

# The Revolutionary Ideals Manipulated

## — Re-figuration of the Founding Fathers in Herman Melville's *Battle-Pieces* —

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Keeping silence for a decade after the publication of *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Herman Melville drastically changed his career from a novelist to a poet to publish *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) from Harper & Brothers Company, New York. Based on earlier volumes of Frank Moore's *The Rebellion Record* (1861–68), Melville's *Battle-Pieces* treats the American Civil War in 72 poems, notes, and a prose supplement. The poems are grouped into two sections: (1) 52 poems, beginning with "The Portent (1859)" and ending with "America," center on the battles of the war and its personalities; (2) 19 poems, subtitled as "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial," consist of elegies, epitaphs, and requiems. *Battle-Pieces* chronologically depicts events and personalities of the Civil War. It urges the Northerners to launch reconstruction of the defeated South with benevolent Christianity, not with hatred and hostility; it also gives a warning that the North's victory was brought about only with material superiority and an immense number of soldiers, and it does not prove that the Northern soldiers had more "skill and bravery" (184) than the Southern soldiers did.

Scholars of the earlier period underestimated his shift from a prosaist to a bard in his later years. In fact, Raymond Weaver's pioneering study, *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (1921), sees Melville's three decades of writing poems as "the long quietus," in which "he turned his back upon the world, and in his recoil from life absorbed himself in metaphysics" (350). Melville studies in the last two decades, however, have paid more attention to his collections of poetry from various standpoints, largely from politics to poetics. As regards *Battle-Pieces*, scholars have studied its political and cultural dimensions: nationalism and transnationalism; slavery and the issue of reconciliation; the chronological order of the poems; contemporary arts; and the tradition of English poetry. Most of these previous studies have evaluated Melville's war poetry by focusing mainly on the contemporary matters around the Civil War.

This paper aims to read Melville's *Battle-Pieces* in the context of the Revolutionary discourses around the Civil War period. As James M. Mcpherson argues, the war had been assessed as "the Second American Revolution," in which both of the Union and the Confederate states appropriated the Revolutionary ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to justify their policies and causes. Melville's war poetry can be seen as a reaction to such controversies. As a Northerner, Melville's war poetry criticizes the Southern states' manipulation of the Revolutionary ideals: for him, "the most sensitive love of liberty was entrapped" to continue slavery (*Battle-Pieces* 182). Yet, Melville's poetry does not simply glorify the Union's victory. Through the ventriloquism of the Southern soldiers and officers, *Battle-Pieces* criticizes the North's partisan patriotism that would engender hate toward other states and help to construct the

North-centered hierarchy. Melville's poetry, which superimposes the image of the defeated Confederate commander Robert E. Lee over that of George Washington, sings the lost voices of the dead soldiers and the ruined South. Along with one major sourcebook, Frank Moore's *The Rebellion Record* (1861–68), I would like to suggest that Melville tries to evaluate the Civil War as a "revolution" (182), not as a mere rebellion, which makes a fundamental counterstatement against the North-centered hierarchy after the war.<sup>1</sup>

### I. Melville's Southern Masquerade

In *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849), Melville integrates the issue of U.S. slavery in his transatlantic narrative. When seeing a mulatto crew member walking "arm in arm with a good-looking English woman," the young protagonist says with surprise: "in New York such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes" (202). *Redburn* does not merely portray black slavery as an issue that is either good or bad, but importantly, it shows a more complex problem: the relationship between the victor (master) and the loser (slave). There, *Redburn* sees the monument dedicated to Lord Nelson, who won the brilliant victory at Battle of Trafalgar. The bronze statue describes Nelson's death "in the arms of Victory" (155). While "[v]ictory is dropping a wreath" on him, the "hideous skeleton" of death "is insinuating his bony hand under the hero's robe" (155). Although these bronze statues are "emblematic of Nelson's principal victory," *Redburn* pays more attention to "four marked figures in chain," which are bound to "seat[] in various attitudes of humanization and despair" (155). The young American sailor superimposes the "woe-begone figures" with "four American slaves in the market-place" (155). According to Eliza Tamarkin, "*Redburn's* sympathies remain curiously suspended between critique and veneration" of heroes (189). A hero's brilliant victory will bring praise to his splendid virtues for future generations, becoming the foundation for a human community such as a nation. But, at the same time, it marks the defeated and captivated as well as the victor, bringing about the hierarchical relationship between the master and slaves.

