HERMAN MELVILLE'S BATTLE-PIECES AND ASPECTS OF THE WAR: BACKGROUND, STRUCTURE, AND MEANING

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by

© Judy A. Simpson, B.S., M.A.T.

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Language and Literature
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September 1977

St. John's Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

HERMAN MELVILLE'S BATTLE-PIECES AND ASPECTS OF THE WAR: BACKGROUND, STRUCTURE, AND MEANING

by Judy A. Simpson, B.S., M.A.T.

Herman Melville published his first book of poetry, a small volume of seventy-two poems about the American Civil War, in August, 1866. Although Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War has stimulated little interest, the volume is a well-conceived, unified, meaningful work of art. A study of Battle-Pieces reveals that Melville wrote in poetic form because he had well-defined theories about the nature of poetry, because he considered himself a poet, and because he believed that the poet had important functions to perform for society. An examination of Battle-Pieces not only manifests why Melville turned to poetry in verse, but it also discloses his process of composition. Melville did not write the war poems haphazardly. His theories about composition determined when as well as how he wrote them. In addition, an investigation into the sources which Melville

used gives insight into how he converted personal experiences and borrowed materials into original poems.

Until one is aware of and applies Melville's concept of architectonics to the study of the entire volume and until one is knowledgeable about Melville's philosophy of the organic theory of art and utilizes it in a study of the individual poems in Battle-Pieces, the volume appears to be a disjointed collection of shards and patches. Only as one studies the structure of the whole and the parts is the organic unity of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War revealed. Not only is a study of Battle-Pieces significant for what it reveals about the background and structure of the volume, but it is also important for what it discloses about Melville's response to the Civil War. That Melville views the war from the perspectives of patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet contributes to the complexities and ambiguities of the volume. These three cycles do, however, fit together to support the main concern of the volume--reconciliation.

A careful investigation of the background, structure, and meaning of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War can only lead to the conclusion that the volume is a fine work of art in its own right. Its style is more often than not suited to content. Its structure fully supports meaning, and its

content reveals an objectivity, realism, and universality nowhere else seen in American Civil War poetry. A study of Battle-Pieces also leads to the conclusion that it is significant for its revelation of Melville. Melville was a conscientious artist who sought to put his poetic principles to work in Battle-Pieces. He was also a devoted American who did not let his patriotism for the North override his concern for the unity of his nation. Finally, Battle-Pieces reveals that Melville wished to help insure the progress of all mankind with his war poetry. He believed that if man could recognize the duality of existence, manifested in America by the Civil War, he would be more tolerant of his fellow men, and the world, therefore, would be a better place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dean F. A. Aldrich and to Dr. D. G. Pitt who offered encouragement through my entire doctoral program, to the staff of the interlibrary loan division of the Henrietta E. Harvey Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland, who cheerfully located and secured many needed materials, to Dr. Gordon Jones who painstakingly scrutinized my work, to Dr. Bernice Schrank who provided invaluable guidance and direction, and to Dr. W. J. Kirwin who kindly supervised the writing of this dissertation, I give thanks.

To Dr. William Beasley of Middle Tennessee State University under whose influence I developed an interest in Battle-Pieces and who has continued to support my work with the volume and to my husband who has not only been patient, understanding, comforting, supportive and loving through these long years but who has also been very insistent that I complete this study, I give my special thanks.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In August of 1866, Herman Melville published his first collection of poetry, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War.[1] Melville's purpose in this small, blue cloth-bound volume of seventy-two poems was threefold. First of all, he sought to become the unofficial poet laureate of the war.[2] In order to do so, he presented dramatically and by way of poetic record "the passions and epithets"[3] of the American Civil War in all its significant aspects, from the hanging of John Brown in 1859 to the appearance of Robert E. Lee before the Senate in 1866. Second, Melville attempted in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War to be the "bard of Progress and Humanity" (p. 467).[4] He feared that the nation had not

[1] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), II, 681-682. All future references to this source will use Leyda, the volume, and the page.

[2] Richard Harter Fogle, "Melville and the Civil War," Tulane Studies in English, 9 (1959), 63.

[3] Herman Melville, "Supplement," Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 463. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[4] Future references to Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War may be shortened to Battle-Pieces.

learned her lesson though nearly one million of her thirty-two million people had died in the war. Melville, therefore, sought to persuade his people that continued hatred between North and South would lead to even greater disaster than had the war itself. Finally, in this small volume of poems commemorating the Civil War, Melville hoped to show the American nation, as well as the North, that the war had more obscure meanings than appeared on the surface.[5] The war, Melville believed, was a manifestation of the universal conflict between good and evil that is present in all of life and nature.

Although Melville's reading public was no doubt surprised that he had published a book of poetry, that he had published another book was no surprise. From 1846 to 1856 he had published ten volumes of prose fiction. The first two of these volumes, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life, published in 1846, and Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, published in 1847, were high-spirited South Sea adventure novels, born out of Melville's experiences as a sailor. Both volumes were very well received by the public. His next novel, Mardi (1849), Melville began as another adventurous South Sea romance; but it soon evolved into a complicated, metaphysical, philosophical and

[5] Robert Penn Warren, Democracy and Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 8.

allegorical treatise. Neither Melville's readers nor his critics were very favorably impressed with this work. Melville, therefore, next published Redburn: His First Voyage (1849) and White-Jacket: or the World in a Man of War (1850) to regain his popularity as a writer of adventure novels. These two books were not so facile as Typee and Omoo nor so metaphysical as Mardi. In them, however, are definite foreshadowings of Melville's ability to combine adventure and symbolism as he did so successfully in Moby Dick in 1851.

Although today Moby Dick is considered Melville's masterpiece, it was not considered so in his own time. In fact, it sold so poorly that Melville was left in debt to his publishers. His readers were not at all impressed by his attempts to incorporate symbolism into an adventure novel. They were no more, or not as much, impressed by his next novel, Pierre or, The Ambiguities, which appeared in 1852. There were complaints, even from Melville's close friends, that the book lacked successful organization, definitive characterization, and good sense.

In short, both Moby Dick and Pierre were complete financial failures; and Melville, ever eager to make a living by his writing, was forced again to regain his audience. This time he did so by writing a biography entitled Israel Potter: His Fifty Years in Exile,

published in book form in 1855 after serialization in Putnam's. This book sold fairly well as did The Piazza Tales, a book of stories and sketches published in 1856. As these two books, as well as Redburn and White-Jacket, indicate, Melville, though he tried, could not believe that writing literature that merely entertained was his goal as a writer. Therefore, in 1857, he made one last attempt to gain a prose reading audience who "dived." Like Mardi, Pierre, and Moby Dick, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, while well received in England, was only halfheartedly accepted in America.[6]

With the rejection of The Confidence-Man, Melville accepted what he had realized long before. He knew that he could not continue to write simple but popular adventure novels; and he also realized that, as much as he wished to, he could not maintain his family of five financially by continuing to write as he felt he must. Melville, however, had something of a Taji, an Ahab, and a Pierre in him. By July 26, 1858, he was busy on a new book--a book of poetry.[7] Melville realized as he wrote on May 22, 1860, while seeking a publisher for this volume, that "of all human events, perhaps, the publication of a first volume of verses is the

[6] Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers: British and American 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 263.

[7] Leyda, II, 594.

most insignificant; but though a matter of no moment to the world, is still of some concern to the author. . . ."[8] At the same time, Melville appears to have believed that "probing the axis of reality" was more appropriate to what he considered poetry than it was to factual narration. Nevertheless, he could not even find a publisher for this collection of poetry.

Just when Melville began to work on Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is not certain; but after its publication by Harper and Brothers in mid-August of 1866, he wrote little prose for thirty years, except Billy Budd, Sailor, which he probably wrote first as a poem, and a few other brief prose pieces. In 1876, he published privately the long, philosophical poem Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage. This work was followed by the publication of John Marr and Other Sailors in 1888 and by Timoleon in 1891. Both of these collections appeared in limited editions of twenty-five copies each. In addition to the four volumes of poetry published during his lifetime, Melville left, at his death in September of 1891, Weeds and Wildings with A Rose or Two and Marquis De Grandvin. These two collections, along with many other miscellaneous verses, were first published in 1924 in The Standard Edition of the Works of Herman Melville.

[8] Leyda, II, 616.

For many reasons, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War deserves a thorough study. Along with Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps, it is the only lasting volume of poetry about the American Civil War, a war that had far-reaching social, political, economic, and literary effects on the nation. The war helped to bring to an end the era of idealistic optimism and enthusiasm as embodied in the works of Emerson, and it brought to the foreground the realism and naturalism of Twain and Crane.[9] The shift toward realism and naturalism can be clearly seen in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, not only in content, but in technique as well. This aspect of the volume perhaps accounts for the fact that Battle-Pieces stands to commemorate the war while the war poetry of authors such as Henry Timrod, Francis Orray Ticknor, Ethel Lynn Beers, James Ryder Randall, Paul Hamilton Hayne,[10] G. H. Baker, George F. Root, James S. Gibbons, Henry Howard Brownell, and Julia Ward Howe,[11] as well as that of Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, and Whittier, has failed to do so. It is not farfetched, therefore, to consider Battle-Pieces as one of the first modern collections of American poetry.

[9] David Hibler, "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: Melville and Whitman on the Civil War," The Personalist, 50 (1969), 130.

[10] Martin S. Day, History of American Literature: From the Beginning to 1910 (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), I, 164.

[11] Day, I, 190.

Another compelling reason Battle-Pieces should be studied carefully is that its author is one of the foremost literary artists of the nineteenth century. Melville was an author who wrote with great care and patience. As even a cursory examination of his manuscripts indicates, he painstakingly revised his poetry, being extremely fastidious in his choice of words and in his prosody.[12] Melville was also an artist who had important things to say in everything he wrote, a man who devoted nearly thirty years to writing poetry. Battle-Pieces, for all practical purposes, begins that thirty-year period and contains, as this study will reveal later, more about poetic form than any of his subsequent poetry. This collection was not only the best received of Melville's poetry during his day--no doubt largely the result of its topical, current nature--but in modern times it has also been anthologized more than any of his other poetry.

Finally, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War deserves an extensive investigation because there has never been a study devoted to it that has attempted to present the volume as an integrated whole which reveals important concepts and techniques of Melville, both man and artist. Of course various periodical articles have treated it singly; but even

[12] William Bysshe Stein, The Poetry of Melville's Late Years: Time, History, Myth, and Religion (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), p. 4.

then, since its publication in 1866, only twelve have dealt specifically with it, and these articles, because of the nature of the periodical, have been general overviews or have considered very specific aspects of the volume. The first modern-day periodical study of Battle-Pieces appeared in 1956 when Gene B. Montague wrote "Melville's Battle-Pieces," an article which contained a brief study of the prosody of the collection and an extensive treatment of the themes in the collection as they related to earlier of Melville's works.[13] This treatment of Battle-Pieces was followed in 1959 by Richard Harter Fogle's "Melville and the Civil War," another general survey of the volume.[14] No other articles appeared on Battle-Pieces until 1962 when "'And War Be Done': Battle-Pieces and Other Civil War Poetry of Herman Melville" was published.[15] Like those preceding it, it was designed to give the reader a general introduction to the volume. In 1964 Frank L. Day published the results of his findings about the source of one of the Battle-Pieces, "The

[13] "Melville's Battle-Pieces," University of Texas Studies in English, 35 (1956), 106-115. All references to the reviews will contain inclusive pages.

[14] Fogle, pp. 61-89.

[15] Harry E. Hand, "'And War Be Done': Battle-Pieces and Other Civil War Poetry of Herman Melville," Journal of Human Relations, 11 (1962), 326-340.

March to the Sea."[16] A year later Leo B. Levy wrote an article entitled "Hawthorne, Melville, and the Monitor" in which he postulates the view that an essay of Hawthorne's, "Chiefly About War Matters," was the source of the following four battle pieces: "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," In the Turret," "The Cumberland," and "The Temeraire."[17] The next study of Battle Pieces discussed the poems as a chronological sequence depicting the occurrences of the war.[18] The author of this article, Jack Lindeman, followed it in 1965 with a discussion of Melville's ideas on Reconstruction, as presented in Battle-Pieces.[19] In 1969 two additional general treatments of Battle-Pieces were published: "Melville's Poems of Civil War Controversy"[20] and "The Melville of Battle-Pieces: A Kindred Spirit."[21] Not until the winter of 1973 did another study of Melville's

[16] "Melville and Sherman March to the Sea," American Notes and Queries, 2 (1964), 134-136.

[17] "Hawthorne, Melville and the Monitor," American Literature, 37 (1965), 33-40.

[18] "Herman Melville's Civil War," Modern Age, 9 (1965), 387-398.

[19] "Herman Melville's Reconstruction," Modern Age, 10 (1966), 168-172.

[20] Ralph E. Hitt, "Melville's Poems of Civil War Controversy," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 2 (1969), 57-68.

[21] William J. Kimball, "The Melville of Battle-Pieces: A Kindred Spirit," Midwest Quarterly, 10 (1969), 307-316.

first volume of poetry appear. This article by Joyce Sparer Adler is the first periodical article on Battle-Pieces which attempts to explain the structure of the volume. Adler believes that the volume is "in effect a tragic drama in three acts."[22] The study is also provocative because Adler sees a contradiction between the poetry and the "Supplement." She believes that Melville fails to see blacks as first-class citizens and that he fails to call for justice for blacks because of his great fear of renewal of the war.[23] Finally, the most recent article on Battle-Pieces is a note in the Explicator in which George Monteiro comments on Melville's use of "Brazilian" in "America." Melville, like others of his day, such as Emily Dickinson, used the word to convey the image of red. The 1847 edition of Webster's Dictionary of the English Language defines "Brazilian" as a heavy wood used for dyeing red. Melville uses it in "America" to describe the red stripes of the American flag.[24]

Three periodical studies have been written which compare Battle-Pieces to Whitman's Drum-Taps. The first, by

[22] "Melville and the Civil War," New Letters, 15 (1973), 99.

[23] Adler, pp. 112-113.

[24] "Melville's 'America,'" Explicator, 32: Item 72.

David Hibler, appeared in 1969;[25] the second, by John P. McWilliams, Jr., in 1971;[26] and the third, by Vaughan Hudson, in 1973.[27] No doubt the paucity of studies comparing these two volumes results from the presupposition that "the limping lines" of the Battle-Pieces can in no way be compared to the masterful free verse of Whitman. While this is true, each of the three authors who have attempted a comparison of the volumes concludes that Melville's volume, while not the greater poetry for a variety of reasons, is the more complex; for it not only portrays the war as a great historical tragedy, but it also projects metaphysical perspicacity into the war.

Several periodical articles have treated Battle-Pieces with other poetry of Melville. In 1946 Robert Penn Warren published what is considered the definitive statement on Melville's poetry. In the article Warren comments on the style of Battle-Pieces and on its treatment of the ironical dualities of existence.[28] Again in 1967 in "Melville's Poems," Warren studied the Battle-Pieces for their technical interest, their anticipation of later trends, and their

[25] Hibler, pp. 130-147.

[26] "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: The Blossom of War," American Quarterly, 23 (1971), 130-147.

[27] "Melville's Battle-Pieces and Whitman's Drum-Taps: A Comparison," Walt Whitman Review, 19 (1973), 81-92.

[28] "Melville the Poet," The Kenyon Review, 3 (1946), 208-223.

metaphysical, yet realistic approach to the war.[29] Another excellent study of Melville's poetry is Laurence Barrett's "The Differences in Melville's Poetry." Barrett's analyses of some of the Battle-Pieces prove his belief that when one defines the distinctive differences in Melville's poetry, the poems "which at first distress us outgrow being distressing, and poems which at first seem failures become successful ones."[30] Newton Arvin in "Melville's Shorter Poems" also uses Battle-Pieces to give detailed attention to Melville's imagery and word choice.[31] While these articles are excellent, they do not provide a detailed study of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War.

There have, of course, been many excellent books on Melville and his works. Many of them, such as those by John Freeman, Lewis Mumford, F. O. Matthiessen, Richard Chase, Geoffrey Stone, Ronald Mason, Sidney Kaplan, Hennig Cohen, Tyrus Hillway, William Ellery Sedgwick, John Bernstein, and Newton Arvin, have devoted parts of their studies to Battle-Pieces.

[29] "Melville's Poems," The Southern Review, 3 (1967), 799-855.

[30] "The Differences in Melville's Poetry," PMLA, 70 (1955), 606-623.

[31] "Melville's Shorter Poems," Partisan Review, 16 (1949), 1034-1046.

In 1970 two other fine studies of Melville's works appeared. Martin Leonard Pops, the author of The Melville Archetype, believes that Battle-Pieces exemplifies the "rage for order that characterized all the work of Melville from the fifties to the nineties."[32] He develops this idea by giving an excellent analysis of the form of "Shiloh." Pops also believes that Battle-Pieces is a new beginning for Melville as well as an extension of the old because "there is neither the quest for sex nor the sacramentalism of the Center and there is little symbolism and little that is even faintly quasi-autobiographical" in the volume.[33] The second study, by John Seelye, projects the idea that Battle-Pieces "shares with his [Melville's] prose a common basis of form."[34] Seelye believes that Battle-Pieces is, like "The Encantadas," a static round, while "A Scout toward Aldie" is like "Benito Cereno" in that it is dominated by a linear element, the futile quest.[35]

Other studies very important to Melville criticism have rarely treated the poetry; and when they have, they have not

[32] The Melville Archetype (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1970), p. 195.

[33] Pops, p. 194.

[34] Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 131.

[35] Seeyle, p. 136.

discussed Battle-Pieces. While the concepts of Thompson, Finkelstein, Brodtkorb, Browne, Percival, Stanonik, Guetti, Lebowitz, James, Stern, Olson and Bowen, as well as others, were not applied to the poetry, they cannot be ignored when one studies Melville's poetry. For example, Milton R. Stern's The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville supports the view that Melville did not want to belong to the optimistic romanticism of his time.[36] On the other hand, even a cursory examination of Battle-Pieces reveals that he was often optimistic about the war and its results. Also, in Battle-Pieces, as in all his works, Melville is ever the romanticist in his use of symbols, but ever the realist in his treatment of themes.[37] While the authors listed above are often controversial and nearly always at variance with each other, their ideas must be considered in any study of Battle-Pieces.

In recent years only two complete studies of Melville's poetry have been published. In 1970 William Bysshe Stein published The Poetry of Melville's Late Years: Time, History, Myth, and Religion. Battle-Pieces is treated only briefly in the introduction to the volume, for Stein believes that, like Clarel, Battle-Pieces is a constricted

[36] The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, Illinois: Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 12.

[37] Stern, p. 4.

expression of poetic talent. The attention which he gives to Battle-Pieces is excellent, however. He shows how Melville's technique often undermines his more conventional poems in the volume. He also presents a superb technical analysis of "The Portent," which he says foreshadows the subtle techniques of Melville's later poetry. Although he thinks Melville succeeds only rarely in Battle-Pieces, he concludes that Melville's performance is quite extraordinary, "providing a glimpse of war that can be compared only to Goya's paintings of military carnage. No such candor nor integrity about war had ever before governed the composition of poetry--not excluding Walt Whitman's."[38]

William H. Shurr's The Mystery of Iniquity (1972) is a thorough study of much of Melville's poetry. His chapter on Battle-Pieces approaches the volume from the concept of unity. He sees Battle-Pieces unified by two cycles of thought: the Cycle of Law and the Cycle of Evil. Shurr believes, furthermore, that the Cycle of Evil is the dominant cycle.[39] Shurr also thinks that he has, by viewing the individual parts of the volume in relationship to each other and to the whole, found the unity that Melville assumed he had achieved when he wrote in the prefatory

[38] Stein, p. 12.

[39] The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), p. 14.

remarks to the volume that the poems "naturally fall into the order assumed" (p. 446). Shurr's study is not intended as an extensive general study of Battle-Pieces. It is, however, the best treatment of the volume to date.

Aaron Kramer included one of the battle-pieces, "Scout toward Aldie," in his study of Melville's Poetry: Toward the Enlarged Heart: A Thematic Study of Three Ignored Poems. Kramer attempts to show that a number of Melville's major themes emerge in these poems and that they also indicate that Melville's "great shift from despair to affirmation" is prepared for.[40] The "Scout toward Aldie" shows, Kramer argues, how man experiences the "moment of truth" about reality at the time of death.[41]

Three unpublished dissertations which contain sections on Battle-Pieces deserve mention. Chapter six of Agnes Cannon's study of "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry" discusses the form of several of the poems in Battle-Pieces to show how these poems exemplify Melville's theories about poetic form.[42] David Goforth's dissertation

[40] Melville's Poetry: Toward the Enlarged Heart: A Thematic Study of Three Ignored Poems (Canbury, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), p. 10.

[41] Kramer, p. 21.

[42] "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1968, pp. 205-207.

contains a study of Battle-Pieces, along with all the shorter poems, to illustrate that the themes of all the poems are representative of Melville's profound melancholy. He studies the verbal devices and stylistic qualities of Battle-Pieces, as well as the other poetry, in order to open the door to further literary acceptance of the poetry.[43] "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon" by Dan Vogel presents a general study of Battle-Pieces. He treats such topics as the circumstances of composition, the source of inspiration, the techniques of composition, and the themes, forms, and symbols of the volume. He concludes his section on Battle-Pieces by making the evaluation that in those poems in which Melville unites thought, technique and symbol, he approaches great poetry.[44]

Unlike the preceding studies, this investigation is a comprehensive treatment of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War and, by extension, of Herman Melville, artist, American, and philosopher-poet. Ultimately the purpose of the study is to show that Battle-Pieces is a well-conceived, unified volume of poetry that exemplifies important theories and

[43] "Melville's Shorter Poems: The Substance and the Significance," Diss. Indiana University 1968.

[44] "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon," Diss. New York University 1969, p. 155.

techniques of Melville the artist as well as revealing important insights into Melville the American and Melville the philosopher-poet during the Civil War. In order to arrive at this conclusion, just why Melville chose to write Battle-Pieces and his subsequent works in poetic form is investigated. To be considered in this regard are three interrelated reasons. First of all, Melville wanted to write with what he called "metaphysical ingredients," and he felt that poetry was a more appropriate medium for this than were certain types of prose. Second, there is evidence that Melville always considered himself a poet and hated being known as a writer of factual narration. This supposition is supported by the fact that his earliest writings were probably poetry. Finally, Melville felt that the poet had certain functions to perform for society, and he wanted to fulfill these in the American society. Battle-Pieces exemplifies these functions.

Next, Melville's method of composing and his use of sources in Battle-Pieces are studied to determine what they reveal about the composition process of the volume. Though Melville would have us believe that he haphazardly began writing Battle-Pieces after the fall of Richmond, this is probably not true. His theory as to when an author should write about an event accounts not only for when he wrote the volume but also for the fact that the volume seems to have

grown in complexity with time. Finally, Melville's use of sources does not make him a derivative author, nor does it violate the originality of the battle-pieces. Further, when Melville's theories of architectonics and the organic theory of art are scrutinized and related to Battle-Pieces, the volume reveals great unity, beauty, and meaning. Until one applies the concepts of architectonics to the whole volume and the concept of the organic theory of art to the parts, Melville appears to be right when he says he seemed to have placed a harp in the window and let the wind play the tunes when he was writing the volume. Once one studies Battle-Pieces in the light of Melville's views of architectonics and the organic theory of art, however, he knows that it is only to the unsuspecting that the volume seems disjointed.

Finally, Battle-Pieces is studied to determine how it reveals the views of Herman Melville, patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet, about the American Civil War. The fact that Melville writes about the war from three perspectives contributes to the complexities and ambiguities of the volume. That he could not, in the final analysis, be content to present the war merely from the historical perspective as patriot and citizen makes the volume achieve its universal significance. Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is for all the forementioned reasons an important volume,

and the student of Melville who has not made a thorough study of it has not given Melville justice.

This study is based on the text of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War in Howard P. Vincent's Collected Poems of Herman Melville. There is, unfortunately, only one of Melville's war poems available in manuscript form,[45] and it is not actually a part of the published Battle-Pieces. For some reason, Melville did not include this poem, "Inscription for the Dead at Fredericksburgh," in the first edition of Battle-Pieces. He had sent this poem to Alexander Bliss to use in a collection of poetry called Autograph Leaves of Our Country's Authors. When Melville sent a revised copy of the poem to Bliss, Bliss had already sent the first copy to the publisher. Bliss, therefore, kept the revised version and Melville's accompanying letter.[46] They are both in the Bancroft-Bliss collection of papers.[47] Neither the Melville letters nor the Leyda Logs give any insight into what might have happened to the manuscripts of Battle-Pieces.

[45] Sidney Kaplan, ed., "Introduction," Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War by Herman Melville (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), p. xxi.

[46] Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman, ed., "Note," The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 223-224. All future references to this source will use the shortened title Letters.

[47] Letters, p. 364.

The annotated proofsheets of the first edition of Battle-Pieces are available in the Houghton Library of Harvard University, as are Melville's and his wife's copies of the edition. These editions are important, for Melville's copy contains his penciled emendations on forty pages and a statement by Mrs. Melville which attests to their authenticity. Mrs. Melville's copy also has three pages containing corrections, and since these agree with Melville's they are considered valid.[48]

To date there have been only four complete printings of Battle-Pieces other than the 1866 edition. The first of these, published in 1924 as volume sixteen of the Standard Edition of The Works of Herman Melville, is the most accurate reprint of the first edition[49] though it does not include the emendations found in Melville's and Mrs. Melville's copies. Next, Battle-Pieces was published in 1947 as a trade edition and as volume fourteen of the Hendricks House Complete Works of Herman Melville. This collection, The Collected Poems of Herman Melville, edited by Howard P. Vincent, incorporates Melville's corrections in the text and cites them in the notes. At the same time, however, this edition fails to make use of all the revisions which Melville had made in the first five poems which he wrote or to include the changes found in

[48]Vogel, p. 315.

[49]Kaplan, pp. xxii-xxiii.

Mrs. Melville's copy of the first edition. In the changes which were included, various typographical errors were made. In addition, only nine of the more than forty typographical errors that appear in the copy-text are corrected.[50]

A facsimile reproduction of Battle-Pieces was produced in 1960. Its editor, Sidney Kaplan, gives in the introduction "a complete and accurate list of Melville's revisions before and after the publication of Battle-Pieces."[51] Probably the most interesting edition of Battle-Pieces was edited by Hennig Cohen in 1963. This volume purports to follow a copy of the original edition and contains not only many pictures and various other items relating to the Civil War, but it also has extensive factual notes on each poem in addition to an informative and scholarly introduction.

At least two editions of Battle-Pieces are unavailable to the public. One is a 1960 unpublished dissertation by Norman Eugene Jarrard. This work, entitled "Poems by Herman Melville: A Critical Edition of the Published Verse," is believed by its author to encompass, for the first time, all of the corrections found in Melville's own copies of the published poems.[52] The poetry volume of the Northwestern-Newberry Edition of The Writings of Herman Melville is not

[50] Kaplan, pp. xxii-xxiii.

[51] Kaplan, pp. xxii-xxiii.

[52] "Poems by Herman Melville: A Critical Edition of the Published Verse," Diss. University of Texas, Austin, 1960, p. 1.

yet ready for publication. According to recent correspondence with the press, this volume will not be ready for several years. When it appears, it will be a critical version in that it will not correspond exactly to the authorized edition but will attempt to get closer to the author's intentions than does the authorized by emending that edition with later authorial substantive and accidental alterations.[53]

Of the four published editions of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, three are not in print: the Standard Edition volume, the trade edition of Vincent's The Collected Poems of Herman Melville, and Kaplan's facsimile reproduction. Kaplan's facsimile was reprinted by the University of Massachusetts Press in 1972 but was unavailable for this study. Instead of the Standard Edition, which is an excellent reprint of the first edition but which fails to consider Melville's revisions, Vincent's edition, which does incorporate most of the revisions but which fails to correct various errors, is used in this study. By collating this text with Kaplan's 1960 facsimile, one is able to obtain a very nearly accurate text. Hennig Cohen's notes on the text are also utilized.

Although any literary position is best argued intrinsically from the primary source with which one is working (and

[53] Harrison Hayford, Herschel Parker, G. Thomas Tanselle, eds., "Textual Record," Mardi and A Voyage Thither, by Herman Melville, III (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 683-684.

I have done that), a treatment of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War also necessitates arguing extrinsically from the prose that preceded it and the poetry that followed it. Although Melville makes several statements about poetry and poetic form in Battle-Pieces, the student of the volume must approach the poems with conceptions based on the reading of Melville's complete works, especially the novels; for Melville's thoughts on poetic form are expressed first and most completely in his prose. The same point can also be made for discussing almost any aspect of Battle-Pieces. This is not to say that Melville's thought did not mature or perhaps change; but once one has determined what Melville's position is in Battle-Pieces, the main sources of illuminating the hypotheses are his other works and his marginalia. If all evidence and illustrations were derived solely from the poetry itself, the position that the volume is a well-conceived, unified work that illustrated important theories, beliefs, and practices of Melville, man and artist, would not be as well validated as it is. The poetry cannot be divorced from the remainder of the Melville canon.

Finally, one must approach Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War realizing that the tone of this volume is significantly different from that of the prose that preceded it. This can be attributed in part to the fact that in Mardi and Pierre, for example, Melville was "wrestling with the angel, art." By the time he wrote Battle-Pieces, however,

he had determined the medium in which he felt he must write, regardless of its consequences, although he was still experimenting with technique. Another contributing factor to the change of tone in Battle-Pieces derives from Melville's having settled, to a great extent, his personal conflict regarding how he was to respond personally to his belief that evil is a cosmic reality. That is not to say that he was not extremely pained by that evil which he felt was represented in the 1860's by the American Civil War, but he had determined that neither unthinking nay-saying nor yea-saying was the correct response to the duality of existence. Although the tone in Battle-Pieces is sometimes ambivalent, in the final analysis, Melville's attitude toward the mystery of iniquity is a so-be-it attitude, a position tempered with both yea-saying and nay-saying.

I have not deliberately neglected to discuss any of the seventy-two poems in Battle-Pieces. In looking back over my examination of the volume, however, I realize that I refer most frequently, and in several different contexts, to those that are most significant poetically or thematically, such as "The Portent," "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions," "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," "Shiloh," "Malvern Hill," "Battle of Stone River," "The House-Top," "'The Coming Storm,'" "America, "Commemorative of a Naval Victory," "The Scout toward Aldie," "Lee in the Capitol," and "A Meditation." With the exception of two or three

pieces, I discussed "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial" generally and as a group. Most of the others, however, have been treated.

CHAPTER II

THE RELEASE OF THE POETIC SPIRIT

That Melville wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War and the majority of his subsequent works in poetic form is not surprising. Of course, the reasons for Melville's turn to poetry, as it is popularly called, are multi-faceted. One cannot simply say that Melville's beginning to compose in poetic form resulted from the fact that the "full years of his creative life were past"[1] or that his "storehouse had been emptied,"[2] for Melville produced a prodigious amount of writing after The Confidence-Man. The length and structure of Clarel alone should be enough to convince the skeptic that Melville could have produced an equally long prose work had he wished to do so. Also, Melville could have continued, with relatively good success, to write short works of fiction if he had not felt able to continue to write long prose works.

That Melville's rejection as a writer of fiction so depleted him physically and emotionally that he turned to

[1] Willard Thorp, ed., "Introduction," Herman Melville: Representative Selections (New York: American Book Company, 1938), p. lxxiv.

[2] Tyrus Hillway, "Melville's Art: One Aspect," Modern Language Notes, 62 (1947), 479.

poetry and wrote only to please himself is not completely valid either. The supposition that Melville was completely defeated by the rejection of his prose is not supported by his actions nor by family statements. Although he was engaged in public lecturing from 1857 through 1869, Melville's affirmative reply to Francis Underwood's invitation of August 19, 1857, to contribute to the projected Atlantic Monthly seems to indicate that he had no intention of giving up writing.[3] Furthermore, Lemuel Shaw's correspondence of June 2, 1857, merely says that "Herman is not going to write any more at present."[4] More conclusive proof that Melville was not contemplating giving up writing is George Duyckinck's letter of July 1, 1858, in which he writes that Melville is busy on a new book.[5] Family correspondence of February 20, 1858, indicates that Melville is "stalworth, in excellent health and very fine spirits."[6] September of 1858 finds him, according to George Duyckinck, in good spirits, robust, and fine looking;[7] and later in this same month, Lemuel Shaw

[3] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), II, 581-582. All future references to this source will use Leyda, the volume, and the page.

[4] Leyda, II, 580.

[5] Leyda, II, 594.

[6] Leyda, II, 593.

[7] Leyda, II, 595.

writes that "Herman is as well as I have seen him for years."[8] Minnigerode also points out that during this period of supposed dejection Melville was cheerful, convivial, gay, ironical, sensitive, vivid, warm-hearted, gentle, and friendly.[9]

Admittedly, Melville was not in the best physical health between 1857 and 1866. In February of 1855 he had his first severe attack of rheumatism in his back,[10] and the following June he was confined to bed with sciatica.[11] Hawthorne's famous observation when Melville visited him in Liverpool in 1856 was that "Melville has not been well, of late; he has been affected with neuralgic complaints from too constant literary occupations, pursued without much success; and his writings for a long while past have indicated a morbid state of mind."[12] This statement indicates that Melville's physical and mental states were as bad while he was writing prose as they were between 1857 and 1866. Of course, Melville was not well during this time either, but his attacks were

[8] Leyda, II, 595.

