

Reconciliation as Sequel and Supplement:

Drum-Taps *and* Battle-Pieces

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Whitman and Melville could have ended their books of Civil War poems with the close of hostilities, but for both writers an additional movement toward reunification and reconciliation is required to give the war shape and meaning: *Drum-Taps* requires a sequel and *Battle-Pieces* a supplement. In both cases, however, thematic or conceptual completion brings formal disruption: reconciliation is deferred or displaced into a separate section of the text and marked by an all too visible scar or seam. The break in Whitman's text marks the point between wartime conflict and postwar reconciliation, a necessary pivot in what he comes to see as a single temporal and psychological process. For Melville, on the other hand, reconciliation is blocked by the politicized struggle of Reconstruction, a discursive shift that leaves the volume not so much temporally incomplete as structurally flawed. Whitman sees reconciliation as a task that poetry can still accomplish, given time; Melville fears that it may lie beyond the reach of discourse altogether.

Why does *Drum-Taps* require a sequel, and *Battle-Pieces* a supplement? Walt Whitman and Herman Melville could simply have ended their books with the close of Civil War hostilities, but each decides against it. For both of them, something more is needed to give the war shape and meaning: an additional movement toward reunification and reconciliation. But in both cases, thematic or conceptual completion brings formal disruption: reconciliation is deferred or displaced into a separate section of the text and marked by an all too visible scar or seam. Whitman and Melville could, theoretically, have delayed publication of their books in order to better integrate this material, or they could have withheld it for a new volume. But instead, each places sequel or supplement alongside his original text, *with* it but not exactly *in* it.

On one level, this is a small formal puzzle, or a detail of publication history, more often treated by critics as a matter of information than interpretation.¹ But it also suggests the poets' different ways of understanding post-war reunification and recovery. Each moves his text toward closure, but turns away from it in different ways and for different reasons. For Whitman, reconciliation is a psychological or symbolic process that remains separate from the war itself, but still follows from it, as a **sequel**. The term implies a continuing temporal development, in which the line between text and sequel serves as a hinge or transition, not an end. For Melville, on the other hand, reconciliation has been blocked by the politicized struggle of Reconstruction, a continuation of the war in different form. By 1866, the poetic form of *Battle-Pieces* seems not so much temporally incomplete as structurally flawed or defective, requiring a prose **supplement** to compensate for its deficiencies or omissions.² Whitman sees

reconciliation as a task that poetry can still accomplish, given time; Melville fears that it may lie beyond the reach of discourse altogether.

Whitman had been gathering the poems for *Drum-Taps* since the early 1860s (Allen, *Singer* 267), and he had described a “MS book” by that title as early as the spring of 1863 (*Correspondence* 1: 86). By the time he had advertising posters printed in late March 1865, he had been discussing its publication for over a year and a half (Miller, 173; Genoways, “Disorder” 98). In a letter of January 6, 1865, to William O’Connor, Whitman repeatedly contrasted *Drum-Taps* with *Leaves of Grass*: the new project, he wrote, was quite separate from the old, and “superior to” it, emphasizing the artistic “control” beneath what might only seem like “wildest abandon”; the collection was “adjusted in all its proportions” with no “verbal superfluity” (*Correspondence* 1: 246, 247).

Nevertheless, within days after signing a publishing contract on April 1, 1865—by April 9, the date of Lee’s surrender, and certainly after Lincoln’s assassination on April 14—Whitman had already come to see the book as needing revision. He made a number of changes while *Drum-Taps* was in press, deleting ten poems and adding another seventeen, including his first elegy for the President, “Hush’d be the Camps To-day” (Genoways, “Disorder” 102, 109).

Ted Genoways has argued for the importance of economic factors, in particular the high cost of paper, in shaping the printed form of the original *Drum-Taps*. Once printed, the book could not really have been discarded, and the original order of the poems may reflect financial pressures rather than a clear poetic intention. But whether one considers Whitman’s original plan of March 1865 (Genoways’s preference), or the published arrangement, *Drum-Taps* cannot

be said to have an order based on more than parataxis, juxtaposition, or at best, “montage” (Moon 172; Szczesiul 129). The problem goes beyond what Michael Moon describes as “two discordant rhetorics” (173); as Anthony Szczesiul points out, “war poems” are mixed with “unwarlike” ones in both the March and April versions, in ways that “dilute the effect of the war poetry” (129, 130).