Melville's ambiguous hero worship is later crystalized in his depiction of the Founding Fathers. In fact, his third novel *Mardi* (1849) reveals a fundamental contradiction of the Jeffersonian ideal: "In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal" (512). The narrator in *Pierre* (1852) also unveils the anti-democratic nature of the Revolutionary sire: "[T]he mildest hearted, and most blue-eyed gentleman [the protagonist's grandfather]" was "the kindest of masters to his slaves" (30). Yet, Melville's hero worship cannot be interpreted as mere criticism of democratic equality. Rather, it is inextricably connected to his longing for the American ideal. As seen in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), Melville sought for the way to realize the "unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things," or to "carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life" (248, 241).

Here, I would like to emphasize the fact that the patriotic narrator in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" designs himself as a Southerner. In effect, Melville depicts the narrator as "a Virginian Spending July in Vermont" (239). Several scholars have argued the reasons for such a Southern masquerade. For example, Melville's southern masquerade is a strategy for him to criticize the Northern writers and their literary world from an outsider's viewpoint. The narrator mocks both Boston and New York critics because of their misunderstanding of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Boston critics merely read the surface of Hawthorne's work, regarding him as "a pleasant writer, with a pleasant style" whose works are far "from any deep and weighty thing" (242). Melville's Virginian narrator also blames the Northern writers for their "literary flunkysm" in

respect to foreign literature. The narrator considers Washington Irving, one representative figure in the New York literary circle, to be “a very popular and amiable writer” and “good, and self-reliant in many things,” but he “perhaps owes his chief reputation to the self-acknowledged imitation of a foreign model” (242).

Nonetheless, Melville’s Southern masquerade does not completely displace the Northern perspectives; rather, his enthusiastic praise of Hawthorne ironically leads him to reinforce North-centered hierarchy. Melville’s masquerade as a Southerner is linked with the main theme of his essay: founding the national literature of America. Melville’s Virginian narrator celebrates the birth of national, not regional, literature: “So all that day, half-buried in the new clover, I watched this Hawthorne’s ‘Assyrian dawn, and paphian sunset and moonrise, from the summit of our Eastern Hill’” (241). The Southern narrator feels cultivated by Hawthorne’s splendid literary talent: “I feel that this Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul. He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further, and further, shoots his strong New England roots into the hot soil of my Southern soul” (250). We can guess the importance of Melville’s Southern masquerade, given that the essay was written on the eve of the Compromise of 1850, which radically promoted the division between the North and South, and moved them toward the Civil War. Readers of the essay, issued in Evert Duyckinck’s *The Literary World*, could foresee the establishment of the national literature through the civilization and enlightenment of Melville’s narrator (the South) with Hawthorne’s light of democracy (the North).

However, in *Battle-Pieces*, published after the bloodshed of war between the North and South, Melville’s North-centered thought is replaced by an ambiguous view of the combatants. One notable example can be seen in “Supplement,” located at the end of the work. Certainly, Melville considers the cause of the South as evil and wrong. The war taught the South “to feel that Secession, like Slavery, is against Destiny” and that “both now [are] buried in one grave” (182). However, Melville convinces the readers that the North and the South are in the same boat: “her [the South’s] fate is lined with ours; and . . . together we comprise the Nation” (182). Melville’s ambiguous view of the Civil War becomes a warning to the North about its attitude as victor. Unlike “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” he requires the “patriotic” Northern writers to “revolt from acting on paper a part any way akin to that of the live dog to the dead lion” (184). In their publications, “the emotion of victory” is confused with “an exultation as ungenerous as unwise” (183). The publications, motivated by hatred for and hostility toward the South, help stigmatize it with “[b]arbarities,” which “the Southern people collectively can hardly be held responsible” (183). If such publications are to be issued, the posterity of the North, which “sympathizes with our conviction, but removed from our passions,” may inherit only hate for the South (183). As the result, “it [is] probable that the grandchildren of General Grant will pursue with rancor, or slur neglect, the memory of the Stonewall Jackson,” the distinguished commander of the South (184). Such Northern patriotism could “pervert the national victory into oppression for the vanquished” (186).