[9] Meade Minnigerode, ed., Some Personal Letters of Herman Melville and a Bibliography (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1952), p. 4.

[10] Leyda, II, 498.

[11] Leyda, II, 502.

[12] Leyda, II, 528.

sporadic. He was ill with sciatica in November of 1859,[13] and in March, 1862, he was not well enough to attend Herman Gansevoort's funeral.[14] The following November he was sick for weeks,[15] after falling from a wagon. By February 7, 1862, however, he seemed to be quite well.[16]

Melville did suffer from attacks of rheumatism for the remainder of his life, but he was never completely incapacitated by them. On the basis of the Melville correspondence, one can conclude that the stories of Melville's poor mental and physical condition were circulated by the Melville family because they believed that an overworked author had a better chance of obtaining a political position than an unsuccessful one, that it was more respectable for Melville to suffer from mental strain than to admit that he had misjudged his talents or the public,[17] and that he could be sent abroad in times of financial crisis without losing respectability.[18] Howard holds that Judge Shaw, Melville's father-in-law, realized that Melville's mental and physical well-being depended on

[13] Leyda, II, 609.

[14] Leyda, II, 648.

[15] Leyda, II, 655.

[16] Leyda, II, 685.

[17] Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 204.

[18] Howard, p. 235.

his financial status[19] and that Elizabeth Melville's concern and comments about Melville's state came when she was ill personally or when the family was facing a financial crisis.[20] On the other hand, one cannot discount the fact that Melville desperately wished to make a living by his pen. He realized as early as 1849 that "a hollow purse makes the poet sink. . . ."[21] He could not, however, continue to write books in the tradition of Omoo or Redburn, even to make money; for he said in a letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, ". . . . and for me, I shall write such things as the Great Publisher of Mankind ordained ages before he published . . . this planet. . . ."[22] He also wrote Richard Bentley in 1849 that

> You may think, in your own mind that a man is unwise, indiscreet, to write a work of that kind, when he might have written one perhaps, calculated merely to please the general reader, & not provoke attack, however masqued in an affectation of indifference or contempt. But some of us scribblers, My Dear Sir, always have a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must--hit or miss.[23]

19 Howard, p. 266.

20 Howard, p. 312.

21 Herman Melville, The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 96. All future references to this book will use the shortened title Letters.

22 Letters, p. 96.

23 Letters, p. 86.

In other words, while Melville's beginning to write in verse form coincides with the rejection of his prose in which he attempts to probe the "axis of reality" and while his continued ill health were contributing factors to his seeking a government job and abandoning writing as a vocation, Melville's turn to poetry was, in the final analysis, the result of his desire to write ". . . rich poetical material . . . which to bring out suitably, required . . . that play of freedom & invention accorded only to the Romancer & poet."[24]

Closely related to Melville's desire to write rich poetical material or, as he later said, to write with "metaphysical ingredients"[25] are two other reasons that the poetic form of Battle-Pieces is not astounding. First of all, Melville considered himself a poet and hated being known as a writer of factual narration. In fact, his earliest attempts at writing were probably in poetic form. Second, Melville's prose writings prior to 1866 indicate that he had carefully considered the characteristics of the poet and the poet's functions in society. Moreover, Melville wanted to perform these functions for the American public.

Melville long considered himself primarily a poet. Several times in his prose he refers to its poetry. On

[24] Letters, p. 70.

[25] Letters, p. 86.

March 25, 1848, he wrote John Murray that Mardi "opens like a true narrative--like Omoo for example, on shipboard--& the romance & poetry of the thing thence grow continually. . . ."[26] Also in a letter to Evert Duyckinck on December 14, 1849,[27] Melville calls himself a poet and in May, 1850, writes Richard Henry Dana, Jr., that the poetry in Moby Dick runs hard.[28] Melville also equates poetry and prose in "Hawthorne and His Mosses." He writes that "poets (whether in prose or verse) being painters of Nature, are like their brethren of the pencil, the true portrait painters. . . ."[29] For Melville, fiction, or romance as he called it, and verse were two forms of poetry, not separate genres. They were the opposite of factual narration,[30] which Melville considered Typee, Omoo, Redburn and White-Jacket to be and which he considered decidedly inferior to fiction and verse. Melville felt strongly that "metaphysical ingredients" should be written in fiction or in verse. He writes, as we have already seen in part, for example, that

[26] Letters, p. 71.

[27] Letters, pp. 95-96.

[28] Letters, p. 108.

[29] "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Herman Melville, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 50.

[30] Agnes Cannon, "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1968, p. 3.

Mardi is to be a romance, vastly different from Typee and Omoo. It contains, he said, romance and poetry which grow continually "til it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too."[31] Here we see the distinction that Melville makes between narration and fiction and verse. Melville saw fiction and verse as those genres best suited to "those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality,"[32] and in Mardi he wrote that "poetry is truth."[33]

Although he never gave up the hope that he could reach an audience with his serious writings, Melville ceased to attempt to support his family by writing and began to write in a form which he believed was more suitable for philosophical contemplation than was prose narrative. Melville did not want to be known as an entertainer, "the author of Typee and Piddledee."[34] He had become and he wished to be known as a serious pursuer of truth--that "scared white doe."[35] Like Lombardo in Mardi, "his thoughts were first callow; yet born

[31] Letters, p. 71.

[32] "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 43.

[33] Herman Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither, ed. Harrison Hayford, Herschel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, III (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 629. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[34] Leyda, II, 616.

[35] "Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 44.

plumeless, they came to soar" (p. 594). One can conclude that

> . . . it would not be too far amiss, to attribute to Melville a conviction that poetry was permanent . . something like the medieval writer's craving to write his high-reaching works in Latin, not in the vernacular. Poetic form rather than the novel was his interest in Mardi, in Battle-Pieces, and in Timoleon, when he chose to write critical judgments on form.[36]

Not only do Melville's concepts of poetry indicate that he had considered himself a poet long before he wrote Battle-Pieces, but there is also some evidence that Melville wrote poetry before he ever attempted prose. In 1947, Howard P. Vincent wrote:

> Poetry was a lifelong interest of Melville's. Although we possess no evidences of his earliest poetic writing, we may reasonably conjecture that he had written verses before the ones printed in Mardi. . . . Chance and good-fortune may some day uncover such juvenile verses, poems, possibly hidden in magazines under strange pseudonyms, or in long-locked attics under accumulated dust.[37]

Chance, good fortune, and doubtless, many hours of hard work have perhaps brought some of Melville's juvenile verses to light. In a chapter entitled "Melville's Sensitive Years," Jeanne C. Howes presents her findings of the study of the

[36] Dan Vogel, "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon," Diss. New York University 1969, p. x.

[37] Howard P. Vincent, ed., "Introduction," Collected Poems of Herman Melville (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. vii.

Pittsfield Sun of 1833 to 1838 to determine what influence this newspaper may have had on Melville when he spent his summers with his Uncle Thomas in Pittsfield. She also investigates what Melville might have contributed to the paper and is fully convinced that a sketch appearing Septemper 25, 1834, is Melville's description of his uncle. She further believes that several essays on education which appeared in the Sun are products of Melville's youthful years. Although she fails to be convinced that any of the anonymous or pseudonymous poems found in the Sun are Melville's and laments that she did not find "The Tropical Summer: a Sonnet,"[38] she does discuss three poems that could possibly have been written by the young Melville.

One of the poems which Howes discovered can be suspected to be Melville's, first of all, because it introduces a character later used in Redburn. The poem reputedly is "From a Volume Entitled 'Poems for Youth by a Family Circle' Supposed to be the Product of Mr. Roscoe's Family, Liverpool." Mr. Roscoe appears as the historian, poet, banker and friend of Redburn's father in Melville's novel Redburn. This poem published November 16, 1833, reads as follows:

[38] "Melville's Sensitive Years," in Melville and Hawthorne in the Berkshires, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1966), pp. 37-39.

> I'll be a fairy and drink the dew
> And creep through the honied flowers,
> And sleep in the violet's tender blue
> And dance in the evening hours.[39]

The fact that Mr. Roscoe appears in Redburn may indicate that Melville wrote this poem.

Second, the poem may be considered Melville's because the style of the title of the poem is similar to several of the titles of the battle-pieces. Compare, for example, the title of this poem with the complete titles of the following poems in Battle-Pieces: "The Temeraire: (Supposed to Have Been Suggested to an Englishman of the Old Order by the Fight of the Monitor and Merrimac)"; "A Meditation: 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." The style of titling in Battle-Pieces is surely very similar to that of "From a Volume Entitled 'Poems for Youth by a Family Circle' Supposed to be the Product of Mr. Roscoe's Family, Liverpool."

Finally, the epigrammatic style of this short poem also reminds one of some of the "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial" that are found in Battle-Pieces. For example, "On the Grave of a Young Cavalry Officer Killed in the Valley of Virginia"

[39] Howes, p. 37.

has only five lines; "An Epitaph," eight; and "Inscription for Marye's Heights, Fredericksburg," seven. One also finds several four- or five-line poems in John Marr, such as "The Man-of-War Hawk," "The Figure-Head," "Old Counsel of the Young Master of Wrecked California Clipper," and "The Tuft of Kelp." The language in this poem, as well as the use of the flower imagery, reminds one of portions of Typee and Mardi. The sensuous tone is also reminiscent of these early works.

On January 21, 1836, another epigrammatic poem called "The Tear" appeared in the Sun.[40] It is significant that Pierre composed just such a poem. In the chapter entitled "Pierre as a Juvenile Author," the reader is told how

> Pierre never forbade that ardent appreciator of "The Tear," who, finding a small fragment of the original manuscript containing a dot (tear), over an i (eye), esteemed the significant event providential; and begged the distinguished favor of being permitted to have it for a brooch; and ousted a cameo-head of Homer, to replace it with the more invaluable gem. He became inconsolable, when being caught in the rain, the dot (tear) disappeared from over the i (eye); so that the strangeness and wonderfulness of the sonnet was still conspicuous; in that thought the least fragment of it could weep in a drought, yet did it become all tearless in a shower.[41]

[40] Howes, p. 37.

[41] Herman Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. 309. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

This is a beautiful example of Melville's humor, and it seems quite likely that he is poking fun at his sentimental "Tear" which reads:

> Sweet Tribute of the parting hour
> Twin sister of the word farewell
> Thy honied nectar has a power
> Beyond what human tongues can tell.[42]

In addition to these verses which may well be Melville's, the New York Public Library, as well as several other libraries, holds a volume of poetry which Meade Minnigerode included in his 1922 bibliography of Melville's works. This volume, entitled Redburn: or the Schoolmaster of a Morning, was printed anonymously in 1845.[43] The copy in the New York Public Library has a handwritten note on the title page which attributes it to Herman Melville. Several aspects of the volume could relate it to Melville. In the first place, the young schoolmaster is named Redburn as was one of Melville's characters later on. Also Melville did teach school in New York state between 1837 and 1840 when he was eighteen to twenty years old. The Redburn of the poem is an orphan, as is Melville's later Redburn, who has been thrown out on the world to meet its buffetings alone. By the time the poem was written, 1845, Melville had been to sea and returned. Moreover, in the poem, Redburn dreams of past

[42] Howes, p. 37.

[43] Redburn: or the Schoolmaster of a Morning (New York: William M. Christy, 1845), p. 30.

experiences which could correspond with experiences recorded in Typee.[44]

The concrete evidence that Melville wrote and published poetry as a young man is at best scanty and inconclusive, but it does not seem at all unlikely. In fact, Melville said himself in "On Sherman's Men," perhaps one of his earliest battle-pieces, that "battle can heroes and bards restore."[45] Furthermore, on May 25, 1862, Melville wrote a letter to his brother Thomas which conveys the following information:

> Since I have quoted poetry above, it puts me in mind of my own doggerel. You will be pleased to learn that I have disposed of a lot of it at a bargain. In fact, a trunk-maker took the whole stock off my hands at ten cents the pound. So, when you buy a new trunk again, just peep at the lining and perhaps you may be rewarded by some glorious stanza stareing [sic] you in the face & claiming admiration. If you were not such a devil of a ways off, I would send you a trunk, by way of presentation-copy. I cant [sic] help thinking what a luckless chap you were that voyage you had a poetaster with you. You remember the romantic moonlight night, when the conceited donkey repeated to you about three cables' length of his verses.[46]

Nevertheless, whatever Melville's early experience with poetry, he had turned, or returned, to it by 1859. It is known that by the end of that year he had sent two of what he called "pieces" to Harper and Brothers for consideration.

[44] Minnigerode, pp. 146-154.

[45] Herman Melville, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 112. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[46] Letters, p. 214.

If these pieces which are conjectured to be poetry were published, it is not known. During this same year, Melville also wrote a long humorous poem to a good friend, Daniel Shepherd.[47] In addition, he studied Emerson's "Merlin," marking the lines which expressed, as we shall see later, his own view that the poet

> . . . shall not seek to weave
> In weak, unhappy times
> Efficacious rhymes. . . .[48]

Melville also bought and studied during 1859 the works of Homer, Herrick, and Child; and by May 22, 1860, he had his own volume of poems ready for the press. Typical of Melville's concern for his publication, he sent Allan, who was to try to find a publisher for the manuscript, a memorandum of a dozen items concerning conditions of publication. Just what this volume consisted of is not known, for Allan failed to find a publisher. Some of the poems, such as "The Little Good Fellows," "Madcaps," "Butterfly Ditty," "A Way-side Weed," "The Cuban Pirate," "Falstaff's Lament over Prince Hal Becomes Henry V," "In the Hall of Marbles," "Pontoosuce," and "Fruit and Flower Painter," may date from this unpublished manuscript,[49] as may the section in Timoleon entitled "Fruit of Travel Long Ago."[50] At any rate, Elizabeth

[47] Letters, pp. 194-195.

[48] Leyda, II, 607.

[49] Howard, p. 264.

[50] Vincent, "Introduction," pp. viii-ix.

Melville, two of Melville's sisters, the Duyckincks, and Charles Scribner all concurred that the poems Melville attempted to publish in 1860 were excellent; and the consensus of all, Melville included, concerning the failure to find a publisher was that poetry was just not selling at this time. Melville's study of poetry as a craft had only just begun, however. After failing to publish his volume of poems or to obtain a government position in 1861, he bought and studied works of Shelley, Spenser, Thompson, Tennyson, Hood, Moore, Mangan, Heine, H. K. White, Arnold, Churchill, Browning, and Madame de Stael.

In keeping with his belief about the nature of poetry, Melville saw the poet's influence on society as very important, for he believed, according to Agnes Cannon's study, that the poet has

> six definable, though interrelated, roles which may be arranged in the ascending order of their social significance as follows: (1) as an entertainer, (2) as the "mouthpiece" through whom the emotions of mankind find expression, (3) as the interpreter of ideas and objects, (4) as the seer who broadens the vision of the world, (5) as the potential savior of his fellowmen; and (6) as the mythmaker.[51]

Although Melville presents these ideas about the poet in <u>Mardi</u>, most of these roles are fulfilled, to some extent, in <u>Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War</u>. Before we see

[51] Cannon, pp. 89-90.

how Melville fulfills the function of the poet in his war poetry, however, let us briefly define these roles of the serious poet.

As entertainer, which Melville considered the most insignificant function, the poet provides a delightful pastime by soothing and amusing his audience, as does Yoomy in Mardi and Cypriote and Glaucon in Clarel, to name a few of Melville's poets. At the same time, even as entertainer, the serious poet's poems are not those that simply entertain. They also stimulate the mind. Melville did not mind being considered an entertainer--he did not wish to be considered "only" an entertainer.[52] Because of the nature of its subject matter, Battle-Pieces is not entertaining in one sense of the word. On the other hand, the volume is very entertaining to one who seeks to determine just what Melville was trying to accomplish with this little volume of poems.

As the mouthpiece[53] for man, it is the function of the poet to bring out into the open the thoughts of man's heart. Man may not even be aware of his own thoughts and feelings about a particular subject; but when the poet speaks, he expresses the unconscious feelings of those to whom he writes. The poet in this function may describe actual

[52] Letters, p. 85.

[53] "Mouthpiece" is the term Melville used for one who expresses the thoughts and feelings of others in Mardi, Chapter 126.

thoughts, abstract ideas, or vague feelings man cannot express. When the reader reads the poet's work, however, he sees himself in the work.[54]

A third function of the poet is to serve as the interpreter of ideas, actions, and objects for man. Yoomy performs just such a function in Mardi when he is able to interpret the symbolism of the flowers that Hautia's heralds present to Taji. In Chapter 70, he interprets the Iris flag, the Circe flowers, the faded jonquil buried in wormwood leaves, and the oleanders. Yoomy continues to interpret the flower symbolism throughout the novel and thus to broaden Taji's outlook on the situation in which he found himself. One learns from Chapter 137 of Mardi that it is the poet's responsibility, Babbalanja says, not only to see the rose but to unfold "its petals and disclose a pearl." Also in the chapter "Wherein Babbalanja and Yoomy embrace," Babbalanja, the voice of philosophy, compares the philosopher and the poet:

> Poets both, we differ but in seeming; thy airiest conceits are as the shadows of my deepest ponderings. . . . Not a song you sing, but I have thought its thought. . . . Poets are we, Yoomy, in that we dwell without us; we live in grottoes, palms and brooks; we ride the sea, we ride the sky; poets are omnipresent (p. 438).

It is the poet's responsibility to embody philosophical thoughts in concrete terms so that man can understand them.

[54] Cannon, p. 98.

Increasingly, Melville realized that he must ballast his philosophical ideas with realistic material objects and natural settings. Melville hoped that his readers would look beyond the objects and events to the unseen meanings that they held. The interpretation of the significance of objects and events in the objective world is one of the poet's important functions, for it allows him to serve as man's liberator.

Closely related to the poet's role as interpreter is his function as seer. Melville felt that the poet was to see all sides, good and evil. He felt that some poets, such as Emerson and Wordsworth, saw only the good in life and were not, therefore, true seers. Melville's poetic purpose was much broader: he wanted to see human misfortune and natural rapacity while at the same time not omitting the beautiful and the perfect, whether earthly or divine, idealistic or material.[55] If the poet is to be a true seer, he must see life steadily and see it whole; and once he does, he may save man from evil.

In the last chapter of Mardi, Yoomy fulfills the function of the poet as potential savior of his fellow men. He is not able to save those who will not listen to him. For example, he pleads with Taji to "commit not the last, last crime"; but Taji is bent on self-destruction and will not

[55] Cannon, p. 126.

allow himself to be saved. The historian, Mohi, however, who has been a perpetual critic of Yoomy, allows Yoomy to save him. Our final view of Yoomy is a beautiful as well as fitting one--"and plunging, they struck out for land. Yoomy buoying Mohi up. . ." (p. 654). It is significant that Yoomy, the poet, saves Mohi, symbol of history, from annihilation. The historian can only record the facts, but the poet is free not only to record historical facts but also to uplift man through his interpretation of those facts.

That the poet is mythmaker is evident in Chapter 93 of _Mardi_. Mohi wishes to recite the history of Tupia for which there are few if any facts. Yoomy feels, and so do Babbalanja and Media, that it is the poet's task to create and to relate this history. Yoomy tells Mohi, _Mardi_'s historian, that "we poets are the true historians; we embalm. . ." (p. 281). While Yoomy admits that his history is often dewy, he believes that his "songs perpetuate many things which you sage scribes entirely overlook" (p. 280). By creating a myth, the poet embodies many ideas which the pure recorder of fact overlooks; for "what are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities as the gross mattock of Dididi, the digger of trenches; for things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative conceits of the fancy" (pp. 283-284). The poet as mythmak[illegible]s more concerned with the symbolic overtones of history tha[illegible]h the facts themselves. The poet as mythmaker is

concerned with the motives underlying human behavior and with symbolic projections of a people's fears, hopes, desires, and values. Since the myths which the poet creates are by nature collective and communal, they bind a nation together in that people's common psychological and spiritual activities. They produce a sense of togetherness of feeling, of action, of wholeness. They transcend time and place.

In Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, Melville performs the functions that he believed are the obligations of the serious poet. First of all, as mouthpiece, Melville undoubtedly hoped to express the thoughts and emotions of his fellow Northerners. He was attempting, furthermore, to express what he hoped would become their thoughts. While the volume was dedicated to the Union soldiers who died in the war and while Melville allied himself with the cause of the North, he was not immune to the merits of the South or to her sufferings. In such poems as "The Frenzy in the Wake," "The Fall of Richmond," "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh," "The Released Rebel Prisoner," and "Lee in the Capitol," Melville expresses his humanitarian views; and he no doubt hoped he was expressing the opinions of his people or that his beliefs would strike a responsive chord in their hearts. Of course, he was not speaking for all the North, as the era of reconstruction later demonstrated; but he did express the views of many of the people north of the Mason-Dixon line. That

Melville intended to be the mouthpiece of the people seems to be indicated by "The Martyr." This poem, he writes, expresses the passions of the people, not his own personal views. The note to "The Frenzy in the Wake" also indicates that the emotions expressed there are purely dramatic, not personal (p. 455). As well as being mouthpiece, Melville also hoped that his volume would persuade the citizens of the North to embrace a humanitarian view of the South if they did not already have such an attitude.

Although Melville did chronicle many of the events of the war, he was much more concerned about interpreting these events for his readers.[56] "The House-Top" is a good example of his skill at interpreting an event. From 1861 to 1863 the North had maintained its force by volunteers, but in 1863 the federal conscription law was passed. Since the law allowed a person to hire a substitute or buy exemption from war duty for three hundred dollars, this left the war to those who were financially unable to purchase either a substitute or exemption. On July 11, a riot touched off by the poor Irish-Americans broke out in New York City. Before its suppression on July 13, over five hundred people had been killed and much damage had been done to city

[56] The poems from Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War treated only briefly in this chapter are discussed in detail in Chapters IV and V.

property.[57] Melville, however, did not choose to record the actual facts of the riot. He chose to lament it and interpret its significance by writing that

> All civil charms
> And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe--
> Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
> Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,
> And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature (p. 57).

The only way to combat this uncivilized behavior is to bring in "Wise Draco" to fight force with force. This return to barbarism and the use of force to suppress it actually supports the view of innate evil which is contradictory to the "Republic's faith implied / Which holds that man is naturally good," and it also serves to support the views of "honest kings" who doubt that American democracy will work. The poet is sad and somewhat bitter because the city, thankful that its order has been restored, does not realize that "a grimy slur" has been cast on the nation. Nor does the city realize that it has contradicted its own philosophy that man is naturally good and thus does not need to be scourged. The rioters, in short, forgot their religion, their civil laws, and their philosophy and returned to an all-compelling interest in self. The poet concludes first that despite a prevalent belief that man is naturally good, his actions betray an evil aspect and second that this facet of man's nature must be controlled by law and religion.

[57] Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1956), p. 444.

Another poem which interprets events instead of merely reporting them is "Battle of Stone River, Tennessee." Had Melville been concerned with the factual details of the battle, he could have readily obtained them from volume six, pages 112-174 of The Rebellion Record. Instead, however, the poet wishes to interpet the battle in the light of both the past and the future. In this poem, supposedly "a view from Oxford cloisters," the American Civil War is compared with the English Civil War of 1471 and more specifically with the battles of Barnet Heath, April 14, 1471, and Tewkesbury, May 3, 1471. In stanzas one and three the poet establishes the fact that this battle, its generals and soldiers, like the battles of Barnet Heath and Tewkesbury, will fade into the mist of time. In stanzas two and four, he establishes other comparisons between the two civil conflicts and asks pertinent questions. For example, in stanza two, he points out that, as is usually the case in war, both sides in the English war were convinced that they were right and believed God to be on their side. "Do North and South the sin retain / Of Yorkist and Lancastrain?" Melville asks. In stanza four, the poet is concerned with the future. Just as the memories of the battles, the generals, and the dead fade into oblivion

> Shall North and South their rage deplore,
> And reunited thrive amain
> Like Yorkist and Lancastrian? (p. 49).

This is the desire of the poet. Hopefully, in this case history will repeat itself.

In carrying out his function as interpreter of the events of the war, Melville becomes the seer who broadens the outlook of the people. In one of the most beautiful and most effective poems of Battle-Pieces, "Shiloh," the poet as seer projects the concept that death destroys all differences. While they lived, the soldiers of the opposing armies had radically differing points of view; but in death they are all the same. Their hopes no longer rest in North or South but if in anything in the cycle of the seasons, symbolized by the skimming swallows.

The swallows, like the wheeling haglets of "The Haglets" and the gulls and floes of "The Berg," serve to remind man that death is inevitable just as are birth and life. War cannot destroy the cycle of nature represented by these swallows. Melville sets forth this same view in "Malvern Hill." The elms of Malvern Hill remember the carnage that took place on their slopes, but they are not unduly concerned because

> . . . sap the twig will fill:
> Wag the world how it will,
> Leaves must be green in Spring (p. 45).

As interpreter, then, Melville becomes the prophet who helps man see beyond the physical destruction of the war to the healing process that will take place. He thus presents both the good and the evil of the War. "Shiloh" and "Malvern Hill" represent the archetypal motif of mystical submersion

into cyclical time. Man, Melville believed, achieves a kind of immortality by submitting to the cycles of nature, especially the cycle of the seasons. America can survive the horror of the war by doing likewise, Melville implies in these two poems.

Melville as poet also functions as potential savior of his fellow men. Battle-Pieces as a volume is devoted to reconciliation. If nothing else, the volume convinces one that Melville hoped to help save his nation from complete destruction. He pleads with the North, since it is the victor, to extend its hand to the South. For example, deviating from the actual events of history, "Lee in the Capitol" is a fervent poetic plea that the North treat the South with "magnanimity." The poet through Lee asks:

> Shall the great North go Sylla's way?
> Proscribe? prolong the evil day?
> Confirm the curse? infix the hate?
> In Union's name forever alienate? (pp. 151-152).

Much the same view is expressed in the last poem of the volume, "A Meditation." Even during the war the soldiers at times forgot their differences and shared a smoke, a biscuit, or a helping hand. Of course,

> A darker side there is; but doubt
> In Nature's charity hovers there:
> If men for new agreement yearn,
> Then old upbraiding best forbear:
> "The South's the sinner!" Well, so let it be;
> But shall the North sin worse, and stand the
> Pharisee? (p. 155).

If the nation is to recover from the war, hate must be put aside. Melville does attempt to be the savior of his nation; for he is clearly as much the poet of the South as of the North.[58] Without doubt Melville regarded himself as the "bard of Progress and Humanity" (p. 467). It is indeed unfortunate that post-Civil War America failed to consider him as such or to heed his warnings.

Finally, as we have seen, Melville considered mythmaking to be the most important function of the poet, and Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War does have mythic implications. According to R. W. B. Lewis, Melville's mythopoetic imagination is what gives this collection its real importance and is the aspect of the volume which should call forth the most admiration. Lewis writes:

> Battle-Pieces, though not entirely overlooked, had a most indifferent success. Melville's poetic achievement is of the sort that the present generation, because of historic experience and critical fashions, has learned to appreciate; for it derived from an imagination alert to paradox and contradiction and to the large mythic action detectable amidst the jostling immediacies of life. That was the imagination summoned to a supreme creative effort by the supreme contradiction of a Civil War. It was not only war as such, it was fratricidal war, the condition of a whole people doing desperate battle with itself, that galvanized the poetic genius of the man for whom communal fraternity was so potent in ideal. It was fratricidal war, moreover, seen as a tragic drama

[58] Robert E. Spiller et al., eds., Literary History of the United States: History, 3rd ed., rev. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 465.

> of deeply traditional quality and of mythic importance. It was because he so envisioned the war, and because, in Battle-Pieces, he gave shape and substance to his vision that Melville deserves to be called the Civil War poet.[59]

For Melville the battles of the Civil War embodied suggestions of universal truths. He realized, and he tried to get his readers to see, that the war was representative of the meaning of existence. He believed that the war had mythic implications because it was indicative of not just the American state of affairs but of mankind's as well. Melville definitely saw the war as embodying suggestions of universality. The war was for Melville a symbol of the universal conflicts that torment men. It was a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic conflicts--"the fundamental ironic dualities of existence: will against necessity, action against idea, youth against age, the changelessness of man's heart against the concept of moral progress, the bad doer against the good deed, the bad result against the good act, ignorance against fate, etc."[60]

Melville also saw America as an embodiment of the myth of regeneration or redemption and initiation. Coming at the end of the first section of Battle-Pieces, "America" sets forth Melville's hopes for his nation. The poet recounts the

[59] R. W. B. Lewis, ed., "Introduction," Herman Melville (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 25.

[60] Robert Penn Warren, "Melville the Poet," The Kenyon Review, 8 (1946), 214.

beauty, virility, and prosperity of the Great Mother, America, before the war. In a sense, Melville, like many of his contemporaries, saw pre-war America as the "Return to Paradise," and this poem alludes to this motif. During the war, Mother America is speechless, "pale at the fury of her brood." As she lies in a death-like sleep, she realizes that evil is a part of man's existence; for

> . . . in that sleeps [sic] contortion showed
> The terror of the vision there--
> A silent vision unavowed,
> Revealing earth's foundation bare,
> And Gorgon in her hidden place.
> It was a thing of fear to see
> So foul a dream upon so fair a face,
> And the dreamer lying in that starry shroud (p. 106).

Only an internal tragedy can bring catharsis to America; and from this suffering Melville hopes will come a nation triumphant in power, knowledge, and maturity. In the war, America undergoes an excruciating ordeal in passing from ignorance and immaturity to social and spiritual adulthood. In Pierre, Melville had observed that in America "death itself becomes transmuted into Life" (p. 8). This, he trusts, will be the outcome of the Civil War. The myth of rebirth and initiation is also seen in the lives of those young soldiers who die "enlightened by the vollied glare" (p. 11) or who live to never forget that "the shark / Glides White through the phosphorus sea" (p. 115); for "(What like a bullet can undeceive!)" (p. 41).

Melville also creates a goddess in the Great Mother figure.[61] She is more than a personification of a nation. She is the Archetypal Woman, who represents both The Great Mother and The Terrible Mother. She is, like the Triple Goddess of "The Haglets," creator, destroyer, and preserver. She is creator not only of the sons of the North and of the South, but she is also creator of the war and, therefore, destroyer, for she has passed on to her children the seeds of darkness that make them wage war. At the same time she is also preserver. She has passed on to her children not only the propensity for evil but also for good. Just as she is capable of seeing that the universe has a dual nature, so are her children. They, too, will learn to accept both sides of life with "no trace of passion or of strife" (p. 107). Some of the archetypal or "universe symbols" that appear in Battle-Pieces, in addition to the archetypal woman, are common ones such as water, the colors black and green, the circle, the wind, and the storm.

By the 1860's Melville realized that he could create myth from history as well as from other sources.

> The most striking example of Melville's mythopoetic use of history is his mythicizing the greatest event of his times, the Civil War. . . . On a psychological level the scenes and events of the rebellion filtered through Melville's imagination, and there became fibers for his deepest thoughts,

[61] Martin Leonard Pops, The Melville Archetype (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1970), pp. 189-190.

> thoughts which he had earlier expressed chiefly through allusions to the Fall of Man and the rebellion of Satan. . . .[62]

Once Melville had mythicized the war it became tragedy, "one that exhibited the classical psychological effects of tragedy."[63] Thus he could write in the "Supplement":

> Let us pray that the great historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity; and may fulfillment verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity (p. 467).

Melville could have written his history of the war from a very partisan point of view. He could have merely recorded the events of the war. As we will see later, there are indications that he was tempted to do so. In the final analysis, however, Melville approached the war as he felt a true poet should. He attempted to present the truth about the war and, therefore, influence the society of his day. Although he hoped that the war had provided a catharsis for America, he was not sure that it had. He, therefore, attempted with Battle-Pieces to insure catharsis by presenting not only one side of the war or by simply recording the events of the war, but by endeavoring to present the war objectively, with all its metaphysical significance.

[62] Gerard M. Sweeney, Melville's Use of Classical Mythology, in Melville Studies in American Culture, ed. Robert Brainard Pearsall, V (Amsterdam: Rodopi N. V., 1975), 143.

[63] Sweeney, p. 143.

Melville did not write Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War in verse form simply because he was so dejected over the poor reception of his prose that he could no longer function as a prose writer. He was dejected and his health was not good between 1855 and 1866, but records indicate that he could have written if he had wanted to do so. The case is more complex than the former details would indicate. Melville's ill health was sporadic during this time, and his dejection resulted from the fact that he could not support his family by writing as he wished to write. He, therefore, determined to abandon writing as a career. Once he had made this decision, he was free to write in a form which he knew would not support him financially but which he believed to be the best mode for his mythopoetic imagination. That he was at heart a poet was Melville's conviction long before he wrote Battle-Pieces. This is indicated, not only by juvenilia which may be conjectured to be his on the basis of internal evidence, but more specifically and primarily by his definition of poetry and by his well-conceived ideas about how the poet should relate to his society. When Melville wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, therefore, he wrote it not as an attempt to make money, though he probably hoped he would, but as an attempt to reach America with an important message. Thirty years is a long time to

devote to a medium that one comes to out of necessity instead of love. In reality, there is little reason to believe that Melville did so.

