

UNFAMILIAR WAR: LITERATURE & TRAUMA IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Aaron Shackelford

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English & Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2012

Approved by:

Dr. Eliza Richards

Dr. Gregory Flaxman

Dr. Jay Garcia

Dr. Timothy Marr

Dr. Jane Thrailkill

©2012
Aaron Shackelford
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

AARON SHACKELFORD: *Unfamiliar War: Literature & Trauma in the American Civil War*

(Under the direction of Eliza Richards)

Unfamiliar War reclaims the importance of romanticism in American representations of the Civil War. According to almost one hundred and fifty years of critical consensus, the sentimentalized forms of popular poets failed to convey the horrors of Shiloh, and the romantic novel could not do justice to the body counts of Antietam. Critics valued instead realism's mimetic depictions of individual experience. This project goes against this approach, arguing for Civil War literature not as a failure, but rather as an effort to use romanticism to make sense of traumatic experiences. Revisiting romanticism's indirect depictions of violence portrays the mode not as escapist but rather as the most productive way for Americans to work through the pain of war and its aftermath. The critical arguments against this function are anachronistic evaluations of how we represent violence imposed in the years following the war. The post-bellum shift to realism marks not a move toward confronting the war but a repression of the very mode that shaped American understanding of the conflict. Thus we need to reread American realism for its inculcation with romanticism and attendant avoidance of violence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation exists only because of the dedication, kindness, and persistence of Eliza Richards. Over many cups of tea and coffee, her hard work and insights kept me working through challenging times and many revisions. She is the very model of a dissertation director, and I consider myself fortunate to have worked with her. Many thanks for the unswerving mentorship and guidance from Gregg Flaxman, the optimism and ideas from Jay Garcia, the support and insights from Jane Thrailkill, and the probing questions and suggestions from Timothy Marr. I also am grateful to have such a collaborative and supportive cohort at Carolina. Amidst many horror stories of academia, we were always a model of friendship and camaraderie. Above all I am lucky to have arrived at the same time as Elissa Zellinger, who shared drafts, ideas, support, and even a brain from time to time. Deric Corlew and Leslie Eager provided hours of conversations on teaching and reading as we shared a small office together. Robin Smith and Jamie Jones read and supported early versions of this project and their advice kept my work going forward, and Lisbeth Wells-Pratt provided the ideas and excitement to finish. Almost every afternoon I found support and inspiration from Randi Davenport, who along with Eliza and Elissa deserves the most credit for the existence of this dissertation. But the source of this all comes from my mother, Terri Shackelford, who showed me that poetry and prose make an unfamiliar world familiar

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
I. Stowe's Romance with Trauma.....	24
II. Patriotism, Elegy, and the Horse.....	58
III. Blood and Water.....	106
IV. Familiar War.....	141
Epilogue: Rethinking Romance to Realism.....	178
WORKS CITED.....	187

INTRODUCTION

In 1867, William Dean Howells, then an assistant editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, reflected upon the inadequacies of American literature in the 1860s. The recent Civil War, he wrote, “has laid upon our literature a charge under which it has hitherto staggered very lamely” (121). Unhappy with the parade of war literature that romanticized the recent conflict, Howells sought literature that would portray “the soldiers we actually know” (121). From Howells’s perspective, the literary output during and immediately after the war relied too much upon stale conventions that could not “treat the war really and artistically” (121).¹ Through his editorial post at *The Atlantic Monthly* Howells played a key role in the pursuit of an American literary style that he believed could resolve the deficiency.² Through his publication and encouragement of a plethora of writers, as well as his own novels, Howells helped shift postbellum literature towards the style we call realism. Howells calls for the move “to deal with character as we witness it in living people” (“Novel-Writing & Novel-Reading” 269) as opposed to the conventional or idealized treatment of character and events in Civil War literature.

While the above narrative gives the impression that realism emerges from the trauma of the Civil War, it does so at the cost of repudiating the representational strategies used by

¹ As another example, an editor of war poetry in 1866 provides the excuse that “it is generally true that great events do not inspire great poems” (White iv) and pleads for his anthology as possessing “not only an historical value as a contemporary record, but a peculiar and sometimes very high value as poetical literature” (v). In the twentieth century, the work of Edmund Wilson and Daniel Aaron inscribed the standard narrative that, while there are individual works of some quality, no great or influential literature emerges from the Civil War.

² In *Reading for Realism*, Nancy Glazener argues that while *The Atlantic Monthly* did not become a main organ for the realist movement until Howells took over editorship, the magazine “espoused protorealism sentiments” from its founding in 1857 (44).

writers on both sides of the war. When Howells and colleagues seek to sever ties with the romanticism that dominates Civil War literature, they declaim the efficacy of the literary mode that defined much of antebellum American literature. A form that employs the imagination to evoke emotional responses more than a mimetic depiction, romanticism held sway over American art for decades, and gave rise to many popular forms. The gothic tales of Poe and the sensational dime-novels of Lippard employ romanticism's emotional emphasis, as well as the well-known sentimental poems and novels that shaped the American literary marketplace. Despite its widespread popularity, Howells suggests that romanticism must always fail to depict the horrors of Shiloh no matter how much faith Americans had in this romantic mode prior to Fort Sumter. This project asserts that the romanticism employed by Civil War-era writers does not mark a failure of American literature. Instead I propose a conscious effort on the part of American writers to appropriate familiar antebellum romantic modes in order to represent the Civil War's violence.

My claim for romanticism's value stems from the traumatic nature of the Civil War and the challenges such horrors pose to literature and representation. When confronted by the previously unimaginable violence of the war, Americans turned to the romanticism and its attendant emphasis upon emotion and feeling over mimetic description. This phenomenon appears in a letter from a Union soldier after the 1864 Battle of the Wilderness. A particularly gruesome and devastating engagement, the soldier tells his Northern family: "the sights I was compelled to witness were horrible. Our feeling can better be imagined than described" (qtd. in Talbott 45). Here the private proposes that his family imagine familiar emotional reactions rather than him attempting to mimetically describe his experiences. This belief puts the soldier in line with the romanticism of antebellum literature rather than a

representation of the combat that the soldier witnessed. Sentimentality dominated the textual productions of America during the war. A Massachusetts corporal fighting in North Carolina wrote home in 1862 that among his regiment “our leading singers have a large repertory of fine sentimental songs” which they use to document everything from their diet to military lessons to the exploits of the troops (Zenas 121). A week later he further recounts the sentimental songs sung at a funeral service attended by the regiment. The corporal’s repeated evocation of this form of romanticism points to just how much troops in the field relied upon emotion and feeling in order to process their daily existence, including the death and destruction that always hovered over their lives. Neither the corporal nor the private express a faith in their ability to describe their life in the army; instead both attempt to relate the feelings and experiences in forms that would be familiar to their loved ones back home through the tenets of romanticism. In this way romanticism formed the core of how Americans represented and comprehended their world, and the traumatic scenes of the war did not alter the importance of this way of thinking.

As scholars of nineteenth-century literature, we often overlook an important value of romanticism during wartime. Trauma theory emphasizes the necessity of *not* directly representing horrific and painful experiences and finding ways to indirectly depict these encounters. As Ellie Ragland puts it in her overview of literary trauma theory, “trauma can *only* enunciate itself as an enigma” (77). That is to say we can only articulate a traumatic event through indirect forms. The soldier cannot, by virtue of his trauma, tell the story of the battle that so shook him because he can neither fully represent nor comprehend the event itself. “The characteristic features of trauma,” Ragland continues, “are the *secrecy* and *silence* that surround it” (77). These two qualities necessarily foreclose the sorts of direct

depiction of events on the battlefield that post-war critics came to associate with laudatory representations of the war. A bloody battle, or even a terrifying night on picket duty, becomes an experience that a soldier cannot represent to himself, much less others. For a civilian who seeks to represent this experience, the same restrictions apply because of the way in which trauma forecloses representation and comprehension. The problem with trauma, as Jacques Lacan pointed out, is the way it blasts a hole in our being and language – what Charles Pyle calls Lacan’s “symbolic gap” – that cannot be papered over (qtd. in Ragland 77). Their language illuminates the choices made by the Union soldiers who emphasize feeling and sentiment over an account of the combat and death their regiments suffer.

Lacan and Sigmund Freud provided the groundwork for the trauma theory put forth by Ragland and others. To dismiss their insights as products of the human psyche’s response to traumas of the twentieth-century overlooks the symptoms of trauma – of the secrecy and silence – that forced writers to find indirect modes to represent the Civil War. As James Dawes has shown, Civil War writers felt as though war “attacks” language. Historian John Talbott’s investigation of Civil War letters and diaries reveals a “Front Experience” that he finds in every way parallel with the traumatic scenes of World War I: “what changed in the half century between the Civil War and the First World War was not the response of the human species to stress, but the cultural expression of the response” (47). Even before Freud published his theories of trauma across the Atlantic, American physicians had begun to piece together elements of what would become psychoanalysis as they “explored the possibility that certain traumatic experiences might induce otherwise healthy, hereditarily untainted men and women to take on the symptoms of a wide variety of physical ailments that had no

apparent somatic basis” (Caplan 9).³ Oliver Wendell Holmes’s son, serving just north of the Wilderness in Virginia in 1864, wrote home “I cannot now endure the labors and hardship of the line” and his Captain noted that while his troops seemed physically unharmed they “have been so horribly worked and badgered that they are utterly unnerved and demoralized. They are easily scared as a timid child at night” (qtd. in Talbott 45). Both soldier and captain avoid describing just what has so unnerved them, but they both express the manifestation of a psychic anguish that would remain undiagnosed for several decades.

The events of a trauma overwhelm and yet, as Freud would argue, can only be articulated indirectly. “The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him,” Freud writes in his discussion of trauma, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it” (18). The core traumatic moment cannot make an appearance in the victim’s consciousness, even if the surrounding details do. To illustrate the dangers posed by trauma, Freud envisions the human mind as an inner cortex – the consciousness – that is protected from stimuli by an outer shield – the perceptions.⁴ The work of the perceptions is as much to shield the mind from stimuli and excitement as it is to gather. Without this shield, our minds would quickly overload and we would die. If we suffer from too much internal stimuli and excitement – such as a terrifying memory – we use projection to “treat them as though they were acting, not from the inside, but from the outside, so that it may be possible to bring the shield against stimuli into operation as a means of defense” (33). This is a coping mechanism, a trick of the mind to protect the

³ Henri Ellenberger provides a more expansive study of the various strands of scientific and cultural thought that criss-crossed the Atlantic from the 1700s forward that would lead to the work of Freud and others.

⁴ The potential problems of this metaphor of a mind that is both exposed to the external physical world and a part of our mental consciousness is explored by Harold Bloom, who argues that Freud himself did not fully appreciate the links between mind and body in his work.

consciousness from fatal overexposure to a prior external event. With this system in place, Freud writes: “we describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli” (33). A traumatic event overwhelms the mind, and so the mind rallies all available resources to survive what Freud calls a break in our psychic defenses. These defenses consist primarily of displacing the memory of the event and shielding the mind from any stimulation that would harken back to the original trauma. What today we call post-traumatic stress disorder is a manifestation of these efforts to evade any connection to a traumatic experience. Victims seek to avoid any direct address to a terrifying experience that breaks down the mental barriers, such as could be created by a memory of a Civil War battle.

Indirection, then, becomes a way around this breach. Freud articulates this response in simpler form in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when he discusses the way our dreams seem to pull from the every-day occurrences in our lives because “for reasons of censorship it [our mind] transfers psychical intensity from what is important but objectionable on to what is indifferent” (627-628). Once again, rather than direct depiction, our mind avoids the “essential part” in order to protect an already damaged consciousness. This forms the enigma of trauma. It also explains why scholars such as Dawes find the Civil War era to be littered with examples of the war “attacking” language, forcing an apparent silence about the wartime experience. The silence that Dawes and other critics identify assumes that indirection is somehow unproductive. Yet the example of the Union troops above suggest that emotion rather than direct depiction formed the basis of their efforts to describe the war. Americans were not struck dumb by the war, but rather they sought ways to “transfer

psychical intensity” – to use Freud’s phrase – from the violence of the war itself towards the culture of romanticism that defines much Civil War literature.

The question becomes, then, not how Civil War writers overcame this inability to directly depict the war, but how they compensated for it. The commonplace which we already know and which does not threaten the “shield” of perceptions becomes the approach by which the trauma may then be articulated. This detour through the indirect forges an imaginative link with the direct trauma. In the second half of her study of trauma and torture, Elaine Scarry demonstrates the central role that imagination plays in “remaking” a victim’s world. If violence can destroy a soldier’s world, then the imaginative capacities help him process the pieces and begin the reconstruction. As a most basic demonstration of this phenomenon, Scarry offers the example of standing in a field. It may sound simple, but a field in central Virginia would indeed seem terrifying for a soldier such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. What if, then, Holmes wished to imagine myself standing by the sea in Massachusetts? In so doing he would imaginatively “reinvent” the geography of the world to place himself there (171). “Imagining is, in effect, the ground of last resort,” writes Scarry, “the imagination is there, almost on an emergency stand-by basis” (166) to provide a source of stability and comprehension when the world appears to be unraveling around you. With no other recourse, he can use the imagination to construct a world that does not threaten his psyche. This strategy relies heavily upon that which he already knows and is familiar with. He must have some conception of what the seaside looks like if he is to seek imaginative refuge there. He must also take advantage of a preexisting conception of the sea as a relaxing or beautiful location, the familiar trope of a seaside haven. It is with these imaginative uses of

that which he already knows – the familiar – that he can reassemble a comprehensible world in the face of the mental breach that is trauma.

I propose the importance of the familiar and the imagination as the critical model through which we approach Civil War literature. Alice Fahs, in her study of wartime literature, points out that “although it has often been suggested that the war acted as an impetus for the development of realism in American letters, popular wartime literature reveals that the experience of war acted as much – if not more – as the impetus for the development and wide dissemination of adventurous romance” (226). If Americans did not create literature that directly depicted the violence of the war, they nonetheless developed a corpus that employed romanticism as a method for representing traumatic experiences. This literature shows us how Americans comprehended their civil war, and our imposition of mimetic realism as the standard by which we evaluate this literature is an anachronistic imposition of postbellum criteria that overlooks the traumatic response Americans required during the war years.

One of the primary reasons for the anachronistic elision of the importance of romanticism during the war stems from the almost immediate efforts to envision the war as a complete erasure of antebellum intellectual culture. After the war, Northerners and Southerners both seemed to evince little interest in using romanticism to process the events of the 1860s. In order to reach the “essential part” of the Civil War, they hammered upon the need for something new. Postbellum Americans saw the war as such a break that antebellum literature and culture was rendered obsolete, despite its value in representations of trauma. This viewpoint continues to inform our thinking of late nineteenth-century America to this day. “The Civil War swept away the slave civilization of the South,” writes Louis Menand,

“but it swept away almost the whole intellectual culture of the North along with it” (x).⁵ By this logic, the war did not merely demolish the South physically and politically. It also rendered pre-war literature and culture impotent, as though the only way to rebuild was to create a new literature and culture.⁶ The theme of the “new” echoes across the rhetoric of the Civil War era and the postbellum discussions. In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln calls for “a new birth of freedom.” He suggests that once “the great task remaining before us” is complete, the country will set out on a new phase of its grand experiment in governance. While the abolition of slavery certainly expands American freedom, Lincoln’s language emphasizes a new beginning, a “new birth,” that severs his post-war vision from 1860 America. This articulation of an entirely new creation, disconnected from the past by the rigors of the Civil War, becomes a dominant theme for presidents and poets alike. The familiar from before the war no longer suffices for the post-war period. Lincoln emphasizes that while the country faces a severe test of the principals set out 87 years before, the results of this ordeal will lead to a new stage of the American experiment. Or as Lincoln put it in his victory speech after Lee’s surrender a year and a half later, “we must simply begin with, and mould from, disorganized and discordant elements” (qtd. in McPherson 852). Even while acknowledging that some detritus remains from antebellum America, Lincoln casts postbellum culture as one that will take the dust in order to craft an entirely different order and approach to the world.

⁵ Menand continues that “It took nearly half a century for the United States to develop a culture to replace it, to find a set of ideas, and a way of thinking that would help people cope with the conditions of modern life” (x). His book *The Metaphysical Club* tracks this development of a new postbellum culture.

⁶ James Dawes frames this phenomenon in terms of radical challenges to “the individual’s relationship with the external world” (26), necessitating the new approaches of thinkers such as William James. George Frederickson posits that the most active northern intellectuals of the 1850s and 60s found postbellum America “seemed to isolate them more than ever from the main currents of American life” (183). Like Menand, these scholars present the war’s impact as too severe to maintain the cultural tools of antebellum thought.

Yet Lincoln's "disorganized and discordant elements" invokes not just political and economic chaos, but tens of thousands of dead and wounded bodies, suffering family members, and traumatized soldiers. Despite the drumbeat of the "new," of the past being swept away, the devastation could not be simply forgotten or, to use a psychoanalytic term, repressed. As psychoanalysis and trauma theory both demonstrate, to declare an event over does not make it so. Freud characterizes the distinction as one between repetition and remembrance. Until a traumatized soldier can reconstruct and comprehend the traumatic event – a daunting and difficult task that requires the use of the familiar, as we have seen – then he "is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it" (*Beyond* 19). The postbellum emphasis upon the new simultaneously forecloses the value of antebellum modes of comprehending violence and insures that the Civil War's violence will continue to trouble Americans. John W. De Forest denounced the "host of ignorant romancers" (qtd. in Schaefer x) who, in his opinion, relied too heavily on antebellum conventions in their war writing. Yet there is more than a touch of hubris in the declarations that realism can more directly represent the Civil War. In the midst of this condemnation of the "ignorant romancers" we lose sight of the purpose served by the romance during the Civil War, and in chapter three I describe how De Forest himself found tremendous value in these conventions in his own representations of combat. He surrounds his depictions of Grant's Mississippi campaign with a highly sentimental love story and scenes of classic romantic adventures and mishaps. While realism claims an ability to represent the "truth" of the war and the soldier's experience, even De Forest found it necessary to turn to these familiar conventions. He engages with sentimental and sensational modes in order to elide the effects of the war on the human body and to make

sense of the chaos and horror of the war in the West. Because the literary output of the war does not meet the standards set in the postbellum era – a standard that still influences readers today – its representational strategies become lost in the flurry of condemnations. Yet postbellum literature falls into the very cycle of repetition predicted by Freud and emblematic of much of trauma theory. Despite its claims and objectives, realism itself struggles mightily to deal with the violence wrecked upon bodies in the Civil War and ends up repeating the same indirect depictions of violence that its advocates so fiercely denounce.

The Familiar

Romanticism's importance during the war as *the* scene of indirection stems in part from its proliferation during the decades preceding Fort Sumter. The explosion of American print culture in the first half of the nineteenth century has been well documented.⁷ A highly decentralized publishing industry and what Meredith McGill calls “the culture of reprinting” meant a mass market of cheap reprints and uncopyrighted newspapers and magazines that could rapidly circulate around the entire nation (1). As Philip Fisher points out, romanticism constituted the dominant mode of the literature both in the United States and in the international texts that also flooded the American marketplace. Americans living in all corners of the country could become familiar with an *mélange* of literary modes that prioritized fantastic and emotionally potent scenes over a didactic representation of daily life.

The romanticism read by Americans posed a series of familiar approaches to representing violence, many of which sought to elide the most traumatic aspects of these

⁷ David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance* provides an expansive introduction to the popular antebellum literature outside of the traditional male-dominated canon. Karen Halttunen elaborates on reading habits of middle-class Americans, while Jane Tompkins and Philip Fisher argue for the important nation-wide cultural impact of these habits.

sensational, gothic, and sentimental scenes. Abolitionist stories, sensational dime-novels, and gruesome adventure tales all entail representations of wounding and death. One of the most familiar to readers then and now is the gothic story and its conventions to represent bizarre and gruesome violence and evoke feelings of fear or horror. Gothic literature employs familiar conventions that draw from other tales in the mode and these then inform other romantic texts. As just one example, Laura Behling notes a tradition of dismemberment in American gothic literature that she traces at least as far back as Washington Irving's 1820 short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and her connection of this story to the tales of Edgar Allan Poe and other antebellum gothic fiction presents just one of many possible genealogies as to how familiar conventional figures of violence perpetuate across romanticism (24). The term "familiar" suggests the sheer ubiquity of romantic literature; it would be almost impossible for an American reader not to encounter romantic depictions of violence in poetry or prose. The term "conventional" marks the tendency of these depictions to carry across genre and time to appear in a wide range of texts, as seen in Behling's example of Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe. Romanticism's depictions of slavery or Civil War battles suggest physical violence and sensational feeling through the same strategies as Poe's horror stories or Susan Warner's sentimental novels. Wartime writers could draw upon a body of experience in their readers – and themselves – to formulate an imaginative understanding of Shiloh or Antietam through the romantic literature of the past. Finally, "figure" identifies specific tropes that writers find effective in displacing or effacing violence to avoid the sorts of direct depictions that trauma forecloses. In this project I focus upon two figures that I find to be particularly salient in Civil War literature: the horse and

blood. I will return to these figures in more detail, but first it is important to demonstrate how familiar conventional figures enable the avoidance of trauma in the first place.

As a test case, I turn first to one of the foremost traumas of antebellum America: slavery. If, as historian James McPherson argues, the Civil War era should begin at the time of the Mexican-American War in 1846⁸, then we can see the intervening fifteen years as an escalation of the debates and concerns over slavery that would consume the nation. In his study of transcendentalism, for example, Philip Gura demonstrates that the responses to slavery swamped all other aspects of the movement in the years leading up to Fort Sumter. George Frederickson begins part one of his study of northern Civil War intellectual life with the telling title “Roles and Rehearsals” in order to show how the arguments over slavery – and the secession crisis triggered by slavery – gave shape to the “the dominant style of American thought” (50) leading up to the war. These perspectives support the rather apparent point that the conversations around slavery played an important role in shaping American writing during the war. The discourses that attempt to represent and comprehend slavery became increasingly familiar to American citizens, regardless of their support or opposition to the institution itself. Writers who sought to depict the horrors of slavery also found important representational value in these familiar conventional figures as a way to comprehend and write of the experiences of bondage, even when telling their own personal stories of trauma.

Coterminous with the outbreak of the Civil War, the nonfiction account of the escaped North Carolina slave Harriet Jacobs appeared in Boston bookstores. Edited by Lydia Maria Child – herself a writer with a well-known reputation for employing the romantic

⁸ A growing body of critical work takes up the importance of the Mexican-American war as a conflict that deserves its own close examination. Eric Sundquist and Jamie Javier Rodriguez both seek to reposition the war as central to studies of antebellum culture and literature.

mode – *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* tells of Jacobs’s time in bondage. Jacobs faced repeated threats of rape and sexual abuse, starting at the age of fifteen, what she calls “a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl” (26). She goes on to explain “my master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import” (26). Jacobs never goes into detail as to what her male owner does to her body. For years critics have taken this evasion as evidence that she did not suffer the sexual violence suggested in her book. They make the implicit assumption – much like critics of Civil War literature – that Jacobs’s evasiveness points to a fictional rather than factual account of her physical violation. If there was physical abuse, her rape remains indirectly depicted throughout the text, for which Jacobs gives a variety of reasons. All of these show the hallmarks of a trauma, of a victim struggling to articulate and indirectly depict her experience even while she is unable to represent the facts. “The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe” (26) she cautions the reader when she first alludes to her owner’s growing interest in sexually abusing her. Jacobs admits that her efforts at representation fail when confronted by the horrors of rape. She casts this failure not only of depicting her own emotional response and experience – the features that realism would praise a few years later – but that the event itself eludes her abilities. “My descriptions fall far short of the facts,” she cautions early in her text, framing the violence of slavery as unable to be represented by a recounting of facts or description (5). Sabine Sielke, in her study *Reading Rape*, argues that Jacobs was in fact raped, and that Jacobs’s evasive prose “results from an awareness that the actual pain cannot be told” (22). The reasons Sielke lists for this inability are threefold, including legal concerns – rape of a female slave was not recognized as a crime – and the political reality that the abolitionist movement tended to make tales of rape a topic of

discussion that demeaned the moral power of the victim. The third reason is trauma, the fact that, in Sielke's words, "the original 'text' resists representation" (22). By "text" Sielke refers to the trauma of the rape itself and its concomitant resistance to direct depiction. Both Jacobs and Sielke suggest that any depictions of rape will "fall far short" because of its traumatic nature, and thus her confessed inability to describe her experience. Jacobs must negotiate both a personal assault as well a cultural effacement of the sexual violation of female slaves – and indeed the sexual exploitation of many women – and both of these traumatic situations resist instantiation in direct depictions. The challenge of representing rape points to a larger concern over how to depict the violence suffered by bodies noted by Karen Sanchez-Eppler, who posits that "the problems of having, representing, or interpreting a body structure both feminist and abolitionist discourses" (15). These problems to which Sanchez-Eppler alludes are the different experiences of women and African-Americans from the white male reader, and that feminist and abolitionist literature must seek ways to adapt to the impossibility of directly conveying those differences. Rape is the extreme example of this problem, a traumatic event that Jacobs and other writers know they will never fully represent.

It seems a curious incongruity, then, that Lydia Maria Child's introduction to *Incidents* argues for the representational power of the text:

I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public; for the experience of this intelligent and much-injured woman belongs to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate. This peculiar phase of slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I

willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn.

(6)

Child expresses confidence that the book will not only shock but also provide a powerful comprehension among readers about the sexual violence suffered by slaves.⁹ Although Child certainly has editorial interests in seeing *Incidents* succeed commercially, her claim also testifies to antebellum America's engagement with violence through indirect depictions. While her account is non-fiction, "Jacobs draws on a wide variety of supernatural tropes," writes John Kucich, including "Christian spirituality, Gothic horror, enlightenment mysticism, and folk wisdom and ritual" (23). Her enlistment of the supernatural and most especially gothic horror makes Jacobs's text an especially salient example of how antebellum authors – on the cusp of the Civil War – employ familiar conventional figures to indirectly depict trauma. Sielke posits that since Jacobs never explicitly represents her rape, it must be figured on the level of rhetoric. That is to say, because Jacobs cannot describe the sexual violence of slavery, she must turn to other literary tools in order to convey its horrors.

This is where the familiar gothic qualities of *Incidents* provide an opportunity for Jacobs. Teresa Goddu traces how "the scene of slavery was often represented as gothic during the antebellum period in America" (133). A type of romance that has roots back to the mid-eighteenth century, the gothic appeared in America literature as early as 1799 with the novels of Charles Brockdon Brown. The association of the gothic with strong sensations of fear and horror made its connection with slavery a potent abolitionist tactic (133). For Jacobs, the familiar figure of the woman in the garret allows her to suggest the sexual violence she confronts without a direct depiction of these scenes. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar

⁹ Sanchez-Eppler and Jean Fagan Yellin both offer a study of how Child came to edit *Incidents* and the problematic positioning she takes as the white editor presenting an African-American's story to the world.

point out in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the familiar conventional figure of a woman trapped in an attic suggests a victim being exploited by a powerful male. They demonstrate how British novels such as *Jane Eyre* – which was among the many unauthorized novels reprinted and circulated in antebellum American print culture – establish a conventional figure that by the 1850s would have been familiar to the readers of Harriet Beecher Stowe. In her 1851 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe subverts this model by transforming the status of the slave Cassie into a position of power rather than helplessness. Cassie did still confront routine sexual assault from her owner, and Gilbert and Gubar illustrate how Stowe's use of the figure of a woman in the attic allows her to suggest Cassie's victimhood as well as establish the slave's reversal of the usual power dynamic. So Jacobs undertakes the same effort, using her story of hiding in first a friend's garret and then her grandmother's attic to suggest both the sexual violence and her efforts to resist victimhood. "Jacobs exploits her position as the victim of a gothic plot," writes Goddu, and in doing so Jacobs employs familiar associations with romanticism to allow her readers to comprehend that as a slave she suffered imprisonment and sexual exploitation (147). By making herself a conventional figure that readers could associate with years of reading gothic texts, Jacobs indirectly depicts the sexual threats that she confronted and survived to write her account of slave life. In this way her use of the gothic allows Jacobs to convey to her readers the horrors of rape even though this trauma eludes representation.

It is important to note that Jacobs does not merely stumble upon this gothic convention because it echoes her life experience. Critics agree that Jacobs takes an active hand in employing this representational strategy of employing a familiar conventional figure to suggest her sexual exploitation, as suggested by Goddu's phrasing that Jacobs "exploits"

her position. The co-editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Incidents* speculates that “the modifications that Jacobs made probably did not bother antebellum readers” but at the same time they would not fail to notice her decision “to tamper with traditional literary forms” (Foster 320). Both Jacobs and her readers would comprehend the violent implications of her use of the gothic figure of the woman in the attic, and her choice of this figure would be grasped as a representational strategy rather than a naïve choice. In other words, the use of the familiar gothic figure in *Incidents* constitutes Jacobs’s literary response to trauma rather than a failing to represent her experience.

Blood and Animals

The example of Harriet Jacobs’s 1861 book points to the power and importance of familiar conventional figures in the representations of violence at the outbreak of the Civil War. Romanticism provided one of the primary scenes of Americans’ comprehension and representation of violence. The form became the scene of American encounters with traumatic scenes, and the mode through which they attempted to depict these scenes in literary texts. Like Jacobs, Americans understood the limitations of descriptions of trauma, and appreciated the value of romanticism’s familiar conventional figures for indirectly depicting violence. When the Civil War created new traumatic challenges, American writers responded by turning to the same figures used in antebellum literature in order to process and indirectly depict the new violence. To demonstrate this concept, I track two of these figures across antebellum, bellum, and post-bellum literature.

Thus **chapter one** examines why the romance became a valuable part of representing the trauma of slavery. Antebellum society did not anticipate the havoc created by Civil War

tactics and technology – thus the power of the war’s shocking destruction – but in the slavery system we may find an analogue to a relentless parade of wounding and death. This is the test case, if you will, for my assertion that trauma demands literature deploy familiar figures to represent the new. “The earth-born Cyclops,” as James Russell Lowell – the first editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* – called it in his poem “The Present Crisis,” inescapably hovers over Civil War literature. Its debates triggered the crisis and continued throughout the war. (The Emancipation Proclamation only freed slaves in unoccupied Confederate territory, not slaves in Union territory such as Kentucky or Maryland.) Like war itself, the slave system includes violence within its most basic operations. Chains, whippings, beatings, rapes, and deaths all mark the experience of the slave. Antebellum writers – whether former slaves, abolitionists, or Southern writers – confronted the need to address an entire system that used violence as its cornerstone. That one of the most successful and widely read representations of slavery’s violence appeared in the form of a romance testifies to the power and importance of romantic figures. Stowe’s novel provides a model through which we can understand how Americans comprehended literary depictions of violence before the war.

To this end, I identify two romantic functions that Stowe uses repeatedly to enable this avoidance of directly depicting violence: horses and blood.¹⁰ She draws from a tradition that makes animals a subject of strong emotional response. Stowe transposes our response to animals onto slaves, drawing attention to the suffering of African-Americans through our reactions to animal suffering. The horse provides a particularly potent and familiar figure

¹⁰ The number of possible literary modes, devices, and conventions used during the Civil War is vast. Timothy Sweet, for example, makes a compelling case for the importance of the pastoral to both Melville and Whitman’s attempts to assimilate the war into their psyches. Eliza Richards has identified the emergent use of the telegraph and the photograph in the work of Dickinson, Holmes, and Melville. Lisa Long argues for “the intimate relationship between the Civil War and a variety of invisible wounds” (4).

onto which violence and its attendant emotions manifest themselves.¹¹ Representations of blood, by contrast, seem to mark the direct depiction of violence, and yet Stowe effectively uses the substance as a replacement for violence. Even as the eponymous hero Tom is beaten to death, Stowe forbears representing his suffering. Instead she provides an ominous paragraph break and then describes the blood on his body. By depicting the outcome rather than the violence itself, Stowe draws upon familiar associations with blood in order to indirectly depict the physical assault Tom suffers. I take up these two figures as emblematic of romanticism's representations of violence that aid American comprehension of the Civil War sparked – in part – by the outrages of slavery.

Chapter two begins my discussion of horses with the 1864 Battle of Cedar Creek, an engagement that gained nationwide fame for a twelve-mile ride by a Union general to rally his troops. Literary depictions of the conflict focus not upon the wounding of 6000 troops but the horse that helped deliver a Union victory. The horse enables poets – including Herman Melville – to represent Cedar Creek as a patriotic scene and thus evade the casualties of war. The animal becomes the emotional focus of depictions of the war – rather than the soldiers – and in this way human injury can be covered over in favor of patriotic or even elegiac representations of the horse.

I argue this is not an unconscious avoidance, but a cognizant and critically valorized strategy for wartime writers to instantiate battles in terms their readers could comprehend. Throughout the war Americans believed in the importance of sentimental emotion as part of the country's overall war strategy. In speeches delivered across the country, orators such

¹¹ Harriet Ritvo points out that in many nineteenth-century classifications of animal hierarchies, domestic animals and those who “served as traditional metaphor for human attributes” (62) were listed as much closer to humans than apes and other primates. Thus horses were seen as more akin to humans than in the post-Darwin era.

as Ralph Waldo Emerson proclaimed the value and importance of emotionally stirring literature that would literally move soldiers to fight more courageously. Even elegiac poems that mourned the death of a soldier – oftentimes represented through the horse and its empty saddle – aroused an emotional response akin to the patriotic excitement found in other poems. In this way the violence indirectly depicted in both patriotic and elegiac poem is perpetuated, stirring the emotions of readers to support further combat. Horses provide an important figure for writers to represent the violence that accompanies combat and create an emotional response that shapes how Americans comprehend the cost of fighting.

In a similar vein, **chapter three** looks at the 1864 Battle of Mobile Bay, a naval engagement in which the ferocity of gunfire left the decks overflowing with blood and body parts. In lieu of a direct depiction of how the Union and Confederate sailors die, the poet Henry Howard Brownell describes the “red” decks of the Union flagship on which he served. His use of blood may seem graphic to us, but in actuality his emphases on the color of the deck allows for a comprehension of the violence of Mobile Bay without a descriptive inclusion of how all that blood left the sailor’s bodies. The familiar function of blood as a result of wounds and violence enables this understanding for Brownell.

Michael Kowalewski wryly notes that “American fiction is not for hemophobics” (11), and the same warning applies to the newspapers and dime novels of antebellum America. The description of literal blood -- not to be confused with racial metaphors that also permeated discussions at this time -- covers over the physical actions that spilled blood. In the second half of this chapter, I turn to novelist John W. De Forest. While critics have praised De Forest as a sort of proto-realist, and De Forest himself came to despise many accounts of the war, his work shows the central importance of the figure of blood to represent

violence during the war. De Forest embraces many romantic conventions, and his efforts to represent the horrors of battle and the medical tents behind the front lines rely upon descriptions of blood rather than the wounds that led men to suffer and die on the field or the surgery table. That many critics proclaim De Forest's work as the most "realistic" of all the literature published immediately after the Civil War speaks to how easily we overlook the influence of familiar romantic figures and their role in suggesting rather than directly depicting violence.

Chapter four traces the effects of these familiar literary conventions upon postbellum American literature. Even as the war transforms the familiar uses of horse and blood, these strategies for representing trauma through the indirect continue to shape post-war literature. This runs counter to the claims of Howells as well as later critics, that post-war literature wiped clean the antebellum traditions and crafted new, more direct conventions to represent the war's trauma.

Even as the sentimental and romantic forms fell out of favor, these conventions continue to appear in the same realist literature that Howells hails as a radical shift away from the antebellum romance. For Ambrose Bierce – praised by Howells as one of greatest living American writers – familiar romantic conventions retain a therapeutic efficacy that allows a still-traumatized nation to acknowledge that a horrific war occurred yet to still avoid directly confronting the war's violence. Americans continued to respond to the war with the same evasiveness they denounced in wartime writers.

Bierce spent four years fighting across the South on some of the war's most gruesome battlefields. His stories force the reader to confront the sheer inability of the soldiers to do anything but imaginatively draw upon the familiar in order to understand unfamiliar

experiences of war. He repudiates Howell's edict to represent the soldiers we "know" by creating soldiers who do not themselves know what they see and must rely on these familiar figures in order to comprehend the traumatic scenes around them. Bierce shows the legacy of the war's use of romantic figures upon post-bellum literature. He illustrates how the generation of writers after the war continued to turn to the familiar literary conventions that shaped the representations of the war. These techniques run counter to the calls of critics such as Howells for postbellum writers to find new ways to "know" the Civil War and in turn reject popular antebellum forms such as the sentimental novel.