To avoid it, Melville suggests that “[p]atriotism is not baseness, neither is it inhumanity” (183). He urges the readers to become “thoughtful patriots,” who evaluate the Civil War and the Southerners with “the truth”: the Southerners are “a people for years politically misled by designing men” who “sought to perpetuate the curse of slavery,” whereas they are not “the authors” of slavery and just its “fated inheritors” (184). Melville’s speaker employs a non-sectionalist attitude to establish national unity between the North and the South. The Southerners have “a like origin” with the Northerners, sharing “essentially in whatever

worthy qualities we may possess” (184). Such a non-partisan view leads Melville to relativize the victory of the North. It was achieved merely with its “superior resources and crushing members,” not “skill and bravery” (184). And, the North has delivered “unfraternal denunciations” for years, and stigmatized the South “under the name of Rebellion”; yet such impeachments are “reciprocal” (184).

According to Carolyn Karcher, in *Battle-Pieces*, Melville seeks the middle ground between President Andrew Johnson’s benevolent plan of “restoration” and harsh “Reconstruction” by the Congress. With Presidential restoration, the North helped the South to change its system from slavery to freedom but did not permit blacks to have access to politics. In contrast, the Radical Republicans pursued a complete eradication of slavery and secessionism without compromise. Naming Melville’s attitude “Re-establishment,” Karcher considers his war poetry as a literary practice, which is equivalent to Presidential restoration (225–26). To be sure, Melville’s “Supplement” repeatedly suggests the importance of establishing unity between the North and South. Although admitting that “[s]ome revisionary legislation and adaptive is indispensable,” Melville’s speaker insists that post-war reconstruction policies be made “not unallied with entire magnanimity” (185). The pursuit of national unity after the war is as significant as resolving the problem of slavery: “Let us be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as philanthropists toward the blacks, our fellow-men” (186).

Here, by finding an echo of the unlimited spirit of democracy in his essay, we can view *Battle-Pieces* as a literary practice to establish his ideal of democracy, which he had pursued from his earlier career. In other words, Melville’s war poetry examines the way to avoid the North-centered hierarchy after the war by reevaluating convictions and heroic figures not only of the North but also of the South. The Civil War makes him rethink democratic equality: “[t]he years of the war tried our devotion to the Union; the time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy” (187). As the preface of *Battle-Pieces* notes, a large number of the poems were written after the fall of Richmond on April 3, 1865. Therefore, Melville assumes that now is in a radical transition from “the years of war” to “the time of peace.”

As the narrator of “Hawthorne and His Mosses” preaches “unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things,” Melville’s war poetry ends up foretelling the advent of the “the bards of Progress and Humanity” after the war (187). For Melville, the Civil War serves to figure out the “unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity” in both the North and South. By reexamining the bloody war from various aspects, Melville resists evaluating it as the cruel time when the nation was divided with the oppressive hierarchy between the victor (the North) and the defeated (the South), which the Northern post-war reconstruction policies would create with their savage patriotism.

Rather, the war displays “patriotic passion” “in a utilitarian time and country,” leading the Northerners to rethink the “other qualities” of the South and find heroic figures with “courage and fortitude matchless” (183). Melville’s hero worship represents a strange expression of the Civil War. Although criticizing the South for planning to perpetuate slavery, he does not see the war as a rebellion, unlike the other Northerners. Melville calls the war a “revolution” (182), which could annihilate the master-slave relationship and establish democratic society. As discussed above, Melville’s earlier texts longed for re-establishing the great achievement of the Founding Fathers. Next, I will look at *Battle-Pieces* within the Civil War discourse of the Revolutionary ideals, demonstrating that, after nearly two decades passed, he continued his project to embody the “unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things.”