Many of Whitman’s subsequent changes, on the other hand, do suggest an emerging thematic and structural intention. He limits the volume’s scope by cutting poems like “Spirit Whose Work is Done” and “Reconciliation,” which make reunification their explicit subject (Genoways, “Disorder” 101-2). Of the pieces he adds, only “Hymn of Dead Soldiers” and “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice” (a revised version of “Calamus 5”) seem to anticipate the restoration of the Union.³ And while “Hush’d be the Camps” speaks of grief at Lincoln’s death, it does not look forward either. Whitman deliberately leaves such matters for the *Sequel*.

Paradoxically, by thus excluding or deferring reconciliation, Whitman gives his now divided text an implicit temporal order. If reconciliation is to “follow from” or “come after” conflict, it requires this temporal, not just paratactic or associative, structure: the violence of *Drum-Taps* must be brought to a close if a restorative sequel is to begin. (It is this sequence—division, conflict, reunification—that will eventually come to structure *Drum-Taps* itself, beginning in the 1871 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.⁴)

One of the things unchanged from the March 1865 “Table of Contents” is the book’s concluding poem, “Not Youth Pertains to Me.” This retention suggests that Whitman reaffirmed, rather than altered, his decision about how to end *Drum-Taps*; the book turns inward, describing not the end of the fighting, but how the war has reshaped the poet: “two

things inure to me,” Whitman writes, “I have nourish’d the wounded, and sooth’d many a dying soldier, / And at intervals I have strung together a few songs, / Fit for war, and the life of the camp” (*Variorum* 2: 528). Wartime experience has changed the poet, but it also serves and validates him. Four years of suffering and death find their conclusion in these “songs.” But Whitman’s description is surprisingly self-effacing: “I have strung together a few songs.” And in his initial version, the songs themselves are seen as limited in both subject and audience: “Fit for war, and the life of the camp,” relevant only to the period of the war and most resonant for the combatants. In both its self-enclosure and its restraint, “Not Youth Pertains to Me” reflects the “diminished sense of self and world” that Betsy Erkkila sees as characteristic of *Drum-Taps* as a whole (222).

“Hush’d be the Camps To-day” was Whitman’s last addition to the book, and it too is notable for its attempts at enclosure and completion. The poem describes Lincoln as already outside time and history—“No more for him life’s stormy conflicts / . . . No more time’s dark events”—a state imitated by the “hush” of the camp as individual soldiers “retire” into silence. As a “dweller in camps,” the poet knows “the love we [soldiers] bore him,” and his voice is to rise from and speak for their “hush’d” ranks. Whitman’s “verse” is directed not toward others, however; he is charged to “Sing, to the lower'd coffin there; / Sing, with the shovel'd clods that fill the grave—a verse / For the heavy hearts of soldiers” (*Variorum* 2: 523). His words accompany and parallel both “the shovel’d clods” and the soldiers’ “heavy hearts,” their weight physically covering and pressing down upon the President’s coffin. It is as if the poem is to fill not just a gap in the text, but also the silence and emptiness left by the President’s death. In anticipating (incorrectly) the date of Lincoln’s burial (its original subtitle is “AL Buried April 19,

1865”), *Hush’d be the Camps*” seeks both to describe and to perform that burial, to make itself the physical and narrative endpoint of the nation’s grief.

The poems of the *Sequel*, on the other hand, reverse this direction, in order to begin the process of reunification. Over twenty-four pages, from “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” through “To the Leaven’d Soil they Trod,” they turn outward from the poet’s consciousness into the physical space of the nation and away from wartime into the future.