Finally, I argue that despite the attempts to create a "new" literature that moves away from the romance of antebellum writing, the authors of the post-bellum find themselves continually confronted by these uses of the familiar in order to process trauma. As American scientists increasingly discovered in the decades after the war, one cannot directly address or represent a traumatic experience. It requires indirect, what I earlier quoted Freud as calling "indifferent," representational strategies. Thus these antebellum conventions, and the opportunities they provide, continue to occupy prominent roles in post-war American literature. They may have been altered through their uses to describe the trauma of the war, but they remain an inescapable aspect of post-bellum literary works

CHAPTER 1

STOWE'S ROMANCE WITH TRAUMA

Introduction: Brunswick, Maine

Uncle Tom's Cabin exerted an influence across 1850s America as few other books have before or since. "Never since books were first printed has the success of *Uncle Tom* been equaled; the history of literature contains nothing parallel to it, nor approaching it" noted *Putnam's Review* in 1853. Most attributed the wide popularity of the book to its treatment of slavery. Stowe successfully incorporated one of the most widely debated issues of the day into an already popular literary form, the romance. The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society predicted that Stowe's fusion of slavery with the romance had tapped "a vein richer than California Gold" that they believed "would be followed by a host of Grub Street imitators. If there was a romance in the country, it was in the relations between masters and slaves, and in the mixed relations growing out of them" (*Frederick Douglass's Paper*). The combination of slavery with a popular literary form gave the book tremendous emotional power for antebellum readers. *Putnam's Review* declared that its topicality lent the book much of its emotional power, observing that despite its unparalleled sales, "this success does not, by any means, argue that *Uncle Tom* is superior to all other books; but it is an unmistakable indication that it is a live book, and that it will continue to live when many other books which have been pronounced immortal, shall be dead and buried in oblivion" (98). The powerful impressions made by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on its antebellum readers

catapulted it to become, as Jane Tompkins puts it, “the most important book of the century” (124).

Defenders of slavery seized upon the conjunction of slavery with a literary treatment as a way to critique *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. “A Southerner” writing in the *New York Daily Times* concedes “the whole dark and terrible picture painted at Legree’s plantation, is the most hideous and revolting which we have ever looked upon. It would, by contrast, actually light up the darkest scene to be found in VIRGIL’s description of the infernal regions, if placed side by side with it; and it’s not surpassed in horrors by any of the dread scenery in DANTE’s Hell” (“Southern Slavery”). Even as “A Southerner” agrees that Stowe describes a horrific system, he links these scenes with extraordinary tales such as *The Aeneid* and *The Inferno* rather than anything that actually exists in the southern United States. In this view, Stowe’s choice of genre undermines the abolitionist impulse that underlies the book. “The attack on the South is a novel – a romance. The system of the South relies on fact – the sentiment of the North flies to fiction,” wrote the *Southern Press*. If Stowe wanted to demonstrate the flaws of slavery, southerners argue, she should not have turned to the romance, a genre that by definition does not rely upon facts. “The structure of the romance, to which class of writings Mrs. Stowe’s story belongs, is one that demands extraordinary events,” wrote William Gilmore Simms, one of the foremost southern pro-slavery writers in antebellum America (qtd. in Duvall 109). Simms describes romances as “imaginative, passionate, metaphysical; they deal chiefly in trying situation, bold characterization, and elevating moral. They exhibit *invention* in large degree” (109). Simms did not mean these as dismissive terms. He describes his own work as predominantly romances. Like many other

southerners, though, Simms did not believe that an accurate depiction of slavery could appear in a genre that relies so heavily upon imagination and invention.

Stowe agrees with her southern critics that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fictionalizes slavery. She argues, though, that any shortcoming is an indictment of slavery, not her text. "The book is a very inadequate representation of slavery" she writes in the introduction to *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "and it is so, necessarily, for this reason – that slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read" (5). She does not name just what is so dreadful, itself a telling elision. The allusions to rape and murder throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though, help us to infer Stowe's line of thought. These acts, she suggests, are too terrible to appear in art even as they constitute an inescapable part of the American slave system. To try to directly depict this violence in a text, Stowe argues, would create a text that nobody could read. Such a work might as well not exist since it could not perform its stated goal to "awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us" (xiii). As a consequence, Stowe admits she wrote a book that does not paint a complete picture of slavery. Instead, she asserts a representational standard that suggests but does not directly confront the most physically violent moments of the institution. Her representation of slavery is therefore not an effort at a graphic depiction. Her painting does not include the worst physical violence. This is inadequate when it comes to slavery, Stowe admits, but it is also necessary if she wishes to create a depiction that does not overwhelm.

Evidence of Stowe's evasion of depicting extreme violence exists throughout the book. One short example occurs as the slave Prue arrives at the St. Clare estate in New Orleans to sell her husks. Prue makes clear that her masters routinely beat her, although she

never says as much. Instead she refers to wishing she were dead, and that if she does not turn over all her revenue from selling husks “they half kills me” (186). These statements suggest the cruel torture that Prue faces, but neither she nor the St. Clare slaves speak it out loud. As Prue leaves, one slave mutters “if I was her master, I’d cut her up worse than she is.” The cook Dinah sharply replies “Ye couldn’t do that ar, no ways...her back’s a far sight now – she can’t never get a dress together over it” (187). Dinah answers the threat of violence with an oblique reference to the results of violence. She claims that Prue’s back is so covered with scars she cannot even tie up her dress. Such horrendous scarring would come about only from repeated and brutal whippings. Dinah and the rest of the slaves well know this. Dinah enacts her own evasion of Prue’s beatings, though, by alluding to Prue’s scars rather than the act of violence itself. Like Prue’s own account, Dinah indirectly depicts the physical acts that make slavery so horrible, eschewing a direct depiction.

A few days later word reaches the St. Clare household that Prue is dead. Like the reader, the characters must again decipher the meaning of Prue’s fate. When a new slave arrives in Prue’s place, the white Miss Ophelia is in the kitchen, and the new slave states “Prue isn’t coming any more.” When Dinah asks why not, the woman replies “We doesn’t exactly know. She’s down cellar” (190). Although the woman seeks to avoid directly addressing the violence that befell Prue in front of Miss Ophelia, even without the presence of a white person the evasion continues. When Dinah asks the woman privately what happened, she responds that “Prue, she got drunk agin, -- and they had her down cellar, -- and thar they left her all day, -- and I hearn ‘em saying that the *flies had got to her*, -- and *she’s dead!*” (190). As Dinah later explains to Miss Ophelia, these somewhat mysterious terms mean that “those folks have whipped Prue to death” (191). This straightforward

statement only comes to the reader fourth hand as Ophelia tells St. Clare what has happened. Stowe represents the physical violence of Prue's life and death only through these codes and elisions. Much like the slaves themselves, Stowe avoids a direct depiction of these graphic moments.

That white Miss Ophelia required Dinah to interpret the meaning behind "flies had got to her" points to the other major complication of Stowe's attempts to represent slavery's evils. Not only does she feel the need to evade the most graphic moments of slavery, but Stowe also realizes these experiences are far beyond the normal life of her readers, and indeed nearly all of white America. The extraordinary nature of this violence adds to the representational challenge for Stowe. Miss Ophelia's constant bewilderment repeatedly reminds the reader of how far beyond their ordinary life slavery exists, even as for Dinah and the other slaves this is indeed part of their everyday lives. The one set of details of Prue's life that she shares comes when Uncle Tom asks her why she drinks so much. Prue then tells how she was forced to let her newborn starve to death, unable to even comfort it at night. Her master "wished it was dead, she said; and she wouldn't let me have it o' nights, cause, she said, it kept me awake, and made me good for nothing. She made me sleep in her room; and I had to put it away off in a little kind o' garret, and thar it cried itself to death, one night" (189). Like other graphic moments, this account comes indirectly, the product of Prue's recounting rather than Stowe's description of the child's starvation. What is more, the scene comes across as utterly fantastic: the voluntary decision by the white master to allow a child to starve in order to make her own servant less tired in the morning. The tale shocks even Uncle Tom, who has already had occasion to hear many stories of slavery. These extraordinary moments are precisely the sorts of physical violence that Stowe wishes to elide.

And yet, as we shall see, Stowe expresses a need, almost a compulsion, to demonstrate the impact of precisely the sort of extraordinary physical violence suffered by Prue. She needed a literary form that would allow her to meet her representational standards, what she calls in *A Key* “a fair representation of slavery as it at present exists” (5). The search for a combination of indirection and the extraordinary led Stowe to the romance.

The Romance: Salem, Massachusetts

The nineteenth century romance was a genre that offered indirect depictions of the extraordinary. Stowe’s contemporaries shared this conception of the romance. In the same year *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* began to appear in serial form, Nathaniel Hawthorne published *The House of the Seven Gables*. In his preface, Hawthorne seeks to explain his own choice of the romance. He begins by setting up an opposition between the romance and its cousin, the novel. These two genres both use fiction in order to craft a work of art through language. The key difference, Hawthorne notes, emerges from their relationship to the life of an imagined reader:

The latter form of composition [the novel] is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience. The former [the romance] -- while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart -- has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer’s own choosing or creation. (xi)

Hawthorne views both forms as capable of representational tasks. As the reviewer from the *Southern Press* demonstrates in his reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as both a novel and a romance, these two genres were by no means mutually exclusive even within the same text.¹² The difference arises from what Hawthorne calls the “probable and ordinary” circumstances of life. This is the purview of the novel. The events of the novel should seem directly taken from one’s daily life; or if not from one’s own life, then from a life that does not seem unusual or fantastic. The romance is not bound by these restrictions, and the events of the romance can be as extraordinary as the skill of the author allows, provided she maintains this truth of the human heart. Further, because the circumstances of that truth are limited only by the writer’s choices, its representations can be incomplete and elliptical. Unbound by the quotidian details of everyday life, the romance allows for indirect approaches to the extraordinary.

Uncle Tom's Cabin contains plenty of moments that do describe the everyday life of both whites and blacks from Indiana to Louisiana. These domestic scenes in Rachel Halliday’s kitchen, St. Clare’s parlor, and even the eponymous cabin have played important roles in the critical reclamation of Stowe’s book. They depict the everyday life of Americans inside and outside of the slave system, and form an integral part of the sympathetic identification with her characters that Stowe seeks to inculcate in her reader. In these passages, Stowe maintains a sense of fidelity to life in a Quaker kitchen or a New Orleans mansion. She directly depicts a world that seems quite ordinary, suggestive of Hawthorne’s definition of the novel. And yet in addition to these scenes – and even in the midst of them – Stowe also seeks to represent extraordinary moments of physical violence and anguish.

¹² It was not until the late nineteenth century that the noun “novel” predominantly referred to any work of long fiction, rather than describing a genre or style of long fiction. George Dekker’s introduction to *The American Historical Romance* provides a brief history of these terms.

These events also constitute the probable and ordinary of slavery. That they happen all too often is one of Stowe's main points. Indirection is necessary in order to circumvent the "probable and ordinary" aspects of a slave's life that she believes cannot be a part of a text.

As part of this indirection, Hawthorne says, the writer of the romance has the freedom to "manage his atmospheric medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen or enrich the shadows of the picture" (xi). Hawthorne describes not a complete detachment from everyday life but rather a movement from the ordinary into the extraordinary; he envisions the romance as a way to modify life with the fantastic. Here is Stowe's opening, a way for her to offer a "fair representation" of slavery in fictional form. In the introduction to her second novel on the institution, *Dred*, Stowe echoes Hawthorne as she argues "there is no ground, ancient or modern, whose vivid lights, gloomy shadows, and grotesque groupings, afford to the novelist so wide a scope for the exercise of his powers" (3). These changes the romance can make to the novel's everyday become especially striking in the context of slavery, writes Stowe. To return to the example of Prue, we see how Stowe uses this shift from a scene steeped in the everyday of the novel into the extraordinary of the romance. The scene begins in the St. Clare kitchen, the setting for many domestic moments. Kitchens as a whole have provided many peaceful quotidian scenes throughout the book. From the Shelby kitchen to the Bird kitchen where Eliza takes shelter to Rachel Halliday's Quaker home, kitchens have served as respites for slaves and readers alike. They have provided places of safety and familiarity for conversation, cooking, and the occasional bit of culinary chaos. Such has been Dinah's kitchen in the St. Clare mansion; while Dinah has resisted Miss Ophelia's efforts to impose a New Englander's organization upon the place, it is precisely because of the lack of violence or other extraordinary events that Miss Ophelia ultimately

surrenders control of the place back to Dinah. Like the other kitchens in the book, this one is ordinary and described as in a novel. Prue's appearance – and subsequent disappearance – casts the kitchen in a different light. Her plight transforms the kitchen into a scene where extraordinary events are quietly and indirectly discussed. The quotidian vanishes as Dinah reveals that Prue's back is covered with scars and Prue explains to Uncle Tom that her child has starved to death. This is not a conversation found in the kitchens of Stowe's readers, nor an experience they have for themselves. These dialogues quickly slide the scenes in the St. Clare kitchen from the everyday of the novel into the romance. The shift in genre appears seamless, in the course of a single conversation, but the sudden allusions to graphic physical violence and its effects mean that this kitchen scene has moved from the "probable and ordinary" into a different sort of representation of life in the St. Clare kitchen. The romance allows Stowe to enact a shift away from the ordinary in an effort to represent, albeit indirectly, the violence that exists within these scenes.

Even as Stowe believed these scenes to be too horrible for art, she also had no direct experience of being a slave. Never a victim of slavery herself, Stowe had to find ways to represent these scenes that were foreign to her own life. Even if they do constitute the everyday reality of a slave in antebellum America, the violence Stowe represents is hardly ordinary for her readers. Compared to the novel, the romance provides an alternative range of approaches to evoke these experiences that for her audience would seem extraordinary. Fifty years later, the novelist Henry James would echo Hawthorne's definition, asserting that "the romantic stands...for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire" (32).

Like Stowe, James identifies scenes of life that can never be experienced directly, no matter how much these writers attempt to imagine the situation. He perceives that there are parts of life that neither he nor his readers could fully apprehend. These, he argues following Hawthorne, fall in the purview of the romance.

Stowe's romance raises the vexing question of why all of this indirection in order to show extraordinary violence is necessary. Why do these features of the romance provide answers to Stowe's need for representing the horrific aspects of the slave system? James sees the romance as leading to a "beautiful circuit" of thought and desire, and Hawthorne speaks of mellow lights and truths of the human heart. Their language suggests an optimism of the romance, a sense that these extraordinary moments lead to the beauty and tender feeling we come to associate with the term outside of the realm of literary genre. They describe the romance as a pleasant escape from ordinary life. What to make, then, of the fact that James uses the romance to tell a disconcerting ghost story in *The Turn of the Screw*, and Hawthorne's own romances explore suffering, adultery, and disillusionment? Stowe seems to have a clearer insight into the genre when she identifies how the romance's qualities assist in the depiction of physical violence. She uses the romance's indirection and extraordinary moments to solve the problem of how to address what today we understand as the trauma of slavery.

Although the concept itself did not exist at the time, antebellum and wartime experiences helped give rise to the inquiries into psychological injury that led to Sigmund Freud's theories of trauma. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains a traumatic experience as a rupture in our normal perception of the world. Typically our perceptions help us to process and comprehend what happens to us and around us. They allow us to recount

and respond to an event. A traumatic experience, though, overwhelms the perceptions and imprints itself on the mind without the benefit of filtering or processing. Robbed of comprehension, the mind struggles to deal with this memory that has been foisted upon it, unable to grasp or forget the experience. It creates a conflict: the traumatic event cannot be described, it cannot be understood, and it must be remembered. Cathy Caruth, drawing on Freud, discusses these three qualities of trauma as “the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event” (5). Trauma takes the form of a memory that the victim can neither understand nor describe, at least not in any complete or meaningful way. The resulting uncertainty creates what Caruth calls “a crisis of truth” (6) in which the contours and details of a traumatic memory will always be fraught and uncertain for both the victim and those who attempt to understand the victim’s experience. Even if a victim ultimately finds a way to cope with the trauma, it is only in the sense that he is confident others embrace the incomplete memory. There is never a sense of complete description or comprehension of the experience. It will always remain incomplete.

This incompleteness makes it both imperative and practically impossible to depict a traumatic event. Drawing from the work of Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Dori Laub, Caruth points out the paradox that “in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute benumbing to it” (6). That is to say, the experience of a traumatic event compels victims to attempt to confront the reality of what happened, even as they seem unable to apprehend it. They can seem numb to the experience, utterly detached from the reality of what happened to them. In practical terms this means that victim accounts of their experience may deviate wildly from other accounts or evidence of the event. Such deviations

exacerbate their sense of a memory they neither see nor understand. And yet, even as the victim expresses a numbness to reality, their struggle marks the moment in the representation of the trauma that Caruth and Laub – and Freud – himself find most productive for sorting through the experience. “To listen to the crisis of a trauma,” Caruth writes, “is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor’s departure from it” (10). A retelling of a traumatic event will not directly depict the experience. Instead, the victim will depart from this direct account, taking refuge in alternative conceptions of the event that elide, efface, circumvent, or otherwise indirectly approach the trauma. At times these indirections can seem fantastic in their departure, what Caruth calls a “belated uncertainty” as to how a retelling conflicts or conforms to the experience (6). Yet this is an unavoidable aspect. The violence simultaneously compels an attempt to understand what has happened even as it makes this attempt indirect and incomplete.

Understanding is a goal of both victims and those around them. Trauma confounds not only the ones who directly experience it, but also those who attempt to bear witness to its effects. That is why Caruth, following Laub and Freud, emphasizes the importance of listening to “the crisis of trauma.” She seeks to draw attention to the incomplete understanding of any traumatic experience, and how a complete comprehension remains impossible. The phrase “crisis of trauma” suggests how trauma can impact and confound even those who do not directly experience it. People who do not suffer the trauma themselves will still find themselves confronted with the impossibilities of direct depiction and comprehension, and even with its insistent return. Although it affects the individual in myriad personal ways, trauma can also be described as a social phenomenon. The encounter

with trauma's impossibilities and remembrances can in turn "infect" others who are equally unable to grasp or forget the traumatic event.

Thus even though Stowe herself never experienced a violent trauma such as slavery, around the beginning of 1851 she began to feel compelled to document the horror of slavery that had existed on the periphery of her world for years.¹³ Her biographer Joan Hedrick cites a letter Stowe wrote in March of that year, in which she describes a pull to confront slavery even as she cringes at the prospect: "Up to this year I have always felt that I had no particular call to meddle with this subject, and I dreaded to expose even my own mind to the full force of its exciting power. But I feel now that the time is come when even a woman or a child who can speak a word for freedom and humanity is bound to speak" (qtd. in Hedrick 208). Stowe describes a form of social trauma; she has become aware of a terrible experience in the midst of her society and it has now impressed itself upon her mind. This white, northern, middle-class female's experience of slavery necessarily differs from the direct trauma experienced by African-American slaves. Nonetheless, as James Dawes demonstrates in his study of Civil War writers such as Mary Chesnut and Walt Whitman, a culture at large wrestling with violence such as war – or slavery – must attempt to represent these scenes. Writers feel compelled to come to grips with the horrors around them, even if they only experience them through words and stories rather than direct experience. Dawes argues "a culture's attempt to produce a literary record" of a violent event operates "much in the same way that the traumatic recall, according to Freud, reestablishes agency by *choosing* to replay and direct an original scene of helplessness" (11). This helps us to understand why Stowe felt compelled, in the face of the rising tension over slavery, to revisit the institution that aroused

¹³ Stowe did, however, undergo the traumatic experience of losing a child. Her year and a half old son Charlie died of cholera in 1849. As Hedrick notes, Stowe would later claim that helplessly sitting alongside Charlie's sickbed and grave taught her what a slave must feel when her child is sold (193).

both fear and anger in her. Her growing awareness of the Fugitive Slave Act's cruelties and other encroachments of the slave system inculcated a need to confront rather than efface. Stowe found herself faced with the traumatic urge to remember despite the pain she associates with discussing slavery. "Must we forever keep calm and smile when every sentiment of manliness and humanity is kicked and rolled in the dust and lies trampled and bleeding and make it a merit to be exceedingly cool," she wrote her brother Henry Ward Beecher, "I feel as if my heart would burn itself out in grief and shame that such things are" (qtd. in Hedrick 205). Although detached from the physical torture of slavery, Stowe nonetheless experiences the traumatic urge to replay the events of a system that inspired so much psychic suffering for herself and the antebellum abolitionist culture that surrounded her.

The problem remains of the indirect and incomplete nature of a traumatic experience. Stowe's marriage of the romance with slavery's trauma provides a coherent solution to this dilemma. Trauma eludes direct depiction, whether in written or oral language. Caruth labels it the "departure" from an event; Dawes calls it violence's "attack" on language. A traumatic moment resists being written or told because of the incomplete perception and understanding suffered by the victim. Our attempts at representation will always depart in some way from reality. However, if we recall two of the defining characteristics of nineteenth-century American romance, we find a genre that embraces these departures. Both the extraordinary and the indirection that mark the romance provide opportunities for writers to represent traumatic events – such as slavery – that might otherwise remain silent and invisible. At the same time, trauma theory helps us to understand the power of the romance and make sense of the importance of what James calls the "subterfuge" of its techniques. Stowe's romance

conforms to the challenges of trauma because the genre itself utilizes these qualities. The romance can display the same features – indirection, incompleteness, and remembrance – that accompany a traumatic experience.

Indirection provides Stowe an alternative to the testimonies and narratives of first-hand experience that were popular among the abolitionist movement. Although she values the facts of slavery that she gathered from various slave narratives and other investigations, she repeatedly asserts that these materials cannot suffice in her efforts to convey the experiences of slavery. In her preface to the 1852 English edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe seeks to defend her depictions of the various characters as indeed analogous to reality, but then closes with an argument that a turn to primary documents does not suffice. “With regard to the practical results of slavery the picture cannot be overdrawn: the half is not told, *and cannot be told*” (qtd. in Diller 633, italics in original).¹⁴ Stowe once again argues here that calls for primary documentation of slavery overlooks the traumatic nature of the system. The “cannot” emphasizes the impossibilities of direct depiction. No less an authority than Frederick Douglass seems to have shared this view. As Gabrielle Foreman has shown, Douglass argues “that language is not adequately expressive; it has ‘no power to convey’” the violence of slavery (156). This does not undermine the value of primary documents, as Douglass and others continued to disseminate first-hand accounts of slavery, and Stowe herself published a massive collection of them in *A Key*. What Stowe and Douglass both argue, though, is that these attempts are not adequate. First-hand depictions of an event such as slavery are necessarily incomplete, a conclusion supported by trauma theory’s

¹⁴ Diller provides an overview and reprints in full the four prefaces Stowe wrote for various editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as well as making a convincing case for their importance in showing Stowe’s evolving thoughts on her text.

understanding that a victim's account will always entail a departure from the traumatic event.¹⁵

The romance, by contrast, enables the indirect depiction of slavery that trauma theory suggests is necessary to apprehend these scenes of violence. Stowe and Hawthorne's emphasis on the visual nature of the romance provides a useful model for understanding this process. They use metaphors of shadow and light to describe the alterations the romance makes to a scene. The terminology suggests that some elements are obscured and others brought out. For example, Stowe describes in detail the surrounding scenes of life in the St. Clare kitchen as Prue complains of her fate: the peculiar disorganization of the kitchen and its layout, as well as the outfits of several of the slaves in the kitchen at the time. The inferred by-product of overheard conversations within this domestic scene, hidden in the shadows as other, non-traumatic, elements are brought into the light. This visual imagery projects a sense of the romance as a genre that, while still vulnerable to trauma's attack on language, responds by *showing* a scene with images rather than *telling* the details of violence with words. In letters to friends, Stowe refers to herself not as an author, but as a visual artist: "my vocation is simply that of a painter, and my object will be to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying. There is no arguing with *pictures*, and everybody is impressed by them" (qtd. in Hedrick 208). Stowe envisions her romance as a visual medium that would represent slavery in terms that struck her readers as "lifelike" even as she avoids directly depicting the aspects of the system that she believed could not be read. Her turn to the visual seeks to give readers the experience of joining Miss Ophelia in St. Clare's kitchen,

¹⁵ See the work of Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Jeannine DeLombard, and Jennifer Greeson for examples of how trauma inflects and influences the narratives of African-American slaves, especially Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

privy to slave life yet not encountering direct depictions of its violence. Such pictures could, at times, evoke within her readers their own sense of exposure to trauma even though these representations use indirection. Some reviewers agreed that Stowe found a way to impress upon her audience “pictures” that gave them this sense of being in the midst of slavery. “It is rather as if, instead of reading the cold summary of the numbers in the armies on that field, and of the numbers of the killed and wounded,” wrote the *New Englander* about Stowe’s depictions of slave life, “we were placed by some terrible *clairvoyance*, in the midst of the battle itself, eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses of horrors which history cannot tell” (589-590). This reviewer juxtaposes these qualities of the romance with the inadequacy of facts to describe a scene. He emphasizes instead the visual nature of Stowe’s book as key to providing this sense of “being there” in ways that direct depiction of events would foreclose. Pictures provide a sense of the real, not the real itself; like clairvoyance they fool the mind into seeing something even as we know is not before our eyes. Thus the indirection of the visual convinces us of our access to experiences of slavery even as we know it is incomplete. Just as Caruth emphasizes a need to willingly embrace a trauma survivor’s testimony, to understand the importance of acknowledging the “crisis of trauma” and its concomitant incompleteness, so Stowe’s turn to pictures invites an acceptance of the indirect and extraordinary nature of her scenes. Like Stowe, this reviewer argues that as a romance *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* represents a world that would otherwise remain invisible and silent.

Along with indirect depiction, the romance helps Stowe’s readers to comprehend the otherwise extraordinary experience of slavery. The extreme violence inherent to slavery – the rape of female slaves, the beating of Uncle Tom, or George’s forced separation from his wife to marry another woman – would be far outside the everyday life of these readers. Any

representation of it, then, would need to be equally extraordinary. Stowe uses the imaginative features of the romance in order to help her readers begin to comprehend these scenes. For her, this is another reason to prefer fiction over the primary documents that she gathers for *A Key*. “In fictitious writing, it is possible to find refuge from the hard and the terrible, by inventing scenes and characters of a more pleasing nature” she writes in the preface to *A Key*, “no such resource is open in a work of fact; and the subject of this work is one which the truth, if told at all, must needs be very dreadful” (3). The imagination – the key quality of the romance touted by her southern critic William Gilmore Simms – provides a way to mediate the incomprehensible nature of a traumatic event. The imagination enables the deviation that Caruth identifies. Here, Stowe casts it as a softening of the impact of slavery. She asserts that through invention her readers can grasp that which would otherwise elude them. In a passage from *Dred*, Stowe demonstrates this phenomenon as the young protagonist Nina muses on the unimpressive impact of her history lessons at school: “Do you know,” she tells her suitor Clayton, “that I never had the least idea that these men were alive that we read about in these histories, or that they had feelings like ours? We always studied the lessons, and learnt the hard names, and how forty thousand were killed on one side, and fifty thousand on the other; and we don’t know any more about it than if we never had” (114). Nina says that previously she did not comprehend the representations of battles in her schoolbooks. Only when Clayton introduces imaginative elements as he discusses the lives of individual men and the works of Shakespeare does Nina grasp that these people fought, suffered, and died. They did not seem real to her until the imaginative element gave her access to these lives that were extraordinary to her own existence. As Henry James says, the romance invokes experiences the reader can never know for herself. Such invocation provides a beginning for overcoming

the incomprehension that accompanies trauma. The conditions she invokes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – the fates of George or Tom or Prue – exist far outside the everyday life of Stowe and her readers. The romance's capacity for the extraordinary provides for the possibility of representing these scenes that the novel could not, and for doing so in a way that helps her readers, like Nina, glimpse the violence of slavery in ways they would not otherwise understand.

Finally, Stowe's romance with trauma enacts the imperative to remember. The indirection and extraordinary scenes that make the mode so effective in its representation of trauma emerge from a tradition of romanticism well known to readers before they pick up *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's book forces its readers to remember previous representations of violence and suffering. At times these references are explicit, as when Stowe directly asks the reader if they too have ever lost a child, a well-established situation in antebellum literature as well as life. The "pictures" that Stowe creates share familiar representational approaches to violence found in romances across the spectrum of the American literary market. She does not invent the shadows and lights and other visual images that help provide the romance its indirection. To the contrary, she draws upon what I call "conventions" in order to facilitate her efforts to indirectly depict slavery's violence. These conventions take advantage of the need to remember. Jessica Forbes Roberts, in her study of wartime conventions in the *Rebellion Record*, notes the rich complexity and importance of conventionality to nineteenth-century literary production. She points out that poetic conventions, for example, "enable the production of even more like poems" (175), creating a self-reinforcing cycle that allows readers and writers to find familiar anchors even in the course of unfamiliar events. Conventionality provides a bulwark against violence's attack on language by seizing upon

the need to remember such violence. By providing routes for the imaginative and indirect depictions so crucial to compensating for the necessarily incomplete depiction of a traumatic experience, conventions use remembering to help Stowe ease the task of representing slavery.

Uncle Tom's Cabin draws upon a wide range of conventional figures, pulled from many different forms of the romance. In my reading we can see how Stowe responds to the problems of trauma through her turn to the romance. In the second half of this chapter, I will attend closely to two specific figures that Stowe uses to represent slavery's violence. Each of these conventional depiction of figures draws from a different form of the romance, what I here call "modes" in order to differentiate these styles from the genre as a whole. For Stowe, they provide methods of indirection that aid in her attempts to show what she calls the evils of slavery.

These figures of the romance matter not just because of Stowe's success in bringing the experience of slavery to the hearts and minds of millions of readers. Her work to bring the conventional depictions to the foreground of abolitionist literature became part of the self-reinforcing cycle of familiar approaches of the romance. Images to represent violence used in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became the conventions for addressing the impossibilities of trauma. The figures that I discuss here will reappear the following decade when writers encountered another type of trauma during the Civil War. They would then use the conventional depictions of Stowe and others for their own purposes, altering them to represent violence that would then be used by postbellum writers for their own needs.

The Sentimental: A Rural Plantation, Kentucky

Eliza Richards calls the sentimental “a strain of literature that privileges the expression of feeling over intellect or reason” (PEPP). Although we tend to associate this mode with female writers such as Susan Warner and Maria Cummins, Jane Tompkins makes the argument in her important 1985 study *Sensational Designs* that for nineteenth-century readers the sentimental – like the romance as a whole – transcends demographic boundaries. “*The House of the Seven Gables* succeeded in 1851,” Tompkins writes, “because it was a sentimental novel; that is, it succeeded not because it escaped or transcended the standards of judgment that made critics admire Warner’s work, but because it fulfilled them” (18). Her example here is revealing, since we have already seen how Hawthorne refers to his text not as “sentimental” but rather as a romance. Like the differentiation between the romance and the novel, the differentiation between modes is necessarily blurry. Critics tend to view the sentimental’s standards of judgment as primarily interested in instructing readers. As Tompkins cautions in her introduction, “because the function of these scenarios is heuristic and didactic rather than mimetic, they do not attempt to transcribe in detail a parabola of events as they ‘actually happen’ in society; rather, they provide a basis for remaking the social and political order in which events take place” (xvii).¹⁶ In this way Tompkins and other current critics of the sentimental recite the objections raised against *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by its proslavery opponents. These critics seek to resuscitate the very important political and cultural work that made Simms and others fear – correctly, as it turns out – the popular response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Yet in doing so they inadvertently reinforce southern arguments that the events in the text are not “real” but rather fictional constructions designed

¹⁶ An altogether different perspective on Stowe’s purpose is offered by Michael Gilmore. In an analysis of the Senator Bird chapter of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Gilmore proposes “the ‘magic of...real presence’ is the ideal toward which all representation in Stowe’s narrative strives” (102).

to enable personal or societal change as opposed to representing slavery. I do not mean to suggest that Tompkins or any other recent literary scholar of sentimentalism fosters sympathy for pro-slavery objections to Stowe's work. Rather, I simply wish to point out yet another instance in which Stowe's indirection is seen as a flaw rather than responsive to the problems of trauma.

The sentimental's representation of violence deals, like the mode as a whole, first and foremost with feelings.¹⁷ Philip Fisher's analysis of the sentimental provides one of the more cogent explanations for how Stowe's readers would understand this mode. He positions the sentimental as one of the driving forces of culture change in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. "From roughly 1760 to 1860 sentimentality was a crucial tactic of politically radical representation throughout western culture" (92), and its prevalence helped give rise to the wave of sentimental fiction that antebellum readers knew so well. In order to explain the impact of the sentimental, Fisher turns to Rousseau's work on compassion. This, Fisher argues, constitutes the primary emotion associated with the sentimental form. He chooses Rousseau's explanation of compassion because "in miniature, his image contains the primary psychology of sentimental narration itself and in particular the essential features of Stowe's treatment of slavery" (105). Just as important, if overlooked, is how Rousseau's example also illustrates how the sentimental uses indirection in the depiction of a traumatic event.

Rousseau's example poses a scenario that leads to compassionate feelings. It is, as Fisher quotes:

¹⁷ The Jane Tompkins-Ann Douglas debate is the most widely known iteration of this trend, and as Cindy Weinstein argues Tompkins and Douglas made the sympathetic emotional response "a litmus test for assessing a text's politics" (1).

the tragic image of an imprisoned man who sees, through his window, a wild beast tearing a child from its mother's arms, breaking its frail limbs with murderous teeth, and clawing its quivering entrails. What horrible agitation seizes him as he watches the scene which does not concern him personally! What anguish he suffers from being able to help the fainting mother and the dying child.

(qtd in Fisher 105)

The man's feelings constitute compassion because he is both helpless to assist and unattached to the victims. The experience of the man replicates that of the sentimental reader, who also does not have the ability to alter the course of events in the story, nor does he have any direct connection to the victims. The antebellum reader's feelings for these victims are not equal, though. Fisher argues that within the framework of sentimental compassion "the primary victim is not the child who undergoes physical destruction, but the mother who must be present when all that she values most is torn from her and destroyed" (106). The emotional anguish over domestic separation and destruction takes precedence over the actual physical destruction of the child. Emotional loss overshadows the corporeal suffering, a form of indirection familiar to Stowe's readers from the countless sentimental texts of antebellum America.

Stowe's representations of sentimental violence prioritize "pictures" of emotional loss above physical suffering. While mental anguish itself offers an indirection from the violence of slavery, she consistently uses specific conventions in order to indirectly depict this loss in ways that her readers would understand. Especially in the early chapters of her book, one of Stowe's most common conventions is that of the loss and suffering of the animal in place of

the human. By displacing violence and loss onto the animal, her strategy dramatizes the indirection found throughout the book.

Before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicts any violence towards slaves, there is first the drowning of the slave George's dog, Carlo. Ordered "to tie a stone to his neck and throw him in a pond" (14), George refuses to kill his beloved pet. His master then drowns the animal in front of George and "pelted the poor creature with stones. Poor thing! he looked at me so mournful, as if he wondered why I didn't save him. I had to take a flogging because I wouldn't do it myself. I don't care" (15). As the inauguration of violence in the book, this scene tells us much about Stowe's representational tactics. Told by George to Eliza, it introduces the unreliability inherent in a trauma victim's testimony. George inserts comments and speculations into his story, believing that the drowning dog "kind o' looked at me as if he understood how I felt" (14) as he watches helplessly. Such sentiment suggests George's efforts to process what he sees even if it departs from reality. We have no sense of Carlo's actual thoughts and responses to his suffering. An attentive reader will see the imaginative assumptions made by George in an effort to understand Carlo's death. The sudden separation from a beloved companion devastates George, and his attempts to comprehend what he sees emphasize the difficulty of representing emotional tragedy. His brief story suggests the problems of depictions of violence, using the loss of the animal to introduce the dilemma.

And it clearly is a loss for George, one that presages the next threat his master issues, "that I should take Mina for a wife, and settle down in a cabin with her, or he would sell me down the river" (15). George already has a wife and child, though, and the experience with Carlo makes George realize that he cannot sustain another trauma. That the animal segues into this understanding for George illustrates the way in which its indirection can still

powerfully represent the suffering of slaves. The loss of the dog troubles George more than the actual violence inflicted upon himself or the animal. He declares that even if he has to take “a whipping” he will not endure further separation from those he loves. The violent death of Carlo, the first act of violence in the book, is depicted primarily through emotional suffering rather than the rocks and drowning that constitute the violence itself. What is more, the attention paid to the animal’s death juxtaposes with the scant attention paid to what is also the first scene of direct violence towards a slave. The abuse George suffers appears as only two single words, “flogging” and “whipping.” These barely qualify as depictions of any kind. Such rapid glossing over the slave’s fate shows another representational value of the convention of the animal in sentimental literature. With the focus upon the animal’s suffering and the loss it evokes, Stowe’s elisions of human trauma draw little notice, turning our attention to Carlo’s fate rather than George’s abuse. This helps to efface George’s physical pain, a violent event that Stowe avoids depicting. The crux of his suffering in this passage stems from the separation and the movement of our attention away from corporeal violence towards the emotions that roil George’s heart.