## II. A War on the Revolutionary Ideals

Scholars have examined *Battle-Pieces* in the cultural and political contexts of the Civil War, which resulted in the division between the North and the South. Deak Nabers demonstrates that Melville's war poetry reflects "legal dilemmas" of the Union between "the positive-law solution to the 'crime' of secession" and "the higher-law solution to the problem of slavery" (2). Alice Fahs's *The Imagined Civil War* (2010) investigates how popular cultural artifacts such as poetry and popular songs during the war reinforced the sectionalist patriotisms between the Union and the Confederacy. But, I would like to pay more attention to the way that such sectionalist discourses were established by manipulation of the Revolutionary ideals. Here, I will look at several documents from Frank Moore's *The Rebellion Record* (1861–68), the sourcebook of *Battle-Pieces*, to explore another war between the North and South, in which both parties deliberately manipulated Revolutionary ideals, represented in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, to justify their policies and causes.

The Confederate states appropriated the Revolutionary discourses in order to vindicate their secession from the Federal Governments. One example is seen in the "The Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union," issued about two months after Abraham Lincoln's election as president on November 6, 1860. While being the first state to ratify the Articles of Confederation on February 5, 1778, South Carolina was also the first to secede from the United States on December 20, 1860. The declaration clarified the cause of secession to be that the non-slaveholding states had become "destructive" to the South. The northern states behaved as if they had "the right of deciding upon the property of our domestic institutions," having seen slavery as "sinful" and denied "the rights of property established in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution" (4). In addition, the northern states had "disturb[ed] the peace of and eloin[ed] the property of the citizens of other States" by "encourag[ing] and assist[ing] thousands of our slaves to leave their homes" and "incit[ing] [them] to servile insurrection" through their publications (4).

In it, we can identify echoes of the Revolutionary documents. South Carolina, actually quoting from the Declaration of Independence, superimposed the history of American independence from England on its secession. The foundational document confirmed "the right of a State to govern itself" and of "a people to abolish a Government when it becomes destructive of the ends for which it was instituted" (3). South Carolina also stressed "the law of compact" as the "fundamental principle" of the Constitution: "The parties to whom this constitution was submitted were the several sovereign States; they were to agree or disagree, and when nine of them agreed, the compact was to take effect among those concurring" (3). When the Constitution had been ratified, two states — North Carolina and Rhode Island — did not approve it "until long after it had gone into operation among the other-eleven" (3). During that time, they were considered "separate, sovereign States, independent of any of the provisions of the Constitution" (3).

As did the Declaration of Independence, South Carolina blamed the Federal Government for becoming "destructive" to the slave-holding states. It referred to the Fourth Article that treats the fugitive slaves: if the person, who is "held to service or labor in one State under its laws," escapes into another, he or she "shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due" (4). However, the non-slaveholding states had not complied with the Constitution. For instance, New Jersey enacted "laws

which render inoperative the remedies provided by her own laws and by the laws of Congress” (4). The courts in New York had also denied “the right of transit for a slave” (4). Thus, these northern states’ disregard of the Constitution allowed South Carolina be “released from her obligation” (4). Finally, Lincoln’s election would impress the North’s hostilities on the Southern states and make the Revolutionary ideals emasculated as a dead letter: “The guarantees of the Constitution will then no longer exist; the equal rights of the States will no longer be lost. The Slaveholding States will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the Federal Government will have become their enemy” (4).

Such justification of the South’s secession is also found in the first inaugural address by Jefferson Davis, the first and only President of the Confederate States of America. According to Davis’s address of February 18, 1861, the South’s beginning as a confederacy displayed “the American idea” (31). As seen in the declaration of South Carolina, Davis also articulated the Revolutionary document. Governments are established with “the consent of the governed” to achieve “justice, ensure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to our selves and our posterity,” and the people have the right to “alter and abolish governments whenever they become destructive to the ends for which they were established” (Davis 31).