“Lilacs” begins at the point where “Hush’d Be The Camps” ends, in stasis and blocked grief. The broken lines of section 2, with their percussive, exclamatory repetitions, are like the words/clods of the earlier poem: “O powerful, western, fallen star! / O shades of night! O moody, tearful night! / O great star disappear’d! O the black murk that hides the star!” (*Variorum* 2: 529). The poem struggles to break free of such repetition, into time and narrative progression. It does so most famously by reversing the burial of “Hush’d Be The Camps” and tracking the redemptive journey of Lincoln’s coffin through the landscape: “Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities, / Amid lanes, and through old woods . . . / Passing the yellow-spear’d wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprising” (530). This movement carries the poem from a single catastrophic moment of loss (the assassination) not to another moment of enclosure (a burial) but through a process of renewal and return, the “lilac blooming perennial” in an “ever-returning spring” (529).

The poet does not simply follow the coffin, however; his path leads him first into fuller darkness and silence, into “the hiding receiving night, that talks not,” where he may encounter death first as an abstraction and then as natural phenomenon (*Variorum* 2: 535). Now the “sight that was bound in my eyes” opens “to long panoramas of visions,” in which the “torn and

bloody” “battle-flags” of the war appear: “I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them, / And the white skeletons of young men—I saw them; / I saw the debris and the debris of all dead soldiers” (538). All the “debris”—material, human, and emotional—of the war can now enter the poem, brought into a structure of survival and recovery. Poet and nation move from private grief to public mourning, and then beyond grief entirely, “passing” beyond the scope of the poem itself.

Of the poems deferred from *Drum-Taps* to the *Sequel*, several describe or enact a similar recovery or transformation, in which the violence of the war is internalized and converted into memory or song. In “Spirit Whose Work is Done,” the “spirit” that has “with muttering voice through the war now closed, like a tireless phantom flitted, / Rousing the land with breath of flame,” is asked to

Touch my mouth, ere you depart—press my lips close!

Leave me your pulses of rage! bequeath them to me! fill me with currents
convulsive!

Let them scorch and blister out of my chants, when you are gone;

Let them identify you to the future in these songs. (*Variorum* 2: 542-43)

The currents of violence are transfigured, given an erotic and emotional charge, in a kiss that convulses and fills the poet with verbal energy. His “songs” will in turn reshape that electric force, “identifying” the war for future readers.

In “As I Lay with my Head in Your Lap, Camerado,” the speaker’s “words” are also “weapons, full of danger, full of death”; the poet has now become the “real soldier,” replacing “the red-striped artilleryman” (*Variorum* 2: 549). He “confront[s] peace, security, and all the

settled laws,” but this is a poetic, not a military project. The poem moves from the past tense (“As I lay . . . / The confession I made”) into the present, as the speaker “resume[s]” an earlier prewar role.

Such movement from wartime into the future becomes a narrative sequence in “In Clouds Descending, in Midnight Sleep.” The poem begins with the “midnight sleep, of many a face of anguish, / . . . the look at first of the mortally wounded,” before its second stanza shifts to “scenes of nature,” in which the dead are buried “after the storm.” In the third and final stanza, both the action and the tense shift from present to past: “Long have they pass’d, long lapsed—faces and trenches and fields” (*Variorum* 2: 550-51). The “now” of this stanza is the postwar period, and these deaths recur only in the survivor’s own sleep, in the refrain, “I dream, I dream, I dream.”⁵

Just as “The Centenarian’s Story” in *Drum-Taps* linked the events of 1861 with the Revolution through memory, so “In Clouds Descending” begins the process of historicizing the Civil War. That process is not a controlled one, however; in 1865, it is still a haunting, an involuntary recollection, not yet the distanced memory described in the poem’s later title, “Old War-Dreams.”

The *Sequel’s* turn outward toward the future is repeated and confirmed in its closing poem, “To the Leaven’d Soil They Trod.” The poet comes “Forth from my [wartime] tent emerging for good, loosing--untying the tent-ropes,” singing not of “war, nor the dead,” but offering a “call” to the “emanative” fields and “endless vistas” of America, “again to peace restored” (*Variorum* II: 556). Their response comes “not in words,” however: “The average earth, the witness of war and peace,” offers only “mute” “acknowledge[ment].” In *Drum-Taps*,

the poet as “Dresser” nourished the wounded. Now “The prairie draws me close, as the father, to bosom broad, the son; / The Northern ice and rain, that began me, nourish me to the end; / But the hot sun of the South is to ripen my songs” (556-57). As in “Song of Myself” and elsewhere, Whitman envisions the poet absorbed by, dispersed into, a nation “restored” to itself.

