Herman Melville's Civil War:
Lincolnian Prudence in Poetry'


> Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.
> -John Brown

> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan-to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.
> -Abraham Lincoln

Our title suggests several senses in which the author of *Moby-Dick* made the Civil War his own. As the books under review indicate, the first of these is that in 1866 Melville published a volume of poems about the Civil War. A decade later, it had sold only 525
copies. The only version in print in 2000 is the Da Capo reprint of the 1866 edition, which helps little with the considerable difficulties of the poetry. In fact, Melville's book is today largely unknown, even to scholars - undeservedly as we shall argue.

But even for the few readers of *Battle-Pieces*, Melville's perspective on the Civil War is far from clear. Herein is a second sense of our title. For among searching questions readers ask are these: Where does the poet stand in relation to the great issues of the war? Whose side is he on? Why does he who, prior to this book, was an author only of prose works, suddenly write this book of poetry - seventy-two poems in lyric form - on the Civil War? A glance at three elements at the beginning of his book indicates why such questions occur.

After his title page, Melville places the first preliminary element, a dedication: "The Battle-Pieces in this volume are dedicated to the Memory of the three hundred thousand who in the war for the maintenance of the Union fell devotedly under the flag of their fathers." By dedicating his poems exclusively to the Union dead, and remaining silent about the three hundred thousand Confederate dead, the poet presents himself at the outset as a partisan of the North - even a harsh partisan by seemingly being oblivious of the terrible losses of Southern manhood. What is more, by focusing exclusively on the North's purpose of maintaining the Union he seems to ignore its purpose, in the end, of destroying chattel slavery of the Negro in the South.

Immediately after the Dedication, Melville places, on a separate page, and in square brackets, a second preliminary element: a playfully enigmatic preface. Here the poet speaks of the relation of the political denouement of the War to the composition of his poems, and of the arrangement and selection of themes therein. Thus, concerning the political outcome of the war, he immediately indicates that most of the poems "originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond." His poems thus seem to view the war above all from the perspective of the crushing military overthrow of the Confederate government, reinforcing the Dedication's sense of the poet as simply a partisan of the North. But as Melville continues, he speaks evasively. Concerning the order of the poems, he writes:
"They were composed without reference to collective arrangement, but, being brought together in review, naturally fall into the order assumed." The ending of this sentence stands in curious tension with the beginning, a tension set up by that disjunctive and transitional "but" at its center. And as for his selection of themes, Melville poses as a poet inspired by he knows not what: "Yielding instinctively, one after another, to feelings not inspired from any one source exclusively, and unmindful, without purposing to be, of consistency, I seem, in most of these verses, to have but placed a harp in a window, and noted the contrasted airs which wayward winds have played upon the strings." The reader asks: How to reconcile the Dedication's Northern partisanship with the Preface's progressively more and more apolitical poeticism? How to construe the disjunction between the sense of a seeming lack of order and the sense of a "natural" order to the whole? How to make sense of the tension between "poetry" and "patriotism," which now begins to emerge and hence to throw into question the intial seeming partisanship?

As the third and final element of the beginning, consider the first poem, "The Portent (1859)." Melville's subject is one of the most partisan and hence controversial figures of the war, John Brown. But Melville's treatment of Brown leaves the reader highly uncertain as to the poet's attitude:

Hanging from the beam,
Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
Shenandoah!
The cut is on the crown
(Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
Is the vivid image of John Brown's gallows-suspended corpse meant to be seen as a blessing or a curse? Is John Brown a Christian martyr or a religious fanatic? Or both and yet neither of these, depending on the moral perspective on his cause? And if the latter be true, what are we to make of the seeming Northern partisanship of the Dedication and the opening of the Preface? Rosanna Warren, in the most thoughtful essay we have seen on the poetry in Battle-Pieces, says this about The Portent:

For a figure who assumed mythic proportions, Brown provoked wildly varying reactions, even among Northerners. Emerson was quoted as saying his execution would "make the gallows as glorious as the Cross"; Hawthorne responded, in his essay "Chiefly about War Matters, by a Peaceable man," "Nobody was more justly hanged. He won his martyrdom fairly, and took it firmly." Melville's poem takes shape and life in the gap in between these two statements. Anyone seeking clear-cut approbation or condemnation of Brown will leave "The Portent" baffled.

Baffled, indeed, is our own judgment as to how one comes away from that first poem, and, indeed, from the first pages of Battle-Pieces.

But our subtitle claims that the puzzlement here and elsewhere in response to Battle-Pieces stems from Melville's attempt to speak with Lincolnian prudence about the great eruption caused by the war. As the poet says in a prose supplement at the book's end: "in times like the present, one who desires to be impartially just in the expression of his views, moves as among sword-points presented on every side" (Da Capo, 272). Reflecting on this statement and many other features of his book, we have found that our perplexity about Herman Melville resembles the perplexity of contemporaries about Abraham Lincoln—most notably, the black leader, Frederick Douglass. Several times in an 1876 eulogy Douglass emphasizes
the difficulty of understanding the "comprehensive statesman," Lincoln. In retrospective appreciation of Lincoln, he urges his fellow citizens to see the need to "allow the President all the latitude of time, phraseology, and every honorable device that statesmanship might require for the achievement of a great and beneficent measure of liberty and progress." Nonetheless, he maintains, despite "the mist and haze that surrounded him, despite the tumult, the hurry, and confusion of the hour, we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln, and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position." Douglass then focuses on the extraordinary difficulty Lincoln faced:

His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful co-operation of his loyal fellow-countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.

Lincoln's statesmanlike ambivalence, his prudent consulting of public sentiment, provided, we believe, a model for Melville. The poet, that is, was tutored by the statesman in the difficulties of statesmanlike prudence.

Such a lesson is important for contemporary social scientists. For, today, in academic circles, there is much talk of "postmodernism," which is to say of dissatisfaction with-and even outright rejection of-the rationalism of the modern Enlightenment project. One facet of that project is the modern teaching of natural rights, as formulated by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; and another facet is
the modern project of a science that has its end the conquest of nature, as formulated by Bacon, Locke, and Descartes. "Postmodernist" dissatisfaction with both facets of the Enlightenment has at its core the sense that the claims of reason—not just the Enlightenment understanding of reason but the claims of reason as such with respect to what is just by nature, or what is knowable about nature, must give way to the claims of "culture" or "history." Political science, for all its seeming claim to be "scientific," is thus increasingly subject to the "postmodernist" theoretical critique.'

In Melville's *Battle-Pieces*, political scientists can glimpse a pre-modern approach to politics, one which we contend decisively transcends postmodern criticisms. Like Lincoln, Melville addresses the passions without himself losing his grounding in reason. Like Lincoln, our poet speaks respectfully (yet rationally) of patriotism and piety, terms out of favor with modern political science, however those notions are viewed by citizens. Like Lincoln, our poet views the political things within the moral perspective of the citizen, yet strives to elevate that perspective to one which, if not philosophic, at least points toward it. In so doing, both the statesman and the poet take a stance remarkably like that of Aristotle in the *Ethics* and the *Politics*. Above all, our poet, like Lincoln and Aristotle, seeks to teach "moderation." But in contrast to the modern behavioral sense of this term as mere institutional or volitional restraint on the passions, Melville invests it with a philosophic sense that is strikingly akin to what Aristotle calls *sophrosyne*, or temperance. In treating the intellectual virtue called *phronesis*, or prudence-practical wisdom-Aristotle closely links *sophrosyne* and *phronesis*, by stating that *sophrosyne* "saves" *phronesis*. By this he means that temperance, rightly possessed and exercised, limits and directs the truth-attaining rational quality which is concerned with action. It thus serves as auxiliary to the rational quality, which both perceives and seeks to realize the things that are good for human beings. Melvillean moderation, we will argue, approximates Aristotelian *sophrosyne* and is in the service of *phronesis*. We bring his *Battle-Pieces* to the attention of the discipline, then, as an instructive example of ancient political science at work within the American tradition, instruction
moreover dressed in poetic garb.

Having thus praised the strengths of the book under review, we must now acknowledge some limitations of the reviewers. However unjustly neglected we opine this work to be, we are certain we do not fully understand it; many of its features remain puzzling to us and thus in need of further study. We offer our review as a work in progress, one suggesting lines of inquiry about *Battle-Pieces'* organization and its teaching, which we hope others will follow with even more understanding. We thus present our review as a series of essays, a series that is, of five (at times somewhat overlapping) trials or efforts to grasp the elusive nature of Melville's book. Whatever the success of our attempt, we believe this to be a deeply thoughtful and austere beauty work, one whose evocative poetry may be compared with the best of our poets.

In Part I, we sketch Melville's situation in the antebellum political background to the Civil War, and briefly treat *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*. In our treatment of these two works we show that, well before the Civil War, Melville thought about fundamental issues concerning the American regime and especially about slavery. Fundamental aspects of his political fiction thus anticipate *Battle-Pieces*.

In Part II, we present an overview of the general nature and structure of *Battle-Pieces*. We also show that, for Melville, the Civil War by no means ends with the military surrender at Appomattox: Like John Brown's "truth" in the Battle Hymn of the Republic, it marches on, not least in the manifold interweavings of painful memories with the demands of attempted reconciliation in spite of the deep remaining hostility between North and South.

In Part III, which focuses most intensively on the text of the book, we present Melville's political teaching. True reconstruction of the Union, the poet teaches, requires moderating sentiments like those of Abraham Lincoln in one of our epigraphs in favor of those of John Brown in the other. Which is to say, the war must be remembered selectively, with some of its harshness poetically downplayed. In one final sense of our title, then, Herman Melville took possession of the Civil War in a creative attempt at poetical
statesmanship.

In Part IV, we evaluate Melville's poetic, as opposed to his political achievement. Here we place the poet's ambition on the stage of world literature.

In Part V, an appendix, we present some details revelatory of the intricacy and beauty of the structure of *Battle-Pieces*.

**I. Melville and the Antebellum Political Background to the Civil War**

Melville, born in 1819 in New York City, grew to manhood there and in Albany at a time when expansion of the American republic greatly aggravated the great issue of chattel slavery. For the admission of new states inevitably raised the question whether they would enter the Union as either "free" or "slave"; and the institution itself repeatedly raised the question of its relationship to the ultimate premises of the two most fundamental of America's "organic laws," the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The nation's dedication to both fundamental "organic laws" is revealed in congressional enactments: In 1788, Congress, operating under the Articles of Confederation, passed a resolution by which "congress would, in a body, attend divine worship...to return thanks for the divine mercy, in supporting the independence of the states."
In 1814, Congress passed a law authorizing an official compilation of the statute laws of the United States, and stipulated that the texts of the Declaration, the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution should precede the text of the statutes. In 1845, Congress authorized a newer compilation of the statutes. Again, the three "organic laws" constitute a noble preamble to the statutes. This version of the laws remained in place all during the sectional crisis which eventuated in the Civil War and during the war itself.

That increasingly dangerous crisis was the political background to the formative and mature years of Herman Melville: In 1820, the year after he was born, Congress enacted the Missouri Compromise: Maine was to enter the Union as a free state, Missouri as a slave state, and slavery was henceforth to be excluded from the portion of the Lousiana Purchase north of the line 36 degrees 30 minutes. When Melville was eight years old, in 1827, and living in New York City, the state of New York abolished slavery, an event celebrated on July 5 with an Emancipation Day parade in the city. When he was thirty-one years old and finishing Moby-Dick, Congress made still another attempt to resolve the worsening conflict over the extension of slavery in the series of bills called The Compromise of 1850. The single most fateful provision of this legislation was the enactment of the principle called "popular sovereignty": majority vote of the citizens would legally decide whether new states to be formed in the territories of New Mexico and Utah would be admitted as "slave" or "free." The undermining of the first principle of the the Declaration of Independence was by now far advanced, but in the name of the people's indefeasible right to choose whether to found new slave-based polities.

When Melville was nearing thirty-five, in May 1854, the problem of the extension of slavery was re-opened with Congress' passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Most crucially, the act applied the principle of "popular sovereignty" to the organization of the two territories, and, even more ominously, repealed the Missouri Compromise. Popular sovereignty now increasingly appeared to mean that whatever the majority decided was right must simply become law, even if it was in profound conflict with the republic's fundamen-
tal principles as those are articulated in the Declaration and the Constitution.

In October 1854, Abraham Lincoln, troubled by the ascendancy of untrammeled "popular sovereignty" as the fundamental political principle of the American regime, gave his famous "Peoria Speech." He attacked the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, denounced the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and forthrightly opposed any extension of slavery into the territories. He held that an extension of slavery would be subversive of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In so arguing, he appealed from "popular sovereignty" to the principles of natural right as articulated in the Declaration and as embodied in the core principles of the Constitution.

In 1856, Melville published his novella, *Benito Cereno.* Its composition and publication took place against the backdrop of the small-scale civil war over the extension of slavery which was going on in Kansas and Nebraska. "Bloody Kansas" was to prove a harbinger of the full-scale Civil War to come. We shall see presently what Melville seeks to do in a fictional portrayal of a Yankee captain's suppression of a slave rebellion on a Spanish ship, a work written against the grim reality of what was going on in "Bloody Kansas."

The preceding sketch of events shows that by the time the Civil War erupted in 1861, Melville had long been surrounded by and witness to the fundamental conflict of the American regime. We shall now argue that his writings show that he reflected upon what he witnessed, that he introduced his reflections into *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno,* and that the reflections in these works anticipate his rhetorical stance as well as the substance of his political thought in the book of poetry on the Civil War. In what follows, we can but sketch the bare bones of an argument in support of this view, but it is sufficient to form the background to his treatment of the violent resolution of the conflict and the aftermath of that resolution in *Battle-Pieces.*

*Moby-Dick*

*Moby-Dick* appears at first to have little to do with an America
troubled by a conflict over slavery. Indeed, the novel seems an escape from that conflict into a whaling expedition, which is set forth in an intricate narrative depicting the interlocking of two monomaniacal pursuits: Ahab, captain of the *Pequod*, engages in the monomaniacal pursuit of an enormous white whale called "Moby Dick," which, during an earlier whaling trip, tore off one of his legs. Ishmael, a recent crew member, who has left his position as a schoolmaster, engages in the monomaniacal pursuit of all possible knowledge concerning whales. The novel traces both interlocking pursuits in great detail. It ends with Moby Dick's destruction of the *Pequod*, bringing sudden violent death to Ahab and all members of his crew, save for Ishmael. In the Epilogue, Ishmael reveals that he alone had been saved by a ship called the *Rachel*. In the last word of his memoir—a work he seems to have been saved from death in order to write—he calls himself an "orphan."

Perceived on its surface, as the preceding sketch describes it, *Moby-Dick* hardly seems to embody anything like political philosophy. And yet, as one ponders Melville's intention in constructing so remarkable an edifice in the midst of the deepening crisis in the American political regime around 1849-51, one cannot help but notice that scattered all through Ishmael's memoir are tantalizing references and allusions to ancient and modern political philosophers: Aristotle, Bacon, Pierre Bayle, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Montaigne, Plato, Rousseau, and Socrates, among others.° These references and allusions are perplexing, not least because Ishmael's use of them is often not only seemingly casual but also deeply ironical. Consider just this example: At one point in his memoir, Ishmael offers a nugget of sage advice to owners of whalers who may chance to read his book: "Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with lean brow and hollow eye; given to unreasonable meditativeness; and who offers to ship with Phaedon instead of Bowditch in his head.' Ishmael's deft contrast between *Phaedo*, Plato's great dialogue on the immortality of the soul, and Nathaniel Bowditch's *New American Practical Navigator* (1802) is but one indication of Melville's juxtaposition of the philosophical problem of the nature of the soul, with all its attendant implications for the best
political regime, and the utterly practical problem of how to find one's way on the vast expanses of the ocean and thus to safety at last by returning to the shelter of political society. Surely the latter takes precedence from the viewpoint of self-preservation. Yet the former as surely takes precedence from the viewpoint of what the meaning of preserving the self ultimately may be.

Catherine Zuckert, a political scientist who has published a number of thoughtful studies of political philosophy, has taken careful notice of this dimension of *Moby-Dick* and has set forth a persuasive interpretive perspective on Melville's masterpiece. She places it in the framework of a tradition of novels by the greatest American writers-Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner. The crux of her argument is this: America's dedication to the principles of natural right as set forth in the Declaration of Independence-above all, the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal"-rests on philosophic foundations that are not themselves fully stated in our first great "organic law." In particular, the underlying questions of the nature of material nature, of human nature in the natural state, of the relationship of nature to human nature, of the transition of man from the state of nature to political society, and of the operations of human nature once man is established in political society under posited laws are left more or less obscure. Zuckert argues that the various novels she treats-workshe perceptively calls "political philosophy in novel form"-seek to remove that obscurity through the thoughtful, detailed fictional projection of Americans back into the "state of nature," where the issues just sketched are treated in fictional form. Among the examples she analyzes are Natty Bumpo in Cooper's *The Pioneers*; Ishmael and Ahab in *Moby-Dick*; and Miles Coverdale and Zenobia in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*.

As for *Moby-Dick*, then, in particular, Zuckert argues that Melville causes both Ahab and Ishmael, the two main foci of the novel, to leave the settled protection of the Constitution and statute laws of American political society in order to venture into the untrammeled and highly dangerous "state of nature" represented by the vast oceans of the world. At one point, Melville causes Ishmael
to speak of this part of the world as the "lawless seas" (Ch. 32, 143). In that setting, the problematic nature of man-including that of his deepest passions and their relation to his moral principles-of man's relation to the cosmos, and of the cosmos itself are all thrown into stark relief. Ahab and Ishmael, each in his way driven by his peculiar monomania, explore the furthest reaches of these questions. One might say that Ahab is a kind of monomaniacal Socratic philosopher of the nature of the cosmos, but of the comos in its relation to man; and that Ishmael is a kind of monomaniacal Socratic philosopher of the nature of the whale, but of the whale in its relation to man. Each inquiry, driven to its extreme, proves to have profound implications for the protective shell which we ordinarily call "political society."

Only one monomaniacal inquirer survives to return and tell of us the journey, the "orphan" Ishmael. He is chastened and, perhaps, enlightened by his incredible voyage. He is ready, it seems, to try to enlighten us, the readers of his memoir. Whether we are capable of enlightenment is, of course, intricately connected to the Socratic question whether virtue can be taught and the even deeper Socratic question whether virtue is knowledge.

Following Zuckert's general lead, we proffer two examples of "political philosophy in novel form" as that mode of political thought is deftly insinuated into the narrative of Moby-Dick. Both treat the fundamental question of the relationship between nature and convention. The first treats that question in the form of the relationship between natural and conventional claims to rule, as it is sketched in Chapter 54, "The Town-Ho's Story (As it is told at the Golden Inn)." The second treats that question in the form of the relationship between the natural and the conventional claims to the acquisition and possession of property, as it is sketched in Chapters 89 and 90, "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish" and "Heads. or Tails." Both these treatments ultimately bear decisively on the great question of the rightness of the institution of slavery, even though that is not immediately apparent on the surface of the novel.

In Chapter 54, Melville causes Ishmael to retell a story he once told at Lima, Peru, to some Spanish friends. Melville's choices of setting, of occasion, and of hearers-interlocutors are themselves all
highly revealing: Lima is a colonial capital under Spanish monarchi-
cal imperial rule; the retelling takes place of "a saint's eve"; and the
hearers-interlocutors assure Ishmael that "Isabella's Inquisition
wanes in Lima" and "there are no Auto-da-Fes in Lima now." Within
this framework, which deftly reminds us of the problem of the inter-
twining of Christianity and politics-one has but to think for a
moment about the Christian dimension of the radical abolitionist
movement and its apotheosis in John Brown-Melville causes
Ishmael to tell a story about a mutiny aboard a whaler named Town-
Ho.

The story focusses on two men: Radney, who is the mate; and
Steelkilt, who is a crewman. Radney comes from Nantucket, the
main port of American whalers, thus is of the elite of whaling's
commonwealth; Steelkilt hails from the frontier of inland America,
Lake Erie and Buffalo, thus is of the pioneers living on the edge of
the land version of "the state of nature." Radney's contempt for
Steelkilt in part reflects his pride in his origins.