A few chapters later, in another depiction of animal violence, Stowe returns to the word “whipping” as the sole marker of human violence. In this case, the term refers to a punishment meted out by Mrs. Bird, the wife of the Ohio senator who is moved to tears by Eliza’s plight. Introduced as a “timid, blushing little woman,” Mrs. Bird nonetheless whips her children and exiles them to bed when she finds her sons “leagued with several graceless boys of the neighborhood, stoning a defenseless kitten” (68). This iteration of “whipping” is, given what we know of Mrs. Bird, exponentially less brutal than that suffered by George and other slaves throughout the novel. The repetition of the word, though, illustrates the

incompleteness of this depiction of human violence. Its application by Stowe in both situations suggests her awareness of the inadequacy of this term. The sentimental focus upon emotional suffering takes greater precedence, and once again an animal serves as the scene of violence. This importance of emotion is echoed by Mrs. Bird's own son, who later observes that after his whipping, "I heard mother crying outside the door, which made me feel worse than all the rest. I'll tell you what...we boys never stoned another kitten" (68). The boy comprehends physical violence – both what he inflicted and what he received – through the emotional pain of his mother. In his comments, he makes a leap from her feelings back to the physical assault on the animal, eliding once again the physical violence he himself suffered.

Mrs. Bird's son unwittingly explains the process of the familiar conventional figure of the animal, and how Stowe uses it to indirectly depict violence. He describes a movement in which corporeal injury of any kind becomes comprehended primarily through the emotional response of witnesses. Even physical damage to those witnesses – the whippings of George and Mrs. Bird's son – are subsumed into the important sense of despair and loss that accompanies the violence. By localizing the majority of the depictions of this violence onto animals, Stowe further effaces slavery's physical effects upon human bodies.

The Sensational: The Red River Valley, Arkansas

Walt Whitman, who worked as an editor at several newspapers that published sensational literature, describes the mode as "blood and thunder romances with alliterative titles and plots of startling interest" whose readers "require strong contrasts, broad effects and the fiercest kind of intense writing" (qtd. in Reynolds 36-37). As Whitman says, this literature displays a predilection for intensely physical scenes of excitement and blood. The

corporeal body becomes the locus of its depictions. Critical approaches tend to view these bodies as metaphorical, emblematic of antebellum America's fraught relationship with a burgeoning diversity, expanding geographical reach, and shifting political roles for men and women. Shelley Streeby describes the sensational as a wide-spread antebellum mode that was "the idiom of many mid-nineteenth-century working class cultures, [and] it is also a racializing, gendering, and sexualizing discourse on the body" (27).¹⁸ Stories of war and violence turn "the soldier into a martyr for the white nationalist cause" (Streeby 60), indicative of what Jaimie Javier Rodriguez sees as a genre intensely concerned with empire and America's relationship with others who might impinge on its growing territory.

These critics arguably enact their own sort of indirection away from the violence that fills the pages of the sensational. For the fact remains that these texts have body counts that rival a modern action film, complete with dismemberments, flying bullets, and gruesome deaths. Critics too quickly metaphorize the physicality that clearly interests writers in this mode. Rodriguez, Streeby, and their peers seem hesitant to understand these graphic scenes as themselves rooted in the challenges of how to represent the brutal violence of the battlefield or the back alleyway. The efforts to locate the sensational tales of writers such as George Lippard, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and even Louisa May Alcott within larger cultural and imperial concerns have proven valuable, but at the same time this focus draws our attention away from the "blood and thunder" that defines the mode. Such a seemingly clear depiction of violence suggests that the sensational takes a much different approach to trauma than the sentimental.

¹⁸ David Reynolds notes the wide-spread popularity of the mode, estimating that "60 percent of all fiction volumes by Americans between 1831 and 1860 were adventurous, sensational, or satirical, while just over 20 percent were domestic or religious" (36).

Critic Carl Ostrowski calls these depictions “the blood that runs so liberally through the pages of this style of fiction” (495). Whereas the sentimental’s indirection leads towards the emotional, here the emphasis upon blood leads towards the physical body. This too serves as a type of indirection, one that fixates upon the minutiae of the liquid pouring out of a wound rather than the injury itself. Such attention to detail can seem disorienting. As David Reynolds observes in his discussion of one of the masters of the sensational, George Lippard, the “overriding goal is to replicate in fiction a society he regards as nightmarish and deprived, he creates an entire nightmare world that is always threatening to destroy ordinary perception of objective surroundings” (“Introduction” xxi). Like other critics, we find Reynolds approaching this mode as primarily about societal issues, but he also identifies the way Lippard’s bloody and violent text threatens objective perception. The disorienting representations of these fantastic scenes draw our attention away from the traumas that Lippard depicts. By focalizing upon all of this blood, Lippard is able to indirectly depict the violence that causes this blood to appear. At one point in his *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard interrupts his descriptions of a retreat to remark: “The heart grows sick of the blood. The chaparral seems a great heart of carnage, palpitating a death at every throb. Volumes would not tell the horrors of that flight” (99). In addition to admitting, like Stowe, the inadequacy of his language to represent the violent aftermath of the battle, Lippard also identifies his own use of blood as the primary convention for his depictions. He ties the circulation of blood with violence; every beat of the heart creates a new death. The intense focus upon a specific physical element effaces the rest of the body, allowing Lippard and other writers of the sensational to indirectly depict traumatic scenes.

The capacity for representing violence makes the sensational a productive mode for abolitionist writers like Stowe. Ostrowski points out the intersections of sensational fiction and slave narratives, arguing that their shared concern with violence “promoted a complex dialectic of exchange between two genres and between black and white cultural forms more broadly defined” (503). It speaks to the urgency and challenges of representing violence that these two forms with divergent rhetorical purposes would converge upon shared depictions of trauma through their use of blood and other figures. In a similar vein, Jennifer Greeson argues that we should read Harriet Jacobs’s narrative through the sensational mode indigenous to the New York City where she resided for twenty years before writing her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. As these examples suggest, even if New England iconoclasts such as the Beechers and the Stowes did not read the penny press, the sensational’s conventions extended far beyond these publications.

We see an example of the shift from body to blood early in Tom’s tenure on Legree’s Red River plantation. When Tom refuses to flog another slave, Legree, “taking up a cow-hide, and striking Tom a heavy blow across the cheek, and following up the infliction by a shower of blows” (308), leaves Tom groaning and bleeding. This scene marks the first serious abuse suffered by the protagonist, and the movement from physical act – the blow across the cheek – into images of liquidity accompanies an escalation of the intensity of the violence. Stowe describes Legree’s first swing, while heavy, as an “infliction” which suggests pain but also can have a weaker sense of “an annoyance, a nuisance, a ‘visitation’” (OED). When the abuse escalates, though, and Legree unleashes a flurry of blows, Stowe shifts her language into an emphasis upon liquids.¹⁹ The term “shower” points to the move

¹⁹ Anne Goodwyn Jones argues that in Southern male white culture, at least as understood through former slaves such as Frederick Douglass, “making another man’s blood flow, whether in ritual fights within one’s

towards the blood that will spill from Tom's wounds. From here Stowe avoids the physical punishment itself. Instead Legree pauses, and demands that Tom flog the fellow slave. Tom once again demurs, "putting up his hand, to wipe the blood, that trickled down his face" (308). We can only guess at the extent to which Tom has been beaten – at the severity of his physical suffering – by the presence of the blood. Stowe focuses our attention upon Tom's body, but not through the direct depiction of his actual wounds. The blood on his face implies wounds all across his head, open gashes brought on by Legree's cow-hide and the pain that must accompany such violence. All these bodily injuries appear indirectly through the depiction of blood. Stowe's use of the figure allows her to represent the torture and eventual death of Tom in ways both familiar and comprehensible.

However we read the death of Tom, it is undoubtedly a violent affair. As he demands to hear what Tom knows about the escape of the female slaves Cassy and Emmeline, Legree threatens, "now, I'll *conquer ye, or kill ye!* – one or t'other. I'll count every drop of blood there is in you, and take'em, one by one, till ye give up" (358). Of course Tom does not give up, and Stowe cloaks his death primarily in Christian imagery of passivity and sacrifice. Yet even as she seeks to represent a religious martyr's death, Stowe must also represent the fatal beating of a slave. To do so, Stowe uses the conventional figure of blood as a way to avoid direct depiction of the physical blows that kill Tom. Legree does the same thing when he speaks to Tom. The slaveholder threatens Tom with the loss of blood, eliding the actual act of violence that will spill it from Tom's body. The liquid obscures the violence even as it

cohorts or by lashing slaves, had become a sign of masculine dominance" and as a result "to make another man's blood leave his body was, at least as I read it, a sign of effective effeminization" (213). With this logic, Legree's whippings of Tom have the effect of further exerting dominance by forcing Tom from the masculine overseer role that he has refused into a more feminine position beholden to Legree's control in ways that he later tries to assert with Emmeline and Cassy.

allows both Stowe and Legree to avoid the description of the act itself.²⁰ It is at once a graphic threat and yet not graphic at all; the threat is metonymic of the whippings Tom suffers, not a direct depiction of the whippings themselves. The specificity of Legree's promise, that he will "count every drop of blood," is an indirection from the individual blows that necessarily precede each drop. As a result, the trauma of Tom's death appears through this spilled blood rather than the beating that Stowe does not name. As she says after a poignant break in the page that follows Legree's anger fatally boiling over, "scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer, cannot be told us, even in our secret chamber, it so harrows the soul" (358). Even here, as she explains her inability to directly depict Tom's death, Stowe turns to blood as a form of indirection from the wounded body. The object of this unspeakable cruelty, Tom's body, does not appear. It remains hidden, while the drops of blood must suffice as Stowe's representation of this trauma. Yet Stowe's readers could still grasp just what happened to the protagonist of her novel. They would have little doubt as to how he died, thanks to Stowe's employment of the familiar to indirectly rather than directly depict his beating and death.

Towards an Unfamiliar War: Boston, Massachusetts

The power and importance of the familiar cannot be overstated in antebellum culture. When confronted with challenges to language, writers found familiar conventional figures of the time to provide the most effective representations of their world. Consider the response of Boston society to Laura Bridgman, a deaf and blind girl who was trained to communicate by

²⁰ Even Legree seems hesitant, at times, to articulate what he has done to Tom. He exhibits classic signs of being traumatized himself, most notably in his descent into alcoholism after Tom's death and his eventual death. This may explain, in part, his efforts to hide Tom from George Shelby.

Samual Howe (husband of the poet and author of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” Julia Ward Howe). In her study of the case, Cassandra Cleghorn finds that “one is struck by the frequency with which Howe uses stock narrative structures, not as though by default (as if he could think of no other way to describe his experience), but as though these clichéd images were fresh and original – as though they occurred to *him first* in his unique encounter with Bridgman” (173). The woman posed a unique challenge to antebellum writers, because her world lacked language of any sort. Cleghorn attributes this repetition to the ability of the romance to represent extraordinary experiences. “In reading contemporary accounts,” Cleghorn continues:

one repeatedly finds writers discovering the problem of how to put what is beyond words into words. Working with the constraints of sentimental convention, the writers who encounter Bridgman name and rename her anomalous state with strikingly similar description. In their cumulative force, accounts of Bridgman thus encourage a view of sentimentalism as that which seeks to disprove the very possibility of indescribability, to domesticate the unknown with deeply familiar phrases. (173)

Much like Stowe and Hawthorne, Cleghorn identifies the familiar romance as a powerful representational tool. Instead of the creation of a “new” in order to depict the girl’s world, the culture of antebellum romance emphasizes the use of the conventions already scattered across American newspapers, magazines, and books.

Like so many modern day critics of the sentimental and the romance in general, Cleghorn refers to “the *constraints* of sentimental convention.” I argue that we can more productively view this reliance upon the “deeply familiar phrases” as liberating. The many

writers who sought to paint Bridgman's world certainly found these conventions a productive sort of indirection in order to represent her world through language. Instead of taking on a direct depiction of Bridgman's world, they try to use the familiar in order to suggest her experience while eliding the aspects of her existence that they felt unable to represent. By the same token, Stowe also uses conventional depictions of familiar figures – drawn from all across the genre – in her efforts to overcome the tremendous representational challenges of slavery. The indirection enacted by these figures signals a clear and coherent representational strategy. The familiarity of these conventions, such as the figures of animals or blood, allows Stowe to depict a trauma that she knows would otherwise elude her literary efforts. In the 1852 English preface, Stowe quotes Horace Mann in a striking passage that articulates the necessity of drawing upon multiple familiar conventions. Mann argues that just as “the complex and infinite meaning of the word GOD cannot be adequately understood, until you analyse [sp] it, and divide and subdivide it, and give it the thousand names” so slavery necessitates just as many divisions and names: “when you penetrate and lay open the infinite meaning of the word SLAVERY, it resolves itself into all crimes and all cruelties, all debasements and all horrors” (qtd. in Diller 633). The repetition of the “all” compliments the imagery of understanding slavery, like god, only through a multitude of names and specific instances. Language, the word itself, does not suffice. Instead Stowe describes another sort of indirection, away from the trauma into a thousand descriptions and alternative approaches. It illustrates Stowe's belief that no single mode or convention would suffice for her literary task. Instead she will turn to many familiar figures for depicting these traumas that otherwise language could not possibly convey.

Her recognition of this fact made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* wildly successful both commercially and politically. The inevitable attacks, in her mind, validated her efforts. Yet a decade later, in 1864, Stowe found herself wrapping up a series of articles for the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* entitled *The Chimney Corner*. This was the sequel to *House and Home Papers* which had first appeared that January in the pages of the *Atlantic*. It seems incongruous that the woman whose representations of slavery helped to galvanize tensions across the country would then turn to such domestic writing in the midst of a war that, for the past year, explicitly sought to end the institution. Of course the domestic always played a vital role in Stowe's work, but her emphasis upon this topic in place of – rather than in service to – a representation of the Civil War's battles was a quite conscious choice. "It is not wise that all our literature should run in a rut cut through our hearts and red with our blood," she wrote to Annie Fields, the wife of *Atlantic Monthly* publisher James Fields (*Household Papers* ix). "I feel the need of a little household merriment and talk of common things" (ix) she continues, understandably desiring an alternative to the tales of violence that necessarily mark stories of the Civil War. Yet this is also an indirection, a response to a new trauma of war. Her desire to "talk of common things" speaks to the appeal of that which we already know in moments of the extraordinary and violent. She left it to others to describe the battles and horrors of the war itself, and they drew from the conventional figures that Stowe's own work a decade earlier helped make so familiar.

CHAPTER 2

PATRIOTISM, ELEGY, AND THE HORSE

Introduction: Winchester, Virginia

The Shenandoah Valley had been the scene of harsh fighting for three long years. In 1862, Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s fast-marching “foot cavalry” eluded and harassed Union troops up and down the Valley, much to Abraham Lincoln’s chagrin. Throughout the war John Mosby, the “Gray Ghost,” harassed Union supply lines (and was the target of an excursion joined by Herman Melville during the writer’s visit to a Union camp in 1864). The Shenandoah was a hotbed of partisanship, and had seen the first scorched earth tactics that General Sherman would later use to great effect in Georgia and the Carolinas. Despite these efforts, in the fall of 1864 the South still used the Valley to threaten nearby Washington, DC and draw attention away from the Confederate capital at Richmond.

By the middle of October, the commander of Union forces in the Valley, General Philip Sheridan, believed the Confederates in retreat. On October 19th, Sheridan ate breakfast in the town of Winchester, Virginia. Much to his surprise, the sound of artillery reached his ears from the direction of his own camp. Sheridan jumped on his horse Rienzi and galloped approximately twelve miles towards the sound of battle. Horse and general arrived near Cedar Creek just in time to rally Union troops and fend off the surprise attack by Confederate General Jubal Early. Historian James McPherson writes that “within a few hours Sheridan had converted the battle of Cedar Creek from a humiliating defeat into one of the

more decisive Union victories of the war” (780). Sheridan and Rienzi earned a full-page illustration on the cover of the November 5 issue of the popular magazine *Harper's Weekly* (fig 1). The next page declared “Sheridan’s ride to the front...will go down in history as one of the most important and exciting events which have ever given interest to a battle-scene, and to this event will be attributed the victory of the day” (706). Even more than the military victory that ended three years of bloody fighting in the Shenandoah, it was the ride to the front that drew the attention of the entire nation.

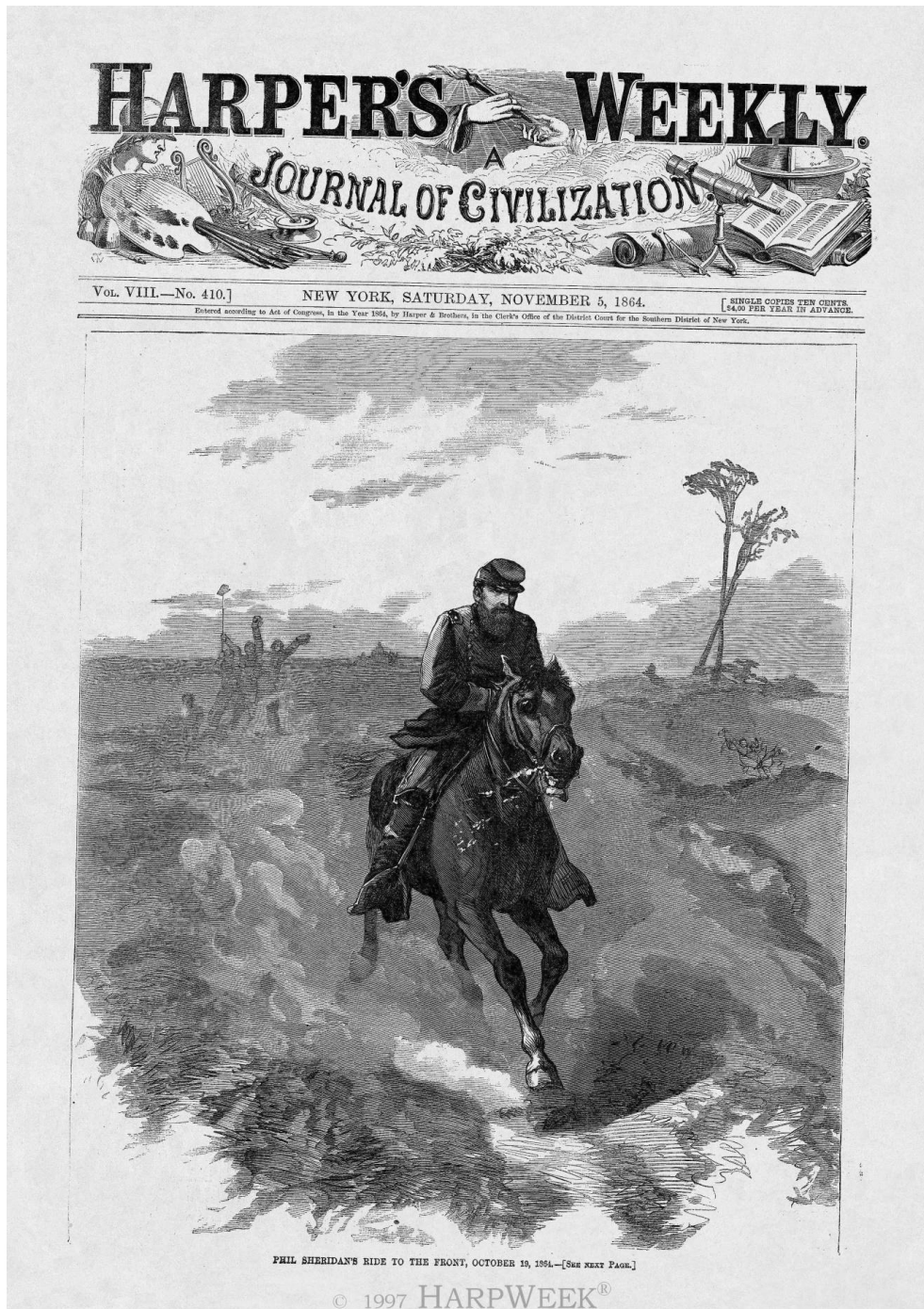


fig 1

The *Harper's* cover reveals the emotional operations that would make a horse ride so popular and powerful in a nation at war. The figure of the horse dominates the scene as he kicks up dirt and foams at the bit. The dust flying behind Rienzi gives the impression of the horse furiously charging towards battle. Rather than a static response to battle, the rising dust

suggests Rienzi moving rapidly towards the engagement, and the flying foam suggests his eagerness to reach the goal. Sheridan, by contrast, calmly sits astride. In this juxtaposition it is the horse that embodies the emotional excitement of the scene that captured the nation's attention. Such excitement inspires the men in the background of the image, where three soldiers cheer amidst the cloud kicked up in Rienzi's wake. They raise their hats, one of them by placing it on his rifle's bayonet as the horse passes by them. This weapon, along with the men's uniforms, constitutes the only reminders of the battle itself. Otherwise the violence that Rienzi charges towards and these men cheer for remains invisible in favor of the sense of eagerness expressed by the horse and witnesses. Without a direct depiction of the battlefield, this image of Rienzi both conveys an eagerness for conflict and inspires the soldiers to fight yet another Civil War battle. By engendering eagerness to fight the enemy, the horse becomes a patriotic figure. In this image of Rienzi the violence that accompanies fighting remains implicit, a pattern common to depictions of horses in Civil War patriotism. The use of horses by writers to encourage patriotic feeling plays a crucial role in helping us to understand how Americans supported and fought their Civil War for so long.

Two weeks after the Battle of Cedar Creek, a crowd gathered at the Pike Opera House in Cincinnati for a rally to raise funds for Union troops and their medical care. One of the highlights was a reading by James E. Murdoch, a well-known actor who vowed to stay off the stage during the war in favor of his philanthropic efforts to help Union troops. On this Halloween night, Murdoch read a poem written by his friend Thomas Buchanan Read. "Sheridan's Ride" was a patriotic ballad written that day, as Murdoch felt it important to have a rousing poem for the fundraiser. Patriotism, Murdoch believed, played a vital role in the war effort because of its ability to inspire eagerness in the face of battle among both

soldiers and civilians. In one of his lectures during the war, Murdoch argues that the eagerness and excitement created by patriotic poetry in particular has a known effect on readers and listeners. Recite a rousing poem to the troops just before battle, Murdoch suggests, “then, too, does the language of heroism, and manly devotion to the cause we fight for, prove the steel to the flint, while the sparks that flash from the contact serve to create a flame, which, firing the veins and swelling the heart, leaves no room for the cooler faculties to operate on the nervous system” (125). He posits that the human mind cannot simultaneously comprehend the surge of emotion and the tactical dangers of a Civil War battlefield. Unable to grasp these dangers, a soldier emboldened by emotions would therefore more likely follow orders that put his life at risk. The poem becomes what Timothy Sweet calls an “idiom of heroism” (3), a romantic construction designed to disassociate the reader’s feelings from the physical destruction caused by war. Sweet’s study of patriotism asserts that these poems are “products of romantic representations of war...they provide a soldier with motivations for fighting but do not bear any relation to the political issues over which war is being fought” (3). Patriotism, Sweet points out, does not persuade a soldier to fight only through political arguments. The encouragement to fight contains an emotional component as well, an appeal to the heart as much as the mind. Sweet sees this apparent blindness to politics as a serious problem with Civil War patriotism and literature. However, such a concern with the ideology of patriotism overlooks the purpose and operation of patriotism during the war. The “swelling of the heart” described by Murdoch motivates the soldier to ignore the dangers of combat and fight without asking questions of slavery or states rights. The ability to inspire patriotic feelings meant that even in late 1864 – when the full horror of

war was widely known – poetry could excite soldiers to set aside a rational knowledge of what combat entails and give civilians the desire to support such combat.

Americans at this time believed that the emotions spurred by patriotism drove the engine of war more than politics or ideology. In his lecture “Moral Forces,” which he gave throughout the war, Ralph Waldo Emerson asked his audiences: “In war, what is the engine that moves this mighty mass and converts an ungovernable, vicious mob into a flexible giant, myriad-handed, myriad-footed, but unique in will, delivering a blow with his fist that will fell a nation? It is sympathy and imagination” (282). Emerson asserts that the ability to imagine and create emotional energy is the force behind the massive war effort on both sides. The power of these feelings inspire soldiers to acquiesce to military maneuvers and strategies that put their lives at risk, and civilians to support these efforts. When the *Harper’s* cover shows Rienzi charging past the soldiers, the horse spurs the sympathy and imagination of the men to support the Union at Cedar Creek, even if it may mean their own death. The cover, on a weekly periodical distributed widely across the Union, would also encourage civilians to feel an emotional charge at the scene that *Harper’s* noted was not only one of the most important, but one of the most “exciting” events of the war (706). Emerson argues, “the coldest of us must believe that the poetry of war, the picture, before the regiments engaged, of the general brandishing his sword, is too much for prudence, or reasoning, or terror: down goes discretion and arithmetic, and the youth who was lately fresh from a school makes a leap into the thick of bayonets” (282). Like Murdoch, Emerson expresses a belief that patriotic excitement makes the prospect of battle appealing rather than terrifying or foolhardy. Disassociation also makes patriotism a particularly productive response to the threat of trauma. Although the word itself was not widely used – terms such as “soldier’s heart” were

used to define conditions that eluded Civil War medicine – the psychic threat posed by the war’s violence underlies Emerson and Murdoch’s embrace of a separation between the mind and physical experience.²¹ Both men perceive that Civil War combat threatens to overwhelm the mind: who can comprehend what it means to “leap into the thick of bayonets?” Emerson and Murdoch urge a redirection away from a representation of what a dozens of sharp-tipped metal bayonets can do to the human body, and towards an evocation of emotional excitement. In this way both men see emotion as facilitating the comprehension of these scenes of battle, while at the same time encouraging more men to take the leap into danger that would otherwise seem incomprehensible.

The lines described by Emerson – a general rallying his troops to leap into the fray – are what I call “heat of battle” poems. These attempt to depict the excitement of a conflict in order to arouse patriotic sentiments that would divert attention away from the trauma of these engagements. Oftentimes these poems eschew an overt political stance in favor of engendering a strong emotional response. Absent a few proper nouns, Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller point out, it would oftentimes be difficult to identify many heat of battle poems as Union or Confederate. It does not seek a mimetic depiction of Civil War combat; rather a heat of battle poem instead focuses upon finding ways to evoke a strong patriotic response in the reader. Even as the war dragged on and the body counts rose, these poems continued to find the emotional surge of battle a potent topic.

We can see the emotional energy described by Murdoch and Emerson appear in the use of the horse in wartime depictions of combat. The curators of a collection of Civil War prints have observed a tendency to depict officers on horseback even when the violent fury of

²¹ Jennifer Travis provides a discussion of the struggles for Civil War surgeons in particular to understand the symptoms of trauma as a physiological phenomenon. Historian John Talbot uses several soldiers’ letters and diaries to draw comparisons between Civil War experiences and World War I accounts of “shell shock.”

the scene would make it impossible to remain mounted (Neely and Holzer). In the case of *Rienzi*, we know that Sheridan was astride the horse because of the sheer distance involved. This ability of the horse to cover great distances at speed means that the animal embodies an eager charge towards combat that marks the patriotic – akin to Emerson’s description of a leap into the thick of bayonets. The movement of horses dramatizes the rush of emotion that leaves rational thought behind. *Rienzi* seems unconcerned with contemplation. He is a horse, after all, and is focused solely on the urge to charge towards the battle. The heat of battle, as it were, appears in the figure of *Rienzi*’s movement across the landscape towards the violence and death that is not represented in the scene or poem.

The horse serves as a microcosm for us to understand how patriotic poetry keeps soldiers fighting and civilians supporting a bloody war. Wartime poets use figures such as the horse to depict the horrific scenes of battle that would otherwise elude representation. In doing so, though, they elicit emotional responses that, in turn, inculcate an excitement for more war. This is the way these conventions operate; it is the price of using emotions as a way to indirectly depict the violence of the war. By erasing the violent acts, patriotism makes it easier, even desirable, to continue fighting. Even when a poet, such as Herman Melville, attempts to point out the perpetuation of violence, his use of patriotic conventions means a continued erasure of the trauma, which leads to more violence. These poems erase the violence of the Civil War even as they evoke emotions that spur a continuation of combat.

Hurrah for Horse and Man: Cincinnati, Ohio

The ballad Murdoch recited in Cincinnati on Halloween night, T.B. Read’s “Sheridan’s Ride,” combines the movement and emotions of the horse to evoke the heat of

battle poem's patriotic fervor. At the heart of "Sheridan's Ride" is the charge from Winchester towards the battle along Cedar Creek. The first two stanzas end with the line "And Sheridan twenty miles away." A tad inaccurate – Sheridan was only twelve miles away on that September morning – but it nonetheless emphasizes the movement from far to near. When Rienzi takes off along the highway from Winchester, the tone, subject, and length of the stanzas all shift as the horse's journey becomes the focus of the poem.

And there, through the flush of the morning light,
A steed as black as the steeds of night,
Was seen to pass, as with eagle flight,
As if he knew the terrible need;
(17-20)

Along with Rienzi's movement down the road a string of patriotic feelings begin to surge into the poem and the horse itself. The pronoun "he," which refers to Sheridan in the first two stanzas, now references Rienzi; the animal becomes the subject of the poem. Rushing with the speed of an eagle, Rienzi does not comprehend the importance of the Battle of Cedar Creek, nor does he fear its violence. Rather, he performs the strategically vital task of delivering the general "*as if* he knew the terrible need." The difference between knowing and acting as if he knows draws attention to how patriotic eagerness becomes a vital wartime asset. It matters little if Rienzi – or a human soldier – understands why he needs to rush to a battle, as long as he achieves the goal. The emotion takes precedence over strategy. The poem affirms that Rienzi feels a surge of excitement as he moves along the road: "He stretched away with his utmost speed; / Hills rose and fell; but his heart was gay" (21-22). Unburdened by fear or strategy, Rienzi focuses solely on the journey towards Cedar Creek. These other emotions seem to have vanished in the face of Rienzi's movement towards battle.

As a heat of battle poem, “Sheridan’s Ride” represents combat in a way that makes fighting seem exciting. In doing so it makes battle also seem desirable, and the poem illustrates how this patriotic function inspires men to further conflict. Rienzi’s arrival spreads the patriotic excitement that pushes out other emotional or rational responses to the battle. He expresses only an eagerness to reach the scene of conflict as “The heart of the steed, and the heart of the master / Were beating like prisoners assaulting their walls, / Impatient to be where the battle-field calls” (28-30). Although Sheridan gets an occasional mention throughout the poem, Read uses the horse to describe the emotions associated with the ride. Ascribing to Rienzi sensations such as “impatient” and, later, “his heart’s desire,” Read’s poem represents the horse as eager for the heat of battle. Read uses the horse to make combat appear as positive, something we should passionately want rather than avoid. Rienzi “Swept on, with his wild eyes full of fire” (38), an image that makes the horse seem both driven to reach the battlefield and unconcerned – unthinking – about anything other than this goal. Described as “wild” and “full of fire,” these terms of unbridled energy pair with Rienzi’s movement towards the battle to evoke patriotic excitement.

When horse and rider reach the battlefield, they find “stragglers, and then the retreating troops” (43), running away in fear of Jubal Early’s dangerous Confederate forces. To depict the Union troops’ rally, Read describes how Rienzi’s patriotism inspires the men to charge back into the same conflict from which they have just run away. Read uses the horse – representative of excitement for battle – as a figure that generates this same emotion in the Union soldiers. “He dashed down the line ‘mid a storm of huzzas” (46). The image of the horse, eager for battle and unconcerned with the dangers, inspires the troops with this patriotism and encourages them to keep fighting:

With foam and with dust the black charger was gray;
By the flash of his eye, and the red nostril's play,
He seemed to the whole great army to say,
"I have brought you Sheridan all the way
From Winchester, down to save the day!"
(49-53)

Read represents the vision of Rienzi as the reason the troops turn around to face the enemy.

The "flash" of Rienzi's eyes and his hard breathing – already tied to his eagerness for battle – convey a message to the men that they should be excited for battle, not running away from it.

As Emerson and Murdoch both describe, patriotic scenes inspire patriotic feelings. The sight of Rienzi's dust-covered and energized arrival with Sheridan spreads this feeling to the Union men.

Read makes no mention of what the men must face in order to "save the day." He emphasizes the excitement for the heat of battle centered upon and spurred by the horse, rather than any representation of what Rienzi and the soldiers charge towards. Read locates the entire afternoon of October 19th in a stanza break. The second half of a conflict that saw 9,000 casualties occurs between Rienzi's message that he has brought Sheridan to save the day, and the opening of the final stanza: "Hurrah! hurrah for Sheridan! / Hurrah! hurrah for horse and man!" (54-55). The patriotic fervor of these lines makes the deadly battle appear exciting. At the same time, Read's heat of battle poem spurs patriotic feelings in his readers without any direct depictions of what Sheridan's ride meant: a sustained battle along Cedar Creek that killed and wounded thousands. The emphasis upon excitement before and after the battle avoids the horrific aspects of Civil War combat. Read uses the heat of battle poem to inspire feelings that can support, even encourage, such violence in a way that makes this violence palatable and easy to process.

As part of this indirection from any traumatic aspects of combat, when the Confederates flee the poem moves quickly to celebration and excitement for the now completed violence. What is more, the celebration focuses upon Rienzi, the same figure used by Read to replace violence with patriotic excitement:

And when their statues are placed on high,
Under the dome of the Union sky,
The American soldier's Temple of Fame;
There with the glorious general's name,
Be it said, in letters both bold and bright,
"Here is the steed that saved the day,
By carrying Sheridan into the fight,
From Winchester, twenty miles away!"
(54-63)

By arguing that Rienzi should be commemorated, Read acknowledges the central role of the horse to the public memory of the Battle of Cedar Creek. His poem envisions the horse as inspiring an excitement that defines the way the Battle will be understood. If this is true, Read suggests in this final stanza, then the emotion spurred by a familiar figure such as Rienzi will take precedence over other perceptions of the battle. The patriotic excitement embodied in Rienzi, and not the more violent aspects of combat, forms the basis for comprehending Cedar Creek. A few days after the battle, the indignant *Richmond Enquirer* pointed out, correctly, that while Sheridan did arrive in the vicinity of the battle "neither he nor the best part of his army were within several miles of the 'rebels'" when the Confederate attack bogged down. From a tactical standpoint, the paper argues, Sheridan's arrival did not turn the tide of that day and Rienzi played no important role in the day's events. Yet the charge from Winchester and the emotions stirred by Rienzi and Sheridan both during the day and in the accounts of the battle in the weeks that followed became the understanding of the battle, in no small part thanks to Read's poem. The emotional power represented and inspired

by Rienzi becomes the focus of comprehending the heat of battle, rather than the details of the fighting and troop movement. Read's own use of this convention is echoed in the call for Rienzi to be enshrined in a hall of honor. In fact, this is precisely what happened to Rienzi, whom Sheridan renamed "Winchester" in honor of the ride. When the horse died, Sheridan donated the body and today Rienzi/Winchester does indeed reside in the Temple of Fame: he is on display in the Smithsonian Museum of American History, alongside a plaque describing the exploits of that day in October. For many Americans, Rienzi's excited charge provides the only extant representation of the Battle of Cedar Creek.²²

For wartime Americans, the value of heat of battle poems came not just from their representational efficacy. The excitement generated by these lines served important fundraising and political purposes.²³ The day after Murdoch's inaugural reading in Cincinnati, Read sent his lines to newspapers across the country. At the time, Abraham Lincoln's reelection campaign was in full swing. Bolstered by the fall of Atlanta in September and the destruction of Early's army, Lincoln's Republican Party still faced a number of electoral challenges, especially at the local level. The excitement of Read's poem became a popular feature of Republican political rallies in the waning days of the campaign. According to McPherson, Republicans treated Read's poem as a campaign document that "seldom failed to rouse crowds at political rallies to roars of patriotic fervor" (780). On Election Day, the Republican-leaning *New York Tribune* reprinted the poem, meaning, as Brayton Harris points out, "Connecticut and New York were swamped with perhaps 200,000

²² One dramatic example of this occurs in the documentary series *The Civil War* by Ken Burns (1990), which focuses on Sheridan's ride rather than the battle itself, and, more tellingly, describes the ride as 20 miles – the number used in Read's poem – rather than the twelve miles Sheridan rode.

²³ "In this era, poetry was seen as serving a vital political function," notes Faith Barrett, "a nineteenth-century reader of poetry would not have considered a politically engaged stance to be an artistic liability" (3).

copies of the *Tribune* and “Sheridan’s Ride” just as the polls began to open” (301). Implicit in this patriotic fervor is the need for Republicans to downplay the violence that had accompanied nearly three and a half years of war. Even with the war turning in favor of the Union, Republicans feared anti-war sentiment sweeping them out of office, especially with Union troops still bogged down outside of Richmond. A campaign document such as “Sheridan’s Ride” could create eagerness for the hard battles remaining even as it effaces the violence of the war.

The Cost of Battle: Richmond, Virginia

As a heat of battle poem, “Sheridan’s Ride” makes no allusion to the Union and Confederate deaths at Cedar Creek. Read’s poem renders death invisible, even though by the time of Cedar Creek wartime casualties on both sides had surpassed half a million men. These numbers, though, meant that in addition to the horrors of battle, Americans had to find ways to understand 500,000 deaths. Poetry that mourns a death – elegy – provided one representational strategy for helping Americans to confront this loss. Elegy, though, also effaces violence and encourages Americans to continue fighting despite the appalling toll of the war. Like heat of battle poems, elegies spur an emotional response that provides indirection from violence even as it inculcates support for more warfare. And like Rienzi’s role as the emotional center of “Sheridan’s Ride,” writers found the horse a potent figure to facilitate the movement from grief to patriotic excitement.