CHAPTER III

THE DISCLOSURE OF THE COMPOSITION PROCESS

Not only is Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War important because it illustrates why Melville began to write verse in earnest around 1857 and why he wrote the war volume in poetry, but it is also significant because it serves to exemplify principles and techniques of Melville's composition process. For example, that he wrote the bulk of Battle-Pieces after the war ended typifies his view that it is only as man looks back on his experiences that those experiences gain real meaning. This theory also accounts for the order in which Melville appears to have written the various battle-pieces, and, furthermore, it contributes to the increasing complexity of the volume. Often those pieces which have the greatest immediacy are those which are the most traditional in theme and form. That Melville borrowed, altered, and added to sources to produce his Civil War poems is in keeping with the way he created his prose works and in no way contradicts his belief that the American writer should "boldly condemn all

imitation."[1] Originality, according to Melville in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," was writing like a man. That writing was to be preferred to "smooth, pleasing" writing (p. 48), even if it were "crabbed and ugly" (p. 49). The original writer is the one "the smell of your beeches and hemlocks is upon . . . your own broad prairies are in his soul; and if you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far roar of his Niagara" (p. 49). Even though Melville derived many of the battle-pieces from sources available to him, when the volume is crabbed and ugly, when it reeks of man's evil nature and of death, when it encompasses the Civil War of both heaven and earth, it is indeed original. No other Civil War poet can claim so much.

Just when Melville decided to compose a volume of verses commemorating the Civil War is uncertain. His great interest in the events of the war from its inception does indicate that he was contemplating a book of verse on the war all along. Melville was not isolated from the war.[2] Neither did he remain philosophically aloof from the day-to-day incidents

[1] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Herman Melville, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1962), p. 49. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

[2] David Hibler, "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: Melville and Whitman on the Civil War," The Personalist, 50 (1969), 131.

of the war.[3] In the first place, he joined the Pittsfield Militia in 1861 and attended drills there until he moved to New York in 1863. According to The Melville Log, early in the war he went with his son Stanwix to see soldiers drill in Pittsfield; and a short time later, with Evert Duyckinck, he viewed the body of Captain James H. Ward, who had been killed by a secessionist's shot.[4]

About this time, July, 1861, Melville is believed to have attempted to join the United States Navy when he visited the Brooklyn Navy Yard. His continuing interest in the war is also evidenced by the fact that on July 12, 1861, Catherine Gansevoort wrote her brother Henry that Melville "wishes to be most kindly remembered & hopes you are sound on affairs of the country."[5] In May of 1862, Melville was following the details of the war closely; for he writes to Thomas Melville:

> Do you want to hear about the war?--The war goes bravely on. McClellan is now within fifteen miles of the rebel capital, Richmond. New Orleans is taken &c. &c. &c. You will see all no doubt in the papers at your Agents. But when the end--the wind-up--the grand pacification is coming, who knows. We beat the rascals in

[3] William J. Kimball, "The Melville of Battle-Pieces: A Kindred Spirit," The Midwest Quarterly, 10 (1969), 308.

[4] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), II, 641. All future references to this source will use the shortened form Leyda, the volume, and the page.

[5] Leyda, II, 662.

> almost every feild [sic], & take all their ports &c., but they dont [sic] cry "Enough!"--It looks like a long lane, with the turning quite out of sight.--Guert has recently been appointed to the command of a fine new sloop of war. I am rejoiced to hear it.[6]

In February, 1863, Melville visited Lieutenant Henry Gansevoort at Fort Hamilton.[7] On August 22, 1863, he attended a parade honoring the return of the Pittsfield regiment,[8] and in December contributed an autograph letter to be sold at a "Sanitary Fair" as a means of raising funds for the Union armies.[9] By the spring of 1864, according to Allan Melville's correspondence, Melville was anxious to see the war firsthand. Allan writes to Richard Lathus:

> My brother Herman & I arrived here this morning. He is very anxious to go to the front, but it appears that it is difficult to get a pass--It has occurred to me that perhaps you might address a line to Secretary Stanton introducing Herman & stating his wish, as a literary man he might be favored. As such men should have opportunities to see that they may describe.[10]

This correspondence seems to indicate that if Melville was not yet writing about the war, he was planning to do so.

[6] The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 215. All future references to this source will use the shortened title Letters.

[7] Leyda, II, 658.

[8] Leyda, II, 662.

[9] Letters, p. 219.

[10] Leyda, II, 642.

After this visit to Lieutenant Colonel Henry Sanford Gansevoort, his first cousin, at Vienna, Virginia, Melville admits that he is patriotic, "enthusiastically so";[11] and his final paragraph in a letter to Gansevoort after his return from the front attests to his enthusiasm:

> And now, Col. Gansevoort of the 13th N. Y. Cavalry, conceive me to be standing some paces from you, in an erect attitude and with manly bearing, giving you the military salute. Farewell. May two small but choice constellations of stars alight on your shoulders. May your sword be a lesson to the despicable foe, & your name in after ages be used by Southern matrons to frighten their children by. And after death (which God long avert, & bring about after great battles, quietly, in a comfortable bed, with wife & children around) may that same name be transferred to heaven--bestowed upon some new planet or cluster of stars of the first magnitude. Farewell, my hero. . . .[12]

While information concerning Melville's actions during the war is scanty, there is enough to indicate that he was not so "out of joint with the times" that he "could not commit himself to anything."[13] He showed interest in the war, both as a private citizen and as a writer. His actions indicate that he related to his times and that he was able to commit himself to the war.

[11] Letters, p. 226.

[12] Letters, p. 226.

[13] Hennig Cohen, ed., "Introduction," The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville (New York: Yoseloff, 1963), p. 13. Only Cohen's "Introduction" and "Notes" are used but will be so indicated in the subsequent references.

In the "Preface" to Battle-Pieces, Melville wrote that "with few exceptions, the Pieces in this volume originated in an impulse imparted by the fall of Richmond,"[14] which occurred on April 3, 1865. Charles Hemstreet wrote in his Literary New York, published in 1903, that he talked with Melville at the home of Alice and Phoebe Cary while Melville was writing Battle-Pieces. This meeting took place in December of 1865.[15] At the same time, it seems rather clear that Melville planned to write the volume for a long while before he began actual composition. Despite Melville's disclaimer, we know for a certainty that "Inscription for the Dead at Fredericksburgh" was written before March 22, 1864,[16] and that "The Frenzy in the Wake" was composed by mid-February of 1865, for Melville says in the note to this poem that it was written "while yet the reports were coming North of Sherman's homeward advance from Savannah" (p. 455).

Howard believes that "Dupont's Round Fight" was written just after November 7, 1861, and that "The Stone Fleet" was written soon after December 20, 1861. Howard, in fact, thinks that all the sea poems were the direct results of the

[14] Herman Melville, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 446. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[15] Leyda, II, 676.

[16] Letters, pp. 223-224.

events. He bases his belief on what he considers to be the distinct tone of immediacy in these lyrics.[17] It is true that these poems possess a greater degree of immediacy than some of the others, such as "The Armies of the Wilderness." On the other hand, they seem to have no greater immediacy than "The Portent," "Misgivings," or "The House-Top." A more valid reason for considering these poems among the earliest pieces written for Battle-Pieces is that they contain several references to poetic craft, and this probably indicates that Melville was considering style and technique early in the composition of the war poems.

From February, 1866, to July, 1866, the following five poems were published in Harper's New Monthly Magazine: "The March to the Sea," "The Cumberland," "Philip," "Chattanooga," and "Gettysburg."[18] The last one appeared in the July issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine, and by July 20, 1866, Melville had completed Battle-Pieces. It was published less than a month later. While one cannot be definite about the time Melville began Battle-Pieces, it seems, contrary to what he wrote in the "Preface" that he conceived the volume early in the war, wrote a half-dozen or so poems during the course of the conflict but began writing in earnest after April, 1865.

[17] Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 271.

[18] Leyda, II, 677-680.

If Melville composed Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War in his ordinary fashion, and there is no way of knowing, he probably wrote the simpler narrative poems, such as "Ball's Bluff" and "Running the Batteries," before such complex pieces as "The Portent," "Misgivings," "Shiloh," or "Malvern Hill." It also seems likely that the pieces which emphasize the Southern cause and plead for mercy for the South were written somewhat later than those which laud the Northern cause. At any rate, this is in keeping with Melville's former method of writing. As is well-known, Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre all began as simple narratives that later took on the metaphysical complications for which they are known today. It is not unreasonable to believe that Battle-Pieces was composed in the same manner. Melville, no doubt, began the volume as a tribute "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" (p. 446); but as was often the case, it soon became a much more complicated venture than he had originally thought it would be.

That Melville early intended to write a volume of Civil War poetry and that he waited until the end of the war to compose most of it is fully consistent with his view that it is creative remembering in the present that gives meaning

to the past.[19] This could very well explain why Melville underscored, bracketed, and checked Madame de Staël's statement that "the present moment has no inspiration for the poet; he must place himself at a distance from the age in which he lives, in order either to judge or to describe it well. . . ."[20] Of course, in all fairness to Madame de Staël, this passage is referring to the present as being an unfit subject for poetry. Melville does subscribe to this theory but only in the sense that he believes a person should be somewhat removed in time from an event before he attempts to record it. This concept manifests itself time after time in the Melville canon. Consider, for example, this statement in Moby Dick by Melville's most famous author-narrator:

> Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces--though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did. . . .[21]

[19] Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 35.

[20] Walker Cowan, "Melville's Marginalia," Diss. Harvard 1966, XI, 62.

[21] Herman Melville, Moby Dick or The Whale, ed. Wayne C. Booth (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), pp. 5-6. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

The Ishmael who is a whaler on the Pequod is not the same Ishmael who tells the story of Ahab and the great whale. As he looks back, Ishmael comes to realize the universal significance of the events that occurred aboard the Pequod.

Like Ishmael, the characters Redburn, White-Jacket, the lawyer in "Bartleby," and Cereno, among numerous others, also see a little into the springs and motives of truth when they look back on their experiences. They do not always see all and are not always the happier for what they do see, but they are only able to sort out their experiences as they look back on them. Two of Melville's best later creations, John Marr and Bridegroom Dick, both look back, remembering old friends and old experiences. In fact, Melville's last work is a looking back. The narrator of Billy Budd looks back to a time before steamships and tells his story of Billy, Claggart, and Captain Vere.

Conversely, there is Pierre. The narrator of this story tells us that Pierre fails as an author because he "immaturely attempts a mature work."[22] He attempts to create a book out of his experiences while he is yet entangled in them and while he is yet unable to see them as a whole. The narrator notes that "only by judicious degrees, appointed of God, does man come at last to gain his Mont Blanc and take

[22] Herman Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. 332. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

an overtopping view [of his experiences]. . ." (p. 335). Pierre, the narrator goes on to inform us, because he has begun "to see through the first superficiality of the world . . . . fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance" (p. 335). Pierre fails as an author because while he "was thinking that he was entirely transplanted into a new and wonderful element of Beauty and Power, he was, in fact, but in one of the stages of the transition" (p. 333).

In short, then, it is feasible that Melville wrote the bulk of the battle-pieces after the war ended because he believed, and incorporated this theory into his fiction and poetry alike, that looking back on and sorting out one's experiences make them meaningful. Looking back on the war enabled Melville to see it not only as a national conflict but as emblematic of man's universal conflict. During the war itself, Melville was caught up in the excitement of war. As the war dragged on, however, he became more and more convinced that a war for right--which he fully believed the Civil War was--was as deadly as a war for wrong and that it was caused no less than the war for wrong by the forces of evil in the universe.

As was always true with Melville, his creative imagination worked best when it was stimulated by the concrete, the specific. It is, therefore, not surprising that several of

the poems in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War result from Melville's war-related experiences, a visit to an art exhibition to view war paintings and the reading of The Rebellion Record, as well as periodical and newspaper accounts of the war.[23] For example, "The Scout toward Aldie" results directly from firsthand war experience. In April, 1864, Melville spent two days scouting for Mosby, the subject of "The Scout toward Aldie," with the Thirteenth New York Cavalry near Vienna, Virginia. While Mosby was not captured, several rebel guerrillas were. Melville gained general impressions, heard stories, and met soldiers that he later wrote about in this poem. Melville possibly learned additional details about Mosby from his cousin, Colonel Henry Gansevoort, who scouted for Mosby on several occasions.[24] The main ideas for the poem, however, came from Melville's personal experience at the front.

At least two other poems in Battle-Pieces were written as a result of Melville's personal contact with soldiers. "The College Colonel" was written after Melville attended a celebration for the Forty-Ninth Massachusetts Regiment and its young colonel, William Francis Bartlett, at the home of J. R. Morewood, Esq., in Pittsfield. Melville was greatly

[23] Dan Vogel, "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon," Diss. New York University 1969, p. 72.

[24] Howard, pp. 276-277.

moved by this young Harvard student, who not only was wounded three other times but who also lost a leg during the war.[25] "The Released Rebel Prisoner" was written as a consequence of Melville's seeing released war prisoners in New York, where he was living in June, 1865. He wrote that

> For a month or two after the completion of peace, some thousands of released captives from the military prisons of the North, natives of all parts of the South, passed through the city of New York, sometimes waiting farther transportation for days, during which interval they wandered penniless about the streets, or lay in their worn and patched gray uniforms under the trees of the Battery, near the barracks where they were lodged and fed. They were transported and provided for at the charge of the government (p. 457).

Melville's visit to the National Academy of Design sometime after April 3, 1865, inspired at least two, and possibly three, of the battle-pieces. Here Melville saw many Civil War paintings of "cavalry charges, foraging parties, soldiers departing for the front, drummer boys, and idealized slave women." He also saw a painting of a landscape darkened by an approaching storm and one of Niagara Falls at sunrise.[26] The two paintings which Melville definitely used in Battle-Pieces were "'The Coming Storm'" by

[25] Leyda, II, 662.

[26] Cohen, "Introduction," p. 14.

Robert Swain Gifford and "The Cumean Sibyl" by Elihu Vedder. Melville was attracted to Gifford's painting because its style was reminiscent of the Dutch school of painting, which he especially liked; and he liked Vedder's painting because of its symbolic and abstract qualities.[27] "A Canticle" may have been the result of Melville's seeing "Sunrise at Niagara" which he saw at the same time that he saw the other two paintings. On the other hand, it may have been inspired by "The Great Fall, Niagara," which was painted by Frederick Church, who was a personal friend of Melville. At any rate, this painting does contain the falls and the rainbow, both of which Melville utilized in "A Canticle."[28]

Melville perhaps went to the art exhibition at the National Academy of Design because he hoped to add to his collection of war poems, and it may well be that he decided to entitle his volume Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War after he saw the battle-pieces at the show. On the other hand, for a long time he had been interested in the type of painting known as "battle-pieces" and noted that he had seen several paintings in this genre by Salvator Rosa in European museums.[29] In the "Supplement," Melville refers to the

[27] Howard P. Vincent, ed., "Notes," Collected Poems of Herman Melville (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), pp. 456-458.

[28] Cohen, "Notes," p. 263.

[29] Cohen, "Introduction," pp. 14-15.

poetry as "the battle-pieces in the foregoing collection" (p. 463). He probably thought of the volume as a type of poetical exhibition of battle-pieces.

There is also one poem in Battle-Pieces which is a versification of a photograph of Winfield Scott Hancock that appeared on the cover of Harper's Weekly, May 28, 1864. Hancock, who commanded the Second Corps during the Spotsylvania Campaign, May 7-20, 1864, was famous for capturing Jackson's former command, the "Stonewall" brigade.[30] Always interested in manliness, Melville saw Hancock as an archetypal figure of this virtue. The poem "Aurora-Borealis" was probably written after Melville had seen a cartoon in Harper's Weekly, also in May, 1864, entitled "A Rebel General Startled in His Camp by the Beautiful and Unexpected Display of Northern Lights."[31] The illustrated news magazines which covered the war, such as Harper's, therefore, influenced Battle-Pieces.

Melville also used his reading about the war as sources for his poems. For example, in July, 1862, the Atlantic Monthly printed an anonymous article entitled "Chiefly About War Matters." This article has since been identified as Nathaniel Hawthorne's; and Leo B. Levy believes that it is the source for four of the battle-pieces: "A Utilitarian

[30] Cohen, "Notes," p. 248.

[31] Cohen, "Notes," p. 276.

"Chiefly About War Matters"; and "The Portent," Melville's powerful poem about Brown's death, may have been influenced by that discussion. Hawthorne did not see Brown as a Christ-like saint, for he writes that "I shall not pretend to be an admirer of old John Brown, any further than sympathy with Whittier's excellent ballad about him may go. . . ."[33] By the same token, though Brown's hanging in "The Portent" is assigned certain characteristics similar to Christ's crucifixion, they are, in the final analysis, only superficial. Not unlike Hawthorne, Melville did not see Brown as a type of Christ. Though "Chiefly About War Matters" may have influenced "The Portent," the source of this poem is probably "How Old Brown Took Harper's Ferry" by Edmund Clarence Stedman. This poem appeared November 12, 1859, in Greeley's Tribune. The lines of this long ballad which suggest that Melville read it are:

> And Old Brown,
> Osawatomi Brown,
> Received three bayonet stabs, and a cut
> on his brave old crown.[34]

Melville writes:

> The cut is on the crown
> (Lo, John Brown),
> And the stabs shall heal no more (p. 3).

[33] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Tales, Sketches, and Other Papers, with a biographical sketch by George Parsons Lathrop (1884; rpt. St. Clair Shores: Scholarly Press, n.d.), VII, 327.

[34] The Poems (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905), p. 8.

View of the Monitor's Fight," "In the Turret," "The Cumberland," and "The Temeraire." There are several views which Melville appears to have taken from Hawthorne. First, they both, Hawthorne and Melville, stress that the advent of the Monitor ended the era of wooden ships. Both feel that war is a young man's game, and both think that war strips off the mask of civilization and reveals man's real barbarism. Finally, certain details in "The Cumberland" and "The Turret" are probably taken from Hawthorne's article. For example, Melville's lines in "The Cumberland" concerning the ship's flag being visible above the water after it was sunk may have come from Hawthorne. In addition, Melville's image of Worden sealed in a diving bell is close to Hawthorne's statement that men "hermetically" seal themselves in the ironclad and go below.[32] Although there is no proof that Melville used "Chiefly About War Matters" and though the tone of his poems and Hawthorne's article is distinctly different, Melville's known use of other journalistic reports of the war, as well as his love for Hawthorne, suggests that he did use Hawthorne's article as the source for the battle-pieces named above.

Emerson's view of John Brown as a Christ-figure, which will be discussed later, is presented by Hawthorne in

[32] Leo B. Levy, "Hawthorne, Melville and the Monitor," American Literature, 37 (1965), 33-40.

In the last stanza of the poem, Stedman hints that John Brown's death will not end his influence:

> But, Virginians, don't do it! for I tell
> you that the flagon,
> Filled with blood of Old Brown's offspring,
> Was poured by Southern hands;
> And each drop from Old Brown's life-veins,
> like the red gore of the dragon,
> May spring up a vengeful Fury, hissing
> through your slave-worn lands!
> And Old Brown,
> Osawatomie Brown,
> May trouble you more than ever, when you've
> Nailed his coffin down![35]

Of course, the sentiment of this last line reflects the sentiment of Melville's entire poem, especially the last stanza:

> Hidden in the cap
> Is the anguish none can draw;
> So your future veils its face,
> Shenandoah!
> But the streaming beard is shown
> (Weird John Brown),
> The meteor of the war (p. 3).

Melville may well have got his inspiration for his poem from Stedman, but his attitude toward the subject is surely not Stedman's.

A 1964 article by Frank L. Day in American Notes and Queries discussed a new source for one of the battle-pieces. It is strange that this source had not been discovered earlier; for on August 18, 1865, Melville ordered a copy of a book by Brevet Major George Ward Nichols, Sherman's aide-de-camp. Melville's "March to the Sea" is reminiscent of Nichols' work in several ways. First of all, the title of Nichols' first section is none other than "The March to

35 Stedman, p. 9.

the Sea," which Melville used as the title of one of his own poems. The mood of Nichols' book is also reflected in Melville's poem; for both present Sherman's trek from Rome, Georgia, to Raleigh, North Carolina, as a great party. Also, Melville's references to the battles of Kennesaw and Allatoona probably come from The Story of the Great March, as do his references to charred Atlanta, the pines of South Carolina, and the great gathering of livestock that occurred as the troops moved through the South. Finally, the best evidence, apart from the title, that Melville used Nichols' account for his poem is his reference to the fighting cocks in stanza five of "The March to the Sea."[36] Melville writes:

> The cocks crowed from the cannon
> (Pets named from Grant and Lee),
> Plumed fighters and campaigners
> In that marching to the sea (p. 86).

The Nichols' reference to the cocks is as follows:

> The favorite pet of the camp, however, is the hero of the barnyard. There is not a regiment or a company, not a teamster nor a negro at head-quarters, nor an orderly, but has a "rooster" of one kind or another. When the column is moving, these haughty game-cocks are seen mounted upon the breech of a cannon, tied to the pack-saddle of a mule, among pots and pans, or carried lovingly in the arms of a mounted orderly; crowing with all his might from the interior of a wagon, or making the woods re-echo with his triumphant notes as he rides perched upon the knapsack of a soldier. These cocks represent

[36] Frank L. Day, "Melville and Sherman March to the Sea," American Notes and Queries, 1 (1964), 134-136.

> every known breed, Polish and Spanish, Dorkings, Shanghais and Bantams--high-blooded specimens traveling with those of their species who may not boast of noble lineage. They must all fight, however, or be killed and eaten. Hardly has the army gone into camp before these feathery combats begin. The cocks use only the spurs with which Nature furnishes them; for the soldiers have not yet reached the refinement of applying artificial gaffs, and so but little harm is done. The game-cocks which have come out of repeated conflicts victorious are honored with such names as "Bill Sherman," "Johnny Logan," etc.; while the defeated and bepecked victim is saluted with derisive appellations, such as "Jeff. Davis," "Beauregard," or "Bob Lee."[37]

The details of the remaining three stanzas also clearly come from Nichols' story. Stanzas six and seven read:

> The foragers through calm lands
> Swept in tempest gay,
> And they breathed the air of balm-lands
> Where rolled savannas lay,
> And they helped themselves from farm-lands--
> As who should say them nay?
> The regiments uproarious
> Laughed in Plenty's glee;
> . . . .
> The grain of endless acres
> Was threshed (as in the East)
> By the trampling of the Takers,
> Strong march of man and beast;
> The flails of those earth-shakers
> Left a famine where they ceased.
> The arsenals were yielded;
> The Sword (that was to be),
> Arrested in the forging,
> Rued that marching to the sea (p. 86).

Throughout his story, Nichols writes at length about the well-fed Union soldiers. Perhaps, however, the fifth chapter entitled "Foraging," provided Melville with

[37] The Story of the Great March from the Diary of a Staff Officer (New York: Harper and Brothers, Pub., 1865), pp. 76-77.

inspiration for these two stanzas. Here Nichols tells how "chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, pigs, hogs, sheep, calves, nicely dressed hams, buckets full of honey, and pots of fresh white lard" are taken by the divisions, in addition to corn and fodder.[38]

Noteworthy here also is the reference to the gathering of grain, possibly the source of lines 1-4 of stanza seven. Nichols writes:

> As the wagons pass along they are not allowed to halt but the grain or fodder is stuffed into the front and rear of the vehicles as they pass, the unhandy operation affording much amusement to the soldiers, and not unfrequently giving them a poor excuse for swearing as well as laughing.[39]

Admittedly this is grain and fodder taken from barns to the roadside, but it is a type of reaping and may have suggested that image to Melville.

While there are many accounts of burnings in Nichols' book, the seventeenth chapter is concerned primarily with a great fire in Columbia, South Carolina, and seems to have been the source for the final stanza of "The March to the Sea:"

> For behind they left a wailing,
> A terror and a ban,
> And blazing cinders sailing,
> And houseless households wan,
> Wide zones of counties paling,
> And towns where maniacs ran,
> Was the havoc, retribution? (p. 87).

[38] Nichols, p. 51.

[39] Nichols, p. 51.

The significant lines here are the last two quoted above. Nichols also refers to both revenge and insanity in the following paragraph:

> There were fires, however, which must have been started independent of the above-named cause. The source of these is ascribed to the desire for revenge from some two hundred of our prisoners, who had escaped from the cars as they were being conveyed from this city to Charlotte, and, with the memories of long sufferings in the miserable pens I visited yesterday on the other side of the river, sought this means of retaliation. Again, it is said that the soldiers who first entered the town, intoxicated with success and a liberal supply of bad liquor, which was freely distributed among them by designing citizens, in an insanity of exhilaration set fire to unoccupied houses.[40]

In addition to Day's study of Nichols' influence on "The March to the Sea," Cohen suggests that the tailpiece of this book may account for some of the details in "The Eagle of the Blue"; however, he does not believe this was Melville's principal source.[41] Actually, Melville's note indicates the source of this poem. He writes that "among the Northwestern regiments there would seem to have been more than one which carried a living eagle as an added ensign. The bird commemorated here was, according to the account, borne aloft on a perch beside the standard. . ." (p. 453). Of course, the actual perch and the bird's being chained are mentioned by Melville. He also describes the

[40] Nichols, p. 166.

[41] Cohen, "Notes," p. 255.

eagle's calm gaze. The eagle in Nichols' book is anything but calm. In fact he is vigorously attacking another defeated-looking eagle. There seems to be no correspondence between "The Eagle of the Blue" and the tailpiece in The Story of the Great March.

There are, however, at least two other poems in Battle-Pieces which perhaps were suggested by Nichols' book. In the first stanza of "The Frenzy in the Wake," Melville writes, "And the African--the imp! / He gibbers, imputing shame" (p. 87). Nichols gives many accounts of the blacks that he encounters imputing shame to the South. He records that they told Sherman how, among many other things, they had not been told of having obtained their freedom and how they were warned by their masters that the Yankee soldiers would capture them and send them to the front to be killed. Nichols also mentions the many physical injustices the blacks had received at the hands of their masters.[42]

In the last stanza of "The Frenzy in the Wake" the poet writes:

> With burning woods our skies are brass,
> The pillars of dust are seen;
> The live-long day their cavalry pass--
> No crossing the road between.
> We were sore deceived--an awful host!
> They move like a roaring wind,
> Have we gamed and lost? but even despair
> Shall never our hate rescind (p. 88).

[42] Nichols, pp. 59-60.

On several occasions Nichols makes the point that the South little dreamed that her soil would be traversed by Union soldiers; and one Georgian goes so far as to tell him, "We did not believe your army would ever penetrate so far south. . . ."[43] In short, Melville is very likely expressing Carolinian feelings when he writes that the people were deceived by their leaders. He might well have taken this sentiment from Nichols. The source of the last line of "The Frenzy in the Wake" may also have been a story recounted in The Story of the Great March to the Sea. In this story, Nichols relates how a young girl just recently ejected from her home in Atlanta assures him that the South hates the North, and nothing will ever change that fact.[44]

Finally, a poem which appears to owe part of its detail to The Story of the Great March to the Sea is "The Prison Pen." Melville writes in verse one:

> Listless he eyes the palisades
> And sentries in the glare;
> 'Tis barren as a pelican-beach--
> But his world is ended there.

And in stanza four:

> A smiting sun. No shed, no tree;
> He totters to his lair--
> A den that sick hands dug in earth
> Ere famine wasted there (p. 78).

[43] Nichols, p. 21

[44] Nichols, pp. 21-22.

In The Rebellion Record, there are two discussions of the Southerner's treatment of federal prisoners which Melville could, and might, have used as the source for this poem; however, the account in the seventh volume stresses primarily the suffering and dying of the wounded resulting from the lack of proper care. It also recounts the details of a group of prisoners being marched from Chickamauga to Richmond. The report in volume eight by a Colonel Streight is much the same.[45] In both cases the prisoners suffer from cold. Both accounts tell how soldiers are kept in an enclosure without shelter of any kind. Only in The Story of the Great March, however, is there any account of the prisoners being inclosed in a stockade, which Melville seems to be describing in stanza one. Furthermore, in neither of the other two accounts is there any reference to the soldiers digging holes to escape the elements. Nichols records, however, that "some of them had adopted the wretched alternative of digging holes in the ground, into which they crept at times."[46] Melville, of course, mentions this in stanza four; however, he makes a notable difference in his poem in the temperature. In both the other references, the prisoners suffer from the cold. In Melville's poem they suffer from the heat.

[45] Frank Moore, ed., The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1865), VIII, 451.

[46] Nichols, p. 84.

It seems, therefore, that The Story of the Great March to the Sea influenced more of the battle-pieces than has been believed heretofore. From this source Melville takes facts and ideas and weaves them into his poem. This, of course, is natural for him. To write Moby Dick, he borrowed facts relentlessly from J. Ross Browne's Etchings of a Whaling Cruise and Thomas Beale's Natural History of the Sperm Whale, to name only two known sources. Often he used these facts just as he found them. In fact, Melville was so embarrassed by the similarity of Moby Dick to Browne's work that he slighted it when he commented on his sources for this work.[47] Further, Melville borrowed facts and ideas from many sources for Clarel. For example, from one book alone, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley's Sinai and Palestine in Connection with Their History, twenty-five or more passages can be traced.[48]

The chief literary source for Battle-Pieces was The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc., edited by Frank Moore. The first eight of these volumes, covering 1860 through 1864, were available to Melville; and in his note to "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh," he cites his

[47] Howard P. Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby Dick (1949; rpt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 131.

[48] Walter E. Bezanson, ed., "Introduction," Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), p. cxi.

source as The Rebellion Record. While this is Melville's only reference to The Rebellion Record, Cohen believes it to be the source of the following poems: "Apathy and Enthusiasm," "The March into Virginia," "Lyon," "Dupont's Round Fight," "The Stone Fleet," "Donelson," "The Cumberland," "In the Turret," "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," "Shiloh," "The Battle for the Mississippi," "Malvern Hill," "Running the Batteries," "Look-Out Mountain," "Chattanooga," "The Swamp Angel," "The Battle for the Bay," "The Eagle of the Blue," and "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh."[49]

In addition to these poems, "The Battle of Stone River, Tennessee" seems to have been suggested by volume seven of The Rebellion Record. Melville's emphasis in this poem, one will remember, is the fratricidal nature of the war; and he compares the American Civil War with the English Civil War of Roses. The following account concerning the Stone River Battle is found in The Rebellion Record:

> In the rebel charge upon McCook's right, the rebel Third Kentucky was advancing full upon one of the loyal Kentucky regiments. These two regiments were brought from the same county, and consequently were old friends and neighbors, and now about to meet for the first time as enemies. As soon as they came near enough for recognition, they mutually ceased firing, and began abusing, and cursing, and swearing at each other, calling each other the most outlandish names; and all this time the battle was roaring around them without much attention from the other side. It was hard to tell which regiment would come off the victor in this wordy battle. As far as I could see,

[49] Cohen, "Notes," pp. 203-271.

> both sides were terrible at swearing; but this could not always last; by mutual consent they finally ceased cursing, and grasping their muskets, charged into each other with the most unearthly yell ever heard on any field of battle. Muskets were clubbed, bayonet met bayonet, and in many instances, when old feuds made the belligerents crazy with passion, the musket was thrown away, and at it they went, pummelling, pulling, and gouging in rough and tumble style, and in a manner that any looker-on would consider a free fight. The rebels were getting rather the better of the fight, when the Twenty-third Kentucky succeeded in giving a flanking fire, when they retreated with quite a number of prisoners in their possession. The rebels had got fairly under way, when the Ninth Ohio came up on the double-quick, and charging on their now disordered ranks, succeeded in capturing all their prisoners, besides taking in return a great many of the rebels. As the late belligerents were conducted to the rear they appeared to have forgotten their late animosity, and were now on the best terms imaginable, laughing, and chatting, and joking, and, as the rebels were well supplied with whiskey, the canteens were readily handed about from one to the other, until they all became as jolly as possible under the circumstances.[50]

Melville may have read the official records of the battle in volume six, but there is nothing in these records to suggest that those fighting in the battle were old friends and neighbors. The note in volume seven does, however, and it seems likely that this section caused Melville to interpret the battle of Stone River as he did, though there is no similarity in tone between the two works.

Melville used The Rebellion Record as a source of attitudes, facts, and ideas which he needed to "flesh out" his volume. For example, he, without doubt, believed the cause

[50] The Rebellion Record, VII, 8.

of the North to be morally right; and he celebrates this cause in Battle-Pieces. Naturally, the Northern documents in The Rebellion Record served to confirm this attitude. On the other hand, it may not be too far amiss to believe that this same work influenced his somewhat objective treatment of the Southern cause. While there seems to be more Northern information than Southern in The Rebellion Record, both are there; and Melville was, without doubt, influenced by these papers.

Melville primarily drew facts from Nichols' work which he used for descriptive detail. The facts which he took from The Rebellion Record, however, are employed with more finesse. First, if he was writing a narrative poem using the documents as a source, he took parts of several accounts and wove them together into one poem.[51] One of the best examples of this method of utilizing his source is "The Battle for the Mississippi." He drew details from each of six Union officers' reports in volume four and wove them into his poem.

Second, if he wanted to intensify drama or mood, Melville drew from one source, which he stripped of everything but its essence. For example, he used the following excerpt found in volume four of The Rebellion Record in "Donelson":

[51] Cohen, "Introduction," p. 16.