Radney exercises the conventional rule of a ship's officer, in
spite of the fact that he is a man of deeply flawed character: harsh,
unfair and highly sensitive to criticism. Steelldl is ordinarily willing
to obey such conventional ship-board rule, but is also aware of his
superiority in character, looks, and ability to Radney, hence in
principle more fitted by nature to rule. Melville causes Ishmael to
depict the conflict thus:

Now, as you well know, it is not seldom the case in this
conventional world of ours [emphasis added]-watery or
otherwise; that when a person placed in command over his
fellow-men finds one of them to be very significantly his
superior in general pride of manhood, straightway against that
man he conceives an unconquerable dislike and bitterness; and
if he have a chance he will pull down and pulverize that
subaltern's tower, and make a little heap of dust of it. (Ch. 54,
245-6)

As the story unfolds, Radney hears Steelkilt, who is strenuously
manning a pump, make some critical remarks about Radney's lack
of character. The mate spitefully orders Steelkilt to sweep the deck and, worse still, to stoop to remove pig droppings—base work on board ship ordinarily performed only by boys. Steellālt's refusal leads at last to open conflict. The spiritedness of each man—his passionate sense of being unjustly treated—produces a crisis of rule. The captain, understandably, siding with Radney—"justice demanded it"—seeks to reduce Steelkilt and some who join him to submission to authority. He at length succeeds. But he also most unwisely does not intervene to prevent Radney's later act of sheer vengeance, applying the lash to Steelkilt, though the latter had warned the mate that were he so to act it would lead to the mate's death. Steelkilt then contemplates the murder of Radney at an opportune moment, yet would make it appear an accident. But, perhaps providentially, Steelkilt is saved from having to perform that illegal and vengeful act by the remarkable denouement: Radney is crushed to death in the jaws of Moby Dick during a vain attempt to kill the whale. Whether justice is thus done, and whether, if so, it is providential, with Moby Dick as the instrument of providence, remains for the reader to decide, for Ishmael is but the teller of the story. But one must also reflect on this further question: May not Ishmael's story suggest that as Steelkilt is at bottom the natural ruler of Radney, so Ishmael is at bottom the natural ruler of Ahab? Surely recollection of Ishmael's warning regarding shipping men obsessed with Plato's Phaedo instead of those equipped with the knowledge contained in Bowditch's Navigator is apropos.

Our second example focuses on Ishmael's treatment of this deeply troubling question: What are the principles, natural and conventional, pertaining to the acquisition and legal possession of material things of this world? In Chapters 89 and 90, Ishmael very compactly lays down an answer. At first, his answer appears to apply simply to whales in the ocean, and is reducible to these two "laws": "I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it. II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it." But Ishmael soon claims that these two laws contain "the fundamentals of all jurisprudence."

Indeed, as his account unfolds, we discover that his "jurisprudence" is much more concerned with possession of vacant land, of
human beings, and, more startling, of whole countries already under rule, than it is with that of whales taken in the state of nature. Listen to these questions posed by Ishmael: "What are the sinews and souls of Russian serfs and Republican slaves but Fast-Fish, whereof possession is the whole of the law?" This parallel of the condition of "Republican slaves" to "Russian serfs" can hardly be a comfort to American owners of slaves, should they fall upon Ishmael's memoir.

Nor is this all. "What to...Brother Jonathan [The United States] is Texas but a Fast Fish?" asks Ishmael, warming to his subject. And as for ostensible " Loose-Fish," hear him on the discovery of America: "What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard [to claim it ] for his royal master and mistress?" Finally, most ominous, is this question by Ishmael: "What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish." The outcome of the Mexican War, recently achieved when Melville completed Moby Dick, was to raise the question whether the United States might not extend its empire well beyond Texas to the whole of Mexico. Is America as a new Rome all too possible?

Having ventured far in the realm of "jurisprudence," Ishmael at length advances the startling notion that "the rights of man" might themselves be understood as a kind of "Loose-Fish." With that startling notion in the immediate background, Ishmael opens Chapter 90, "Heads or Tails," with an epigraph, in Latin: De balena vero sufficit, si rex habeat caput, et regina caudam. It is from Bracton's De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae, the first systematic compilation of English law. This is the only chapter of the 135 chapters in Moby-Dick to open with an epigraph from a work of jurisprudence. The singularity of this chapter, especially given the gravity of the issue being treated, thus requires a few further remarks.

Ishmael jocularly renders Bracton's Latin thus: "that of all whales captured by anybody on the coast of that land [England], the King, as Honorary Grand Harpooner, must have the head, and the Queen be respectfully presented with the tail." Ishmael's satirical elevation of the king of England to the rank of "Honorary Grand Harpooner" introduces a further inquiry into the nature of law in relation to what is by nature just. For the pith of the chapter is an
account of a notorious case of the application of the ancient law of England: Some "honest mariners" from an English port, having at great peril pursued a whale far out at sea, then killed and beached it, are at once confronted by an officer of the Crown. He carries Blackstone's *Commentaries* under his arm. Citing Blackstone, he compels the whalers to turn the whale over to the duke of Wellington. For what reason? Why, the duke's claim is indefeasible and is found to be "delegated" from "the Sovereign." Ishmael turns Lockean political philosopher. He naughtily inquires what can possibly be the right of the Sovereign to a whale which has been captured by the labor of sailors operating in the state of nature. Then, even more naughtily adverting to Plowden, a writer cited by Blackstone, Ishmael finds that the whale belongs to the king and queen, rather than to those who use their labor to capture and kill it, "because of its superior excellence." This is Ishmael's pithy and devastating comment on the commentators: "And by the soundest commentators this has ever been held to be a cogent argument in such matters" (Ch. 90, 401). One has but to transpose this episode into the context of the American debate whether whites are meant by nature to rule blacks because of the alleged "superior excellence" of the whites to see the explosive potential of Ishmael's ventures into "jurisprudence."

Nature versus convention. It is the fundamental problem underlying every claim to the rightness of any positive legal code and, more basically, the rightness of the political regime which is the framework for that code. Melville's insertion of the problem into the unfolding story of the pursuit of Moby Dick in the state of nature is but one of the many remarkable ways in which political philosophy takes novel form in his book. Let us next consider, then, how this mixed mode of *Moby-Dick* is deftly carried forward in Melville's novella, *Benito Cereno*.

**Benito Cereno**

Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1856), like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), uses fiction to try to change antebellum American opinion about slavery. Showing the Negroes in his story...
to be fully human, Melville dramatizes the prejudices which prevent North and South from recognizing both that humanity and slavery's injustice. Thus, as in *Moby-Dick*, nature is opposed to convention.\textsuperscript{15}

Melville's story might have recalled to its immediate readers two widely publicized United States court cases of slave rebellions on board ships: the *Amistad* in 1839 and the *Creole* in 1843. The former of these reached the United States Supreme Court where John Quincy Adams, arguing for the Africans, echoed the Declaration of Independence: under the "law of nations," the Africans were obliged to obey only the "law of Nature and Nature's God." Justice Joseph Story concurred: "We may lament the dreadful acts by which they asserted their liberty, and took possession of the *Amistad*, but they cannot be deemed pirates or robbers in the sense of the law of nations.'

Melville's plot opens in 1799 off the coast of Chile, where an American merchant ship approached a ship flying no flag and apparently in some difficulty. Thinking to aid its crew, the American captain (Amasa Delano) approaches what turns out to be a Spanish merchantman carrying slaves. Although disturbed by the disorder and lack of discipline on the Spanish ship—the blacks (for instance) are unchained and appear hostile to the white Spaniards—Delano remains uncertain of its cause, vacillating between suspicion that the Spanish Captain (Benito Cereno) plans some treachery against the American ship or that he is too weak to command his own ship properly. The American captain cannot see the third and true possibility: that the slaves control this ship and are presenting a *trompe 'oeil* elaborately contrived by their leader, Babo. For he believes Negroes naturally inferior and incapable of rule. When at length Delano discovers the truth, he forcefully retakes the Spanish ship and re-enslaves the blacks. Back on land, there is a trial wherein depositions by the Spaniards explain how the Negroes took over the ship and ruled it by terror, demanding passage to their native Senegal. The blacks, for instance, killed their former master (Don Alexandro Aranda), placed his skeleton on the ship's prow, and warned the whites: "Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader" (107). After
the trial, at which Babo is condemned to death, there is a final meeting between Cerenno and Delano. The Spaniard is a broken man, unable to forget the experience of being deceived by Babo; the American, by contrast, remains optimistic and wants to forget the experience.

Although Melville based this plot on Captain Amasa Delano's *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels* (1817), he made subtle and revealing changes in the narrative of his source to suggest his own political design. In general, whereas the real-life Delano's narrative self-servingly highlights his own compassion and bravery, Melville shifts focus to Delano's prejudice deceiving him about the slave rebellion. Among specific details, Melville changes the months and the year of his novella to recall events in American constitutional history. His slave ship sails not in winter (as the real-life one did) but in summer, thus allowing Melville's slaves to gain their independence on July 4th, the day America gained its independence, that date falling precisely at the mid-point of the fictional chronology of events devised by Melville. What is good for America, Melville seems to suggest, is good for Negroes. Again, Melville changed the year of the revolt from 1804 to 1799, the mid-point of the twenty-year period during which the Constitution, in Article I, Section 9, stipulates that no laws ending the slave trade could be passed. Likewise transformed is the slave ship. It is rechristened the San Dominick to recall the island where a 1799 slave rebellion occurred. Added to the ship is a carved figurehead of Christopher Columbus, the man who first brought slavery to the New World. One here cannot but recall Ishmael's sardonic reference to Columbus's "discovery" of America and his claiming it for Spain-while bringing slavery into the New World.

Also suggesting the slavery controversy in antebellum America is the way Delano's miscomprehension of the true state of affairs on the San Dominick mimics the prejudices of Americans. Although Babo covertly rules by terror, Delano views Babo and his fellow blacks as one might charming household pets. When Babo, pretending to be Cerenno's valet, shaves his supposed master, the Spanish captain is terrified with Babo's knife at his throat. But the uncompre-
hending American cheerfully muses upon the scene:

There is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person. Most negroes are natural valets and hairdressers; taking to the comb and brush congenially as to castanets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. There is, too, a smooth tact about them in this employment, with a marvelous, noiseless, gliding briskness, not ungraceful in its way, singularly pleasing to behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of. And above all the great gift of good humor. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune.¹⁸

Faced with cunning like Shakespeare's Iago with Othello, the American sees only Harriet Beecher Stowe's Topsy. Thus does Melville pierce the complacency of Northern opinion about blacks as shoe shinners and minstrel singers.

But Delano is not alone in miscomprehending. So also does Cereno in the final meeting with Delano. Even back on land, he remains terrified and indeed a man broken by the experience of Babo's evil treachery. When Delano tells Cereno to forget the past and renew himself as do the forces of nature, Cereno notes that these, having no memory, are not human. Although Cereno thereby evinces a more humanly complex response to the slave revolt than Delano's, he does not apprehend Babo's humanity. In fact, then, neither white captain learns by the experience that blacks are unjustly enslaved.

Suggesting the whites' incomprehension of the humanity of the blacks is Melville's ambiguous ending to his story:

Some months after [the trial], dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black [Babo] met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St.
Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the
recovered bones of Aranda; and across the Rimac bridge
looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without;
where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito
Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. (116-
17)

At first, that Cereno "follow[ed] his leader" into death appears
to mean he followed Aranda. As one reflects on the novella,
however, in reality Babo seems Cereno's true leader, as indeed he
is Delano's. For it is this subtle black who outwits the two white
captains in the story, showing himself the natural ruler of these two
conventional ones.

Babo, who could have explained his human superiority and the
humanity of the other blacks, "met his voiceless end," refusing to
speak after his recapture. As Melville writes, "His aspect seemed to
say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (116). Since the
deeds of the blacks risking their lives for freedom could not convince
whites of their humanity, what could words do? Hence Babo dies in
resolute silence, his stillness resembling that of the uneducated
Negro slave in America. Such men need a white spokesman.

This they receive in Herman Melville. The white captains in this
story are too close to the experience to reflect upon it and thereby
to rethink their prejudices. Not so is the reader of a fictional
presentation of the story. He can discern, as whites in the story
cannot, Babo's humanity and his natural rule. Such a teaching about
black excellence, it should be noted, differs from that of Harriet
Beecher Stowe. Whereas *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents the Negro as
something poor and pathetic to be pitied, *Benito Cereno* presents
him as something manly and cunning to be feared. In fact, Melville's
perspective resembles that of Thomas Jefferson in his remark about
white Americans being trapped by the institution of slavery: "we
have the wolf by the ears and we can neither hold him, nor safely let
him go."  

*Benito Cereno* was Melville's final antebellum publication on
the issue which led to the Civil War. This novella exudes pessimism
about overcoming the problem of chattel slavery in America. The prejudices and resentments on the part of the two races make a solution seem unlikely. Yet within a decade, the solution provided by the Northern victory in the Civil War created new and different difficulties for the American Republic, difficulties to which Melville turned in his *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*.

II. On the Nature and Structure of *Battle-Pieces*

A. *The War's Political and Literary Potency.* "There has been an upheaval affecting the basis of things...." This is Melville's terse judgment on the significance of the Civil War, a judgment set forth in the prose Supplement to his book. (259). That judgment is most immediately applicable to the war's profound effects on America's political regime. Those effects arose, first, from the utter defeat of the Confederacy by the Union at the cost of over six hundred thousand dead soldiers on the two sides; second, from the unprecedented and abrupt emancipation of millions of slaves; third, from the problems of political as well as physical reconstruction; and fourth, from the irreversible revolution in the technological character of warfare, symbolized most powerfully by the clanking ironclads which utterly displaced stout oak sailing ships. All of these effects are presented, in one way or another, in the poetry of *Battle-Pieces*.

The North's military triumph ended the fundamental conflict between the existence of chattel slavery, on the one hand, and the principles of the Declaration and the ends of the Constitution, on the other hand. But it also, by its effects, including most potently, its ineluctable production of searing memories, posed very difficult questions about how what Lincoln had called a "new birth of freedom" was to be achieved. Melville's perspective thus shifts from treating the antebellum question of the fundamental conflict concerning chattel slavery in both *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, to that of treating the new question of how to rebuild the republic that, early in *Battle-Pieces*, is called "the world's fairest hope" (13). Statesmanship has a new task, and the statesman who effected the end of the fundamental conflict lies in a grave, the victim of potent malice. There is thus a void to be filled, if humanly possible, whether
by those holding public office or by writers who are public-spirited. Melville, we will show, was such a writer.

Melville's judgment concerning the "upheaval" of the Civil War also proves to be applicable not just to the military, technological, and political dimension, but also to the poetry he thinks to be most appropriate for representation of the terrible struggle and its aftermath. Lee Rust Brown, in his introduction to the Da Capo edition of *Battle-Pieces*, aptly remarks: "Confronted with an event more obviously suitable for an epic format—the birth of a nation in blood—he chose to write in the traditionally more intimate genre of the short lyric" (Da Capo, IX). But, as Brown further argues, Melville adapts the traditional form to his extraordinary subject: Instead of giving to his lyrics "the authority of a central personal voice," he presents each of the separate lyrics as a "splintered, conflicting 'aspect' of a reality too large and too terrible for smooth literary absorption" (Da Capo, IX). Melville, it seems, seeks to teach us about the war by requiring us to absorb a poetry reflective of the awfulness and the revolutionary character of the conflict. Those qualities, one may say, insist upon being integrated into the fabric of the reborn republic, yet must be tempered so as to be capable of such integration. This proves to be a stern teaching about a stern theme. It is a poetry that is aptly characterized in these lines from "The Armies of the Wilderness (1863-4)":

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None can narrate the strife in the pines,
A seal is on it—Sabaean lore!
Obscure as the wood, the entangled rhyme
But hints at the maze of war—(103).
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**B. ON THE PORTENT AS EPIGRAPH TO THE WHOLE.** As we noted in our introduction, Melville's lyric splinterings open with a baffling short poem, *The Portent*. The poem's subtitle indicates the year, 1859, in which John Brown was hanged. Its first line, "Hanging from the beam," conjures an image of the immediacy of Brown's execution. Its last line, rooted in retrospective knowledge of the course of events from 1859 to 1865, indicates that the swaying corpse, meta-
morphosed into the trajectory of an awe-inspiring heavenly body, must be understood in all its awful truthfulness: it is "The meteor of the war." The poem's placement and its claim to teach such a truth require that we consider various other features about it.

The first thing to notice is that Melville does not list it in the Contents pages of Battle-Pieces. He thus metaphorically imitates, by the suddeness of the way in which he introduces the poem, the suddenness with which soldiers may confront unexpected enemy forces. That kind of battlefield encounter, in fact, proves to underlie one of Melville's most poignant poems: In the battle for Atlanta, in 1864, Confederate forces suddenly fell upon General James McPherson, who, all unaware, was riding beyond Union lines. A Confederate soldier shot McPherson in the back as he sought to escape. He was a bright star of the Union Army, highly praised by both Grant and Sherman, and the highest ranking Union officer to be killed in the war. Melville memorializes his funeral in an intricate poem, "A Dirge for McPherson," which we will treat in Part III at length.

A second thing to notice is that Melville causes The Portent, alone among the seventy-two poems, to be set entirely in the emphatic typeface, *italics*, thus further setting it apart from the rest of the book. Taken together, these two features of The Portent suggest that Melville intends for it to serve as an epigraph. Now, it is true that, conventionally, an author chooses an epigraph from another author's writing—as Rousseau chose a passage from Aristotle's *Politics* as the epigraph for his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*. Melville, by crafting his own epigraph, produces an instructive tension between adhering to a convention and decisively departing from it. That tension, we shall show as we proceed, is an essential feature of the book.

As is the case with any thoughtfully chosen epigraph, so with Melville's singular use of The Portent: the difficulty consists in thinking through what it says and then thinking through its various connections to all that follows. Today, given that most of us have little detailed knowledge of the vast set of events we call the Civil War, such thinking requires not only pondering the poems themselves,
but gaining or regaining knowledge of relevant historical facts which lie just beyond the immediate boundaries of the poems but which Melville presupposes and subtly draws upon to teach us about the great "upheaval."

Let us then consider, first, some of the historical facts most relevant to the execution of John Brown and to Melville's poetic depiction thereof. In 1856—the year Melville published *Benito Cereno*—the struggle between pro- and anti-slavery forces unfolded in Bleeding Kansas. Brown and two of his sons and other anti-slavery men went to Pottawatomie Creek, Kansas. Shortly before, pro-slavery men in Kansas had killed six anti-slavery men. Brown and his group retaliated by using swords and guns to slaughter three men and two boys who had but recently moved from Tennessee to Kansas. None of the murdered had owned slaves; but John Brown and his band judged them to be pro-slavery. They thus subjected the five to vigilante "justice." Brown himself, at least, appears to have thought such action to be a sacred mission, one transcending the law of the land, which was held to be utterly complicit in the evil of slavery.

In October 1859, Brown led a raid on the Federal Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. His ultimate intention was to foment a slave rebellion in Virginia, a rebellion which would then spread throughout the South and bring an end to the evil institution under which the slaves suffered. The raid, which Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave who became the leading Negro spokesman for the abolition of slavery, refused to join, was a disastrous failure. But given the heated political atmosphere in the country, it produced agitated, often vehement, pronouncements in both North and South. Rosanna Warren, whom we quoted earlier in this essay, calls attention to but two such pronouncements.

Melville, highly attentive to the unfolding of political events, would have known that Robert E. Lee, soon to become the rebellious South's premier general, led the United States Marines who captured Brown and his band and that, in the process, a Marine cut Brown on the head with a sword. Melville also likely knew that
Thomas J. Jackson, soon to earn the sobriquet of "Stonewall" for his crucial role in inflicting a stunning defeat on Union forces at First Manassas, led a contingent of cadets from the Virginia Military Institute up the Shenandoah Valley to serve as guards at the execution of Brown. This took place at Charles Towne, Virginia, a few miles southwest of Harper's Ferry, on December 2, 1859. Melville also probably knew, from contemporary detailed accounts in newspapers, that Brown, tried for and found guilty of treason under the laws of Virginia, was reported in the press as going to his death reflecting on the beauty of the Shenandoah Valley, which lay in full view just to the south of the gallows. The portentousness of Lee's and Jackson's roles in the capture and execution of John Brown joins the larger portentousness of the emergent image of Brown's gallows-suspended corpse metamorphosed into "The meteor of the war." Taken together, they form the moral, the political, and the military entry to the war itself in Melville's book. And the role of Lee and Jackson in the capture and execution of John Brown stand in the background of the treatment Melville gives to those two Southern warriors, especially in a pair of poems on Jackson, and in the remarkable treatment of Lee in "Lee in the Capitol," the penultimate poem in Battle-Pieces.