‘The sheer scope of Civil War death caused a reconfiguration of Americans’ relationship with the dead and dying. Corpses became a common sight for soldiers in the field and civilians at home, whether in the form of bodies shipped home or the proliferation

of photographs and lithographic reproductions. “The corpse itself lost much of its power and multivalence as a religious symbol,” notes one study of Northern death practices, “there were simply too many of them to accommodate time-consuming reflection and proper, respectful treatment” (Laderman 97-98). This new relationship with the corpse, though, did not detract from the emotional response that Americans associated with death. The scale of killing may have forced a change in actual practices, but Americans still placed a high value on at least making an attempt to maintain the process of mourning from antebellum times. They sought ways to comprehend the death of a comrade or loved one. Drew Gilpin Faust suggests that “making a death real, feeling and accepting its certainty, required effort” (145) of an emotional and physical kind. Robbed of the ability to engage in traditional burial practices for comrades fallen on the battlefield, for instance, “soldiers made efforts to perform at least minimal acts of closure, such as covering them with dirt from the earth, no matter what condition the bodies were in” (Laderman 103). The physical body became less important than the feelings and rituals that surrounded a comprehension of a soldier’s death. These rituals, from mourning clothes to funeral sermons, were part of what Faust identifies as an imperative that “the Civil War’s carnage required that death be given meaning” (170). Americans demanded not closure, but a sense of purpose and even inspiration from a death. Unable to engage in what they saw as appropriate mourning rituals for the corporeal body, Americans made literature a prime scene for this effort. “Both north and south,” writes Alice Fahs, “writers not only asserted the importance of remembering *all* ‘fallen soldiers’ during the war but implicitly and explicitly assigned literature a central role in accomplishing this task” (96). At the same time, the shift away from the physical body allowed literature to efface the violence that killed these soldiers and focus instead upon the assignation of

meaning. With its focus upon compensation for an oftentimes absent physical body, elegy came to focus upon the generation of strong emotions for the dead without directly confronting how that person died.

The horse once again provides a route for avoiding the war's violence and generating strong emotions. The image of the riderless horse became a standard trope for both sides who wished to mourn a soldier whose body is not present. The title of Rosa Wild's poem "The Empty Saddle," which appeared in Richmond's *Southern Illustrated News* in early 1863, demonstrates this convention. A soldier greets a Confederate cavalry regiment, proud of their exploits in combat. For the first three stanzas, the speaker swells with patriotic feelings as he contemplates the heat of battle:

Many a Northman bit the dust
In our dashing wild career;
Many have felt the deadly thrust
Of the avenging Southern spear.
And this is the way we pay them back
For the woes they leave in their desolate track.
(7-12)

Descriptions of movement accompany an eagerness for combat in these opening stanzas. The speaker evinces excitement that the men "on their panting steeds" (13) ride out to fight the Union troops. "My heart at the thought feels light and gay" (6) he notes early on as he reflects on how "the avenging Southern spear" will strike down the Yankees. Like "Sheridan's Ride," the excitement over the heat of battle in this poem is embodied in the charge of horses towards the enemy, a "dashing wild career" at the foe that emphasizes the excitement over a potential "deadly thrust" rather than focusing on the injuries caused by the spear and "hard blows" (5). In his eagerness for this combat, the speaker can focus upon the exciting features of a Confederate victory rather than dwell upon the cost of that victory.

In the fourth stanza, though, the speaker gazes at the returning troops and realizes that his brother is not among them. By the fifth stanza he finally processes his sibling's death:

But, ah! a foaming horse you lead;
'Tis my brother's favorite Bay;
And now in your eyes my woe I read,
His saddle was emptied to-day,
And the daring boy among the slain,
Will never hear our bugle again.
(25-30)

The delay in recognition – nearly a third of the poem – exhibits the extent to which the patriotism of the early stanzas can forestall a recognition of the costs of battle. The riderless horse provides the means for the speaker to understand his brother's death even in the absence of a corpse. The individual identity of the horse – his brother's favorite Bay – allows the speaker to understand the individual identity of the soldier who was killed on the raid. This knowledge of his brother's death spares the speaker the details of the battle. He does not learn if his brother died from a gunshot to the head or a bayonet to the heart, or any of the countless other ways Civil War soldiers could perish on the field. The "foaming horse" points to the recent battle as well, its sweat and foam marking the intensity and energy that, in a heat of battle poem, signal excitement for combat. Like Rienzi, the horse simultaneously models the emotional response to battle and mediates the experience by standing in for both combat and the death that results from the engagement. Spared knowing just how his brother died, the speaker feels a surge of emotion at the sight of the horse. He repeatedly swears that "I may not weep" and then proceeds to do just that, tearfully mourning his brother's death. The horse provides an indirect depiction of this death in a way that lets the speaker comprehend the loss of his brother.

The horse allows the writer of “The Empty Saddle” to avoid representing the violence that killed the brother and to evoke a surge of emotion that does not only mourn a fallen soldier but also supports further Confederate fighting. The speaker’s mourning quickly moves into another patriotic stance. He promises to kill more Union troops and declares “We swear by his empty saddle to make / More horses riderless still” (37-38). His response to the riderless horse and his brother’s death encourages more death. This elegiac poem does not discourage violence. Rather, this vow by the speaker shows how the emotion spurred by elegy leads to the same patriotic excitement found in a heat of battle poem. The threat of “more riderless horses still” presumably implicates the Union cavalry, but by not specifying Union or Confederate the line suggests that both sides will suffer even more casualties. Max Cavitch argues for a direct link between elegiac mourning and this emotional urge that seeks to destroy others. He sees elegy as a form that responds to violent death by encouraging a patriotism that, in turn, perpetuates more conflict. Elegy, Cavitch writes, “helps generate and sustain the compensatory discourse known as patriotism. As an incentive to collective mourning, patriotism redirects destructive impulses...towards groups or classes of persons who are not only *not* to be mourned but who might even have to be destroyed” (228). The representation of death in an elegy spurs a desire to engage in more conflict. The riderless horse of “The Empty Saddle” facilitates this process through indirection, arousing the anger and sadness of the speaker without overwhelming with the trauma of his brother’s death. He then redirects this anger not at the conflict that killed off his brother but at the Union army, the unseen enemy who should be destroyed rather than mourned. The riderless horse comes to stand not just for the physical death of the Confederate soldier but the threat posed by the

Union soldiers the speaker wishes to fight. Elegy, too, has the effect of creating an emotional state that effaces violence even as it also creates an eagerness for that violence.

Faith Barrett characterizes the emotional outpouring found in these Civil War poems as a therapeutic process. She describes these emotionally-charged poems as “a kind of release valve for the pressures of an otherwise unbearable loss” (7). They provide an indirect route for Americans to comprehend otherwise traumatic experiences in terms both familiar and meaningful. Barrett points out that these representations of the war could allow “a wide range of readers to assume multiple and contradictory emotional stances in relation to the war’s violence” (7). The absence of direct depiction of a soldier’s death allows readers to process and respond to the conflict in ways that seem paradoxical. Mourning for a war death leads to support for more war? The emotional turn towards patriotism, demonstrated in the last third of “The Empty Saddle,” makes just such a move. The fact that both the mourning of elegy and the eagerness of heat of battle utilize this indirection demonstrates the therapeutic value and similar purpose of these poetic forms. Later perceptions of the era’s poetry seems to overlook this purpose, measuring literature on its direct response to violence. Even sympathetic readings of wartime literature view Civil War writers as somehow naïve about the traumatic events they obscure with the emotional cries of heat of battle and elegy poems: “Civil War writing does not regard silence as evidence of the debilitating effect of violence on the individual’s power of self-expression,” writes Franny Nudelman, “but rather as testimony to the war’s monumentality – its power not to shock and disturb but to awe and inspire” (80). Nudelman identifies the two poles at which we tend to place the war’s writers: debilitated or uncritically emotional. Yet to believe in such a dichotomy suggests there is not a close relationship between shock and awe, between disturbed and inspired. The apparent

silence of elegies or heat of battle poems does not exclusively express either debilitation or testimony to the war's power. Rather, these poems navigate the effects of violence by spurring emotions that provide comprehension. Conventions such as the horse allow silence and emotional inspiration to go hand in hand. The emotions that Nudelman identifies as testimonies to the war's power serve a specific purpose: to cover over the debilitating effects of violence and allow soldiers and civilians to keep up the fighting that would otherwise overwhelm the mind. Heat of battle poems and elegies both encourage a civilian population to maintain their support for a war that became increasingly horrific. The patriotic function of these two forms is so intertwined that poets found ways to oscillate between these two forms within the same poem. Thanks to the indirect depictions of trauma that occur in these lines, excitement for combat and mourning a death could exist simultaneously in a poem that encourages support for even more violence.

Not Stopping for Death: Helena, Arkansas

The end of 1862 brought horrendous fighting across the length of the country. Just before "The Empty Saddle" appeared in the beleaguered city of Richmond, Stonewall Jackson had returned victorious from the Shenandoah to join the Confederate defenses around the capital. In December alone, battles in Fredericksburg, Virginia and Stone River, Tennessee each rivaled the body counts of Antietam. On the far side of the Confederacy, Union troops under Ulysses S. Grant were threatening to divide the country in two by seizing the Mississippi River. Both sides became frustrated with the interminable violence. "If there is a worse place than Hell," Abraham Lincoln commented after the Union defeat at Fredericksburg, "I am in it" (qtd. in Menand 43). Americans on both sides shared Lincoln's

war weariness. Reports and body counts of these deadly conflicts and countless small skirmishes poured across the telegraph wires, and soldiers found themselves confronting daily traumas as the war dragged on. To process the war's costs – much less support the continuation of hostilities – poets turned to familiar conventions such as the riderless horse and familiar forms such as heat of battle and elegy.

As Grant contemplated how to capture the Mississippi River, the Ninth Illinois Cavalry were stationed in the woods of Arkansas. The poet Edmundus Scotus claims to serve with the unit when he publishes his poem “The Cavalry Scout.” It appears in Frank Moore’s *Rebellion Record* with the subtitle “A Ballad of the Second Wisconsin, Written Among the Tombs.” The poem tells of a deadly ride by members of the Second Wisconsin across enemy lines to deliver news to headquarters in Helena, Arkansas. In his representation of the journey, Scotus combines the excitement of a heat of battle poem with the mourning of an elegy. In doing so, he imagines just how effective patriotism could be on the battlefield. Scotus structures the poem as a reminder that soldiers did not have the luxury of a “release valve” of emotion while in the midst of battle. He depicts a mission in which they cannot stop for death, just as they cannot stop to consider the perils of their mission while Confederate guns blaze around them. With his concurrent use of heat of battle and elegy, Scotus envisions how emotion drove soldiers to continue fighting in the midst of terrifying conditions.

Scotus’s poem also uses the horse to bridge the emotional power of heat of battle and elegiac poetry, and shows the similar function of these two important Civil War forms. He uses the inexorable movement of the horse to represent how the men process the surges of emotion created by the danger of their mission and the death of the sergeant. Throughout the

ballad, the animal carries the men into danger without pause and then provides a way for them to mourn the death of their comrades while still carrying out their duties. Scotus uses the horse to bring the emotional power of the elegy to bear as a counter to those moments when violence would seem to threaten the men's excitement for battle. The horse helps them to comprehend death around them even as it spurs a patriotism that allows them to continue fighting. The riderless horse evokes an eagerness for battle akin to the excitement modeled by a horse's charge towards the heat of battle.

Scotus opens his poem with the urgency and danger of the troops' mission. Ordered to deliver a message to Helena before sunset, a Lieutenant accepts the command and calls for an escort to make it through the woods where the Confederates may mount an ambush. "Comrades!" the courier calls out, "the path is fringed with death; who rides with me to-day?" (4). The warning does not deter a slew of volunteers, including a "gallant Sergeant," described as a ranger who will lead the way, and "Along the ranks a wild shout broke: 'We follow! lead the way!'" (6). The men express not just a willingness to take on the dangerous mission, but eagerness to engage in the battle ahead. Their "wild" response shows a disregard for fear or rational contemplation of the Confederate threat. Scotus represents their excitement as akin to Emerson's prediction: their patriotism allows them to overcome these mindsets and charge into the fury of battle regardless of the threat. The figure of the horse provides a way to represent this feeling, providing the movement that will carry the men towards a violent confrontation that they look forward to rather than contemplate or fear:

To horse! the steeds impatient neigh; to horse! the way is long.
Brave hearts are light, keen sabres bright, and willing arms are strong.

The clatter of hoofs! the clash of steel! the day is nearly done;
There will be need of armed heel ere the far off goal be won.

Lo! the entrance of Cyril's Wood gapes like the mouth of hell;
The dauntless courier mutters, "Good! the rebel dogs watch well!"
(11-16)

The movement towards the woods where the Confederates wait in ambush is welcomed by the sergeant, but the poem's inclusion of the "impatient" horses that gallop onwards makes this eagerness appear inexorable. The animal is portrayed as carrying the men forward regardless of the rebel threat. The form of the poem complements this charge of the horses into danger. With its ballad form, "The Cavalry Scout" uses rhyming couplets with fourteen beat lines. Combined with anapests that create a sense of rapid movement, the constraints of the ballad form provide a formal echo of the ride towards the woods. The ballad's form does not allow for any deviation, just as the mission allows for no opportunity to peel off and avoid combat. In this way Scotus uses formal properties to represent movement in the same way as the horses charge forward. The rhyming pairs of fourteen beat anapest couplets continue unabated regardless of the salvos, just as Scotus depicts a cavalry charge that does stop for gunfire: "No reign is drawn at the line of flame; tally, a score and six" (17). This tally drops as the ballad continues, going from twenty-six to seventeen in just a few lines. It signifies the death of men as the troops ride through a Confederate ambush. The results of the "line of fire" – a salvo of gunshots – are depicted through this rapid tally. The sense of inexorable movement Scotus employs makes a pause for a more detailed representation seem impossible. The men cry out "for God and liberty" (19) and the poem depicts this eagerness for battle as superseding any halt for contemplating gunfire and death. The ballad's sense of movement created by the horse allows for Scotus to avoid the violence faced by the cavalry scout.

Implicit in Scotus's representation of this ride is that troops comprehend a battle in much the same terms as the poem. Although we do not know if Scotus actually served with the Illinois cavalry, he imagines the men as charged with excitement in a way that lets them avoid fear or a rational contemplation of their comrades' deaths. What would happen, though, if the men were to pause and mourn the death of a comrade? What if, in other words, the poem switched to elegiac mode rather than heat of battle? "The Cavalry Scout" explores this possibility, visually signaling a break in the action with parenthesis as it describes the death of a sergeant/ranger:

"Help ho! the sergeant!" (One hath seen whence the death-bearing
sped;
Aimeth the ranger's eyes between, pierceth the ranger's head.)

Under the giant cypress him the rough hands gently place;
Give water to cool the fevered lips, to lave the burning face.
(25-28)

In this vision – and we soon discover that it is an imaginary aside – the violence around the men disappears from the poem in favor of a depiction of the Good Death for the sergeant. Such an elegiac scene offers up an alternative way to respond to the slaughter suffered by the unit. Instead of eagerly charging through the gunfire, this aside provides mourning and a focus upon the dying body in lieu of the bullets and wounds that killed the sergeant and others. Yet this scene remains in the fourteen-beat anapest couplets that lent a strong sense of the horse's gallop through the woods. The poem's meter does not pause or break, despite the shift first towards an elegy and then back into heat of battle. "Away! Away! think not to stay! no bootless vigil keep, / Give little heed to a comrade's need – a soldier may not weep" (35-36). The call pulls the poem away from this scene of a Good Death and back into a heat of battle charge through the woods. The shift reads as a rejection of the elegiac scene by Scotus.

He explores what such a depiction offers in the midst of a deadly conflict, and why troops in battle may be tempted to pause to mourn their sergeant and ignore the gunfire around them. Because they are in the midst of such violence, though, he rejects this avoidance as ultimately futile and impractical. It would not, Scotus suggest, serve as an effective emotional response to death in combat precisely because of the need to finish the dangerous mission, as the meter of the poem reminds us. This vision points out that while elegy and heat of battle both avoid depicting violence – and provide models for how to comprehend Civil War combat – writers and soldiers understood that each form had strengths and weaknesses. That is to say, even for a poet such as Scotus who may have never penned another poem in his life, the choice of how to go about depicting violence mattered very much. These forms were not used as a response to debilitation or ignorance, but rather Scotus’s elegiac aside points to an awareness of the indirection away from violence offered by each form and a cognizance of how each form represents the traumatic scenes of the war.

The appearance of a riderless horse, though, allows Scotus to evoke both mourning and eagerness simultaneously. The reason he would want to do this may come from a curiosity in how soldiers could wrestle with these conflicting emotions in the course of battle. Whether from first-hand experience or not, Scotus positions the horse as central to shaping the violence of the ride. He envisions a synthesis of the elegy and the heat of battle, and merges the two into the final stanzas of the poem:

Drive home the spur! a riderless horse into the night leads on;
Follow! faint not! his master’s corpse is many a mile by-gone.

On! On! deem not the danger passed till the wished-for goal be won.
– “WHO GOES?” – “Thank God! the lines, at last!” and the hard race is done.
(45-48)

The troopers in the poem follow a riderless horse towards the safety of Helena. This horse acts as an elegiac reminder of their fallen comrades. It is a familiar conventional figure that provides for the mourning the men cannot pause to indulge in with their sergeant. Already here Scotus describes a way to incorporate elegiac mourning into the midst of combat. He seeks to validate mourning as not incommensurate with the successful completion of a mission, just as the more traditional elegiac scene he describes appears impractical. By his reckoning, the riderless horse could provide a mourning function for cavalry soldiers during battle, not just afterwards as we saw in "The Empty Saddle." The horse allows the poet Scotus to represent the deaths of this mission without directly depicting the shot officers; instead he only acknowledges a corpse miles behind. Concomitant to this function, the riderless horse leads the charge through battle much as Rienzi does in Read's poem. Thus the elegiac riderless horse also generates the excitement of a heat of battle poem. Scotus portrays this horse as inspiring the men to traverse the final few miles and to ignore the deaths of their comrades. He uses the animal to continue the strong sense of movement that exists throughout the poem's meter, and the command to both keep moving and ignore the dangers returns the poem to the energized feelings of earlier stanzas. Together, both modes incite a patriotic willingness to continue riding and fighting, regardless of the violence and death around the men.

Scotus closes the poem with a gesture towards the cost of the representational strategies he has used to describe this ride. Throughout the poem he has used both heat of battle and elegy to depict this engagement in a way that erases the violence of this dangerous day. The horse especially plays a key role in this effort. The final line of the poem shows the extent to which the use of patriotic convention effaces the bloody results of the mission:

“Boys! who is here?” a trooper cried; “How many are alive?”
And the stern courier’s voice replied: “BRAVE COMRADES, WE ARE
FIVE!”
(49-50)

The final line harkens to Wordsworth’s poem “We are Seven” in which a young girl asserts that her two dead siblings be included in the count when the speaker asks how many brothers and sisters she has. That the Lieutenant insists upon only counting the living reads as a final assertion that the patriotic feelings used to depict the events in Arkansas also erases the violent deaths. Unlike Wordsworth’s young girl, who claims a continued kinship for her siblings, the Lieutenant counts only the survivors as his comrades now. In this way the Lieutenant vocalizes the implications of the patriotism used by Scotus to represent this skirmish: avoiding a direct confrontation of the (at least) twenty-one men who died on this ride. In their place, Scotus places the capitalized and victorious declaration of the Lieutenant. With his praise for the men as “BRAVE,” the officer’s words also point out that the patriotism inculcated by this poem will make men more confident and eager for battle. Focused upon the living, the adjective denotes the consequence of Scotus’s use of familiar conventions and forms to erase the violence that befell the Second Wisconsin. Even though the subtitle of the poem claims to have been “Written Among the Tombs,” Scotus ends his poem with an effacement of the dead and an assertion that the living are brave and will continue fighting. His poem provides a poignant example of how patriotic forms such as elegy and heat of battle can exist simultaneously as they avoid violence and encourage the fighting to continue. What is more, the end of his poem demonstrates the cycle of violence that seems endemic to this patriotic poetry as it moves from erasure as a way to comprehend violence towards support for further violence. It is the cost of using these figures to understand the war’s cost, and it is a cycle that no poet avoided. If there is one wartime poet

whom critics believe at least tried to break this cycle, it would be Herman Melville in his 1866 collection *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. However, an examination of Melville's use of the horse in elegy and heat of battle poetry shows that while he may have been aware of the ways patriotism perpetuated violence, his poems follow the same conventions we have seen throughout this chapter.

Melville's Patriotism: Fairfax, Virginia

The vast majority of Melville's knowledge of the war came second-hand through interviews and newspapers. He kept abreast of wartime periodical publications, and Robert Penn Warren's introduction to a volume of Melville's poetry imagines the writer "immersing himself in a systematic study of poetry and poetic theory and was, at the same time, following the war with intense concern. There were the newspapers and bulletins, the hodgepodge compilation of the *Rebellion Record*" (10). This consumption of a wide swatch of wartime materials exposed Melville to a bevy of patriotic efforts. As Melville notes in his "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces*, "the times are such that patriotism – not free from solicitude – urges a claim overriding all literary scruples" (239). The value of patriotism as a way to process the war, Melville suggests, takes precedence over other representational concerns. It was a sentiment seemingly shared by his poetic peers in publications such as the *Rebellion Record*. Edmund Wilson sees this claim of patriotism as the primary critique of Melville's war poetry. He famously dismisses *Battle-Pieces* as "versified journalism: a chronicle of patriotic feelings on an anxious middle-aged non-combatant, as, day by day, he reads the bulletins from the front" (479).²⁴ For Wilson, the label "patriotic" is a negative; it implies

²⁴ Robert Penn Warren cites this comment as the impetus for his own study of Melville's poetry.

Melville sought to escape the war's more violent aspects. In this sense, Wilson captures quite well the indirection that Melville uses to great effect in many of his wartime poems.

Emotions such as mourning and excitement permeate *Battle-Pieces* far more than efforts to describe Civil War combat.

That Melville avoids direct encounters with the war's battles has drawn the attention of many critics, even as several prominent scholars – such as Wilson – have misunderstood the importance of this choice. Melville seems to erase the violence of the war's battles in favor of a swarm of feelings associated with its conflicts. “The battlefield is not the problem, which in Melville's poetic world appears as divided territory that is nonetheless enfolded in, ennobled with, and unified by epical allusions and religious parallels” (Castronovo and Nelson 339-340). The battles themselves exist on the periphery; Melville seems far more interested in the ways we use emotions and avoid violence in order to comprehend the conflicts. What seems to have eluded many critics is that Melville's “poetic world” is populated not only by epics and religious imagery, but also the emotionally powerful elegies and heat of battle poems that appeared alongside the day's news and in the first nine volumes of the *Rebellion Record*. Hershel Parker goes so far as to claim that “as far as we know, Melville seems not to have been influenced by any of the war poems which peppered collections like the *Rebellion Record* and appeared in newspapers and magazines (such as *Harper's Weekly*, to which he subscribed). There is no evidence that he paid attention to other poets' volumes of Civil War poems” (509). While Parker is correct that we have no direct evidence akin to Melville's annotations in books of British poetic theory, Melville's own poetry engages with the same evocations of patriotism as seen in other Civil War poems. If anything, Melville displays a deep interest in the way a heat of battle poem such as

“Sheridan’s Ride” shares the same patriotic excitement as the many elegies that mourn men engaged in these battles.²⁵ He seems keenly aware of the surges of emotion that shape the comprehension of these conflicts by soldiers and civilians. If Melville differs from his contemporaries, it is in the explicit claims his poetry makes for a nearly inevitable continuation of violence caused by patriotism. That is to say, while much of his poetry seems to evade and even declaim the terrible destruction of the war, it also puzzles over the way this conflict seems to perpetuate further violence. *Battle-Pieces* displays an adept use of patriotic conventions such as elegy and heat of battle. By doing so, though, Melville’s poetry evokes the same cycle of patriotic violence that haunts patriotic verse.

Melville’s poem “Sheridan at Cedar Creek” provides one of his most explicit explorations of how comprehending a battle can simultaneously erase and perpetuate violence. One reason for this may be that Melville personally knew some of the troops surprised by Jubal Early’s Confederates on that October morning at Cedar Creek. In the summer of 1864, Melville joined a Union cavalry scout in the woods of Northern Virginia (Garner). This particular adventure would appear in *Battle-Pieces* as “The Scout toward Aldie.” The Battle of Cedar Creek, though, was where the men with whom Melville experienced a taste of army life met their deaths. “Herman’s visit to Vienna [site of the Union base] and his scout through Loudon County [in Virginia] had given him a special reason to mourn these dead” writes Melville’s Civil War biographer, Stanton Garner (357). His direct experience with these men would have made Melville especially sensitive to the conflicting emotions of a battle such as Cedar Creek. His own depiction of that day,

²⁵ Jessica Forbes Roberts has argued, as a preface to her reading of “Sheridan at Cedar Creek,” that close attention to the poetic conventions in the *Rebellion Record* and elsewhere “equips us to see and learn from other poets’ keen engagement with conventions and their modes of transmission” (187). She leaves unstated but strongly implied that Melville’s poetry owes a large debt to these conventions.

“Sheridan at Cedar Creek,” reveals a sensitivity to the thin line between heat of battle and elegiac poetry.²⁶

Like his fellow poets, Melville uses the figure of the horse to represent the patriotic fervor created by these responses to combat. He uses Rienzi as a way to avoid depicting the violence that killed the men he knew. Garner praises Melville’s poem “Sheridan at Cedar Creek” in relation to T. B. Read’s version of events as “more apropos because it deals both with the ride and with the subsequent events, whereas Read treats the ride as though it were a victory in itself” (356). This seems a disingenuous claim. Melville does not describe the battle itself any more than Read. Melville’s poem does incorporate elegiac stanzas into his representation of the excitement of the day. Read uses the horse primarily as a model of the heat of battle. Melville uses Rienzi in the same way, but he also employs the horse to evoke mourning for the dead. Both emotions aid in the processing of the destruction of the battle. Throughout the poem, Melville uses Rienzi not just to evoke emotions but to probe how these emotions shape comprehension of the battle. His conclusion is not the complete forgetting of the dead seen in a poem such as “The Cavalry Scout,” but Melville nevertheless ends his poem with an assertion that the men whose deaths he avoids depicting will spur more fervor for violence.

Like Read, Melville opens his poem with the sounds of battle reaching Sheridan and then uses Rienzi to figure the reactions.²⁷ Each stanza begins with a command that directs how Rienzi should be treated and perceived. In this way the horse serves as the central figure

²⁶ Although *Battle-Pieces* was published in 1866, both Robert Penn Warren and Melville’s Civil War biographer, Stanton Garner, agree that “Sheridan at Cedar Creek” was composed during the war. The poem was first published in *Harper’s* in April 1866, under the title “Philip” (Parker 531).

²⁷ As is the case for much of Melville’s periodical reading, we have no way of proving he took note of Read’s “Sheridan’s Ride.” As cited above, Parker believes the influence of poems such as Read’s to be negligible. “Sheridan’s Ride” was wildly popular, though, and appeared in both *Harper’s Weekly*, to which Melville subscribed, and several New York area newspapers.

through which the battle is understood. The first stanza orders that the horse – who remains nameless throughout the poem – be prepared for battle. “Shoe the steed with silver / That bore him to the fray, / When he heard the guns at dawning--” (1-3). Melville uses the horse as a sort of gateway to the emotional resonance of each stanza. In this first stanza, for example, it evokes the excitement for conflict of a heat of battle poem. The commands for the horse do not come from Sheridan. Like Rienz, the general is not named but instead exists only through the pronoun “he” until one of the “epical allusions” crowns him as “Philip, king of riders” (25) in the third stanza. Little of what Sheridan sees or does at Cedar Creek appears directly in the poem. Instead of the battle itself, Melville’s poem focuses upon these varied emotions, emphasizing the blurred feelings over the physical actions on this chaotic and mountainous battlefield.

The first stanza evokes the familiar sense of movement and excitement that accompanies heat of battle poems. Melville does not use the regular meter employed by both Read and Scotus. Instead Melville’s language emphasizes both the eagerness to move towards battle and the mediated aspect of that feeling. As Rienz is shod for an urgent ride to battle, Sheridan does not just hear the guns, “he heard them calling, calling—/ Mount! nor stay:/ Quick, or all is lost” (5-7). Sheridan’s response to this indirect perception of battle – he does not see the battle but instead hears a message – is described as one of excitement. Even in this first stanza Melville seems to simultaneously explore how to represent the eagerness for battle and the way in which heat of battle poems could evoke the same response in the reader. He describes Sheridan’s emotional reaction to the sounds of battle as akin to the way a reader would respond to a poem such as “Sheridan’s Ride;” instead of a direct encounter with combat, it is the mediated suggestion of battle that stirs the emotions. The response is

another version of Emerson's description of the role of imagination in mobilizing a nation's support for war. The evocation of battle through indirect means leads to calls to shoe the steed in silver and engage in combat.

The stanza's emphasized words of "shoe," and "gallop" also create a sense of movement that links these lines to heat of battle poetry. Their echo of "feet" and galloping meter suggest formal elements linked closely to Union patriotism by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1861 poem, "The Ride of Paul Revere" and used to great effect by Read in "Sheridan's Ride." The iambic meter of these poems – also seen in "The Cavalry Scout" – may be absent, but Melville uses language to evoke these poems' use of the horse to represent the excitement of battle. By stating the gallop of the horse rather than metrically depicting it in the manner of Longfellow or Read, Melville draws our attention to the way these poems tie excitement to battle through the horse. In this way he also points out how an emotional charge can shape our comprehension of battle. His suggestion throughout the poem is not that we somehow misunderstand what happened nor that the version of events in a heat of battle poem such as "Sheridan's Ride" is somehow inaccurate. Rather, Melville shows how the surge of emotion tied to a mounted charge – such as Sheridan's – shapes how we understand and remember the engagement. The second stanza opens with the command to "House the horse in ermine – / For the foam-flake blew / White through the red October" (11-13). The white fur of the honorific ermine takes precedence over the red blood of the conflict still at hand. While the foam of the horse suggests the furious charge towards battle – just as it did in "The Empty Saddle" and even on the cover of *Harper's* which Melville most likely saw – this foam has been replaced by the symbolic ermine. Melville describes a

metamorphosis in which the bodily substance of saliva turns into a noble material that evokes not exhaustion or fear, but honor and pride.

Melville's representation of Cedar Creek also envisions the mere sight of Rienzi and Sheridan as sufficient to inspire the Union men to beat back Early's Confederates. By doing so, Melville emphasizes the excitement of battle rather than the cost:

He thundered into view;
They cheered him in the looming,
Horseman and horse they knew.
The turn of the tide began,
The rally of the bugles ran,
He swung his hat in the van;
The electric hoof-spark flew.
(14-20)

Like Read, a single stanza and its break contains the totality of Melville's representation of the Battle of Cedar Creek. The white ermine replaces Rienzi's foaming excitement, covers "red October," and the patriotism created by this portrayal of the men's excitement covers the violence of the battle itself. The central understanding of the battle comes from the emotions rather than events, and these emotions encourage eagerness for war, not fear or hesitation. The final line of the stanza further suggests that these feelings constitute the understanding of the battle disseminated across the electricity of the telegraph to the public. Stories of Rienzi get transmitted, "the electric hoof-spark flew," as *the* dominant representation of Cedar Creek.²⁸ Melville shows how figures alter our understanding of the conflict's deaths by wrapping them in a patriotic frame. When Sheridan is finally named, it is

²⁸ Telegraphs provided the initial reports of almost all war news. The *New York Times*'s first report of the Battle of Cedar Creek relied on telegraphic announcements: "Another great battle was fought yesterday at Cedar Creek, threatening at first a great disaster, but finally resulting in a victory for the Union forces under Gen. Sheridan, more splendid than any heretofore achieved. The Department was advised yesterday evening of the commencement of the battle by the following telegrams" ("Victory"). Grant's words of praise for Sheridan, printed in newspapers across the country, also came from a telegraph the general sent from Virginia to the Secretary of War, and then "leaked" to the press.

done so in an exaggerated tone that emphasizes the movement of Rienzi and the glory of battle. The very act of moving beneath the cypress trees of the Shenandoah towards combat:

touched and turned the cypress
into amaranths for the head
of Philip, king of riders
Who raised them from the dead
(22-25)

The juxtaposition of the purple amaranth – which according to legend never fades – with the dying soldiers shows the apparent incongruity of how patriotism encourages support for war and victory come at an unstated cost in human life. The eagerness created by Rienzi's charge spurs patriotism even as it leads to death. The allusion to Sheridan as a Lazarus figure offers a reminder of the dying men who made this victory possible even as it adds to the glorification of the deeds of a day that ends in celebration:

The camp (at dawning lost),
By eve, recovered – forced,
Rang with laughter of the host
As belated Early fled.
(26-29)

These celebrations efface the day's 6000 casualties in favor of emotional revelry. This is one way in which Melville shows the shared outcome from heat of battle and elegy. The excitement of victory makes these deaths a source of cheer and celebration. As Rienzi charged to the front, mourning leads to the same patriotic thrill of news that Sheridan acted as a modern day Lazarus. The horse's movement facilitated the exciting event that is celebrated, making the poem one that encourages a patriotic excitement rather than focusing upon the fallen.

The final stanza of "Sheridan at Cedar Creek" attempts to shift from the heat of battle into a more direct elegiac mode. "Shroud the horse in sable – / For the mounds they heap!"

(31-32). Here, Rienzi does not have an empty saddle, but nonetheless takes on the representational task of mourning the fallen soldiers who have thus far remained effaced in favor of the patriotism of the moment. Cloaked in black, Rienzi is meant to stand in for the heaps of the dead, avoiding the gruesome details of their deaths in favor of the shrouded horse. A series of gunshots honor the fallen: “It is the parting volley, / It is the pathos deep” (34-35). These bullets, though, do not hit flesh. Instead they only evoke an emotional response of pathos that shapes how the men are remembered, rather than the effects of bullets during the battle itself. The memory of the battle – and its victims – that was created by the patriotic fervor of the previous three stanzas is the same as the comprehension of the battle created in this elegiac final stanza. Melville closes the poem with a reminder that this elegy for the dead does not, in fact, provide anything but an emotional and altered understanding of these men:

There is glory for the brace
Who leave, and nobly save,
But no knowledge in the grave
Where the nameless followers sleep.
(37-40)

These lines argue that while the elegiac impulse creates a sense of pathos and patriotic celebrations of horse and rider, the dead remain nameless and unknown. This effacement includes the way that they died; the violent details of 9000 casualties are lost. These conventions serve to once again shield soldiers and civilians from the costs of the conflict. The cues provided by Rienzi shape the conception of the Battle of Cedar Creek, whether this takes the form of elegy or heat of battle poem, in such a way as to ease the comprehension of the violence itself. Melville’s representation of the battle that killed the men he knew draws

from both heat of battle and elegy, and both forms simultaneously efface violence and lead to a patriotic support for the glory of battle.

Throughout *Battle-Pieces* Melville seems to find what Timothy Sweet calls “only the promise of further disintegration and destruction” (107) in both the aesthetic and political realm. That is to say, Sweet views *Battle-Pieces* as a continual exploration in the eruption of violence within the nation and the realization that “the war merely prefigures its own repetition” (107) because of the ideological conflicts and the paradox of using violence to create unity. Sweet suggests that Melville’s greatest worry in *Battle-Pieces* is this sense of repetition of violence leading only to more violence. If this is indeed the case, then it makes sense that Melville seems particularly atune to the process in which heat of battle and elegy both give rise to patriotism. Melville seems concerned that this erasure is the cost of processing the trauma of the war, and threatens to lead to further traumas. The cost of psychically coming to terms with the war’s combat, then, is an eagerness for more combat.

The Grey Ghost: The Wilderness, Virginia

Melville knew some of the men who died at Cedar Creek because of his excursion in Virginia’s Loudon County earlier that year. The ride through Northern Virginia has drawn surprisingly little attention considering it is Melville’s only direct experience with a Civil War soldier’s life in the field. Melville himself thought enough of his brief cameo as a soldier to make it a central portion of *Battle-Pieces*. “The Scout Toward Aldie,” Melville’s poetic account of the experience, stands apart from the rest of the poems, and is by far the longest poem of the collection. Drawing upon his own experience as both civilian and a direct participant in a ride towards the Shenandoah, Melville uses the interrelationship of excitement

and mourning to represent the violence of the Virginia wilderness. He describes a world where troops must overcome their fear of death and fighting an enemy they cannot see. The shifts between the men's excitement to fight the Confederate partisans and their fear of the same are central to Melville's representation of the excursion into the wilderness. He uses the figures that evoke these emotions, but in so doing Melville continually returns to the problem that in order to describe how the Union men continue to fight, he must erase the violence that threatens these same troops. "The Scout Towards Aldie" illustrates Melville's inability to break free of these conventions' patriotic support for battle and effacement of violence.