> The night of Thursday will long be remembered by the troops surrounding Donelson. The weather . . . . toward the close of the afternoon became chilly and lowering. About six o'clock a heavy rain set in. During the warmth of the day before . . . whole regiments had cast aside their overcoats and blankets, and without tents, and in a great majority of cases, occupying positions rendering a fire a sure mark for the enemy's batteries, with nothing to eat but cold rations, their condition was deplorable indeed.
>
> To add to their discomfort, when thoroughly saturated with rain, a pelting snow-storm set in, continuing all night. As can be imagined, with an enemy in front, continually annoying and annoyed, but little sleep was indulged in. The only demonstration of importance on the part of the rebels, during the night, was a formidable attempt on the right wing to obtain Taylor's battery. . . .
>
> But, cold and hungry, with garments stiff with frost, the soldiers were still hopeful and firm. . . . The universal sentiment was, as blunt Col. Oglesby expressed it, "We came here to take that fort and we will take it. . . ."[52]

This information Melville distills into the following lines:

> Night closed in about the Den
> Murky and lowering. Ere long, chill rains.
> A night not soon to be forgot,
> Reviving old rheumatic pains
> And longings for a cot.
> No blankets, overcoats, or tents.
> Coats thrown aside on the warm march here--
> We looked not then for changeful cheer;
> Tents, coats, and blankets too much care.
> No fires; a fire a mark presents;
> Near by, the trees show bullet-dents.
> Rations were eaten cold and raw.
> The men well soaked, came snow; and more--
> A midnight sally. Small sleeping done--
> But such is war;
> No matter, we'll have Fort Donelson (p. 22).

The final way in which Melville uses materials taken from *The Rebellion Record* is to have them serve as a springboard

[52] Cohen, quoted in "Introduction," p. 16.

from which to explore deeper concerns.[53] Needless to say, this utilization of his source results in the best poems in Battle-Pieces. "Dupont's Round Fight," a case in point, is a good use of facts as a starting point for interpretation. The source of this poem was probably volume four, page 106, of The Rebellion Record. Melville, however, includes few if any of the facts recorded there in his celebration of the event. The battle merely serves as a basis for his contemplation that, like all successful battles life must be regulated by laws.

Melville created all of his writings as a result of borrowing, altering, and adding. Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is no exception. He gathered his materials from some of the battle-pieces from personal experiences, some from interests and observations, some from printed materials, and some from his creative imagination. The sources for only about twenty-nine of the seventy-two poems in Battle-Pieces have been traced at this point. Some of the remainder of the verses were probably inspired by other periodical accounts of the war. Many of the others, such as "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions," and "America," are, no doubt, the products of Melville's imagination alone.

In addition to the fact that some of the battle-pieces can be traced directly to Melville's reading, at least two

[53] Cohen, "Introduction," p. 16.

other books which Melville studied prior to writing Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War appear to have influenced the volume significantly. The first of these was the 1862 edition of Matthew Arnold's Poems. Melville purchased this volume April 6, 1862, and the "Preface" and the poem "Sohrab and Rustum" may have influenced Melville to write a volume of Civil War poetry in the elegiac strain.[54] At any rate, many of the battle-pieces are definitely elegiac. Some of the elegies are occasioned by the death of a particular person. The two Stonewall Jackson poems are probably the best examples of this type, and "A Dirge for McPherson" is also an elegy of a sort. "The Martyr" is also elegiac; however, the poet is expressing not his personal feelings but the feelings of the people. Two of the most successful elegies in Battle-Pieces are "Shiloh" and "Malvern Hill," which will be treated in detail in Chapter V. Both of these poems are tributes to the average obscure soldiers who died in the two battles named in the titles of these poems. They are, however, more than that. They are like Gray's Elegy in that they use death as a means of exploring man's place in the universe. Most of the verses in the section of Battle-Pieces entitled "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial" are also elegiac in tone though they are too brief to be considered elegies as such.

[54] Walter E. Bezanson, "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry," PMLA, 69 (1954), 380.

That Melville was impressed by Arnold's discussion of the proper subject for poetry also seems possible. According to Arnold, the eternal object of poetry is human action, but this action must be "an excellent action." Excellent actions are those "which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time." The excellence of the action, Arnold goes on to add, has nothing to do with modernity nor antiquity.[55] Evidently Arnold affirmed Melville's belief that the present can be a fit subject for poetry if the emotions which are engendered by that action are timeless. Melville was poet enough to recognize that the Civil War was a proper subject for poetry.

Melville's reading of the "Preface" and "Sohrab and Rustum" may have also influenced him to include in Battle-Pieces some elements of the tragic epic. As is well known, "Sohrab and Rustum" was intended as an epic tragedy, and many of Melville's war poems seem to have more of the heroic spirit that elevates epic struggle than does "Sohrab and Rustum." If Melville hoped Battle-Pieces would be something of an American epic, he would have been in the tradition of many late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Americans

[55] Matthew Arnold, "Preface" to Poems, edition of 1853, in Selected Poetry and Prose (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 106.

who wished to produce the great American epic. He may well have believed, as did John Knapp, that the epic was the best way to preserve American history. In 1818 in "National Poetry," Knapp wrote:

> Is it [epic poetry] not the best means to acquaint the greater portion of our population with the most memorable acts, to make them familiar in their mouths and the associates of their favorite thoughts and fancies? Would it not, moreover, the most lastingly preserve the memory of those actions which afford noble instructions, are exemplars of men's ability to be greatly virtuous, and kindle in others an honourable ambition; and at the same time exhibit and tend to perpetuate the characteristic feelings and habits in which all things originated?[56]

If Melville did not know of this or similar statements concerning the American epic, he no doubt knew of Joel Barlow's attempt in 1807 to produce an American epic. He also surely knew of Longfellow's Hiawatha, which was intended as an epic. Furthermore, Melville had long been interested in the epic. Lumsford, the poet in White-Jacket, has composed entire epics; and Jack Chase in this same novel talks of and praises the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Lusiad. Earlier even than White-Jacket, in Mardi, the persona commends the works of Homer, Virgil, and Milton and comments that they have had great influence on his own muse (pp. 367-368). Needless to

56 "National Poetry," The Continuity of American Poetry, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 69.

say, the epical qualities of Moby Dick have not gone uncelebrated.

In the 1853 "Preface," Arnold highly commends the ancient epics. On the other hand, he condemns "the domestic epic dealing with the details of modern life which pass daily under our eyes."[57] He is not, however, saying that a good modern epic is not possible. He only says that the modern epics then available--Goethe's Hermann and Dorothea, Byron's Childe Harold, Carlyle's Jocelyn, and Wordsworth's The Excursion--were not to be compared with the Iliad because the action was not so great, the personages so noble, nor the situation so intense.[58] Melville certainly saw that the Civil War was a fit subject for a tragic epic despite the fact that he had no intentions of attempting to produce one in the formal sense in Battle-Pieces. At any rate, two students of Battle-Pieces have made passing references to the epical nature of the volume. Cannon says that it has the scope of epic poetry.[59] R. W. B. Lewis observes that it expands in the direction of a tragic epic, and he goes so far as to call Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War an

[57] Arnold, p. 107.

[58] Arnold, p. 108.

[59] Agnes Cannon, "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1968, p. 202.

epic.[60] While one must be cautious when applying the term tragic epic to Battle-Pieces, in the light of Melville's interest in the genre, it does not seem amiss to believe that, while not attempting to create a tragic epic in the traditional sense, he did write a volume of poetry in Battle-Pieces which is epical in scope and which attempts to produce the catharsis of the tragedy. The volume's references to Paradise Lost serve to establish a setting that reaches the totality of time and space. Melville made these references to Milton's epic in "The Conflict of Convictions," "Apathy and Enthusiasm," "Look-Out Mountain," "Armies of the Wilderness," "A Canticle," and "The Fall of Richmond." Not only is America at war but Melville's references to Satan, Raphael and Michael serve to remind the reader that this war is symbolic of the war that goes on in the universe between good and evil. Like Milton, Melville wondered why evil is allowed to exist. As much as he wanted to, he could not accept the knowledge of evil in the world without great pain. He could not justify it. It simply existed. The use of Miltonic allusions also serves to present the war as man's latter fall from whence could spring national reconciliation, which Melville sincerely hoped and pleaded for in Battle-Pieces.

[60] R. W. B. Lewis, ed., "Introduction," Herman Melville (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 26.

Since the Miltonic allusions occur in "The Conflict of Convictions," "Apathy and Enthusiasm," and "A Canticle," as well as in the more historical pieces, Melville used these allusions late as well as early in the composition of Battle-Pieces. They cannot, therefore, be explained away by saying that Melville attempted to elevate his poems to epic stature but abandoned that attempt as the poems became more symbolic. The references to Paradise Lost are a conscious attempt to elevate Battle-Pieces to an epic scope and to establish a metaphysical perspective for the poems. By creating the myth of the new fall, Melville amplifies on the theme of reconciliation, his primary concern in the volume. Melville reveals in his attempt to make his poems epical in scope that he realized that "no epic in the history of mankind was as climactic, soul-stirring, or far-reaching in its consequences, as our great American Civil War."[61] Though he did not always write in the epical voice in Battle-Pieces, Melville realized the significance of the war and tried to convey that to the American people.

In addition to its being epical in scope and theme, Battle-Pieces has other aspects in common with the epic. It is written in the epic spirit, for example. The epic poet accepts and transfigures "the general circumstances of his

[61] James I. Robertson, Jr., ed., "The Concise Illustrated History of the Civil War," special edition of "American History Illustrated."

time . . . symbolizing, in some appropriate form, whatever sense of the significance of life he feels acting as the accepted unconscious metaphysic of the time."[62] In other words, a work becomes the epic kind when it has a communal or choric quality. The author, consciously or unconsciously, knows that he speaks for a large group of people living in or near his own time.[63] Melville undoubtedly felt himself, or at least hoped to be, expressing the feelings of a large group of Americans; and, furthermore, hoped that Battle-Pieces would become a sort of scripture for the North. Battle-Pieces is also epical in that it is not predominantly elegiac nor nostalgic. It indicates faith in the beliefs or the way of life it reveals. There can be no doubt that Melville believed that America was the "world's fairest hope." He wrote in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" that "we are rapidly preparing for that political supremacy among nations, which prophetically awaits us at the close of the present century" (p. 48). Even though the war was a terrible tragedy, he hoped and prayed that the iron dome might be "stronger for stress and strain" (p. 7). Though he was optimistic about America's future, Melville, however, did have great fears

[62] Lascelles Abercrombie, quoted in E. M. W. Tillyard's The Epic Strain in the English Novel (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 15.

[63] E. M. W. Tillyard, The Epic Strain in the English Novel (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 15.

for her. He felt that one could be completely patriotic without being unrealistic about the weaknesses of one's country.

The hero of Battle-Pieces, therefore, is America herself.[64] Melville was concerned not only with what happened to the sons of North and South, but his primary concern was with the nation and what would happen to her. Like the typical tragic hero, America is neither completely good nor completely without goodness. Her flaw, slavery, a violation of moral law, brought about her downfall. Moreover, she, like the majority of tragic heroes, possesses a "hybris, a proud, passionate obsessed or soaring mind" which brings about her "morally intelligible downfall."[65] America prior to the war disregarded the significance of "man's foulest crime" (p. 3) in her midst. In her pride, she failed to heed those, Melville among them, who warned her that the evil of slavery would be atoned for. In Battle-Pieces, "America is the tragic figure, slavery the fated flaw, and war the inevitable fate. . . ."[66]

[64] Lewis, "Introduction," p. 26.

[65] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 210.

[66] Joyce Sparer Adler, "Melville and the Civil War," New Letters, 15 (1973), 99.

Like the tragedy, Battle-Pieces attempts to arouse fear and pity in its audience. Melville hoped that the vision of death which he presented would bring a new unity to his people. The poems, like traditional tragedy, take America, as well as her individual soldiers, from innocence to the loss of that innocence. It stops short, however, of proclaiming that the war has "instructed our whole beloved country through terror and pity" (p. 467). Let us pray, Melville writes, that it has done so (p. 467). Since Melville could not rest in the hope that the war had purified the country, he set about to write a tragic epic of a sort which would perhaps help to do so.

Battle-Pieces also recounts deeds of great valor or deeds requiring superhuman courage during the American Civil War. Melville commemorates or describes in one way or another twenty-seven confrontations of the war. He also celebrates or at least alludes to twelve prominent figures who performed deeds of valor during the war: Brown, Lyon, Dupont, Grant, Jackson, Farragut, Sheridan, McPherson, Sherman, Lincoln, Mosby and Lee. In addition to exalting the leaders in the war, Melville lauds the common soldiers, whether on sea or land. He also commemorates their ships and horses. Melville is in the Homeric tradition, for Homer

exalts his warriors to only a step below the gods.[67] This accounts to some degree for that strain of "hero worship" in Battle-Pieces which critics have so long deplored but have never really attempted to explain. They seem to have forgotten or they choose not to believe that Melville said that he was "never a blind adherent to the cause of the North" (p. 461), an adherent, but not a blind one.

While it may be impossible to trace direct influences of Arnold in the individual battle-pieces, Melville's reading of Arnold in 1862 confirmed and encouraged him in already partially established views. For after all, like Arnold, Melville too felt keenly the collapse of traditional Christian faith as a result of the assaults of science, higher criticism, and utilitarianism. Both felt lonely because ties with God and nature had been destroyed and man was left in what was perceived as an indifferent cosmos. Both Melville and Arnold realized that the old social system was being destroyed by industrialization and middle-class democracy. Both also searched for individual meaning and purpose in life, at the same time realizing that little true consistency would be found.

[67] Harry E. Hand, "'And War Be Done': Battle-Pieces and Other Civil War Poetry of Herman Melville," Journal of Human Relations, II (1962), 332.

If Melville used various ideas from Arnold, that is not surprising, for he often took straws and made haystacks. This is perhaps what happened as a result of his reading Arnold's Poems. It either established or confirmed his belief that the present can be a subject for poetry, reinforced him in the elegiac strain, and perhaps convinced him to expand his war poems in the direction of the tragic epic. The volume did not affect the poetic form of the battle-pieces, but it almost certainly influenced Melville's direction in his portrayal of the war.

As we shall see in detail in Chapter IV of this study, Melville was not only influenced in a general sense by his reading of Arnold, but he was also greatly influenced in March and April of 1862 when he read Madame de Staël's Germany, a volume of literary criticism. His reading of this volume helped Melville to confirm some ideas concerning poetry that he had been developing during his year of extensive reading of poetry. The volume also seems to have had a direct influence on his prosody from Battle-Pieces on. At any rate, his markings of Germany give us our best insight into Melville's ideas concerning poetic technique, as we shall see shortly.

Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War reveals that Melville had definite theories and techniques about composing a work, just as he had about which genre a work should be

written in. Though he probably decided to commemorate the war in verse sometime before he began to write, he composed most of the pieces after the war ended. The volume grew in scope and objectivity until it resembled nothing that other authors of the Civil War had produced, for Melville recognized the "lineaments of the fundamental"[68] in the war. His concept of the war as a tragic epic enabled him to portray the war in its symbolic significance, its universality, and its complexity. Indeed, Melville's major achievement in Battle-Pieces is creating an awareness of the universality of the war. It was nothing short of genius that enabled Melville to take his personal experiences and impressions, weeklies, newspaper articles, paintings and reports and produce a volume of poetry that speaks for all time and for all people.

[68] Cohen, "Introduction," p. 19.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVELATION OF THE ORGANIC UNITY

Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is often regarded as that volume of Herman Melville's poetry from which certain pieces, such as "The March into Virginia," "Shiloh," and "Malvern Hill," are anthologized. Unfortunately, this approach to the volume ignores, or slights, two of Melville's poetic theories that provide a basis for approaching the collection in a manner different from the way it has been studied heretofore. First, Melville's theory of architectonics demands that Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War be viewed as a totality. The individual poems in Battle-Pieces fit together to form an integrated whole so that the complete volume achieves poetic significance and philosophical meaningfulness. Thus an analysis of the parts of the volume to the exclusion of the whole does not lead to a proper understanding of it nor an appropriate appreciation of it. Instead, a study of the entire volume is required. The architectonic theory, then, stresses, first of all, and primarily, a synthetic approach to Battle-Pieces,

This is not to say that the individual poems of the volume are without significance. The principle of architectonics applies to the individual poems in the collection as well as to the entire volume. The individual poems must be considered in their totality, not line by line, not image by image, not word by word, if they are to be truly meaningful. Yet, the parts of the poem must be perfectly articulated if the whole poem is to be united as a whole. The organic unity of Battle-Pieces is, therefore, dependent upon its perfectly articulated parts also. The articulation of the parts of Battle-Pieces is related to the second of Melville's theories about poetry: the organic theory of art. This theory grows out of and overlaps with the architectonic theory. This theoretical perspective sees poetic form growing out of the artist's content. Just as the whole collection of poetry grows out of the parts, so, too, the technical aspects of a poem are controlled by the ideas and moods of the poem. The fusion of these two elements, the architectonic and the organic, in Battle-Pieces makes it a volume having durability as well as organic unity. The former provides unity for the whole collection and its individual poems while the latter insures that the parts are perfectly articulated.

Melville subscribed to the architectonic theory before he wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War as well as while

he was composing the volume. Yoomy in Mardi, for example, considered his best composition a song full of songs. Melville's other volumes of poetry, like Battle-Pieces, are unified around a central theme which bears out the notion that a good collection of poetry is made up of individual pieces on a single topic. John Marr and Other Sailors is unified by its sea theme and imagery; Timoleon, by its themes of art and isolation; and Weeds and Wildings with A Rose or Two, by its pastoral theme. Clarel, Melville's 18,000-word narrative poem, concerns a modern pilgrim's search for truth in the Holy Land.

Melville's marginalia concerning his theories about the importance of structure are also revealing. While he was working on Battle-Pieces, he marked the following statement in the 1853 "Preface" to Arnold's poems:

> What distinguishes the artist from the amateur, says Goethe, is Architectonicè in the highest sense; that power of execution, which creates, forms, and constitutes: not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration.[1]

That same year, Melville marked in Madame de Staël's Germany that

> Nothing is so easy as to compose what are called brilliant verses; there are moulds ready made for the purpose; but what is very difficult, is

[1] Walker Cowen, "Melville's Marginalia," Diss. Harvard 1966, I, 290-291.

> to render every detail subordinate to the whole, and to find every part united in the whole, as well as the reflection of the whole in every part.[2]

Melville's marginalia often indicate agreement with what he was reading and when these concepts are applied to Battle-Pieces, one can conclude that Melville was concerned with the overall effect of the collection of poems on his readers.

There is further evidence in the "Preface" to Battle-Pieces which bears out the observation that the volume should be read as an organic unit. Melville writes that the seventy-two poems

> . . . were composed without reference to collective arrangement, but, being brought together in review, naturally fall into the order assumed.
>
> The events and incidents of the conflict--making up a whole in varied amplitude, corresponding with the geographical area covered by the war--from these but a few themes have been taken, such as for any cause chanced to imprint themselves upon the mind.[3]

Melville here stresses the fact that although the poems were not composed in order, they do make up a whole, for they correspond with the geographical area covered by the war. Melville does portray the war geographically by following

[2] Cowen, I, 284.

[3] Herman Melville, "Preface," Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 446. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

with his poems the four phases of the Northern plan of attack: the blockading of the coast, the division of the South by gaining control of the Mississippi River backbone, the division of the South by Sherman, and the strangulation of the South by the capture of Richmond.[4] Thirty-nine of the seventy-two poems in Battle-Pieces are also dated and arranged in chronological order, which gives added continuity to the volume. Melville, concerned with the impact of the entire collection on his readers, wanted to produce a comprehensive picture, not just of the chain of events that made up the war but of its entire ramifications, immediately for the North but ultimately for the South and for all of mankind as well. For this reason, Melville, who in retrospect could believe that he was not a blind adherent to the Northern cause (p. 461), could write:

> The aspects which the strife as a memory assumes are as manifold as are the moods of involuntary meditation--mood variable, and at times widely at variance. 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. (p. 446).

Melville is not saying that Battle-Pieces does not have unity. He is explaining that a complete picture of war

[4] Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1956), p. 427.

cannot present only one side. This is not to say that a person cannot take sides in a war. Melville definitely did. As we have already seen, he dedicated Battle-Pieces to the memory of the three hundred thousand Northern soldiers who died during the war (p. 446). He also believed, as he writes in the "Supplement," that "patriotism is not baseness, neither is it inhumanity" (p. 462). He felt, however, that the

> Northern writer, however patriotic . . . must revolt from acting on paper a part any way akin to that of the live dog to the dead lion . . . yet it is right to rejoice for our triumphs, so far as it may justly imply an advance for our whole country and for humanity (p. 463).

Melville further explains in the prose "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces, which Vincent believes is "an explicit statement of the message which is implicit in the series of poems preceding it,"[5] why he left in the volume some of the battle-pieces which do not necessarily reflect his own personal views. He writes:

> I have been tempted to withdraw or modify some of them, fearful lest in presenting though but dramatically and by way of poetic record, the passions and epithets of Civil War, I might be contributing to a bitterness which every sensible American must wish at an end. So, too, with the emotion of victory as reproduced on some pages, and particularly toward the close. It should not be construed into an exultation

[5] Howard P. Vincent, ed., "Notes," Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 460.

> 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. Zeal is not of necessity religion, neither is it always of the same essence with poetry or patriotism (p. 463).

What Melville can be construed to be saying in these remarks in Battle-Pieces is that the volume must be considered as a whole, a complete, realistic picture of the war. While it is true that he believed the cause of the North was right and while he mourned for those who died defending that cause, at the same time he does not pretend that any one poem in the volume reflects the complexity of his personal beliefs. His purpose in writing the volume was manifold, as we have seen; but one objective was to convince the North that, however noble its cause, war is ever the result of evil. Melville felt that if his people understood the real cause of the war they might more readily be drawn to reconciliation with the South, for they shared the common bond of being a part of a universe where no clear dichotomy exists between good and evil. Melville did not pretend that he felt no "moods variable and at times widely at variance" (p. 446) about the causes, events, and result of the war. Through his volume he hoped that the North, and ultimately all Americans, would concede that no issue ever has only one side.

Melville's theory that the parts of a work are combined into an integrated whole so that the work has meaning, not

through its parts, but through its total organism makes the strange physical structure of <u>Battle-Pieces</u> meaningful. In the first edition, the first poem in the collection, "The Portent," stands alone. It is not listed in the table of contents, and Melville did not correct this in his copy of the first edition as he would have had it been a printer's error. The poem comes immediately after the table of contents, is set in italic type and is separated from the remaining poems by a blank verso. Sixty-nine of the remaining poems are divided into two groups. The first fifty-three are the battle-pieces proper. Included in this group are three poems, other than "The Portent," which are prefatory in theme to the battle-pieces. These three poems, "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions," "Apathy and Enthusiasm," reflect Melville's fear that Americans comprehend little of the significance and impact of the impending war, and thus they set the tone for the entire volume.

Beginning with "The March into Virginia," Melville commences to record such events of the war as the battles of Bull Run and Ball's Bluff, Dupont's expedition against Port Royal, South Carolina, the sinking of old whalers in Charleston's port, the surrender of Fort Donelson, the sinking of the <u>Cumberland</u>, the fight of the <u>Monitor</u> and <u>Merrimac</u>, the battle of Shiloh, the victory of Admiral Farragut on the Mississippi, the Malvern Hill battle, the contest at Antietam,

the victory at Gettysburg, the draft riots in New York City, the battles of Lookout Mountain and Chattanooga, the Wilderness campaign, the capturing of Mobile Bay, Sherman's march through the South, the fall of Richmond, the surrender at Appomattox, the enthusiasm at the end of the war, Lincoln's assassination, the dissolution of the armies, and the release of rebel prisoners. Interspersed with these poems are the eulogies, or "hero worship" poems as they are frequently called, such as "Lyon," "Sheridan at Cedar Creek," "The Victor of Antietam," and "A Dirge for McPherson." There are also undated miscellaneous pieces, such as "On the Photograph of a CorpsCommander," "The Swamp Angel," "In the Prison Pen," "The College Colonel," and "The Eagle of the Blue," included with the battle-pieces. In addition, there are eleven general poems after the last of the pieces that describe specific events of the war. The poems, such as "'The Coming Storm,'" "The Apparition," and "On the Slain Collegians," once again remind Melville's readers of the universal significance of the war while "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh" and "Magnanimity Baffled" are pleas for forgiveness for the South. "A Grave near Petersburg, Virginia" and "Formerly a Slave" are expressions of hope, not only that the war is forever over but that it has accomplished some good, however slight. Finally, "America," the last poem in the battle-pieces section, reveals what the poet trusts America has learned about herself and is

a statement of his expectations for her future. It is further a statement of Melville's philosophical perspective that evil lies just under the surface. "America" also embodies Melville's hope that the tragedy of the war has taken America from naive innocence to wisdom and maturity.

Melville played down the actual sequence of events of the war by intermingling general poems with the ones in which he recorded actual occurrences of the war. He did this because he wanted to emphasize the emotional attitudes of the war as well as the actual circumstances of the conflict.[6] In fact, as we have seen, Melville says in the "Supplement" that he presented "dramatically and by way of poetic record, the passions and epithets" of the war (p. 463). The inclusion of such poems as "Misgivings," "The Conflict of Convictions," "'The Coming Storm,'" and "The Apparition" serves to elevate Battle-Pieces far above the "patriotic gore" of much of the poetry that was written about the Civil War during the 1860's because they are assertions that Melville saw the war as more than a partisan conflict that involved only one nation in the world. He saw it as a symbol of universal dualism that entangles all men and all nations.

The next section of Battle-Pieces is comprised of sixteen poems labeled "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial."

[6] William J. Kimball, "The Melville of Battle-Pieces: A Kindred Spirit," Midwest Quarterly, IV (1969), 309-310.

These poems are generally very brief pieces, unified by their elegaic tone and traditional prosody. They differ from the preceding poems which extol soldiers in that they are written in commemoration of groups of soldiers instead of individuals. Two poems, which come at the end of this group of poems, "Commemorative of a Naval Victory" and "The Returned Volunteer to His Rifle," unlike all the others in this section, return to Melville's concern with the duality of existence and to his hope that the war is truly over.

The remaining poems in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War are three long ones entitled "The Scout toward Aldie," "Lee in the Capitol," and "A Meditation." Each of these poems is set off from the rest of the collection and from each other by blank versos. The title of each appears on a page by itself. These poems are capstones for the entire volume, for they reiterate Melville's most important concerns. In "The Scout toward Aldie," the philosophical perspective of Battle-Pieces is emphasized as Melville explores man's position in the universal scheme of things and how he is to react to the knowledge of his situation. Myths such as the myth of regeneration and the myth of initiation are treated here. Both "Lee in the Capitol" and "A Meditation" are statements of Melville's concern as a citizen. While the former is a plea for Congressional magnanimity to the South, the latter is a petition for personal forgiveness and

re-establishment with the South. In addition, as we shall see shortly, these two poems also reiterate the important philosophical concerns of _Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War_.

Unless one studies the physical construction of _Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War_ in the light of architectonics, the poems in the volume appear to have been very haphazardly arranged, and Melville's statement that he placed a harp in a window and let the breeze play the tune appears very apt (p. 446). On the other hand, when one studies the structure of the entire volume carefully, one is reminded that Melville actually says that he "seems" to have placed a harp in the window. This is one of the few times that Melville's ironic spirit breaks through in _Battle-Pieces_, for the structure of the volume has little meaning except for those who realize the importance that Melville attached to the concept of architectonics and who realize, therefore, that the structure of the volume supports its main themes.

Not only are the poems in _Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War_ important to the whole, but so are the "Notes" and the "Supplement." Melville includes several different types of notes in the volume. Some are factual, some explanatory, and some cite sources. Some are notes in which Melville attempts to refrain from angering his readers by explaining why he writes as he does. These notes, therefore, are

especially important to the whole volume, for they contribute to the development of the theme of reconciliation. Melville felt, however, that all the notes were important to a complete understanding of the whole volume, for he says in the "Supplement" that were he "fastidiously anxious for the symmetry of this book, it would close with the notes" (p. 460). One of the notes which represents those that are merely factual is the note to "The Muster" which reads:

> According to a report of the Secretary of War, there were on the first day of March, 1865, 965,000 men on the Army pay-rolls. Of these, some 200,000--artillery, cavalry, and infantry--made up from the larger portions of the veterans of Grant and Sherman, marched by the President. The total number of Union troops enlisted during the war was 2,668,000 (p. 457).

Several of Melville's notes are explanations of his choosing that particular subject. In the note on "The Victor of Antietam," Melville writes that "whatever just military criticism, favorable or otherwise, has at any time been made upon General McClellan's campaigns, will stand . . ." although "unmerited disparagement of the man . . . must necessarily die out. . . ." The reason Melville chose to write on McClellan, however, was that "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" (pp. 450-451).

In the note to the "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh," Melville cites the source of his information. He writes that "the incident on which this piece is based is narrated in a newspaper account of the battle to be found in the 'Rebellion Record'" (p. 456). This is the only note in which Melville cites the source for a poem.

There are also several notes written in the interest of reconciliation in which Melville explains when and why he deviated from historical facts. For example, Melville did not intend that his treatment of Mosby in "The Scout toward Aldie" be taken as factual. In the note to this poem, he explains that the association of Mosby with spirits and spells is a presentation of how the people, not he, feel about Mosby. He writes:

> In the verse the name of Mosby is invested with some of those associations with which the popular mind is familiar. But facts do not warrant the belief that every clandestine attack of men who passed for Mosby's was made under his eye, or even by his knowledge.
>
> In partisan warfare he proved himself shrewd, able, and enterprising, and always a wary fighter. He stood well in the confidence of his superior officers, and was employed by them at times in furtherance of important movements. To our wounded on more than one occasion he showed considerate kindness. Officers and civilians captured by forces under his immediate command were, so long as remaining under his orders, treated with civility. These things are well known to those personally familiar with the irregular fighting in Virginia (p. 459).

In other words, Melville had a realistic view of Mosby, but realism does not necessarily make good poetry, especially

ballad-like poetry, so Melville takes the liberty of making Mosby into a folk hero. In this note he acknowledges Mosby's true character, but he writes about him in the poem as at least some people perceived him.

Likewise, in the note to "The Frenzy in the Wake," Melville attempts to make it clear that the sentiment expressed in the poem is purely dramatic. His note reads in part:

> 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.
> Though the sentiment ascribed in the beginning of the second stanza must, in the present reading, suggest the historic tragedy of the 14th of April, nevertheless, as intimated, it was written prior to that event, and without any distinct application in the writer's mind. After consideration, it is allowed to remain (p. 455).

One can conclude then that Melville's notes contribute to the main concern of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War--reconciliation--for Melville tries to explain that the most inflammatory poems in the collection are purely dramatic and should be considered as such.

The poetry and notes of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War are followed by what Melville calls a supplement. This essay, which R. W. B. Lewis calls "one of the noblest essays ever written by an American,"[7] continues to amplify the

[7] R. W. B. Lewis, ed., "Introduction" to Part III, "The Civil War Poet," in Herman Melville (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 314.

primary theme of Battle-Pieces. First, Melville asks the North to realize that the South, though wrong, was led into the war by some "designing men" and by some "honestly-erring men" who caused them to believe that their constitutional rights were being denied by the North. Melville also wants the North to see that the South's military endeavors were honorable and that her leaders were often valiant and deserving of respect. Let the North admit too, he goes on, that the triumph of the North "was won not more by skill and bravery than by superior resources and crushing numbers" (p. 464). Because of these and other factors, Melville asks the North to forget her bitterness and to work to bring about a just reconstruction of the South.

Next, Melville addresses himself to the question of the blacks. He believed that they should be treated with kindliness and sympathy, but he did not believe that rights should be given to blacks and denied whites. This, he fears, would "provoke, among other of the last evils, exterminating hatred of race toward race" (p. 465). His ultimate hope is that "our institutions. . . may in time convert and assimilate to good all elements thrown in, however originally alien" (p. 465). Although it is true that Melville speaks only to whites in the "Supplement" and that he does not discuss justice for the slaves, it does not necessarily follow that there is a contradiction between the poetry and the

"Supplement."[8] No doubt, with hindsight we can say that Melville failed to address himself sufficiently to the cause of the Southern black. On the other hand, his chief concern is the rebuilding of the Union, not the future of the slave. Given his time, Melville seems to be enlightened concerning blacks and the turn that the relationship of blacks and whites would take if the North did not move carefully in its reconstruction plans.

Melville also asks that national victory not be turned into oppression for the South. This, he states, would lead to bitter division in the North. He goes on to add that when the Southern seats in Congress are reoccupied, the "maintenance of Congressional decency . . . will rest mainly with the North. Rightly will more forbearance be required from the North than the South, for the North is victor" (p. 466). Some, Melville goes on, do not feel that this is an issue since the test oath excludes anyone from Congress who took part in Secession. But, the test oath can and probably will be altered. Melville does not feel that such a move would involve any violation of "the principles of democratic government" (p. 467). Finally, Melville concludes the "Supplement" with the prayer "that the great historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without

[8] Joyce Sparer Adler, "Melville and the Civil War," <u>New Letters</u>, 15 (1973), 112-113.

instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity; and may fulfillment verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity" (p. 467).