The poems of Whitman’s *Sequel* thus perform a clearly different function from those of *Drum-Taps* proper. But their gestures of potential recovery and fulfillment are, as I have said, left in a strangely liminal position. Whitman feels that the poems are sufficiently important to delay the initial distribution of *Drum-Taps*, but he nonetheless only appends them to it (Kaplan 300). Both the original volume and its sequel are again included without revision as “annexes” to the 1867 edition of *Leaves*, and are fully incorporated into the volume only after 1871 (Allen, *Handbook* 112).

Betsy Erkkila calls the 1867 *Leaves* the “most chaotic” edition, but there may be something behind this aspect of its disorder (263). The change in direction between *Drum-Taps* and the *Sequel*—its turn away from the battlefield and its shift in perspective from inward to outward—requires a gap or break in which the pivot can occur. And so the *Sequel* must initially stand apart, if only to establish a temporal structure in which a “beginning” can take place. For Whitman in the late 1860’s, reconciliation may indeed be underway, but it can still only be projected, distinguished from the war by a physical separation within the text.

In his prefatory note to *Battle-Pieces*, Melville described most of its poems as composed after the fall of Richmond in April 1865. He may have begun writing them earlier (Parker 194), but the forces shaping the volume are those of 1865-1866, not the year before, and they are quite different from those affecting *Drum-Taps*. Melville's manuscript went to Harper & Brothers in late July of 1866, in the midst of an intense political battle between President Andrew Johnson and Congressional Republicans over the shape and terms of postwar Reconstruction (Garner, 433). This conflict is all too visible in Melville's late revisions: his addition of at least one poem and the final prose "Supplement" whose politics have remained so problematic and controversial.

Battle-Pieces's preface is decidedly evasive in describing the collection's form: the poems, Melville claimed, "were composed without reference to collective arrangement, but, being brought together in review, naturally fall into the order assumed." He wrote that he was "yielding instinctively . . . to feelings" from different sources, "unmindful, without purposing to be, of consistency" (*Published Poems* 3). Melville's multiple negatives ("unmindful, without purposing") notwithstanding, the result is neither a matter of chance nor a single "natural" order. He structured and restructured his materials in several different ways. One organizational principle or literary form succeeds another in the text: poetic chronology and commemoration are followed by annotation and then his prose appeal. *Battle-Pieces* does not so much defer resolution as compulsively and repeatedly attempt it, each form proving insufficient in its turn.⁶

The book's first and longest section is organized chronologically: 43 of its 52 poems are either dated or linked to a specific event, and they appear in a sequence running from 1859 to

June 1865. This part comes to a logical close, according to Robert Milder, with a cluster of retrospective pieces including “The Muster,” “Aurora-Borealis,” and the allegorical “America.” Milder sees the section as tracing a complex arc of “trauma and national reeducation,” in which Melville depicts the nation’s fall into history (*Exiled Royalties* 181-82, 169).⁷

Robert Penn Warren is sharply critical of “America,” but he too notes its structural function in the text: “as its position in the volume *Battle-Pieces* indicates, it is a poem written to resolve—no, gloss over—the very issues raised in the body of the book” (31). Edgar Dryden takes Warren’s reading a step further, describing the poem as a gathering point for echoes of both Milton and pieces from earlier in the volume, echoes that ironize and undercut the allegory but complete the narrative frame (89-94).

This model of narrative completion is, however, followed by “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial.” The 16 poems in this section instead offer images of burial and commemoration, of repeated spatial enclosure or containment (as in Whitman’s “Hush’d be the Camps”). Melville’s preface speaks of the “incidents of the conflict” as “making up” a “geographical” or spatial “whole” (*Published Poems* 3), and here he offers a landscape of graves, marked (in “Inscriptions” or “Epitaphs” [123, 126]) or unmarked (in “uninscribed” or “natural Monuments” [130, 134]). In one way, the “Verses” retrace the temporal progression of the preceding section, but only to disperse it across the space of the nation, from Missouri to Maine, Louisiana, and Virginia, and then finally to bodies lost at sea.⁸