Consider, second, some links between the historical background, briefly summarized here, and elements of The Portent. The poem is addressed, by way of a poetic apostrophe-an apostrophe which appears in both stanzas-to the Shenandoah Valley. That valley is one of the most beautiful and fertile areas of the South, but also one fated to suffer devastation and its inhabitants to undergo great suffering as the war ground to its terrible conclusion. These two aspects of its fate are vividly captured in the line "Gaunt the shadow on your green," wherein the gaunt and twitching corpse of John Brown does indeed cast its shadow, southward, on the fertile valley-but a valley whose green is progressively to give way to the grey, brown, and black of destruction and death.

The lines "The cut is on the crown" "And the stabs shall heal no more," forming a poetic frame to the parenthesis (Lo, John Brown), in the first stanza, tersely evoke both the cuts on his "crown" which
the United States Marines inflicted during his capture and, more profoundly, the never-to-heal "stabs" Brown and his followers inflicted on the five men in Kansas. Indeed, the metamorphosis of those "stabs" into the yet-to-heal metaphorical "stabs" of the hatreds and resentments of North and South is itself a remarkable forecast of the long shadow of the Civil War. The bitter quarrel, in South Carolina, in 1999, concerning the propriety of flying the Confederate flag over the state capitol, is but one manifestation of the residual effects of those "stabs" well more than a century after the last guns were fired.

Consider, third, just a few of the intricate poetic allusions which Melville embeds in *The Portent* and then the way in which they anticipate other such poetic allusions in the body of the poems. Rosanna Warren comments on the image of the "valley":

The subliminal suggestion of "valley" in relation to "Shenandoah," combined with "shadow" and the ominous implications of the poem thus far, may call to mind "the valley of the shadow of death" from Psalm 23. (Warren, 107)

Warren also observes that Melville's use of the image of a "meteor" evokes memory of Satan's banner, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "The imperial ensign, which, full high advanced/Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind." (I. 535.) And, in a parallel way, she observes that Melville's use of "weird" to refer to John Brown evokes memory of the witches, aptly called "weird sisters," in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with all the attendant implications of that which has supernatural power over human events (Warren, 109).

Hennig Cohen, who made what is so far the most careful general scholarly study of *Battle-Pieces*, looked more broadly at the poetic allusions of the book than does Warren. He shows in detail that the three most important sources of poetic inspiration for Melville are passages in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible; Milton's treatment of the revolt of Satan; in *Paradise Lost*; and a number of Shakespeare's tragedies (Cohen, 11-13). A few examples of these poetic resonances, emanating from the epigraphic *The Portent*, must suffice for this essay.
Cohen observes that "The Conflict of Convictions" is cast in the form of a dialogue and is the first of three such poems in the book—the other two are "Donelson" and "The Armies of the Wilderness." The "conflict" in the poem's title has a double meaning: On the one hand, it presages a profound articulation of the great moral and political issues which agitated the Republic as it moved toward actual war; on the other hand, it transcends those issues in the direction of what Robert Penn Warren calls "the fundamental ironical dualities of existence such as "will against necessity" and "ignorance against fate (Cohen, 207-8). The poem also is rich in poetic allusions, following the example of The Portent. Consider these lines from early in the poem:

Satan's old age is strong and hale,
A disciplined captain, gray in skill
And Raphael a white enthusiast still;
Dashed aims, at which Christ's martyrs pale,
Shall Mammon's slaves fulfill?

Cohen detects in these lines, particularly the last, allusions both to Matthew 6.24 ("No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and mammon.") and Paradise Lost I.679-82 ("Mammon led them on,/ Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell/From heav'n, for ev'n in heav'n his looks and thoughts/ Were always downward bent...").

The preceding brief excursions into the ways The Portent serves as Melville's epigraph to the whole are but one dimension of the structure of the work. We turn, then, to consider, more generally, what that structure is.

C. THE THREE GROUPS OF POEMS IN BATTLE-PIECES. With the blindfolded, mute, swaying body of John Brown and the metamorphosed body as meteor lingering in his mind, the reader is at once led into the main body of the poems. They prove to fall into three groups. The first group, which has no general title, contains fifty-two poems (Da Capo, 13-162); the second group, titled "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial," contains sixteen poems (165-186); and the third group, which, like the first group, has no general title, contains three
The first poem in the first group is titled "Misgivings (1860)." It speaks in the voice of a Northern patriot who muses "upon my country's ills"; who characterizes America as "the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime," the crime of enslavement of Negroes; and who, in contemplating the emergent political and military storm, reflects that "Nature's dark side is heeded now-(Ah! optimist-cheer disheartened flown)-" (13). The fifty-second and last poem in the first group is titled "America." It thus marks a return to the theme of "my country" in "Misgivings." This poem speaks in a voice which seems to be that of a patriot, yet not now the Northern patriot of "Misgivings," but one who transcends the fundamental division into North and South. This new patriot, aware of the pit into which America has sunk, reflects on the course of the war; on America as a Mother who, "speechless stood,/ Pale at the fury of her brood"; and on the fact that at "her feet" lies "a shivered yoke" cast off from the enslaved. But this new patriot ends with an ominous thought: America now comes to view as a triumphant figure, "Law on her brow and empire in her eyes" (162). What that possibly portends is deeply troubling regarding the nature of the American republic in an uncertain future following the Civil War.

Between these framing poems of the first group are lyric poems of widely varying lengths, spoken by many different voices and presented within a complex and interacting set of perspectives. Three of those perspectives are particularly crucial to our inquiry. The first perspective is a dialectic which frames the military dimension of the war within the political dimension. The first main group begins with three poems-"Misgivings" is the first-which articulate the increasingly hate-filled political atmosphere in America leading up to the outbreak of hostilities at Fort Sumter. The group ends with thirteen poems-"America" is the last-which feature a variety of voices reflecting upon various facets of the war in the aftermath of Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. Among these is one called "The Martyr"; it is an evocation of the passion of "the people" in the North which was unleashed by the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. At the center of
the thirteen is one called "The Released Rebel Prisoner"; it is a sympathetic evocation of a Southern soldier, released from imprisonment, moving through New York City on his way to his devastated "home," under the gaze of "the Foe"-who are also called "His cousins and his countrymen." Thus the entire first group opens and closes with complex reflections on the nature of the Civil War, in particular on its political dimensions, and these reflections frame a long central section in which the majority of the poems treat specific battles of the war and the remainder treat themes closely related to but distinct from the military part of the struggle.

The second perspective in this opening group-this interlocking of battles and related topics—thus proves to be intertwined with the first, and to be reflective of the two themes announced in the title of Melville's book. The first theme is "battle-pieces." These poems treat a relative handful of the more than ten thousand military engagements of the Civil War and include poems on crucial and famous battles such as "Donelson," "Shiloh," and "Gettysburg." The principles underlying Melville's selection of battles are difficult to grasp, but we will set forth some suggestions on this point in the third part of our essay and in the Appendix. The second theme is "aspects. These poems treat highly various subjects: "The House-top," on the draft riots in New York City in July, 1863; "The Swamp Angel," on a huge black mortar used over many months in the siege of Charleston, a mortar likened to "a thick Afric lip" and set in vivid symbolic tension with the "white man's seraph," St. Michael's Church; and "A Dirge for McPherson," on the military funeral of General James McPherson, the highest-ranking Northern officer to be killed in battle, struck down by a Confederate bullet before Atlanta. The complex interplay between the "battle-pieces" and the "aspects" of the war is one of the most challenging and revelatory dimensions of Melville's book.

The third perspective which comes to light within the first group is a chronology of the war. This is most readily visible where Melville has added a date to the title of a poem. At first, it is simply a year (1859); in later poems, it is a month and year (May 1863); and for one and only one poem, that which treats the people's response to the
death of Lincoln, Melville sees fit to append the date certain: April 15, 1865. Melville's deliberate, subtle, and rigorously accurate attention to chronology is a complex subject the details of which may be found in the argument set forth in the Appendix to our essay. It is sufficient, here, to make two observations:

First, beneath the manifest surface of the use of dates for some poems in the first group there comes to light, on close investigation, a remarkable rigor and precision that pertain as well to the events referred to in the undated poems, which are interspersed among the dated ones. These qualities reflect Melville's detailed, careful, and intense use of contemporary material on the war, including, most particularly, a commercial publication called *The Rebellion Record*, published in New York City. It is a series of huge volumes containing immensely detailed material on the unfolding of the war: official reports of battles; newspaper accounts, North and South; speeches; political events, North and South; and poetry called forth by the war.

Second, in two instances, Melville has unobtrusively transposed the date of important events to effect remarkable and subtle political purposes. In the one case, in a footnote to the poem "Gettysburg," he has transposed the date of the dedication of the military cemetery at Gettysburg from November 1863 to July 4, 1865. In the other case, he has transposed the date of a congressional hearing, before which the defeated Robert E. Lee is commanded to testify, from February 1866 to April 1866. These transpositions, both of which have complex political effects, come to light only against the background of the scrupulous fidelity to accurate chronology which otherwise characterizes the ordering of the poems. This facet of Melville's political thought, in *Battle-Pieces*, is, we submit, worthy of classical rhetoricians such as Xenophon, a teacher of rhetoric to Benjamin Franklin.

The second group of poems-sixteen in number—has, as we noted, the general title: "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial." Nearly all of the sixteen poetically anticipate the prose thought of the Supplement: "the glory of the war falls short of its pathos—a pathos which now at last ought to disarm all animosity" (265). The poems that convey this pathos, this suffering, are nearly all elegiac: they are
mourning songs. As such, they are quieter, simpler, and nearly all are shorter than those in the first group. Though they often refer to specific battles—such as Pea Ridge, Arkansas (a Northern victory), and Chickamauga, Tennessee (a stinging Northern defeat)—the perspective, the emphasis, is not on the battle activity as such, nor on who was victorious or who was defeated. Rather, it is on those who suffered and died, or who suffered and lived on, fated to meditate on that suffering: soldier, parent, brother, widow, orphaned child. And here, though Melville again employs different voices—soldiers who were slain speaking from the grave to the living, or a commemorative speaker standing at a grave—it is often impossible to tell whether the scene is in the North or the South, or whether the speaker is from either part of the now perilously reunited Republic. Suffering, deep human suffering, in a war that was "an upheaval affecting the basis of things," has joined even foes, in North and South alike, in a way that transcends political boundaries and, in a sense, obliterates them. Such at least is the possibility delicately conveyed by the poetry.

The second group, though thus predominantly elegiac, comes to a perhaps fitting conclusion in two poems which portray victorious Northern soldiers in their transition from war to peace. The penultimate one, "Presentation to the Authorities, by Privates, of Colors captured in Battles ending in the Surrender of Lee," portrays Northern soldiers laying surrendered Confederate battle flags on "the altar which of right claims all /Our Country," then turning toward "waiting homes with vindicated laws." The ultimate one, "The Returned Volunteer to his Rifle," portrays a Northern volunteer, from the Hudson Valley region of New York, soliloquizing as he in fact returns to his "hearth-my father's seat." The soldier's apostrophe to his rifle includes the last evocation of a specific battle in this second group of poems:

> How oft I told thee of this scene-
> The Highlands blue-the river's narrowing sheen.
> Little at Gettysburg we thought to find such haven;
> but God kept it green.
Long rest! with belt, and bayonet, and canteen. (183)

With this poetic apostrophe, one might think that Melville's poetry on the Civil War should come to a close: the war is ended, peace is restored, the soldier is home. But it is troubling to realize that, although in the preceding, predominantly elegiac poems in the second group, the boundaries between North and South are largely obliterated by shared pathos, yet here at the very end there is no poem treating the return home of a Southern soldier. Furthermore, by the deft device of making the Northern soldier remember but one battle, his survival at the slaughter at Gettysburg, the poet also calls attention to the high point of the Confederacy's assault on the North, and more galling to Southern sensibility, to Lee's defeat, which was sealed by the devastation of Pickett's division in what is perhaps the best-known and most disastrous maneuver of the entire war. Is this not to rub salt in Southern wounds still raw from utter defeat in battle? Is this a proper way to make the transition from war to peace? Has the poet forgotten that the end of war is peace?

What we find, in fact, is that the poetry does not end with the transition from war to peace. Instead, the reader is confronted at once with a third and final group of poems, three in number, a group with no general title, one which at once thrusts him back into the war. For the first poem of this final group proves to be another "battle-piece," one which seems properly to belong in Melville's first group of poems on the war. This jolting poetic return to war takes place in a poem titled "The Scout Toward Aldie." It is by far the longest poem in Melville's book. It is a narrative, in ballad form, of a Northern cavalry raid into northern Virginia. The raid is directed against the formidable-almost mythic-Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby, who leads a skillful and tenacious group of guerilla rangers in repeated attacks on Northern forces. The Northern commander of the raid is an audacious young colonel of cavalry, a bridegroom, who leaves his bride in his tent as he goes to capture or kill Mosby. The raid is a disaster. The colonel is killed and Mosby and his men escape. At the end, the poet evokes the grief of still one more widow, whose heart "no more shall spring:/To Mosby-land the
dirges cling" (225).

One must wonder if Melville's poetic art has failed him in so ordering his book: Why does he make a seemingly disorderly poetic return to the agonies of the war, so recently ended? Why is not "The Scout Toward Aldie" where it belongs-among the "battle-pieces" set within the chronological unfolding of the war? And why does the poet rekindle the pathos of the second group of poems by compelling the reader once again to witness and share in the grief of still one more young widow?

In reflecting on these questions, we are moved to recur, first, to a statement in *Moby-Dick* and, second, to a poem within the first group of *Battle-Pieces*, a poem that speaks of the poet's art. At the beginning of a chapter titled "The Honor and Glory of Whaling," Ishmael makes this striking pronouncement: "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method." (Ch. 82, 361). That thought is poetically figured forth, we suggest, in the poem titled "Dupont's Round Fight" (November, 1861). It portrays a sea battle at Port Royal, South Carolina: Northern steam-propelled warships move repeatedly around a perfectly executed geometric course, a broad ellipse, to unleash devastating broadsides against Southern land batteries. Prefacing the two-stanza poetic narrative of the naval maneuver and its effects is a single stanza concerning Art:

In time and measure perfect moves
All Art whose aim is sure;
Evolving rhyme and stars divine
Have rules and they endure.  (30)

This first stanza is itself an exemplar of the principle it states: perfect measure in each and every line—that is, perfect iambic feet, four to each odd- and three to each even-numbered line. What is more, Hennig Cohen, who has written the most thoughtful notes on these poems yet to be published, observes that in this poem "Melville adheres to a degree of regularity of form remarkable for him. This regularity is appropriate in a poem which has as its theme the necessity for `rules`— (Cohen, 215). All the more striking, then,
is the momentary irregularity that suddenly appears in the second line of the third and final stanza:

The rebel at Port Royal felt  
*The Unity* overawe, (emphasis added)  
And rued the spell. A type was here,  
And victory of law.

The third-to-last line, and it alone, momentarily breaks the otherwise perfect measure of iambics with the anapestic foot in "o-ver-awe," and, paradoxically, thus undermines the very unity it expresses. The broken line is a clue to the meaning of the whole.

That sudden poetic disorderliness within a larger framework of strict orderliness, a disorderliness that itself is rooted in a profound sense of what true Art ultimately requires, underlies Melville's placement of "The Scout Toward Aldie." For as we shall now see, that seemingly disorderly re-opening of warfare in the third-to-last poem of his book, a structural disorderliness anticipated by the poetic disorderliness of the third-to-last line of "Dupont's Round Fight," is itself a poetic reflection of Melville's concern that the war may not truly be over. Melville's concern is shown, first, by the fact that only in "The Scout Toward Aldie" does he ever depict guerrilla warfare. That warfare is vividly and terribly portrayed as one in which the combatants on both sides are reduced to a Hobbesian state of nature, a war of every man against every man, a war that is conducted seemingly endlessly by small bands of determined combatants operating utterly on their own in no-man's-land. It is warfare in which even the most minimal laws of war are ignored: those captured on either side are not treated as legitimate prisoners of war under the law of nations but are peremptorily hung from the nearest tree. This is fearfully barbaric action which Melville powerfully evokes when he causes a Union officer to refer to the hangings as "that vile jerk and drop" from the "gallows-bough" of a tree in the forest (198). The image of the swaying executed body of John Brown which opens Melville's book is thus here replaced by the image of the swaying lynched bodies of prisoners, victims of guerrilla warfare of the most savage kind.
Melville's concern that the war may not in fact be over is shown, second, in "Lee in the Capitol," the poem that follows immediately upon "The Scout Toward Aldie." In this the central poem of the final group of three, Melville for the only time in his book poetically treats an actual political event: the compulsory testimony of Robert E. Lee before a joint committee of Congress in February 1866. The crux of the inquiry directed to Lee is a series of questions concerning the bona fides of the Southern surrender, including, in particular, the question whether, "should we our arm withdraw,/Would that betray" the newly emancipated blacks? (232). Lee is made to reply as best he can, a reply which comes to a climax in his delivery of a noble, albeit wholly fabricated, speech, given to him by Melville. It is a speech to which we will return at some length in our third part. But the senators remain unconvinced. The issue is not settled and Lee leaves.

Melville's concern that the war may not be over is shown, third, by a remarkable passage in the Supplement. Emphasizing that there remain great and troubling "doubts" and "fears" as to what will be the course of events a year or so after the war has ended, Melville poses these pregnant questions:

Why is not the cessation of war now at length attended with the settled calm of peace? Wherefore in a clear sky do we still turn our eyes toward the South, as the Neapolitan, months after the eruption, turns toward Vesuvius? Do we dread lest the repose may be deceptive? In the recent convulsion has the crater shifted? Let us revere that sacred uncertainty which forever impends over men and nations. (267-8)

In the event, "that sacred uncertainty" proves, mercifully, to have opened not in the direction of prolonged savage guerrilla warfare, as the gruesome aftermath of full-scale massed battles, but in the direction of an uneasy peace called "reconstruction." But Melville, writing in mid-1866, shortly before the book went to press, could not know that any more than could other American citizens. And so, his last poem makes a return to elegy, to the poetic mode of the central part of his Civil War poetry, in the hope, it seems, that it
maybe the final such poetic rendering required by his Art. It is most fitting that his very last poem is called "A Meditation." It alone of all the poems has a lengthy subtitle, one much worthy of that meditation—that deep and searching contemplation—to which the title calls us: "ATTRIBUTED TO A NORTHERNER AFTER ATTENDING THE LAST OF TWO FUNERALS FROM THE SAME HOMESTEAD-THOSE OF A NATIONAL AND A CONFEDERATE OFFICER (BROTHERS) HIS KINSMEN, WHO HAD DIED FROM THE EFFECTS OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN THE CLOSING BATTLES (238).

The American Civil War at its darkest reaches was indeed at times one of brother against brother. It is awesome to contemplate that the unnatural act of fratricide proved to be a rough and ugly stone in a new foundation of the American Republic; and it is worth noting, in this connection, that the only political philosopher to be named in Battle-Pieces is Machiavelli (267), whose Discourses on Livy presents the most searching treatment ever written of the fratricidal origins of ancient Rome.

Ishmael says that "To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme" (Ch. 104, 456). Let us next consider what sort of political teaching Melville seeks to impart to readers who will stay the difficult and often painful course with him as he takes up the mighty theme of the Civil War in his mighty book thereon.

III. The Political Teaching of Battle-Pieces

Battle-Pieces was composed retrospectively in two senses: first, Melville wrote at the end of the war; second, he reshaped that war to meet the needs of postwar reconstruction. The first sense can be documented immediately; the second is the argument put forth here in Part III.

In the Preface Melville claims both that he recollected "the strife as a memory" and that most of the poems "originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond," which is to say, the fall of the Confederate government and thereby the harbinger of war's end. As partial substantiation of these claims, more than a third of the poems treat events after Appomattox. But it is Melville's reshaping of the
Civil War, that second sense of retrospect, which will concern us here.

To understand it, we shall take our bearings by the prose Supplement at the end of Battle-Pieces, first by explicating its teaching on moderation. Next we will show how the argument for moderation in the Supplement dictates a reshaping of the Civil War poems. Last we return to the rhetorical insistence upon patriotism and piety in the Supplement to show how these find moderate echo in the poems. By repeatedly taking our bearings from the Supplement, we imitate Melville: as he read the war from the perspective of its end, so we shall read his book.

A. MELVILLE'S "SUPPLEMENT" : MODERATION IN VICTORY. This twenty-five paragraph essay needs to be considered for both its political argument and for its political rhetoric. First the argument.