Fearful that the readers of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War would not get the message that he intended from the collection--and indeed many did not--Melville wrote the supplement to the poems. He admits, as we have already seen in another context, that the book should have ended with the notes. On the other hand, he says that "the times are such that patriotism--not free from solicitude--urges a claim overriding all literary scruples" (p. 460). Indeed Melville seems to have believed that "truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges"[9] and that

> The profounder emanations of the human mind . . . these never unravel their own intricacies, and have no proper endings; but in imperfect, unanticipated, and disappointing sequels (as mutilated stumps), hurry to abrupt intermergings with the eternal tides of time and fate.[10]

Melville, therefore, uses the "sequel" in Battle-Pieces to reinforce the truth he is trying to present, much as he

[9] Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative), ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Seals, Jr. (Chicago: The University Press, 1962), p. 128.

[10] Herman Melville, Pierre or, The Ambiguities, ed. Henry Murray (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), p. 166. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

does in "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno." The "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces is important as it reinforces Melville's main concern in the volume. One can conclude with Vincent, therefore, that

> Written in a spirit of profound compassion and humane tolerance--much in the spirit and nobility of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address --it is an explicit statement of the message which is implicit in the series of poems preceding it. No doubt the document, having suffered the usual neglect of Melville's writing, will eventually be much better known --perhaps to assume its rightful place among the "American Scriptures."[11]

Because of Melville's careful planning and construction, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War achieves organic unity. A work of art, however, has not met all the requirements of the principles of architectonics unless its parts are perfectly articulated. What is true for the book of verses is also true for each individual poem in the volume. Melville's ultimate concern, therefore, for the individual poem was the effect of the poem in its entirety. As Melville's marking of Madame de Staël's comment that it "is very difficult to render every detail subordinate to the whole, and to find every part united in the whole, as well as the reflection of the whole in every part"[12] can be applied to his belief in architectonics, it can also be used to support his concept

[11] Vincent, "Notes," p. 460.

[12] Cowan, I, 284.

that the technical aspects of a poem are controlled by the governing ideas and moods of the poem.

Just as one can find evidence in Melville's prose that confirms his theory of architectonics, so one can determine Melville's concepts of the organic theory of art from the prose written prior to Battle-Pieces. The earliest statements of Melville's concern with form and its relationship to subject matter, for instance, are found in Mardi. In Chapter 137, "Babbalanja and Yoomy Embrace," Babbalanja tells Yoomy that ". . . not a song you sing, but I have thought its thought; and where dull Mardi sees but your rose, I unfold its petals and disclose a pearl."[13] The discerning reader of poetry must look beyond mere externals. Form is, of course, of utmost importance; for one approaches content through it, but it is the "pearl" or the content that the reader seeks.

The poet, Lombardo, with whom it is common to identify Melville as poet, explains what he believes to be the relationship of the technical aspects of form and content. In Chapter 180, "Some Pleasant, Shady Talk," Babbalanja defends Lombardo's Koztanza when Abrazza charges that it is "wholly wanting in unities." He says:

[13] Herman Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, III (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 437. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

> No, your Highness; for though Lombardo abandoned all monitors from without; he retained one autocrat within--his crowned and sceptered instinct. And what, if he pulled down one gross world, and ransacked the etherial spheres, to build up something of his own--a composite:--what then? matter and mind, though matching not, are mates; and sundered oft, in his Koztanza they unite:--the airy waist, embraced by stalwart arms.
>
> . . . there are things infinite in the finite; and dualities in unities. Our eyes are pleased with the redness of the rose but another sense lives upon its fragrance. Its redness you must approach, to view: its invisible fragrance pervades the field. So, with Koztanza. Its mere beauty is restricted to its form: its expanding soul, past Mardi does embalm (p. 597).

Here Melville expresses the concept, which he later expresses in his poem entitled "Art," that all "artistic endeavor" depends on reconciling opposites. The opposites that unite successfully in <u>Koztanza</u> are the "airy waist," thought, embraced by "stalwart arms," form. It is interesting in the light of <u>Battle-Pieces</u> that Melville equates form with masculinity. All of his works are strong and robust; especially is this true of <u>Battle-Pieces</u>. When Melville says in the section from <u>Mardi</u> quoted above that "its mere beauty is restricted to its form," he is not proving that he had little interest in poetic form. Just prior to writing the statement that one part of us, our eyes, is pleased with the outward appearance of the rose, the redness, he wrote that another part of us responds to the fragrance, the content. In order for one to smell the fragrance, the rose must be there. At the same time, it is the fragrance of the rose that "pervades the field."

In addition to what Melville says about poetic form in Mardi, some poems are themselves included to prove that form emerges from theme. Lack of rhyme, Yoomy says, produces a "rude, clanging thing, dissonant as if the north wind blew through it" (Mardi, pp. 435-436); and he proceeds to quote a poem that proves his point:

> Our clubs! our clubs!
> The thousand clubs of Narvi!
> Of the living trunk of the Palm-tree made;
> Skull breakers! Brain spatterers!
> Wielded right, and wielded left;
> Life quenchers! Death dealers!
> Causing live bodies to run headless (p. 436).

At the same time, Yoomy can put his audience to sleep with his "most musical poetry." He sings:

> Her bower is not of the vine,
> But the wild, wild eglantine!
> Not climbing a moldering arch,
> But upheld by the fir-green larch.
> Old ruins she flies:
> To new valleys she hies;--
> Not the hoar, moss-wood,
> Ivied trees each a rood--
> Not in Maramma she dwells,
> Hollow with hermit cells (p. 501).

The next volume in which Melville makes statements about the relationship between poetic technique and content is Battle-Pieces. In fact, there are more comments about poetic method in Battle-Pieces than in any of Melville's other poetry. In "Dupont's Round Fight," for example, Melville stresses the importance of form. He sees a direct parallel between durability, order, and artistic principles; therefore, he writes:

> In time and measure perfect moves
> All Art whose aim is sure
> Evolving rhyme and stars divine
> Have rules, and they endure (p. 15).

Melville makes it clear here that art, rhyme, the universe, or a fleet of ships are successful only as they are governed by law. In Melville's opinion, "law is an Idea which can be embodied at all levels and in all items of the great chain of being."[14] Rules are essential in all areas of life if order is to be maintained. The poem is itself a picture of regularity as Melville uses the ballad stanza to support his thesis in the poem that law is an ordering device for man. The only break in rhythm is the extra unstressed syllable in "Unity" in line ten. This is fitting, however, since Melville wishes to imply that Unity, not the Union forces, was responsible for the success of the battle against Forts Walker and Beauregard on Port Royal Sound, South Carolina, on November 7, 1861. Melville also capitalizes "Law," along with "Right" and "Unity," in this poem to emphasize its importance.

One of several battle-pieces which illustrates Melville's theory that form is important because it imposes order on chaos[15] is "The Armies of the Wilderness." "The

[14] William H. Shurr, The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), p. 15.

[15] Agnes Cannon, "Melville's Concepts of the Poet and Poetry," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1968, p. 211.

Armies of the Wilderness," an antiphonal poem of nineteen stanzas, extends the Wilderness battle beyond the single incident and makes it a metaphor of the entire war.[16] In the last stanza of the poem, Melville concludes that

> None can narrate that 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--(p. 69).

The word <u>rhyme</u> here must refer to <u>stanza</u> because the poem is basically regular in both its rhyme scheme and basic structure. By writing the poem in regular form, Melville attempts to create order out of chaos. He definitely believed in:

> Not magnitude, not lavishness,
> But Form--the Site;
> Not innovating wilfulness,
> But reverence for the Archetype.[17]

Believing in the importance of form, Melville often worked within traditional poetic forms. For example, he uses the pseudo-Pindaric ode form in "The Conflict of Convictions," the literary ballad form in "The Scout toward Aldie," the ballad stanza in "Dupont's Round Fight"; and "The House-Top" is a blank verse Coleridgean conversation poem. Melville also uses the short epitaph, the epigram, and the gnomic stanza. Conversely, he experiments with long dramatic

[16] Hennig Cohen, "Notes," <u>The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville</u> (New York: Yoseloff, 1963), p. 245.

[17] Herman Melville, <u>Collected Poems of Herman Melville</u>, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 248.

monologues, character sketches, and panoramic narratives. In his use of these and the various other stanza forms in Battle-Pieces, Melville is, of course, in the tradition of the English Romantic poets that he studied prior to writing Battle-Pieces.

In addition to using traditional stanzaic patterns, Melville also insisted, generally, on regular rhyme and rhythm in Battle-Pieces. His basic line of verse contains four iambic feet though he often follows the iambic tetrameter line with a line of iambic trimeter. He definitely believed that a poem should have a basic regularity; and since he felt the necessity to write in a regular rhythm, iambic tetrameter is an appropriate one, for it provides a masculine, mechanical, matter-of-fact, colloquial cadence and is especially suited, therefore, to the subject of war and death as found in Battle-Pieces.[18] Melville always used the tetrameter line for the serious statements in his poetry. Generally speaking, also, Melville was a rhyme-above-all poet, and poor rhymes are often one of his more serious problems as a poet. For example, in the poem "Lyon," he rhymes fly on, scion, iron, sigh on, die on and Lion. In "The Victor of Antietam," he rhymes bran-man-van-McClellan-ran-began and day-assay-way-bay-sway-may-lay-ray.

[18] Melville would no doubt agree with Northrop Frye (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 251) that a four-stress line is inherent in the structure of the English language.

Conversely, in some poems, such as "Formerly a Slave," his rhyme words are unhackneyed: mild-child, fate-antedate, core-lore, shine-benign.

Melville's use of traditional rhythm and rhyme schemes goes back ultimately to his concern with the importance of form. At the same time, he was probably influenced by the poetry in The Rebellion Record, which, as we saw earlier, was his major source for Battle-Pieces. Most of the poems included in The Rebellion Record were written in common meter and followed a rigid rhyme scheme. Moreover, just prior to writing Battle-Pieces, Melville had carefully studied the poetry of Spenser, Tennyson, Hood and Moore, who are also very exact in their rhythm and rhyme patterns. Finally, Melville indicated agreement with Madame de Staël's statement that "rhyme is a modern discovery; it is connected with all our fine arts, and we should deprive ourselves of great effects by renouncing the use of it. It is the image of hope and memory."[19]

Many of the poems in Battle-Pieces are also traditional in diction. For example, one immediately notices the archaisms and poeticisms in poems such as "The Stone Fleet" where Melville writes, "Four were erst patrician keels" (p. 16). He also consistently uses ye, thee, and thou, and

[19] Cowen, I, 190.

at times he ends his verbs with th or eth as in "he lieth in his blood--" (p. 93) in "The Martyr." The eagle of the blue "exulteth in the war" (p. 80). Other archaic terms, such as erst, nathless, anon, finny, glaive, joyance, and ere, to name a few, appear. One also finds such poeticisms as Albion (p. 37) and Afric (p. 70) in Battle-Pieces. There are several explanations for Melville's preference for archaisms and poeticisms. He used them, perhaps, in order to extend his vocabulary,[20] or by using these terms Melville may have wished to remind the nation of the peaceful era before the war. Another feasible explanation is that he absorbed his archaisms and poeticisms from his favorite authors--Shakespeare, Burton, Browne and Milton. More important, however, his use of traditional diction, as well as traditional stanza forms and meters, emphasizes that he did not believe in "innovating wilfulness." He rejected "effete Romantic diction,"[21] yet at times he used even more archaic diction than did the Romantics. He was imprisoned to a degree by the traditional trappings of poetry because of his strong belief in the importance of form.

[20] Henry F. Pommer, Milton and Melville (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1950), p. 39.

[21] Newton Arvin, "Melville's Shorter Poems," Partisan Review, 16 (1949), 1035-1036.

Although Melville had, as we have seen, a great reverence for form, he was also an advocate of the organic theory of art; therefore, he was free to a certain extent to deviate from traditional poetic forms and expressions when he felt that his subject matter demanded that he should. In fact, he deliberately chose, as Newton Arvin observes, "to forego writing a poetry of enhanced musicality, incantory diction and symbolism" similar to that of Poe, Whitman, and Lanier and to develop a "colloquial, prosaic, anti-poetic verse."[22] This colloquial, prosaic, anti-poetic style is especially fitting for the subject of war. Melville also believed anti-poetic verse appropriate for dramatic poetry in general, which he considered Battle-Pieces. His comment on Madame de Staël's statement that ". . . the effects of poetry depend still more on the melody of words than on the ideas which they serve to express"[23] was that "this is measurably true of all but dramatic poetry and perhaps narrative verse."[24] This statement helps account for the fact that in Battle-Pieces Melville works within the framework of traditional forms but changes his stanza pattern, rhyme, rhythm and diction at will to produce the effect that he wishes the poem

[22] Arvin, "Shorter Poems," p. 1035.

[23] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), II, 647. All future references to the volume will use the shortened form, Leyda, the volume, and the page.

[24] Leyda, II, 647.

to have. In fact, in Battle-Pieces, Melville explains that he uses anti-poetic verse in his war poetry because of the subject at hand. He writes in "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," for example:

> Plain be the phrase, yet apt the verse,
> More ponderous than nimble;
> For since grimed War here laid aside
> His painted pomp, 'twould ill befit
> Overmuch to ply
> The rhyme's barbaric cymbal (p. 39).

Melville felt that the war represented, as he later wrote in Clarel, a "sad arch between contrasted eras" (p. 422). He sensed that whereas the American style of life before the war was characterized, for the most part, by a simple agrarianism, the post-war era would be an age of increasing industrialism and materialism. That Melville regretted the passing of what he considered a heroic way of life for an impersonal one is seen in the companion pieces "The Temeraire" and "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight." The essentially lyrical "The Temeraire" stands in marked contrast to "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight." The fight of the Monitor and the Merrimac does not lead the "Englishman of the Old Order" in "The Temeraire" to conclude that the new methods of war are effeminate. Man has learned a "deadlier lore" (p. 39). "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" reveals that Melville was not just being sentimental about the loss of chivalry, as symbolized by the

destruction of the Temeraire. What he does regret is that in the new era war will be more effective than it was in the days of chivalry. This is true because war is "beyond the strife of fleets heroic" and is now "deadlier, closer, calm 'mid storm" (p. 40). The soldiers have become more deadly than they were in previous eras, for "they are now but operatives" (p. 40). They are not governed by passion: "All went on by crank, / Pivot and screw, / And calculations of caloric" (p. 40). Melville is glad, however, that the new methods of war make it "less grand than Peace, / And a singe runs through lace and feather" (p. 40).

Unlike "The Temeraire," which is basically regular, "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" is the epitome of Melville's anti-poetic style. Fittingly enough, as we have seen, Melville begins the poem with a comment on the technique he uses. Since war is showing "the streaks of weather" (p. 40) and since it has laid aside its painted pomp, Melville feels that a verse description should be appropriate to this type of warfare. The phrases are plain and ponderous in all of the poem, especially in stanzas one and three. The war goes by "crank, pivot, screw, and calculations of caloric." The effect of this prosaic, monosyllabic, technological vocabulary is to create here, as well as in others of the Battle-Pieces, blunt factuality or unromantic precision. There is little rhyme in the poem

except in the second and sixth lines of each stanza; and the words that do rhyme have contrary associations, such as nimble, cymbal; heroic, caloric; fates, plates; fans, artisans; weather, feather. For example, "fans of banners" are associated with pre-mechanized war, while "artisans" refer directly to persons skilled in mechanical procedures.

As we have seen, Melville approved of Madame de Staël when she said that rhyme is the "image of hope and memory" and that the poet would deprive himself of an important technique if he abandoned it. About the same time, however, he underlined and checked the following statement in Richard Hooper's introduction to Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad*: "Besides methinks sometimes to beguile the ear with running out and passing over the rhyme as no bound to stay us in the line where the violence of the matter will break through."[25] Melville also indicated his approval, near the time of the previous marking, of Henry Kirke White's statement that "harmonious modulations, and unvarying exactness of measure, totally precluding sublimity and fire, have reduced our fashionable poetry to mere sing-song."[26] Of course, these marks cannot conclusively prove that Melville consciously deviated from true rhyme because he

[25] Quoted in Cannon, p. 219.

[26] Sidney Kaplan, ed., "Introduction," *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), p. xiii.

believed a lack of it indicated a violent subject matter, but this is in keeping with his organic theory of art.[27] It is also true that in Battle-Pieces, Melville often establishes a rhyme and rhythm pattern in the opening lines of a poem and then deviates from that pattern when his subject matter indicates that he should. "Battle of Stone River, Tennessee," for example, is fairly regular with its four stanzas of eight lines followed by a couplet refrain. In the last stanza, however, regular rhyme becomes near rhyme, and the stanza is enjoined with the couplet to point up the essence of the poem:[28]

> But where the sword has plunged so deep,
>   And then been turned within the wound
> By deadly Hate; where Climes contend
>   On vasty ground--
> No warning Alps or seas between,
>   And small the curb of creed or law,
> And blood is quick, and quick the brain;
>   Shall North and South their rage deplore,
>   And reunited thrive amain
>   Like Yorkist and Lancastrian? (p. 49).

Another poem where Melville allows the "violence of the matter" to show through is "Malvern Hill." In this instance, however, it is not the deviation from rhyme but from rhythm that indicates the violence of the subject matter. In the first six lines of each stanza, except the first two lines of stanza three, the syllabic count is regular; for Melville

[27] Leyda, II, 649.

[28] Cohen, "Notes," pp. 234-235.

wishes to establish a mood of forgetfulness and tranquility. In the last four lines of each stanza, however, he evokes the horror of the battle at Malvern Hill by breaking into irregular rhythm, as well as by the grim images he creates. As is often the case, Melville prefaces this change in rhythm by a dash:

> Ye elms that wave on Malvern Hill
> In prime of morn and May,
> Recall ye how McClellan's men
> Here stood at bay?
> While deep within yon forest dim
> Our rigid comrades lay--
> Some with the cartridge in their mouth,
> Others with fixed arms lifted South--
> Invoking so
> The cypress glades? Ah wilds of woe! (p. 44).

In many cases, also, Melville freely intersperses trochaics in his iambic-tetrameter lines. This variation produces a roughness and gives strength and character to a verse, such as the following one from "'The Coming Storm'":

> All feeling hearts must feel for him
> Who felt this picture. Presage dim--
> Dim inklings from the shadowy sphere
> Fixed him and fascinated here (p. 94).

Melville's "violence, distortions and wrenchings" in versification are not the result of ineptitude but of his "conscious effort to develop a nervous, dramatic, masculine style."[29] They are also, more importantly, a result of Melville's effort to produce a verse form that was suitable

[29] Robert Penn Warren, "Melville the Poet," Kenyon Review, 3 (1946), 210.

for recording the "great historic tragedy" of his time. Melville was poetically capable of writing Battle-Pieces in the lyrical style of "Monody," "Iris" and "The Marchioness of Brinvilliers." By not doing so, he reveals his belief in the principles of the organic theory of art. His application of the organic theory of art gives the individual poems in Battle-Pieces unity as form emerges from content. The poems are, thus, perfectly articulated even when they are not completely successful in that Melville always seeks to adapt his form to his content. Melville, even though he had great respect for traditional poetic forms and techniques, developed a rough masculine style of poetry that was appropriate to recording a war because he believed that form should be adequate to content. Herein lies one of the strengths of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War that sets it above most of the war poetry of Melville's contemporaries.

Not only did the organic theory of art serve to free Melville from regular rhythm and rhyme to some extent, but it also helped him at certain times to forego the use of poetic and archaic diction. As we have seen, he used technological terms in "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" to emphasize the mechanical nature of the Civil War, and he used mathematical terms in "Dupont's Round Fight" to emphasize regularity and form. In order to create a colloquial, anti-poetic style, which he felt would adequately

portray the terror of the American Civil War, Melville also used terms from areas such as business and law as well as from industry and mathematics. In addition to using prosaic terms, Melville's use of precise, realistic detail contributes to his prosaic poetry.[30] Even in highly traditional poems, such as "Lyon," one finds lines like "We bled in the corn" (p. 13). In "Donelson," Melville even gives the weight of the cannon ball that smashed into one of the Northern ships, as well as details about who was killed and how, when he writes in that poem:

> The Louisville's wheel was smashed outright.
> A hundred-and-twenty-eight-pound ball
> Came planet-like through a starboard port,
> Killing three men, and wounding all
> The rest of that gun's crew,
> (The captain of the gun was cut in two) (p. 25).

Melville's use of a prosaic vocabulary as well as prosaic detail in Battle-Pieces grew out of his desire to create a poetry fitting to the subject of war. War demands a vigorous, down-to-earth vocabulary just as it demands realistic detail. Melville was poet enough to know this.

As was stated early in this chapter, architectonics and the organic theory of art are interrelated. While architectonics provides organic unity for the entire collection, it also implies that each individual poem must be conceived as a whole. The individual parts of the volume are unified

[30] Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction," Selected Poems of Herman Melville (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 15-16.

because their technique grows out of the meaning with which the author wishes to reach his audience. The framepieces of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War aptly demonstrate both the concept of architectonics and the organic theory of art. This is true, first of all, because these pieces--"The Portent," "America," "The Scout toward Aldie," "Lee in the Capitol" and "A Meditation"--preview and reiterate the major themes and perspectives of Melville, American and philosopher-poet. They are also representative of the poetic technique of both the prosaic Melville and the traditional Melville. The framepieces of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War convincingly illustrate that in this volume the details are subordinate to the whole; each part is united in the whole, and the whole is reflected in every part.[31]

Melville's purpose in the first poem in Battle-Pieces, and ultimately his most important concern in the volume, is to convince his readers that the war is not what it appears to be; it is a symbol. John Brown's hanging then is used in "The Portent" as a representation of the conflict between what appears to be true and what is actually true. In essence, just as the war is a symbol, so Brown's hanging is a symbol.

At the time of Brown's hanging in 1859, no one could really know, of course, what far-reaching consequences this

[31] Cowan, I, 284.

hanging would have on the country. Melville uses the two stanzas in this poem to contrast what seems true with the future reality. In line 3 of stanza one, John Brown's death appears to have cast a shadow merely on Shenandoah or the South; but the first three lines of stanza two point out that hidden in this event "is the anguish none can draw"; for the future veils its face (p. 3). In fact, even in the last line of stanza one, Melville alludes to the fact that, like Brown's wounds, this event will have far-reaching effects on the whole country which will never be erased completely. Melville shrewdly makes Shenandoah represent the entire nation by saying, "the cut is on the crown." While Brown had a literal cut on his head, Melville means far more than that by this line. He wishes to convey the idea that Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry was really an attack on civil law and order in the American system. This interpretation is borne out by the fact that in line 2 of stanza one, Melville says that Brown's "hanging from the beam, / Slowly swaying . . ." is the result of law--not only the law of physics which demands that a suspended body sway but also the law of the land which demands that an insurrectionist be hanged.[32] Several other poems in Battle-Pieces, such as "Dupont's Round Fight," "The Victor of Antietam" and "Lee in the Capitol," also emphasize Melville's position that the destruction and

[32] Shurr, p. 17.

pain of the war result in part from the breakdown of law. At the same time, while John Brown's hanging was within the regularity of the law, it resulted in overwhelming irregularity and breakdown of law as war usually does. Therefore, that which often appears to be true is far from being reality.

"The Portent" also emphasizes the conflict between idealism and realism that is examined in Battle-Pieces. There is little doubt that when John Brown and his twenty-one followers captured the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, they believed that their insurrection would result in freedom for at least some of the slaves in America; and at his death, many people, especially in the North, saw Brown as a martyr who, Christ-like, died to deliver those who were held in slavery. Ralph Waldo Emerson went so far as to say that Brown's death had made the "gallows as venerable as the cross."[33] In the first stanza of "The Portent," Melville seems to support this image of Brown because the reference to the "cut on the crown" serves to remind one of Christ's crown of thorns. The reference to the stab wounds in line 7 further reinforces Brown as a Christ figure.[34] In the

[33] Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted from New York Daily Tribune, in Ralph L. Rusk's The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 402.

[34] William Bysshe Stein, The Poetry of Melville's Late Years: Time, History, Myth, and Religion (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), p. 8.

second stanza, however, Melville revokes this Christ image by picturing Brown's head covered by an executioner's cap instead of a saint's hood. If Brown had been a Christ-like deliverer, he would not have appeared in a cap, which was actually placed there by the executioner, and which at best serves to reduce Brown to a mere criminal or at worst to reduce his "appearance to that of a scarecrow."[35] Whatever Brown is idealistically believed to be is not what he is. He is not a Christ-like deliverer: he is, in fact, a prophet of doom. Melville creates the prophet-image by the use of the "streaming beard," which is the mark of the traditional prophet and indicates that a storm is imminent. This image is further substantiated by the refrain "Weird John Brown," for weird means "having the power to control the fate or destiny of men. . . ."[36] Brown becomes now the tool of fate and prophecy though he is a blind seer blinded by the cap,[37] perhaps a symbol of his idealism. Brown is further linked to "disaster rather than deliverance" when Melville calls him "the meteor of the war" (p. 3). Though Brown is blinded to reality by his idealism, his death provided a glimpse of

[35] Stein, p. 9.

[36] Dan Vogel, "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon," Diss. New York University 1969, p. 149.

[37] Cohen, "Notes," p. 206.

the approaching reality of war and is a symbol that the war is more than it appears to be.

Thematically, "The Portent" is a fitting preface for Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War because its concerns are a direct outgrowth of Melville's most important concern in Battle-Pieces--the nature of reality--that "inextricable interweaving of good and evil which is central in Melville's thinking."[38] As was mentioned earlier, Melville had at least three reasons for writing this volume of poetry. First, he wished to record and commemorate the war; second, he wanted to bring about reconciliation between North and South; and third, he wanted to acquaint his readers with what he believed to be the nature of reality; for the Civil War was, for Melville, a symbol of the "stress of Universal Dualism,"[39] a mirror of the battle between good and evil. He felt that if he could convince his audience of this, national reconciliation would soon follow. In "The Portent," Melville established the fact that John Brown's hanging is not just what it appears to be nor just what it is wished to be. By the same token, Melville is saying that the Civil War is not what it appears to be nor what it is wished to be.

38 Willard Thorp, "Introduction," Herman Melville: Representative Selections (New York: American Book Company, 1938), p. lxxxvii.

39 Vogel, p. 117.

Melville's prosody in "The Portent" also makes it an appropriate prefatory poem to the collection of battle-pieces. First of all, as he does throughout the volume, Melville welds form and content. The poem has no regular meter, but with the exceptions of lines 5 and 7 in stanza two, the syllable count is identical in the corresponding lines of both stanzas. The first four trochaic lines in each of the two stanzas are set against three basically iambic concluding lines. The trochaic rhythm of the first four lines enhances the kinetic imagery of Brown's body "slowly swaying." The change to iambic rhythm in the last lines of each stanza serves to "wrench" the emphasis of the poem from John Brown's actual death and turn it to what that death symbolizes. This rhythm pattern serves to emphasize the regularity of Brown's hanging. The two stanzas also reflect each other in the corresponding phrases in each stanza, such as "hanging from the beam" and "hidden in the cap" found in line 1 of stanzas one and two, the repetition of Shenandoah and John Brown in both stanzas, and the interlinking of the rhyme in both stanzas.

There are differences of opinion about the rhyme scheme in "The Portent." William Shurr writes in his recently published study of Melville's poetry entitled The Mystery of Iniquity that Melville fully intended law, draw, Shenandoah, war, and more to rhyme not only so that "The Portent" would

be strengthened as a unit but also because Melville wished to establish his regional pronunciation as normative.[40] This theory would, to some degree, help one account for the fact that while the rhyme in Battle-Pieces is sometimes perfect as it is in the first seven lines of "Misgivings," it can deteriorate into the fie on, die on, fly on, iron, zion rhymes of "Lyon." On the other hand, the use of assonantal, consonantal, identical and eye rhymes in "The Portent" helps to create intensity as Melville further pits regularity against irregularity.[41] In other words, the rhyme of the poem supports Melville's belief that while Brown's death is within the regularity of the law, it will work far-reaching irregular effects on the country.

"The Portent," one can conclude, provides a fitting overview of the entire collection of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War. Immediately upon introduction to the volume through this poem, one is uneasily aware that here is a volume of Civil War poetry that presents no pat attitudes, no pat ideas, no pat conclusions. Indeed its very prosody is strange and unusual. The reader of "The Portent" also senses at once that its author wishes him to look beyond the obvious so that he can understand what Melville believes are the real issues behind the American Civil War. As he

[40] Shurr, p. 9.

[41] Cohen, "Notes," p. 203.

often does in this collection, Melville begins with an actual event, the hanging of John Brown, and then moves to what this event symbolizes for the country and ultimately for all mankind.

Just as "The Portent" reflects the perspective of Melville the philosopher-poet on the war, so do "America" and "The Scout toward Aldie." Here Melville becomes explicit that the war really symbolizes the conflict between good and evil, and he also suggests how man is to respond to this duality of existence. "America," coming at the end of the battle-pieces proper, and "The Scout toward Aldie," the first of three long poems at the end of the volume, contribute to the architectonics of the volume since they are reiterations of Melville's concern for the progress of all men.

While resistance without defiance, acceptance without surrender is the theme of "America," this poem also reiterates many of the themes of the entire collection. For example, in the first stanza, the mother goddess, America, rejoices in the young innocence of her children. This emphasis of course reminds one not only of the optimism that America as a young country revelled in, but it also reminds one of the young soldiers who marched "lustily / Unto the wars" (p. 14), failing to realize that only by

confronting death would they become men.[42] They had yet to see that war is really a grim affair, not a game.

In the second stanza, the children of America have begun to fight. Here the persona admits that the real cause of the war is not clear--"And over the spear-point of the shaft / I saw the ambiguous lightning play" (p. 106). This line does not mean that the war may be either a creative or a destructive force.[43] One simply cannot be sure which side represents right, for this line is followed by "valor with Valor strove" (p. 106). Both sides are equally courageous. In the meantime, Mother America is completely horrified "at the fury of her brood" (p. 106). She becomes so horrified that she slips into a trance-like sleep--synonymous of the depths to which America has sunk. In this trance-like sleep, presented in stanza three, America sees the truth about the cause of the war:

> The terror of the vision there--
> A silent vision unavowed
> Revealing earth's foundation bare,
> And Gorgon in her hidden place (p. 106).

Mother America saw that active evil is a real part of the universe and that evil is ever ready to manifest itself in the form of hate, war, and death. In the final stanza,

[42] Alan Lebowitz, Progress Into Silence: A Study of Melville's Heroes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 6.

[43] Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 237.

however, the poem presents how Mother America reacts to the reality that she has seen:

> But from the trance she sudden broke--
> The trance, or death into promoted life;
> At her feet a shivered yoke,
> And in her aspect turned to heaven
> No trace of passion or of strife--
> A clear calm look. It spake of pain,
> But such as purifies from stain--
> Sharp pangs that never come again--
> And triumph repressed by knowledge meet,
> Power dedicate, and hope grown wise,
> And youth matured for age's seat
> Law on her brow and empire in her eyes
> So she, with graver air and lifted flag;
> While the shadow, chased by light,
> Fled along the far-drawn height,
> And left her on the crag (p. 107).

She broke into "promoted life" with "no trace of passion or of strife" (p. 107). In other words, she reacts with true wisdom, armed neutrality. She had broken the "yoke" of innocence and "matured for age's seat" (p. 107). The triumph she feels at having come through the war is tempered by her knowledge that evil in the form of war may break out again at any time; therefore, though the light chases the shadow away, Mother Goddess is left standing "on the crag" (p. 107).

If "America" is an attempt by Melville to prove that America will emerge from the war purified and "stronger for stress and strain," it fails because

> There is too great a leap from the convincing vision of stanza three, and no signs of how this deep terror is to be banished. If the vision had been such a terrifying one, then how does it function in reasserting peace and fertility and how can they endure? "Light" is brought in to vanquish the shadow (1.47), but it is a light which

> does not have its source within the universe of the poem.[44]

If, on the other hand, this poem is a statement of how America and her sons are to see the real truth of the war--that it is not really a matter of which side is right--but that it is merely a manifestation of the evil that lies just under the surface, not only in man but in the entire universe, the poem is successful. It also succeeds as a statement of how man is to react to his knowledge about himself and the world. Finally, it is successful as a statement of Melville's hope that America will look to the future, not with naive optimism but with a clear, realistic understanding of her potentiality in the light of her knowledge about man and the universe. "America" is a picture of America as she matures from an innocent, optimistic girl to a poised, mature, wise matron who realizes the truth about life and her future as a nation. Like Ishmael, she has the ability to see the truth and to emerge with "hope grown wise."[45]

The first of the three long poems at the end of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is "The Scout toward Aldie," a ballad in which Melville portrays with vigorous narrative

[44] Shurr, p. 23.

