learn that “that empty sleeve, it is a badge/Of bravery and honor;/It whispers of the dear old flag,/And tells who sav’d our banner.” Lest the sacrificed appendage be forgotten, the chorus continues: “Three hearty cheers for those who lost/An arm in Freedom’s fray,/And bear about an empty sleeve,/But a patriot’s heart today.” Significantly, the “buts” of the song illustrate the bifurcated symbolic power of the sleeve. The sleeve communicates absence and presence, the loss of an appendage but the winning of a war. “The strife for freedom is gone by; The war-cry sounds no more,” the song begins, “But the heroes come with empty sleeves/From out the battle’s roar.” As Whitman wrote, “The war is over—yet never over”; the battle is done, but its effects remain. The returning veterans have lost their arms, but their patriotic hearts are unscathed. Empty sleeves indicate loss and victory, suffering and survival.

Good-by, Old Arm!

Though the empty sleeve that replaces the living arm figures prominently in many poems about amputees and amputation, the limbs, cut off and buried, sometimes reappear in literary form, memorialized and re-embodied through text. Like unwieldy and uncomfortable prosthetics, these literary limbs never fully replace actual missing arms and legs; instead, they serve as placeholders that embody loss and the effects of violence. By transforming amputated limbs into poetic subjects, writers unbury and display the corporeal evidence of war’s violence. Poems and prose that document the process of amputation highlight the suffering of individuals and insert the amputated arms and legs of soldiers into the literary record of the war. Like Phineas

Whitehouse, the penmanship contest entrant who created an ode to his “crippled arm,” George Cooper and an unnamed veteran from New Haven, Connecticut, address and invoke their missing limbs, producing a record of their personal experience of loss and creating literary limbs that will not decay.

“‘Good-By, Old Arm!’: A Hospital Incident” by George Cooper appeared in *The United States Service Magazine* in November of 1865 and *The Soldier’s Friend* in June of 1866.⁶⁵ An article titled “Forgotten!” precedes the poem in *The Soldier’s Friend* and asks, “Who can forget that those men have borne the musket over plain and marsh, through heat and cold, under burning sun and piercing frost—have stood in the front as the nation’s defenders?”⁶⁶ The soldiers of the Union “pursued treason from one step to another” and bear the proof of their actions on their bodies. “And after the battle,” the piece continues, “came the further experience of the surgeon’s knife.” The article urges men and women untouched by war to recognize and sympathize with those who have been, underscoring the differences between civilian life and the life of an amputee:

It may be very pleasant to lie down on a comfortable bed and wake up to find that you are as much of a man or woman as you were when you dropped into the arms of the sleepy god, and you were carried off in gentle argosies to dreamland banks and bower. But to lie down on a surgeon’s table, and find yourself dropping into slumber, while your arms and legs are firmly held by the attendants, is a different affair, truly.

The domestic and comfortable bed becomes the surgeon’s table as amputation disrupts the article’s sentimental appeal. For the soldier undergoing amputation, hospital attendants serve as

⁶⁵ George Cooper, “‘Good-by, Old Arm!’: A Hospital Incident,” *The United States Service Magazine* 4, no. 26 (November 1865): 452; *The Soldier’s Friend* 2, no. 6 (June 1866): 2.

⁶⁶ “Forgotten,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 2, no. 6 (June 1866): 2.

sorry replacements for Morpheus and waking involves finding oneself not “as much of a man.” Addressing the reader in the second person, the piece urges those whole in body to put themselves in the place of the amputee: “And then, when you being to feel a return to consciousness... and look around you to know what and where you are, it savors somewhat of reality to know that the good right arm has been quietly dropped into a basket or a trough at your side, or the leg...has been added to the list of those who have gone before.” The article seeks to communicate the transformative experience of amputation; the waking man must determine “what he is”—losing a limb forever changes his physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual being. While “Forgotten!” begins by praising the “nation’s defenders,” it ends with the stark “reality” of the discarded leg or arm. Cooper’s poem foregrounds this reality. “If the patriotic reader has *not* experienced these sensations,” the article preceding the poem concludes, “we commend to him the following verses, which are admirably appropriate.” By describing the process and accompanying emotions of losing an arm, the poem allows readers to vicariously experience amputation.