The “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial” might be seen as offering a balance or coda to the first section of the book, combining images of interment and commemoration with the kind of outward movement we saw in “To the Leaven’d Soil They Trod.” But Melville cannot rest

with even this double conclusion. The war's repressed violence returns in "The Scout Toward Aldie," but now in the shapelessness of guerilla warfare, its fallen landscape haunted by the gray ghosts of Mosby's Rangers. In a sense, this poem recapitulates yet again the movement of the book's first section, from naiveté to disillusionment and grief. Unlike almost all of the other battle poems, "The Scout" draws on Melville's own experience, but it lacks the specific dates of the other poems or the locations of the "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial": its setting is somewhere in Northern Virginia, "toward Aldie" (Garner 304-23). And the "verse" is ultimately forced to "turn aside" (*Published Poems* 162), trapped by grief as the Union soldiers had been by a Confederate ambush, and as Whitman's poet had been in the first sections of "Lilacs."⁹

Late in the construction of *Battle-Pieces*, in April 1866 or after, Melville added "Lee in the Capitol." Here he again works from historical fact, Robert E. Lee's testimony before members of the Joint Congressional Committee on Reconstruction in February 1866, but he inserts an admittedly fictional speech making the case for Northern "magnanimity" in victory (*Published Poems* 167). The committee poses the key questions of the Reconstruction debate:

"Does the sad South still cherish hate?
 Freely will Southern men with Northern mate?
 The blacks—should we our arm withdraw,
 Would that betray them? Some distrust your law." (165)

This is the central issue of Reconstruction: in David Blight's words, "how to make the logic of sectional reconciliation compatible with the logic of emancipation" (31). But Lee's speech offers only an indirect or partial response. "How shall I speak?" he asks twice, "Thoughts knot with thoughts, and utterance check" (166). The "natural offspring of this civil war" are "A

desolated land, and all / The brood of ills that press so sore,” but equally natural are the South’s “strong fidelity . . . to the home and to the heart” (166, 168).

The scene ends with the General’s apparent failure and his dismissal by the committee, but Melville adds a final stanza:

But no. Brave though the Soldier, grave his plea—
 Catching the light in the future’s skies,
 Instinct disowns each darkening prophecy:
 Faith in America never dies;
 Heaven shall the end ordained fulfill,
 We march with Providence cheery still. (168-69)

Lee invoked “Nature” in his plea for magnanimity (168), but the poet invokes a faith in Providential history. This is certainly a rhetorical move toward the future, but its “cheery” optimism comes as a sudden, forced reversal of the previous stanza, in which “The past her shadow through the Future sent” (168).

Melville’s explanatory notes (which he ultimately placed between the final poem and the prose “Supplement”) would have marked the physical end of the volume, in a self-reflexive gesture reminiscent of Whitman’s “So Much Pertains to Me.” The notes create a distance between the reader and the war, converting the poems into historical artifacts in need of explanation. The strategy resembles Whitman’s in “In Clouds Descending,” with its controlled movement from past to present and into dream. But Melville’s late additions (“Lee” and “A Meditation”) work against such closure, preventing the conversion of war into memory.¹⁰ Lee

returns from the past, moving from battlefield to capitol, because the conflict has returned as well, transposed from warfare into politics.¹¹

It is here, and for this reason, after at least four different attempts at resolution, that we encounter Melville's "Supplement." This piece, added late, destroys the "symmetry" of the book, as Melville described the effect (*Published Poems* 181). His rationale for the "Supplement" is the same as that for including "Lee in the Capitol": "events have not yet rounded themselves into completion" (181). But as Carolyn Karcher, Robert Milder, and others have noted, Melville's argument in the "Supplement" is not very different from the one in Lee's speech or in the book's final poem, "A Meditation."¹² Why, then, does he feel the need to break the "symmetrical" closure of his notes and extend the text? If the difference is not thematic, perhaps it lies in the formal shift from poetry to prose.