[45] Herman Melville, Moby Dick or The Whale, ed. Wayne C. Booth (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), p. 107. All future references to this volume will appear in the text.

and vividly realistic description the gallantry, lurking danger, and sudden ambush that accompanies a Union cavalry expedition as they attempt to capture John S. Mosby, a Southern guerilla leader who inflicted heavy losses on the Federal soldiers in Virginia, south of the Potomac. As we discovered earlier, Melville was especially interested in Mosby and had been on an expedition looking for him when he visited his cousin, Colonel Henry Gansevoort in April, 1864. Gansevoort finally took Mosby's camp on October 14, 1864, but Mosby was never captured.[46] This poem is a strange tribute to Mosby although Mosby is not actually a character in the poem. Melville uses his name as a refrain in all 110 stanzas and this does get monotonous.[47] It does serve, however, to make Mosby, as far as the other characters in the poem are concerned, an omnipresent symbol of hidden danger and evil: "As glides in seas the shark, / Rides Mosby through green dark" (p. 117). His being ascribed supernatural characteristics further emphasizes that Mosby is a symbol of the universal evil that lurks just under the surface. The poem as a whole is also a study of how man learns the truth about how he is to react to the problem of evil in himself and the world once he recognizes it. The

[46] Vincent, "Notes," p. 459.

[47] Richard Harter Fogle, "Melville's Poetry," Tulane Studies in English, 12 (1962), 81.

main question in all of Melville's works is "what should be man's response to his situation in the universe, where evil is omnipresent and where man by the involuntary act of birth becomes inevitably involved?"[48] This search for the proper response is nearly always represented in Melville's works by a journey, and "The Scout toward Aldie" represents that quest in Battle-Pieces. Like Ahab setting out to find Moby Dick, the scouting party goes into the wilderness to find Mosby, a rebel guerilla. Melville uses the journey to symbolize the search for truth, and Mosby is encountered as is Moby Dick. Like Moby Dick, instead of being defeated, he maims and eludes his potential destroyers. Even the leader of the scouting party, like Ahab, is killed. Seelye goes so far as to say that Mosby is Moby with an s.[49]

Mosby seems at times to represent the inscrutable, as does Moby Dick. The party knows how he operates. Just where he operates is another matter. In a sense, he seems omnipresent as well as omnipotent. In fact, the poet hints that Mosby is a god. The major in the party believes that Mosby will have to be killed with a silver bullet. Melville further contributes to the idea of Mosby's deity by calling him "a satyr's child" (p. 117).

[48] James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962), pp. 4-5.

[49] John Seelye, Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 134.

The questors in this poem are intriguing. They are not monomaniacal as are Taji, Ahab, or Mortmain.[50] In the young colonel, we have a questor more like Starbuck or Flash. He is serious about his quest for Mosby, but like Starbuck he refuses to acknowledge the gravity and danger of the quest. Like Flash, also, he is dead to anything like an apprehension of any possible danger from encountering Mosby. In his opinion Mosby is but a species of a magnified mouse. The colonel dies just as he had lived: "careless of Mosby he lay--in a charm!" (p. 142). He, therefore, dies without having been enlightened about the nature of reality.

The questor who accompanies the colonel is a grizzled major. That this man is an experienced veteran not only of the civil conflict but also of the universal conflict between good and evil is evidenced by his scar, "kind Mosby's Christmas gift" (p. 129). His wisdom and calm are evidenced by his constant smoking; for, whether on Battle-Pieces, Moby Dick, or "Herba Santa," Melville always relates smoking to contemplation, wisdom, and peace. Unlike Ahab, who throws his pipe away, the major clings to his. Although the major too is serious about his quest for Mosby, his real concern is with far graver problems, such as man's inhumanity to his fellow men, which is represented by man's allowing his evil

[50] Seelye, p. 134.

nature to control him. In stanza thirty-four, the major sees a bit of rope in a tree; and the following conversation with the colonel ensues as he asks:

> ". . . but what's that dangling there?"
> "Where?" "From the tree--that gallows-bough;"
> "A bit of frayed bark, is it not?"
> "Ay--or a rope; did we hang last?--
> Don't like my neckerchief any how;"
> He loosened it: "O ay, we'll stop
> This Mosby--but that vile jerk and drop!"
> (p. 125).

Unlike the colonel, the major realizes that Mosby, representing absolute truth about good and evil in the universe, will be taken only as the result of much careful seeking. Like Ishmael and Rolfe, the major believes in the quest; but, also like them, he had come to realize long before this search that what bit of insight into absolute truth man gains comes not by enthusiasm but by reflection.

The hospital surgeon, who goes on the quest "sashed in sacred green," sitting lightly on his horse because he thinks evil will not touch him, little dreams that the end of the quest will find him with more insight into the truth of evil than he would ever have believed possible. Those Melvillian characters that death affects most profoundly--Ishmael, Benito Cereno, Clarel, and the narrators in "Cockle Doodle Do," and "Bartleby"--are those who have the greatest potentiality for learning all of the ultimate truth about the conflict of evil and good that man is capable of learning.

Indeed, the surgeon may now be well on the way to becoming an Ishmael or a major; for he

> Was changed; late bright-black beard and eye
> Looked now hearse-black; his heavy heart,
> Like his fagged mare, no more could dance;
> His grape was now a raisin dry (p. 144).

The surgeon, for better or for worse, has learned that evil in the form of death touches all. He will never be the same. Some people like the major have already seen a little into the mixture of good and evil in the universe. Some like the surgeon will come to see; and some, like the young colonel, never see. This poem, therefore, reiterates Melville's cosmic view and once again shows his mythopoetic imagination at work.

"The Scout toward Aldie," like Battle-Pieces in its entirety, represents the search for truth about the good and evil in man and the universe. It also delineates how man is to react to his knowledge once he gains it. He is not to ignore it as does the colonel. He is not to fly in the face of it as do Taji, Ahab, and Pierre. Like the major, Babbalanja, White-Jacket, Redburn, Ishmael, Rolfe, and Vere, he must come to accept, with armed neutrality, what he learns. Armed neutrality or poise in the face of the knowledge that evil is present in the universe comes when one realizes that good, as well as evil, is also present in all people and in all things. Armed neutrality allows man to resist the evil that he sees in himself and others. It is,

however, resistance without defiance. It is also acceptance without surrender.

Both "The Scout toward Aldie" and "America" are successful thematically and as framepieces, for they represent pertinent themes of many other poems in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, such as the archetypal journey from innocence to maturity, from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to armed neutrality. Although, technically, neither poem is especially noteworthy, both create unforgettable images and present undeniable truths.

The next frame poem of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is "Lee in the Capitol." First of all, "Lee in the Capitol" summarizes Melville's position as citizen on the way the nation and its leaders should react toward the South during the reconstruction period. This poem is Melville's version of what happened when Lee appeared before the Reconstruction Committee of Congress, February 17, 1866. Just why Melville dated the poem 1865, we do not know. It could have been simply an error since Melville was correct in dating all the other poems. On the other hand, he probably dated it a year early because he wished to make Battle-Pieces as timely as possible.[51] At any rate, Melville also takes poetic license in his interpretation of what happened when Lee appeared before the committee. Actually, Lee responded to

[51] Cohen, "Notes," p. 292.

the questions he was asked with only short, dignified answers. Melville presents him as delivering a fairly long plea against vengeance. The poem is a moving portrait of a noble man who has put down his sword and become head of a seminary:

> No word he breathes of vain lament,
> Mute to reproach, nor hears applause--
> His doom accepts, perforce content,
> And acquiesces in asserted laws;
> Secluded now would pass his life,
> And leave to time the sequel of the strife (p. 146).

These lines are especially interesting in view of the fact that it has been recently discovered that on June 13, 1865, Lee filed for pardon and citizenship, and on October 2, 1865, swore the Amnesty Oath which was necessary if he were to regain his citizenship. Some historians have long maintained that Lee would not have taken this oath. After five years of searching, however, Elmer O. Parker, assistant director of the Old Military Records Division of the National Archives in Washington, D. C., and a descendant of a Confederate soldier, found the oath upon which Lee's restoration to citizenship depended in a cardboard box of unindexed, uncatalogued papers.[52] Melville perhaps had read somewhere that Lee had taken the oath or perhaps he correctly analyzed Lee's character.

[52] "Lee's Pardon Not Necessary?" The Tennessean [Nashville], Sunday Ed., 27 July 1975, p. 2B, cols. 1-5.

Lee went to appear before the committee, and Melville pictures him as passing blackened homes destroyed by war. This scene adds to the portrayal of Lee as a sad, pitiful, but admirable hero, who chose wrongly but is still to be honored as being a good man; for throughout the poem, Melville has Lee attribute the war, as well as his part in it, to fate. Melville then alludes to Sulla, a Roman general who was known for exacting terrible vengeance on those he conquered. "Shall the great North," Melville asks, "go Sulla's way? / Proscribe" prolong the evil day? / Confirm the curse? infix the hate?" (pp. 151-152). After his speech in which Lee pleads for humanity toward the South, the Senators dismiss him, "moved, but not swayed" (pp. 151-152). Melville implies that the North will continue to follow the philosophy of Sulla which will threaten America with continued hatred and violence.[53]

Melville, the poet "who despite the darkness of evil and fate" still hoped for the progress of all men,[54] could not end his poem on this realistic, yet pessimistic note; so he adds the following contradictory stanza to "Lee in the Capitol":

[53] Shurr, p. 24.

[54] Harry E. Hand, "'And War Be Done': Battle-Pieces and Other Civil War Poetry of Herman Melville," Journal of Human Relations, II (1962), 339.

> But no. Brave though the Soldier, grave his plea--
> Catching the light in the future's skies,
> Instinct disowns each darkening prophecy:
> Faith in America never dies;
> Heaven shall the end ordained fulfill.
> We march with Providence cheery still (p. 152).

One possible explanation for this cheery stanza is that Melville knew more or less how the North was going to react to the South but did not want to admit it. Perhaps this is an ironic ending since Melville, though he did not himself support this position, knew that the North was going to react to the South out of instinct, not logic.[55] More than likely, however, Melville wrote the poem at one time and attached the positive ending to it when he fitted Battle-Pieces together, since he was deliberately trying to convince the North to be reconciled with the South. Melville's viewpoint in "Lee in the Capitol" is essentially that of the "Supplement" in which he states that "no consideration should tempt us to pervert the national victory into oppression for the vanquished" (p. 466). This poem is a fitting framepiece, for it reiterates one of Melville's most important themes in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War--the South must be forgiven and received back into the Union so that the war will truly be over.

Melville realized, however, that reconciliation of North and South could not be truly effective if that

[55] Cohen, "Notes," p. 293.

reunification was only brought about by an act of government. Eventually, and ultimately, that reconciliation would have to be personal. "A Meditation" is a plea for personal and individual love and respect between Yankee and Rebel. It is "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" (p. 153).

First of all, the poet reminds the reader that deep within man there is a natural sense of brotherhood which is horrified by civil strife:

> How often in the years that close,
> When truce had stilled the sieging gun,
> The soldiers, mounting on their works,
> With mutual curious glance have run.
> From face to face along the fronting show,
> And kinsman spied, or friend--even in a foe.
>
> What thoughts conflicting then were shared,
> While sacred tenderness perforce
> Welled from the heart and wet the eye;
> And something of a strange remorse
> Rebelled against the sanctioned sin of blood,
> And Christian wars of natural brotherhood.
>
> Then stirred the god within the breast--
> The witness that is man's at birth;
> A deep misgiving undermined
> Each plea and subterfuge of earth;
> They felt in that rapt pause, with warning rife,
> Horror and anguish for the civil strife (p. 153).

This sense of brotherhood was not strong enough to stop men from fighting. On the other hand, it was not destroyed; for even during the war, the poet points out that enemies forgot

their differences and talked about common experiences, shared a biscuit, or nursed a foe. There is a darker side, the persona admits. While there is a natural sense of brotherhood, if that sense is not to be overridden, the Unionist is going to have to make an effort to forget that "the South's the sinner!" (p. 155) lest he become a worse offender than the South. Melville concludes the poem with a reiteration of a favorite theme--that the brave and courageous Southerner is due mercy in direct proportion to the valor with which he fought. "A Meditation" is an obvious framepiece, for it closes Melville's Civil War volume of poetry with a restatement of his concern that the North be reconciled to the South on a personal as well as a national level.

Just as "Lee in the Capitol" and "A Meditation" reiterate Melville's concern as citizen for the re-establishment of North and South in a stable union, they can also be seen as expressions of Melville's philosophical perspective. "Lee in the Capitol," for example, can be read as a statement that man must accept his fate, the intermingling of good and evil, with a "so-be-it" attitude. Lee does not refuse to accept the outcome of the war nor does he rail at it. He accepts it, not without pain, but without rancor. So, Melville believes, every man is to accept the truth about the duality of existence. "A Meditation" further extends Melville's metaphysical comment on the war. Melville

makes it clear that there is little to comfort man about the doubleness of things. God, if He is there, is responsible for evil or He is silent; Nature contains the shark as well as the seasonal cycles; Time provides healing, but it also produces more war; History reduces war to legend, but its pages are strewn with bodies. Ultimately, therefore, man can find most comfort in his brotherhood with his fellow men. Even though man, like God, Time, Nature, and History, also has a dual nature, his knowledge of his affinity with his fellow men can enable him to understand something of why his brother acts as he does; and thus he can enjoy a kinship, a spirit of comradeship, with his brothers that provides comfort.

Although it failed to do so, Melville wished _Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War_ to make a formidable impression on his country. He attempted to achieve impact with this volume, not only by what he had to say but how he said it. His emphasis on architectonics led him to be concerned, first, with the total impact of his entire volume and, second, with the individual whole poem. Viewed, therefore, only poem by poem or line by line, _Battle-Pieces_ is not effective. On the other hand, if one views the volume from "The Portent" to "A Meditation," the poem is imposing, stately, and stirring. Not excluding Whitman, Melville is the only Civil War poet not only to attempt to record the war in all its

aspects but also to give it a philosophical, universal perspective. His sense of architectonics helps him to do this successfully "and to often produce a poem conventional and commonplace in form but concealing an intellectual power not fully realized in its individual context. Thus there are few anthology-pieces; but the collective impact is a formidable one."[56] While at times he is not successful in freeing himself from poeticisms, archaisms, rhythm and rhyme, Melville does write a poetry that is "a fit metaphor for the mechanism and impersonal death"[57] which he thought characterized the American Civil War. He was the only poet writing about the Civil War to attempt to do so and, thus, must be credited with greatness. Because of its organic unity, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War emerges as a formidable collection of Civil War poetry.

[56] Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust (London: John Lehmann, Ltd., 1951), p. 210.

[57] David Hibler, "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: Melville and Whitman on the Civil War," The Personalist, 50 (1969), 136.

CHAPTER V

THE DELINEATION OF THE CYCLICAL NATURE

Not only is Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War significant because of its structure, but it is also of import because of what it reveals about Herman Melville's response to the Civil War. Melville's complex and multi-faceted reaction to the war is revealed in Battle-Pieces by three cycles of poems. The key not only to these major groups in Battle-Pieces but also to the ambiguities of the volume is found on the inscription page of the first edition of Battle-Pieces which reads:

> Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, by Herman Melville, patriot and citizen, who was concerned for the welfare of the Republic and all of its sons; and by Herman Melville, poet, who despite the darkness of evil and fate, still hoped for the progress of all men.[1]

It was Herman Melville, patriot, who considered the North the symbol of right and the South the symbol of evil, who toyed with the idea that God had allied Himself with the Union, and who unabashedly worshipped at the feet of the Northern soldiers. It was Herman Melville, citizen, however,

[1] Harry E. Hand, "'And War Be Done': Battle-Pieces and Other Civil War Poetry of Herman Melville," Journal of Human Relations, II (1962), 339.

who deplored the destructive and divisive effect of the war, who was concerned for the entire nation, and who pleaded for forgiveness and reunification of North and South. It was Herman Melville, philosopher-poet, who saw the war as a manifestation of the duality of existence, probed the causes and results of that duality, and investigated how man is to react to that duality in himself and his world once he recognizes it. This cycle is the most significant of the three; for Melville realized, as he wrote in the "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces, that "to treat of human actions is to deal wholly with second causes."[2] Melville's ultimate wish was to be the poet of progress and humanity. He did not simply want to be the Brady of the Civil War.[3] Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War delineates, then, the perspectives of Herman Melville, patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet on the American Civil War.

At the same time, the fact that Melville saw the war from three different points of view accounts for the ambiguities and complexities found in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War. For example, in his role as patriot, Melville can laud the North and her cause. Conversely, as citizen,

[2] Herman Melville, "Supplement," Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 464. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[3] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 267.

he understands the point of view of the South and can treat her, her heroes, and her part in the war objectively. As philosopher-poet, Melville knows that because of the duality of existence, neither North nor South can be considered completely right nor wrong. Just as he cannot be sure that one side represents good and the other evil in the war, neither can Melville be simplistic in his views about the war in general or about its causes.

Although Melville's seeing the war from several different perspectives makes the volume ambiguous on certain points, the seventy-two poems in Battle-Pieces are unified thematically by the three cycles of thought. No clear trichotomy exists between the three cycles in the sense that all three are found throughout the volume and in that some of the poems which fit into one cycle according to the topic being discussed fall into another cycle because of the manner in which Melville treats them. Finally, and most important, the three cycles merge into each other because all of them contribute to Melville's overriding concern in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War--reconciliation.

The poems in the Patriot's Cycle are those in which Melville proclaims that the Northern cause is the cause of right, those in which he says or implies that God does or will assist the North in the war, and those in which he eulogizes soldiers, primarily Northerners, who fight in the

war. The poems in this cycle, especially the eulogies, are the most emotional ones in the volume. One of the poems in which Melville clearly declares that the North is the defender of right is "Inscription for Graves at Pea Ridge, Arkansas":

> We here who warred for Man and Right,
> The choice of warring never laid with us
> There we were ruled by the traitor's choice (p. 108).

In "Gettysburg: The Check," the patriot writes that "pride was repelled by sterner pride / And Right is a strong-hold yet" (p. 56). The Confederate ship in "The Battle for the Bay" is "strong as Evil, and bold as Wrong" (p. 75). This ship is also referred to as a "man-of-sin" (p. 75). This allusion to 2 Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" causes the reader to infer that the Confederate ship is controlled by satanic forces. The Southern soldiers are also referred to in this poem as "traitors" (p. 74) and "bad ones" (p. 75). The most complete statement in Battle-Pieces that the South is the evil one is the entire poem entitled "Look-Out Mountain: The Night Fight":

> Who inhabiteth the Mountain
> That it shines in lurid light;
> And is rolled about with thunders,
> And terrors, and a blight,
> Like Kaf the peak of Eblis--
> Kaf, the evil height?
> Who has gone up with a shouting
> And a trumpet in the night?

There is battle in the Mountain--
  Might assaulteth Might;
'Tis the fastness of the Anarch,
  Torrent-torn, an ancient height;
The crags resound the clangor
  Of the war of Wrong and Right;
And the armies in the valley
  Watch and pray for dawning light.

Joy, joy, the day is breaking,
  And the cloud is rolled from sight;
There is triumph in the Morning
For the Anarch's plunging flight;
God has glorified the Mountain
  Where a Banner burneth bright,
And the armies in the valley
  They are fortified in right (p. 58).

When the poet begins, one is tempted to think that the persona is referring to the mountain as the abiding place of the Lord, for God is often cited in the Bible as dwelling in a holy hill. Very shortly, however, one realizes that the allusion is ironical, for Lookout Mountain, a plateau located near Chattanooga, Tennessee, was held by Confederate forces; and this poem celebrates their being driven from the mountain in November, 1863. The persona is very clear that Lookout Mountain, while it is inhabited by the Southern army, is the residence of evil. It is compared to Kaf, the residence of Eblis, who is the chief of the fallen Angels, according to the Koran. In addition, at the base of Kaf is the Arabian hell.[4] The South is further identified as the evil one in stanzas three and four in this poem when the poet alludes to her as the "Anarch." In Paradise Lost, Chaos who

[4] Hennig Cohen, ed., "Notes," The Battle-Pieces of Herman Melville (New York: Yoseloff, 1963), p. 242.

reigns over the area between the gates of hell and the earth is renamed "Anarch"[5] and allies himself with Satan to destroy the world. By using this allusion, Melville equates the South with chaos and destruction. The war is also called "the war of Wrong and Right" (p. 58); and when the South retreats from the Mountain, the Northern armies are "fortified in right" (p. 58).

Not only does Melville the patriot identify the North as the symbol of right, but he also writes several poems in which he says or implies that God aids the North. God "glorified the mountain" (p. 58) in "Look-Out Mountain," for example. The only direct Biblical quote found in <u>Battle-Pieces</u> is in "Battle for the Mississippi," line 6, stanza one. "The Lord is a man of war" is from Exodus 15:3, implying perhaps that God is not only responsible for war and takes a direct part in it but also that He enjoys it. "The Battle for the Mississippi" also compares the rejoicing of the North over this victory with the rejoicing of Moses and Israel after they had been successful in crossing the Red Sea. This allusion serves to imply that God is fighting for the North, for it was God, not the Israelites, who destroyed the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in "Running the Batteries" serves the same purpose, for it was God who brought these

[5] Cohen, "Notes," p. 242.

men safely out of the fiery furnace. The use of angels in "The Battle for the Bay": "Behind each man a holy angel stood-- / He stood though none was 'ware" (p. 73) again intimates that God is assisting the North. In "Gettysburg," a description of the battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, which took place July 3, 1863, and which prevented Lee from entering the North, Melville again implies that God aids the North. He alludes, for example, to 1/Samuel 5:2-3. The Philistines had taken the Ark of God, according to this passage, and had put it in the temple of Dagon. Dagon, on two occasions, fell down in worship of the Ark and in so doing broke off his head and hands. Here Melville uses Dagon to refer to the defeated South. Just as God subjected Dagon to Himself, so He repulses the South:

> 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 (p. 55).

In the Patriot's Cycle, therefore, it is quite clear that Melville presents the South as the evil one. It is not just that her cause is evil; she is evil. The North, on the other hand, represents right, and God and His angels assist her. The North's cause is just; thus the Northern armies are just. Not only does Melville the patriot laud the North and her position in the war, but he also celebrates her

soldiers. These poems represent Melville's respect and admiration for heroic men and heroic deeds and even for inanimate objects. Melville fully believed that

> 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 (p. 70).

These lines indicate at least part of the reason that Melville included an entire section of eulogies in Battle-Pieces. Since man can know little about God, Melville raised man to a super-human plane and found in him a substitute for God,[6] a kind of religious faith.[7] The world is a place of terror, Melville believed, unless faith is transferred from a silent God to a belief in the potentiality of man.[8] While social and cosmic injustices cannot be done away with, they can be palliated by the balm of brotherhood.[9]

In "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial," we find the majority of the eulogies. These sixteen poems are general,

[6] Ray B. Browne, Melville's Drive to Humanism (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1972), p. 4.

[7] M. O. Percival, A Reading of Moby Dick (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1950), p. 127.

[8] Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, Illinois: Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 24.

[9] Leon F. Seltzer, The Vision of Melville and Conrad: A Comparative Study (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970), p. 103.

not specific. One, for example, is written in praise of those "Who Perished in the Defense of Lexington, Missouri." Another is written to the "Men of Maine: Killed in the Victory of Baton Rouge, Louisiana"; and one is addressed to those killed at Chickamauga. The poems in this section, like others in the Patriot's Cycle, are partisan. The South is the traitor (p. 108), the Northern soldiers "fight for Right" (p. 108), and the Northern flag is a "heavenly flag" (p. 110). While sorrow is expressed for those who died, the poet is primarily concerned with the bravery and courage of those who gave their lives in the various conflicts. Unlike most of the battle-pieces proper, however, these poems are quietly sorrowful. The verses in this section are short, rarely running over fifteen lines, as the following two poems indicate:

ON THE HOME GUARDS

WHO PERISHED IN THE DEFENSE OF LEXINGTON, MISSOURI

The men who here in harness died
   Fell not in vain, though in defeat.
They by their end well fortified
   The Cause, and built retreat
(With memory of their valor tried)
For emulous hearts in many an after fray--
Hearts sore beset, which died at bay (p. 107).

THE FORTITUDE OF THE NORTH

UNDER THE DISASTER OF THE SECOND MANASSAS

No shame they take for dark defeat
   While prizing yet each victory won,
Who fight for the Right through all retreat,
   Nor pause until their work is done.

> The Cape-of-Storms is proof to every throe;
> Vainly against that foreland beat
> Wild winds aloft and wilder waves below:
> The black cliffs gleam through rents in sleet
> When the livid Antarctic storm-clouds glow (p. 108).

Unlike those in "Verses Inscriptive and Memorial," most of the eulogies in the battle-pieces section of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War are specific. They are written in praise of General Nathaniel Lyon, General George B. McClellan, General Philip Sheridan, and Major General McPherson. Like the poems in "Verses Inscriptive," these eulogies have more regular rhythm and rhyme than most of the other poems in the collection, though Melville's rhyme may be assonantal, consonantal, identical or eye rhymes. Melville's regularity in these poems is in keeping with his organic theory of art, for since he is creating poems of praise, it is fitting that they have regular rhythm and rhyme. Melville also achieves regularity in these eulogies by using the refrain. Perhaps, since he always used the person's name as part of the refrain, he wished to elevate these men to hero status, or he used their names because they were already elevated in the minds of the populace.

It is generally conceded that Melville's eulogies are, if not the most ineffective, among the most ineffective poems in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War. For example,

> "The Victor of Antietam" is an unadulterated eulogy of McClellan which falls flat, from general poor judgment, the relative meaninglessness of the

The racy, rhythmic regularity that echoes the galloping arrival of Sheridan in the first stanza slows down to imitate the death knell in the stanza quoted above. By changing the movement Melville relates joy and victory to death and defeat.

There are several reasons that the poems which Melville writes in praise of particular people fall short of being his best poems. One reason for the failure of these poems is that the characteristic Melvillian idiom is missing in them. In his best poems, Melville is colloquial, anti-poetic and prosaic.[13] Of course, this does not explain why Melville could write successful poems, such as "Iris," written at the death of a friend, and "Monody," written at the death of Hawthorne, and not do so in Battle-Pieces. Melville's failure in the eulogies in this volume results, nevertheless, from his failure to break with traditional poetic techniques. In these poems he strains for regular rhythm and rhyme. Too often he stresses sound, not sense. He is also guilty in these poems of using recurring archaisms, such as fray and assay. Melville is often not successful in Battle-Pieces when he sticks closely to traditional poetic techniques. He is much more successful when he abandons regularity and writes in his own uniquely prosaic style.

[13] Newton Arvin, "Melville's Shorter Poems," Partisan Review, 16 (1949), 1035.

> praise bestowed, the difficulties of formal eulogy, and certainly the unfitness of the name itself of the victor of Antietam to serve as a melodic refrain, as Melville uses it thirteen times.[10]

This observation on "The Victor of Antietam" can apply as well to "Lyon," and "Dirge for McPherson." Naturally, some of these poems are successful. The best of the eulogies, for example, is "Sheridan at Cedar Creek." It contains "a unity of theme, a center of interest, and prosody to produce the desired effect."[11] This poem celebrates a reversal of fortune. Contained in it are both exultation and pathos. The cypress image is changed to the amaranth image when Sheridan's rush to counterattack Jubal Early's Confederate forces ends the last important fighting in the Shenandoah Valley.[12] In the last stanza, however, the exultation has changed to pathos; for despite the victory, one should

> Shroud the horse in sable--
> For the mounds they heap!
> There is firing in the Valley,
> And yet no strife they keep;
> It is the parting volley,
> It is the pathos deep.
> There is glory for the brave
> Who lead and nobly save,
> But no knowledge in the grave
> Where the nameless followers sleep (p. 77).

[10] Richard Harter Fogle, "Melville and the Civil War," *Tulane Studies in English*, 9 (1959), 71.

[11] Dan Vogel, "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in *Mardi*, of *Battle-Pieces*, *John Marr* and *Timoleon*," Diss. New York University 1969, p. 77.

[12] Cohen, "Notes," p. 251.

Another reason these eulogy poems fail is that Melville makes no attempt to philosophize in them. He is always at his best when he probes the axis of reality, and he does not attempt to do so in these poems. "Commemorative of a Naval Victory," on the other hand, is a eulogy that is very effective:

> Sailors there are of gentlest breed,
> Yet strong, like every goodly thing;
> The discipline of arms refines,
> And the wave gives tempering.
> The damasked blade its beam can fling;
> It lends the last grave grace:
> The hawk, the hound, and sworded nobleman
> In Titian's picture for a king,
> Are of hunter or warrior race.
>
> In social halls a favored guest
> In years that follow victory won,
> How sweet to feel your festal fame
> In woman's glance instinctive thrown.
> Repose is yours--your deed is known,
> It musks the amber wine;
> It lives, and sheds a light from storied days
> Rich as October sunsets brown.
> Which make the barren place to shine.
>
> But seldom the laurel wreath is seen
> Unmixed with pensive pansies dark;
> There's a light and a shadow on every man
> Who at last attains his lifted mark--
> Nursing through night the ethereal spark,
> Elate he never can be;
> He feels that spirit which glad had hailed his worth,
> Sleep in oblivion.--The Shark
> Glides white through the phosphorus sea (pp. 114-115).

Melville is at his very best in the last stanza of this poem where he conveys his conception of the unavoidable terror lurking in life. The men, sailors in this instance, who are the most likely to realize that evil is a cosmic

reality are those, such as the hunter or warrior, who constantly face death. Even though a man who has been "refined and tempered" in battle by coming face to face with the reality of life can enjoy the accolades of his fellow men after a victory, he can never be proud of himself; for he realizes not only that evil is present in others but that it is a part of himself as well. He can, therefore, never be proud. This is the type of man who is fit to be pictured for a king--a strong, yet gracious, gentle man who realizes his brotherhood with his fellow men. Despite this man's knowledge of evil, he is in repose. Though he can never be "elate," he can accept reality as he finds it. Nowhere else in Battle-Pieces does Melville express so well his concept of universal dualism and its effect on the thinking man.

"Commemorative of a Naval Victory" is a fine poem structurally as well as thematically in that its form supports its meaning. Although the poem has a predominantly tetrameter rhythm, Melville varies the rhythm by including trimeter and iambic lines. For example, the discordant final lines of the third stanza are three stress lines which help to emphasize the shark image, one of the most effective images in Battle-Pieces and one for which Melville prepares the reader in stanza one by writing that "the wave gives tempering." In his use of the word tempering, Melville not only alludes to the sea but also to the sword in the following

line. Just as the Damascus sword was one which had been highly refined and well tempered, so the sea refined those who recognized her as a symbol of universal duality. The shark, which is used again in Battle-Pieces in "The Scout toward Aldie," is the locus of the power of evil.[14] Here Melville successfully amalgamates the sea and the sword images. Confrontation with either, he believed, was likely to lead to enlightenment about the evil that exists in the world. In the opening two lines of stanza three, the use of the image of the "laurel wreath" and of the "pensive pansies" effectively conveys the idea that the man who has passed from innocence to maturity can never be proud of this achievement. The "laurel wreath" represents those who excel in poetry or war while "pensive pansies" represent thoughtfulness.[15] The person who has come face to face with metaphysical reality can never be carefree.

"In the Turret" is a poem commemorating a specific personality of the war which is also effective because Melville uses it to comment on enlightenment about reality. This poem was written about Lieutenant John Lorimer Worden, commander of the Union ironclad Monitor, who was eventually blinded during an attack by the Merrimac. Like a true hero, Worden performs his duty even though he comes to realize that

[14] Cohen, "Notes," p. 284.

[15] Cohen, "Notes," p. 284.

the battle he is engaged in is not simply a confrontation with the South. It is, in reality, an encounter with evil. The use of the word goblin, which is used one other time in Battle-Pieces in "The Apparition," makes it clear that the spirit which confronts Worden in stanza three is the spirit of evil.[16] This spirit taunts Worden by saying:

> "Man, darest thou--desperate, unappalled--
> Be first to lock thee in the armored tower?
> I have thee now; and what the battle-hour
> To me shall bring--heed well--thou'lt share;
> This plot-work, planned to be the foeman's terror,
> To thee may prove a goblin-snare;
> Its very strength and cunning--monstrous error" (p. 36).

Melville's comparison of the Monitor to a diving bell in stanza one prepares the reader for Worden's realization that he is going to see evil in all its power while he is "cribbed" up in the turret with the cosmic spirit of evil that pervades the universe. Worden becomes one of Melville's true heroes; for as Melville indicated in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," he loved all men who "dived." Although Worden has learned the truth about life, he is not bitter or angry; for in the first stanza the poet asks:

> What poem shall uplift his charm,
> Bold Sailor, to your height of daring
> And interblend therewith the calm,
> And build a goodly style upon your bearing (p. 35).

Just as the sailor in "Commemorative of a Naval Victory" has been refined by what he learned while being tempered by the

[16] William H. Shurr, The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), p. 35.

sea, so Worden emerges as a brave, good, calm man, no less strong because he accepts what he learns. He truly has a "part / With men whose manhood never took denial" (p. 36).

In addition to his eulogies of people, Melville also wrote two simple eulogies of ships--"The Stone Fleet" and "The Cumberland." Melville here uses form to convey his tone and theme, for these poems are, like the other simpler eulogies, characterized by a regular rhythm, and they are basically tetrameter, though "The Cumberland" has an alternating trochaic stanza in which Melville emphasizes "the vowelled syllables free." The rhyme schemes in both of these poems are regular, and both poems use the refrain which contributes to regularity and incantation; for Melville was dealing with the past, an era which he felt was best represented by traditional poetic forms. These two poems reflect Melville's love for the sixteen old whalers that were used in an attempt to block the main entrance to Charleston's harbor and for "The Cumberland," the Federal's wooden man-of-war sunk by the Southern ironclad in Hampton Roads on March 8, 1862.[17] In "The Stone Fleet," Melville is sadly resigned to the fate of these old ships, similar to ones in which he "scudded round the Horn" (p. 16). At the same time, he barely conceals his delight that the plan to block the harbor fails:

[17] Cohen, "Notes," p. 221.