The subject of the Supplement is post-Civil War Reconstruction. Addressed to the victorious North, its purpose is to plead for generosity toward the defeated South in order to restore the Union. But the defeated South means the white South and such generosity involves temporarily subordinating the black freedmen to the goal of reuniting the states.

We can locate Melville's argument on the political spectrum of his time. Cohen notes: "[Melville] inclined in his political sympathies toward the Democrats and the moderate wing of the Republican party, and one of the few reviews of any length devoted to Battle-Pieces was in a newspaper of this persuasion (New York Herald, September 3, 1866)" (294). In fact, the poet's political sympathies approximate those of President Abraham Lincoln. This is the Lincoln who, towards war's end, concluded his Second Inaugural thus: "With malice toward none; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." This is the Lincoln who is reported by Lord Charnwood to have rejected harsh treatment of Confederate leaders:
Lastly, there was talk of the treatment of rebels and of the demand that had been heard for "persecution" and "bloody work." "No one need expect me," said Lincoln, "to take any part in hanging or killing these men, even the worst of them. Frighten them out of the country, open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off." "Shoo," he added, throwing up his large hands like a man scaring sheep. "We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union."  

This is finally the Lincoln who, in his last public address, sketched his policy on Reconstruction. The date was April 11, 1865, after both the fall of Richmond and the surrender of Lee at Appomattox. In the following passages from that address, the President enunciates the general principle of Reconstruction and then illustrates with the proposed new state government for Louisiana:

We all agree that the seceded States, so called, are out of their proper practical relation with the Union; and that the sole object of the government, civil and military, in regard to those States is to again get them into that proper practical relation.... The amount of constituency, so to to [sic] speak, on which the new Louisiana government rests, would be more satisfactory to all, if it contained fifty, thirty, or even twenty thousand, instead of only about twelve thousand, as it does. It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man. I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers. Still, the question is not whether the Louisiana government, as it stands, is quite all that is desirable. The question is "Will it be wiser to take it as it is, and help improve it; or to reject, and disperse it?" "Can Louisiana be brought into proper practical relation with the Union sooner by sustaining, or by discarding her new State Government?".... Concede that the new government of Louisiana is only to what it should be as the egg is to the fowl, we shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it?.... What has been said of
Louisiana will apply generally to other States. (Basler ed., VIII, 403-4)

Before his own assassination, then, Abraham Lincoln sketched a Reconstruction policy resembling that of Herman Melville.

Nonetheless, between the president and the poet, there are differences in emphasis. While addressing Reconstruction, Melville eschews details of legislation and concentrates on the sentiments needed to support laws. The poet thus recalls the teaching of Plato and Rousseau: laws by themselves are weak; to be effective, they require support in the mores. Especially is this true after a civil war, where laws have failed and arms have destroyed so much. As Melville says, "the pacification...which lovers of their country yearn for, and which our triumphant arms... did not bring about, and which law-making never by itself can achieve, may yet be largely aided by generosity of sentiment, public and private" (266). Questions the poet finds appropriate are about manners: "...true reconciliation seldom follows a violent quarrel; but...nice observances and mutual are indispensable to prevention of a new rupture" (270).

The manners of interest to the poet, of course, are primarily those of the North: "Rightly will more forbearance be required from the North than the South, for the North is victor" (271). Furthermore, this forbearance is directed toward white Southerners. Blacks are, of course, to be considered, but in a subordinate position. "In our natural solicitude to confirm the benefit of liberty to the blacks," writes Melville, "let us forbear from measures of dubious constitutional rightfulness toward our white countrymen-measures of a nature to provoke, among other the last evils, exterminating hatred of race toward race" (268). The poet is well aware of dangers of such a policy towards blacks, but he hopes for future remedies to these: "Something may well be left to the graduated care of future legislation, and to heaven.'

Such a policy, generosity towards white Southerners and subordination of freedmen, ran against the grain of Northern feelings, as Melville's Supplement shows. Northern feelings were bitter, triumphant, and censorious. Bitterness is mentioned three times. Melville
worries lest he contribute to "a bitterness which every sensible American must wish at an end"; he aborts a line of thought that "leads toward those waters of bitterness from which one can only turn aside and be silent"; he breaks off another theme "with resentments so close as to be almost domestic in their bitterness" (263, 269, 272). Such bitterness finds causes. One is the "clinging reproach" of "the systematic degradation of man," this "curse of slavery" (261, 266).

More pertinent to the war are two topics so sensitive the poet mentions them only in the central paragraph. Here he writes briefly, generally, and apologetically:

There were excesses which marked the conflict, most of which are perhaps inseparable from a civil strife so intense and prolonged, and involving warfare in some border countries new and imperfectly civilized. Barbarities also there were, for which the Southern people collectively can hardly be held responsible, though perpetrated by ruffians in their name. (264)

And immediately Melville turns away from these topics to speak of Southern virtues. The poet even cautions about the emotion of victory: "It should not be construed into an exultation misapplied—an exultation as ungenerous as unwise, and made to minister, however indirectly, to that kind of censoriousness too apt to be produced in certain natures by success after trying reverses" (263-4). For such emotions can easily restart the war, at least in speech: "Upon differences in debate shall acrimonious recriminations be exchanged? shall censorious superiority assumed by one section provoke defiant self-assertion on the other? shall Manassas and Chickamauga be retorted for Chattanooga and Richmond?" (270-71).

These Northern feelings, Melville realizes, are obstacles to acceptance of his argument. The poet knows his position is unpopular. Awareness of this difficulty is suggested by delay. Not until the eighteenth and nineteenth paragraphs does he fully state his argument. Previous to these full statements, the poet several times alludes to his tardiness in coming to the point. In the fifth paragraph,
having broken off from stating his case, he says there "seems no reason...why serviceable truth should keep cloistered because not partisan" (260). Yet cloistered remains his argument, for ten paragraphs later, still with no full statement of his policy, the poet apologizes: "Let it be held no reproach to any one that he pleads for reasonable consideration for our late enemies..." (264). And toward the end he admits that "in times like the present, one who desires to be impartially just in the expression of his views, moves as among sword-points presented on every side" (272).

Besides delay, Melville attempts to remedy the unpopularity of his politics by making two rhetorical claims. He associates himself with patriotism and with Christianity. His Supplement begins: "Were I fastidiously anxious for the symmetry of this book, it would close with the notes." But, he adds, "the times are such that patriotism—not free from solicitude—urges a claim overriding all literary scruples" (259). And on the next page he says, "the work of Reconstruction, if admitted to be feasible at all, demands little but common sense and Christian charity" (290). Each of these claims, once introduced, is developed at some length. We shall return for a fuller investigation of the poet's patriotism and his Christianity below. For now it is enough to say that Melville's Reconstruction argument, faced with passionate opposition, is protected by certain rhetorical devices.

B. MELVILLE'S CIVIL WAR POETICALLY RESHAPED BY MODERATION.
The argument for moderating postwar passions, we shall now argue, shapes Melville's poetry of the war. For the poet composes Battle-Pieces in hopes of tempering extremes of passion both by omission and commission, by avoiding certain things and fabricating others. The key to these selections is that Melville wants "to modify or do away" with those feelings and opinions "of a less temperate and charitable cast" (265; 260). Everything must be done with a view not to historical accuracy but to facilitate "the pacification...lovers of their country yearn for" (266).

This reshaping of history can be illustrated first in the poetic treatment of three leaders of the war: Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses Grant, and Robert E. Lee. Lincoln's is a particularly telling case in
view of the principled agreement between president and poet. Nonetheless, Lincoln and the rhetoric of his speeches all but disappear from the poetic part of *Battle-Pieces*. Hence in seventy-two poems about the Civil War, the following words never appear: Abraham Lincoln, slavery, and the Declaration of Independence. "The Martyr," a poem about Lincoln's assassination, never mentions the president by name; and in fact its true focus, suggested by its subtitle, is "the passion of the people on the 15th of April, 1865" (141). Mention is made of "The Abrahamic rivers" in "The Muster," a poem about the final postwar review of the Northern troops at Washington (145, 146). But this phrase is ambiguous, since in context it could also refer to either the biblical patriarch or the Mississippi River. Perhaps the omission of Lincoln's name is best explained in one of Melville's notes: "Few need be reminded that, by the less intelligent classes of the South, Abraham Lincoln...was regarded as a monster wantonly warring upon liberty. He stood for the personification of tyrannic power. Each Union soldier was called a Lincolnite" (251). The disappearance of Lincoln's name from the poems, even from the poem devoted to his assassination, is a training of Northern restraint.

If Lincoln's name is hardly mentioned, his speeches fare even worse. In his Second Inauguration Address, Lincoln claimed slavery was the root of the conflict: "All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war" (Basler ed. VIII, 332). For his own purposes of moderating postwar hostilities, however, this is a claim Melville downplays. The word "slavery" itself never appears in the poems. And there is but one mention of "slaves," in a poem about Northern General Sherman's "March to the Sea": as Union troops march through the South, "And the banners brightly blooming/The slaves by thousands drew,/ And they marched beside the drumming,/ And they joined the armies blue" (130).

There is, however, a poem titled "Formerly a Slave," a poem that suggests Melville's ambivalence towards the freedmen. Although hinting at dangers for the blacks, this poem reiterates the need to subordinate their immediate interest to reconciliation among whites. One hint of peril is the placement of this poem within a group of
poems set just after the war, where troubling events suggest the passions of the conflict have not died and, indeed, will not easily die. In the first of this small subgroup, a released Southern prisoner of war, stopping at New York ("the Nineveh of the North"; "The City of the Foe"), cannot stop thinking of the war. In the second, Southern guns, buried in a Virginia cemetery, suggest Southerners desire to continue the war. In the fourth, "The Apparition" describes a volcanic eruption desolating an idyllic pastoral scene, a desolation recalling the war. In the fifth, "Magnanimity Baffled," finds a Northerner trying to befriend a Southern soldier who, he discovers, is already dead.

Into the center of this foreboding context Melville inserts "Formerly a Slave," describing a painting of a black woman freed from slavery. Its beginning is ominous: "The sufferance of her race is shown,/

(154). The allusion is to Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice where the Jew Shylock remarks to his Christian enemy Antonio, "In the Rialto you have rated me About my moneys and my usances. Still I have borne it with a patient shrug, For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe." Thus Melville's beginning is unsettling, suggesting hatred between different races and creeds as well as its unjust treatment of minorities. Nonetheless, much of the poem bespeaks the argument of the Supplement, with its hope for the future of the black race in America. Although the woman in the portrait suffers, nonetheless "Her children's children they shall know/The good withheld from her;/ And so her reverie takes prophetic cheer." The final line speaks of her face as "Sibylline, yet benign," prophetic of future good.

These ambivalent poetic sentiments are consistent with the prose Supplement. The poet, on the one hand, is touched by the plight of the freedmen. "The blacks, in their infant pupilage to freedom, appeal to the sympathies of every humane mind." Nonetheless he argues, while we are rightly concerned for the future of the blacks, "the future of the whole country, involving the future of the blacks, urges a paramount claim upon our anxiety" (267). While we rejoice at the downfall of slavery as an abhorred "atheistical iniquity," yet "the coexistence of the two races in the South...seems
With such evil the poet counsels moderate hopes; for "with certain evils men must be more or less patient" (269).

Finally there is the Declaration of Independence. Central to Lincoln's indictment of slavery was this document's equality clause: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." For Abraham Lincoln, this clause not only revealed the injustice of slavery; it also provided the unifying bond for our nation of immigrants. As Lincoln explains in an 1858 speech, not all Americans are descendants of Englishmen.

We have besides these [English descendants] among us perhaps half our people who are not descendants at all of these men, they are men who have come from Europe-German, Irish, French and Scandinavian-men that have come from Europe themselves, or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things. If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us, but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together.... (Basler ed., II, 499-500)

And it was this "electric cord in that Declaration" which Lincoln, in his 1863 Gettysburg Address made both the purpose to which the country dedicated itself at its birth ("Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation...dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal") and for which it
fought the Civil War: "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation...can long endure."

Melville reverses Lincoln. In place of the equality clause from the Declaration the poet reinstates the common English ancestry of Americans. Hence the battle of Fort Donelson becomes a "perverted Bunker Hill"; the narrator in one poem observes "In North and South still beats the vein Of Yorkist and Lancastrian"; another searches the lineage of a Northern commander:

Trace back his lineage, and his sires,
Yeoman or noble, you shall find
Enrolled with men of Agincourt,
Heroes who shared great Harry's mind. (105)

Melville himself in the Supplement at last distinguishes the blacks from Southern whites by speaking of the latter as "having a like origin with ourselves" and "nearer to us in nature" (44, 74, 105, 151, 266, 267).

This emphasis on common ancestry conduces to pacification; it also turns the war itself into fratricidal slaughter and reconciliation into family harmonizing after the war. Hence just before the war the narrator of "Apathy and Enthusiasm" speaks of "The appealings of the mother to brother and to brother,/ Not in hatred so to part"; the Wilderness in Virginia, where two bloody battles were fought, resembles "the plain Tramped like the cinderybeach of the damned-a site for the city of Cain." As opposed armies warily wait for battle on the same field, a chorus warns, "Picket, Take heed-take heed of thy brother!" (96). The final "Meditation" is narrated by a Northerner after attending two funerals of brothers on opposites sides; it recalls moments during the war when brothers and kinsmen felt a sympathy towards the other side, when "something of a strange remorse Rebelled against the sanctioned sin of blood,/ And Christian wars of natural brotherhood." And this same narrator, surveying the fratricide, asks "Can Africa pay back this blood Spilt on Potomac's shore?" (97, 13, 241, 242).

So both Lincoln's name and his speeches about slavery and citizenship are replaced by poetry the poet hopes will fulfill Lincoln's
hope in his Second Inaugural, "to bind up the nation's wounds." In contrast to Lincoln's unobtrusiveness, the two military leaders of the war figure prominently in these poems about "the wars of Grant and Lee" (137). Grant is mentioned twenty-two times (in eight poems as well as notes and Supplement); Lee appears seventeen times (in five poems and notes). Yet the portraits of both have also been artfully remodeled to fit postwar needs.

Grant, the war figure mentioned most often, receives considerable praise. What Helen Vendler calls his panoramic view at Chattanooga ("Grant stood on cliffs whence all was plain") suggests a statesmanlike foresight like that of Melville himself. A poem for the 1863 Battle of "Chattanooga" speaks of Grant having a "plan"; one for the 1864 battle of Wilderness mentions his "resolute scheme" (90, 101). And at war's end in "The Fall of Richmond," his star is in the ascent:

Honor to Grant the brave,
Whose three stars now like Orion's rise
When wreck is on the wave-
Bless his glaive. (135)

Highly praised though he be, Grant is nonetheless sketched selectively. His praiseworthiness rests less on brilliantly conceived and ruthlessly fought battles than in magnanimous clemency after the fighting. The Northern general does not receive a poem celebrating his most brilliant triumph at Vicksburg, although this campaign is mentioned for purposes of reconciliation. Specifically, the end of this campaign is mentioned in the final lines of the final poem in order to encourage not triumph but magnanimous refusal to be triumphant:

When Vicksburg fell, and the moody files marched out,
Silent the victors stood, scorning to raise a shout. (243)

Grant is allowed a celebratory triumph in "The Surrender at Appomattox," but later, after a poem on the assassination of Lincoln, this surrender is mentioned in a poem whose subtitle reads: "A plea against the vindictive cry raised by civilians shortly after the surren-
der at Appomattox" and which ends thus:

    Spare Spleen her ire,
    And think how Grant met Lee. (145)

    Furthermore, Grant's generalship is downplayed in the second-
longest poem, "Donelson." Grant's excellence in this poem seems
limited to a passive kind, such as observing the spirit that is already
in his soldiers (47) and then restraining his soldiers from a night fight
(50). This passivity belies Melville's source. A newspaper account in
*The Rebellion Record* praises Grant's generalship, such as his
logistical sense of where a variety of men and materiel could be
brought to bear upon this fort, as well as his immediate leadership
at several crises in the battle. 35 Even on small points Grant's
achievements are usurped by those of his men: it was Grant, not his
men, who uttered the following:

    *Our troops are full of spirits say
    The siege won't prove a creeping one.*
    *They purpose not the lingering stay
    Of old beleaguerers;* (34)

    In fact, Donelson was the beginning of Grant's great strategic insight
into the nature of this war: fight the enemy wherever you meet him;
use Northern superiority in men and materiel; and demand uncon-
ditional surrender. But no mention is made of Grant's demand in
this and subsequent battles for "unconditional surrender." Nor is
mention made of his reputation as a "butcher" of men in battles
including Wilderness. In other words, instead of opposing Grant's
generalship to that of Lee in ways that might rekindle wartime hate,
Melville downplays military leadership and emphasizes Grant's
noble restraint and magnanimity toward a fallen foe. A Grant so
remodeled fits the Supplement policy of moderating the passions of
war for the needs of Reconstruction.

    Similar to the treatment of the Union general is that of his
Confederate opponent. Like Grant, Lee does not receive a poem
celebrating his most brilliant victory, that at Chancelorsville, al-
though that battle is mentioned in connection with Stonewall
Jackson's death. Nor is Lee's defeat mentioned in "Gettysburg." Thus Melville hews to a middle way, intending to rouse neither triumph nor resentment, for neither passion conduces to true pacification.

Lee, however, receives the honor of becoming the poet's spokesman. In the lengthy penultimate poem, "Lee in the Capitol," Melville invents for the now-retired Confederate general a speech to a congressional hearing, one that anticipates crucial points of the Supplement. Specifically, Lee tells the Northern senators what they must accept of Southern attitudes towards the war. Responding to questions by Northern senators about the mind of the South, Lee goes beyond the questions to counsel Melvillian restraint and magnanimity:

Push not your triumph; do not urge
Submission beyond the verge....
Where various hazards meet the eyes,
To elect in magnanimity is wise. (234-5)

Lee's poetic remarks echo Melville's Supplement in calling for Northern restraint: "It is enough, for all practical purposes, if the South have been taught by the terrors of civil war to feel that Succession, like Slavery, is against Destiny; that both now lie buried in one grave; that her fate is linked with ours; and that together we comprise the Nation" (260). That is, the South must only "feel" the inevitability of the war's outcome; we in the North ought not push the South beyond this to hypocritical statements of penitence for having waged the war. And we should exercise this restraint not simply out of realism, but also in the name of higher virtues. As Melville argues: "Some revisionary legislation and adaptive is indispensable; but with this should harmoniously work another kind of prudence, not unallied with entire magnanimity" (266-67).

Melville and his spokesman Lee not only counsel Northern restraint towards the South, but also Northern sympathy for the South's attachment to its own, to its war heroes, its kith and kin. As Melville writes in his own name, "The mourners who this summer bear flowers to the mounds of the Virginian and Georgian dead are,
in their domestic bereavement and proud affection, as sacred in the
eye of Heaven as are those who go with similar offerings of tender
grief and love into the cemeteries of our Northern martyrs" (263).

A similar sympathy for Southern love of its own is expressed in
Lee's speech by means of a story of a Moorish maid who converted
to Christianity. When the priests demand the maid prove her
Christian faith by leaving her Moorish father and even by hating her
kin, she responds in moving terms:

Then will I never quit my sire,
But here with him through every trial go,
Nor leave him though in flames below-
God help me in his fire!" (236)

And both Lee and Melville use this appeal to natural love of one's
own in order to urge a certain restraint by the North, especially by
Northern lawmakers.

But these three great leaders are not the only poetic manifesta-
tions of the Supplement policy; also employed in this cause is the
poetic device of having the poems spoken by a variety of voices of
ordinary people. There are poems by Northerners and poems by
Southerners; there are poems that give voice to Southern anger and
to Northern disunity. This variety may be an attempt on Melville's
part to revive civil discourse in America after its breakdown. The
Supplement reminds Americans that "those unfraternal denuncia-
tions, continued through the years, and which at last inflamed to
deeds that ended in bloodshed, were reciprocal" (265). The poet
hopes these denunciations will be replaced by more moderate
utterances. "The years of war tried our devotion to the Union; the
time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy" (271).
In some sense, the variety of voices allowed to speak in Battle-Pieces
is a poetic attempt to test our "faith in democracy," as we shall now
demonstrate.