In addition, Davis stressed their industry of agriculture to justify the South’s secession from the United States. The Southerners, “an agricultural people,” had embraced peace and the free trade as “true policies” to export commodities required in manufacturing countries (31).<sup>2</sup> Yet, if “passion or lust of dominion should cloud the judgment or inflame the ambition” of the Northern states, the Southerners must prepare for maintaining their countries and the people’s property (31). Saying “the Constitution formed by our fathers in that of these Confederate States,” Davis’s address concluded with a sensational superimposition of their secession with that of the Revolutionary sires:

Reverently let us invoke the God of our fathers to guide and protect us in our efforts to perpetuate the principles which by his blessing they were able to vindicate, establish, and transmit to their posterity; and with a continuance of His favor ever gratefully acknowledged, we may hopefully look forward to success, to peace, to prosperity. (31)

Avoiding the mention of slavery, Davis’s address portrayed the Southerners as the yeoman, who Thomas Jefferson admired as the foundation of his nation, were free from vices of the corrupting city and embodied the republican virtues.

As well as the Southern states, Lincoln adopted the Revolutionary discourses to express his political attitude. His famous address at Gettysburg on November 11, 1863, heroically sanctified dead Union soldiers, who fought for establishing the democratic “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (n. pag.). Lincoln’s mourning for the dead soldiers could remind the audience of the American Revolution: “Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (n. pag.). Moreover, his first inaugural address, given on March 4, 1861, can be read as a response to the South’s manipulation of the Revolutionary ideals. Just two months after Davis’s address, his inaugural speech carefully tried to avoid the national division by removing the Southerners’ fear that “their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered” (36). Quoting his former speech and the Corwin Amendment, in which “domestic institutions” of each State were to be secured from intervention from the Congress, Lincoln said

that he had “no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interference with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists,” and that “the property, peace, and security of no section are to be in anywise endangered by the now incoming Administration” (36). He also touched on the issue of the Fourth Article, which stipulated the sending of fugitive slaves back to their states, arguing “[a]ll members of Congress” completely support the law as “unanimous” (37).

At the same time, however, Lincoln’s inaugural speech expressed the impossibility of legal secession of the Southern states. It is because the “perpetuity” of the Union “is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments”:

[I]f the United States be not a government proper, but an association of States in the nature of a contract merely, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade by less than all the parties who made it? One party to a contract may violate it — break it, so to speak; but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it? (37)

Lincoln took advantage of the law of compact, on which the declaration of South Carolina and Davis’s address relied as the basis of their secession. He logically suggested that if one member of the United States tries to withdraw from the Union, it must take consensus from the other ones. Whereas admitting the “revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow” the existing government, Lincoln counted historical validity of the perpetuity of the Union, which was “formed by the Articles of Association in 1774” (38, 37). For Lincoln, the Articles of Association was more important than the Constitution because of its longevity. The validity of the Union’s perpetuity was confirmed by the fact that it had appeared before the Constitution. In Lincoln’s address, the older age of the Union proves that it is closer and truer to Revolutionary ideals than the Constitution.

Except for Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, all of these texts were included in Melville’s sourcebook, *The Rebellion Record*. “Supplement” in *Battle-Pieces* shows us that Melville was very well aware about such an argument between the Union and the Confederacy. The prose supplement describes such a sectionalist manipulation of the Revolutionary ideals:

It was in subserviency to the slave-interest that Secession was plotted; but it was under the plea, plausibly urged, that certain inestimable rights guaranteed by the Constitution were directly menaced, that the people of the South were cajoled into revolution. 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. (182)

Melville’s supplement indicates how the partisan discourses re-presented the Revolutionary ideals of the Constitution. Although the spirit of the Constitution is in the “sensitive love of liberty,” the South manipulates it under the guise of liberty to establish “an Anglo-American empire,” which maintains “the systematic degradation of man,” slavery. Next, I will read Melville’s *Battle-Pieces* as a response to the war on the Revolutionary ideals. More specifically, I would like to focus on his allusions to the Revolutionary sires, arguing that his war poetry aims to relativize the North’s victory and avoid the North-centered hierarchy through masquerade as a Southerner.