And all for naught. The waters pass--
Currents will have their way;
Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;
The harbor is bettered--will stay.
A failure, and complete,
Was your Old Stone Fleet (p. 17).

Neither Time nor Nature is influenced by man's puny efforts to change the harbor, and Melville is glad. The real irony of the situation is that neither the fleet nor the scuttlers are the allies of Nature or of Time. Unlike "The Stone Fleet," "The Cumberland" is not a lament for "The Cumberland." It is an exultation of her heroic fight against the Merrimac. Melville was so impressed by this event that the three poems following "The Cumberland," "In the Turret," "The Temeraire" and "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," reflect on the significance of the past, as symbolized by the wooden ships' being destroyed by the modern age of technology. Both "The Stone Fleet" and "The Cumberland," especially the former, convey Melville's great sense of loss at the destruction of these old ships and what they represent.

Though not without good qualities, most of the poems in the Patriot's Cycle are generally less successful than many of the other poems in Battle-Pieces. This is true, at least in part, because they are not written in Melville's best anti-poetic style. Perhaps he thought that he would reach more readers of his time with what we now call

poeticisms and archaisms than he could have with his more colloquial idiom. More than likely, however, since these poems concern more traditional aspects of war and since Melville was hoping to elevate his work to epic stature,[18] he felt that a traditional mode was more appropriate for them than an anti-poetic one would have been. Another important reason that these poems fail as a group is that they did not inspire Melville's poetic imagination. For the most part, he did not "dive" in them. He is always at his best when he moves from concrete, specific realistic stimulation to what that stimulation represents philosophically. In the majority of the patriotic poems, Melville did not attempt "to probe the axis of reality." As Chapter III of this study pointed out, these poems may have been written very early in the composition of Battle-Pieces; however, Melville felt that they were valuable contributions to the whole, so he used them even after the volume had taken on its philosophical perspective.

It is also possible that Melville included the poems in the Patriot's Cycle in Battle-Pieces in an attempt to reach the Northerners by presenting them with a group of poems with which they could identify so that he could win their trust and, therefore, lead them to unity

[18] John P. McWilliams, Jr., "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: The Blossom of War," American Quarterly, 23 (1971), 106.

with the South; especially is this true of the eulogies. Melville believed, as we have seen, that "manliness not only draws warrior to warrior, but it can also draw together all men who respect the heritage of the warrior."[19] Man cannot understand God or His ways, but he can see and identify with other men. Melville no doubt hoped that the two factions in the war would be brought closer together by a presentation of valiant men. Melville may have also believed that once he established rapport with the North, once they believed that he was truly a patriot, then he could convince them that though he believed in the cause of the North, and there is no reason to doubt that he did, he was also concerned for the entire Republic and for all her sons. Thus the Patriot's Cycle merges into the Citizen's Cycle.

The Citizen's Cycle represents Melville's concern for his country and her future. He feared that the war would bring an end to democracy; and, thus, America would lose her promise as a sanctuary for individualism and civilization. He also recognized and regretted that the war represented the beginning of the era of industrialization and mechanization in America. Finally, and most important, he was afraid that the breach in America between North and South would never be healed. To this end he wrote the poems in _Battle-Pieces_ in which he seeks to bring about reconciliation. He

[19] Hand, p. 332.

does this primarily by presenting the South's point of view about the war, for he was concerned for the Republic and all of her sons. That Melville wrote some of the poems in Battle-Pieces from the citizen's perspective contributes to its objectivity and, at the same time, to its ambiguity; for this cycle presents a different perspective on the war than does the Patriot's Cycle. In addition, the poems in the Citizen's Cycle serve to make the volume complete. The poems in this cycle are a tribute to Melville's love not only for his country but for humanity as well.

Melville was not blind to America's faults nor to her problems. In fact, in many of his works, such as Israel Potter and The Confidence-Man, he indicts her for her shortcomings. Nevertheless, his was a lover's quarrel with America,[20] for she was for him "the world's fairest hope" (p. 3). The Civil War, therefore, filled him with great fears for his country. His great concern was just how the war would affect the nation as a whole. That "he feared that the nation would lose its sense of forward direction; that it would destroy its past, and emerge, if not divided, too weak to fulfill its course of further development"[21] appears to be an adequate summary of his apprehensions. He also feared that

[20] Fogle, p. 62.

[21] William J. Kimball, "The Melville of Battle-Pieces: A Kindred Spirit," Midwest Quarterly, 10 (1969), 308.

> 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 (p. 7).

Melville was afraid, not that the war would strengthen the country, but that the North, heady in its new-found power, would forget the principles of democracy. For Melville, "the Founders' dream" was a "reasoned, free, heroic form of republicanism."[22] He feared that the North would fail to act within these bounds. If it did, the real basis of America would be gone, and she could look for no real future.

When one says that Melville feared that the war would destroy America's past, there are several aspects which are involved. First of all, he appears to have felt that if the future of democracy was not insured, all that democracy had accomplished in the past in America would be negated, and Melville, like many men of his day, felt that America was the new Eden. If America's democratic system was destroyed by the war, the doubts of honest kings concerning the value of democracy would be corroborated (p. 57). In the second place, as we have intimated, Melville felt that the war represented, as he later wrote in Clarel, a "sad arch between

[22] Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 232.

contrasted eras."[23] He sensed that whereas the American style of life before the war was characterized, for the most part, by a simple agrarianism, the post-war era would be an era of increasing materialism and industrialism. This awareness appears in "The Conflict of Convictions" when the poet says that the people "prosper to the apoplex," or to the full (p. 5). By the time he came to write Clarel and John Marr, his fears of encroaching materialism had been realized. In Clarel, Rolfe, Mortmain and Ungar constantly attack the prevalent worship of mammon; and Bridegroom Dick in John Marr laments that "in mart and bazar Lucre chuckled the huzza, / Coining the dollars in the bloody mint of war."[24]

That Melville regretted the passing of a simple way of life for a more complex, industrialized one is also implied in Battle-Pieces, as we have seen, in "The Stone Fleet," "The Temeraire," and "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight." While one cannot conclude that Melville was not being sentimental about the loss of chivalry, one can agree that Melville is not rejoicing that killing has become more

[23] Herman Melville, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, ed. Walter E. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), p. 422. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

[24] Herman Melville, John Marr and Other Sailors, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 171. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

scientific.[25] Melville regrets the loss of the simple past for industrialism. In Pierre, for example, one finds indications of Melville's love for the agrarian life as represented by his respect for the old, landed families of America.[26] This aspect of Melville's thought accounts in part for his efforts to sustain himself and his family by a gentleman farmer's avocation--writing. It may also account to some degree for his sympathy with the Southern United States. These conjectures carry added weight when one remembers that Melville was descended from an aristocratic line through his mother and related to another through his wife. Melville never outgrew the pride of his heritage.[27] Like James Fenimore Cooper, he seems to have believed that the well-educated, intelligent, far-sighted, "natural aristocrat" should shape the destiny of America. Melville came to believe that:

> In the past is the true blessedness;
> The future's ever overcast--
> The present aye plebeian. (Clarel, p. 379).

[25] Ralph E. Hitt, "Melville's Poems of Civil War Controversy," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 2 (1969), 62.

[26] Walter E. Bezanson, ed., "Introduction," Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), p. civ.

[27] Henry A. Murray, ed., "Notes," Pierre or, The Ambiguities, by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1962), pp. 436-437. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

America's past was of real importance to him. Melville placed great importance on the past and believed that its ideals must be maintained. This is the import of the following lines from "The Conflict of Convictions":

> (The poor old Past,
> The Future's slave,
> She dredged through pain and crime
> To bring about the blissful Prime,
> Then--perished. There's a grave!) (p. 7).

Melville's greatest fear when he wrote Battle-Pieces was that the war would result in a permanently divided nation, not divided in the physical sense, but divided by continued hate and strife between North and South. He feared that dissension as to how reconstruction was to be effected would further alienate North and South. Indeed, he had reasons for his fears. The Fourteenth Amendment, which disqualified from public office any who had fought for the South, had passed in Congress in June 1866, and congressional elections were soon to be held. This, Melville implies, is the reason that he included the "Supplement" in Battle-Pieces.[28] The predominant theme of Battle-Pieces from the personal perspective is reconciliation and reunification, for Melville hoped the volume would serve to cause the victors to take a fresh, objective look at the war and at the "vanquished foe." If the country is to fulfill the

[28] Cohen, "Notes," p. 294.

founders' dreams, it must be reunited by love and toleration. As Lee says in "Lee in the Capitol," she should:

> . . . blend anew,
> As the bones of the slain in her forests do,
> Bewailed alike by us and you (p. 150).

Like the dead, the participants in the war while "foemen at morn" must be "friends at eve" (p. 41).

Melville attempted to show the people in the North that the Southerner was in reality no different from the Northerner. He hoped that by doing this the North would gain an understanding of the position of the South and of her soldiers and, therefore, be willing to be reunited with the South. He does this, first of all, by attempting to show the North that the South's heroes were great men who should be recognized for their heroic character. In the "Supplement" he writes:

> Spite this clinging reproach, however, signal military virtues and achievements have conferred upon the Confederate arms historic fame, and upon certain of the commanders a renown extending beyond the sea--a renown which we of the North could not suppress, even if we would. In personal character, also, not a few of the military leaders of the South enforce forbearance; the memory of others the North refrains from disparaging; and some, with more or less reluctance, she can respect. Posterity, sympathizing with our convictions, but removed from our passions, may perhaps go farther here. If George IV could, out of the graceful instinct of a gentleman, raise an honorable monument in the great fane of Christendom over the remains of the enemy of his dynasty, Charles Edward, the invader of England and victor in the rout of

> Preston Pans--upon whose head the king's ancestor but one reign removed had set a price--is it probable that the grandchildren of General Grant will pursue with rancor, or slur by sour neglect, the memory of Stonewall Jackson? (p. 462).

To encourage the spirit of unity Melville wrote two poems about Stonewall Jackson, who was accidentally killed by his own men, May 2, 1863. In one of these pieces, "Stonewall Jackson Mortally Wounded at Chancellorsville," Melville presents a Northern view of Jackson, no doubt indicative of his own views about Jackson. How can this "man who fiercest charged in fight, / Whose sword and prayer were long" (p. 52) be praised? Because, Melville goes on, he was "true to the thing he deemed was due, / True as John Brown or steel" (p. 53). Many in the North found it easy to sympathize with Brown but not with Jackson. Melville is implying that Jackson is as worthy of respect as is Brown. The poet concedes that the North does not owe Jackson a wreath. It does, however, owe him a tear; for the North should mourn that a brave, honorable man is dead. Melville hopes that ". . . coming days / Shall not forget him with this song" (p. 52).

The theme of "Stonewall Jackson (Ascribed to a Virginian)" is much the same as the one discussed above. Jackson was a strong, brave, brilliant, yet humble commander, who did what he had to do. "Stonewall followed his star"

(p. 54). The last stanza freely expresses Melville's view that the North, as well as the South, should remember Jackson:

> O, 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:
> "Fortune went with the North elate,"
> "Ay, but the South had Stonewall's weight,
> And he fell in the South's great war" (p. 55).

Whether the war was right or wrong will be a debatable question for many years. Why Jackson fought for the South will be unanswered; however, whether right or wrong, he was a great man. That obviously is the point that Melville wants the North to see. Even if they conceive Jackson to have been wrong in fighting for the South, he is to be honored as a man of great valor and integrity. Melville himself found it difficult to understand what caused a man of Jackson's caliber to fight for the South, though he did understand that "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. . . ." (p. 461). Both of these poems are tributes to a man Melville greatly admired. They reflect Melville's inability to take a partisan view of Jackson or the war, and they also reflect his great desire to bring the South and the North to reconciliation.

Another group of poems which Melville wrote to encourage reconciliation are those poems in which he presents the Southern point of view about events of the war. Melville hoped the Northerner would come to see the Southerner simply as a man with the same needs as any other person, regardless of the ideas and convictions that drove him to fight for secession. "The Released Rebel Prisoner" is one of these poems. Melville probably decided to write this poem after seeing hundreds of released Southern prisoners of war travel through New York on their way South in June of 1865. These men, according to Melville's note, wandered around the city for days, penniless and, no doubt, depressed (p. 457). The irregularity of the rhythm pattern of this poem serves to help the reader feel the irregular pulse of this soldier who has seen behind the outward facade of war and who has been enlightened by what he has seen:

> His face is hidden in his beard,
> But his heart peers out at eye--
> And such a heart! like a mountain-pool
> Where no man passes by (p. 99).

This released prisoner is also distressed because of the loss of great Southern soldiers, such as Hill, Ashby, and Stuart, who were killed, seemingly, in vain. He, furthermore, cannot return to his home or his family in the South, for they too have been destroyed:

> Home, home--his heart is full of it;
> But home he never shall see,
> Even should he stand upon the spot:
> 'Tis gone!--where his brothers be (p. 100).

The young soldier has nowhere to go.

> And so he lingers--lingers on
> In the City of the Foe--
> His cousins and his countrymen
> Who see him listless go (p. 100).

In this last line, it first appears that the released soldier is the listless one who goes. And he is; however, the subject of the verb *go* is ambiguous.[29] Perhaps it is his Northern cousins and countrymen who listless go. They see the suffering prisoner, but they are apathetic about his plight. They should feel for this one who has suffered so much both spiritually and physically, but they do not. He is still the enemy. Melville arouses pity for the Southern soldier and at the same time shrewdly castigates the North for her unfeeling attitude toward a suffering human being. In her victory, she has forgotten her humanity. This poem indicates that:

> The rebels were to him [Melville] what they had been before and during the war, men who supported bravely a delusory ideal. He had not hated them or supposed them friends. He saw the Northern and Southern soldiers as possessed equally of courage and patience in suffering. In a way they seem in his verses to be fighting on the same side because a like valor animates them.[30]

[29] Cohen, "Notes," p. 274.

[30] Willard Thorp, ed., "Introduction," *Herman Melville: Representative Selections*, American Writers Series (New York: American Book Company, 1938), p. cxv.

Melville also attempted to get the North to understand and sympathize with the South because of the devastation of her countryside. In "The March to the Sea," in six 12-line stanzas, the persona presents one view of Sherman's march to the sea after his Northern forces had destroyed Atlanta on November 17, 1864. The mood of the first stanzas is joyous and lighthearted. The use of the refrain increases this feeling as Melville writes: "It was glorious glad marching / That marching to the sea" (p. 84). The second line of the refrain is changed in each stanza, preparing the reader subtly for the dramatic change in mood that begins in the seventh stanza and culminates in the eighth. The entire seventh stanza, in fact, is slower in tempo than the previous stanzas and, therefore, prepares the reader for the reversal in mood:

> The grain of endless acres
> Was threshed (as in the East)
> By the trampling of the Takers,
> Strong march of man and beast;
> The flails of those earth-shakers
> Left a famine where they ceased.
> The arsenals were yielded;
> The sword (that was to be),
> Arrested in the forging,
> Rued that marching to the sea:
> It was glorious glad marching,
> But, ah, the stern decree! (p. 86).

The refrain in stanza six repeats the refrain in stanza one, and the last line of the refrain in stanza seven also prepares one for stanza eight in which Melville switches

dramatically from what the victorious soldiers felt to what their victims felt:

> For behind they left a wailing,
> A terror and a ban,
> And blazing cinders sailing,
> And houseless households wan,
> Wide zones of counties 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 (p. 87).

The seventh line of this stanza, "Was the havoc, retribution?", as it appears in Vincent's edition, is an emendation taken from Melville's own corrected copy of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War. In the original, published in Harper's, the line read: "It was Treason's retribution / (Necessity the plea)." In the first edition, the lines were changed to "It was Treason's retribution / But howsoe'er it be." Finally, Melville emended the line to read "Was the havoc, retribution? / But howsoe'er it be."[31] This emendation indicates a softening of Melville's own attitude toward the South, and it also indicates an increasing desire to refrain from saying anything that would further alienate North and South. Melville may have changed the line because he felt that military necessity was a poor excuse for the destruction of the South. At least Cohen believes

[31] David Hibler, "Drum-Taps and Battle-Pieces: Melville and Whitman on the Civil War," The Personalist, 50 (1969), 144.

this is the point made in Melville's note to the companion poem, "The Frenzy in the Wake,"[32] when he writes:

> Undoubtedly Sherman, in the desolation he inflicted after leaving Atlanta, acted not in contravention of orders; and all, in a military point of view, is by military judges deemed to have been expedient, and nothing can abate General Sherman's shining renown; his claims to it rest on no single campaign. Still, there are those who can not but contrast some of the scenes enacted in Georgia and the Carolinas, and also in the Shenandoah, with a circumstance in a great Civil War of heathen antiquity. Plutarch relates that in a military council held by Pompey and the chiefs of that party which stood for the Commonwealth, it was decided that under no plea should any city be sacked that was subject to the people of Rome. There was this difference, however, between the Roman civil conflict and the American one. The war of Pompey and Caesar divided the Roman people promiscuously; that of the North and South ran a frontier line between what for the time were distinct communities or nations. In this circumstance, possibly, and some others, may be found both the cause and the justification of some of the sweeping measures adopted (p. 455).

Lindeman, on the other hand, believes that this note indicates at least tacit approval of Sherman and his campaign by Melville, patriot and citizen, if not by Melville, poet.[33] "The March to the Sea" is not so much a celebration of Sherman's campaign as it is a picture of both the glory and the terror of the conquest of Georgia. The final stanza of the poem is a reminder that one needs to be sympathetic

[32] Cohen, "Notes," p. 260.

[33] Jack Lindeman, "Herman Melville's Civil War," Modern Age, 9 (1965), 397.

about the devastation that occurred in the South. It is also an indictment of those Northern "maniacs" who destroyed towns and communities in the South. In the final analysis, however, in his changing "It was Treason's retribution / (Necessity the plea)," Melville's condemnation not only of the South but of the North is modified. The South is no longer called the traitor as she was in the first writing. Melville seems to be saying in that version that Sherman's men were justifying their conduct on the basis of the fact that the South deserved the treatment that she was getting because she was a traitor. In addition, they further relieved themselves from responsibility for their actions by saying that the events of the war were decreed by necessity. When he changed these lines, however, one wonders if Melville were not implying that the havoc was caused by evil, violent men bent simply on destruction. He is unwilling to be definite on that position, however, and says in essence that it really does not matter what the cause, the South will never forget Sherman's march to the sea. The cause, however, was important, and Melville's first lines were better than his emendation.

"The Frenzy in the Wake" is a savage hymn of hate from the Southern point of view. Melville was careful to write that this piece was purely dramatic. On the other hand, one cannot help feeling that Melville could understand something

of the South's hate, anger and frustration and that he wanted the North to see that the Southerners experienced these very real human emotions. In the last stanza of this poem he writes:

> With burning woods our skies are brass,
> The pillars of dust are seen;
> The live-long day their cavalry pass--
> No crossing the road between.
> We were sore deceived--an awful host!
> They move like a roaring wind,
> Have we gamed and lost? but even despair
> Shall never our hate rescind (p. 88).

The beauty of these lines is the possible double meaning. One can understand these lines to mean that the South was deceived by her leaders (which Melville actually believed), or one can read them to imply that the South was deceived by the enemy, which she never dreamed would move so far South. This stanza also indicates that Melville was afraid that while the war had been won, victory was really failure because of the intense hatred that had been engendered by the war. Unlike most of the other poems in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, the typography of "The Frenzy in the Wake," and especially "The March to the Sea," supports the topic of the poem. The arrangement of the lines on the page, as well as the rhythm, produces an image of movement; for the reader visualizes the marching, destructive Northern troops as they sweep through the South.

Furthermore, in several poems, Melville asks that the North be magnanimous to the South. As we have seen, he

repeats this point in the "Supplement" when he says that the North as victor should exercise greater benevolence to the South than the South should toward her. In "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh," where Melville asks the victorious North to be gracious to the South, he paints a vivid picture of the color bearers in battle and then compares them to Christian martyrs who were burned at the stake for what they believed:

> The color-bearers facing death
> White in the whirling sulphurous wreath,
>   Stand boldly out before the line;
> Right and left their glances go,
> Proud of each other, glorying in their show;
> Their battle-flags about them blow,
>   And fold them as in flame divine:
> Such living robes are only seen
> Round martyrs burning on the green--
> And martyrs for the Wrong have been (p. 95).

The alliteration in lines 2, 6, and 7 serves to convey the movement of the smoke-filled air and of the flags. The dash after "green" in line 9 draws one up short as Melville reminds the reader that he understands that these men are martyrs for wrong. "Perish their cause," he goes on; but "mark the men" (p. 95). Since the Northern soldier would not fire on the color-bearers during the battle of Shiloh, why should he want them punished after the war was over:

> Sunday at Shiloh, and the day
> When Stonewall charged--McClellan's crimson May,
> And Chickamauga's wave of death,
> And of the Wilderness the cypress wreath--
>   All these have passed away.

The life in the veins of Treason lags,
Her daring color-bearers drop their flags,
And yield. Now shall we fire?
Can poor spite be?
Shall nobleness in victory less aspire
Than in reverse? Spare Spleen her ire,
And think how Grant met Lee (p. 96)

The variability of the rhythm and rhyme of this poem supports Melville's belief that it would be highly irregular to imprison brave Southern soldiers after the war was over as some Northerners were insisting shortly after the surrender at Appomattox. Just as Grant was kind to Lee, so should the Southern soldiers be treated kindly.

In "Magnanimity Baffled," Melville's theme is that the Southern cause is dead, that the war is over, and that the North must understand this fact and seek, indeed go out of its way, to be reunited with the South, regardless of the South's attitude. This same point is made in "A Grave Near Petersburg, Virginia." Melville hopes that the rebel cannon, Daniel Drouth, symbol of the grievances of the section, may never be disinterred. The Southern cause is buried. Both sides, especially the North, must see to it that the war does not begin again. In passing, it is significant that Melville, patriot, expresses a radically different attitude toward the burial of the gun in his note to the poem than he does in the poem. He writes:

> Shortly prior to the evacuation of Petersburg, the enemy, with a view to ultimate repossession, interred some of his heavy guns in the same

> field with his dead, and with every circumstance calculated to deceive. Subsequently the negroes exposed the stratagem (p. 457).

His choosing not to express this view in his poem is certainly a credit to Melville the poet and to his objectivity as the poet of the war.

Finally, in "The Martyr," Melville subtly condemns the North for her hatred of the South. Even though a Southerner had killed Lincoln, Melville did not believe that the entire South should suffer for the crime of one man. In fact, in the note to the poem, he writes:

> At this period of excitement the thought was by some passionately welcomed that the Presidential successor had been raised up by heaven to wreak vengeance on the South. . . . But the expectations built hereon (if, indeed, ever soberly entertained), happily for the country, have not been verified (p. 456).

It was not that Melville feared what Andrew Johnson would do to the South, for he wrote:

> The Avenger takes his place,
> The Avenger wisely stern,
> Who in righteousness shall do
> What the heavens call him to (p. 93).

What Melville feared was the effect that the anger of the people would have on reconciliation:

> 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 (p. 93).

Melville saw it as ironical that the death of Lincoln, who was viewed by many people as a martyr, a Christ-like figure, should inspire such hatred and desire for revenge. Melville attempts in the poem, therefore, to play down Lincoln's image as a martyr and emphasize his role as a father and as a "Forgiver" (p. 93). Just as Lincoln yearned "to redeem the evil-willed, / And, though conqueror, be kind" (p. 93), so Melville hoped he could encourage his fellow Northerners to do likewise. So fearful of doing anything that would deter re-establishment, Melville, despite the fact that he wrote that the poem is "Indicative of the Passion of the People" (p. 93), marked out the title "The Martyr" in his copy of the first edition of Battle-Pieces. As in the other poems in the Citizen's Cycle, "The Martyr" is an expression of Melville's concern for the Republic and all her sons.

Melville tried to promote in his Northern readers an attitude of respect, forgiveness, and acceptance which would, in the long run, bring them to accept and propagate reconciliation and reunification with the South. He attempted to do this by writing patriotic poems with which his fellow Northerners could identify. Simultaneously, Melville's foremost concern was the preservation of the Union. In order to try to assure unity, Melville attempts to get the North to understand the South. He realized that "the great qualities of the South, those attested in the War, we can perilously

alienate, or we may make them nationally available at need" (p. 464). Only as conciliation takes place between North and South will the country be reunited.

Had Melville limited his poems in Battle-Pieces to those concerned with the personal perspective, the volume would have been an outstanding one, as far as Civil War poetry is concerned, for Melville not only presents the most comprehensive of any poetic coverage of the war, but he is also the most objective of all the poets who wrote about the American Civil War. On the other hand, the volume would have little interest for us today except as a relic of a major American author. Melville, however, "used the war as an artistic device--as background or as symbol--to develop themes not exclusively concerned with war in the usual sense of an armed conflict."[34] As he noted in the "Preface" to Battle-Pieces, "but a few themes have been taken" from "the events and incidents of the conflict" (p. 446). These themes are as pertinent to present-day man as they were to the American of the 1860's, for they were written by "Herman Melville, poet, who despite the darkness of evil and fate, still hoped for the progress of all men."[35] The Poet's Cycle overlaps with the other two cycles because Melville seeks to bring

[34] Barbara Meldrum, "Melville on War," Research Studies, 37 (1969), 130.

[35] Hand, p. 339.

the North to the point of humane reconciliation and reunification with the South by showing her that the war resulted not from political, economic or social problems in America but from the source of evil itself. If the Northerner can see this, he can fully realize his brotherhood with the Southerner. They are both caught in the web of the evil which operates not only out of the universe but out of themselves as well. Melville, thankfully, does not believe that no good is to be found in North or South. It can, for good and evil are braided into one cord. There is, therefore, hope for reconciliation between North and South. Melville's basis for his philosophical perspective in the Poet's Cycle is the "inextricable interweaving of Good and Evil."[36] The war is a "manifestation of the Universal scheme of things," the "symbol of the storm and stress of Universal Dualism," the "reflection of the conflict between Good and Evil."[37] In the Poet's Cycle, therefore, Melville deals with the nature of reality and of man, the source of evil, and man's reaction to the reality of evil. The poet also tries to provide some comfort and some hope for man in his predicament and, finally, he suggests how man should react to his knowledge of the ironical dualities of existence.

[36] Thorp, p. lxxxvii.

[37] Vogel, p. 117.

In his skillfully executed poem, "Misgivings," the second poem in Battle-Pieces, Melville "dives to the heart of the evil universe."[38] Melville points out that the Civil War is merely symptomatic of profound metaphysical problems, for ". . . storms are formed behind the storm we feel" (p. 4). Actually the storm, which Melville uses as a symbol of the war and of evil, is a result of Time and Nature. The tempest, he says, bursts from the waste of Time. Time is "a process of attrition and decay"[39] in that it is seeking to destroy the "world's fairest hope" (p. 3). The world's fairest hope, however, is tainted by "man's foulest crime" (p. 3), slavery. In the first stanza, Melville describes the storm and then moves to what that storm symbolizes. In the second stanza, he does the opposite. In both cases, however, he uses the storm metaphor to imply that Nature plays some part in creating the storm. He writes, "Nature's dark side is heeded now-- / (Ah! Optimist--cheer disheartened flown)" (p. 4). Of course, this is an anti-transcendental stance, for Melville could not accept the idealistic view of nature that his transcendental friends had.[40] Unlike the cosmic idealist of his day, he did not believe in the unity, equality and oneness of man

[38] Shurr, p. 27.

[39] Shurr, p. 26.

[40] Stern, p. 24.

and nature.[41] As far as Melville could see, Nature is often "ethically blind, perceptually dumb, whitely indifferent, intellectually blank, and morally patternless."[42] It is at times imbued with ferocity, pain, and death. Man is not immune to her capriciousness.

Melville further ties the two stanzas of "Misgivings" together by pointing out that the controlling institutions of society are being destroyed by the war. The influence of the church, a restraining and purifying element, is negated first because as Melville implies in "Battle of Stone River, Tennessee," the church entered into the war by taking sides. The home, symbol of love and brotherhood, is threatened not only because its sons die in the war but also because they often die for opposite sides. It is important that Melville uses the hemlock to represent the home. Perhaps Melville is implying in this symbol that the home could have been a preventative of the war if it had properly taught a love for all humanity. It did not; therefore, the home itself is destroyed by the war.

[41]Stern, p. 5.

[42]Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), p. 74.

Melville also implies that the state, symbol of law and order, is endangered by the war. William H. Shurr in his Mystery of Iniquity writes that there are two main cycles of thought in Battle-Pieces: the cycle of law and the cycle of evil. Shurr believes that

> In his first attempt to find a pattern of meaning in the political and social chaos of the Civil War, Melville experiments with the tenets of the conservative tradition. States and individuals ought not to rebel against duly constituted civil authority. The destruction and pain of the war result directly from breach of the law. In this cycle harmony and peace will return to the cosmos when the law is reasserted.[43]

"Misgivings," like "The Portent," does indicate that the war threatens the state and, therefore, law and order. Melville believed that civil law was essential to society because of man's nature. In "The Age of Antonines," he wrote that only "under law made will the world repose / And the ruler's right confessed." "Ah," he concludes, "might we read in America's signs / The Age restored of the Antonines."[44] Also, in "The House-Top," Melville writes:

> All civil charms
> And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe--
> Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
> Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,
> And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature (p. 57).

[43] Shurr, p. 14.

[44] Herman Melville, "The Age of Antonines," in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 236. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

Again Melville is concerned that the war has dissolved the influence of the church and civil law in America. The result is that "man rebounds whole aeons back in nature" (p. 57) when the restraining influences of law and religion are removed.

With "Misgivings," then, Melville immediately warns the reader of Battle-Pieces that the Civil War is the direct result of the all-embracing evil that pervades the universe. "The Coming Storm" also contains a concise statement of Melville's belief that evil is the constant reality, though man, especially Americans of the nineteenth century, refuses to believe this. In this poem the symbol of evil is a demon-cloud which, Melville writes, is "like the mountain one" (p. 94), probably a reference to "yon black mountain lone" (p. 4) of "Misgivings." The fact that the demon-cloud releases its fury on "a spirit as mild / As this urned lake, the home of shades" (p. 94) makes its evil all the more heinous. For optimistic Americans unprepared for the war, evil seemed to suddenly burst upon the new Eden. Only those men like Melville and Edwin Booth, who actually owned the picture which Melville describes in this poem, were prepared, at least in part, for the war. Booth, the "him" referred to in the poem, cannot be "utterly surprised" by the evil which the war represents, for he has reached "Shakespeare's core and found man's final lore." He has learned that it is man's

fate to recognize the duality in the universe. The evil that revealed itself in the war should not have surprised America. In her optimism and naiveté, however, she was unaware that evil could blight her paradise. By the same token, all men should be aware of the ever-pervasive evil that threatens them. Melville emphasizes the juxtaposition of the peaceful lake, good, and the storm, evil, by counterpointing the roughness of the rhythm in the last two lines of the first stanza with the regularity of the first two lines. The combination of regularity and irregularity throughout the poem serves as an incessant reminder that even though life may be idyllic for the time, it is certain that disaster may come at the most unexpected moment. That is "man's final lore" (p. 94). At the same time, the repetition, exemplified by the use of _feeling_, _feel_, and _felt_, contributes a sense of control and regularity to the poem.

A similar poem in _Battle-Pieces_ in which Melville expresses the idea that evil is an ever-present reality in all of life is "The Apparition." In this poem, which discusses how the innate evil of the universe lies just under the surface, ready to erupt like a volcano at any moment, the rhyme and rhythm, unlike those of "'The Coming Storm,'" are basically regular and provide the reader with a sense of stability, just as repetition did in "'The Coming Storm.'" Melville effectively uses the volcano to create an image of

sudden destruction, and there are several striking lines in the poem, such as "so, then, Solidity's a crust-- / The core of fire below" (p. 102). In addition to the technical finesse exhibited in the poem, it is the most concise statement of Melville's philosophy concerning evil in his entire writings. The volcano is a symbol that evil in man and in the universe lies just under the surface:

> All may go well for many a year
> But who can think without a fear
> Of horrors that happen so? (p. 102).

The war is not a unique event. It is the result of evil--the permanent and controlling reality of life.[45] At the same time, the volcano is also a symbol for the Civil War, for in the "Supplement" Melville asks,

> 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 his toward Vesuvius? Do we dread lest the repose may be deceptive? In the recent convulsion has the crater but shifted? (p. 465).

The war was actually a manifestation of evil that lurks in the universe, just out of sight. Since Melville does not mention the war in the poem, however, one realizes that the war enables man to understand the general nature of reality: "So, then, Solidity's a crust-- / The core of fire below" (p. 102).

[45] Shurr, p. 41.