Aldie sits at the entrance to a gap in the Shenandoah Valley. As Melville describes in one of his notes to the poem, it exists within "the confine of a country, in some places wild, which throughout the war it was unsafe for a Union man to traverse except with an armed escort. This was the chase of Mosby, the scene of many of his exploits or those of his men" (234). These woods became known as the "Wilderness" during the war, a name that connotes the dangers troops confronted when they left the highways between cities. Robert Arbour notes that in Melville's poems these woods often become a scene of isolation and brutal combat. "The wilderness," he writes, "becomes an agent of defamiliarization that estranges the soldiers from their sentimentalized identities" (53). The name of John Mosby, a Confederate general who used local sympathies to maintain his guerilla tactics throughout the war, appears in every stanza of "The Scout toward Aldie." His threat serves as a constant reminder of the dangers confronted by soldiers. Mosby's ability to melt into the civilian population raises the level of trepidation among the Union men: "Yet rumor made him every thing – / A farmer – woodman – refugee – / The man who crossed the field but now" (185). Early in the poem Melville seeks to evoke a mixture of fear and anticipation for the combat

promised by the invisible threats that threaten a seemingly safe environment. This combination will exist throughout the poem. Using the appearance of the newly constructed dome of the U.S. Capitol in nearby Washington, Melville describes how these emotions also shape comprehension of the world around the men:

The Capitol dome – hazy – sublime –
A vision breaking on a dream:
So strange it was that Mosby's men
Should dare to prowl where the Dome was seen.
(186)

These lines show the difficulty of processing the feelings of fear and excitement that saturate Melville's vision of military life. The dreamlike state in which the troops live seems to come from both the wilderness that surrounds them and the threat of Confederate partisans who could be anywhere. Danger makes their existence hazy and clear comprehension becomes difficult. Living in fear of getting shot at any moment has the effect of dulling the soldiers' ability to perceive their world. The Capitol, one of the ultimate symbols of patriotism, cuts through this haze. It contrasts with the eerie surroundings of the Wilderness and the threat of the Confederate Mosby. Yet Melville moderates the impact of the dome with dashes and terms – “hazy,” “sublime,” “strange” – that suggest confusion rather than clarity. The patriotic inspiration of the Dome does not create insight, but instead marks a change from a dream to a vision: a difference of type rather than kind. As in his other poems, Melville links all emotional responses to battle with an altered comprehension.

The poem elucidates how the conventions of patriotism keep men fighting in a constant cycle of fear and excitement. Eagerness for battle and mourning for the dead become the dominant emotional responses of the troops as they face both camp life and a scout in pursuit of Mosby. Even the young Colonel, the commander of this regiment, finds himself

searching for an emotional response to the dangers he faces.²⁹ His wife has joined him at the front. She sees him as a hero, “And fame, be sure, refines the vow; / But fame fond wives have lived to rue, / And Mosby’s men fell deeds can do” (186). Melville’s lines point out how, like the experience of seeing the hazy Capitol dome across the trees, the excitement of combat shifts the attention away from the dangers of death. It does nothing to eliminate the danger posed by Mosby’s men, nor does it provide any insight into how the Confederate partisans operate. The wife perceives combat in the Wilderness with a feeling of eagerness. The speaker of the poem points out, though, how often the fulfillment of this patriotic urge leads to death, albeit a noble death that will spur more officers to risk their lives. Her love for the Colonel’s bravery against Mosby forgets the violences he faces. And even if the Colonel were to die (which he will by the end of the poem, as did the real Colonel Lowell at Cedar Creek), this death would be understood in the terms of elegiac mourning that would encourage other men – and other wives – to support more excursions against Mosby and the Confederates. Indeed, the last line of the poem does just this: “To Mosby-land the dirges cling” (209). As the Union troops will continue their excursions into the Wilderness to find Mosby, whose name remains associated with these woods, mourning “clings” to the land because violence will continue to erupt. The elegiac songs become part of the comprehension of the land in a way that simultaneously encourages men to forbear caution and continue their mission to hunt down Mosby.

Most of “The Scout toward Aldie” tracks this continuum between patriotism and violence as the men plunge towards the Shenandoah. Throughout the poem Melville describes the shifts in rapid-fire fashion. As in other wartime poems, the horse provides a

²⁹ The Colonel in this poem is based on Charles Russell Lowell, Jr, who was the nephew of the literary editor and writer James Russell Lowell. The young Lowell was a rising star in the military, but was killed at Cedar Creek during the Union counter-attack inspired by Sheridan’s arrival.

figure to represent the shifts. The horses create a sense of eagerness for battle: “The champing horses lightly prance – / Full of caprice, and the riders too / Curving in many a caracole” (190). The animals express a light-hearted feeling that the men adopt. The riders take their cue from the horses’ “caprice” much as the troops at Cedar Creek take their cue from Rienzi. Together the cavalry rides in whimsical patterns, unconcerned with death or violence and evoking the excitement and movement of a heat of battle poem. The next stanza, though, takes place “By the hospital-tent the cripples stand – / Bandage, and crutch, and cane, and sling” (190). These wounded men provide living symbols of the dangers of combat, but Melville casts their injuries as fuel for further patriotic fervor. The injured watch their mounted comrades prepare eagerly for battle:

And palely eye the brave array;
The froth of the cup is gone for them
(Caw! Caw! the crows through the blueness wing):
Yet these were late as bold, as gay;
But Mosby – a clip, and grass is hay
(190)

There is a feedback loop between these two stanzas, and it is a microcosm of the cycle of violence inculcated by patriotism. The horses model excitement for combat, joined by their riders who feel the same “caprice” as the animals. Mosby’s rangers, though, may quickly and suddenly cut these men down. The metaphor in the last line, though, envisions these men becoming, in turn, food for the horses. Their injuries and deaths, by this logic, “feeds” the excitement modeled by the horses. “How strong they feel on their horses free” begins the next stanza, referring once again to the mounted men (190). The eagerness for combat that Melville evokes remains unmitigated by the scene in the hospital that he also describes. In fact, the metaphor of Mosby turning grass into hay suggests that injuries and death foment even more eagerness for fighting. Men shot in battle may cause a brief interlude of mourning,

but their injuries remain a part of the patriotic process that comprehends violence with a call for more violence. Rather than describing the effects of Mosby's bullets on flesh, he represents only how these injuries feed into the emotional oscillations that Melville uses to depict Civil War combat.

The regiment rides out to hunt down Mosby. Before they locate the Confederate raider, though, they first encounter signs of past violence. Throughout the forest they find ruins from previous raids:

The blackened hut they turned to see,
And spied charred benches on the green;
A squirrel sprang from the rotting mill
Whence Mosby sallied late, brave blood to spill.
(193)

These are reminders of the violence that the men face. The troops can not help but gaze upon the scene of Mosby's deeds. The concern they feel for these past events echoes the sense of a cycle of violence that hovers over this and other Melville poems. This ruined homestead stands in for a bloody raid by Mosby. It indirectly depicts the terrors of partisan warfare in the Wilderness. At the same time it suggests the pull of more violence, as the men continue to ride in search of Mosby, whose name still haunts every stanza. What is striking about Melville's depiction of this opening foray into the woods is the emphasis upon silence.

"Silent speed on a scout were wise" he notes after describing a horse briefly crying out on a steep riverbank (192). "Silent they sweep" after the blackened hut (193). These stanzas lean heavily on the conventions of heat of battle (with their rapid movement and pursuit of combat) and of elegy (with their mourning for a dead whose bodies are gone). Yet Melville also draws our attention to the way violence, both past and future, remains unspoken. None of the men, or the horses, are allowed to articulate a response to what they see or feel.

Silence, after all, is the order of the day. In this way any fears or concerns the men have also remain unspoken in the poem. The movement of the horse and the elegiac scenes provide the content of these stanzas. Melville relies upon these emotional conventions to represent violence and also to allude to its pending outbreak as the troops search for Mosby.

Melville casts the experience of battle in the Wilderness as a constant exercise in deception and comprehension. Mosby's rangers and the Union troops play a game of cat-and-mouse through the woods of Virginia as each attempts to outwit and surprise the other. Horses provide one of the main figures for Melville's depiction of the confusing and misleading scenes of conflict. Throughout the poem whenever men "ride out" it harkens a charge towards combat, an eager search for an enemy who may or may not be nearby. To lose a horse, as happens to five Confederates, means capture and defeat. One of the captive Virginians offers praise for the mounted Union men: "Why, three to one – your horses strong – / Revolvers, rifles, and a surprise – / Surrender we account no shame!" (203). Even more so than their guns, the fact that the Union men ride good steeds gave them the advantage in the skirmish. A moving horse lends power and success in combat. It also covers over weakness. During the capture of these Confederates, the Union major hurts his knee. The injury only appears when "He sighed, and slid down from his horse, / And limping went to a spring-head nigh" (201). The animal allows the major to hide the disability, though, making him just as able and eager to fight as if he were unhurt. Melville draws on the heat of battle poem to make the animal a sort of nexus of excitement for battle that overcomes such things as a lame knee. The charging horse effaces these physical ailments. When the order goes out for the men to quickly mount and head towards another town, one officer calls out "Boots and saddles! – our pains we lose" (210). In this way the officer explicitly associates the patriotic

scene of a mounted horse with the erasure of any injuries the men may have suffered during their time in the Wilderness. Such scenes allow Melville to explore how even after a man has been made lame by battle he continues to ride after the enemy. Melville suggests that the power of patriotism is the way it allows troops to erase past violence in the pursuit of more combat.

Melville, like other poets of the time, knows the constructed nature of these conventions, the way in which they are propagated by men like James Murdoch and Waldo Emerson to facilitate the war effort. A charging horse equates to military prowess and bravery. A riderless or lame horse suggests injury and mourning. As part of his representation of the deception and struggle to comprehend the Wilderness, Melville imagines the soldiers taking advantage of these same signifiers. In Melville's version of events, Mosby's men use the emotions associated with the horse as part of a ruse. When Union troops encounter a wagon with "a lame horse, dingy white" (206), they interrogate the driver and female passenger. Because of the poor shape of the animal, the troops fail to detect any danger and credulously listen to the driver's story that Mosby will be found in nearby Leesburg. They ride straight into an ambush set by Mosby and his men. The incident suggests another way in which patriotic conventional figures encourage more violence. Instead of stoking an emotion in place of a direct depiction of the horrors of war, Melville conjures a scenario in which the lame horse makes the Union troops feel that here is a man who is decidedly *not* eager for battle. It is the absence of a strong charging horse that makes the men all the more eager to ride into battle themselves. They mistake the lack of a patriotic scene for a lack of military preparedness. Patriotism comes to demand even more patriotic inspiration, feeding its cycle of violence even further.

As the Union troops approach Leesburg, they pause to concoct a plan. The major and young colonel disagree over how best to sneak into the town and – they think – take Mosby by surprise. The major advocates a silent and cautious approach, “Softly we enter, say, the town – / Good! pickets post, and all so sure – ” (217). The colonel, on the other hand, wants to charge the town directly. Both men imagine a sort of idealized version of battle. They speak of “crack! the rifles from every gate” and clouds of smoke, but they remain silent on the injuries created by these riflecracks. It is not that these men are naïve, but Melville forbears representing these brutal wounds and he imagines a military conversation doing the same. His officers prefer to fall upon the conventions of the heat of battle that erases these harsh realities in favor of planning the next attack.

And, Melville further suggests, such distinctions do not matter. The men have fallen into a trap that will be sprung regardless of how they conceive their situation. As the colonel and major debate tactics, the major’s “horse here shied” (218). It is yet another instance of the horse providing a marker for the chaos of battle. Mosby’s men attack, and in the confusion they realize that one of the Confederate prisoners had been the Gray Ghost himself, now escaped during the skirmish. During the battle Melville describes a jumble of horses and men and gunsmoke:

“Steady – dismount – form – and into the wood!”
They go, but find what scarce can please:
Their steeds have ben tied in the field behind,
And Mosby’s men are off like the wind.
(219)

Even as the Union men get off their horses, the Confederates mount and ride off. The stanzas of the battle are a conflicting mess of such confusion and misadventures, what the major at one points calls “this crazy ride!” (220). In an echo of the earlier injunctions for silence,

Melville describes the language of a violent ambush: “Mosby speakers from the undergrowth – / Speaks in a volley! out jets the flame! / Men fall from their saddles like plums from trees;” (219). Like so many other scenes, the direct effects of Mosby’s “language” is missing. Saddles become empty, but by drawing on this elegiac convention Melville can avoid the exact wounds that knock these men off their mounts. He can use the empty saddles to suggest violence, while at the same time remain vague as to what injuries and tactical situations the men must overcome. His battle scene is a flurry of patriotic conventions that do not so much represent a battle scene as they provide ways to comprehend the confusion and struggle to perceive the Confederate threat.

With the death of the young colonel – an homage, perhaps, to the death of young Colonel Lowell at Cedar Creek – the men ride back to their camp saddened but determined to continue the fight. “That Mosby! – I’ll cast a silver ball!” swears the major (221), promising to himself that more violence will follow in the wake of this battle. Some critics have argued that “The Scout Towards Aldie” describes a descent into violence and cruelty, the encounter with “an agent of defamiliarization that estranges the soldiers from their civilized and sentimentalized identities” in the words of Robert Arbour (53). Yet when we pay attention to Melville’s use of patriotic conventional figures, using the horse as our guide, the opposite seems true. That is to say, in response to the defamiliarizing threat of the Wilderness and the Shenandoah, Melville depicts soldiers who lean more and more heavily upon the familiar conventions that helps them to comprehend a campaign saturated with deceit and misdirection. The consequence of these patriotic feelings, though, makes the men seem somehow less civilized or sentimental. This is because in order to understand the threats and combat around them, they must both avoid and embrace violence. Melville evinces distress

over this, noting how “The bullet of Mosby goes through heart to heart!” (224) as the death of one officer perpetuates both mourning and a desire for more deaths. The death of one soldier creates the conditions for a wife to mourn and another soldier to also die in a future battle. Yet Melville also seems as reliant upon these conventions as he imagines the soldiers themselves to be.

The problem for Melville is not one of accuracy or representational efficacy. He seems more concerned with how these conventions help us make sense of a war that seems to constantly elude comprehension. The climactic battle of “The Scout Towards Aldie” provides perhaps the most colorful example of how the patriotic conventions do not offer any sort of tactical advantage, but they do keep the men fighting one way or another, even if it means mistaking Mosby for a Virginia farmer and losing their young colonel. In the process of understanding battle, these conventions perpetuate violence. Even when he tries to point out this process, Melville describes a Wilderness and Shenandoah that will see more men and more violence. These figures do not allow Melville the poet to capture the violent scenes in Virginia, just as the Union never did capture Mosby. Instead they depict how more men enter the fray, and more civilians support these efforts.

That horses came to play a vital role in how heat of battle and elegy poems spurred and depicted patriotism should come as no surprise. Historians estimate that over one million horses died in the course of the war. These animals were as enmeshed in the battlefield as any human soldier. For poets facing the task of representing the violence of these battles, though, the animals also provide a route to evoke the emotions that simultaneously erase and foster violence. Horses in these poems aid the comprehension of combat precisely because of the indirect depictions they facilitate and the patriotic feelings they can inspire. Even after

the war, horses served this function for a nation that struggled to understand what happened during four bloody years. The horses of famous generals – such as Rienzi and Stonewall Jackson’s mount Little Sorrell – toured the country. Jackson’s horse required a full-time guard, lest souvenir hunters snip its tail hairs completely off. These animals provided patriotic reminders of battles whose violence and horrors both North and South struggled to come to terms with.

CHAPTER 3

BLOOD AND WATER

Introduction: Mobile Bay, Alabama

Mobile, Alabama was the last open Confederate port in the eastern half of the Gulf of Mexico. It held out thanks to a series of three forts, minefields, and gunboats that guarded the mouth of Mobile Bay. In August of 1864, Union Rear Admiral David Farragut led a daring assault and, by the end of the month, he had sealed off the city's access to the Gulf. Although the number of men killed in naval engagements paled compared to the toll of the war's ground campaigns, the Battle of Mobile Bay was still a horrific conflict. A correspondent for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* described the scene on board the *Selma*, a Confederate gunship that had been hammered by Farragut's ships: "The rebel vessel had lost dreadfully in killed and wounded, and when her decks were reached, the dead and dying lay around, while her scuppers ran with blood" ("Farragut's Victory"). The scuppers – openings in the sides of a ship designed to drain water from the deck – now served a very different purpose than keeping the *Selma* afloat. While the soil of ground battles could soak up much of the evidence of battle, on the watertight deck of the *Selma* the blood pooled and collected until it reached the sides to pour overboard. Even though only eight men died onboard the *Selma*, the correspondent's adverb "dreadfully" as he describes the blood-soaked deck signals his horror at the violence that took place on the gunship.

With enough blood to pour through the scuppers, the scene on board the *Selma* provides a glimpse at just how much damage Civil War combat could inflict upon the human body. As gruesome as this scene may seem, it also points to how efficiently the use of blood signifies injury. The correspondent does not describe the actual injuries suffered by the “dead and dying” Confederate sailors. Instead he need only mention their existence, and then uses blood as a way to elucidate how grievously the men have been wounded. The description of the floating battlefield avoids the rest of the gruesome details suffered by the men, focusing solely upon the red fluid filling the deck. The reporter’s choice points to the multiple tropic functions of blood in representing the war’s violence on land and sea. Blood provides a moment of graphic realism when it describes the literal substance and a metonym for bodily injury, even as we are aware of the many metaphorical meanings that make blood such a familiar figure. Our knowledge of both possible meanings has led to a critical tautology in which we attribute to some wartime writers the status of “realist” because of their more literal use of blood whereas other writers remain identified as “romantic” because their blood seems more metaphorical. This chapter argues, though, that the multiple functions of blood render this a false distinction. The Americans who undertook to write of the war understood blood to serve multiple functions at once, as both a metaphor and an evocation of a physical substance. Blood both depicts injury and shifts our attention away from the wound through graphic indirection and metaphor, and writers embraced the representative importance of both functions. Only later have critics sought to segregate these purposes and placed undue emphasis on the physical substance as the preferred signification for blood in wartime literature. For Americans who lived through the Civil War, the value of blood as a

convention came primarily from its possibilities to comprehend and organize a multitude of responses to the violence of the war.

In her analysis of depictions of Civil War deaths, Franny Nudelman argues for a metaphorical understanding of blood as a substance whose sheer ubiquity could create a way to tie together disparate groups. She takes the speeches of John Brown as her departure, especially his courtroom speech after being sentenced to death: “Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done!” (qtd. in Nudelman 18). Nudelman points out the way Brown uses the metaphorical meanings of blood to make common cause between his death and slavery’s ills. She writes that “blood, imagined here as a sort of universal fluid, united Brown, his family, and countless slaves” (18). At its most basic level, Nudelman argues, the evocation of blood can provide a route to make an individual’s experiences apply to others. It carries powerful metaphorical properties that tie together experiences across race, class, and gender: “Blood signifies a common medium extracted, or abstracted, from the staggering material differences between the enslaved and the unenslaved” (24). Nudelman’s argument envisions the concept of blood as an abstract metaphor that intentionally mixes the bodily substance with nineteenth-century racial definitions of black or white “blood.” Her reading shows how Americans conflated the substance inside our bodies with racial differences to create a bond that links together the bodies of disparate populations. As a result, the familiarity we have with our own bodies becomes the basis for a tropic use of blood that ties all bodies together in common cause.

While Nudelman focuses upon blood's ability to unite racial and political bodies, her reading follows a critical tendency to overlook the physicality that enables this metaphorical function. The metaphorical use of blood is persuasive because John Brown takes advantage of the fact that while he will not actually bleed – he was sentenced to death by hanging – his death could be comprehended as akin to the spilled blood of his sons who were shot to death at Harper's Ferry and the many slaves who suffered beatings across the South. Brown evokes a literal meaning of blood to forge a link between the popular image of the violence of slavery – in which slaves like Uncle Tom bleed to death under the lash of cruel masters – and the accounts of his own failed raid and now execution. As we saw in Chapter One, representations of slavery before the war oftentimes used blood to both sensationalize and draw attention to the violence of slavery. As in the beatings in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the blood of a wounded slave would point to the abuses of slavery only because of her inclusion of the physical substance that spills from Tom's body under the whip of Legree. Blood provided a convention for representing forms of violence completely foreign to white abolitionist readers in ways that nonetheless allowed these readers to comprehend in some way what happened to a slave's body in the South. John Brown, as a participant in both the Kansas/Missouri clashes and a shootout with troops led by a Virginia military officer by the name of Robert E. Lee, had perhaps the best glimpse of the coming war as anyone. Brown had already witnessed literal blood spilled in this conflict. He positions the substance not only as a metaphor but also as a metonym that points to the array of physical injuries suffered in the course of both slavery and the fight to end slavery. Even as he embraces the metaphorical function of blood, his language – of spilling blood, of mingled blood, and his

own direct experiences – reminds us of that he also is representing a physical substance that results from violence, not just a symbolic warning of the looming conflict.

It is important for current readers to not allow the metaphorical meanings blind us from the literal uses of blood in wartime literature. Even today, blood-stained bibles and other Civil War equipment are routinely sold by collectors, a testament to the physical substance's ubiquitous presence. Americans understood this blood not just as the metaphor that Nudelman sees in John Brown, but in literal terms that signaled the fierce fighting of the war. "The American people are now in tears," declared Frederick Douglass in 1865 as the war drew to a close, "the Shenandoah has run blood – the best blood of the North. All around Richmond, the blood of New England and of the North has been shed – of your sons, your brothers and your fathers." Even as he deploys the same unifying metaphor of blood as John Brown's speech six years earlier, Douglass's comments to Boston's Anti-Slavery Society can also be read as quite literal. Union (and Confederate) troops had suffered horrendous casualties across the Shenandoah (as we saw in the previous chapter) and Richmond remained a gruesome precursor to World War I's trench warfare. That is, Douglass's use of specific scenes of battle shows how blood takes on a function of evoking the war's violence in a more literal fashion than Brown's speech before the war. Even as the African-American Douglass uses blood as a "common medium" abstracted to a level that encompasses all men, he goes beyond what Nudelman's analysis entails to also remind his white Boston audience of the many wounds and fatalities that have occurred in both eastern and western Virginia. Douglass's references would not be lost on his audience, who by now would have seen an overwhelming body of evidence as to just what Civil War combat did to human beings. The

audience in Boston would take Douglass's inclusion of blood not only on a metaphorical level but also as a reminder of the corporeal violence caused by four years of war.

The Civil War provided an abundance of this sort of violence, as the scene aboard the *Selma* suggests. "There were things seen in the surgical wards which you will, I trust, never see, or only in jars in the surgeon-general's museum," commented the surgeon and author Silas Weir Mitchell as he looked back on his wartime service (7). The aftermath of Civil War battle did not only challenge the medical profession. The correspondent for *Frank Leslie's* must convey to his readers these things that they, too, will never witness for themselves. When we read the efforts of Americans to describe the effects of Civil War violence, two elements stand out that most trouble the combatants and witnesses. First is the scope of the injuries suffered by individual soldiers, the range of possible ways for the human body to be wounded. Second is the scale of the violence, the sheer numbers of wounded bodies in even a small skirmish. An attention to the metaphorical and corporeal functions of blood shows us how writers sought to comprehend both scope and scale.

The scope of Civil War injuries baffled even the most hardened medical professional. The heavy low-caliber projectiles fired by both sides would either rip off body parts or embed themselves deep into flesh and bone. Mitchell recalled how surgeons struggled to extract the lead shot from soldiers: "We groped for bullets with roughed porcelain probes, the mark of lead on the probe recording the locality of the ball" (11). With no way to diagnose wounds beyond the most rudimentary examination, even surgeons such as Mitchell were hard-pressed to come to grips with the range of possible injuries men suffered on the battlefield. For a soldier or civilian without medical training, the task became even more daunting. Even on the decks of the *Selma*, a minor scene compared with the body counts of

land battles, we can assume that each of the dead and dying soldiers suffered a uniquely traumatic blow to his body. Whether the *Frank Leslie's* correspondent neglects these individual injuries out of respect for the fallen or a lack of forensics training, he instead turns to blood to suggest the scope of wounds inflicted by the Union gunships. This is an extremely literal solution to the problem of scope. The many types of injuries are reduced to their lowest common corporeal denominator, namely the fact that they make men bleed. It becomes a metonym for the countless possible injuries suffered on the front lines. The use of blood employs symbolic meanings to universalize the scene: these men have suffered wounds just like so many other soldiers in war, rendering the details of their injuries moot. They have bled and died fighting for the Confederacy in the midst of a Union victory, and the scope of these wounds become immaterial to the depiction of the scene aboard the *Selma*. As both a literal and metaphorical convention blood does not so much efface the scope of Civil War combat as render it secondary to the representation of the scene.

The second major challenge posed by the war was the scale of injuries. Mitchell estimates that he personally treated 25,000 wounds during the war, and after Gettysburg alone the Union medical corps tended to over 27,000 injured men (10-11). Such numbers boggle the mind, and critics such as James Dawes have argued that some representations of battle retreat to these numbers as a way to moderate the impact of Civil War conflict. We struggle to associate such tallies with the violence inflicted upon tens of thousands of individual men, thereby erasing the impact of a battle upon the corporeal body. Even as writers use the numbers to depict the scale of Civil War death, these digits do not provide a coherent meaning as to the injuries suffered by so many soldiers. A small number – such as the eight deaths aboard the *Selma* – can therefore seem minor and unimportant. The number

in essence obfuscates the wounds suffered by the Confederate sailors by minimizing how many of them died in relation to the battle as a whole, much less the entire war. Nor does the appearance of blood resolve this dilemma. What blood can do, however, is provide a more graphic depiction of just how brutal eight deaths on a single ship can seem. This is another function of blood in the *Frank Leslie's* article, showing that while the octet may seem minor in the context of the war or even this single battle, we can comprehend the damage done to their bodies by the sheer volume of blood pouring over the scuppers of the ship. This sanguine image contextualizes the scale of casualties by depicting not a number but the results of eight bodies destroyed in the course of the battle. Comprehension of the scale of Civil War injuries shifts from numbers to the images and impressions of the witnesses of the battle. Such a move does not guarantee accuracy, but it does figure the scale of the battle in terms that have the potential to be familiar and universal. In this way blood can also serve as a metonym for the scale of Civil War casualties, pointing to the large – or small – numbers of wounded and dead without relying on numerical counts.

In order to tell the story of Civil War battles, Americans knew they had to find ways to cope with the scope and scale of combat. At the same time American writers and readers were aware of the sentiment expressed by Mitchell, that precious few of those not in battle would ever witness the sort of violence seen at Mobile Bay, much less at a Gettysburg or Antietam. What is more, even those who witnessed such violence would struggle to comprehend and depict the scope and scale of Civil War battle, while critics shifted their criteria for what constituted an effective representation of these experiences. The work of two men – both writers before the war – who saw action in the western theatres of the war shows

how blood facilitated their attempts to both comprehend and depict what they witnessed, and the shifting critical definitions that shape how we understand their use of blood.

Red Everywhere: Boston, Massachusetts

In an 1865 issue of the Boston-based *Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. wrote a short review of the poet he called “our Battle-Laureate, Henry Howard Brownell” (591). A lawyer, historian, and middling poet before the war, Brownell wrote a poetic account of Union Admiral Farragut’s campaign in New Orleans, which began a correspondence between the two men (Aaron 153). Appointed as a Union observer under Farragut at Mobile Bay and elsewhere, he became one of the most battle-hardened of the Civil War poets. For Brownell, blood defines part of his experience at Mobile Bay, a fact to which he testifies in both poetry and prose. His poems do not attempt to avoid the violence that he witnessed onboard Farragut’s ships, but they do convey a struggle to understand this violence. Brownell seems to have been deeply impacted by the sight of so much blood, but also aware that the sailors with whom he served did not have the luxury to pause for anything, even the death of their shipmates. His poetry uses images of blood to depict the scope and scale of Civil War combat while also meditating upon how his comrades avoid being overwhelmed by these traumatic sights.

Brownell collected his poems in an 1866 volume entitled *War-Lyrics and Other Poems*. Published in Boston by the distinguished firm Ticknor & Fields, Brownell dedicated the volume to Admiral Farragut. At the front of this collection Brownell placed his own account of the Battle of Mobile Bay, “The Bay Fight.” In this opening poem, which Daniel Aaron calls “Brownell’s most impressive War poem” (153), he praises the ships and men

who fought across the water as he describes the movements of Farragut's fleet. When the last Confederate boat sinks, the Union ships prepare to attack the forts that guard the bay. Before doing so, though, the speaker of the poem describes the pause as the sailors gather themselves before this next offensive:

And now, as we looked ahead,
All for'ard, the long white deck
Was growing a strange dull red;
But soon, as once and agen
Fore and aft we sped
(The firing to guide or check,)
You could hardly choose but tread
On the ghastly human wreck,
(Dreadful gobbet and shred
That a minute ago were men!)
(222-231)

Throughout the poem, the speaker uses the inclusive "we" to create the impression of being one of the crew, which Brownell himself was at the Battle of Mobile Bay. The speaker positions himself as a direct witness to the carnage, taking on the role of a sailor aboard Farragut's flagship *Hartford* who will depict the literal scene aboard the Union vessel. Yet Brownell also prepares the reader for a voice that will need to turn to metaphor in order to depict the sights on board the *Hartford*. From an opening epigram citing Longfellow's mythological "Saga of King Olaf" to digressions to the *Hartford's* origins at the Brooklyn Naval-Yard (72), Brownell creates an expectation in the reader that the speaker's description will rely upon symbolic associations as much as eyewitness accounts of the engagement. By placing himself amidst the *Hartford's* crew, the speaker stakes a claim for an experience that he will describe in literal terms but whose comprehension relies on the intertwining of metaphor with the metonymic function of blood.

This position sets up moments such as when the speaker voices the response of the sailors when they gaze across the deck. With the *Selma* and other ships defeated, the sailors pause to take in the aftermath of their battle. Brownell's lines create a trajectory of slow recognition at both the scope and scale of the injuries suffered by their shipmates and he does so by drawing from the multiple possible meanings of evoking the figure of blood. When first juxtaposed with the white deck, the "strange dull red" seems innocuous to the reader. Unusual, to be sure, but the beginning of the stanza does not reveal why the deck has begun to shift colors. While red in this context can suggest blood, the diverse symbolic meanings of the color open up a range of possibilities and delay recognition of what has befallen the crew of the *Hartford*.³⁰ Brownell veils his literal description of the deck awash in blood in other metaphorical meanings of the color red. Early stanzas of the poem emphasize red as the sheets of flame that pour forth from fighting ships, describing them as "A storm-cloud all aglow / With flashes of fiery red" (209-210). Brownell even compares the Confederate ironclad *Tennessee* to a dragon "belching flame from his bow / and the steam from his throat's abyss" (154-155). The opening Longfellow epigraph establishes this play on the gunships as dragons or serpents spitting red fire: "On the forecastle, Ulf the Red / Watched the lashing of the ships – / 'If the Serpent lit so far ahead, / We shall have hard work of it here,' / Said he." These alternative meanings create a sense of uncertainty as to the implications of the red decks. Brownell does not evade the horrific scene, but he does initially depict it with language that can also point towards the mythological glamor or furious cannon fire of earlier stanzas. The burden of these previous stanzas makes the red

³⁰ The color red would play a dominant role in the representations of Mobile Bay well into the postbellum era. Consider Louis Prang's 1886 chromolithograph of Julian Oliver Davidson's *Battle of Mobile Bay*. Saturated in red hues, the chromo provides an eerie visual accompaniment to Brownell's poem that, according to Mark Neely and Harold Holster in *The Union Image*, is both "well-researched" and "suggests the higher artistic aspirations of Louis Prang" in his series of chromo war images (118).

deck all the more unsettling, as what has been used to represent the naval gunfire transforms into a metonym for the effects of these shots.

The red is a graphic metonym whose meaning does not become clear until later in the stanza. The sailors begin moving across the deck, and while the next few lines suggest men hurrying to their duty, the final lines of this stanza reveal the gruesome reason for the red decks. Such a delay, combined with the continued use of the first person plural, frames the altered meaning of the color as a cognitive shift by the witnesses. Until the revelation that the sailors must pick their way across a “ghastly human wreck” the importance of the red ship, while implied, was not made explicit. Only after the poem describes sailors walking over the remains of their comrades does the full implication of red as a metonym for blood become clear. Even with this line, the speaker forbears a clear articulation of what happened to his shipmates, not directly naming blood or the injuries that caused this human wreck. The color stands in for the fluid which in turn stands in for the myriad of injuries on the Union ship. The reader does not learn the number of men killed or wounded onboard the *Hartford*, nor do we learn the scope of their injuries. Even the evocative line “dreadful gobbet and shred” alludes to some sort of terrible flesh wound, but it too forebears details. In this way the blood that covers the ship functions as a way to suggest both the scope and scale of the violence. It points to an indeterminate amount of men who have been grievously injured in an indeterminate way, while providing a clear evocation that these uncertain wounds are disturbing, and that the victims are barely recognizable as men.

The next stanza reveals the horror of the scene, expanding the graphic image of blood to encompass the entire ship and threatening to overwhelm the depiction of the battle:

Red, from main-mast to bits!

Red, on bulwark and wale—
Red, by combing and hatch—
Red, o'er netting and rail!
(232-235)

Repetition creates a sense of the red covering the ship in a way that cannot be escaped. With the previous stanza's strong association of red with blood and its attendant suggestions of the scope and scale of the violence, the image of a ship coated in red across its width, breadth, and height makes for a horrific scene. The speaker seems stunned at the graphic image of a ship covered with blood. The "we" from the last stanza – and indeed much of the poem – vanishes in favor of the declarations of red covering the entire ship. It creates a sensation of the color being inescapable, which in turn points to both gunfire and bloodshed being inescapable as well. Even more than the human wrecks that the sailors must step over in the previous stanza, the repeated red points to tremendous carnage on the *Hartford*. Brownell uses this graphic imagery of blood, though, to at the same time draw our attention away from the details of what happened to the sailors. The color red points towards blood in the same way that blood points towards bodily injuries. Thus while the multiple symbolic and metonymic functions of blood mean that Brownell graphically represents a ship enmeshed in a fierce naval battle, the reader – like the sailors on the ship who must walk over their fallen comrades – experiences a delayed realization of the full implications of this graphic scene. As blood threatens to overwhelm Brownell's depiction of the scene, his use of the figure also mediates the scope and scale of the violence that allows the speaker to grasp that the men have been injured without contemplating the details of this wounds.

Brownell's "red" stanza stands out as an unusual break for a poet who, despite Holmes's praise, was generally criticized for focusing more on events than emotions in his lines. The *North American Review* observed in, "his finest pieces a crowding of incidents to

the injury of effect as a whole” (320). Much of “The Bay Fight” does jam together a plethora of events at Mobile Bay, compressing the time needed by the Union navy to secure a victory. The eruption of blood during a lull in the fighting shows how easily the men could avoid comprehending battle injuries as long as the other form of “red” – gunfire – distracted them from the injured on the deck. The evidence suggests that this tactic reflects Brownell’s own conception of the battle. In a letter to Holmes, the poet explains that during the fight itself, blood formed one of the primary sensory experiences of Mobile Bay: “Some of the descriptions might seem exaggerated, but better authorities than I am say they are not. To be sure, blood and powder are pretty freely mixed for the painting of it; but these were the predominant elements of the scene, – the noise being almost indescribable, and the ship, for all the forward half of her, being an absolute ‘slaughterhouse’” (qtd. in Holmes 590). Here Brownell steps away from his poet’s role and gives the soldier’s account of the scene. His description reveals how much of an impression the blood made upon him, and an apparent inability – or unwillingness – to otherwise depict what he saw on the decks of the ship. The inclusion of quotation marks around “slaughterhouse” seems telling, as though even this describes too much and he prefers to allow the blood to stand in for all of the injuries, just as it does in his poem. These Civil War wounds confound Brownell, who struggles to convey in prose form what he witnessed in the waters off Alabama: “Though we had only twenty-five killed and twenty-eight wounded (some of whom afterwards died) on that day, yet numbers were torn into fragments, (men with their muscles tense, subjected to violent concussion, seem as *brittle as glass*,) causing the deck and its surroundings to present a most strange spectacle” (qtd. in Holmes 590). In this letter defending the veracity of his poetic depiction of the battle, Brownell seeks to deemphasize the scale of the casualties on the *Hartford*,

claiming that it was not the numbers of killed and wounded that stunned him. His term “only” belies an awareness that a comparison with other Civil War battles will make his own encounters seem puny: an Antietam or Shiloh saw one thousand times as many men fall. He suggests that at the time, though, the scale of injuries on *Hartford* seemed almost overwhelming. In order to address the scope of injuries, Brownell relies on vague and metaphorical language of “strange” and “brittle as glass” to describe the gruesome results of naval warfare. These troublesome outcomes of Civil War combat seem to elude Brownell’s language in his letter. Whether or not this is a result of Brownell’s own inability to process the scene, his hesitant descriptions in prose point to a traumatic experience whose mere details do not suffice to convey a gruesome outcome of battle.