### III. Ventriloquizing the South

Poems in *Battle-Pieces*, as I first introduced, are grouped into two sections: (1) 52 poems describe the battles of the Civil War and its personalities; (2) 19 poems, subtitled as “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial,” consist of elegies, epitaphs, and requiems. According to the introductory remarks, Melville’s war poetry originated in “an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond,” composed “without reference to collective arrangement” (n. pag.). Nonetheless, scholars have scrutinized the complicated arrangement of Melville’s poems. For instance, Maki Sadahiro points out that Melville’s battle pieces seem to compose the events of the Civil War in a chronological order, but they actually exclude specific proper nouns. Sadahiro considers that such a strange composition indicates “interrupted history,” which would not narrativize the war, based on the relation of cause and effect (66). Peter J. Bellis also explores the schizophrenic composition of *Battle-Pieces*. Although Melville completes his war poetry with “America” in the first section, he continues in the second one, which widely describes the various locations and motifs of the war. Making comparisons with Walt Whitman’s war poetry collection, *Drum-Taps* (1865), Bellis argues that Melville’s poetry implicates his ambiguous attitude toward reconciliation between the North and South. The poems adopt “the imperfect, negotiated discourse of partisan politics” in order to find the middle ground between President Andrew Johnson’s “restoration” and Congressional “Reconstruction” (89).

Melville’s *Battle-Pieces*, I think, seems to turn the section of “life” into that of “death”: the former part narrates the various acts of the Civil War personalities; the latter is made up of voices of dead soldiers. Equating heroic war personalities with brave poets, Melville considers the Civil War an opportunity to get back lost humanity: “They said that Fame her clarion dropped / Because great deeds were done no more — / That even Duty knew no shining ends, / And Glory — ‘twas a fallen star! / But battle can heroes and bards restore” (131). Melville curiously counts as a poet the dead as well as the living. “At the Cannon’s Mouth (October, 1864)” sanctifies the brave attack of the Union officer, William Barker Cushing, as embodying the Christian virtue of self-sacrifice: “In Cushing’s eager deed was shown / A spirit which brave poets own — / That scorn of life which earns life’s crown; / Earns, but not always wins; but he — / The star ascended in his nativity” (93). For Melville, the dead soldiers as well as the war heroes are equally seen as hero-bards, who restore lost human passions “in a utilitarian time” (183). In fact, as “The Armies of the Wilderness” indicates, “[n]one can narrate that strife” in the battle-field (76). As if “[a] seal is on it,” “the entangled rhyme [of the living] / But hints at the maze of war” (76). Yet, “[a] riddle of death, of which the slain / Sole solvers are” (76). To describe the war as a whole, Melville not only narrates heroic deeds of the living but also makes a desperate attempt to listen to the dead soldiers’ voices.

Melville’s war poetry hazards criticism of the North to relativize its victory over the South. In the former section of “life,” Melville’s war poetry ambivalently demonstrates the light and dark sides of the Civil War heroes. “The March to the Sea (December, 1864)” indeed uncovers the two-facedness of the famous Union officer, William Tecumseh Sherman, whose military campaign determined the surrender of the South and the end of the war. Melville’s poem stresses the Northern cause to abandon slavery with reference to racial variety in Sherman’s forces: “[t]he slaves by thousands drew, And they marched beside the drumming, / And they joined the armies blue . . . For every man it was free” (95). Sherman’s march predicts the embodiment of freedom throughout the country.



Yet, Melville also deplors the cruelty of the “glorious glad marching” (95):

For behind they [Sherman’s forces] left a wailing,  
 A terror and a ban,  
 And blazing cinders sailing,  
 And houseless householding wan,  
 Wide zones of countries paling  
 And towns where maniacs ran.  
 Was the havoc, retribution?  
 But howsoe’er it be,  
 They will long remember Sherman  
 And his streaming columns free —  
 They will long remember Sherman  
 Marching to the sea. (96)