“Good-By, Old Arm!” begins as surgery ends: “The knife was still—the surgeon bore/The shattered arm away.” A regular contributor to *The United States Service Magazine*, a monthly periodical founded to provide “a clear and intelligent report of progress to our noble armies in the field, our gallant navy afloat, and a patriot people from whose hearths more than a million men have gone forth,” Cooper depicts the aftermath of amputation by focusing on the experience of a “noble hero” addressing his “strong right arm.”⁶⁷ Upon seeing “the vacant

⁶⁷ “A Word of Greeting,” *The United States Service Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1864): 1. According to its mission statement, the monthly hoped to provide “a concise body of military doctrines and principles with practical illustrations drawn from the present war,” “special articles” by “persons of the highest authority,” and “literary articles...to break the monotony of the technical science which must form our staple matter.”

place,/Where limb of his had lain,” the soldier requests to view the disembodied arm. The following three stanzas record the soldier’s words to his shattered limb, elevating the arm to a poetic object that can be apostrophized. “Clasp[ing] the fingers cold,” the soldier bids adieu to his arm as “down his pale but manly cheeks/The tear-drops gently rol[l].” The dead fingers of the once strong and vital right arm are macabre proof of the soldier’s loss and disrupt a scene that at times resembles a deathbed farewell in a sentimental novel. Holding the proof of his service to the nation, the soldier addresses his arm as “comrade” and tells it, “we have done with war—/Let dreams of glory fade.”

Like Hamlet clutching poor Yorick’s skull, the soldier remembers that which cannot be re-membered. “I do not mourn to lose you now/For home and native land,” the soldier tells his arm, but also notes “it’s hard to part such trusty friends.” The soldier thanks God “no selfish thought is [his]/While here [he] bleeding lies” and says to the attendants, “Bear, bear it tenderly away--/Good-by, old arm! good by!” Though the poem depicts a noble soldier sacrificing his limb “for freedom pure and grand,” the image of the “bleeding” and “pale” man clutching his “shattered arm” remains powerful evidence of loss and transformation. The title phrase appears three times in four stanzas, emphasizing the difficulty of relinquishing a body part; like the body of a dead comrade, the arm is mourned and borne away to be buried.

Published in *The Soldier’s Friend* in 1867, “L-E-G On My Leg” was written, according to the copy that precedes the poem, “by a soldier in the hospital at New Haven, Ct., who lost his leg at Fair Oaks.”⁶⁸ The newspaper does not provide the soldier’s name, but it validates his qualifications to write a poem about the experience of war and of amputation by providing information on where he lost his leg. Though the soldier-poet only alludes to the traditional elegiac form, the newspaper prints the poem and its punning title underneath the bolded title “An

⁶⁸ “L-E-G On My Leg,” *The Soldier’s Friend* 3, no. 6 (June 1867): 1.

Elegy.” Because elegies to soldiers frequently appeared on the pages of Civil War periodicals, the soldier’s “L-E-G” is not out of place on the front page of *The Soldier’s Friend*; however, the tongue-in-cheek humor of the soldier’s version of the elegiac form underscores the entrance of the missing limb into poetic discourse. The title and apotheosis of the lost leg mix bathos and pathos to create a new, corporeally-focused elegiac form. Addressing his “good leg” as “thou” and employing archaic verbs like “hast” and “did’st,” the soldier-poet invokes high-brow literature while honoring his “sturdy stump.” Apostrophizing the absent limb, the speaker intones, “thou wast a faithful friend,/And truly hast thy duty done.” Like the dying and dead soldiers of numerous elegies, the leg served its country and was sacrificed on the altar of freedom.

Despite its lofty language, the poem remains grounded in the physical. The lines “I lost my left leg for the ‘right,’/And yet the right’s the one that’s left” evidence the physicality of language while providing evidence of the “strange paradox[es]” of war. It is partly the bodily connotations of words like “left” and “right” that allow the poem to serve as a reminder of the leg and proof of the soldier’s loss. Out of language, the soldier makes a literary prosthesis: “But while the sturdy stump remains,/I may be able yet to patch it,/For even now I’ve taken pains/To make an L-E-G to match it.” The poem, like a prosthetic leg, attempts to replace the missing limb but also marks the absence of the original leg. An imperfect substitute, the poetic tribute is at times clumsy and does not fit comfortably in the elegiac tradition. The darkly humorous tone of the “L-E-G” seems to imply the impossibility of ever replacing that which has been lost; instead, the process of writing the poem allows the soldier to honor his leg and memorialize it.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ In her analysis of the poem, Marjorie Trapp argues that the “poem foregrounds assumptions about both fact and fiction, where fiction fills in for missing facts, for missing body parts” (135). Her reading misses the poem’s ironic tendencies—text can never fully replace missing limbs; it can only serve as a reminder or marker of absence. The “L-E-G” the poem creates is prosthetic (an imperfect substitute).