I argue that this in turn explains why his poem employs the blood to describe what for Brownell seems to have been the most horrific sight of his naval service. Brownell’s poetic depiction appears to reflect his own comprehension of the scene. Blood becomes the primary graphic image of the scene, a metonym that facilitates comprehension of the scene and points to rather than directly depicts the scope and scale of these injuries. While trauma theory might suggest that this reliance upon metonym shows a repression, Brownell casts it as a sign of courage to delay comprehension of the exploded bodies that litter the deck. He frames this repression as a question of practicality and even heroism, not traumatic avoidance, and the multiple functions of blood facilitate this process. The next stanza praises the Union sailors who could put aside this horrible sight: “Grand was the sight to see / How by their guns they stood, / Right in front of our dead” (240-242). A soldier, the poem reminds us, pushes aside a reckoning of all this red and stands fast by the guns that will shoot out more flame and send more blood across the ships. This rapid turn from a stanza of shock over the dead to a stanza

of admiration for the sailors who ignore the dead illustrates the utility of employing a familiar metonym to represent the terrible scene on the ship. Brownell encapsulates these injuries with a single repeated word, “red,” and can then leave it behind, just as the men on Farragut’s ship do. It creates a scene of traumatic eruption followed by a repression that avoids blood for the rest of Brownell’s book of poetry.

If we do identify this stanza as repression, for the Union soldiers it is not a shortcoming but rather a praiseworthy necessity. The men take note of the gory deck, and then move on to stand by their guns in preparation for the next assault, just as Brownell expresses a moment of shock at the blood and the body count implicit in this scene, and then moves on to ignore these injuries for the rest of the poem. Brownell describes men for whom this metonymic comprehension of injuries is not some form of silence or failure of language. Rather it reflects a form of realism that uses a literal image remembered by a witness to the war in order to suggest both the violence and the practical needs of military men in the field. In his review of Brownell’s poetry, Holmes argues, “no man can tell a story at second hand with the truth of incident which belongs to an eye-witness who was part of what he saw.” By praising Brownell as the avatar of this vision of war poetry, Holmes posits that representations of the Civil War should reflect not just the violence of the war, but should also replicate the mental effort of witnesses to *not* comprehend the scope and scale of battle. Realism, by this definition, entails both literal and symbolic descriptions that represent violence but also mirrors the response of soldiers who oftentimes do not – or cannot – attempt to grasp the scenes before them. Holmes praises Brownell for making this violence comprehensible for readers, and, we are led to believe, Brownell does so by employing the same response to horrible injuries as the men with whom he sailed.

Wash Away the Blood: Port Hudson, Louisiana

Oliver Wendell Holmes saw in Brownell the nation's "Battle-Laureate," a soldier who successfully bridged the gap between experiencing the intensity of battle and representing these experiences for his readers. The critic and erstwhile author William Dean Howells disagreed with this standard for evaluating Civil War literature. In his view the only soldier-writer who rose to the challenge was John W. De Forest, a Union officer and author whose 1867 novel *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Succession to Loyalty* caught Howells's attention. "We suspect that Mr. De Forest is the first to treat the war really and artistically," Howells wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*. "His campaigns do not try the reader's constitution, his battles are not bores." This observation echoes the critiques of the *North American Review*: too many writers – such as Brownell – attempt to cram too many facts and incidents into a depiction of battle.

It is not the presence of these details *per se* that bothers critics. Rather, it seems to be the sense that this abundance of information becomes bogged down by the literal and symbolic meanings assigned to these facts and incidents, exponentially expanding the importance of every detail until the experience itself becomes lost in the morass of emotionally laden language. David Shi, in his exploration of the emergence of realism in America, cites an 1865 article from *The Nation* that declares an end to the "gauzy romanticism of the antebellum era" (65). He identifies the growing dissatisfaction with Holmes's supposition that war writing should attempt to lay out all the ways a soldier does and does not comprehend the scope and scale of battle. In place of this layering of meaning Shi quotes a different editor from 1865, who praises "the greater reality of feeling developed

by the war, [and] we have grown more sober, perhaps, and less patient of sheer artificiality” (65). The suspicion of artificiality or gauzy romanticism explains Howells’s assertion that De Forest makes his soldiers seem real, a sentiment echoed by Shi himself who argues that the novel is “the most authentic contemporary novel about the Civil War” (61) in part because “its prose is relatively plain and terse, devoid of the grand metaphors and lyrical adjectives favored by [Confederate veteran and novelist John Estes] Cooke and other romancers” (63). In a similar vein, the novelist Stephen Becker praises De Forest as “the first American to write realistically and grimly of war from first-hand experience” (28). This vision of realism praises De Forest for representing the intense experiences of an individual soldier and forbearing both the symbolism and the collective responses to combat we see in Brownell. Instead of grand metaphors, De Forest emphasizes graphic depictions of Civil War injuries and his characters’ struggles to comprehend the scope and scale of these injuries. This is the vision of realism that remains the dominant paradigm in our understanding of American literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. It values descriptions of the sights of war – such as blood – and a reticence to employ direct metaphorical associations with these visions, preferring instead to focus on the individual’s efforts to understand these images. And yet De Forest questions even the possibility of the very thing for which Shi and Becker praise him. Despite his reputation as a war writer, De Forest does not even get around to describe the Battle of Port Hudson until Chapter 20. Before he does so, he warns the reader: “it is too early to tell, it is even too early to know, the whole truth concerning the siege of Port Hudson” (247). Here he admits that he does not seek a direct depiction of what happened in this battle. Such a task would, at least so close to the war, be impossible in De Forest’s view. The realism and grimness that Becker sees in the novel does not come from

De Forest's conviction as to how Port Hudson "really" happened, nor does De Forest manifest faith in the value of his graphic descriptions of battle.

Too often overlooked is that what critics see as a gritty realism in De Forest's prose is in fact a heavy reliance on the familiar associations of blood that carry over from antebellum romanticism. De Forest's reputation rests in large part on his depiction of the fierce battles along the Mississippi river. These chapters do stand out; in large part because of how much they differ from the rest of De Forest's sentimentalized novel. For the vast majority of *Miss Ravenel*, De Forest unfolds a storyline of longing and thwarted love. The first twenty chapters of the book reveal that De Forest was as much versed in the conventions of antebellum romance as he was in military experiences.³¹ Much of the novel does little to represent the war because the conflict remains in the background of the characters' lives, shaping the events without any direct appearance. De Forest opens the novel with a meditation on the fact that "every great historical event reverberates in a very remarkable manner through the fortunes of a multitude of private and even secluded individuals" and thus "it was unquestionably the southern rebellion which brought Miss Ravenel and Mr. Colburne into interesting juxtaposition" (3). In these introductory paragraphs, De Forest does hint at his interest in how the war impacts the experiences of individual citizens. He places this in implicit opposition to the "overcrowding of incidents" that critics saw in Civil War writers such as Brownell. *Miss Ravenel* will explore the consequences of war upon a person's mental and romantic life more than the physical dangers of combat. In doing so, De Forest suggests, his novel eschews a depiction of the many incidents of the war in favor of individual impressions and comprehensions. "I am not trying to show how things really are,"

³¹ To be sure, the characters of Colburne and Colonel Carter engage in plenty of military conversations as they move from a fictional New England city to New Orleans, but these take place in the comfortable confines of "New Boston" hotels and other locales far away from the battlefield.

De Forest tells his readers later in the novel, “but only how the Colonel looked at them” (98). De Forest declaims a sense of accuracy in his novel, and in doing so challenges the value of eye-witness accounts as representations of warfare or any other facet of his characters’ lives. He prefers instead to emphasize the emotional and intellectual states of his characters in their daily lives rather than close attention to the details of their experiences. While on the one hand this seems a logical reaction that defines realism’s response against romanticism, it also undercuts the critical claims that De Forest writes “realistically” of an “authentic” Civil War depiction.

De Forest’s novel, in fact, shows how the familiar conventions he supposedly rejects actually inform his characters’ understanding of their war-torn world. With his refusal to assert the accuracy of his depictions, De Forest positions his own prose not as an effort at a realist account of gritty and traumatic experiences of war that fully foregoes sentimental scenes of combat. The realism of De Forest does explore the confusing and conflicting responses to the war, and his own uncertainty as to how to process these responses. To this end, though, De Forest employs an expansive use of conventional familiar figures. These are the same symbolic meanings that inform much of the war literature condemned by De Forest’s advocates, and it is through these familiar conventions that De Forest forms his efforts at comprehending the traumatic scenes of the battlefield.

From this perspective it makes sense that De Forest focuses much of his novel upon the more sentimental storyline of Colburne and Ravenel’s courtship. Amanda Claybaugh notes that De Forest “draws attention to the differences between his own novel and the conventional narratives it rewrites,” which she sees as a logical prelude to his efforts to

rewrite war narratives as “truthful.”³² Of course De Forest was hardly the first writer who “makes much of the fact that the novel’s heroine is not beautiful but merely very charming,” to cite some of Claybaugh’s primary evidence for this claim (206). E.D.E.N. Southworth made a career out of such heroines. De Forest embraces the conventions of sentimentality in part by highlighting quite explicitly when he finds these conventions either useful or unhelpful. “Melodramatically considered, real life is frequently a failure” (133) De Forest writes as Colburne and Ravenel fail to take advantage of a chance encounter in New Orleans. The novelist does not seem to reject melodrama, sentimentality, or conventionality out of hand. Rather, he acknowledges that the expectations of these conventions sometimes deviate from the course of an individual’s life experiences and their perception of those experiences. These deviations, though, allow the narrator to explain the failed courtship of Colburne and Ravenel in New Orleans, thus the sentimental becomes the convention through which this experience is understood, even if it does not follow the traditional antebellum form. De Forest embraces the deviations, and he does not view this as a particularly innovative approach to writing. Instead he acknowledges – such as when Miss Ravenel receives a declaration of love from Colonel Carter – that “man has no just comprehension of this moment” (179) and accepts the representational limitations of his craft when experience does not follow convention.

Thus it seems an incomplete reading of De Forest when critics, starting with Howells and continuing to the present day, attempt to cast De Forest as repurposing the novel to reflect the brutal experiences of the Civil War. The representations admired by these critics comes from De Forest’s confidence in using – and occasionally deviating from – familiar

³² Claybaugh also points out a line of criticism – including Nina Silber, Martin Buinicki, and Gregory Jackson – that views the romance of the southern Ravenel and northern Colburne as a complex staging of national reconciliation.

conventions to describe individuals' comprehension of the world around them, just as he does throughout this sentimentalized novel. De Forest's reputation as a realist creates a perception of what critic Michael Schaefer calls "a certain irony" that the innovative writer and demanding soldier turns to familiar sources for both his narrative structure and his accounts of combat (62). Such a comment again belies the contemporary disbelief we have in the ability of the familiar to represent human experience. Similar to Claybaugh's efforts to reconcile De Forest's sentimental plot, Schaefer marks a critical attempt to perceive De Forest's uses of familiar style conventions as an outlier in order for De Forest to fit within the larger paradigm of post-bellum realism. The possibility of De Forest valuing these familiar sources does not seem viable for Schaefer. Instead he attributes it to "a soldierly devotion to correctness and clarity" that, Schaefer argues, reflects De Forest's own self-perceived status as a loyal military man (62). This argument relegates De Forest's use of convention to a courtesy for his readers – born out of necessity and tradition – rather than a valuable strategy for representing individual experiences in a series of conflicts that De Forest himself witnessed while serving under Ulysses S. Grant during the war.

De Forest's combat scenes focus upon the experiences of his character Captain Colburne, who finds himself in the midst of the Battle of Port Hudson. Fought along a series of forts guarding the Mississippi near Baton Rouge, the summer-long siege of Port Hudson saw nearly 8000 deaths, and another 5000 Union deaths from disease in the swamps of Louisiana. Capt. Colburne is shot during one of the early assaults on the Confederate breastworks, and finds himself at both a field hospital and then a military hospital in New Orleans. Colburne's journey leads him to encounter a range of Civil War injuries, both on the battlefield and in the hospitals. Unlike Brownell, De Forest's depictions of the many injuries

suffered by the Union troops include graphic descriptions of gaping wounds and amputated limbs. Despite this apparent difference in the amount of literal description, De Forest's battle scenes bear a striking similarity to Brownell's depiction of Mobile Bay. As in Brownell's poetry, the appearance of blood points to horrible injuries but also covers over the inability of the soldier to comprehend the scope and scale of these wounds. For Brownell this conventional function of blood employs metaphorical meanings to echo the sailors' rapid avoidance of comprehending the wounds of their comrades. De Forest, though, makes both the literal and metaphorical meanings of blood a point of confusion and ambiguity, even outright misconceptions, as to the results of battle. These errors on the part of his military protagonist are made possible by De Forest's keen awareness of the conventional functions of blood. What critics take to be De Forest's efforts at realism – gruesome scenes of men wandering the battlefield – are in fact De Forest's use of romantic convention in order to reconcile his desire for clarity with his conviction that a thorough comprehension of a wartime experience will remain elusive.

As Colburne's unit encounters a dug-in Confederate regiment, the narrator of the story refers us to a letter written by Colburne to Miss Ravenel. Here he tries to convey the experience of battle, even as he admits that the sheer noise and chaos of the vicious siege "made me unable to bear spectacles which I had witnessed in other engagements with perfect composure" (251). Colburne acknowledges that his depiction of Port Republic relies on oftentimes mistaken perceptions. Blood provides the primary concept through which Colburne attempts to understand the condition of the men around him. Colburne himself is quite aware of his own inability to distinguish those injuries which are fatal and which are mere inconveniences. After the boom of a cannon nearly stuns him, Colburne witnesses a

man covered in blood: “I saw a broad flow of blood stream down the face of a color-corporal who stood within arm’s length of me. I thought he was surely a dead man” (251). The sight of blood pouring down the man’s face suggests a terrible head wound, and this seems to be all that Colburne can understand when he recovers from the shock of the canon fire. The “broad flow” that he sees as a “stream” tells Colburne that the man will certainly die, and the passage deploys both literal and metaphorical language in order to signify Colburne’s attempts at understanding the wound. His logic seems solid when he uses this combination of the literal and metaphorical to conclude that the man will die. If this were a Brownell poem, for instance, he would surely be a dead man. Yet in this instance Colburne is wrong. In what he calls “one of the wonderful escapes of battle” it turns out that the man “only” has suffered a severe cut to his head: “The bullet had skirted his cap where the fore-piece joins the cloth, forcing the edge of the leather through the skin, and making a clean cut to the bone from temple to temple. He went to the rear blinded and with a smart headache, but not seriously wounded” (251-252). De Forest does not portray Colburne’s thought process as something to critique. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how else Colburne could have processed the scene before him other than to conclude that his comrade has suffered a grievous wound.

The first half of this scene, before Colburne understands that the man is not dead, seems a realism more akin to that endorsed by Howells. The conventions of blood point him to this conclusion, and the mixture of literal and metaphorical language highlight De Forest’s choice to introduce the wound in this way. Once Colburne realizes his mistake, he proceeds to go about describing the graphic details of the injury. This too seems akin to the representation of war elucidated by Howells that values a preponderance of details. What makes De Forest’s passage stand out is the way this graphic imagery reveals the flaws in

Colburne's reliance upon convention. The man's profuse bleeding would conventionally be associated with a mortal head wound, but De Forest uses his graphic imagery not to represent what Colburne perceives, but to point out the mistakes in Colburne's attempts at perception. In this way De Forest shows us just how much the scope of injury in Civil War combat challenges our comprehension. Colburne cannot grasp the difference between a fatal shot and a headache-inducing cut, and the reason is because of the preponderance of details and symbolic associations. While these images serve to facilitate the realism espoused by Holmes, in this passage De Forest casts such details as a flawed method of comprehending and representing combat.

Which is not to suggest that De Forest believes in a superior method. The blood that first catches Colburne's attention does serve the same purpose as the flood of red in Brownell's poem. Attention to the blood provides an anchor for both writers to describe the military men's mental response to battle. At the moment of his initial witnessing, Colburne relies on the blood to frame his initial comprehension of men wounded on the battlefield without direct depiction of the precise impact upon their bodies. The difference between Brownell's red ship and Colburne's bloody color-corporal comes in the aftermath of these scenes. Brownell envisions sailors who may not fully grasp the scope and scale of battle, but he characterizes this as a military benefit that allows them to continue to fight. De Forest removes any strategy or benefit from this reliance upon convention, casting it instead as a strategy for organizing perceptions rather than achieving any sense of accuracy. It is as though by providing a preponderance of details, De Forest shows the futility of attempting to perceive the details of Civil War combat. In this way De Forest runs counter to the vision of realism with which he is often associated. Even as he questions the ability of familiar and

symbolic associations to provide knowledge, De Forest also subverts the value placed on the graphic details for which he is often praised.

One of the more famous examples of this strategy in *Miss Ravenel* occurs a few pages later, when, having been shot, Colburne collapses near the corpses of two Union artillerymen: “A dozen steps away, rapidly blackening in the scorching sun and sweltering air, were two more artillerists, stark dead, one with his brains bulging from a bullet-hole in his forehead, while a dark claret-colored streak crossed his face, the other’s light-blue trousers soaked with a dirty carnation stain of life-blood drawn from the femoral artery” (258). The critic Gordon Haight praises this passage as an example of De Forest’s “simple, direct language never heightened for melodramatic effect” (112). By the same token David Shi calls on the reader to “note the effect of sober observation and the conspicuous lack of sentimentality” (63). Yet the description of these two dead soldiers uses the blood in order to create a melodramatic link between disparate elements, in this case two distinct injuries. One hurt in the head and the other in the thigh, the men’s wounds bear little in common other than being fatal. De Forest ties the two casualties together, though, with the common signifier of blood. The shared appearance of blood on each corpse – and the metaphorical ways De Forest describes the substance as he compares it to both wine and flowers – connects the fate of the two men in a way that aids in the comprehension of the scene. In terms of a straightforward diagnosis as to what killed these men, the blood itself is superfluous, a sort of flourish, especially the streak across the face of the man shot in the forehead whose brains are also visible. Even before mentioning the blood, De Forest has identified the men as not just dead, but “stark dead.” The language that De Forest uses in this passage seems anything but simple or direct, and the details do not elucidate either death. What the language does

achieve, though, is an array of emotional, even melodramatic, associations with the fallen men. Despite the claims of critics, the descriptions draw on metaphors that contrast the brutality of the scene with luxury and peace. Colburne's perception of their death becomes tied to flowers and wine and not just the more gruesome aspects of these casualties. The vision of blood as wine also summons religious hope that these men's death will be redeemed through the blood of Jesus, an important component of Civil War era responses to fatalities.

What critics take to be De Forest's efforts at a realism that emphasizes graphic depictions of the individual experience of war still rely heavily upon symbolic associations and close attention to the familiar substance of blood as the focal point of comprehension. This scene stands out because De Forest does include elements valued by post-war realism, but his depiction of these dead men also forbears any representation of the violence that killed them, nor does he provide any insight into the scope of their injuries beyond Colburne's initial perceptions. In this way the artillery scene also echoes Brownell's model of realism more closely than is usually acknowledged. Colburne appears overwhelmed by this scene, able to pick out only a few details that De Forest conveys through metaphor as much as simple or direct language.

Rescued by his Lieutenant as the Union forces fall back, Captain Colburne soon finds himself in a field hospital where he encounters a cavalcade of injured soldiers. The description of the hospital is also graphic, but in doing so De Forest illuminates the struggles to comprehend the scope and scale that these graphic scenes suggest. Colburne once again appears akin to Brownell's soldiers, even as De Forest provides more gruesome details of the condition of the hospital than we see on board the *Hartford*. Both military scenes, though, are

represented as confusing aftermaths of battle that threaten to overwhelm the witnesses. In other words, for all of the blood and wounds Colburne encounters, he seems remarkably unclear as to what has befallen these soldiers, or how many of them have suffered. In this sense the field hospital points to a series of traumatic sights but uses blood to facilitate the representation of what Colburne witnesses and shows a reliance upon the convention to make sense of graphic imagery:

It was simply an immense collection of wounded men in every imaginable condition of mutilation, every one stained more or less with his own blood, every one of a ghastly yellowish pallor, all lying in the open air on the bare ground, or on their own blankets, with no shelter except the friendly foliage of the oaks and beeches. In the centre of this mass of suffering stood several operating tables, each burdened by a grievously wounded man and surrounded by surgeons and their assistants. Underneath were great pools of blotted blood, amidst which lay amputated fingers, hands, arms, feet, and legs, only a little more ghastly in color than the faces of those who waited their turn on the table. (260)

The collection of limbs and joints stand out in this passage, thanks to the grisly list of various body parts. Where Brownell describes symbolically as the residue of a slaughterhouse, De Forest names the appendages that lay scattered across the ground. The effect of the two strategies remains the same, however: an undifferentiated mass of wounds. De Forest makes the compilation of body parts suggestive of many and varied injuries suffered by the Union troops as they tried to take Port Hudson. The image is undeniably graphic, and the presence of the pools of blood only adds to the impression of terrible trauma. These were not clean

amputations, but painful and bloody surgeries. For all of its gory details, though, De Forest uses these amputated limbs to suggest wounds that do not actually appear. The pool of blood and body parts suggest both injuries and medical procedures but allow De Forest to avoid a direct depiction of these disturbing traumas. Here is another case of De Forest adroitly using conventional associations to create a decidedly unconventional scene, drawing our attention to graphic details as a way of covering over other details. Although there is little question as to how or why these pools of blood appear on the hospital floor, De Forest uses our associations with blood to evoke rather than depict these causes. Both bullet and surgeon's saw can therefore be alluded to but not shown even as the scene maintains a sense of horror and graphic descriptions. These direct injuries to the body are pointed to but never depicted. In this way De Forest's use of blood is very much akin to that of Brownell, who also summons a traumatic scene and then quickly covers it over. The strategy allows De Forest to portray Colburne as unable to conceive of the specifics of the scope and scale of what happened at Port Hudson while still creating the sensation of the abundance of description associated with realism.

Colburne seems desperate to impose some sense of order onto this overwhelming sight. Most peculiar is his claim of each man "stained more or less with his own blood." The phrase stands out because of the question as to how Colburne could differentiate one man's blood from another. The undifferentiated pool of blood and pile of unclaimed limbs a few sentences later reflects this uncertainty. Blood all looks the same, and yet we assume that the blood on a person belongs to him. Colburne cannot know to whom to attribute the blood any more than he can identify the amputated body part, but his belief points to an effort to make sense and organize the horrific scenes around him. Here at what De Forest calls "the centre

of this mass of suffering,” Colburne asserts an ability to comprehend the meaning of blood, which in turn allows him to grasp the scope and scale of injuries around him. He makes an assumption that his associations with blood provide insight and understanding into the traumatic event. Colburne seems to use the same logic as Holmes when he reads Brownell’s poetry, that a familiar substance such as blood will always lead us towards comprehension of a terrible scene. Just as Holmes does not question Brownell’s realism because of the poet’s combination of literal and symbolic language to depict the familiar, so Colburne trusts in the same familiar object – blood – to shape his own conception of the hospital. De Forest shows us that however later critics respond to Brownell’s use of language, the response of the sailors aboard the *Hartford* reflects how soldiers also process the violent scenes of the war.

The hospital scene also returns to another familiar convention of blood. While the incident with the color-corporal’s wounded head shows that not all blood is fatal, here in the swamps of Louisiana “human nature could hardly survive such a hurt in such a season; nearly all the leg amputations at Port Hudson proved fatal” (261). Here, the blood on the wounded men does point to death. The differentiation does not matter, because all of these men will die, regardless of the details of their injury. Critic Lisa Long connects De Forest with the goals of the United States Sanitary Commission to argue that the field hospital shows the author’s “efforts to eradicate individual attachments and their struggles with debilitating personal histories” which allows a focus upon mass treatment of large populations (88). She argues that with every amputee condemned to death, De Forest makes the individual injury unimportant because the focus of the field hospital – and the larger sanitary and medical efforts of the Union – cannot concern itself with these single wounds. The pile of limbs and pool of blood would seem to embody this effacement of the individual

and emphasize instead the sheer scale of casualties that require medical attention on a massive scale. In this reading, blood continues to provide a way to conceive of the scale, if not the scope, of combat, but in a different register than the reading above. The many tropic associations of blood enable De Forest to simultaneously depict these two reactions in a scene at once gory but also devoid of death or surgery.

De Forest's handling of the multiplicity of meanings adds resonance to the many images of liquidity in these chapters. With blood presenting such a panoply of associations, De Forest turns to water to represent the efforts to comprehend – and even heal – the wounded at Port Hudson. Images of liquidity become a sort of counter to the violence evoked by the figure of blood. From the field hospital where he witnesses so many amputated limbs and dying men, Colburne joins “the sluggish current of suffering” that moves down the Mississippi from Port Hudson to the Union hospital in occupied New Orleans” (264). The metaphor of a moving current of wounded men is not all that different from the multiple functions of blood: it suggests the scale and scope of the men staggering away from the front without any direct depiction of their numbers or injuries. Described as flowing away from the battlefield, this river of casualties builds upon De Forest's continual use of blood to represent his shift in the novel away from the flurry of direct violence. The only other combat depicted in the novel – a desperate holdout by Colburne and the Ravenel family at a small Union fort – forbears the sorts of violence represented at Port Hudson. Indeed, the only killing described during the raid occurs when Dr. Ravenel bayonets an unseen Confederate through a gunhole. It is only at Port Hudson and its aftermath that De Forest endeavors to represent the chaos and slaughter of Civil War battles, a fact oftentimes overlooked by modern critics quick to praise De Forest's commitment to “realistic” battle scenes.

As Colburne moves away from the battle, De Forest begins to wash away the reminders of combat. He does this in a quite literal fashion at the New Orleans hospital. Filled with men wounded at Port Hudson, “iced water appeared to be the only exterior medicament in use,” De Forest writes of the medical facility, “and the hospital nurses were constantly drenching the dressings with this simple panacea of wise old Mother Nature” (266). Water creates a stark juxtaposition with the liquid blood that De Forest uses to organize and depict the battlefield. He ties water to healing and recovery and as a natural phenomenon, compared to the unnatural appearance of blood and its concomitant evocation of violence. Cold-water dressings were considered the cutting edge of Civil War medicine. An 1863 manual from the surgeon general of North Carolina notes: “The days of Cerates, Ointments, and Cataplasms has passed, – having been swept into oblivion by the copious streams of Cold Water, with which an enlightened Surgery has comforted and relieved the mutilated victims of a thousand Battle Fields” (Warren 74). Applications of cold water would cause arteries to contract, reducing the flow of blood to open wounds and, surgeons hoped, fending off infection long enough for the wound to heal. Cold water thus became the Civil War’s counter to the wounds figured through figures of blood. De Forest’s hospital scenes and their emphasis upon cold water reveal just how much blood becomes implicated in perceptions of Civil War injuries. If blood marks violence and injury, then water, DeForest suggests, signals a healing process that will wipe away these injuries. It washes away blood and soothes the pain of bullet wounds. Colburne himself comes up with a system whereby “he got a nurse to drive a hook into the ceiling and suspend his quart cup of ice to it by a triangle of strings, so that it might hang about six inches above his wounded arm, and shed its dew of consolation and health without trouble to himself” (266). Colburne uses blood as his

primary figure of comprehension on the battlefield. At the hospital he turns to water as a way to sooth both his brain and his body. The two fluids mirror each other, with blood pointing to all of the injuries in the war, and water to all of the healing in the hospital. Both liquids act as figures that allow the traumatized soldier to collapse injuries – and the effort to heal injuries – into generic categories rather than individualized experiences.

Water becomes DeForest's method for depicting the remarkable resiliency of the human body in the face of horrific wartime casualties. Colburne joins one of the Union surgeons on his daily rounds, and this Dr. Jackson marvels at the body's ability to heal itself. "Great doctor, old Nature – if you won't get in her way. Works miracles – miracles!" (268). The doctor's reliance on the term "miracle" reminds us of the lack of in-depth medical knowledge at the time, the sense that we can understand neither the wound nor the cure. DeForest's apparent use of "correctness and clarity" in the descriptions of both battlefield and hospital rely heavily upon these two liquids in order to comprehend these two scenes of the war that confounded Americans in the military and at home. He relies upon the conventional figure of blood – and its "opposite" of water – in order to provide an impression of clarity that in fact obscures and collapses both wounds and the healing of these wounds.

As perhaps a final reminder of the importance of this figure to a soldier's experiences in the field, DeForest ends the chapter with a letter from Colburne's romantic rival and commander at Port Hudson, an officer by the name of Carter. In this letter, Carter tries to convey the danger posed by Confederate sharpshooters, who could unleash a shot into the midst of the Union encampments at any time. One morning, Carter writes, "a bullet whistled so unusually low as to attract my attention and struck with a loud smash in a tree about twenty feet behind me. Between me and the tree a soldier, with his great coat rolled under his

head for a pillow, lay on his back reading a newspaper which he held in both hands” (269).

Carter’s initial description provides what had been his first understanding of the impact of the gunshot: that it flew harmlessly through the camp and hit the tree. The troops go back to playing cards. Soon, though, Carter looks back at the soldier with the newspaper and

“noticed that there were a few drops of blood on his neck, and that his face was paling”

(269). Only with this signal of blood does Carter’s unit comprehend what happened to the

man: “the ball had struck him under the chin, traversed the neck, and cut the spinal column where it joins the brain, making a fearful hole through which the blood had already soaked

his great-coat. It was this man’s head, not the tree, which had been struck with such a report”

(270). This final scene of Port Hudson reminds the reader that very little of Civil War

violence could be described as correct or clear, at least from the perspective of the soldiers in

the field. Instead they must rely heavily upon blood in order for them to understand what has

happened around them. Carter’s mistaking a bullet hitting a tree instead of a man’s head

seems an appalling error, but once again without the appearance of blood to point to a wound

the soldiers seem almost unable to comprehend the man’s death. Even though Carter writes

of the experience as “a remarkable circumstance,” it shows the extent to which the figure of

blood becomes tied to the comprehension of violence in the minds of soldiers and, in turn, to

representations of the war. Without any apparent blood, the men believed their comrade

alive. When the blood does appear, they understand him to be dead. The liquid enables this

cognitive move. DeForest takes advantage of this same process, using blood to depict the

mass deaths at Port Hudson in a way that seems “clear and correct” yet also collapses

countless wounds into pools of blood that can then be washed away with cooling water.

DeForest's work, and the praise heaped upon *Miss Ravenel*, shows how much we have come to associate with blood a realistic depiction of war, to the extent that it comes to stand in for all the myriad forms of violence seen in the Civil War.³³ Those men who were direct witnesses to such sanguine scenes write in ways that validate Brownell's reliance on the metaphor of "red." A soldier's vision of battle was indeed "red," because this was how the men comprehended the bloody sights around them. If anything, the conviction that DeForest embraces a more "clear" or "truthful" version of the war than his peers leads us to embrace the possibility that blood did, in fact, constitute a central way for the public to understand the scope and scale of Civil War combat. DeForest himself suggests this possibility when he makes blood the key signifier for the troops to identify a dead or wounded comrade. Critics such as Daniel Aaron would be correct to praise *Lady Ravenel* precisely because of its reliance on blood to represent the "truth" of a violent war from a soldier's perspective, even if the purpose of this blood imagery is misread. It speaks to the traumatic nature of the war, and to the depth of our own desire to avoid violence scenes that we embrace DeForest's use of blood as one of the clearest representations of the war.

³³ Daniel Aaron, as another example, writes "of all the novels of the War, De Forest's came the closest to meeting Grant's specification" that accounts of the war be only "truthful history" (180).

CHAPTER 4

FAMILIAR WAR

Introduction: San Francisco, California

The headline of the May 23, 1892 *New York Times* article conveys a sense of shock: “Sharp Criticism of Mr. Howells. Ambrose Bierce of San Francisco Says Harsh Things of Him.” Calling Bierce “the leading critic and literary light of the Pacific,” the *Times* piece reports on Bierce’s May 22 *San Francisco Examiner* editorial in which he attacks both literary realism and Howells’s brand of realism in particular. To Bierce, the representations found in Howells’s writing fail because of a lack of imaginative properties. “Absolutely destitute of that supreme and sufficient literary endowment, imagination,” he writes of Howells, “he does not what he would but what he can; takes notes with his eyes and ears, and writes up as does any other reporter.” From Bierce these are damning words.³⁴ The result of Howells’s mere journalistic approach to depicting the world, Bierce argues, is that “he has seen and heard nothing worth telling.” For Bierce, a combination of a lack of direct experiences – Howells spent the Civil War in Europe, for example – and an unwillingness to move outside of his own cultural circle renders Howells’s prose altogether inane.

³⁴ In his *Devil’s Dictionary*, Bierce repeats his disdain for journalism as a mode of realism, describing a “reporter” as “A writer who guesses his way to the truth and dispels it with a tempest of words” (286).

This blistering attack comes from the man whom Howells labeled “one of the country’s three best writers” (qtd. in Morris 4).³⁵ That Howells would offer such praise suggests that Bierce’s own literary efforts fell more in line with Howells’s vision of realism than Bierce would like to admit. Bierce’s literary talents and experiences on the Civil War battlefield would seem to make him an ideal candidate to write the sorts of wartime stories of which even Howells would approve and, as we saw in the previous chapter, felt America desperately needed. One of the first to heed Lincoln’s call for troops at the opening of the war, Bierce volunteered with the Ninth Indiana in 1861. He fought primarily in the Western theater until January 1865. As Daniel Aaron notes, “of all the literary combatants of the Civil War, none saw more action or steeped himself so completely in the essence of battle” (183). After the war Bierce headed to San Francisco where he became an accomplished editor and, as the *Times* article suggests, earned the respect of writers on both coasts. Yet Bierce’s own literary attempts at representing the war – written mostly in the 1880s and 90s – show a marked ambiguity towards the writer’s ability to evoke realism and draw from personal experience. On the one hand Bierce refers to war writing in his short story “George Thurston” as “observations entered in red,” suggesting a faith in the sort of “eyes and ears” reporting he identifies with Howells’s mode of realism. At the same time Bierce’s stories evince a deep skepticism that his observations depict anything more than the efforts of soldiers to comprehend war, rather than a realistic depiction of the war itself.

Bierce’s quarrels with Howells provide an opening to study how post-war writers grappled with the challenges inherited from wartime literature. The emphasis on a need for a “new” literature after the war shapes our belief that in the aftermath of the conflict American

³⁵ According to his biographer Roy Morris, Bierce, who had a contentious relationship with Howells, replied “I suppose Mr. Howells is the other two” (4).

writers turned towards Howells's realism and rejected the sentimental romanticism that dominated much pre-war writing.³⁶ Louis Menand's claim that realism and the philosophy of pragmatism emerge because the Civil War wiped away Northern culture and created a "clean slate" embodies this mentality. Alice Fahs, for one, has pointed out the flaws in this thinking, noting in her study of soldiers' consumption of literature that "although it has often been suggested that the war acted as an impetus for the development of realism in American letters, popular wartime literature reveals that the experience of war acted as much – if not more – as the impetus for the development and wide dissemination of adventurous romance" (226). We have already seen in earlier chapters how even outside of this specific genre the conventions of romanticism inform American efforts to represent the violence of war. Bierce's skepticism – cynicism even – of realism invites us to further challenge this narrative and identify how the conventional romantic depictions of violence in antebellum America maintain enormous influence in postbellum literature. The emphasis Bierce places on the imagination suggests the imaginative functions of the romance used by Stowe and Hawthorne maintains an unconscious presence in the supposedly new literary forms. Even as realism claims to subscribe to an original and rigorous depiction of real individual lives and experiences, it does so through the unacknowledged use of the familiar conventions that informed previous decades' representations of violence. This final chapter will argue that Bierce's war writing reveal realism's supposed rejection of the romantic and the sentimental in favor of "the real" as a way of depicting the war is itself a traumatic repression of the Civil War experience.

³⁶ Nancy Glazener has documented the many forms of this cultural and literary push towards realism, including critic Henry Giles's call for "veracity and reality" in literature (96) and James Russell Lowell's observation that after looking "death in the eye for four years" the nation has moved towards a more mature – i.e. realist – literature (283). Daniel Borus explores the many declarations and resistances of the realist movement.

The role of the romance and the imagination in Bierce's literature has occupied shifting terrain in the critical appraisals of his work. Edmund Wilson sees Bierce as a traumatized man "constantly obsessed with death" such that "Death may perhaps be said to be Ambrose Bierce's only real character" (622).³⁷ Written in the midst of the Cold War, Wilson's book seeks out the perspectives of men and women "who have left their personal records of some angle or aspect" of the Civil War so that we might better understand the individual experiences of combatants and civilians as the United States faces off against the Soviet Union (X). To this end, Wilson finds Bierce's literature inadequate as a record of the war, more akin to gothic tales than realistic accounts of war. "Bierce's short stories are often distinguished from the hackwork of shudder magazines," Wilson complains, "only by the fact that the shudder is an emotion that for the author is genuine" (624). Wilson does not question that Bierce witnessed terrible scenes during the war. He believes that Bierce's representations of these scenes constitute failures both of form – Wilson places high value on the novel whereas Bierce wrote exclusively short stories and essays – as well as genre. Wilson sees Bierce's stories as saturated with elements of the romance, with gothic images and emotional evocations rather than the depictions of actions and reactions that Wilson values.