Melville’s speaker represents the destructive nature of Sherman’s military campaign from the perspective of the Southerners. Historically speaking, Sherman’s march, known as the Savannah Campaign, aimed to completely break the back and spirit of the Confederacy by adopting scorched-earth tactics through Georgia from November 15 to December 21, 1864. Melville’s poem brings a grotesque contrast of color, blazing red and pale blue, to illustrate the hellish scenery of the ruined South. There, people lose their homes, and some go mad and roam around. Wondering if Sherman’s scorched-earth campaign is “the havoc, [or] retribution,” they will remember his march, which is done for freedom, but “left a wailing, / A terror and a ban.”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, “The Fall of Richmond (April, 1865)” gives a critical look at the Union’s glorious victory: “God is in Heaven, and Grant in the Town, / And Right through might is Law — / God’s way adore” (99). As post-war reconstruction policies showed, the North’s triumph could enforce the “Right” laws to rebuild the South, which had perpetuated “the systematic degradation of man,” slavery (182). Yet, as Melville’s poem ironically implies, they are established only with “might,” the military power of the North. If recalling that the poem was first published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in February 1866, we can regard the poem as a caution to the Northern readers against the jingoistic mood in the North after ending the war.

In addition to his ambiguous perspective on the Union officers, the superimposition of the Revolutionary hero on the Confederate commander enables us to understand the reason Melville evaluates the Civil War as a “revolution” (182), not as a mere rebellion. Throughout *Battle-Pieces*, Melville sometimes refers to the Revolutionary sires. One example is seen in “The Armies of the Wilderness (1863–64),” which Melville wrote based on his experience of visiting the Union’s camp in the woods of Virginia. The poet laments the “strife of brothers,” comparing the national conflict to the wilderness of Virginia: “Through the pointed glass our soldiers saw / The base-ball bounding sent; / They could have joined them in their sport / But for the vale’s deep rent” (69). Thus, in the Civil War, the poet implies, the North and the South have forgotten their brotherhood and killed each other as in the story of Cain. The poet does not hope for the defeat of one party: “[i]n this strife of brothers / (God, hear their country call), / However it be, whatever betide, / Let not the just one fall” (69). In this poem, Melville’s text historicizes the Civil War with the view of the Revolutionary Fathers: “*Did the Fathers feel mistrust? / Can no final good be*

wrought? / Over and over, again and again / Must the fight for the Right be fought?" (70; italics original). Here, the remark in *Mardi* that "'Tis right to fight for freedom" (533) enables us to find the implication of the Revolutionary sires, who fought for independence and freedom from England. In the Civil War, the Fathers would see repetition of their fratricidal fight with England in their sons' fight and doubt the causes of the war. Although the right fight for freedom has been repeatedly fought, the "final good" will not be established if the war lets only "one side fall." In a sense, Melville's text, tracing the Revolutionary history of independence, laments the fraternal conflicts between England and the American colonies, and between the Union and the Confederacy

Such mistrust of the Union's cause of the Civil War is cleared in "Lee in the Capitol," which ventriloquizes Robert E. Lee to relativize and criticize the Union's causes of the war. While appearing before the Reconstruction Committee of Congress and seen with "curious eyes," Lee makes a testimony as the defeated Confederate commander (164). Melville places the poem of Lee's testimony in "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial," or the section of "death." Yet, Lee was still alive and supported Johnson's Reconstruction policies at the time when Melville published his war poetry in 1866. In Melville's poem, Lee as the defeated commander recalls his dead soldiers and burned homeland, ambiguously behaving as if he is "the victor and the vanquished" (164). At the end of his testimony, the senators urge him to "speak out" if "[a]ught else remain" (165). Lee's testimony gives a warning against the North as victor through a parable of a Moorish maid:

A story here may be applied:  
 "In Moorish lands there lived a maid  
 Brought to confess by vow the creed  
 Of Christians. Fain would priests persuade  
 That now she must approve by deed  
 The faith she kept. 'What deed?' she asked.  
 'Your old sire leave, nor deem it sin,  
 And come with us.' Still more they tasked  
 The sad one: 'If heaven you'd win —  
 Far from the burning pit withdraw,  
 Then must you learn to hate your kin,  
 Yea, side against them — such the law,  
 For Moor and Christian are at war.'  
 '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!'" (167–68)

Lee compares the North to Christian priests and the South to a Moorish maid. During the war between "Moor and Christian," Christian priests require her to convert to Christianity and to prove her "faith" with deed. In other words, she must "learn to hate [her] kin" and leave them behind. But, she refuses to do it and decides to remain with her sire. Lee's parable reminds the readers that the North's postwar policies revolve around hostility toward the South, which implants hatred for sires and kin in the Southerners.