Both North and South are allowed to speak of the deceased
Confederate General Stonewall Jackson in poems set side by side
(79-83), as we earlier noted. The first of these begins in doubt about
eulogizing this man ("How can we praise?"), continues in qualified
conviction of the wrong of the Southern cause ("Earnest in error, as we feel"), but concludes with some praise ("Relentlessly he routed us;/ But we relent, for he is low"). The second of these poems, subtitled "Ascribed to a Virginian," reverses this process. It begins in confident praise ("One man we claim of wrought renown/ Which not the North shall care to slur;/ A Modern lived who sleeps in death,/ Calm as the marble Ancients are"). But it concludes with some doubt ("0, much of doubt in after days/ Shall cling, as now, to the war;/ Of the right and the wrong they'll still debate,/ Puzzled by Stonewall's star"). Thus by different ways, North and South arrive at some agreement about the Southern general.

Other times Melville allows the South to speak more passionately. "The Frenzy in the Wake: Sherman's advance through the Carolinas" gives versified representation to Southern angry hated of Sherman, the blacks, and the Union. Hence the Southern voice, angry at Sherman's devastation, says: "Curse on their foreheads, cheeks, and eyes /The Northern faces -true/ To the flag we hate, the flag whose stars/ Like planets strike us through" (133). And the poem concludes in defiant despair for the Southern cause: "Have we gamed and lost?/ But even despair Shall never our hate rescind" (134). But lest readers mistake these passions for the author's, Melville appends a note distancing himself from the speaker in the poem: "This piece was written while yet the reports were coming North of Sherman's homeward advance from Savannah. It is needless to point out its purely dramatic character" (251). And Melville's note does not leave it at distancing the poet from the sentiments expressed in his poem. This note also speaks of the responsibility Melville could not distance himself from: that the anger expressed by the speaker in the poem might suggest the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, "the historic tragedy of the 14th of April." Denying any such connection for a poem written before the assassination, Melville says, "After consideration, it was allowed to remain." But even this is insufficient, for Melville concludes his note with a consideration of the morality of Sherman's desolation of the South, comparing this tactic unfavorably to the restraint of Pompey during a Roman Civil War, but concluding that there might possi-
bility have been some justification for "some of the sweeping measure [Sherman] adopted" (251).

If Melville's variety of lyric voices allows the South to speak for itself with its doubts and its ugly passions, this variety also allows the North to speak in ways that are not always persuasive nor noble. "The Victor of Antietam," for instance, is a poem whose narrator extravagantly praises the indecisive Union General George McClellan with questionable claims such as: "you propped the Dome" and "With you they shook dread Stonewall's spell" (70, 71). Melville's note to one of these claims, however, says: "Some there are whose votes aided in the reelection of Abraham Lincoln, who yet believed, and retain the belief, that General McClellan, to say the least, always proved himself a patriotic and honorable soldier. The feeling which surviving comrades entertain for their late commander is one which, from its passion, is susceptible of versified representation, and such it receives" (248; italics added). In other words, the speaker in "The Victor of Antietam" is not Melville himself, but rather an imagined soldier who served under McClellan and whose loyal sentiments are given "versified representation."

Conflicting Northern opinions are particularly in evidence in "Donelson," a poem presenting a variety of citizens reading telegraph news accounts of this battle from a public bulletin board. After the reading of an inconclusive battle account, Melville allows the dissonance of Northern citizen opinion to be represented:

"Ugh! Ugh!  
`Twill drag along-drag along,"  
Growled a cross patriot in the throng,  
His battered umbrella like an ambulance-cover  
Riddled with bullet-holes, spattered all over.  
"Hurrah for Grant!" cried a stripling shrill;  
Three urchins joined him with a will,  
And some of taller stature cheered.  
Meantime a Copperhead passed; he sneered.  
"Win or lose," he pausing said,  
"Caps fly the same; all boys, mere boys;
Any thing to make a noise.
Like to see the list of the dead;
These *craven Southerners* hold out;
*Ay, ay,* they'll give you many a bout."
"We'll beat in the end, sir,"
Firmly said one in staid rebuke,
A solid merchant, square and stout.
"And do you think it? That way tend, sir?"
Asked the lean Copperhead, with a look
Of splenetic pity. "Yes, I do."
His yellow death's head the croaker shook:
"The country's ruined, that I know (39-40)

Amidst this cacophony of a cross patriot, hero-worshipping boys, a
cynical Copperhead, and a staid merchant, one has a sense of a
disunited North. Such a North is less likely to feel and act triumphant
at its victory.

A similar deflation of Northern arrogance occurs in the pairing
of "Gettysburg: The Check" with "The House-top: A Night Piece."
The speaker in the first poem celebrates the Northern victory by
associating Northerners with the Bible's chosen people and South-
erners with the Bible's Philistines:

> O pride of the days in prime of the months
> Now trebled in great renown,
> When before the ark of our holy cause
> Fell Dagon down-
> Dagon foredoomed, who, armed and targed,
> Never his impious heart enlarged
> Beyond that hour; God walled his power,
> And there the last invader charged. (84)

The downfall of the Philistine god Dagon and the claim for the
North's "holy cause" allude to the first book of Samuel. But imme-
diately following this biblical elevation of the North, in a place where
we naturally might expect a poem celebrating with pride the great
Northern victory at Vicksburg, which was achieved, most signifi-
cantly, on July 4, we find instead a poem scorning the New York City draft riots, a poem in which the speaker finds the supposedly godly North guilty of rioting and of murdering blacks ("the Atheist roar of riot") and of reducing the city to a Hobbesian state of nature ("man rebounds whole aeons back in nature"). Finally, the coming of Federal troops casts a "grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied,/ Which holds that Man is naturally good,/ And-more-is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged" (86-7).

In short, Melville's practical teaching reshapes the Civil War so as to moderate those of its extreme passions inhibiting Reconstruction. As Abraham Lincoln said, in a previously quoted remark, "We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union" (Charnwood, 450).

C. MELVILLE'S MODERATE TEACHING ABOUT PATRIOTISM AND PIETY. As we mentioned above, Melville's Supplement rhetorically protects its controversial Reconstruction policy not only by delaying but more importantly by claiming that policy is both patriotic and Christian. Loyal and pious Americans, he implies, should support it. Upon investigation, each of these claims proves somewhat problematic, from both the evidence of the Supplement and that of the poems.

The poet's first claim is not so much untrue as in need of qualification, as suggested by both the Supplement and the poems. The former begins with a broad claim:

Were I fastidiously anxious for the symmetry of this book, it would close with the notes. But the times are such that patriotism-not free from solicitude-urges a claim overriding all literary scruples. (259)

This initially broad claim, as we shall see, is refined by subsequent remarks in the Supplement, refinements which suggest Melville is no ordinary patriot.

In fact, successive statements so refine and elevate this passion as to transform it into philosophic statesmanship. Hence, the poet shortly identifies himself as "one who was never a blind adherent" (259). We are told there is "no reason why patriotism and narrowness
should go together" (260); that "Patriotism is not baseness, neither is it inhumanity" (263): and that "Zeal is not...of the same essence with...patriotism" (264). But even in the midst of these refinements, Melville acknowledges that patriotism can have narrow and zealous manifestations. Discussing Edmund Ruffin, the Southerner who "with impious alacrity fired the first shot of the Civil War at Sumter, and a little more than four years afterwards fired one into his own heart at Richmond," Melville writes: "Noble was the gesture into which patriotic passion surprised the people in a utilitarian time and country" (265). But if Ruffin is in some sense "patriotic," not all forms of this virtue rise to the level of Melville's patriotism.

Indeed, Melville focuses his love of country on a carefully defined notion of America, as both the prose and the poetry suggest. Melville's America, like that of the founders, places a primacy on deliberative self-government, and hence on the legislative branch. While he rejoices in the destruction of slavery, he laments that "emancipation was accomplished not by deliberate legislation; only through agonized violence could so mighty a result be effected" (268). When he speaks of details of politics in the Supplement, it is only with Congress as the deliberative body he seems concerned, with the "maintenance of Congressional decency in the future" (271). The principal symbol of the country—it occurs eight times in five poems—is the "Dome" of the Capitol, the seat of Congress.

Furthermore, the threat to the country is that imperial expansion will render deliberative self-government impossible. So in the debate between Yea and Nay in "The Conflict of Convictions," Nay chides Yea's optimism about the outcome of the war thus:

Power unanointed may come-
Dominion (unsought by the free)
And the Iron Dome
Stronger for stress and strain,
Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;
But the Founders dream shall flee. (17)

The dream at the founding of a self-governing democracy (says Nay) will by replaced by imperial administration if a triumphant America
seeks empire across the Spanish main. The Supplement suggests this imperial gambit had also been a possibility for the Confederacy: "Through the arts of the conspirators and the perversity of fortune, the most sensitive love of liberty was entrapped into the support of a war whose implied end was the erecting in our advanced century of an Anglo-American empire based upon the systematic degradation of man" (261). This fear of a self-governing republic destroyed by expansion is attributed finally to Melville's spokesman Robert E. Lee. After Lee's Melvillian speech in "Lee in the Capitol," Lee sees the senators are not persuaded by his appeal for a magnanimous treatment of the white South. Hence as the former Confederate general departs, his mind drifts back to ancient Rome in its transition from republic to empire:

Forth he went  
Through vaulted walks in lengthened line  
Like porches erst upon the Palatine:  
Historic reveries their lesson lent,  
The Past her shadow through the Future sent.  (237)

Lee has testified under the republican dome of the Capitol; but as he departs these "vaulted walks" segue into porches on the Roman hill where the emperors constructed their palaces after the destruction of the republic. Thus does Lee's reverie of the past cast a shadow over the founders' dream of a republic.

Not that Melville is unaware of other threats to the founders' dream. Indeed the poems suggest loyalty to this dream as a mean between two extremes: naive optimism and cynical pessimism. The former extreme the poet calls "the Republic's faith." This creed combines Christian belief that God's Providence physically prevents us from catastrophe along with the American belief that we progress morally such that we avoid catastrophe. The fideistic version of this creed is voiced by Yea in "The Conflict of Convictions":

The terrors of truth and dart of death  
To faith alike are vain; (15)

The American version is described in "The House-top": "the
Republic's faith implied, Which holds that Man is naturally good,
And-more-is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged" (87). Both
versions differ radically from Melville's view of mankind and history,
a view given voice by Nay in "The Conflict of Convictions":

Age after age shall be
As age after age has been,
(From man's changeless heart their way they win). (17)

Accordingly, neither God nor progress, but "sacred uncertainty ...
forever impends over men and nations" (268). To say the same
thing differently: tragedy is always possible, as suggested by the
poet's mentions of both the "historic tragedy of the 14th of April"
when Lincoln was assassinated and of "the terrible historic tragedy
of our time" in the Civil War (251, 272).

If the optimist holds too high an opinion of mankind's capacity
for self-government, the pessimist errs in the opposite direction. In
the poems this harsh belief is associated with European monarchs
who look with skepticism upon young America's experiment in
democracy. So in "The Conflict of Convictions," Nay says "Kings wag
their heads" at America's civil dissentions and say: "Now save thyself
Who wouldst rebuild the world in bloom" (15). Again, in "The
House-top," the use of Federal troops to quash rioting in New York
("Wise Draco comes") corroborates the "cynic tyrannies of honest
kings" (87). And finally in "Lee in the Capitol," the Confederate
general's final plea for leniency toward the South is this: "unless you
shun/ To copy Europe in her worst estate-/Avoid the tyranny you
reprobate" (237).

Thus Melville's patriotism is a thoughtful allegiance aware of
less reflective loyalties and of less worthy alternatives to the founders'
dream of a self-governing democracy. More questionable than the
poet's patriotism, however, is his equation of the Supplement's
Reconstruction policy with Christianity, especially with Christian
charity. This claim is made explicitly several times in the Supple-
ment. Once the poet claims "the work of Reconstruction...demands
little but common sense and Christian charity" (260). Again: "Be-
nevolence and policy-Christianity and Machiavelli-dissuade from
penal severities toward the subdued" (267). And in arguing for his differing policies toward Southern whites and the manumitted blacks, he writes: "Let us be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as philanthropists toward the blacks, our fellow-men" (268). Furthermore, the Supplement contains a higher proportion of terms associated with Christianity than do the poems. The North should not expect the defeated South to express "penitence...since this evidently would be a contrition hypocritical" (260). Southern mourners are "as sacred in the eye of Heaven" as are Northern (263). As for those who will never reconcile themselves to peace, "On such hearts every thing is thrown away except it be religious commiseration, and the sincerest" (265). Finally, the poet closes the Supplement, and thus his whole book, with a prayer: "Let us pray that the terrible historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity" (272).

But despite these explicit and implicit attempts by Melville to present his policy as Christian, we may rightly have some doubts. The poet's policy certainly is magnanimous; it may also be prudent; but it seems too calculating and political to be charity. If it is Christian charity and not prudent statesmanship, why is it focused primarily on whites? Furthermore, since in Christian thought charity is a virtue which admits of no extreme, why is Melville so careful to limit his benevolence? As he says in speaking of the blacks, "benevolent desires, after passing a certain point, can not undertake their own fulfillment without incurring the risk of evils beyond those sought to be remedied" (268-69). These may be thoughts of the statesman, but they differ from those of the Christian.

When we turn from the prose Supplement to the seventy-two poems, we find more, yet ambiguous support for Melville's Christianity. One point of Christian teaching to use for illustration is that of personal immortality. Christianity promises that the end of human life is followed by another and (for the good) a better world. As Christ rose from the dead, so Christians will rise from natural death to life eternal. The Scriptural lesson often read at Christian burials explains this promise of immortality:
But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 37

In other words, Christianity comforts us with a better world beyond this life.

Now Melville certainly creates some poetic voices expressing pious Christian sentiments of this kind here and there. For instance, "The Battle for the Mississippi" ends with consideration of "Death's dark anchor" in this battle; but the dead are comforted by the poem's narrator with hope of another world:

Yet Glory slants her shaft of rays
Far through the undisturbed abyss;
There must be other, nobler worlds for them
Who nobly yield their lives in this. (66)

And elsewhere Divine Providence is lauded for bringing the war to a joyous end, as in "A Canticle: Significant of the national exaltation of enthusiasm at the close of the War," as in this chorus:

The Lord of hosts victorious,
Fulfill the end designed;
By. a wondrous way and glorious
A passage Thou dost find-
A passage Thou dost find:
Hosanna to the Lord of hosts,
The hosts of human kind. (140)
So in various places, Melville gives poetic voice to devout Christian sentiments about the end of life.

Yet these sentiments are contradicted by still other poems, with the result that Melville's teaching on immortality is at best uncertain. Consider for instance three poems containing in their titles references to Christian services for soldiers who died in the war: "Shiloh: A Requiem," "A Dirge for McPherson," and "A Requiem for Soldiers lost in Ocean Transports." While the Christian hope for immortality is sometimes mentioned in these poems, none offers a clear affirmation this hope will be fulfilled. In varying degrees each appears subtly (which is to say moderately) skeptical.

The first, "Shiloh: A Requiem," is subtle in its disbelief. The poem consists of a single sentence of nineteen lines and is set at the Shiloh battlefield with some swallows, the wounded, and a church:

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh-
Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
Around the church of Shiloh-
The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer
Of dying foemen mingled there-
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve-
Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
And all is hushed at Shiloh. (63)

Initially this poem seems to evoke two concentric circles about a point. The central point is the church mentioned in the tenth and
central line. The inner circle is formed by wounded soldiers "stretched in pain...Around the church." The outer one is formed by the swallows who in their "wheeling" motion circle the church. And circularity is reinforced at poem's end by the return of both the image of the swallows and of double rhymes with "Shiloh" ("fly low" at beginning, "lie low" at end). But the initial appearance of concentric circles needs to be qualified; for during most of the poem the two circles exist at different times. The inner circle existed in the past, on a specific Sunday night in April 1862 when rain "solaced the parched ones." The outer circle, to judge by verb tenses, exists in a continuing present of unspecified "clouded days." A further distinction is this: whereas in the outer circle swallows merely repeat their wheeling, those in the inner one change, moving through a three-stage sequence: the wounded are comforted by the rain, hear the echo of their groaning and praying from the church, and are doubly converted by the prospect of death by bullet: foes become friends in a day and they cease to care about fame or country. At poem's end, however, our initial image is again clarifying; for at last the two circles exist together in the continuing present: the now deceased wounded "lie low" while overhead the swallows skim.

Although this poem is subtitled "A Requiem," centers on a church, and takes place on the Lord's Day, nonetheless it offers to the dying only secular Requiem or rest. The comforts to them are natural rain water for dehydration and human comradeship for suffering. The church only echoes back the sound of dying groans. Hence the poem offers no sense of the Christian hope for transcendence of earthly life, for a "requiem aeternam" or eternal rest of immortality hereafter. The dying do not even aspire to some supernatural mode of existence: they utter only a "natural prayer," perhaps a plea for relief of physical pain. Rather, the "Requiem" or "rest" for those who at poem's end "lie low" is the ceasing of life and the reentry into nature in the continuing present.

The middle lines concerning the inner circle are drawn from *The Rebellion Record* documents on the battle of Shiloh (IV, 356-417; esp. 385-400). For instance, the Sunday night rain:
A heavy thunder-storm had come up about midnight, and though we were all shivering over the ducking, the surgeons assured us that a better thing could not have happened. The ground, they said, was covered with wounded not yet found, or whom we were unable to bring from the field. The moisture would to some extent, cool the burning, parching thirst, which is one of the chief terrors of lying wounded and helpless on the battle-field, and the falling water was the best dressing for the wounds" (IV, 396).

And for the log church: "Gen. Sherman's camps, to the right of the little log-cabin called Shiloh church, fronted on a descending slope of a quarter to a half mile in breadth, mostly covered with woods, and bounded by a ravine" (IV, 387).

But Melville is not completely faithful to his source. There was little killing around the church Sunday because Sherman's men were routed from their camp that morning and quickly retreated (IV, 388, 392). There was much slaughter elsewhere, especially in a field before a wood (perhaps Melville's "forest-field") from which Union soldiers raked rebel soldiers for six hours and left many dead and wounded (IV, 392). So why does Melville reorder the fighting so as to place it around the church on Sunday? Perhaps he does so to suggest the church cannot provide the rest or salvation which "Requiem" suggests. Perhaps there is further impiety in the title "Shiloh" as well as the mention of swallows. For "Shiloh" is a biblical term for the Messiah or Savior. And concerning swallows, Cohen notes "From his acquaintance with Renaissance painting, Melville may have known that the swallow.... [is associated] with the Resurrection because of the belief that the swallow hibernated in the mud, from which it was reborn each spring" (229). Thus, with subtle deception, the title, subtitle, and swallow of this poem suggest the coming of the divinity and the promise of a life after death.

Similarly impious is another funeral poem, "Dirge for McPherson," this one with a hidden theme, the choice of a way of life, whether Christian biblical or pagan Homeric. The initial hint of this theme occurs in the word "Dirge" in the title, one of those
English words derived from church Latin, specifically this one from the Church Office for the Dead, which begins with the antiphon from Psalm 5: 8: "Dirige, Domine" or "Direct, 0 Lord, my way in thy sight because of mine enemies, make thy way straight before my face, For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their part is very wickedness." The Psalm, of course, speaks of the biblical way of life, and the Church service of the specifically Christian way. But one has to wonder, in view of allusions to Homer's *Iliad* both in the poem and its note, whether Melville wanted us to think about Achilles' choice of ways of life, the choice his goddess mother Thetis offers: either a long but inglorious life or a short but immortally glorious one.

The poem describes a church service for Major General McPherson in six stanzas of four lines each, each beginning with a verb in the imperative:

Bear him through the chapel-door-
Let priest in stole
Pace before the warrior
Who led. Bell-toll!

Yet when the lesson is read for this service, its message is hardly Christian confidence in an immortal afterlife:

Lay him down within the nave,
The Lesson read-
Man is noble, man is brave,
But man's-a weed.

This last remark may allude to Psalm 103: 15-16: "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know him no more." It is true that some lines suggest the Christian Last Judgment when Christ will raise the dead:

Take him up again and wend
Graveward, nor weep:
There's a trumpet that shall rend
This Soldier's sleep.
Yet there is a four-line chorus, two lines after the first and two lines after the last stanza, which while echoing St. Paul in Thessalonians, seems to dash hope for Christian promise. When the two couplets are placed together, the chorus reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But, tell us, shall we know him more,} \\
\text{Lost-Mountain and lone Kenesaw?} \\
\text{True fame is his, for life is o'er-} \\
\text{Sarpedon of the mighty war.}
\end{align*}
\] (124–5)

For McPherson, who died in Kenesaw near Atlanta, life is over and we shall not know him more; he can be compared to a noble pagan warrior in Homer's Iliad. The comparison of McPherson to Homer's Sarpedon is repeated in Melville's note to this poem. At best, therefore, this poem offers weak or ambiguous affirmation of Christian teaching about life's end.