"Lee in the Capitol" sought to have a soldier speak, through poetry, to "policy," but the effort failed.¹³ This is no longer the time of "soldiers and sailors," or of poets, but of "politicians," Melville writes, and a different kind of rhetoric seems required. Between 1865 and 1866, a moral or psychological impulse toward reconciliation has given way to a political struggle over Reconstruction, and Melville's text is thrust into a still unstable present: "to altered circumstances complicated adaptations are to be made," as "patriotism . . . overrid[es the] literary" (*Published Poems* 181). The "Supplement" is offered as a political intervention, an act rather than an aesthetic "record," working through direct rhetorical address instead of the indirection of lyric or dramatic monologue (183).¹⁴

For Michael Paul Rogin, Melville speaks in the "Supplement" "more reliably in his own voice than anywhere else in his work" (279); Milder sees the document as "reason[ing] with its

audience,” offering a “carefully modulated argument” for Melville’s position (*Exiled Royalties* 169, 183). For me, however, the “Supplement” is most striking in its lack of specificity and its evasiveness. Its language echoes the debates over the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the 14th Amendment, but mentions none of them directly. Melville’s first person may be more direct in address, but his essay works through a series of qualifications and negations, playing oppositions against themselves; it swings between charity and doubt, between the urge toward moderation and the moral claims of former slaves.

The poetry of *Battle-Pieces* had been characterized throughout by its formal and rhetorical restraint, its commitment to finding adequate linguistic structure for experience. The language of the “Supplement,” on the other hand, goes well beyond the ironic play of voices in the poems—its verbal instability and excess seem to work against the possibility of closure or coherence. The result is a text that indeed moves “as among sword-points” (*Published Poems* 187), a self-consuming artifact par excellence. In this way, perhaps, it reflects both the tangled discourse of postwar politics and Melville’s despairing sense of America’s racial and political impasse.

Carolyn Karcher sees Melville as trying to create a middle ground between President Johnson’s plan of national “restoration” and Congressional “Reconstruction,” but she regards Melville’s term, “Re-establishment,” as in practice equivalent to the former (“Moderate,” 225, 226; see also Foner 240). This position seems to oversimplify the complex, often tortured debates and compromises from which the 14th Amendment was crafted (Foner 251-55). Melville proposes neither a return to the status quo ante (“restoration”) nor the remaking of one region by another (“Reconstruction”). Nor does he adopt “a language of . . . national

regeneration” (Blight, 32), as Whitman does in “Lilacs”; given the politics of 1866, Melville cannot see reconciliation as either a natural or a spiritual process. The war has been a violent rupture, “an upheaval affecting the basis of” the entire nation, which can be “re-established” once again only through the imperfect, negotiated discourse of partisan politics (*Published Poems* 181).

Again and again, Melville speaks of discursive constraint or repression: “one who never was a blind adherent feels constrained to submit some thoughts. . . . How many and earnest thoughts still rise, and how hard to repress them” (*Published Poems* 181, 184). His statements are often vague or hedged, buried in convoluted syntax and contrary-to-fact expressions:

Though, perhaps, nothing could ultimately have averted the strife, and though to treat of human actions is to deal wholly with second causes, nevertheless, let us not cover up or try to extenuate what, humanly speaking, is the truth—namely, that those unfraternal denunciations, continued through years, and which at last inflamed to deeds that ended in bloodshed, were reciprocal. (184)

Melville’s language here does precisely that which it claims to reject: it twists and turns and “covers up” and “extenuates” its “truth.” The upshot is a diffusion—evaporation, almost—of responsibility.

Ironically, the clearest part of the “Supplement” may be the one dealing with African American rights, even though it comprises only a single paragraph (the essay’s longest), and appears two-thirds of the way through. It is perhaps only logical that this part of the essay should have received the most critical attention, for it confronts the problems of postwar race relations far more fully than “Lee in the Capitol.” Here the “agonized violence” of the war is

acknowledged most directly and the fear of its return imaged most powerfully as a volcano threatening to destabilize a perhaps only superficial peace (*Published Poems* 185). But this is also the point at which Melville makes clear his racial paternalism and his willingness to privilege white brotherhood over black equality.