In Melville's poetry, Lee speaks for the Southern people, who just seek to restore their pastoral life: "The South would fain / Feel peace, have quiet low again — / Replant the trees for homestead-shade" (166). As seen in Davis's inaugural address, Melville's Southern masquerade implicates the Jeffersonian worship for the yeoman. Furthermore, Melville's poem makes an allusion to another Revolutionary sire through Lee. He superimposes the defeated Southern commander over the most representative Revolutionary hero, George Washington. Those "who look at Lee must think of Washington," and they "in pain must think, and hid the thought, / So deep with grievous meaning it is fraught" (165). According to biographical facts, Lee and Washington did have something in common. Both were born in Virginia: Washington was born in Popes Creek, the Colony of Virginia in 1732; Lee was born in Stratford Hall, Virginia in 1807. Lee married with Mary Anna Randolph Custis, who was a step-great-granddaughter of George Washington. The allusion of Lee to Washington connotes an ironical thought that, if the representative Revolutionary sire had been in the same position as Lee, Washington would also have rebelled against the Federal Government, as he did in the American Revolution. Also, Lee fears that the North would "press" the "partial thoughts" on the South:

I know your partial thoughts do press  
Solely on us for war's unhappy stress;  
But weigh — consider — look at all,  
And broad anathema you'll recall.  
The censor's charge I'll not repeat,  
The meddlers kindled the war's white heat —  
Vain intermeddlers and malign,  
Both of the palm and of the pine; . . . (167)

The conflation of Lee-Washington historicizes the Civil War. Melville's poem warns that the North-centered hierarchy would be created through the "partial" laws after the war and that the North would become as oppressive and destructive for the South as England for the American colonies. As "Supplement" shows, Melville somehow admits political intervention of the North into the South to liberate black slaves. Yet, Lee's eloquent speech admonishes the North against pushing its triumph too much and urging "[s]ubmissiveness [to the South] beyond the verge" (167).

This paper reads *Battle-Pieces* in the trans-bellum context of the war on the Revolutionary ideals. Around the Civil War period, both of the Union and the Confederacy deliberately articulated the Revolutionary documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to justify their policies. Melville's war poetry, as I have seen, can be interpreted as a response to such an argument. Through the ingenious re-figuration of the Founding Fathers, *Battle-Pieces* ambiguously reveals the potential danger of the North's victory, not only the hypocrisy of the cause of the Southern states. Melville's Southern masquerade, reflecting his desire to abandon his identity as a jingoistic Northerner, reminds the Northern readers of the American history of "revolution" and encourages them to relativize their victory and avoid inheriting the partisan hatred in the future.

**[Notes]**

- 1 My study is inspired by Elizabeth Renker's argument of *Battle-Pieces*. Renker criticizes the conventional "source studies," in which scholars have considered "the sources are inferior" to the literary works. They regard Melville as "the great author," who "pulls 'sources' into his rarefied field of artistic production" (137). But, in his war poetry, as Renker shows, Melville performs "active dialogue[s] with his contemporary world" through "his differences, his objections, his talking back" (140).
- 2 In *War on Words* (2010), Michael Gilmore points out that "[t]he Empire State [New York], Melville's birthplace and current residence, enjoyed a remarkably close relationship with the former Confederacy" (175).
- 3 In *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Long Civil War* (2015), Cody Marris examines the historical analogy to "the Roman Civil War" in "The Frenzy in the Wake." There, Sherman's scorched earth campaign becomes "a more brutal repetition of Julius Caesar's subjugation of Pompey" (98). Carrs argues that Melville's war poetry shows "history is tilted toward regress rather than progress" (97).

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