In certain respects, the final poem about the promise of eternal life, "A Requiem for Soldiers lost in Ocean Transport," resembles others of the sixteen "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial" (163–83). This middle section of poems is placed just after and responds to the troubling ending of the war as portrayed in the first section (141–62). What is troubling about the war's ending is not only the sense in some poems that the passions of the war have not died, but also and especially the suggestion in "The Martyr" that the sorrow of the people at the assassination of Lincoln might turn to angry vengeance, as happened to the Roman plebeians in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. As the Romans went from sobbing for Caesar to rioting against his killers, so Melville's chorus hints might happen after Lincoln's murder:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{There is sobbing of the strong,} \\
\text{And a pall upon the land;} \\
\text{But the People in their weeping} \\
\text{Bare the iron hand:} \\
\text{Beware the People weeping} \\
\text{When they bare the iron hand.}
\end{align*}
\] (141–2)

As if to calm the people, "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial"
consists, as we previously noted, of mostly short and simple poems about the brief and unheralded lives of unnamed soldiers (or women who nursed them or who are now their widows) whose allegiances in the war are not always made clear and who died in often unnamed battles. The pathos of these poems lends itself to Melville's policy of the Supplement where he notes that "the glory of the war falls short of its pathos-a pathos which now at last ought to disarm all animosity" (265).

Yet in other respects "A Requiem for Soldiers lost in Ocean Transports" is untypical of its context in alluding to the Homeric epic and in its denial of Christian "requiem aeternam." The poem begins with a lengthy epic simile ("When... So...") typical of Homer.

When, after storms that woodlands rue,
To valleys comes atoning dawn,
The robins blithe their orchard-sports renew;
And meadow-larks, no more withdrawn,
Caroling fly in the languid blue;
The while, from many a hid recess,
Alert to partake the blessedness,
The pouring mites their airy dance pursue.
So, after ocean's ghastly gales,
When laughing light of hoyden morning breaks,
Every finny hider wakes-(176)

But while the fish revive and return to the ocean's surface after a storm subsides, the drowned soldiers do not: "them forever from joyance torn, Whose bark was lost where now the dolphins play;" These dead "are washed away,/ Far to the reef of bones are borne; And never revisits them the light...." (177). Thus the title of this poem seems ironic: whereas a Christian Requiem promises eternal rest with God, this poem speaks of the drowned soldiers forever torn from such hope.

But if Melville appears uncertain about religious transcendence, we need not go as far as Helen Vendler who speaks of his "religious nihilism" ("Lyric of History," 6). For other poems suggest a certain reverence, an admiration and striving for some excellence.
In this world it seems, the end or purpose of human life is forming virtuous character. "On the Photograph of a Corps Commander" (for instance) praises Winfield Scott Hancock:

   Ay, man is manly. Here you see
   The warrior-carriage of the head,
   And brave dilation of the frame;

Sometimes, of course, appearances deceive, but this man's appearance is a reflection of his soul:

   A cheering picture. It is good
   To look upon a Chief like this,
   In whom the spirit moulds the form.
   Here favoring Nature, oft remiss,
   With eagle mien expressive has endued
   A man to kindle strains that warm. (105)

The remarks about Nature's remissness requires explanation, one which reveals its troubling character. "Nature, oft remiss" recalls Aristotle's *Politics* in a context discussing natural slavery: "Nature indeed wishes to make the bodies of free persons and slaves different as well [as their souls]...yet the opposite often results, some having the bodies of free persons while others have the souls." This remark is especially troubling in a war fought over enslaving blacks; for Melville follows this poem with one titled "The Swamp Angel." This latter poem describes a large black siege gun which terrorized the city of Charleston during the war. The anger of Charleston citizens at this gun expresses itself in racial terms. The gun is said to be "a coal-black Angel With thick Afric lip" (p. 107). To this gun is opposed the white church of St. Michael in Charleston, "Michael (the white man's seraph was he)" (109). Thus, disturbingly enough, Melville alludes to racial differences.

The Hancock poem continues with a further philosophic allusion. Gazing upon the appearances of such a virtuous soul as Winfield Scott Hancock is a better help to virtuous living than remote thoughts of the divinity:
Nothing can lift the heart of man
Like manhood in a fellow-man,
The thought of heaven's great King afar
But humbles us-too weak to scan;
But manly greatness men can span,
And feel the bonds that draw. (105-6)

Melville's thought here resembles comments in Milton's prose piece Of Education. While acknowledging that the ultimate end "of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright," Milton notes that "because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching" (Yale Prose, II, 366-69). In other words, since God is too high a subject to be scanned by men, we must start with a lower object of study in what Milton refers to as "a virtuous and noble education" (Yale Prose, II, 376). In place, then, of a morality based on divine promise of a heavenly afterlife, this poem offers the experience of human excellence of a natural kind: manly greatness human beings can measure.

But such a human ethics is not for all. For, despite America's optimistic faith in progress, most of us need some political and religious sanctions. Consider, once again, the poem on the New York City Draft riots of July 1863, "The House-top," in which the narrator views the chaos of the city as a return to the state of nature: "man rebounds whole aeons back in nature." He speaks of the rioters as having broken free from "All civil charms And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe-Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway Than sway of self...." (86). But throughout this terrible poem describing the killing and looting of the draft rioters, the narrator is above the fray. He speaks with a calm that contemplates from the house top both the heavenly bodies, giving one its Greek name ("Beneath the stars the roofy desert spreads.... where parching Sirius set in drought"), and the riot-ending military rule, finding its Greek analogue ("Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll of..."), and the riot-ending military rule, finding its Greek analogue ("Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll of...").
black artillery"). In short, although the rioters need "civil charms and priestly spells" of political and religious sanctions, the narrator may not; he recalls the foresighted General Grant and the statesmanlike Herman Melville.

Similarly philosophic is the narrator in another poem on the gravest crisis in the book, the assassination of Lincoln. Here is an exigency not simply for a Northern city but for the whole country, which Melville memorializes in "The Martyr: Indicative of the passion of the people on the 15th of April, 1865." The narrator clearly, wary of the people, worries about mob violence in revenge for Lincoln's murder:

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand:
Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand. (141)

But in this crisis, for Melville himself, both civil charms and priestly spells are replaced by the philosophical poetry of Shakespeare. That is, just after this gravest crisis of the book, Melville places his poem about viewing a painting and reading Shakespeare, "The Coming Storm; A Picture by S. R. Gifford, and owned by E. B. Included in the N. A. Exhibition, April, 1865." This poem falls into two parts, one on the painting of a coming storm, the other on the value of reading Shakespeare. The painting of the "coming storm" suggests to the narrator in the first instance the crisis that suddenly came upon the nation with Lincoln's death:

A demon-cloud like the mountain one
Burst on a spirit as mild
As this urned lake, the home of shades.

But it suggests as well the Civil War itself, which "Misgivings," set before the war, compares to a coming storm:

And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
The hemlock shakes the rafter, the oak in the driving keel. (13)

The second part of "Coming Storm" claims that Shakespeare's "pensive child" or thoughtful reader cannot be completely surprised by any sudden turn of events:

No utter surprise can come to him  
Who reaches Shakespeare's core;  
That which we seek and shun is there-  
Man's final lore. (143)

Melville's own "final lore," his political teaching in *Battle-Pieces*, combines an obvious plea for moderation toward the South with occasional hints of his own philosophical immoderation. Thus this poetry mixes conventional surface with flashes of unconventional wisdom, a combination characteristic of ancient philosophic sophrosyne.

**IV. Evaluating *Battle-Pieces***

*It is impossible, in view of what Mr. Melville has done and of his intention in his present book, not to read his "Battle-Pieces" with a certain melancholy. Nature did not make him a poet.*

-Charles Eliot Norton, *The Nation*, September 6, 1866

In an attempt to estimate the excellence of Melville's poetry, we now consider and respond to the harshest critics of *Battle-Pieces*. Such a one is Charles Eliot Norton who, in the epigraph, says "Nature did not make him a poet." We do so not simply out of fairness to the book's detractors, but more importantly because their (partial) confirmation of our argument allows us to highlight our disagreement. We agree with Norton and others we will cite that this is a book that eschews grand and tragic passions, for it is essentially the work of a poet of restraint or of moderation. We are in accord, then, about the character of Melville's poetry. We differ with the critics, however, on the source-the etiology-of his temperateness. Where
they speak of inability, we speak of deliberate choice. Where they see weakness, we see strength.

This disagreement is pivotal; upon it everything hinges. For, if Melville chose moderation out of deliberate strength, we need to think more deeply about his purpose in so doing than do his critics. To state matters most broadly, these critics (we shall now argue) do no gaze far enough to see Melville's intention—or rather, his ambition. They judge too parochially. As we have noted, *Battle-Pieces* abounds in references to Shakespeare and Milton, to Plato and Homer. These are not mere decorative erudition; they indicate benchmarks by which our poet ambitioned to be judged. For Melville is an American writer who sees his writing on a world stage. And so he should. This aspiration was sensed by the poet and critic, Robert Penn Warren. While finding Melville deficient in the craft of poetry, Warren claims that his ambition was of a higher order than his more successful contemporaries:

> It must be admitted that Melville did not learn his craft. But the point is that the craft he did not learn was not the same craft which some of his more highly advertised contemporaries did learn with such glibness of tongue and complacency of spirit. Even behind some of Melville's failures we catch the shadow of the poem which might have been. And if his poetry is, on the whole, a poetry of shreds and patches, many of the patches are of a massy and kingly fabric—no product of the local cotton mills.

Like Warren, we claim that Melville's "kingly fabric" ought to be judged by the height of his aspirations, not the lowly success of his contemporaries. Melville aspires to a place in company with the world's great writers.

This claim, of course, requires explanation. We want to analyze the implications of one especially harsh review by the popular novelist William Dean Howells in an 1867 *Atlantic Monthly*. Howells says, "Mr. Melville's skill is so great that we fear he has not often felt the things of which he writes, since with all his skill he fails to move us" (Kaplan ed. xlii; italics added). And
elsewhere in the same review:

Is it possible—you ask yourself, after running over all these celebrative, inscriptive, and memorial verses—that there has really been a great war, with battles fought by men and bewailed by women? Or is it only that Mr. Melville's inner consciousness has been perturbed, and filled with the phantasms of enlistments, marches, fights in the air, parenthetic bulletin-boards, and tortured humanity shedding, *not words and blood*, but words alone? (Kaplan ed., xli.; italics added)

Howells is on to something. As one of the commercially successful writers of his time, he understands something of poetry: to wit, that it should be emotionally moving. But this understanding raises the philosophical question of the nature of poetry.

Melville alludes to this question at least twice in this book, but so briefly and elusively that we are apt to ignore his precision. One is in "On Sherman's Men: who fell in the Assault of Kenesaw Mountain, Georgia." Here the narrator remarks, "battle can heroes and bards restore" (174). This is the convention. And in the Supplement Melville enlarges upon poetic convention, while allowing space for his unconventional poetry: "Zeal is not of necessity religion, neither is it always of the same essence with poetry or patriotism" (264). He speaks precisely when he says "Zeal is *not...always* of the same essence with poetry...." One can almost hear Melville add, however, "not always" but "almost always." Which is to say, Melville insinuates that poetry is about warriors and is almost always zealous. But this is the convention, as we have shown, Melville eschews. His is certainly not zealous war poetry. Why is this so?

The political answer is that Melville wanted to moderate, not to enflame, the Civil War passions during Reconstruction. But besides the political reason for that time period, there is a poetical or perhaps philosophical reason, one which places Melville on a stage older and larger than post-war America. Indeed, to elucidate Melville's thinking requires an excursion backward in time to Shakespeare and even to Plato.

To begin our excursus, consider first that friendly critic of the
poets, Plato's Socrates and his claim "there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (Republic, Book X, 607b). The philosophers in this quarrel charge that the poets flatter the dominant passions of their audience. Both Plato's Ion and his Symposium make this accusation. Speaking to the rhapsodist or dramatic reader Ion in the former, Socrates criticizes Ion's manipulating the passions of his audience: "Shall we assert that this man [a dramatic reader of poetry] is then in his right mind who, adorned with rich raiment and golden crowns, cries in the midst of sacrifices and festivals, although he has lost none of these things, or who is frightened while standing before twenty thousand friendly human beings, although no one is stripping or harming him?" Nonplused by this critique of his profession, the foolish rhapsodist blurts out that moving the audience is for him the real business of poetry:

I look down on [the audience] each time from the platform above as they are crying, casting terrible looks and following with astonishment the things said. I must pay the very closest attention to them, since, if I set them to crying, I shall laugh myself because I am making money, but if they laugh, then I shall cry because of the money I am losing." (535e)

Socrates' case against the poets, then, is that they are mere entertainers for profit, unprincipled manipulators of human passion. This is a charge whose force more thoughtful poets than Ion have recognized. Hence in the Symposium, Socrates teases the popular tragic poet Agathon. Speaking with some irony Socrates says:

My wisdom's a poor, dubious thing, but yours is brilliant and effusive. Why, just the day before yesterday you displayed your youthful brilliance and dazzled more than thirty thousand witnesses from all over Greece.

To this the somewhat nettled Agathon replies: "Don't be insolent, Socrates." As self-aware poets like Agathon know, in order to remain popular, they must flatter their audience by glorifying the lively and intense passions. Otherwise stated, a wise or rational man
has no important role on a stage mirroring the life of its audience.

Melville's poet, Shakespeare, exemplifies the difficulty of finding a dramatic role for wisdom." His best solutions are toward the end of his career at the height of his powers in the so-called Romances, such as *The Tempest* with its central character the wise Prospero. Earlier in his so-called problem plays, wisdom has a less central role in such characters as the wise Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, the studious Duke in *Measure for Measure*, and the crafty Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*. But these "problem plays" receive criticisms similar to those of *Battle-Pieces*. Even *The Tempest* is so disparaged. Readers not charmed by the play's magic find its hero Prospero somewhat cold, calculating, and talkative. He never performs a passionate great deed. His great work is to magically restrain the passions of those enemies he brings to his island and to reform their souls. At the height of his powers over his foes, he restrains his own anger and forgives:

    Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
    Yet with my nobler reason `gainst my fury
    Do I take part: the rarer action is
    In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
    The sole drift of my purpose cloth extend
    Not a frown further. (5.1. 25-30)

Such rational restraint is not the stuff of popular drama, some would say. We want poetic heroes like the Othello who ends his life by proclaiming to have loved "not wisely, but too well" (5.2. 344) and then kills himself with his sword. That is what Howells wanted: "words and blood"-and words which flatter our passionate lives and do not remind us by contrast of our lack of wisdom.

The English Bard's efforts to find wisdom a dramatic role were fathomed by "Shakespeare's pensive child," as "The Coming Storm" calls Melville. Such understanding Melville conveyed first in a review and then in his prose fiction. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," he distinguishes Shakespeare as popularly appreciated entertainer from Shakespeare as comparatively unappreciated philosopher:
For by philosophers Shakespeare is not adored as the great man of tragedy and comedy.-"Off with his head! so much for Buckingham!" this sort of rant, interlined by another hand, brings down the house, those mistaken souls, who dream of Shakespeare as a mere man of Richard-the-Third humps, and Macbeth daggers. But it is those deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality;-these are the things that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare.... But, as I said before, it is the least part of genius that attracts admira-

And Melville's own prose fiction reveals that he followed Shakespeare's lead. In *Moby Dick* his solution resembles the Bard's earlier plays, such as *Troilus and Cressida*. Here he avoids the risk of wisdom on center stage: his main character Ahab has the tragic passion and his detached narrator Ishmael (like Shakespeare's Ulysses) has the wit. That great novel is antebellum, and its separation of heart and head is not what Melville tries in postwar works. In fact, we might compare Melville's last work, *Billy Budd*, to *The Tempest*. In the former, the main character (Captain Vere) is wise, somewhat like Prospero. But Vere is clearly not heroic; indeed, Melville contrasts him with the hero Lord Nelson who died at the moment of his greatest naval victory. Nelson expired doing what heroes in poetry do: speak passionately and die passionately. Captain Vere by contrast died in bed; and his greatest moment is not a deed but a speech before a Drum Head Court moderating between two extremists, Billy Budd and John Claggart.

As in *Billy Budd so* in *Battle-Pieces*, Melville frustrates our desire for the heroic, even while indicating awareness of our longing. Corresponding to the former's use of Lord Nelson is the latter's mention of two characters with tragic potential: weird John Brown early and fanatic Edmund Ruffin late (10 and 265). Either could have been the passionate hero of a tragedy of the Civil War. But a stirring rendition of the war keeps the warlike passions alive. So, instead of choosing such a hero, Melville picks as his main character
a "quiet seminary's head," Robert E. Lee (229). How can a college administrator be the poetic hero of a great and tragic war?

To state this question is to catch sight of the great risk Melville took in Battle-Pieces. For this "quiet seminary's head" is the poet's chief spokesman, exhibiting in deed and speech the restraint and moderation which Melville wants to encourage in the America of 1866. Lee travels from Washington College through the war-ravaged South to his ancestral estate of Arlington. Here he pauses to exhibit an un-poetic restraint: "the burst, the bitterness was spent, The heart-burst bitterly turbulent, And on he fared" (230). Dutifully he wends his way to the halls of Congress where he is to testify. He delivers a speech-again, unpoetically-urging a moderating of the Northern desire for vengeance. And so pleading, Lee serves Melville's purpose in modifying those passions of the Civil War "of a less temperate and charitable cast" (260).

So we close with one final detractor of Melville's Battle-Pieces. In Patriotic Gore, Edmund Wilson censured Battle-Pieces as "versified journalism; a chronicle of the patriotic feelings of an anxious, middle-aged non-combatant as, day by day, he reads the bulletins from the front."46 Wilson of course meant Melville was non-combatant in the Civil War. But this point, while true, disregards a combat even older than our Civil War. For the poet of Battle-Pieces was a belligerent in Socrates' "old quarrel of philosophy and poetry." And as such a belligerent, Melville was as aware as his critics that his restraint would by some be viewed as a poetic deficiency. But what was loss in popular appeal was gain elsewhere, in patriotic duty and in poetic achievement. If Melville's "kingly fabric" of poetry is not yet Shakespeare's, it is already something to be able to compare the two without embarrassment, as one cannot compare most American writers. Judged by philosophic standards, Melville is our greatest writer. And if his political hopes for Reconstruction in America were not realized, his poetic achievement nonetheless stands as an exception to what de Tocqueville described as the medocrity of democratic literature.47 For Herman Melville subordinated popularity in what de Tocqueville called the democratic industry of literature to philosophic patriotism.
V. Appendix

Whether Melville's *Battle-Pieces* is a book in the emphatic sense supposed throughout our series of essays, turns on answers to questions such as these: Is there a deliberate structure of the whole? If so, is it wholly manifest, or, alternatively, is it only in part manifest and in part obscure? What is Melville's purpose in his use of structural and other rhetorical devices in his book? In proffering some answers to these questions, we present this Appendix as a work in progress, a contribution to the study of Melville's book, but one which recognizes, as we said at the very outset, that there are many features of the book which remain puzzling and in need of study.

A. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF *BATTLE-PIECES*. (1) prose dedication, commemorating the 300,000 Union dead [1 page]; (2) untitled brief prose statement on the composition and nature of the poems [1 page]; (3) Contents, listing titles of poems [4 pages]; (4) seventy-two poems [233 pages]; (5) twenty-four prose Notes to the poems [9 pages]; (6) prose Supplement [14 pages].

Thus Melville's book, when viewed as a whole and on its surface, proves to consist of two pairs of prose bookends, one fore and very brief, one aft and considerably longer, framing a substantial poetic center. How the poetic center is related to the prose bookends is by no means apparent. That question is treated in some detail in Part III of the text; a comprehensive treatment has yet to be achieved.

On the reasonable premises, first, that Melville is a careful writer and, second, that he is the best guide to his intention in constructing his book, in what follows we offer some results of our scrutiny of just two of the complex ways in which he indicates his purpose: first, his use of chronology; and second, his ordering of particular groups of poems.