For him, the problem of race relations is the same “knot” whose “intricacy” “entangled” the America of his earlier “Benito Cereno”; Melville cannot “Undo it, cut it” a decade later, either (*Piazza Tales* 76). The problem reappears in Lee’s “knotted” thoughts (*Published Poems* 166) and, I would argue, in the twisted, clotted verbiage of the “Supplement” as well. For Melville, a resolution remains unachievable—conceivable, yes, but only as indefinitely deferred:

Surely we ought to take it to heart that that kind of pacification, based upon principles operating equally all over the land, which lovers of their country yearn for, and which our arms, although signally triumphant, did not bring about, and which law-making, however anxious, or energetic, or repressive, never by itself can achieve, may yet be largely aided by generosity of sentiment public and private. (185)

Peace will not come from force or the rationality of “law-making,” and it can only be “largely aided” by charity and sentiment. The only way that Melville can “[suppose] a happy issue out of present perplexities” is in “the generation next to come” (183). As the “Supplement” itself demonstrates, the nation cannot be reconstructed, reconciled, or reestablished in language alone, whether poetry or prose.

Both Whitman's *Sequel* and Melville's "Supplement" are open-ended, forward and outward looking, turning toward the reader and deferring closure. They show the two poets' different insights into a crucial paradox: the cessation of violence is not sufficient to give the war its meaning, which requires reconstitution of the nation as a whole. But binding up the nation's wounds is not a singular event to be captured in a single "song" or "battle-piece." It can only be an extended and conflicted process; paradoxically, their texts can seek closure only by turning toward their audience, looking to their readers for completion.

At this point, Whitman and Melville diverge. Robert Penn Warren speaks of Whitman's Civil War poetry as "synthetic" in its drive toward unity, seeking reunification through "aggregation, or absorption"; Melville's approach, on the other hand, is "analytic," viewing the Union as "a political arrangement" rather than a mystical one (26, 30, 29). Such distinctions are useful, I think, in describing the different functions and fates of *Sequel* and "Supplement."

Whitman does believe that poetry can speak to policy, that their languages can be made one and the same. By 1871, he may be sanguine enough to bring both *Drum-Taps* and its sequel into the framework of *Leaves*. Or, as Christanne Miller suggests, this incorporation may be only an "appeasement," a sacrifice of "Libertad" for the sake of "Reconciliation" (184). In the Preface to the 1876 edition, Whitman speaks of *Drum-Taps* as "pivotal to" his project; the war is now a turning point, after which the United States are prepared "to enter upon their real history—the way being now, (*i.e.* since the result of the Secession War,) clear'd of death-threatening impedimenta, and the free areas around and ahead of us assured and certain" (*Leaves* 656n, 660). And by 1881 he has merged poems like "Reconciliation" and "To the Leaven'd Soil" into *Drum-Taps* proper and established "Memories of President Lincoln" as a

separate group of elegies. He is able to see a continuity, rather than a contrast, between war and reconciliation.

Battle Pieces, in contrast, is never resituated by its author in a volume of collected poems. Carolyn Karcher may be right that for both Melville and Whitman, “white identity provided a ground for cementing national unity” (“The Moderate” 241), but Melville’s bitter skepticism about the relation between poetry and policy remains. As Edgar Dryden puts it, Melville “is driven to violate the work’s formal purity with an addition that follows what properly ought to close itself . . . and suggests that the literary as such does not suffice (67). His “Supplement” ends with a prayer that “fulfillment” may “verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity” (*Published Poems* 188), a hope that someday a visionary poetry might be possible.

As it stands, the “Supplement” anticipates—and repeats—the failure of the poems that precede it, but Melville’s despairing judgment goes beyond the aesthetic. His “Supplement” foresees the failure of Reconstruction itself, a process that yielded a punishing North, a resistant South, and the eventual return of Jim Crow. From his darkened perspective, no postwar political arrangement—radical Reconstruction, speedy “restoration,” or something in between—could have avoided renewed conflict and the sacrifice of African American freedom. Any plan would have remained inadequate and incomplete, at once excessive and insufficient, a substitute for an impossible, imagined “natural” reconciliation, always in need of supplementation. Nearly 150 years later, it is all too clear that Melville, not Whitman, was the more prescient, for the tasks of reconciliation and reunification still remain.