Only a one-armed soldier

By highlighting the changed and marked bodies of soldiers, writers call on Americans unscathed by the war to recognize the plight of veterans and honor their service by assisting the wearers of empty sleeves and the bearers of crutches. Short pieces describe individual soldiers' personal experiences of wounding and amputation while widely disseminated poems make the individual universal in their pleas for charity and recognition. A central aim of such pieces is the memorialization of experiences unfamiliar to those Americans who did not fight in the war. Like the phantom limbs of amputees, these texts insist on their existence and haunt the unwounded in order to encourage gratitude and monetary assistance.

Civilians could support the wounded by purchasing handbills printed and sold by individual veterans. The American Antiquarian Society's collection of Broad­sides and Ephemera contains a number of handbills featuring nearly identical poems. While antebellum "begging poems" call for the sympathy of readers on the basis of destitution and helplessness, handbills sold by soldiers emphasize patriotic service in a brutally violent war as justification for financial support.⁷⁰ Printed in 1865, "The One-Arm Soldier," "The One-Armed Boy," and "George M. Reed, The One Arm and One Leg Soldier" all use the same anonymous poem to tell the individual stories of the veterans who sell them.⁷¹ Each handbill identifies the battle in which the soldier was wounded; Reed's version even indicates that he was wounded on "Sunday morning,

⁷⁰ For examples of what the American Antiquarian society calls "begging poems," see B.F. Whipple, "The Blind Man's Appeal" (1850), American Broad­sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 7496, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; "Railroad Boy's Appeal" (c. 1850), American Broad­sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 24418, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>

⁷¹ "George M. Reed, The One Arm and One Leg Soldier" (1865), American Broad­sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 603, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; "The One-Armed Boy" (1865), American Broad­sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 1457, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; "The One-Arm Soldier" (1865), American Broad­sides and Ephemera, Series 1, American Antiquarian Society n. 1456, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>.

April 6th, 1862.” The “boy” who lost his arm at Petersburg, the soldier of “Co. D, 3d Mass. Cavalry” who was “disabled at Winchester, Virginia,” and Reed broadcast the rhetorical power of their individual bodies by selling poems that situate their personal suffering within a larger narrative of destruction. While the war mass-produced wounded bodies, the mass-produced handbills serve as literary advocates for individual soldiers. Asking the reader (addressed as “stranger”) to “buy a copy of my song” and “buy a crippled soldier’s song,” the poems act as literary limbs; by giving a “stranger” a *handbill*, the amputee symbolically offers his missing limb to the purchaser. The reader cannot grasp the soldiers’ missing limbs, but they can support the veterans by buying a poetical substitute. Literary proxies for soldiers’ missing limbs, the handbills rely on the sympathetic responses of the public but refuse to romanticize or sentimentalize the process of wounding or the plight of living as an amputee.

The “I” of each of the three poems addresses the “stranger,” beginning a “story simple” with a description of battle. The same words ostensibly describe three different experiences of wounding; “when the fight was fiercest,” reads each poem, “Where my comrades `round me fell,/I was wounded in the trenches/By the bursting of a shell.” In the same way, one stanza serves to depict the horror of three battles: “Hundreds died, all crushed and mangled,/Some, in agony of pain;/Bit the very earth beneath them/Soaked with life-blood of the slain.”⁷² Rising out of this hellish landscape, the representative soldiers carry markers of the violence that “crushed” and “mangled” the myriad dead. The speaker of each poem recognizes the rhetorical power of his body: “It was not my fate to perish/In the storm of iron and hail;/But a mutilated soldier,/I have come to tell the tale/That ten thousand are repeating/Through our peaceful land to-day;/How they fought and how they suffered/In the din of deadly fray.” “The One-Arm Soldier”