By the same token, Daniel Aaron's assessment of Bierce a decade later also compares the veteran to an antebellum romantic rather than a postbellum realist. The war, Aaron writes, "left him a casualty, permanently warped and seared like one of Hawthorne's damned seekers who is crushed rather than tempered by revelation" (190-191). Both critics share a dismissal of Bierce's imaginative representations of war, and they foreground this failure as a

³⁷ Wilson cites Clifton Fadimon's 1946 introduction to *The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce* as his source for the Death-as-a-character reading of Bierce.

result of Bierce being unable to come to terms with the traumatic scenes of the war. Aaron writes that “the War remained for Bierce hardly more than a lurid stage set for a private drama” (192), dismissing Bierce’s literature as more therapeutic process than representation of combat. He argues that Bierce’s “tales of war are not in the least realistic; they are, as he doubtless intended them to be, incredible events in credible surroundings” (184). Like Wilson, Aaron evinces skepticism that any element of the romance should be effaced from realistic depictions of the Civil War, and thus Bierce’s literature reads as the anachronistic struggles of a broken soldier to voice his own fears, from which readers can gain little but a shudder.

More recent critics find Bierce’s focus upon a soldier’s “private drama” to constitute his success as a writer of the Civil War. Their view of Bierce understands his fiction as one of the first psychological explorations of the violence of modern warfare, which puts him as the progenitor of a line of war writers including Crane, Cummings, Dos Passos, and Vonnegut (Morris 2). This line of criticism denies that Bierce deploys conventional romantic figures, instead emphasizing the mimetic qualities of Bierce’s prose. What Wilson sees as a failure to depart from the conventions of the gothic becomes reconfigured as a mimetic depiction of the experiences of Civil War soldiers. These critics maintain a strong commitment to realism’s pursuit of veracity, proposing that the mimetic depiction of the actions and emotional reactions of soldiers remains free of romantic conventions or language. If anything, this more positive generation of Bierce critics rejects even more strongly Bierce’s call for the imagination to act as the nexus of literary pursuits. Much like their nineteenth-century predecessors, the emphasis shifts to Bierce’s ability to get at the “truth” of the war through a depiction of the psychological experiences of soldiers. His biographer Roy

Morris, Jr argues we should approach Bierce's war tales as literary revelations about warfare: "in an age of gilded ritual and reflexive cant overlying a slippery social network of hypocrisy and greed, Bierce had given himself the task of telling the truth" (7).³⁸ Or as Michael Schaefer phrases it, Bierce strives to develop "a more accurately descriptive, more realistic form of combat discourse" (xiv) that represent the troubled psyche of the soldier, rather than a grand history of the Civil War.³⁹ Bierce needed twenty years to write, they argue, because it would take that long to identify a way to represent a Civil War experience that was, in essence, "new." Schaefer's study of Bierce and fellow veteran De Forest claims the purpose of war stories are not external description but "a truthful account of what the Civil War soldier did and felt" (15). This transforms the confused and traumatized literature perceived by Wilson and Aaron into a realist depiction of a soldier's perceptions and the sights around him. Lawrence Berkove calls Bierce's work "a visible and honest representation of the true state of things, and in common with the stoics of old, Bierce believed *vivere est militare*, that to live is to be a soldier" (38). These critics' focus on the individual soldier's experience of battle transforms Bierce from a romantic obsessive into a realist writer akin to De Forest.

This critical kinship, though, fails to acknowledge De Forest's own reliance on familiar romantic figures seen in the previous chapter, which in turn also effaces Bierce's use of these figures in order to convey a soldier's conception of battle. It undermines Bierce's emphasis upon the imagination as a vital tool for the efficacy of literature, especially when it comes to representing the violence of war. Recall the work of the trauma theorist Elaine

³⁸ This branch of Bierce criticism can be traced back to H.L. Mencken who frequently asserted his friend's propensity of truth-telling. "Right or wrong," Mencken declared, "Bierce always stuck to the truth as he saw it" (qtd. in Joshi & Schultz xxiv) and he praised Bierce's war stories in multiple reviews.

³⁹ Asked "to write an accurate history of the war," Bierce replied "the fools would probably not understand a word of it" (Duncan & Klooser 21).

Scarry, who makes a convincing case that the very experience of warfare threatens to overwhelm the mind with pain and injury. The suffering associated with violence “seems to become the single broad and omnipresent fact of existence” (55), a palimpsest that covers over any other reaction, which would seem to obviate realism’s claims for representing the experiences of soldiers. Scarry proposes that to overcome this traumatic threat requires the imagination – the same feature that Bierce claims as central to his literature. “Imagination is, in effect, the ground of last resort” (166) to construct a familiar mental world that allows for the soldier to reconstruct a stable world and continue to survive in the midst of violence and pain. This imaginative work takes the form of envisioning that which the soldier already knows, the familiar images and ideas that allow him to process the trauma of violence that threaten to otherwise overwhelm the mind. The need to turn to that which we already know points to the importance of familiar romantic figures in depictions of the Civil War. The conventional depiction of these figures provided antebellum and wartime readers with familiar depictions of violence that allowed them to grasp the horrors of the war, a fact which does not escape Bierce the Civil War veteran.⁴⁰ When critics praise Bierce as a realist who presents a mimetic representation of a soldier’s experience, they lose sight of the vital role of this imaginative function and mistake the familiar romantic figures for a realistic depiction of a soldier’s experience.

Cathy Davidson’s *The Experimental Fictions of Ambrose Bierce* presents a more complex and subtle approach to Bierce. She proposes that Bierce’s prose rebels against the possibility of depicting a soldier’s experience. In a pointed rejection of the critics who associate Bierce with post-bellum realism and its attendant mimetic ideals, Davidson argues,

⁴⁰ Adrian Hunter notes, “in his writing, the successful soldier is only reckoned with in terms of his outward conduct: indeed, his very identity as a combatant depends on not investigating his mind. Conversely, the soldier who fails to perform adequately in battle has his failure explained in terms of his excessive ‘inwardness’” (284).

“the conventional devices of late-nineteenth-century realism could hardly serve an author who set out to weigh the limitations of conventional views of reality” (2). She describes an author who creates a language-based play on narrative in order to echo the psychological confusions of soldiers in the field. Bierce’s genius, Davidson argues, is his ability to use language to bring the reader into the same state of uncertainty as his protagonist. In this way Bierce turns representation of the war experience into an impossible task that his own fiction echoes:

It should also be noted that the very indeterminacy within Bierce’s texts requires the reader to enter into not just the experience of the protagonist but also the creation of the text itself. The reader, as much as the protagonist, finds it necessary to fill in the narrative events – to decide just what it was that happened. This indeterminacy marks Bierce as a precursor of contemporary experimental fiction.

(21)

Davidson believes that Bierce creates depictions of the trauma of Civil War battle by inculcating the same disorientation and confusion that accompanies the violence of the war, rather than attempting to depict the violence itself. She draws an important distinction, though, between representing the experiences of a soldier – the work of realism and Bierce’s advocates – and the effort to replicate the sense of disorientation and confusion that the soldier has experience. “Bierce’s texts hold up a mirror, but it is not a mirror held up to nature. It is a mirror held up to consciousness – with all its conscious, subconscious, and unconscious tricks and turnings” (122). She uses the phrase “mimesis turned inside out” to suggest Bierce’s turn away from a representation of the world and towards a replication –

through language and thus always incomplete – of the inner world of the protagonists. The external world becomes largely irrelevant in Davidson's reading of Bierce, because his language-based representations of the world assume an indeterminacy that forecloses the mimesis praised by realists and later critics such as Morris and Schaefer.

At the same time, Davidson still maintains a connection with these critic through her use of the term "mimesis" and its suggestion of a stable object Bierce cogently attempts to represent, even if she concedes that Bierce does so through the play of language and narrative. Yet Bierce seems far more interested in examining the imaginative tools that soldiers use to attempt to process the horrific experiences of the war, rather than attempting to represent the soldiers' internal or external experiences. He demands that we drop the concern with mimesis and instead shows us that the world of the Civil War was never understood beyond a spectrum of constructed views that are constantly in flux. In this way Edmund Wilson and Daniel Aaron both seem correct to identify in Bierce a traumatized soldier struggling to represent a battlefield which he does not comprehend himself. Wilson's description of lurid tales worthy only of "shudder magazines" is insightful, for it points to Bierce's representations of violence through familiar imaginative conventions such as the blood stories found in the penny press. Bierce resists the concept of mimesis because he describes an unstable and variable set of experiences which the soldier does not grasp from moment to moment. In its place he locates the conventional depictions of romantic figures used by soldiers to comprehend violence from one moment to the next. Oftentimes these conceptions are contradictory and even dangerous, which Bierce attributes to the traumatic reactions of soldiers in the middle of battle rather than the failings of language or literary style. Bierce does not assign himself the task of representing a soldier's world. Instead he

puzzles over the many familiar figures that a soldier's mind uses in order to assemble and edit a traumatic experience.

Studying the Historical Present Tense: A Field North of Atlanta, Georgia

James Whitcomb Riley once complained that Bierce had given himself the task of “editing God” (qtd. in Morris 7). Riley’s riposte meant to critique Bierce’s penchant for attacking nearly every author he encountered, including Riley himself.⁴¹ From the perspective of his fellow Hoosier, Bierce was perpetually dissatisfied with representations of the world around him, and he never shied from voicing this opinion. What Riley misses – what so many of Bierce’s critics seem to miss – is that for Bierce the real editor is the human mind and the need to turn to familiar conventions in order to apprehend the world. Bierce did not want to edit God; he wanted writers to realize that their own minds were too unreliable to make mimetic claims about God’s world. Barely a paragraph can pass by without Bierce’s protagonists struggling to comprehend even the most basic stroll through the woods. To make sense of the chaos – or threat of chaos – around them, soldiers in Bierce’s tales rapidly deploy familiar conventional devices. When it comes to military success and insight, the strategy seems woefully inadequate. Bierce’s depictions of combat, though, portray men with no other option for psychologically navigating their way through the war. To elucidate the conceptual challenges and strategies Bierce employs, I will first turn to the tale “A Son of the Gods: A Study in the Historical Present Tense.” The grammatical term in the subtitle is an apt label for the intertwining of conventional figures already familiar to the soldiers in the

⁴¹ Riley, like so many authors, had good reason to be bitter towards Bierce. As Riley’s biographer Elizabeth Van Allen notes, “in Bierce’s opinion, Riley’s poems were a disgraceful butchering of the English language, if the dialect Riley used could be classified as English at all, and his work was devoid of the style, technique, and language necessary to make his writings true poetry” (9).

story – the historical – with the uncertain threats facing these traumatized soldiers – the present tense. It points to the imaginative processes that soldiers use in order to understand a deadly threat, and how the experience of these repeated threats makes them increasingly reliant on the familiar figures from their past in order to comprehend their world. At the same time, Bierce shows how this survival strategy of the soldiers comes at the price of gross military mistakes, undermining any claims that the historical present tense is a form of mimesis. Instead Bierce casts it as desperate attempt to make sense of a violent world, and drawing attention to the shifting imaginative figures upon which soldiers rely to survive the war.

“A Son of the Gods” demonstrates the extent to which Bierce believes the human mind edits its experiences on the battlefield. The Union troops have been through an interminable series of battles and traumatic confrontations: “Yesterday, and for many days and nights previously we were fighting somewhere; always there was cannonading, with occasional keen rattlings of musketry, mingled with cheers, our own or our enemy’s, we seldom knew” (56).⁴² The vague description – “many” and “somewhere” and “occasional” – creates a sense of uncertainty. The troops have no idea of their location or any concept if their side is winning or losing. Meanwhile the gunfire seems free-floating and unconnected to a specific enemy. The shots provide constant reminders of the battlefield, even as the troops marching through the woods cannot know if they pose a threat. Nor do the men know when they will next confront pain and death. The cavalcade of uncertainty in the opening of the story establishes the importance of the men’s imagination in order to apprehend their

⁴² The editors Russell Duncan & David Klooster, along with Bierce biographer Roy Morris, all place “A Son of the Gods” in the midst of the 1864 campaign against Atlanta, where Bierce was eventually wounded by a shot to the head. Morris classifies it as part of a “trio of short stories set in the Atlanta campaign” that attempt to capture a brutal summer campaign during which “in both camps, the soldiers lived with a pervasive sense of impending doom” (87).

situation. Since they cannot know when they will next face violence, they must formulate their own expectations based solely on the familiar conventions already present in their own mind. This is Elaine Scarry's point, that the imagination is the ground of last resort in order for a traumatized mind to process the world. Unable to find meaning as they march across an unknown land to face an unknown enemy, the troops must rely upon their past knowledge in order to grasp their present state.

The central conflict of "A Son of the Gods" emerges from the inability to know if the threat of violence is imminent or a product of the imaginative efforts of the troops. The Union troops have reached a clearing, on the other side of which could be more empty woods, or a Confederate force waiting in ambush.⁴³ "Behind the trees – what? It is necessary to know" (56) and this need for insight, for knowledge about what awaits the Union troops, drives the action of the story. The army must probe the woods to determine if their fear of the woods is a by-product of their imaginative response to the traumas they have faced for uncounted days, or a prudent tactical precaution. The troops have no ability to perceive a threat, but they can imagine a mass of Confederate soldiers hiding in the dark forest. They turn to the past – the familiar figures – in order to make sense of the present situation. The irony is that violence also offers the solution to this puzzle. "The natural and customary thing to do is send forward a line of skirmishers. But in this case they will answer in the affirmative with their lives" (62). As often happens in Bierce's stories, the Union commander must respond to uncertainty with more violence, in this case marching his troops right at the woods to see if the enemy will fire and kill them. "What a price for gratified curiosity! At

⁴³ Davidson suggests that in several stories Bierce "uses the symbol of the dark wood much the same way as did Hawthorne (whose work Bierce much admired). A character passes into an uninhabited natural world in which the responses of civilized humans no longer obtain" (28). In "A Son of the Gods" the opposite movement occurs, as the soldiers emerge from the dark woods and confront a deadly human military situation.

what a dear rate an army must sometimes purchase knowledge!” (62). Bierce describes a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the soldiers’ turn to the imagination in order to comprehend their violent world which leads them to send more men towards confrontation. He undermines the concept of a “real” war by pointing out how the very act of attempting to grasp the military situation is achieved through further bloodshed, making the pursuit of knowledge about the battlefield only an exercise in more violence. If the Confederates are indeed hidden in the woods, many of the skirmishers will be shot and killed. The survivors will have undergone yet another trauma, and the next line of trees they encounter will also be seen through the historical present tense: understood through the imaginative recollection of the past even as they confront a new and unfamiliar present.

The title character comes up with a different tactic than the standard march of a line of skirmishers. A young officer, his idea takes advantage of the power of familiar romantic figures in a soldier’s comprehension of war, and seeks to use it to fool the hidden Confederates. The officer dresses himself “in full uniform, as if on parade. He is all a gleam with bullion – a blue-and-gold edition of the Poetry of War” (58). In this garb he presents himself as the familiar romantic vision of a soldier. His comrades laugh at his initial appearance. Mounted upon a white steed and a red saddle-blanket, the troops recognize his dress as an emblem of conventional romantic figure of a zouave, soldiers who would wear flashy colors to parade down the street. The men also know that such dress tends to inspire gunfire from the enemy: “No one who has ever been in action but remembers how naturally every rifle turns toward the man on a white horse; no one but has observed how a bit of red enrages the bull of battle” (48). These elaborate military uniforms, familiar to Americans from countless descriptions and prints as the ideal Civil War soldier marching to glory,

become an immediate target. The appearance of the romantic image of a soldier draws the attention of every rifle, as though this familiar scene becomes the focal point of the violence of the battle.

The Union troops soon perceive that such a response to a familiar figure is precisely the young officer's hope. The description of the officer as a gleaming edition of the book of War, dressed so as to elicit gunfire, reveals the crux of his plan. In presenting himself as a romanticized figure of war, the young officer will attempt to lure the hypothetical Confederates into shooting at this emblem of war. He will present to the tired and traumatized Southerners a manifestation of what the popular imagination depicts as a Union soldier. The reality of Civil War combat meant that soldiers rarely directly encountered each other. Instead there are the elusive unknowns described early in the story. A soldier never sees the enemy, but only imagines them: "he thinks of them as inaccessible; and, catching an unexpected glimpse of them, they appear farther away, and therefore larger, than they really are – like objects in a fog. He is somewhat in awe of them" (48). On a daily basis each side can only imagine what the other looks like, and thus they must use the conventional figures from the past to understand the present. The officer bets that the sudden appearance of what the Confederates imagine as the image of a Union soldier will elicit an outpouring of gunfire. This, in turn, would reveal their position with the loss of only one life instead of a whole squad of skirmishers. His hope is to seize upon the historical present tense such that the familiar qualities of his uniform will trick the Confederates into shooting despite the tactical advantage they maintain by holding their fire.

The stratagem shows the power which romantic figures have over the minds of the soldiers, and the importance of such figures to conceptions of the Civil War. To any rational

mind the Confederates should never fire at the young officer, and yet the historical present tense is such a pervasive perspective that his own troops quickly become enraptured by the scene. Like the Confederates across the field, the Northerners lose track of the present situation as they become enmeshed in the familiar romantic figure before their eyes. As they watch him, the Union troops who at first laughed find themselves reveling “How glorious! Gods! what would we not give to be in his place – with his soul!” (59). Such sentiments reveal how the romantic conception becomes the mode through which the soldiers respond to the trauma of the battlefield. Their wish “to be in his place” betrays a near instantaneous forgetting of the reason for the young officer’s ride in the first place: to save their lives. Each of them perceives the scene in this familiar romantic mode and wishes to nullify his sacrifice by sacrificing himself, making his death a zero-sum game.

The men’s desire to take the officer’s place in the line of fire also reveals how familiar romantic figures perpetuated violence; men who perceive the battlefield through the historical present tense might disregard the traumatic dangers of rifle and cannonfire and thus become more effective soldiers. In retrospect this makes the romantic perspective of battle seem downright dangerous, a sort of delusion that led men to their deaths while at the same time forming the dominant mode through which soldiers and civilians understood these military deaths. This suggests one reason why post-bellum culture turned against the romance and denied its viability as a representational strategy. If these romantic figures could so mislead men so as to wish to die, then surely they could not have a place in a movement towards realism. Put another way, conventional romantic representations of violence became so inculcated with the violence of the Civil War that post-bellum efforts at establishing a new literature and culture suppress the importance of these figures to wartime experiences.

Bierce's stories point out, though, the central place romanticism takes in the comprehension of the war. He forces us to confront the fact that unstable and variable perceptions of the battlefield are shaped by the imagination's turn to familiar and conventional romantic figures.⁴⁴

Thus the Union men become so enraptured with the young officer that they lose track of their own physical being and yearn to take on his "glorious" soul. "Ten thousand hearts keep quick time to the inaudible hoof beats of his snowy steed. He is not alone – he draws all souls after him; we are but 'dead men all'" (60). The soldiers care neither for their external world nor their own psychological state. What Bierce points out they do care about is the imaginary hoof beats of the officer's white horse. This repetition of representational strategies thirty years after the war shows the influence they still held over the veteran and writer Bierce. The description of the young officer's appearance begins with the snow-white horse, and as Bierce relates the soldiers' view of his ride towards the woods the horse becomes the primary figure through which they comprehend his mission. Hidden Confederate troops, their location discovered, unleash a barrage of lead at the officer. The narrator and other soldiers can only guess at his survival based on how they perceive the horse's movements. Rolls of smoke erupt from the woods and "before the rattle of the rifle reaches us he is down. No, he recovers his seat; he has but pulled his horse upon its haunches" (251). Far enough away from the shooting that they see before they hear a shot, the men have no idea if the officer survives until they see the horse on the move. Bierce's series of declarative sentences convey a sense of oscillating uncertainty on the part of the

⁴⁴ Bierce's story "One Kind of Officer" describes what happens when troops disregard the search for knowledge. Reminded repeatedly by their Lieutenant that they are to never question a command, a Union artillery battery follows orders and opens fire through a fog bank, blasting at its own troops.

narrator and his comrades.⁴⁵ Shots are fired and the men wait to understand what has happened by virtue of the horse and its rider. They swing between horror at the violent eruptions from the woods and hope as they watch the white horse continue to navigate the no-man's-land between North and South.

The shift in emotional response echoes the important work of the conventional figure of the horse in wartime literature. As we saw in the representations of Sheridan's 1864 ride to Winchester, during the Civil War the horse provided a way to navigate the apparent paradox of how eulogies and patriotic fervor simultaneously perpetuating violence while mourning the dead. A key feature of the figure of the horse is the way it enables indirect suggestions of violence. Rather than depict the dangers facing the young officer, Bierce here describes how soldiers rely upon the animal in order to make sense of the threats on the battlefield. His emphasis upon the horse harkens to the war literature of Herman Melville, Thomas Read, and other writers who represented the mixed emotions of mourning and patriotism through the romantic figure of the animal. In doing so, Bierce demonstrates the importance of such a figure to the soldier's understandings of the battlefield. A conventional depiction of the horse as a romantic figure that obscures the violence of war does more than provide for a poet's representation of battle; it shapes how the soldier himself experiences combat. Bierce's use of the historical present tense as a way of understanding the value of romantic figures reminds us of their therapeutic function in the midst of traumatic battles. The battle-weary

⁴⁵ As Schaefer points out in discussing a Maine volunteer's account of Gettysburg, "use of the first-person plural also reveals a[n]...important aspect of veteranship" (13). As soldiers become more experienced, they adopt a "sense of community with the other members of his unit" (13) and utilize the first-person plural form to discuss actions and even feelings. Therefore while Grenander argues that the story "is written in the first person by a staff officer who observes the action" (123) nothing forecloses the possibility that the story is told by a private or other enlisted man on the line.

Union troops of “A Son of the Gods” latch onto the figure of the horse such that this becomes the primary mode through which they conceive of violence.

So enraptured are the men by this scene, so central is it to their perception of the battlefield, that they forget their own existence. “The missiles themselves come bounding through clouds of dust into our covert, knocking over here and there a man and causing a temporary distraction, a passing thought of self” (251). The ephemeral nature of these moments of self-awareness suggest just how much the familiar past constructs the world around them during this engagement. Bierce describes men who forget that they are even in danger because they have engaged so fully with the familiar figure of the horse and the brave romantic soldier atop the animal. The external world becomes subsumed by the figures through which Bierce’s soldiers – including the narrator – construct their world. When the horse and then the officer do fall, the troops evince a classic sentimental response. In a deep outpouring of emotion, they begin to cry and then furiously charge the Confederate lines. “Our men attempt to cheer; they are choking with emotion; they utter hoarse discordant cries; they clutch their weapons and press tumultuously forward into the open” (252). This charge undercuts the goal of the officer who just sacrificed himself so that the men would not charge into the open. Exposed in the field, the vanguard suffers the same fate as the Son of the Gods, but the men seem unconcerned because they exist in the historical present tense. The charge is an emotional outpouring at the death of the figure of the horse and rider. So familiar is this scene that the Union commander appears unsurprised at his men’s suicidal reaction to the death of the officer. “Not a sign of feeling in his face; he is thinking. Again he directs his eyes forward; they slowly traverse that malign and awful crest. He addresses a calm word to his bugler” (252). The commander is described earlier in the story as a regal horseman whose

appearance and pretensions inspires his men by the romantic cast of his actions. Even looking through his field glass “seems to dignify the act; we are all addicted to it” (248). As an officer who knows and values the importance of evoking the emotional response of the historic present tense in his battle-weary men, the commander grasps what has happened to his men and patiently waits for the surge of emotion to wear off. At last the trumpet signals force the men to recognize the futility of their charge and “the lines face about and sullenly follow, bearing their wounded, the skirmishers return, gathering up the dead” (252). Even when forced to return, it seems that these traumatized Union troops would prefer to charge to their death than reform lines and confront the wounded and dead that resulted from yet another skirmish. They sulking men carrying the dead suggest why the familiar romantic figure of the officer offers such an important and even appealing mode for them to comprehend yet another day of combat and death.

In an 1897 column, Bierce lets slip a curious fabrication he made to “A Son of the Gods.” An editor of the original *Life* magazine argued that while the young officer’s sacrifice seems glorious and worthy of a drama, “it is not war” (qtd. in Duncan & Klooster 254). The editor could not believe that such an event occurred, and like many realists he declaimed the elements of the romantic in the story. Such figures and emotions have no place in representations of war, he suggests. Bierce responded that “well, I saw that thing done, just as related. True, the ‘Son’ escaped whole, but he ‘rode out’ all right, and if matters had been as we all believed them to be, and as he thought them himself, he would have been shot to rags” (254). As part of his defense of the story, Bierce reveals that the young officer did not in fact die. It raises an intriguing question, namely if the troops nonetheless charged the Confederate lines even if the steed and officer did not die. More importantly, though, Bierce

suggests that the actual life and death does not matter in his representations of the Civil War so much as the emotional responses and methods for comprehending the battlefield experienced by the soldiers. He validates that the historic present tense means men processing the battle such that they worry not about the life or death of a soldier *per se*. The focus instead rests on the imaginative responses of men to familiar conventional figures so that they can evade the traumatic scenes that confront a Civil War soldier every day. The romantic figures of the horse and the young officer carry a familiar meaning that aids the troops' mental survival on the battlefield, not their physical well-being.

Carriers of Significance: A Creek South of Chattanooga, TN

The philosopher Giorgio Agamben can further elucidate the selection of the familiar by those who seek to represent these traumatic experiences, such as the men on the battlefield in "A Son of the Gods." In his work *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben uses the term *umwelt* to describe the external world that can be experienced by a human or any other living being. Coined by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, it inscribes the knowable world for that living being "that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements that he [Uexküll] calls 'carriers' of significance'" (Agamben 40). No being's *umwelt* necessarily links to another being's because carriers of significance do not inherently match up. "A unitary world does not exist, just as a space and a time that are equal for all living things do not exist" (40) and, as many of the Civil War writings we have seen suggest, just as a single Civil War narrative does not exist. In fact, Agamben, (following Heidegger) argues that part of the human experience consists of our ability to identify a vast range of *potential* carriers of significance and select which carriers hold meaning for us. The human mind makes choices

over how we experience the world.⁴⁶ The external world does not control our experience of the world. Instead the human mind shapes the understanding of the battlefield around us.

Agamben's articulation of these carriers of significance illuminates how both the Confederate and the Union troops could be so easily seduced by the familiar romantic conception of the young officer in "A Son of the Gods." If the work of comprehension depends on the mind's choices, then the familiar ways of understanding violence in American culture become all the more important. The conventional depictions of these romantic figures hold such relevance during the Civil War because these form the most likely sources for the mind to base its selection of carriers of significance. Put another way, the soldiers – and the narrator – of "A Son of the Gods" select the white steed as the focus of their perception of what happens on that field. They do so not for any intrinsic reason, nor do they do so as a standard collective choice. Instead each of these American soldiers seems to make the same choice of a carrier of significance, because the figure of the horse occupies such an important role in the representations of violence in American culture. They have all heard poems and seen lithographs of horses as patriotic figures in ways that efface the direct depictions of violence. Thus the group of individuals each choose the same familiar because of its importance as a conventional romantic figure.

Realism as articulated by Howells and then later critics – both antagonistic and sympathetic of Bierce – valorizes the carriers of significance that enable a mimetic conception of the world. That is to say, they praise representations of the human mind that depict a unitary world of space and time, namely one that mimetically recreates the soldier's

⁴⁶ M.E. Grenander argues that Bierce's reliance on the short story emerges from a desire to show "the sudden, sharp crisis that interested him" as opposed to the "plot on the grand scale" (78). These moments of crisis, Grenander writes, are "the ultimate existential anxiety" when a character must decide for him or herself how to understand a world full of "forces that are frequently dark and mysterious" (77).

individual experiences on an external Civil War battlefield. Bierce, though, points out that external mimesis is not the key factor when a soldier assembles his carriers of significance. A turn to the familiar and the conventional depiction of figures is, in fact, representative of the soldier's world while fighting in the war. Bierce posits that a soldier's carriers of significance will oftentimes value the romantic and the familiar, no matter how dark or delusional that may seem to an outside observer. He does not value mimesis in this way, but instead Bierce emphasizes the carriers of significance that allow a soldier to survive and form a comprehension of the battlefield, even if from the perspective of realism or contemporary critics these carriers of significance seem outmoded, wrong, or inaccurate. Note that among the many implications of this approach to Civil War representations is that Bierce does not, in fact, argue for a failure of language. In fact, he proposes that language itself is perfectly suited for the precise exploration of the Civil War.⁴⁷ The flaw comes when we assume that this language should describe our pre-determined vision for how soldiers experience the war, rather than the imaginative and familiar carriers of significance upon which men rely in the face of traumatic encounters. What has become an *a priori* conception of how to represent war threatens our understanding of one of Bierce's most famous war tales, "Chickamauga."

James Dawes calls Bierce's story "the summary image of Civil War representation" which eludes language and demands instead a silence in response to the traumatic events of the war (7). I argue, though, that this perspective undermines the tale's testimony to how we perceive the horrors of Civil War violence. The protagonist of the story is a six year old child who has wandered from his nearby home. As a deaf-mute – the "reveal" at the end of the story – the child is unaware of the conflict raging around him and struggles to comprehend

⁴⁷ "Language, n. The music with which we charm the serpents guarding another's treasure" (*Devil's Dictionary* 77).

the parade of dead and dying soldiers whom inadvertently lead him back home. Dawes and others use the ending of the story to mark the moment of the child's realization of the horrors of war. I argue, though, that Bierce's story represents a child and an adult narrator who have both been traumatized throughout the story. By using what appears to be a child's naïve perspective, Bierce shows how the human mind reacts to the aftermath of battle – not just when the child stumbles upon his dead mother at the end of the tale but from the moment he encounters the dead and dying soldiers. The naiveté of the child allows "Chickamauga" to approach the depictions of violence without preconditions as to how these depictions should refer to an external world, but this does not mean the child does not witness traumatic conditions throughout the story. "Chickamauga" thus becomes another study as to how humans choose carriers of significance – to use Agamben's term – in order to understand Civil War battle. The choices are striking in the way the child continuously turns to familiar figures, as does the narrator who takes on the role of a war veteran struggling to articulate what the child does not understand. Bierce represents the battle of Chickamauga not through mimetic depictions of the world but rather by describing the imposition of familiar concepts by both child and narrator in order to create their own understandings of the battle and survive the traumatic experience.

Just as in "A Son of the Gods," very little direct depictions of violence occur in "Chickamauga." Only the aftereffects of war appear in the text. This begins with the child's familial history, which "had for thousands of years been trained to memorable feats of discovery and conquest – victories in battle whose critical moment were centuries, whose victors' camps were cities of hewn stone" (189). A generational legacy of domination and soldiering leaves unspoken the conflicts across three continents. The story wraps the results

of battle from antiquity until the Mexican-American War into abstract phrases such as “followed the flag” and “war and dominion.” Such terms make his family’s long tradition of participation in Anglo-Saxon warfare seem a badge of honor, one that the boy’s father, a veteran of the Mexican-American War, proudly passes on to his son. Not just a point of pride, though, they show a tradition of wiping away the actual violence implicit in battles across Europe, Africa, and America. These memorial phrases foreshadow the juxtaposition between the glorified description of war preached by the boy’s father and the gruesome scene the child will personally encounter at Chickamauga. His father’s phrases help establish the familiar conceptions of war that themselves create the conditions for Chickamauga to become so traumatic to the boy. The father raises his son upon “military books and pictures and the boy had understood enough to make himself a wooden sword” (189). When confronted with the horrors of a Civil War battle himself, the boy struggles to pick out carriers of significance that allow him to understand the aftermath through these romantic figures taught by his father. The failure to do so explains in part why the child represses the possibility of a battle raging around him. He cannot find a way to reconcile the childhood representations of war and violence with what he encounters in the woods, and thus he does not assign a military meaning to these scenes.

As he wanders into the woods near Chickamauga, swinging his wooden sword and fighting off imaginary hordes, the boy manifests an idyllic view of violence’s combat. He steps across a stream “and fell again upon the rear-guard of his imaginary foe, putting all to the sword” (189). This is harmless child’s play, the translation of his father’s books and stories into a juvenile romp through the woods. The boy’s game highlights the idealized and romantic tradition of war that provides the initial basis our perceptions of violence and its

apparent disconnect from actual combat. An encounter with an animal marks the first moment when the unknown imposes itself upon the boy, and he finds himself confronted with a challenge outside of his familiar paradigm:

Advancing from the bank of the creek he suddenly found himself confronted with a new and more formidable enemy; in the path that he was following, sat, bolt upright, with ears erect and paws suspended before it, a rabbit! With a startled cry the child turned and fled.

(190)

Why does the rabbit so terrify the child? Later in the story, when the child encounters a wounded soldier, the narrator explains that “at least it had not the long, menacing ears of the rabbit” (190), which suggests that the utter unfamiliarity of the frightened lagomorph unnerves the child. The startled animal’s appearance – standing on its hind legs and ears straight up – does not mesh with the boy’s usual conception of a rabbit. Confrontation with the unfamiliar strips the mystique from the boy’s adventure and instead interposes a sense of danger. Instead of the “safety” of a romantic war narrative, the boy finds himself threatened by a strange creature. As a result of the strangeness, the boy is confronted with the unfamiliar, which in turn terrifies the child. Without a familiar figure onto which he can append this experience, the boy responds with sheer terror.

Shaken and fearful, the boy falls asleep and unwittingly slumbers through the passage of an army. Upon awaking, he wanders through the woods and stumbles upon the wounded and dying soldiers retreating from the battlefield. The boy’s confused impressions of the wounded soldiers form the descriptive power of the story, along with the efforts of the narrator to elucidate on the images that the boy fails to understand. The narrator’s depictions

of the wounded and dead of Chickamauga suggest the horror that surrounds the boy. Faced with a cavalcade of horrific and bloody scenes, the boy turns to that which he already knows from his antebellum childhood on a southern plantation. The veteran narrator, meanwhile, employs a not altogether different set of romantic images in order to depict the aftermath of what historian James McPherson calls “the bloodiest battle in the western theater” (672).⁴⁸ The boy’s speculations allow Bierce to illustrate how vital the familiar is to our ability to apprehend traumatic experiences.

When he sees the first moving soldier, “he took it to be some large animal -- a dog, a pig -- he could not name it; perhaps it was a bear” (191). This is a case of mistaken identity, as we quickly learn that the being is in fact human. To identify the being as something other than human forecloses, however briefly, the impact of the war upon humans. It delays the realization of what is crawling through the woods outside Chickamauga. Since the boy’s conception of war does not include the painful struggles of wounded men, he initially perceives the soldier as a bear. The boy chooses the carries of significance – “large,” “strange,” “moving” (191) – that he can assign to a more familiar object than a grievously wounded soldier. Even as the boy begins to recognize “something in form or movement of this object” (191) that tells him this is not a bear, Bierce’s language emphasizes the unfamiliarity of the scene to the boy’s mind. While Bierce’s narrator intervenes to describe the waves of men coming towards the boy, he uses language that maintains the same reliance upon the familiar figures of animals used by the boy. Through a striking series of sentences

⁴⁸ McPherson recounts how the Battle of Chickamauga shocked even the Confederate victors. He cites North Carolina General Braxton Bragg being “more appalled by the wastage of his own army than impressed by the magnitude of his victory....Bragg’s immediate concern was the ghastly spectacle of dead and wounded lying thick on the ground. Half his artillery horses had also been killed” (674).

that begin with “they,” Bierce depicts the suffering men in terms that perpetuate the boy’s familiar animal figures as the central motif to represent the aftermath of Chickamauga:

They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by the dozens and by hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible.

(191)

The first sentence’s simple declaration belies the description throughout the rest of the paragraph. In this way Bierce suggests that even as the boy perceives their basic identity as men, the child still grasps the scene before him using the romantic conventions passed on to him by his father. Unable to walk upright, emerging like a horde from the woods, they move in biblical pairs, or small groups. They do not move in unison as a trained army does, and seem to have no united purpose, but merely an “unnatural” appearance. Very little seems human in these lines, and the paragraph makes clear the boy’s confusion about these beings.