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Notes

¹ In “The Disorder of *Drum-Taps*,” Genoways has carefully laid out the publication history of *Drum-Taps*, including the poems Whitman displaced into his *Sequel*; but in his essay “Civil War Poems,” he nevertheless treats them as a single text. Erkkila often does the same. Similarly, Milder describes Melville’s “Supplement” as an “afterthought,” “only the overt political expression of an intention that operates throughout the volume” (*Exiled Royalties* 169).

² My comments on terms here are based on nineteenth-century usage as described in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. There, a “sequel” is defined as something that “follows as a result from an event” or “as a continuation”; a “supplement,” on the other hand, is “something added to supply a deficiency” (2: 2733, 3165). Also applicable here is Jacques Derrida’s discussion of writing as supplement in *Of Grammatology* (144-45). Melville’s poetry cannot be said to invoke a spoken presence in the way that Whitman’s sometimes does, but the prose “Supplement” to *Battle-Pieces* is, in Derrida’s terms, both a surplus and the mark of an absence in the poetic text.

³ In the case of “Over the Carnage,” this anticipation may be an effect of Whitman’s later incorporation of some of its lines in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”: “I chant this chant of my silent soul, in the name of all dead soldiers. . . . / Perfume therefore my chant, O love! immortal Love!” (Whitman, *Variorum* 2: 511, 512).

⁴ As Szczesiul notes, most critics who describe a narrative structure in *Drum-Taps* work from the cluster in the 1881 edition of *Leaves*; Coale and McWilliams offer good examples of this approach.

⁵ Whitman uses a progression of tenses in a similar way to provide temporal structure to “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”

⁶ Lee sees in individual poems this pattern, which “dramatizes . . . partiality by looping back on slightly altered refrains . . . as if the speaker cannot resolve his thought and so repeatedly tries and fails again before finally leaving off” (398-99).

⁷ Throughout this cluster, Melville uses—and critiques the use of—natural imagery to confirm its concluding function. Soldiers become an “Abrahamic river” in “The Muster” (*Published Poems* 109), the flashes of bayonets are Northern Lights in “Aurora Borealis” (111), and young soldiers are compared to plants or vines in “On the Slain Collegians” (119). But “A Grave Near Petersburg, Virginia” (“May [the] grave be green—still green / While happy years shall run”) holds a gun rather than a human corpse, and “The Apparition” reminds the reader of “The core of fire below” a field of “pastoral green” (114, 116). Timothy Sweet emphasizes Melville’s critique of the pastoral in *Traces of War* (190-200).

⁸ This section, too, ends with a naturalizing gesture, as “the returned volunteer” turns from his rifle to the “blue” and “green” of the Hudson River valley (*Published Poems* 138).

⁹ Grant Shreve notes “The Scout Toward Aldie”’s placement in the text, in “a liminal space between . . . the war and the process of reunion” (14).

¹⁰ Stanton Garner groups “A Meditation” with “Lee” as late additions to the collection (432).

¹¹ “The armies had virtually all disbanded . . . Thus the conflicting conceptions of justice, victory, defeat, liberty, labor, and rights had to be worked through in the only arena available—politics” (Blight 43).

¹² Karcher, “White Fratricide,” 351, 357, and “Moderate,” 227; Milder, *Exiled Royalties*, 169. Castronovo and Nelson, on the other hand, see *Battle-Pieces* and the “Supplement” as at odds in their discursive approaches, with Melville’s “poetic voices” open to division and difference in ways that the “patriotic voice” of the “Supplement” is not (346).

¹³ I derive the poetry/policy distinction from Allen Grossman’s “The Poetics of Union” (873).

¹⁴ Melville draws a contrast between his poetry, as “a poetic record [of] the passions and epithets of civil war” and “the emotion of victory,” and the “Reason” and “intellectual impartiality” that the postwar period demands (*Published Poems* 183, 181). This is why, he claims, he has been “tempted to withdraw or modify some of them” (183) and why they must be supplemented now. But such a distinction between feeling and reason, poetry and prose, soon breaks down: the only “practical” way in which Melville can imagine reconciliation is “if the South have been taught by the terrors of civil war to *feel* that Secession, like Slavery, is against Destiny; that both now lie buried in one grave; that her fate is linked with ours; and that together we comprise the Nation” (182; emphasis added). Here both feeling and poetic figuration (the “burial” of Secession and Slavery) are required to recreate the Nation.