⁷² “The One Arm and One Leg Soldier” is slightly different: “Hundreds died, all crushed and mangled,/Some in agony and pain;/Yes the very earth beneath them/Soaked with life-blood of the slain.”

differs from the other poems in its punctuation: “But, a mutilated soldier,/I have come to tell the tale,” thus removing the depreciatory potential of “but” and emphasizing the soldier’s survival and new-found identity and purpose. More than a byproduct of war’s violence, the soldier embodies and disseminates his experience of the conflict. “The One-Armed Boy” capitalizes and italicizes “*Mutilated Soldier*,” emphasizing the soldier’s role as both an individual and a type. Despite minor differences, all three poems underscore the “story” that all wounded bodies tell. This story is “simple” and representative, while simultaneously indicative of individual suffering. “I need not make it long,” each soldier-speaker asserts, emphasizing the powerful communicative force of bodies marked by war. Acting as literary limbs, these handbills record significant stories of the war while calling on citizens to support veterans.

In 1871 a one-legged veteran told his story in the pages of *The Galaxy*, describing his personal experience of wounding and identifying the place of amputees in American society.⁷³ The anonymous former soldier answers the question every amputee, he claims, encounters almost daily. “I was shot through the ankle,” he writes, “the joint was smashed to pieces, and the foot had to come off half-way up to the knee shortly after.” In this veteran’s rendition, the details of wounding are unsentimental, journalistic fact. However, he acknowledges the significance of the “story” surrounding a missing limb. Though absent, a limb can become a repository of the history of the war and a marker of the persisting legacy of violence.

The anonymous veteran indicates the flexibility of a missing limb by advising all “one-legged men” to “adopt the cannon-ball story.” Civilians who inquire about the missing limb, the veteran argues, will be disappointed if they “learn that the loss was caused by an ordinary

⁷³ “One-Legged Men,” *The Galaxy* 11, no. 3 (March 1871): 353-362.

accident.” Delineating the hierarchy of amputation-inducing injuries, the veteran writes, “If a musket-ball caused the injury, a considerable interest is created. But a man whose leg was shot off, actually shot off by a cannon-ball, is a treasure for the time being.” Only the cannonball story “gives unalloyed gratification, as being genuinely horrifying.” It is for this reason that the veteran advises “all beggars who wish to prosper....to adopt the cannon-ball story, making the shot as large as modern artillery will carry.” The veteran’s description of the cultural cachet of limbs removed by cannonballs does not diminish the rhetorical power of arms and legs removed by violence; instead, it critiques the often fickle and unfair ways in which the American public understands and interacts with loss.

The veteran’s tongue-in-cheek humor and his scathing tone reject the tendency of “scribblers” and the general public to use “cripples” as “moral scarecrows and butts for satire.” He critiques Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and James Russell Lowell for portraying amputees detrimentally and unfairly. In *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), Dickens depicts the wooden-legged Silas Wegg as a ne’er-do-well errand runner, semi-literate blackmailer, and ballad seller who attempts to buy back his amputated leg through nefarious means.⁷⁴ According to Adrienne E. Gavin, Dickens included characters with wooden legs in many of his novels, usually as objects of ridicule.⁷⁵ Thackeray’s epic poem *The Chronicle of the Drum* (1841) begins with the image of “a dozen of wooden-legged warriors” listening to an old veteran “prate” at a tavern.⁷⁶ Beggars of suspect morality and veracity, the amputees lack honor. The article

⁷⁴ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London : Chapman and Hall, 1865). For Wegg’s first appearance, see Chapter 5.

⁷⁵ Adrienne E. Gavin, “Dickens, Wegg, and Wooden Legs,” *Our Mutual Friend: The Scholarly Pages*, <http://omf.ucsc.edu/london-1865/victorian-city/wooden-legs.html>.

⁷⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Chronicle of the Drum* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1882), Internet Archive, http://openlibrary.org/books/OL6563947M/The_chronicle_of_the_drum.

identifies the correct way to appropriately represent amputees: “If Thackeray had bethought himself to give Colonel Newcome a wooden leg to remember his India campaigns by, that gallant soldier and gentleman would not have suffered in the world’s estimation.” If he had possessed a physical embodiment of his heroics, the scion of Thackeray’s literary family *The Newcomes* (1855) would provide a fitting example of “the ideal wooden-legged man”—a figure whose military service and honor are visible and tangible.