At the same time, the narrator makes clear that at least some of the perceptions of the wounded men through familiar animal figures stem from this veteran soldier’s conception of the scene, not the boy’s. “Not all of this did the child note; it is what would have been noted by an elder observer; he saw little but that these were men, yet crept like babes” (191). Cathy

Davidson refers to the oscillations between the narrator's voice and the child's perceptions as "narrative double vision" through which "Bierce regularly contrasts the child's inchoate idea of the world about him with the older narrator's more experienced formulations...the more perceptive reader can also partly reverse that process and see, at times, the limitations of the narrator's wisdom in terms of the child's innocence" (37). The narrator suggests that it requires a keen, careful observer to note the suffering of the men, and yet the language which links the soldiers with animals points to his shared reliance upon the familiar figure of the suffering animal. Much as Stowe uses animal imagery to alleviate the depictions of slave violence, the narrator alleviates the depiction of Chickamauga's violence by turning to the same images of animals rather than ravaged human bodies.

Indeed, the passage above bears a similarity to Stowe's efforts at indirectly depicting the ravages of a slave's existence on Legree's plantation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. When "the weary occupants of the shanties came flocking home" (300), Stowe represents these abused and exhausted slaves as animalistic in their existence. As Tom looks around him:

he saw only sullen, scowling, imbruted men, and feeble, discouraged women, or women that were not women, – the strong pushing away the weak, – the gross, unrestricted animal selfishness of human beings, of whom nothing good was expected and desired; and who, treated in every way like brutes, had sunk as nearly to their level as it was possible for human beings to do.

(301)

Stowe forbears a depiction of the physical and sexual assault, the starvation and the disease that cuts down the slaves at Legree's plantation. Instead she uses the figure of the animal to suggest the myriad sorts of violence and physical depravation suffered by these men and

women. I do not suggest that Bierce draws directly from Stowe's scene. The opposite, in fact, as Stowe's passage demonstrates a convention for indirectly depicting a traumatic scene that Bierce's narrator and boy both turn to in response to their own traumatic experience. With this sort of double narration, Bierce's scene suggests that the child's comprehension is, in fact, just as insightful and accurate as the narrator's efforts at representing the struggling soldiers. While the boy may not grasp the traumatic scene before him, the narrator relies on the same familiar figures as the boy does, which themselves come from a romantic antebellum and wartime tradition for obviating the most violent aspects of violence. Thus as Davidson suggests, the child's perspective draws our attention to the conventions that shape the narrator's more experienced understanding of the battleground, which brings us to question the assumptions as to how we as readers impose preconditions for representations of trauma.

Blood, too, becomes an important figure for the boy's recognition and simultaneous avoidance of the suffering he finds all around the woods. He moves among the injured, "going from one to another and peering into their faces with childish curiosity. All their faces were singularly white and many were streaked and gouted with red" (191). His initial conception of this red is not an association with violence but rather of other non-violent memories. These red visages "reminded him of the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them" (192). Such an apparent misidentification seems to shock the narrator, who calls attention to "the dramatic contrast between his laughter and their own ghastly gravity" (192), but it is a contrast made possible by the metonymic perception that the narrator himself uses to describe the wounded men. The narrator forbears a direct depiction of the soldiers' wounds, preferring instead to more

often use the term “red” as a metonym for the substance that covers the men’s faces. In his repression of the traumatic scene before him, the child creates an additional layer of meaning between the blood and how the boy comprehends this color. Like the narrator, the boy picks up on the color streaked across the men’s faces, but he perceives this as a carrier of significance that points to clowns at the circus, rather than wounded men. Both responses enact an avoidance of the traumatic state of these walking wounded, and while the narrator expresses outrage at the child’s conclusion, Bierce’s dual narrators bring to light the arbitrary nature of both perspectives and the way in which familiar conventions will inform our understanding of any traumatic scene. While the adult narrator implicitly claims a more mimetic assessment of the external conditions of Chickamauga, Bierce casts the child’s perception as built upon the same conditions, just with a different set of carriers of significance. Thus the familiar sensational figure of blood shapes the boy’s apprehension of the wounded just as much as it does the narrator’s, but in a way that points to two radically different conceptions of the men. Both narrators in this story imaginatively respond to the violence of Chickamauga, and Bierce’s language illuminates the intersecting and diverging representations of the battlefield created by their use of figures familiar from antebellum times.

This becomes even more apparent when the boy decides that the wounded soldiers are not just “merry spectacle” (192), but active entertainment for his benefit. In another return to the antebellum conventions of representing slavery, this southern child recalls “he had seen his father’s negroes creep upon their hands and knees for his amusement – had ridden them so, ‘making believe’ they were his horses” (192). The boy continues to understand that the soldiers are human, yet wishes to pretend they are animals in the same

way he would play at his family's slaves being animals. His decision to perceive the soldiers as slaves and therefore treat them as animals layers multiple examples of familiar romantic responses to violence within a single scene. The child avoids conceiving of the wounded soldiers' injuries by conceiving of them first as slaves, itself evocative of the ways the child's southern antebellum upbringing effaces the suffering of African-Americans held in bondage. The move to then treat these supposed slaves as animals further represses the violence of the soldiers by turning to a figure long used to indirectly depict the violence wrought upon slave bodies.

Here Bierce again forges links between pre-war depictions of slavery and post-war depictions of violence. He presents questions as to how the former shape our understanding of the latter. Born out of a romantic tradition that enables the boy to treat slaves as horses, does the boy's use of this tradition in order to understand a horrific battle somehow diminish or invalidate his perceptions? Put another way, Bierce here challenges the reader to dismiss the boy's imaginative response to the trauma as somehow inappropriate even as the child creates this imaginative response from the same antebellum traditions that inform many representations of the Civil War. Indeed, the adult narrator quickly adopts the boy's perspective in some sense, depicting the soldier as a horse as well when the wounded Confederate "flung the boy to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done" and turns around to reveal "a face that lacked a lower jaw" (192).⁴⁹ The graphic scene then combines both blood and animal imagery by depicting the man's wounds as giving him "the appearance of a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast by the blood of its quarry" (192). As before, the narrator's depiction of the horribly wounded Confederate draws from

⁴⁹ As Chickamauga was a major Confederate victory in the Tennessee campaign, the advance of the soldiers' "more fortunate and now distant comrades" (193) suggests that these are wounded Confederates falling back from the line of advance.

the same conventions as the child, only with a gruesomely different representational effect. Although our impulse is to acclaim the adult narrator's depiction as the mimetic representation of Chickamauga's aftermath, the reliance on familiar figures by both perspectives calls into question any single comprehension of the battle. In his non-fiction account "A Little of Chickamauga," Bierce expresses this same ambiguity. He calls himself "hardly more than a boy in years" but simultaneously asserts that he "had seen enough of war to give me a fair understanding of it" (195). Written nine years after his short story, Bierce could hardly have failed to note his own juxtaposition and embrace of a boy struggling to make sense of war and a grizzled veteran who believes he has a "fair" comprehension of the battlefield.

At the close of "A Little of Chickamauga," Bierce reflects upon the different conceptions of Chickamauga for those who witnessed the battle as opposed to those who rely upon representations of the conflict:

To those of us who have survived the attacks of both [Confederate General Braxton] Bragg and Time, and who keep in memory the dear dead comrades whom we left upon that fateful field, the place means much. May it mean something less to the younger men whose tents are now pitched where, with bended heads and clasped hands, God's great angels stood invisible among the heroes in blue and the heroes in gray, sleeping their last sleep in the woods of Chickamauga.

(199)

Bierce does not argue that the younger men who have gathered to celebrate the anniversary of Chickamauga have a different conception of the battle because of problems of language or

representation. Instead he points out that the carriers of significance of each person will necessarily be different, and that for veterans such as him each spot on the battlefield carries an emotional meaning assigned because of the violent circumstances that led them to those woods. This is a sentimental conception of Chickamauga, an association of romantic figures – the fallen hero – as a way for Bierce and others to understand the violence of one of the most gruesome battles in the war.

His approach to how we experience and represent Civil War combat should inform how we read the much-discussed final scene in “Chickamauga.” After wandering through the woods, the child comes across a burning farmhouse, which he slowly begins to recognize as home. In the yard, by the light of the fire, he finds his mother. Her head has been blasted away by a stray shell. The penultimate paragraph of the story documents the child’s response and reveals the “twist” which explains how the child managed to sleep through the battle of Chickamauga:

The child moved his little hands, making wild, uncertain gestures. He uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries – something between the chattering of an ape and gobbling of a turkey – a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil. The child was a deaf mute.

(194)

Although the narrative twist is the child’s status as a deaf mute, the scene draws the attention of James Dawes and other critics for its apparent assertion that war ultimately cannot be articulated in anything other than the incomprehensible “language of a devil.” And yet both the child and the narrator turn to familiar figures to represent the aftermath of battle throughout the story, which should signal that both these characters have been engaging –

and repressing – the horrors of combat from the time the child awoke. Often overlooked are the reasons why the narrator perceives the child in such animal-like terms. Just as he did to describe the crawling soldiers earlier in the story, the narrator finds himself confronted with a traumatic event, in this case a child crying over the maimed body of its own mother. This is an inversion of the classic definition of the sentimental scene as described by Rousseau, who, recall, defines sentimentalism as the outpouring of sympathy for a mother whose child has been torn from her by wolves (Fisher). Such an echo should give us pause. What we may read as a mimetic depiction of a child's tortured cries employs the same familiar figure of the suffering animal that has appeared throughout this story of repressed traumatic scenes. Dawes reads this scene as "a nightmare vision of violence overseeing the end of all human speech" (7). It seems a strange irony that such an apocalyptic verdict grants the narrator the precise ability that Dawes claims the story forecloses – namely the ability to directly depict a traumatic experience – which declares the end of human ability to represent traumatic experiences.

Instead, the narrator's turn to animal imagery suggests his own efforts to comprehend the reactions of the child. These efforts harken to the myriad of familiar figures used to represent the aftermath of battle throughout the story. The animal imagery used to depict the child's traumatized shouts should draw our attention to the reliance upon the familiar as a strategy for enabling the reader to comprehend this scene. Ostensibly about the impossibility of representing the horrors of war, the final passage itself draws from the same romantic conventions used throughout the war (and afterwards) to both understand and represent the Civil War. Bierce places the narrator's imaginative description of the boy's trauma as a counter-weight to the boy's own response to his mother's death. The narrator does not seem

concerned with a mimetic account of the boy's mental condition, but rather selects the carriers of significance – the boy's screams and gestures – and places them in a familiar context that allows the reader to grasp some of the horror of the scene. In this way Bierce argues for two different perspectives on the scene – the child's and the narrator's – and refuses to validate one perspective over the other. "Chickamauga" does end with an incoherent scream, but it is a scream that emerges from the traumatic experience of Bierce's narrator, who imaginatively responds to a scene he perceives through familiar romantic figures.

Conclusion: New York City, New York

A month after Bierce's attack on William Dean Howells and the lack of imagination in realism, a New York newspaper *The Sun* savaged Bierce's book of war stories; "chewed it into small wads" (63) in Bierce's words. The crux of the critique argues that Bierce's tales lack any adherence to facts or reality, that the incredible scenes described could not possibly have been believed by troops fighting in the war. "We will venture to say that no such erroneous impression could have been produced in the Federal army, or in any portion of it," writes *The Sun*, arguing that the troops would instead have understood any scene "as the facts warranted" (64). This reads as a screed for realism, arguing that the romantic and gothic images found throughout Bierce's stories did not have any place in a factual – and therefore realistic – representation of a Civil War encounter. The critic denies that an army, or a portion of an army, could ever be so deluded as to charge a Confederate line over the death of one officer, or mistake a falling cavalry officer for an apocalyptic "Horseman in the Sky" as Bierce relates in another short story by the same name.

In his response, Bierce offers two correctives for the civilian “*Sun-dog*.” First, he points out, in the horseman story it is only a single man who perceives the plunging officer (whose horse had been shot by a sniper and charged off a cliff). Bierce affirms that his representations of Civil War combat focus on the experiences and imaginative responses of individuals. While he does at times ascribe reactions to entire armies, he notes that it is the single soldiers who make up these armies whose psychological reactions he seeks to depict. Second, Bierce quotes a line from his story, and notes “the officer was overcome by the intensity of his emotions” (64). Here Bierce asserts that whatever the facts may seem to warrant, the comprehension of Civil War engagements does not depend on these facts. It is the emotional response of a soldier, and the imaginative tools he uses to process – or repress – those emotions that dictates how we understand the war. His rebuttal to the *Sun* critic argues for the emotional reaction of individual soldiers as the primary way through which we should represent and understand the Civil War, not a reliance on facts as we think we know them.

That Bierce needed to argue this point in 1892 points to the repression of romanticism in America in the post-war years. For the writer who had seen four years worth of fighting, there was no question that individual perceptions of the war were fluid and dependent upon imaginative uses of familiar romantic figures. Literary critics and writers, and American culture as a whole, attempted to move away from this perspective, and the stories of Bierce also suggest why this might be so. As Bierce shows, these familiar depictions of conventional romantic figures formed a vital part of the American experience of the war. They became one of the primary routes for Americans to understand and represent the traumatic scenes of combat. With these familiar figures tied to such awful scenes, Americans attempted to move

away from the modes that had become inculcated in the violence of the war. Realism became an effort to push away the traumatic experiences and depictions of the war, and embrace a new form supposedly free from the associations with horrific battles such as Shiloh or Chickamauga. As Bierce illustrates, though, these conventional depictions could not be repressed, and like all repressed traumatic memories, they returned again and again to American literature, forming the ways in which we conceive of what it means to represent an unfamiliar war.

EPILOGUE

RETHINKING ROMANCE TO REALISM

The April 1862 issue of the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* arrived in New England homes on the heels of newspapers recounting the Battle of Shiloh. Both events impacted aspiring American writers at the time. Shiloh shocked Americans with its hitherto unimaginable body counts. It inspired Herman Melville to write the line “what like a bullet can undeceive!” in his poem “Shiloh: A Requiem.” One Illinois soldier wrote his father “We have at last had our wish for a hard battle gratified and never again do I expect to hear the same wish from the lips of our men” (qtd. in Masur 33), and Americans began to realize that the war would be far more bloody than they expected. The issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* that followed a few days later had a less immediate impact on American perceptions of the world, but it was arguably more important to the history of American literature. The cover article by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “Letter to a Young Contributor” provided advice for aspiring writers of all sorts, including a poet by the name of Emily Dickinson in nearby Amherst who took advantage of Higginson’s article to begin a correspondence with the editor and soon-to-be Union officer.

Although historians cite Shiloh as the final death knell for “any romantic ideals that had led Americans to believe glory and honor were to be found on the battlefield” (Masur 33), Higginson’s essay points to a more complicated relationship with warfare in April 1862. “The fact is patent,” he tells his readers, “that there is scarcely any art whose rudiments are

so easy to acquire as the military” (409). Higginson does not seem impressed by the representational challenges of the Civil War. To the contrary, he argues that military matters pose no more difficulty than any other field, that we should view “war as the accidental” which occupies our attention for the moment but which will not irrevocably alter the work of poets (409). Writers already have the ability to conceptualize and respond to the war, Higginson suggests, and they must not allow themselves to forget “how remote will the present soon appear! while art and science will resume their sway serene, beneath skies eternal” (410). The temptation is to view Higginson’s bravado as the last gasp of antebellum romanticism, already nullified by the carnage at Shiloh, much less Antietam, Gettysburg, or Petersburg. What if, though, we assume that Higginson – a man of deep literary sensibilities and abiding interest in the progress of the war – is not merely the mouthpiece of a fading generation but is, like the poet in Amherst, also eager to “tell all the truth but tell it slant?” That is, what if we lend credence to Higginson’s confidence in American letters to respond to the national crisis and depict the events of the war, even if those depictions appeared in a form that later readers might find unsatisfactory?

Our popular conception of postbellum realism exists as a counterpoint to the romanticism espoused by Higginson. “Despite the immense variation among American realisms,” writes Daniel Borus, “all have in common the mission of demystifying the romantic and supernatural codes to the narrative that held sway through the Civil War and immediate postwar years” (19). We have seen the deep sense of dissatisfaction that Americans had with their war literature immediately after the conflict, and this unease extended to all of the arts as the nation attempted to rebuild. This is the call for a “new” that I discussed in the introduction, the belief that Higginson was in fact wrong and that the Civil

War marked a break from a literature – and indeed many forms of art – which led Americans to in large part repudiate the representational styles of their antebellum and wartime compatriots. Gregory Pfitzer draws attention to how “the 1860s and 1870s witnessed a ‘rage for facts’” (103), which he sets in opposition to the “idealized forms” of romanticism. Realism would embrace this desire for facts with a mantra that emphasizes accuracy and mimetic representation, giving a more “real” sense of the world: “Aiming for a direct impression that corresponded to the way in which readers experienced their lives, realism in the United States generally avoided the temptation to invest things with contrived language. Using the most neutral language possible allowed things to speak, as it were, in their most natural voice” (Borus 22). The implication, of course, is that “contrived language” – and Borus’s own terminology is a telling commentary on his own stance towards realism – describes the antebellum romanticism that the Civil War obviates and the new America rejects in favor of the hunger for facts and accuracy of experience.

The previous chapter showed how one of the most respected postbellum war writers embraces rather than rejects some of the romantic conventions found in antebellum and wartime texts. It seems that many Americans shared Bierce’s continued interest in the romantic. Pfitzer traces the unfortunate career of historian Benson Lossing, whose *Pictorial History of the Civil War* met with poor sales even as it attempted to embody realist principles. It seems Lossing struggled with what Pfitzer calls “adjudicating between the desire to report the war with visual and literary accuracy and the need to obscure or embellish aspects of it for the sake of popular taste” (116). We see again the sense of a dichotomy and a rejection of Higginson’s thesis, as though the only possibility of either visual or literary accuracy comes at a rejection of any romanticized or obscured representations of the war.

Given what we now know about the problems of direct depictions of traumatic experiences, this seems an odd concern. It speaks to the ways realism seeps into our critical conversations, but this particular anecdote also suggests that the American public had less faith in the demands for realism than its advocates then and now. Rather than a sense of the Civil War sweeping away – to use Louis Menand’s phrase – the intellectual paradigms of the North, we see here a negotiation between a need for realism and a popular taste that saw continued value in the familiar conventions that had allowed soldiers and civilians to navigate the violent conflict.

Perhaps part of the reason Higginson expresses such confidence in literary representations of the war comes from his knowledge that Americans already had at their disposal an approach that navigated the rigors of traumatic experience quite well. In a telling comment, Pfitzer argues that Americans embraced realism in part because “the failure to confront reality being viewed as an important contributing factor to the war itself” (102); romanticism posed a dangerous erasure that had led America into the Civil War and should be replaced by the accuracy of realism.⁵⁰ Yet this assumes that the antebellum representations that “look away” from reality do so through accident or shortcoming, an assumption we have inherited from post-bellum realism’s ascension in literary and critical circles. Maurie McInnis provides a compelling example of how this was not the case. She quotes a scolding letter from Harriet Beecher Stowe to her London publisher after the English edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeared with the image of a female slave being whipped as its cover:

⁵⁰ I hasten to add that while I use Pfitzer’s chapter as a demonstration of the fetishization of realism, I also have tremendous respect for Pfitzer’s work and his willingness to engage with young scholars. I consider it a great fortune to have spent a week with him at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA and wish to thank both him and the AAS staff for providing important inspiration for this epilogue.

It was my desire in this work as much as possible to avoid resting the question of slavery on the coarser bodily horrors which have constituted the staple of anti-slavery books before now....Hence you will observe that there is not one scene of bodily torture *described* in the book – they are *purposely* omitted. My object was to make more prominent those thousand worse tortures which slavery inflicts on the *soul*.

(qtd. in McInnis 51-52)

Stowe's letter claims both awareness and agency in her "failure" to directly depict the violent reality of slaveholding. For Stowe, the lack of a realism with regard to the experiences of slavery's physical tortures and traumas is nothing short of an intentional choice designed to enhance, not avoid, the experience of a slave's reality. To the extent that Stowe's novel "looked away" from reality, it did so as a conscious choice and with a mentality that the romantic conventions used throughout her book would in fact make for a more compelling representation of slavery.

McInnis's research shows that Stowe did not make her choice in a vacuum, but rather joined a large body of abolitionist writers who sought to move away from efforts at representing physical trauma towards an emphasis on romantic conventions. She notes, "beginning in the 1840s, antislavery materials and published slave narratives increasingly employed a novelistic approach that relied on the sentimental language of emotional loss caused by family separation" (48). This is an important change from when "early American abolitionist materials were, for the most part, polemical productions intended to shock their readership with graphic (both in word and image) recountings of the barbarities of slavery" (45). The shift *away* from the graphic imagery – in both senses of the term – towards a

romantic style does not seem a retreat away from the horrors of slavery. The 1840s coincides with the catalyst of the abolitionist movement in America. These abolitionist writers instead express a deep faith in the ability of romantic conventions and figures to represent slavery in ways that graphic imagery could not. If anything, Stowe's comment and the larger trend in which she participates asserts the superiority of these indirect depictions of slavery.

Why, then, did post-bellum America – or at least post-bellum American intellectuals – push against the romance with such ferocity and in a way that leads us even today to question the efficacy of romantic figures for indirect depictions of violence? Why does Higginson's argument seem so naïve to readers even today, in what we might call a post-Shiloh world? I believe there are two interrelated answers. One comes from Pfitzer's comment that the romance's refusal to look at facts and reality head-on was held culpable in some way for the war. If his thesis is correct – and I believe it is, in part because even today we readily accept the concept that romanticism looks away from reality – then of course Americans would dismiss the literary forms they held responsible for the trauma of the Civil War. I would take Pfitzer's argument one step further and propose that, as this project has shown, the romance's importance to wartime representations made the association with the war's violence even more intimate. If familiar figures of the romance provided Americans the conventions they needed to apprehend and grasp the violence of the Civil War, then to turn away from the romance would allow for an avoidance of the figures complicit, as it were, with that traumatic event. This would be a type of repression, an effort at erasing the conventions of the romance in favor of realism not simply because of a faith in the accuracy of the latter, but also because of the role of the former in conveying the war's horrors. "Vibrations travel faster now," wrote the abolitionist and preacher John Weiss in an *Atlantic*

Monthly article “War and Literature,” a mere two months after Higginson: “men would be foolish to expect that the new life will go journeying in classic vehicles” (683). Despite Weiss’s claim, it was precisely these familiar forms that helped Americans represent the terrible battles that did indeed arrive with startling speed via the telegraph and mass media systems. His impulse, though, that the terrible news of battles would push Americans to embrace new forms of representation seems prescient, but like many others he fails to appreciate the repressive qualities of such a move.

Weiss’s comment also reveals his optimism, like so many others, that the “new life” of America will indeed be a new world. A fervent believer in the Union cause even in these dark days of 1862, Weiss called the conflict “the first truly religious war ever waged” (679). Weiss anticipates the realist movement in his belief that the changes wrought by the war will necessitate a new form of literature, and his faith in the new brings us to the second reason why romance may have fallen from critical favor after the war. As we have seen, the realists believed that they had, in fact, found a form that could confront and directly depict the war’s violence. Realism’s investment in facts, in mimesis and accuracy, meant that it offered a tempting claim to its representational efficacy of the war. The complaints of Howells and De Forest betrays their expectation that realism will allow for depictions of “just what war is,” and the critics who praise Bierce and De Forest for their battle scenes reminds us of the legacy of that belief. The analysis of Bierce and De Forest I have offered shows just how inculcated they are in both romantic conventions and avoiding direct depictions of violence. The persistent belief to the contrary means that realism and its critics can comfortably *claim* a direct depiction of the Civil War. This in itself is a type of repression, though. If the realists believed that they “strove to convey to readers the existence of a reality ‘out there’” (Borus

22), then in doing so they could deny the efficacy of the romance in conveying traumatic experiences such as the war.

Today trauma theory asserts that it is the efforts at indirect depiction that most effectively – even accurately – represent such scenes. In enacting a rejection of romanticism, the advocates of realism overlook this most basic tenet of trauma. Frederic Jameson has recently suggested that this dilemma hovers over any sort of war literature. He speculates that all forms of literary war representation “may be reduced and simplified by the rather different consideration cutting across all of them – namely, the suspicion that war is ultimately unrepresentable – and by an attention to the various forms the impossible attempt to represent it may have taken” (1533). Jameson’s point, writing in the 21st century, is that no form of war writing can overcome the traumatic challenges of warfare from any era. We should turn our attention instead to how this war writing attempts to respond to the challenge. Here, I suspect, is the reason why realism rejects romanticism as a tenable form for representing the Civil War. Romanticism, as we see with Stowe and other abolitionists, is a genre whose writers openly acknowledge their evasions and elisions in an effort to represent traumatic events. Realism, on the other hand, seems to manifest an unconscious evasion of the problems of representation. Its claims of accuracy and mimesis belie the necessary indirection that Jameson implies must exist in all war literature.

Which returns us to Higginson’s advice to young contributors. He posits that after the war the literary representations of military experiences will continue as they have before; that is to say they will continue with the same indirection and representational struggles as existed before the war. In this sense Higginson’s comments seek to reassure young writers that the seemingly immense challenges of depicting the violence of the war do not require an entirely

new form of literature. Even in the aftermath of Shiloh, as it turns out, it is the conventional depictions of familiar romantic figures that will facilitate Americans' comprehension of their violent Civil War.

WORKS CITED

- Aaron, Daniel. *The Unwritten War; American Writers and the Civil War*. New York: Knopf, 1973. Print.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. Print.
- "American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society." *Frederick Douglass' Paper* 27 May 1852. Print.
- Arbour, Robert. "The Not-So-Modern Proto-Modern: The Intertextual Geography of Herman Melville's Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*. 8.1 (2010): 39-65.
- Barrett, Faith. "'Words for the Hour': Reading the American Civil War Through Poetry." *Words for the Hour": A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*. Ed. Faith Barrett & Cristanne Miller. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005. 1-24. Print.
- Barrett, Faith, and Cristanne Miller, ed. *Words for the Hour": A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005. Print.
- Becker, Stephen. "On John William De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*." *Classics of Civil War Fiction*. Ed. David Madden and Peggy Bach. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991. 23-36. Print.
- Behling, Laura L. *Gross Anatomies : Fictions of the Physical in American Literature*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008. Print.
- Berkove, Lawrence I. *A Prescription for Adversity : The Moral Art of Ambrose Bierce*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002. Print.
- Bierce, Ambrose. *The Devil's Dictionary*. Vol. 7. New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1911. Print. *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*.
- . *Phantoms of a Blood-stained Period : The Complete Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce*. Ed. Russell Duncan, and David J Klooster. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. "Freud: Frontier Concepts, Jewishness, and Interpretation." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 113-127. Print.
- Borus, Daniel H. *Writing Realism : Howells, James, and Norris in the Mass Market*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Print.
- Brownell, H. H. *War-lyrics and Other Poems*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866. Print.

- Caplan, Eric. *Mind Games : American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Caruth, Cathy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 3–12. Print.
- Castronovo, Russ, and Nelson, Dana D. "Fahrenheit 1861: Cross Patriotism in Melville and Douglass." *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*. Ed. Levine, Robert S & Otter, Samuel. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 329–348. Print.
- Cavitch, Max. "American Constitutional Elegy." *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*. Ed. Weisman, Karen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 224–237. Print.
- Claybaugh, A. "Bureaucracy in America: De Forest's Paperwork." *Studies in American Fiction* 37.2 (2010): 203–223. Print.
- Cleghorn, Cassandra. "Chivalric Sentimentalism: The Case of Dr. Howe and Laura Bridgman." *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Ed. Mary Chapman & Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999. 163–180. Print.
- Davidson, Cathy. *The Experimental Fictions of Ambrose Bierce*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Print.
- Dawes, James. *The Language of War : Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002. Print.
- De Forest, John William. *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.
- Dekker, George. *The American Historical Romance*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.
- DeLombard, Jeannine. "'Eye-Witness to the Cruelty': Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass's 1845 Narrative." *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 245–275. Print.
- Diller, Christopher G. "The Prefaces to Uncle Tom's Cabin." *The New England Quarterly* 77.4 (1987): 619–645. Print.
- Duvall, S.P.C. "W.G. Simms's Review of Mrs. Stowe." *American Literature* 30.1 (1958): 107–117. Print.
- Ellenberger, Henri F. *The Discovery of the Unconscious : The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books, 1970. Print.

- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Moral Forces: Read on a Fast Day Appointed by the President of the United States, 13 April 1862." *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843-1871*. Ed. Ronald A. Bosco & Joel Myerson. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001. 274-286. Print.
- Fahs, Alice. *The Imagined Civil War : Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Print.
- "Farragut's Victory at Mobile." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 03 1864 : 380-382. Print.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering : Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. Print.
- Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.
- Foreman, Gabrielle P. "Sentimental Abolition in Douglass's Decade: Revision, Erotic Conversion, and the Politics of Witnessing in The Heroic Slave and My Bondage, My Freedom." *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Ed. Mary Chapman & Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print.
- Foster, Francis Smith. "Resisting Incidents." *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Ed. Nellie Y McKay & Frances Smith Foster. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001. 312-329. Print.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The inner Civil War : northern intellectuals and the crisis of the Union*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ed. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1975. Print.
- . *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Perseus Books Group, 2010. Print.
- Garner, Stanton. *The Civil War World of Herman Melville*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. Print.
- Gilbert, Sandra M, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic : The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. Print.
- Gilmore, Michael. "Uncle Tom's Cabin and the American Renaissance." *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Ed. Cindy Weinstein. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 58-76. Print.
- Glazener, Nancy. *Reading for Realism : The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. Print.
- Grenander, M.E. *Ambrose Bierce*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971. Print.

- Greeson, Jennifer Rae. "The 'Mysteries and Miseries' of North Carolina: New York City, Urban Gothic Fiction, and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 277–309. Print.
- Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America : Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.
- Gura, Philip F. *American Transcendentalism : A History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007. Print.
- Haight, Gordon. "Introduction to *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*." *Critical Essays on John William De Forest*. Ed. James Gargano. Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1981. 106-116. Print.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Murder Most Foul : The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.
- Harris, Brayton. *Blue & Gray in Black & White : Newspapers of the American Civil War*. Washington, DC: Brassey's Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The House of the Seven Gables*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937. Print.
- Hedrick, Joan D. *Harriet Beecher Stowe : A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.
- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. "Letter to a Young Contributor." *The Atlantic Monthly* 10.59 (1862): 401-411. Print.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "Our Battle-Laureate." *Atlantic Monthly* 5.1 (1865): 589–591. Print.
- Howells, William Dean. "Comment on New Books." *The Atlantic Monthly* 77.461 (1896): 422. Print.
- . "Miss Ravenel's Conversion." *The Atlantic Monthly*. 20:117 (1867): 120-122. Print.
- . "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: An Impersonal Explanation." *Selected Literary Criticism*. Ed. Ronald Gottesman, vol. 3. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993. 220-225. Print.
- Jacobs, Harriet Ann. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Ed. Nellie Y. McKay, and Frances Smith Foster. New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2001. Print.
- James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984. Print.

- Jameson, Fredric. "War and Representation." *PMLA* 124.5 (2009): 1532–1547. Print.
- Jones, Anne Goodwyn. "Engendered in the South: Blood and Irony in Douglass and Jacobs." *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones & Susan V. Donaldson. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997. Print.
- Kowalewski, Michael. *Deadly Musings : Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993. Print.
- Laderman, Gary. *The Sacred Remains : American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. Print.
- Long, Lisa A. *Rehabilitating Bodies : Health, History, and the American Civil War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Print.
- Lowell, James Russell. "The Present Crisis." *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*. vol. 1. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873. Print.
- "Lyrics of a Day: or Newspaper-Poetry." *The North American Review*. 104 (1864): 320. Print.
- Kucich, John. *Ghostly Communion : Cross-cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-century American Literature*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2004. Print.
- McGill, Meredith L. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. Print.
- McInnis, Maurie Dee. *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the Southern Slave Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Print.
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom : The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.
- Masur, Louis P. *The Civil War : A Concise History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Melville, Herman. *Published Poems : Battle-pieces ; John Marr ; Timoleon*. Ed. Robert Charles Ryan and Hershel Parker. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009. Print.
- Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001. Print.
- Mitchell, Silas Weir. *The Medical Department in the Civil War*. Philadelphia: Silas Weir Mitchell, 1914. Print.
- Morris, Roy. *Ambrose Bierce : Alone in Bad Company*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1995. Print.

- Murdoch, James W. *Patriotism in Poetry and Prose*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864. Print.
- Neely, Mark E, and Harold Holzer. *The Union Image : Popular Prints of the Civil War North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. Print.
- Nudelman, Franny. *John Brown's Body : Slavery, Violence & the Culture of War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Print.
- Ostrowski, Carl. "Slavery, Labor Reform, and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City-Mysteries Novel." *African-American Review* 40.3 (2006): 493–506. Print.
- Parker, Hershel. "Historical Note." *The Writings of Herman Melville: Published Poems*. Ed. Robert Charles Ryan. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2009. 331–528. Print.
- Pfitzer, Gregory M. *Picturing the Past : Illustrated Histories and the American Imagination, 1840-1900*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002. Print.
- "Phil Sheridan Riding to the Front." *Harper's Weekly*. 8:410 (1864): 706. Print.
- Ragland, Ellie. "The Psychical Nature of Trauma: Freud's Dora, the Young Homosexual Woman, and the Fort! Da! Paradigm." *Topologies of Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Memory*. Ed. Linda Belau & Petar Ramadanovic. New York: Other Press, 2002. Print.
- Read, Thomas Buchanan. "Sheridan's Ride." *The Poetical Works of Thomas Buchanan Read* vol. 3. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1903. 265-267. Print.
- Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance : The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.
- . "Introduction." *The Quaker City, or, The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life*. Ed. Reynolds, David S. Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. vii–xli. Print.
- Richards, E. "Correspondent Lines: Poetry, Journalism, and the US Civil War." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 54.1 (2008): 145–170. Print.
- . "Sentimental." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Fourth Edition*. ed. Roland Greene, et al. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- . "US Civil War Print Culture and Popular Imagination." *American Literary History* 17.2 (2005): 349–355. Print.
- Ritvo, Harriet. "Our Animal Cousins." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15.1 (2004): 48–68. Print.

- Roberts, Jessica Forbes. "A Poetic E Pluribus Unum: Conventions, Imperatives, and the Poetic Call-to-Arms in Frank Moore's Rebellion Record." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 54.1 (2008): 171–198. Print.
- Rodríguez, Jaime Javier. *The Literatures of the U.S.-Mexican War : Narrative, Time, and Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. Print.
- Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty : Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993. Print.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain : The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Print.
- Schaefer, Michael. *Just What War Is: Civil War Writings of De Forest and Bierce*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. Print.
- Scotus, Edmundus. "The Cavalry Scout." *Rebellion Record* 7 (1864): 33–34. Print.
- "Sharp Criticism of Mr. Howells." *The New York Times* 23 May 1892 : n. pag. Print.
- Shi, David E. *Facing Facts : Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.
- Sielke, Sabine. *Reading Rape : The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.
- "Southern Press Review." 1852. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Web.
- "Southern Slavery: A Glance at Uncle Tom's Cabin. By A Southerner." *New York Daily Times* 16 July 1853. Print.
- "The Story Heralded." *Richmond Enquirer* 25 Oct 1864. Print.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Dred : A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. Ed. Robert S Levine. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Print.
- . *Household Papers and Stories*. New York: AMS Press, 1967. Print.
- . *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin : presenting the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded, together with corroborative statements verifying the truth of the work*. Bedford, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1998. Print.
- . *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994. Print.

- Streeby, Shelley. *American Sensations : Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Print.
- Sweet, Timothy. *Traces of War : Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Print.
- Sundquist, Eric J. *Empire and Slavery in American Literature, 1820-1865*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006. Print.
- Talbott, John. "Combat Trauma in the American Civil War." *History Today* 46.3 (1996): 41–47. Print.
- Tompkins, Jane P. *Sensational Designs : The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.
- Travis, Jennifer. *Wounded Hearts : Masculinity, Law, and Literature in American Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Print.
- "Uncle Tomitudes." *Putnam's Monthly Review* Jan. 1853: 97–102. Print.
- Van Allen, Elizabeth J. *James Whitcomb Riley : A Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. Print.
- "Victory!" *New York Times* 21 Oct 1864. Print.
- Warren, Edward. *An Epitome of Practical Surgery for Field and Hospital*. Richmond: West & Johnson, 1863. Print.
- Warren, Robert Penn. "Dark Knowledge: Melville's Poems of the Civil War." *Raritan* 19 (1999): 100–121. Print.
- Weinstein, Cindy. *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-century American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Weiss, John. "War and Literature." *The Atlantic Monthly* 9.56 (1862): 674–684. Print.
- White, Richard Grant, ed. *Poetry Lyrical, Narrative, and Satirical of the Civil War*. New York: The American News Company, 1866. Print.
- Wild, Rosa. "The Empty Saddle." *Harper's Weekly* 7.319 (1863): 86. Print.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966. Print.

Yellin, Jean Fagan. "Written By Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative." *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Ed. Nellie Y. McKay & Frances Smith Foster. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001. 203–209. Print.

Zenas, Haines. *Letters from the Forty-fourth Regiment M.V.M.: A Record of the Experience of a Nine Month's Regiment in the Department of North Carolina in 1862-3*. Boston: Herald Job Office, 1863. Print.