B. ON THE USE OF CHRONOLOGY. The Contents pages of Melville's book contain only titles of parts-beginning with "Misgivings" and ending with "Supplement." When the reader turns to the body of the book, he finds that Melville has placed "The Portent (1859)," depicting the executed body of John Brown, prior to "Misgivings" but has not listed it in the Contents; and he also finds that Melville
has appended the date, 1859, to the title. By the first action, Melville at once re-orders the structure of the book that is indicated on the surface in the Contents. "The Portent" becomes, as we argue in Part II of the text, an epigraph to all the poetry. By its sudden and unexpected appearance, it signals, first, a rhetorical change of direction in entering upon the subject of the Civil War and, second, a use of structural devices which require scrutiny.

By the second action, Melville adds an element which is also not visible in the Contents—the element of historical time for the poetic event depicted, but only to the extent of placing it within a year, 1859. The significance of this unobtrusive addition is by no means apparent. A survey of all the poems as they appear in the body of the book—a summary of this survey is presented in the table at the end of the Appendix—shows these features of the use of chronology: First, Melville appends dates to the titles of thirty-eight of the seventy-two poems, which is to say that nearly half refer to events that do not appear to have any date at all. Whether that is appearance or reality is a question. Second, the use of dates begins with a single event dated only as 1859; the use of dates then moves through a series of events for every year from 1860 through 1865; and it ends with a single event dated as April 1866. Third, at first, Melville appends only a year (1859), or of two years (1860-1). But beginning with "The March into Virginia," the first poem to treat a battle of the war-First Manassas (or Bull Run)—Melville now adds a month: (July 1861). This mode of dating—by both month and year—is then the dominant one throughout the rest of the book, but with one notable exception: "The Martyr," a poem on the "passion of the people" on the day Lincoln died. Here, for the only time in his book, Melville uses a date of a specific day: April 15, 1865.

As we pondered these features of Melville's use of chronology, we at length felt compelled to pose and answer questions such as these: Why, in the case of "The Portent," does not Melville at least indicate the month of the execution of John Brown, which is to say, December? And if by the month as well as year, why not date the event still more exactly, by the specific day when it took place—December 2, 1859? And so on. Is Melville concerned with such
chronological precision? And, more generally, if he proves to be, what has that dimension of his presentation of the Civil War to do—indeed, has it anything to do—with the purpose of his book?

The singularity of the precision with which Melville dates one and only one event the passion of the people on the day Lincoln dies—suggests that he was perfectly capable of exactly the same precision for other poems that treat events that occurred on a single day: for example, November 7, 1861, the date of the naval battle depicted in "Dupont's Round Fight," or April 9, 1865, the date of the surrender of Lee to Grant in "The Surrender at Appomatox." In fact, however, he does not so proceed. The result is a curious mixture of chronological imprecision with chronological precision, a mode of orderliness joined to disorderliness. Whether that curious mixture is deliberate or accidental is a large and important question.

Three related questions then are these: First, what evidence is there that Melville had access to and used documentary sources for the construction of his chronology? Second, how accurate is that construction, especially as tested by extraneous sources? Third, how is a reader to construe departures from accuracy, if and when they are found?

The surface of Battle-Pieces gives no indication how to treat these questions. But well beneath that surface, buried in a note to "Rebel Color Bearers at Shiloh," Melville himself points the way. For in that note, for the only time in the whole of his book, Melville alludes to a specific documentary source: "The incident on which this piece is based is narrated in a newspaper account of the battle to be found in the 'Rebellion Record.- Melville then quotes part of the newspaper account (252). Twentieth-century researchers, including Frank Day in particular, followed this clue to discover that Melville made extensive use of the documentary volumes titled The Rebellion Record as source material for at least twenty poems in his book. In some cases—especially "Donelson (February, 1862)"—Melville's use is extensive. What is more, as the argument in Part III of the text of this essay shows, his use of The Rebellion Record for the poem on Donelson is both subtle and complex. More generally, the evidence mounted by Day and others shows conclusively that
Melville made detailed use of at least seven of the twelve volumes of *The Rebellion Record*. These volumes, which average eight-hundred pages in length, were published by Van Nostrand, in New York, from 1861-1868. Most volumes contain a "Diary" section, which chronicles events of the war, virtually day by day; a large "Documents" section, which contains official reports on battles, speeches, legislative actions, newspaper accounts, and other detailed material on the war; and finally, a section of miscellany titled "Poetry, Rumors and Incidents." Day's analysis shows that Melville at times made use of material from each section of these documentary volumes. What is more, the chronological order of the poems with datings exactly follows the chronology of events set forth in the relevant volumes of *The Rebellion Record*. In short, Melville, in constructing the order of his poems which date the event depicted, was remarkably attentive to chronological exactitude and had detailed documentary materials allowing him so to proceed.

Nor is that chronological exactitude confined to the poems with datings. In the "Comments" column of the table at the end of this Appendix we show the remarkable chronological orderliness of the events Melville treats, whether in poems which are dated or in those which are not. Thus, for example, he places "The Cumberland" just before "In The Turret"; when one turns to the historical record, whether in *The Rebellion Record*, or in the indispensable *The Civil War Day by Day* by E. B. Long and Barbara Long, one finds that these poems refer to events on March 8 and March 9, 1862, precisely the order of the two poems as they are presented by Melville. Thus, for example, having treated the two Battles in the Wilderness—one of May 1-4, 1863 and one of May 5-8, 1864—in a single poem, "The Armies of the Wilderness(1863-4)," Melville allusively indicates in the immediately following poem, "On the Photograph of a Corps Commander," that it concerns General Hancock. The historical materials show that Hancock was a Corps commander at the battle of Spotsylvania, May 28, 1864; thus this poem also falls into its correct chronological place. Finally, to cite just one more example: Melville places "The Martyr"—the only poem, as we have noticed, to specify an exact date—just before "The Coming Storm," which
must be intended to follow the poem on Lincoln's assassination because its text alludes to that terrible event.

These pieces of evidence that Melville strove to be both remarkably orderly and accurate in the chronology of the events he depicts stand in contrast to the surface sense of the work as a mere loose collection in which there is a rough chronological dimension. But, one must also ask: What is Melville's purpose in obscuring the dating of certain events while making manifest that of others? Are there no datings which undermine the hypothesis of great exactitude? And if so, what do they indicate?

As it happens, there are, so far as we have been able to perceive, exactly two such datings, and both prove to be remarkably revealing once they are brought to light and interpreted. The first problematic use of chronological ordering is in a note appended to a line in the text of "Gettysburg: The Check (July, 1863)." The second is in the specification of the month of April in the parentheses appended to "Lee in the Capitol (April, 1866)."

In the last stanza of his dense, thirty-six-line poem on the battle which marked the turning point of the Civil War, Melville causes his narrator to speak of an obscure event—one when a "warrior-monument, crashed in fight." To that line, he appends a note, where he now speaks for himself, when he says: "On the 4th of July, 1865, the Gettysburg National Cemetery, on the same height with the original burial ground, was consecrated, and the corner-stone laid of a commemorative pile."

What can Melville mean? Is he oblivious of the fact that the official dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg took place on November 19, 1863, and that the event was widely celebrated in pamphlets and other publications, one such booklet giving details of the ceremony and printing, among other materials, the single most famous speech in the English language? Or has Melville simply made a gross blunder? We think that, far from being oblivious or grossly blundering, he acted with great deliberation and political perspicacity.

We start from the fact that Melville transposes what he calls the "consecration" of our most famous National Cemetery from its literal
historical date to the date of the first celebration of our national independence after the carnage of the Civil War had at last ended. The fundamental premise of the Declaration of Independence, the "self-evident truth" that "all men are created equal," had on this date finally been acted upon by virtue of the war's irreversible emancipation of millions of Negro slaves. In seeking by this rhetorical device of transposing dates to direct such close attention to the significance of the Fourth of July, 1865, and to the principles embedded in the fundamental document which gives that date its deepest meaning, Melville exercises what may be called "poetic liberty." What is more, it is poetic liberty with political import, for it is commemorative of, and, we suggest, consciously rooted in, a single wonderful sentence in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate [emphasis added]-we cannot hallow this ground." Melville's choice of Lincoln's central verb, consecrate, to refer to the public ceremony at which Lincoln spoke seems utterly fitting. Nor is this all. Melville causes his narrator to imitate the terse poetic profundity of Lincoln's speech by the immense poetic compression of the poem on the great battle at Gettysburg. In so doing, Melville pays a tribute to Lincoln that is as remarkable as it is oblique and subtle. It is a tribute which indicates a concern by Melville for the part Abraham Lincoln played both in the articulation of the ultimate issue of the Civil War, and in the fighting of the war, however unevident that concern is on the surface of his book. It is poetic teaching by a master poet who knows how to indicate more than he directly says.

The second problematic dating by Melville comes to light in the central poem of the last group of poems: "Lee in the Capitol (April, 1866)." This form of dating exactly follows the form of so many other poems in his book. The form, in itself, therefore, does not provoke inquiry. What is more, the poem on Lee is separated from the last prior dating by the intervention of twenty-three poems, and one of them, "The Scout Toward Aldie," is by far the longest poem in the book, so that this particular dating is at a considerable remove from all the others.

The text of the poem depicts Robert E. Lee's appearance before
a group of what the narrator calls Senators, who have summoned Lee to testify within the Capitol of the United States. (In fact, the joint committee to which Lee gave testimony comprised both representatives and senators.) After Lee tersely responds to several questions, the senators ask him if he wishes to add anything. The narrator next portrays an internal struggle in Lee's soul, then reports that Lee gave a long speech. It is by far the longest speech in Melville's book; it is the only speech uttered in the Capitol of the United States; and it is entrusted to the most revered general of the Confederacy.

What are we to make of these features of Melville's singular presentation of Robert E. Lee? In search of clarification, we turn to the note Melville appended to the title of the poem. It is the last note in Melville's book and, therefore, the transition between his speeches explicating some aspect of the poems and his own longest speech, which is to say the speech he himself gives in the Supplement. The note is divided into three paragraphs. In the first, Melville states that Lee was among those summoned to appear, "during the spring just passed," before the "Reconstruction Committee of Congress," and recapitulates the questioning set forth in the poem. This is the second and central paragraph:

In the verse, a poetical liberty has been ventured. Lee is not only represented as responding to the invitation, but also as at last renouncing his cold reserve, doubtless the cloak to feelings more or less poignant. If for such freedom warrant be necessary, the speeches in ancient histories, not to speak of Shakespeare's historic plays, may not unfitly perhaps be cited. (Da Capo, 255)

Finally, in the third paragraph, Melville tersely treats the probable cause of Lee's speaking as he does: Lee feels deep concern for the kind of treatment the South is likely to receive from the Congress of the victorious North.

Our contention that Melville engages in poetic liberty in his treatment of July 4, 1865, in the note to his poem on Gettysburg, is now reinforced by his own explicit admission, in the note on Lee, that he has engaged in "a poetic liberty" in giving Robert E. Lee a
speech that never in historical fact was ever delivered. That admission compels the reader, we suggest, to look carefully at every aspect of the poem on Lee and at the note appended to it.

First, as for the dating, Hennig Cohen has this to say:

The date in the subtitle is incorrect. The fact that Melville was accurate in his dating in all previous subtitles suggests that the error may have been deliberate. If it is indeed not simply due to inadvertence, the cause may be that Melville attached a value to the first anniversary of the surrender and changed the date accordingly, or else that he wished to make his book appear as timely as possible....Lee arrived in Washington on February 16, 1866 and left on February 20.... (Cohen, 292)

We go further than Cohen: We contend that Melville quite deliberately transposed the setting of his poem on Lee from February to April 1866, and did so in order to make it fall in that month of "spring" April, when the Civil War began and ended, and, what is more, in the month that marks the first anniversary of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. In so proceeding, Melville manages, in the course of his book, to combine remarkable historical accuracy with even more remarkable poetic orderings. What is more, in citing the authority of "ancient histories"-Thucydides and Livy surely come to mind-and "Shakespeare's historic plays," Melville indicates a supreme standard of excellence against which his own book is meant to be appraised, both as to "history" and "poetic truth." Still further, by this second transposing of dates, he reminds us of the earlier transposing of dates: parallel to the transposing of Lee's fictitious, poetic truth-telling speech from February to April of 1865 is the transposing of Lincoln's actual, poetical truth-telling speech from November 1863 to July 4, 1865.

One further comment is now in order regarding a remarkable but unevident consequence of the second transposing of datings: Melville's overall poetic plan for his book features precisely eight datings in the month of April: "Shiloh. A Requiem" [1862], "The Battle for the Mississippi" [1862], "Running the Batteries" [1863], "The Fall of Richmond" [1865], "The Surrender at Appomattox"
Herman Melville's Civil War

[1865], "The Martyr" [1865], "The Coming Storm" [1865], and "Lee in the Capitol" [1866]. But given the transposition of Lee's speech from February 1866 to April 1866, as the consequence of employing "poetic liberty," Melville falsifies the otherwise impeccable historical record. That falsification, in turn, reduces the number of poems placed in April to seven. It thus falls out that the central poem placed in April is "The Fall of Richmond." Such a placement proves to square exactly with the significance attributed to that event in Melville's little untitled preface: "[With few exceptions, the Pieces in this volume originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond]."

In bringing this great event of April 1865 to the literal center of all the events in April that he has chosen to be dated, Melville also focuses attention on the most politically significant event of the Civil War: It is the fall of the seat of the Confederate government, which, from beginning to end, was the political main-spring of the military attempt to destroy the Union. Melville may well have known, in fact, of a remarkable statement made by Jefferson Davis, who had moved the capital to Danville, Virginia, in a last desperate attempt to evade the destruction of the Confederate cause. Davis said: "It would be unwise, even if it were possible, to conceal the great moral, as well as material injury to our cause that must result from the occupation of Richmond by the enemy."50 The Confederate Constitution, although largely modelled on the Federal Constitution of 1789, boldly made the enslavement of the Negro constitutional. With the fall of Richmond and, shortly after, of the government itself, that attempt to make the enslavement of Negroes a constitutional right, in a modern republic, was finally defeated, albeit at enormous cost to citizens in both North and South. The fundamental conflict between the natural right to equality and the constitutional status of the Negro had at last ended.

C. ON THE CHOICE OF BATTLES AND ASPECTS. We have dwelt at length and in detail on Melville's careful attention to the chronology of his poems, first, because it is revealing in itself and, second, because it is an indicator, *mutatis mutandis*, of his careful attention to the choice he has made of battles and aspects of the war to be treated. It is to a bare sketch of this second dimension
that we must now turn.

Close analysis of the themes of all the poems in Melville's book reveals that only about twenty-six poems of the seventy-two can properly be characterized as "battle-pieces," in that they treat battles as such, and even some of these treat given battles in rather oblique fashion. This is also to say, then, that the greatest part of the book treats matters which belong, more properly, to "aspects" than to "battle-pieces" of the title. The relative paucity of "battle-pieces," and their seeming subordination to "aspects," is all the more striking when one considers the vast number of military engagements which occurred during the war. The Longs estimate that there were over 10,000 engagements on land alone, and hundreds more on the waters of rivers and the ocean. Melville well understood the scale of the war from his use of detailed use of The Rebellion Record. The disproportion between this enormous scale of the conflicts and Melville's spare treatment indicates the need to seek with the greatest care the principles of selectivity which underlie his choice of specific "battle-pieces," and, in turn, the choice of the themes of the "aspects."

The interaction between the two kinds of poems proves to be highly complex. We can here give but a few examples of this dimension of Melville's book, but they reveal a deep reflectiveness about the Civil War. After the epigraphic poem, "The Portent," Melville places a group of three poems, "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions," and "Apathy and Enthusiasm." These constitute a moral-political prologue to the poetic treatment of the first phase of the military conflict, which begins only with "The March Into Virginia." These three poems have as their structural counterpart the three last poems in the book, "The Scout Toward Aldie," "Lee in the Capitol," and "A Meditation." As such, the two sets of three poems frame the rest of the poetic center, just as the two prose bookends frame the whole of that center. What is more, the central poem of each set of three framing poems features dialogic exchanges—in the case of: "The Conflict of Convictions," a dialogue between Yay and Nay as to the nature of the war; in the case of "Lee in the Capitol," a dialogue between "Senators" and Robert E. Lee.
In between the two sets of three framing poems, at the center of which are dialogic poems, Melville intersperses the "battle-pieces" with poems that treat very different "aspects" of the ongoing military and political drama. These are highly varied in poetic character and are spoken by a variety of personae. One notable example of this dimension of Melville's choice of themes is provided by a group of four "aspect" poems, framed fore and aft by "battle-piece" poems. The group of four is inserted between "Sheridan at Cedar Creek," which depicts a victory by General Phillip Sheridan on October 17-19, 1864, and "At the Cannon's Mouth," which depicts the Federal navy's sinking of a Confederate vessel on October 27, 1864. Between these two Federal victories, one on land, one at sea, Melville inserts the group of four "aspects." His reasons for so doing, and, in particular, his choice of the particular "aspects" embedded in the four, have to be inferred from the nature of the themes treated.

The interspersed group treats these "aspects": (1) an anonymous soldier in an anonymous prison camp, who dies of starvation, ["In the Prison Pen" (1864)]; (2) an anonymous crippled young Northern officer, formerly a college student, returning home, ["The College Colonel"]; (3) an eagle carried as a battle ensign by a Federal unit, an eagle that though "scarred" "no deadly hurt he knew," perhaps because he was "charmed /The Eagle of the Blue," ["The Eagle of the Blue"]; (4) a "dirge" composed for use in the funeral service of a specific named soldier, one "McPherson," ["A Dirge for McPherson, Killed in Front of Atlanta (July, 1864)."

Why are these "aspects" brought together, in this order, and interspersed as a single group framed by "battle-pieces" which depict Federal victories? We think they are meant to be a series of cumulatively powerful reflections on fate: A soldier fated to die, alone, not of wounds, but in prison from want of food; a soldier, not long before a college student, fated to be maimed in battle, but welcomed home at last, profoundly reflecting on the "truth" that came to him from battles and imprisonment; an eagle, symbol of the Republic, fated to witness battles and be scarred, yet survive, his "years...charmed"; and McPherson, fated to die before Atlanta. Fated deaths, one obscure, the other famous, frame survival, if
maimed or scarred. But what does it mean to be "fated" to endure any of these afflictions?

If reflections on the nature of fate be the underlying principle joining the parts of this little group of "aspects," we must further wonder why Melville has chosen to conclude the group with the fate of McPherson. The poem is a beautiful, subtle rendering of a military funeral within a Christian church. But it ends, suddenly and puzzlingly, with this couplet, in italics: *True fame is his, for life is o'er-/Sarpedon of the mighty war.* Why this sudden evocation of Sarpedon, a hero in Homer's *Iliad*, the epic poem without equal in Western history, the first and most profound poetic rendition of war in that history? This turning by Melville drives us, if we would be driven, further and further from the reality of the Christian funeral for General McPherson and in the direction of reflection on what he intends by so abrupt and enigmatic a summoning to memory of a pagan Greek hero. We have offered some interpretive suggestions on this matter in our third part. But for this place, it is sufficient to note that in the only poem of the group of four that treats the fate of a named human being, Melville invites, perhaps urges, the reader to digress from perceiving the grim realities of the Civil War to the contemplation of Homer. We are thus moved to place the war itself in a much wider framework for reflection.

We turn, next, to consider the framing device Melville uses for the beginning and ending "battle-pieces" of his book. We find, on once again scrutinizing the ordering of the whole first part, that Melville, not surprisingly, begins his treatment of actual battles with the first pitched battle of the Civil War, First Bull Run, or as the Confederates would call it, First Manassas: "The March into Virginia. Ending in the First Manassas (July, 1861)." But instead of ending his treatment of actual battles with any of the major engagements of 1865-such as the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, or the capture of Fort Fisher, North Carolina, or the capture of Mobile, Alabama-Melville does so with a poem on General William Tecumseh Sherman's famous (or to the Confederates, immensely infamous) march from Atlanta to Savannah. Melville titles this ending "baffle-piece" poem "The March to the Sea (December, 1864)."
Two *marches* thus form the fundamental frame of Melville's treatment of actual battles. The first march is of innocent, utterly inexperienced young Federal soldiers, whom Melville's narrator describes as "...they gayly go to fight,/ Chatting left and laughing right," only all too soon to be "enlightened by the vollied glare," enlightened in a terrible and paradoxical sense, as their gay march turns into a desperate rout: mob-like, those who survive the "vollied glare," flee for their lives towards Washington. The second march is of a vast Federal army, formed in four columns, cutting a swath sixty miles wide, largely living off the countryside, and destroying much of what was not needed by the army. In this poem, the theme of "marching" appears twenty-one times, as if to echo that relentless tide, often in a march-like couplet which ends a stanza: "It was glorious glad marching,/ That marching to the sea." And with one exception, the "marching" is that of the Federal forces, producing a total rout of the Confederates in their path.