Rejecting the depredations of “magnates of literature” and “smaller fry,” the anonymous veteran advocates a new form of representation that will support one of his article’s central messages: “We halt in our gait, but our moral nature is not of a surety equally lame.” In the author’s formulation, missing limbs can connote valor, honor, and sacrifice. Men who lost their legs and arms in the war had violence inscribed on their bodies; by telling the story of his wounding, the veteran resists the attempts of others to write the meaning of his body. In doing so, he encourages other one-legged men to recognize the symbolic power of their bodies and become the creators of their own narratives of pain, loss, and survival.

Central to the veteran’s narrative of being wounded, awaiting surgery, and losing a limb is the peculiar phenomenon of phantom limbs, a condition famously described in S. Weir Mitchell’s “The Case of George Dedlow.” Published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1866, the story of a quadruple amputee includes the first person narrator’s observations on the physical and psychological condition of many amputees: “I found that the great mass of men who had undergone amputations for many months felt the usual consciousness that they still had the lost limb. It itched or pained, or was cramped, but never felt hot or cold.”⁷⁷ Unlike the fictional Dedlow and the physician S. Weir Mitchell, the author of “One-Legged Men” actually experienced these strange sensations and explains the phenomenon. His explanation combines a

⁷⁷ S. Weir Mitchell, “The Case of George Dedlow,” *Atlantic Monthly* 18, no. 105 (July 1866): 6.

scientific rationale for the physical and mental condition while underscoring the symbolic power of missing limbs. “A fragment of the body thus separated from the trunk perishes and dissolves into its various original elements, which soon reassimilate with other animate or inanimate matter,” he explains. “The soul or mind, however,” he continues, “refuses to recognize the fact, and will not give up its consciousness of any part of the frame it inhabits, either at the moment of separation or long years after parting company.” A séance momentarily reunites Dedlow with his missing limbs, but he soon returns to being a “fraction of a man” and struggles to hold onto his individual identity.⁷⁸ The anonymous veteran feels his missing leg but can never touch it. Both men are forever changed and shaped by violence and must deal with the repercussions of dismemberment long after the war is over. An amputated limb is absent and present, “reassimilated” but lost forever.

The paradoxical nature of missing limbs imbues the social and cultural position of amputees. Writing in 1871, the anonymous veteran seeks to record what should not be assimilated; his wounded body and the wounded bodies of thousands of veterans will remain marked by the war even as the nation reconciles and recovers. Missing limbs should not be absorbed into “gratifying” stories. “Any honest, generous youth who did his duty,” the former soldier recounts, “had dinned into his ears, as long as our great contest lasted, laudation of his bravery and self-sacrifice, and dazzling predictions of success and honorable station throughout the rest of his life.” Those marked by war, the veteran argues, “were assured the softest berths that rescued society and a grateful nation provides.” Six years after the end of the war, these promises have failed. As the nation moves further away from the battlefield, the veteran implies,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 11.

the wounded body loses its communicative power. Explaining his negative outlook, the veteran writes,

Now, when we find that, however honorable scars may be, serious injuries make capital only for beggars; that merchants will pay full price only for whole men; that cripples' labor, like women's, is held cheaper than it is really worth; can you blame us for becoming a shade morose, a trifle sour of disposition in the first days of our undeception?

The veteran's text serves as a phantom limb, insisting on the continuing effects of the war in the face of national recovery; embodying the pain and frustration of a one-legged man, the piece resists assimilation.

The anonymous veteran's diagnosis of the plight of amputees provides a powerful counterpoint to the hope of Bourne's penmanship competition. While the contest promised gainful employment for determined and productive amputees, the author of "One-Legged Men" indicates the difficulties faced by men crippled by the war. Both the hope of substituting the left arm for the right and the persistent pain of the phantom limb are central to understanding the ways in which missing arms and legs and empty sleeves function in the literature of the war. By writing about loss and making missing limbs into literary subjects, amputees, wounded veterans, and sympathetic civilians insist on maimed bodies' rightful place in the canon of Civil War literature.

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