The one exception, which is truly worth noting, are these lines in the fifth of the eight stanzas: "And the banners brightly blooming,/ The *slaves* [emphasis added] by thousands drew,/ And they marched beside the drumming,/ And they joined the armies blue." This is one of only three parts of Melville's book to speak explicitly of "slaves" or "slavery," the other two being the poem "Formerly a Slave," and a series of passages in the prose Supplement, upon which we comment in our third part.

What Melville intends by the paucity of obvious references to slavery in his poems on the Civil War—that terrible institution which impelled John Brown to seek to end it at any cost, driven by what he construed to be a divine command—is itself a large and troubling question. But what is now evident is that in the ending frame for his treatment of actual battles, Melville tersely evokes an image of freed slaves by the thousands, marching, marching, marching, with their liberators. But to what destiny, once those liberators have marched north toward total victory, demobilization, and home, leaving the hordes of slaves to fend for themselves? What is also evident is that the beginning and ending frames both depict routs—that of the Federals at Manassas and that of the Confederates, on a much more
massive scale, on the way from Atlanta to the sea. Let us then inquire further what lies at the center of these beginning and ending frames, each of which depicts military routs, one of terror-ridden Northerners, the other of terror-ridden Southerners.

The center of the group of thirty-three "battle-pieces" and "aspects" framed by the two marches is the first of two poems in a row on Stonewall Jackson. The first poem is "Stonewall Jackson. Mortally Wounded at Chancellorsville. (May, 1863)." The second is "Stonewall Jackson. (Ascribed to a Virginian)." The subtitle of the first poem is very similar to that for General McPherson; it anticipates that later subtitle; and it is one of but two subtitles in the book to speak so concretely of the mode of death fated for famous men of the war. This affinity of Jackson and McPherson, a Southerner and a Northerner, as seen through the lens of Melville's poetic treatment, requires further reflection, not least when one realizes that Stonewall Jackson is the only figure of the war whom Melville honors by making him the focus of two poems.

The first of the two poems on Stonewall is by a spokesman for the North, the second by a Virginian, spokesman for the South. We are thus led to reflect on Melville's placement of these two poems. Digressions as they are from the unfolding chronological treatment of "battle-pieces," we find that they are framed by "Running the Batteries" and "Gettysburg." The first depicts a daring successful Federal naval maneuver, and, what is more, a crucial step in Ulysses S. Grant's campaign to capture Vicksburg; the second depicts the repulse, on land, of General Robert E. Lee's most daring assault on the North.

The framing of the two Stonewall poems with two Northern victories, one naval and the other on land, surely must make us wonder what might have happened had Stonewall not been fatefuly and fatally wounded at Chancellorsville and, instead, had been with Lee at Gettysburg. Would the outcome of that great battle have gone the other way, as it might readily have done? And if it had, might not the outcome of the war been very different from what we now know, and what Melville well knew when he composed these two poems on Stonewall? How to weigh in the scale of judgment on this most
terrible of American wars the effects of "fortune" or "chance"? And still more troubling, how to weigh such effects against the sense of Providence, or of God's will?

The knowledge of Northern victory, of maintenance of the Union, of forcible emancipation of the millions of slaves, all underlie the Northern spokesman's speech. He begins with a ready, indeed utterly compelled, recognition that Stonewall was "The Man who fiercest charged in fight,/ Whose sword and prayer were long-/Stonewall!" His last stanza opens with a restatement of that recognition and then a turning: "Relentlessly he routed us;/ But we relent, for he is low-/Stonewall!" The center stanza, which mediates between these two perspectives on Stonewall's warrior prowess and early death, is a complex reflection on the "Cause" Stonewall served. That cause, as the spokesman tersely states, is "dead," a cause for which Stonewall "vainly died and set his seal," a cause which "we feel" was "in error," but a cause to which he was "true"-"True as John Brown or steel."

This belated remembrance of John Brown is the only such passage in the poetic center of Melville's book, and thus lends still greater significance to "The Portent" as epigraph. The single line in which we for the third and last time hear a poetic persona speak the name of John Brown is poetic compression as dense as the steel to which it refers. This poetic line is, moreover, inescapably a reminder of John Brown's abolitionist hatred of slavery, and by dialectical opposition, of Stonewall Jackson's warrior defense of the cause of slavery: The Northern spokesman says Stonewall was strong with "sword" and "prayer," even as was John Brown. But to "relent," as the Northern spokesman says "we" do, is to temper the severity of judgment on the cause that Stonewall so valiantly served. Such tempering is due, it seems, to the admiration that Stonewall's relentless military prowess seems to compel, even when the cause for which he fought was fundamentally wrong, and, above all, because he has been brought fatally "low" by a chance bullet from one of his own men. Immensely complex, then, are the images and reverberations of the concluding triplet of the poem: "Justly his fame we outlaw; so/ We drop a tear on the bold Virginian's bier,/ Because
no wreath we owe."

A full analysis of this poem, and of the Southern spokesman's response, would take us far afield, a trip well worth taking, were there but world enough and time. It must suffice, for the conclusion of this excursion into the problem of Melville's ordering of his poetry, to read and to reflect intensively on the closing dialogic triplet of the Southern spokesman's reply: "Fortune went with the North elate,/ Ay, but the South had Stonewall's weight,/ And he fell in the South's great war.'

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TABLE
Chronology of Poems: Numbers 1-47 and Number 71.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<td><strong>1860</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Misgivings</td>
<td>(1860)</td>
<td>Late autumn 1860 (&quot;late autumn brown&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Conflict of Convictions (1860-1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;the early part of the winter 1860-1,&quot; Melville's note.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Apathy and Enthusiasm (1860)</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;cold November&quot; 1860,</td>
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1861

5. March into Virginia (July 1861)  
   July 21, 1861.
6. Lyon (August 1861)  
   August 10, 1861.
7. Ball's Bluff (October 1861)  
   October 21, 1861.
8. Dupont's Round Fight (November 1861)  
   November 7, 1861.
9. Stone Fleet (December 1861)  
   December 20, 1861.

1862

10. Donelson (February 1862)  
    February 13-16, 1862.
11. Cumberland (March 1862)  
    March 8, 1862.
12. In the Turret (March 1862)  
    March 9, 1862.
13. Temeraire [same time as 11 and 12, because same theme of ships & technology]

14. Utilitarian/Monitor [same time because same theme as above]

15. Shiloh (April 1862)  
    April 6-7, 1862.
16. Battle for Mississippi (April 1862)  
    April 24-25, 1862.
17. Malvern Hill (July 1862)  
    July 1, 1862.
18. Victor of Antietam (1862)  
    Battle of Antietam: September 17, 1862.

1863

    December 31, 1862-January 3, 1863.
20. Running the Batteries (April 1863)  
    April 16, 1863.
21. Stonewall Jackson (May 1863)  
    May 2, Jackson wounded; May 10, died. This and the next poem treat Jackson in retrospect after the end of the war, though the date in the subtitle accu-
rately focuses on the wounding and death.

22. Stonewall Jackson
23. Gettysburg (July 1863)

July 1-3, 1863. In a note to the poem, Melville transposes the date of the "consecration" of the military cemetery at Gettysburg from November 19, 1863, to July 4, 1865. See the Appendix for an analysis. See also the "comments" section for "Lee in the Capitol."

24. House-top (July 1863)
25. Look-out Mountain (November 1863)
26. Chattanooga (November 1863)
27. Armies of Wilderness (1863-4)

1864
28. On Photo Commander

29. Swamp Angel

30. Battle for Bay (August 1864)
31. Sheridan: Cedar Creek (October 1864)
32. In the Prison Den (1864)
33. College Colonel
34. Eagle of Blue
35. Dirge for McPherson (July 1864)
36. At Cannon's Mouth (October, 1864)
37. March to the Sea (December, 1864)

1865

38. Frenzy in the Wake (February 1865)

39. Fall of Richmond (April 1865)
40. Surrender-Appomattox (April 1865)
41 A Canticle

42. The Martyr (April 15 1865)

43. Coming Storm (April 1865)
44. Rebel Color Bearers at Shiloh

45. The Muster (May 1865)

46. Aurora-Borealis (May 1865)

47. Released Rebel Prisoner (June 1865)

1866

71. Lee in the Capitol (April 1866)

Sherman's advance through Carolinas.

April 2-3, 1865.

April 9, 1865.

Between April 9 and April 15, 1865.

Only date specified by day: Lincoln dies on Easter Saturday.

[after April 15, for it alludes to assassination]

[after April 15, for it alludes to assassination]

Parade celebrating victory, but in shadow of assassination.

Beginning of dissolution of "Armies of the Peace."

Last poem to which Melville gives a date within Part I of his book.

NB: Melville appends no dates to poems in Part II.

Lee's testimony to a joint committee of Congress took place on February 17, 1866. This is the only instance where Melville, in a sub-
title to a poem, exercises "poetical liberty" by transposing the date of an actual event. See the Appendix and the "comments" section, above, to the poem on Gettysburg.

NOTES

1. The genesis of this review essay was in a Liberty Fund Colloquium on Battle-Pieces. It was held, appropriately, in Charleston, South Carolina, hard by Fort Sumter. We thank the trustees and officers of the foundation for having opened the way; and the participants in the colloquium for thoughtful questions and observations, both of which greatly shaped our inquiry. We especially thank James Hurtgen, who shared with us his post-colloquium thoughts.

We also thank William A. Williams, Jr., who, at our request, quickly prepared an electronic text of Battle-Pieces, then made a concordance to it available on his website: www.concordance.com. We also have made use of his concordance of Moby-Dick, available at the same site.

Finally, we thank Thomas Engeman and Jeremy Rabkin, who made detailed, thoughtful comments on a draft; Paul Cornish, who made helpful comments and aided us with library research; and the late Deborah Baran Cornish, who prepared an analysis of Melville's uses of the Bible, Milton, and Shakespeare, as they are presented in the notes to the Hennig Cohen edition of Battle-Pieces.

2. In 1963, the late Hennig Cohen published what is, thus far, the only scholarly edition of Battle-Pieces. It contains a wide-ranging, perceptive introduction, many detailed and highly informative notes, and, as a bonus, vivid illustrations reproduced from graphic art of the Civil War. Unfortunately, this sole scholarly
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edition is long out of print. In 1972, Sidney Kaplan published an
edition. The text is simply a reprint of the 1866 edition. It also
contains a brief introduction, a note on the text, a list of Melville's
revisions, and the text of a few reviews published when the book
appeared in 1866. This edition is also out of print. The Da Capo
reprint edition contains an introduction by Lee Rust Brown, a
specialist in American literature. Brown's essay is a careful apprecia-
tion of the difficulties, the poetic qualities, and the deep thoughtful-
ness of the poems. We know of no other forthcoming edition of
Battle-Pieces. However, in 2000, the publishers of the Newberry-
Northwestern edition of Melville's works will bring out a volume of
his poetry. We do not know what kind of critical apparatus it will
contain.

3. When Battle-Pieces was published, it received twenty-seven
reviews—but only, so far as we have been able to ascertain, in various
publications in the North. Although a few reviewers gave the book
perfunctory praise, a number were quite critical, on the one hand,
of the poetry, and, on the other hand, of Melville's political views.
Thus the American Literary Gazette and Publisher's Circular
[Philadelphia] said this: "[Melville] has written too rapidly to avoid
great crudities: His poetry runs into the epileptic. His rhymes are
fearful. The first one in his book makes `law' and `Shenandoah'
rhyme." The reviewer for the New York Times focused on that part
of the prose Supplement, which ends Melville's book, and in which
Melville argues for a policy of "moderation" towards the South. The
reviewer fiercely said: "The use of such treasonable language as this
shows a singular hardihood on the part of one who has studied and
written about the ferocious inhabitants of the South Sea islands, who
were accustomed, as we all know, to cold missionary on their
boards." For these and other reviews, see Herman Melville: The
Contemporary Reviews. ed. Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The passages of
reviews we have quoted are at 513 and 509.

4. Rosanna Warren, "Dark Knowledge: Melville's Poems of the

5. Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lin-


8. The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Constitution are "The Organic Laws of the United States of America." Virtually all of the time since 1878 they have stood, under that title, as a noble preamble to the statutes of the federal government. The latest version of those statutes is *The United States Code.* For a detailed historical analysis of the statutory basis of placing the "organic laws" at the head of the statutes, and the significance of that historical development, see *Four Pillars of Constitutionalism: The Organic Laws of the United States.* Introduced by Richard H. Cox (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998) 9-71.


10. The most revealing treatment of the references and allusions to these, as well as many other authors, may be found in the detailed notes in the bicentennial edition of the novel. *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* by Herman Melville. Edited by Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent. (New York: Hendricks House, 1952). See also: Mary K. Bercaw, *Melville's Sources* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987); Merton M. Sealts, *Melville's Reading.* Revised


14. See also this statement by Ishmael: "For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base." (Ch. 33, 147-8)


17. Melville's changes from his source were first noted by William Richardson, Melville's "Benito Cereno": An Interpretation With Annotated Text and Concordance (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), 71-72. Richardson's volume also reprints the relevant portion of Amasa Delano's Narrative of Voyages and Travels, 95-122.

18. Quoted from The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860 (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 83. Further citations from this volume will be in parenthesis in the text. This volume, like Richardson's, reprints the relevant part of Delano's Narrative of
Voyages and Travels.


20. From the first appearance of Melville's book until the present, the dominant perception of commentators is that it is simply a collection, which is to say a loose assemblage of poems treating various battles and other aspects of the Civil War and loosely joined to some prose elements. Hennig Cohen and some few others go further, to argue that the book does manage to achieve a certain coherence. Cohen says that "The central theme of *Battle-Pieces is one of opposition and reconciliation"; that Melville's "choice" of certain material "contributed to the thematic and structural unity of his book"; and that the variety and range of the "verse forms" is "perhaps a formal principle, intended to show unity in diversity, and to reflect the `varied amplitude of the war- (19-22). For similar statements, see Stanton Garner, *The Civil War World of Herman Melville* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 33-4. We think this appraisal of Melville's book is more just than that which views the book simply as a collection. But even it does not reach the question whether Melville intends his volume to be understood as a *book in the most emphatic sense*-that is, as a whole in which the constituent parts have been chosen with great care and combined to set forth a teaching. A book in this emphatic sense would be Plato's *The Republic*, Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Lear*, or Montaigne's *Essais*, all books Melville knew and held in high regard. We think, as the argument in the text seeks to show, that Melville did intend for *Battle-Pieces* to be perceived as a book in the emphatic sense. For a more extensive treatment of this question, see the Appendix and its attached table.


22. See Rosanna Warren, *op.cit.*, for the most detailed and
thoughtful treatment of the intricacies of the poetic features of *The Portent*.


24. See Garner, *op.cit.*, for an extensive and detailed treatment of this aspect of Melville's understanding of the Civil War.


26. See the table at the end of the Appendix.

27. See the detailed argument in the Appendix.


Melville could have learned of Plato's teaching about mores supporting written laws from John Milton's *Areopagitica*, where the English poet speaks of "those unwritten, or at least unconstraining laws of virtuous education, religious and civil nurture, which Plato there mentions [in his *Laws*], as the bonds and ligaments of the Commonwealth, the pillars and sustainers of every written Statute" (*Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe and others [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-73] II, 526). Subsequent quotations from this volume annotated in text (Yale Prose, II, page number). For an explanation of Milton's Platonism in this work, see Paul M. Dowling, *Polite Wisdom: Heathen Rheto-
ric in Milton's Areopagitica (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 53-54.

31. (269). Melville's temporary subordination of the freedmen's interest is controversial. One critic writes: "The fact that Melville did not in this instance resist Eurocentric racial hierarchialism to the extent that he did in some earlier works, notably Moby-Dick and "Benito Cereno" has disconcerted some Melvillians." (Lawrence Bruell, "Melville the Poet," The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville, ed. Robert S. Levine [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 153-154.)

But do not such disconcerted Melvillians fail to grasp the temporal character of Melville's position, which is to say, postwar as opposed to prewar? The shift in time was sufficient to moderate the speech of even so vehement a critic as the black leader Frederick Douglass, as explained by Herbert Storing. Storing has just summarized Douglass's harsh denunciation of Dred Scott decision before the war and now he turns to Douglass's different rhetoric in the post-war period:

It is instructive in this connection to compare Douglass' speech on the Dred Scott decision with his speech in 1883 on the Civil Rights case, striking down federal legislation prohibiting discrimination against blacks. The war was over, for the country and for the black, and the character of the speech was determined by that great fact. This is not to suggest that the Civil Rights case was not a serious blow. Douglass saw it as standing in a line that included the forcing of slavery into Kansas, the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the Dred Scott decision. "We have been, as a class, grievously wounded, wounded in the house of our friends," he said at the mass meeting called to protest the Civil Rights decision. But although wounded, the blacks were not turned out of their political house, as they had been in Dred Scott; and Douglass' rhetoric was governed by that difference. He began by noting that he had taken the trouble to write out his remarks, that they might be "well-chosen, and not liable to
be misunderstood, distorted, or misrepresented." He sug-
gested that it maybe that "the hour calls more loudly for silence
than for speech," and he exhibited an unusual reluctance to
enter into the criticism he had to utter. He aimed to achieve a
certain kind of silence, while speaking. He contended that the
most serious evil in the land, "which threatens to undermine
and destroy the foundations of our free institutions," is-not
race prejudice or injustice to blacks, as one might have ex-
pected, but-"the great and apparently increasing want of
respect entertained for those to whom are committed the
responsibility and the duty of administering our government."Douglass urged his partisan audience never to forget that
"whatever may be the incidental mistakes or misconduct of
rulers, government is better than anarchy, and patient reform
is better than violent revolution." While not interfering with
fair criticism, he would give "the emphasis of a voice from
heaven" to the repugnance felt by all good citizens to any
disrespect for governors. Coming "a little nearer to the case
now before us," he began his criticism, but again interrupted
himself to caution that "if any man has come here tonight with
his breast heaving with passion, his heart flooded with acri-
mony, wishing and expecting to hear violent denunciation of
the Supreme Court, on account of this decision, he has
mistaken the object of this meeting and the character of the
men by whom it is called." Douglass then entered into a
vigorous criticism, but he did so only after having introduced
the subject with the greatest circumspection and concern for
maintaining the dignity and authority of the Court and the law
for which it spoke. This was now the blacks' Court as well as the
whites'. Better to have a Court that does serious harm to blacks
than to have none at all. ("Frederick Douglass," American
Political Thought, ed. Morton J. Frisch and Richard G. Stevens
[New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971], 153-54.)

32. 1.3. 111. All quotations from Shakespeare found in The
Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974). Sub-
sequent quotations annotated in text in parentheses (by act, scene, line)

33. These and other word counts were aided by the "Concordance of Great Books," William A. Williams, Jr.'s site on the Internet.


35. The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events (New York: D. Van Nostrand, Publisher, 1861-68), Volumes I-XII, IV; 170-85. Subsequent annotation to this volume in text in parentheses (volume in Roman, pages in Arabic).

36. Another is belief in Divine Providence. This topic is discussed, for instance, in "Running the Batteries" (75-78). But a comparison of changes Melville makes in his newspaper source (Rebellion Record, VI, 546-48) at the beginning and end of his poem render problematic the statements of belief in the middle stanzas (76).


40. Melville's prudential stance toward the extraordinary difficulties of "reconstruction" is an echo of Lincoln's stance in the Second Inaugural. A thoughtful essay on Lincoln's rhetorical stance is Garry Wills, "Lincoln's Greatest Speech?," The Atlantic Monthly 284 (September, 1999), 60-70.


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44. For this understanding of Shakespeare, we are indebted to Allan Bloom, Love and Friendship (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 274, 348, 394-5.


47. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969), Volume II, Chapters 13-15. The Frenchman's criticism is summarized in the following: "By and large the literature of democracy will never exhibit the order, regularity, skill and art characteristic of aristocratic literature; formal qualities will be neglected or actually despised. The style will often be strange, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, and almost always strong and bold. Writers will be more anxious to work quickly than to perfect details. Short works will be commoner than long books, wit than erudition, imagination than depth. There will be rude and untutored vigor of thought with great variety and singular fecundity. Authors will strive to astonish more than to please, and to stir passions rather than to charm taste" (475).

48. See, in particular, note 20, supra.


50. Long, op.cit., 666.

51. Melville, in a handwritten note on a copy of the poem, changed "vain" to "great" (Cohen, 238).