"The House-Top" is probably the clearest statement in Battle-Pieces of Melville's belief that man, like his universe, is not completely good. Melville wrote this poem as a result of the New York draft riots, which occurred on July 11, 1863, when the first compulsory military service list was published. Ironically, poor New Yorkers, and to a lesser degree, poor Bostonians, took out their anger about compulsory military service by attacking blacks and destroying their property. These poor people revolted against the Conscription Act because it allowed those who could afford to pay, to buy freedom from the draft. Federal troops had to be called in to dispel the violence that erupted and about a thousand rioters were killed.[46] The bringing in of the troops, along with the reversal of the Conscription Act, finally stopped the violence which went on for three days. Melville was incensed by these riots, and "The House-Top" effectively conveys this anger:

> No sleep. The sultriness pervades the air
> And binds the brain--a dense oppression, such
> As tawny tigers feel in matted shades,
> Vexing their blood and making apt for ravage.
> Beneath the stars the roofy desert spreads
> Vacant as Libya. All is hushed near by.
> Yet fitfully from far breaks a mixed surf
> Of muffled sound, the Atheist roar of riot
> Yonder, where parching Sirius set in drought,
> Balefully glares red Arson--there--and there.
> The Town is taken by its rats--ship-rats
> And rats of the wharves. All civil charms
> And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe--

46 Cohen, "Notes," p. 239.

Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
Than sway of self; these like a dream dissolve,
And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature.
Hail to the low dull rumble, dull and dead,
And ponderous drag that jars the wall.
Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll
Of black artillery; he comes, though late;
In code corroborating Calvin's creed
And cynic tyrannies of honest kings;
He comes, nor parlies; and the Town, redeemed,
Gives thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heeds
The 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
(p. 57).

The major theme of this poem is that, contrary to the prevalent views of the transcendentalists and the founding fathers of America, man is not inherently good. The image of the tiger in the third line of the poem prepares the reader for the poet's alluding to the rioters as rats, "ship-rats / And rats of the wharves" (p. 57). Also, the reference to "parching Sirius set in drought" relates man to animals, for Sirius is the Dog Star, synonymous with madness. Here, however, the inference is that it is men, not dogs, who are mad. In the first six lines Melville also establishes the moral sterility of the rioters by the reference to Libya, a symbol of aridity. He further contrasts the sleepy, parched town with the ocean in which all terror dwells. Man has rebounded back in nature because "all civil charms / And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe" (p. 57) have been dissolved. Civil law and religion both put emphasis on others. Once man becomes

primarily interested in himself, he ceases to regard civil law or religion.

Melville also seems to imply in these lines that though man subjects himself to civil law and religion out of fear, that is preferable to his being controlled by self. In the last part of the poem, the persona is distressed not only that the use of force must quell the riot but that man must be controlled by tyrants who are demanded by necessity, such as Draco, Calvin, and honest kings. Most of all the persona is grieved that the town, symbol not only of America but of mankind as well, does not realize that this dependence on outside forces for goodness casts aspersions on the very founding principles of America "which holds that Man is naturally good, / And--more--is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged." Just as Roman law forbade the scourging of its citizens, so America had believed that man, the noblest of nature's creations, should not need to be punished. The fact that military force had to be used to stop the riot in New York proves that man does have to be punished when and if his evil nature is not held in check by outside forces. The regularity of this blank verse poem imposes this concept; for since Melville believed that the church, the home, and the laws of society helped man to control his propensity for evil by providing him with outside restraint, the use of blank verse in this poem emphasizes man's need for direction

by forces other than himself. Like "The Portent," "'The Coming Storm,'" "Shiloh" and "Malvern Hill," "The House-Top" successfully unites thought, technique, and symbol.[47]

In neither "The House-Top," "'The Coming Storm,'" nor "The Apparition" is Melville saying that man is entirely evil. Although there is no clear statement in Battle-Pieces that Melville felt that good is a part of man's potential, just as is evil, the fact that he recognizes the great men of the war and dedicates his volume to the task of bringing about reconciliation indicates that he did believe that man is capable of doing good. In addition, he does make clear statements in most of his other writings that while man has a natural belligerency or a natural inclination to do evil, he also has a natural inclination to do good. He writes in Mardi, for example,

> But think not we believe in man's perfection. Yet, against all good, he is not absolutely set. In his heart, there is a germ. That we seek to foster. To that we cling; else all were hopeless.[48]

"The essence of all good and evil is in us. . . ." (p. 437).

One of the famous passages in Moby Dick also treats the duality of good and evil. Ishmael, momentarily dazed by

[47] Vogel, p. 155.

[48] Herman Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, III (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 627. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

looking into the fire of the tryworks (or, if you will, at evil), almost capsizes the Pequod. Upon recovering himself, he admonishes the reader to

> Look not too long in the face of fire. . . . Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. Tomorrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp--all others but liars!
>
> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon.[49]

In like manner, "Two Sides to a Tortoise," part two of "The Encantadas or 'Enchanted Isles'," expresses this view. Not only does it delineate Melville's view of the presence of good and evil, but it also indicates the close relationship between good and evil:

> Yet even the tortoise, dark and melancholy, as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side, its calipee or breastplate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge. Moreover, every one knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you but put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this . . . you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Enjoy the

[49] Herman Melville, Moby Dick or The Whale, ed. Wayne C. Booth (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), p. 420. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

> bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest, and don't deny the black. Neither should he, who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position so as to hide the darker and expose his livelier aspect, like a great October pumpkin in the sun, for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. The tortoise is both black and bright.[50]

Rolfe's opinion in Clarel that "evil and good they braided play / Into one cord" (p. 419) seems a clear statement of Melville's view, for "in best of worlds if all's not bright / Allow, the shadow's chased by light."[51] Finally, in "Rammon," an unpublished introduction and poem, Melville concludes that

> A primary law binds the universe. The worlds are like apples on the tree; in flavor and tint one apple perchance may somewhat differ from another, but all partake of the same sap. One of the worlds we know. And what find we here? Much good, a preponderance of good; that is, good it would be could it be winnowed from the associate evil that taints it. But evil is no accident. Like good it is an irremovable element. Bale out your individual boat, if you can, but the sea abides.[52]

[50] Herman Melville, "The Encantadas or 'Enchanted Isles,'" in Herman Melville, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1962), p. 127. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

[51] Herman Melville, Marquis De Grandvin, in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 313. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

[52] Herman Melville, "Rammon," in Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 411. All future references to this source will be cited in the text.

The third poem in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, "The Conflict of Convictions," continues Melville's comment on evil. In it he wonders what the outcome of evil's having manifested itself in America will be. This poem is the most complex poem in the collection because three different voices speak. One voice, representing the intelligent man of faith who works within the framework of tradition to seek to find the answers to the chaos of the war, and, by extension, of evil, is denoted by roman type. The sneering, cynical voice, who thinks there are no answers or that the answers are not worth knowing, is depicted by italic type. Finally, the third voice, delineated by capital letters, indicates that neither of the other two voices has the answer.

The traditional voice vacillates between hoping that the nation will emerge from the war stronger than it was before the conflict and between despairing that this will happen. He wants to believe that America will be "stronger for stress and strain" (p. 7) and that the founder's dreams of a new Eden will be realized. Although he bolsters his arguments with biblical and Miltonic allusions, he cannot sustain his hope that God and heaven are interested in either the outcome of the Civil War or mankind's war with evil. He concludes that "age after age shall be / As age after age has been" (p. 7), for "heaven with age is cold"

(p. 6). War and evil will continue with neither faith nor hope having much if any impact on them. The American nation might survive the war, but it may be able to do so only as a result of the intervention of and control of tyrants. In that event, the American founders' dream of individual liberty will be destroyed. The traditional voice finally concludes that neither America nor man can overcome the effects of evil. The only thing that is certain is that "death be busy with all who strive-- / Death with silent negative" (p. 7). Neither the faith nor the intellectualism of the voice provides any hope.

Each time the traditional voice speaks, the italic voice of cynicism and irony responds. This voice is completely negative. War will never be over; evil will never be overcome; God will be deaf forever; there will be no new Eden realized in America; the future will be just like the past, full of war and evil. To worry about human problems is ridiculous. In the ages to come the primal sea will once again cover the earth. Once the traditional voice reaches these same conclusions, and he does, there is nothing left for the cynic to reply. All is vanity.

Needless to say, despair and cynicism do not resolve the conflict of convictions. The third voice, in a paraphrase of Job 38:4-7, summarizes his position on the outcome of the war and, symbolically, on the display of evil. This

voice's conclusion is that man cannot provide definitive answers for the problems that the manifestation of evil reveals:

> YEA AND NAY--
> EACH HATH HIS SAY;
> BUT GOD HE KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY.
> NONE WAS BY
> WHEN HE SPREAD THE SKY;
> WISDOM IS VAIN AND PROPHESY (p. 7).

Men simply cannot know if God is responsible for or contributing to the war or evil. It is vain to try to find what causes evil and what the results of it will be. The mystery of iniquity in the universe is to be accepted by man, not understood. This is a theme, as we have seen, which Melville elaborates on fully in "The Scout toward Aldie." As patriot, Melville sincerely wished to believe that God would intervene in the war. As citizen, he fervently hoped that America would be the hope of the world. As poet, however, he realized that the issues are not so simple. Neither simple faith nor hope in God, man, nor necessity can solve the problems that the manifestation of evil presents. At the same time, while cynicism and irony may allow one the luxury of detachment, they do not provide solutions either. In reality, neither does the third voice. These three voices represent three attitudes that man may take toward the chaos that evil imposes on him. The attitude that man must take is that there is higher truth which

will remain unknown to him.[53] In this knowledge man must be content.

In the seventh stanza of "The Conflict of Convictions," Melville alludes to youth and age and its relationship to the problem of evil: "Senior wisdom suits not now, / The light is on the youthful brow" (p. 6). Poems concerning youth and evil comprise a rather large group in Battle-Pieces, and Melville's point in these poems is that just as the young men who go off to war often do not realize the significance of what they are doing, neither do they realize what the war is symbolic of. It is not a thing of glory. It is a thing of horror. Some of these young men, moreover, will come to realize that the war is symbolic of evil and will, therefore, be initiated into real maturity. Others will die too soon to be enlightened. In "Chattanooga," for example, Melville describes those who managed to fight their way to the top of Lookout Mountain only to drop

> . . . into Death's wide-open arms,
> Quelled on the wing like eagles struck in air--
> Forever they slumber young and fair,
> The smile upon them as they died;
> Their end attained, that end a height:
> Life was to these a dream fulfilled,
> And death a starry night (p. 61).

Like these young men who died at the battle of Chattanooga, the slain collegians

> Never felt life's care or cloy.
> Each bloomed and died an unabated Boy;

[53] Shurr, p. 30.

> Nor dreamed what death was--thought it mere
> Sliding into some vernal sphere.
> They knew the joy, but leaped the grief,
> Like plants that flower ere comes the leaf--
> Which storms lay low in kindly doom,
> And kill them in their flush of bloom (p. 105).

These soldiers "leaped the grief" of realizing not only that death is a horrible, certain finality and that war is not child's play, but they even in their deaths did not realize that death, like war, is an indication of the existence of evil in the world. These soldiers are like the young men in "Apathy and Enthusiasm" who,

> . . . were all elation
> Hearing Sumter's cannon roar
> And they thought how tame the Nation
> In the age that went before.
> And Michael seemed gigantical,
> The Arch-fiend but a dwarf;
> And at the towers of Erebus
> Our striplings flung the scoff (p. 9).

Unlike the older soldiers, mentioned in this poem, who view the pending conflict with foreboding, the young soldiers dare to defy death because in their youthful optimism they believe that good will triumph and that there will be no real contest between the forces of evil and the forces of good. These young "unabated Boys" never did learn the truth about war, death, or life as did the sailors in "Commemorative of a Naval Victory," as did Worden in "In the Turret," as did the men in "The March into Virginia," as did the major in "The College Colonel," or as did the soldiers in "Shiloh." "All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys, / The champions and enthusiasts of the state" (p. 10).

In "The March into Virginia," Melville describes the young men who went off to fight in the first major engagement of the war which took place on July 21, 1861, along Bull Run near Manassas Junction, a railroad depot located between Richmond and the Shenandoah Valley. The first strophe, which presents the problem, is full of wrenchings because Melville realizes that the gaiety, impulsiveness, and ignorance of youth shall be destroyed all too soon. Although he feels that "youth's ardors and joys" must precede maturity, a mature person has to be enlightened about the duality of existence. Can he be enlightened and retain his "trust and cheer" (p. 10)? Melville does not believe so.

The second strophe, through its rhymes, shifts the reader's attention to the marching men from the didactic lines of the first stanza and the first lines of the second stanza. In the second stanza, Melville uses the legal terms "forecasteth" and "precedent" to amplify on the idea that youth rushes madly to reality, choosing to ignore not only the wisdom of the ages mentioned in stanza one, but also the principle that war is horrible. The youths refuse to believe the "precedent" that like all other wars this one will be tragic. They also despise ("contemned") maturity's "foreclosures of surprise" (p. 10). The legal sense of the word "foreclosure" is that one's previous rights are taken away. Melville is implying that youth despise the idea that

maturity will take away their innocency and optimism. They do not give up their optimism without a struggle.

In the next ten lines, as we have suggested, the tone changes dramatically:

> The banners play, the bugles call,
> The air is blue and prodigal,
> No berrying party, pleasure-wooed,
> No picnic party in the May,
> Ever went less loth than they
> Into that leafy neighborhood,
> In Bacchic-glee they file toward Fate,
> Moloch's uninitiate;
> Expectancy, and glad surmise
> Of battle's unknown mysteries (p. 10).

The light attitude displayed in these lines is in marked contrast to the tone of the opening lines. We are allowed only a momentary identification with the joyful soldiers, however, before Melville shifts to the heart of his poem:

> But some who this blithe mood present,
> As on in lightsome files they fare,
> Shall die experienced ere three days be spent--
> Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare,
> Or shame survive, and, like to adamant,
> Thy after shock, Manassas, share (p. 11).

In a short three days, the idealistic young soldiers lose their innocence. They are enlightened about the true nature of the war and of evil by the "vollied glare" (p. 11). Those who survive First Manassas are hardened for further war. It is noteworthy that the boys "perish, enlightened" "Or shame survive" (p. 11). They are ashamed of the crushing defeat which they suffered in this battle, and perhaps they are also ashamed that they were so blithe about war.

In "Ball's Bluff," Melville also comments on how sad it is to see youth march off to death so "lustily." They feel so "immortal, like gods sublime" (p. 14). They do not believe that "death in a rosy clime / Would come to thin their shining throng" (p. 14).

The enlightenment theme is also seen in several other poems in _Battle-Pieces_. "The College Colonel" (pp. 79-80), like the young soldiers in "The March into Virginia," comes to realize that the war is a symbol of evil and that evil is an everpresent reality in life. In this poem, the young colonel and the remnant of his army who survive the war are compared to sailors who barely escape from the sea with their lives (p. 79). One is reminded of how Pip in _Moby Dick_ saw the nature of reality in the sea and emerged demented. What Pip and the College Colonel both realize is that evil is a part of life. The Colonel is a hero, but it is as if he has lived a thousand years:

> A still rigidity and pale--
>   An Indian aloofness lones his brow;
> He has lived a thousand years
> Compressed in battle's pains and prayers,
>   Marches and watches slow.
> There are welcoming shouts, and flags;
>   Old men off hat to the Boy,
> Wreaths from gay balconies fall at his feet,
>   But to _him_--there comes alloy.
>
> It is not that a leg is lost,
>   It is not that an arm is maimed,
> It is not that the fever has racked--
>   Self he has long disclaimed.

> But all through the Seven Days' Fight,
> And deep in the Wilderness grim,
> And in the field-hospital tent,
> And Petersburg crater, and dim
> Lean brooding in Libby, there came--
> Ah heaven!--what truth to him (pp. 79-80).

The old men are presented as rejoicing in the "Boy's" triumph at war. Perhaps they "off hats" to him out of respect for the fact that he is now one of them--he has seen the truth about war and the evil it represents.

Another poem in the enlightenment epicycle is "Shiloh," one of Melville's most successful and indeed one of the most successful of all Civil War poems. This poem commemorates the Battle of Shiloh, which took place on the Tennessee River on Sunday and Monday, April 6 and 7, 1862. The Confederate forces commanded by Albert Sidney Johnson lost 10,694 soldiers, including Johnson himself. The Union army lost 13,047 men.[54] Melville frames the heart of his poem in four rhyming lines at the beginning and two at the end in which he pictures circling swallows. The wheeling swallows are often symbolic of life and resurrection, as are spring (l. 5), rain (ll. 5-6), Sundays (l. 8), and churches (ll. 9-10), which Melville also uses in this poem. On a first reading, these images stand in marked contrast to the soldiers who are dying. Each time, however, that Melville presents an image of life, he follows it by an image which

[54] Cohen, "Notes," p. 228.

suggests darkness, pain, fighting, and death. These images seem to negate the life imagery. At the same time, the soldiers who were "foeman at morn" are "friends at eve-- / Fame or country least their care" (p. 41). They have, also, to their credit, realized that war is not a boy's game: "What like a bullet can undeceive!" (p. 41). This enlightenment is for Melville a type of new life. Sadly, however, the poem goes on, these men "lie low . . . / And all is hushed at Shiloh" (p. 41). It is better to die enlightened, however, according to Melville, than it is to live or die without realizing the truth about war, man, and the universe. Melville, therefore, realizes that some of those young men who went to war so jubilantly died just as they had lived, unaware of the complexity of life. Some of them who were so exultant when the war began realized all too soon that wars are evil and that it is the nature of evil to deceive. Some, however, despite the fact that they are illuminated about the war and the reality of existence, still die.

In addition to presenting the theme of enlightenment, "Shiloh" also provides some consolation for the fact that death, evil, and the knowledge of evil are a part of man's life. The "wheeling" of the swallows, the repetition, the feminine rhyming of Shiloh (11. 4 and 19) with fly low (1. 2) and lie low (1. 17), and ending the poem as it

began, with the wheeling swallows--all serve to contribute to the circular development of the poem. This emphasis on the circular, therefore, is one of the main aspects of the poem. Just as the circular development of the poem is important to meaning in "Dupont's Round Fight," it is in this poem also. Melville wishes us to realize that though life and hope are very real, so are death, evil, and knowledge about evil. Both evil and good are part of life; all revolves. Death is real but so is life: "And live once over, who shall tell the rest? / Life is, of all we know, God's best" (p. 83). Melville, therefore, finds some solace concerning death, war, and evil in the life-death-rebirth cycle of nature.

A second poem in Battle-Pieces in which Melville uses a circular development and which also indicates hope in the life-death-rebirth cycle of nature is "Malvern Hill." The Battle of Malvern Hill took place July 1, 1862, as McClellan attempted to capture Richmond from Lee. Melville's source was probably a quotation from the Appeal which described the house at Malvern Hill where the battle took place. According to this description, the lawn was "embowered" with a "fine grove of ancient elms"; and the battle seemed, the author says, "a bitter satire on the wickedness of man, this peaceful, serene, harmonious aspect of nature. . . ."[55] Melville

[55] Cohen, "Notes," p. 231.

visited Malvern Hill in April, 1864, when he was touring various battle fields in Virginia.

"Malvern Hill," like "Shiloh," is an elegy similar to Gray's in the sense that Melville uses the theme of death to discuss man's place in the universe. The poet asks the elms if they remember the men who died at Malvern Hill. For the poet this is a question that has eternal significance. He does not feel that he can ever forget those who died: "Some with the cartridge in their mouth, / Others with fixed arms lifted South" (p. 44). The elms, representative of nature, however, do not feel compelled to answer. The poet next reminds the elms that the man-made spires of Richmond saw "the haggard beards of blood" (p. 44) as men fought in this battle. Do they not sorrow for the many who suffered during seven days and nights of battle? The elms continue their silence, for when the spires of Richmond are crumbling into dust, they will continue to be renewed each year.

When the poet addresses the elms in the third stanza, he describes the endurance of McClellan's men who were forced to withdraw from Malvern Hill to Harrison's landing on July 1, 1862, even though they had held their positions against Lee during actual battle. "Reverse we proved was not defeat; / But ah, the sod what thousands meet" (p. 45). Then he asks, "Does Malvern wood / Bethink itself, and muse and brood?" (p. 45). Now the elms can respond for the

question involves time and endurance. They respect endurance. In a sense, too, they must endure death--the death of winter for the rebirth of spring. They know that "wag the world how it will / Leaves must be green in Spring" (p. 45). Man may also endure death by knowing that it is only one aspect of the cycle of life. The bitter memory of death and suffering is eased by time and new life.

In form, image, and theme, "Malvern Hill" evokes a circle as does "Shiloh." The poem begins with a reference to May in line 2 and ends with an allusion to a new May or spring. Of course, the elms themselves represent the inevitability of nature's cycle. From this cycle man can attain some comfort. In both "Shiloh" and "Malvern Hill," Melville presents the possibility that man, despite the ever-present reality of good and evil in the universe, can take some comfort from nature's cycle. After all, Herman Melville was the poet who, despite the darkness of evil and fate, still hoped for the progress of all men.

While Melville does seem to believe that the knowledge of the cycle of nature can comfort man about death and eternity, he does not imply that nature is man's friend. "Nature is nobody's ally," he writes in "The Stone Fleet" (p. 17). In "Apathy and Enthusiasm," nature produces a sky which is like a sheet of lead (p. 8), certainly not very responsive to man's cries for help. For the most part,

nature in Melville's works does not appear to be actively evil, unless its unyielding silence can be interpreted as evil. There are creatures, such as the Maldive shark, which appear to be completely evil, but the shark is a friend to the "sleek little pilot-fish" (p. 200). They find a haven in his jaws. On first appearance, nature in "The Haglets" and in "The Berg," both found in John Marr, appears to be actively evil. On closer examination, however, this is not true. Man is found to have been destroyed in "The Haglets" by his own negligence, not the active malignance of nature; and while negligence is not involved in man's destruction in "The Berg," neither is nature. The berg is characterized only by its "dead indifference of walls" (p. 204). In other words, like every other aspect of life, there is an inextricable interweaving of good and evil in nature. The good is represented by the hope that its life-death-rebirth cycle generates. Its evil, if it can be considered as such, is represented by its vast indifference to man's needs.

Not only does Melville hope that nature will help men forget the terrors of the Civil War, but he also hopes that time will help to negate the horror of the war. This view is expressed in "Battle of Stone River, Tennessee," and "Formerly a Slave." Its fullest expression, however, is in "Donelson." Melville writes:

Ah God! may Time with happy haste
Bring wail and triumph to a waste,
And war be done;
The battle flag-staff fall athwart
The curs'd ravine, and wither; naught
Be left of trench or gun;
The bastion, let it ebb away,
Washed with the river bed; and Day
In vain seek Donelson (p. 33).

This verse makes it very clear that Melville is not primarily concerned with the victory of Union forces at Donelson. The Battle of Donelson is synonymous of the entire war, with the changing weather, the near victories and defeats; but Melville hopes that all that the battle symbolizes for both sides might be washed away in time. Here nature in the form of the river bed serves to aid time in erasing from memory, Donelson, symbol of the entire war, and its effect on man. The flowing water image used throughout the poem serves to unify the entire poem and to suggest, too, that war and its scars will pass away. The battle commemorated in this poem was fought February 12-18, 1862. It was a turning point of the war as the Confederates lost both their Kentucky and northern Tennessee positions. Most important, it allowed Grant to split the South as he drove his forces down the Mississippi to Vicksburg.

Using a modern cinematic-like technique, Melville presents not only the battle but the reactions of the people at home as they read reports of the battle of Donelson on a public bulletin board. Again Melville uses different types

of print to represent different voices: Roman type represents the narrative, all capitals indicate headlines of the war bulletins, and italic type depicts dispatches from the front. The passages of narrative are in the past and the dispatches are in the present tense. Although setting the poem in different types and tenses emphasizes the differences between watchers and soldiers, these differences are only superficial. In reality both watchers and soldiers share equally in the suffering. Although their circumstances differ, they both endure the rain, the cold, the fear of death, the suffering:

> Yea, many an earnest heart was won,
> As broodingly he plodded on,
> To find in himself some bitter thing,
> Some hardness in his lot as harrowing
> As Donelson (p. 29).

Melville's use of newspaper articles as sources for his dispatches contributes immediacy and realism to his poem. His language of war technology does the same. He writes of "blasts of shrapnel and quick shell" (p. 22), of "ice-glazed corpses, each a stone-- / A sacrifice to Donelson" (p. 26), of soldiers, "fierce wasps whose sting was present death" (p. 21), of "hanging gardens of cold death" (p. 22), of columns of infantry that "rolled on, vomited out of Donelson / Rolled down the slopes like rivers of hell" (p. 27), of "blood drops on the snow-crust there / Like clover in the white-weed show" (p. 30). Although there is

no rhyme scheme as such, the use of rhyme in the poem gives a sense of order and control to a chaotic subject and what could have been an unmanageable technique. In this poem, although Melville lacks conciseness, he uses the prosaic style at which he is best as he addresses himself to the hope that the effects of the war will be completely obliterated by nature and time.

Just as the Patriot's Cycle and the Citizen's Cycle attempt to bring about reconciliation between North and South, so the Poet's Cycle tries to bring all mankind to reconciliation with the "ironical dualities of existence." While it is man's responsibility to know that evil is a reality of life, he is to accept this knowledge, hoping that the good which is also present in existence can somehow redeem life. Unlike those who are destroyed because they refuse to graciously accept the fact that evil is a part of life or those who refuse to admit that evil even exists, Melville's real heroes are the Ishmaels, the Redburns, the White-Jackets, Hunillas, the Wordens, the Surgeons who, though they are saddened by what they learn about themselves and their world, do not rail at the evil they see or shut their eyes to it; they accept it with a so-be-it attitude. Melville's heroes in Battle-Pieces are those that enlightenment has left calm (p. 35), brave (p. 126), gentle, strong,

and good (p. 115). The subject of "'The Coming Storm'" is well aware that "a demon-cloud like the mountain one" (p. 94) can burst upon him at any moment, for he has reached "Shakespeare's core" (p. 94). At the same time, his spirit is mild (p. 94). He knows what to expect from life, and he is "Shakespeare's pensive child" (p. 94). He is not obsessed with defying evil nor does he ignore it. He accepts it with "a spirit as mild / As this urned lake, the home of shades" (p. 94). Men of this nature are Melville's true heroes. By the time he came to write Battle-Pieces, though we still see glimpses of the yea-sayer and the nay-sayer in him, as in "The Conflict of Convictions," Melville had become reconciled to the fact that life is composed of both good and evil. He no doubt hoped that his war poems would help bring other men to that same reconciliation.

In the Poet's Cycle, therefore, Melville attempts to explain the forces behind the Civil War. If the readers of Battle-Pieces can come to understand that the war is symptomatic of the reality of evil in the world, if they can understand that all men are caught up in the duality of existence, then they are initiated into the brotherhood of men. Though the knowledge that evil is the controlling reality of life is painful and though man realizes that Time, Nature, History and Man are capricious, because of the nature of reality, he can still obtain some comfort in the fact that like himself,

Time, Nature, History and Man are also capable of good. It is only as man accepts the mystery of iniquity that he reaches true manhood.

That Melville wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War as patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet accounts for certain tensions and contradictions in the volume. Melville was too much the philosopher to be able to perceive the war from only one viewpoint as did so many authors of other Civil War poetry. To see the complexities of Battle-Pieces is to see the mind of Herman Melville. As one examines Melville's war poems, he sees ambiguities in Melville's concept of the war, of its causes, of the South's role in the conflict and of God's relationship to the war. These uncertainties, however, do not detract from Battle-Pieces. On the contrary, they enhance the volume in several respects.

First of all, because Melville wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War from the vantage points of patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet, he is ambivalent toward the Civil War. He can write, for example, that

> Turned adrift into war
> Man runs wild on the plain,
> Like the jennets let loose
> On the Pampas--zebras again (p. 65),

and

> Ah God! may Time with happy haste
> Bring wail and triumph to a waste,
> And war be done;
> The battle flag-staff fall athwart
> The curs'd ravine and wither; naught
> Be left of trench or gun (p. 33).

At the same time, as we have seen, he can eulogize the Union soldiers as he applauds their bravery, courage, and nobility. On the other hand, as we have also discovered, he recognizes the bravery, courage, and nobility of the Southern soldier. After all, since Melville did not feel that the men on either side of the conflict were to be held responsible for the war,[56] he could praise their efforts. Melville is attempting to get his kinsman to realize that the Southerner is no different from him. He felt, as he indicates in "A Meditation," that a soldier, Northerner or Southerner, deserved mercy and respect in direct proportion to his courage in battle. One cannot conclude that because Melville appreciates and celebrates various Southern soldiers he supported the South in the war. By the same token one cannot assume that he gloried in the Civil War because he appreciated the Union soldier's willingness to die for what he believed right. "A just cause, without description of heroic deeds, never stirs the imagination."[57] Melville also writes in "The Battle for the Mississippi" that "the strong wing to the muse is given / In victory's roar" (p. 42).

As we have also observed, Melville did support the cause for which the North fought as just. This also contributes to

[56] D. S. Goforth, "Melville's Shorter Poems: The Substance and the Significance," Diss. Indiana University 1968, p. 111.

[57] Hand, p. 330.

his ambiguity. Because he did support the cause of the war is not to say that he approved of the means taken to right the wrongs done to the black. In fact he writes:

> Some hearts there are of deeper sort,
> Prophetic, sad,
> Which yet for cause are trebly clad (p. 11).

He felt that

> Now, though far and wide, to keep equal pace with the times, great reforms, of a verity, be needed; nowhere are bloody revolutions required. Though it may be the most certain of remedies, no prudent invalid opens his veins, to let out his disease with his life (Mardi, p. 529).

Melville also felt that the war was greater than the cause; for he asks, "Can Africa pay back this blood / Spilt on Potomac's shore?" (p. 154). In the final analysis, while he does approve of the cause for which the war was fought, he concludes:

> Were men but strong and wise,
> . . . .
> War would be left to the red and black ants,
> And the happy world disarm (p. 66).

Melville sympathized with the cause of the war, but he never lost his horror of it.[58]

Melville's ambivalent attitude toward the war can be traced in part to his belief that war, however unlovely, is an inevitable part of the human condition and that man must

[58] Charles Hettinger, "Herman Melville's Poetry," Thesis Duke University 1936, p. 331.

realize this fact. Very ironically he writes in "The Conflict of Convictions":

> (Dismantle the fort,
> Cut down the fleet--
> Battle no more shall be!
> While the fields for fight in aeons to come
> Congeal beneath the sea.) (p. 4).

Later in this same poem he reiterates the view implied here when he writes that

> Age after age shall be
> As age after age has been
> (From man's changeless heart their
> way they win.) (p. 7).

That Melville believed that "war yet shall be, and to the end" (p. 40) does not imply in any way that he ever approved of the war; but he did recognize that man being what he is, war will come. Since the war came, Melville hoped that it would result in good; but he does not indicate that he felt that the war had any good aspects in itself. If good did come from the war, that good would be inextricably mixed with the evil the war had brought; for "seldom the laurel wreath is seen / Unmixed with pensive pansies dark" (p. 115).

Any assertion, therefore, about Melville's ambiguity on the war seems explainable when one considers the complexity of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War. Melville did believe that courage and bravery lent themselves to poetry and that brave men deserved being lauded. Second, he did sympathize with the cause of war; and he did believe, too, that war is an inevitable part of the human dilemma.

Ultimately, however, Melville's ambiguity toward the Civil War did not result from his becoming reconciled to the war as it dragged on because he saw it as a manifestation of the universal scheme of things,[59] nor did it result from the fact that he wholeheartedly endorsed the war at its beginning but gradually became skeptical of its justifiability.[60] Melville's ambiguity about the Civil War results from his humanness. As most of us would, he had mixed feelings, not about war in general but about a war that affected him and his country. It is easy to say that war is terrible; but it is not so easy to say that one should not fight to protect himself, his property, or what he believes in. Melville, like most of us, never did solve that problem in his own mind, nor could he do so in Battle-Pieces. This ambiguity toward the Civil War produces in Battle-Pieces a thematic and artistic complexity.[61]

Though Melville was ambivalent in his attitude toward the Civil War, his lifelong passionate hatred of war comes to a climax in this volume.[62] Indeed, to realize that, while Melville hated war in general and the Civil War in

[59] Thorp, p. lxxvii.

[60] John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1964), p. 187.

[61] Bernstein, p. 187.

[62] B. L. Reid, "Old Melville's Fable," Massachusetts Review, 9 (1968), 543.

particular, he could still support the cause of the Civil War, appreciate the soldiers on both sides, and hope for good to come out of the war, though it was a terrible reality of life, is to see Melville as a much nobler, a much more complex soul than one who wavered in his attitude toward "war's red dance o'death" (John Marr, p. 170). In the paradox of rightness of cause entwined with war's agony and waste lies the source of the central tension in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War.[63]

That Melville wrote a good portion of Battle-Pieces as a citizen who was concerned for the Republic and all her sons also accounts in part for the fact that he makes few references to the slavery issue in the poems themselves. His strongest statement is that slavery is "man's foulest crime" (p. 3). That Melville had little to say about slavery resulted from the fact that Battle-Pieces was designed to bring about re-establishment. If slavery had been treated in detail in the volume, old passions would have been revived. Melville surely did not wish this to occur. Basically, however, he made only passing references to slavery in Battle-Pieces because he did not consider slavery as a significant cause of the Civil War. He believed that while the slavery issue was used by evil men in the South to provoke war, slavery, like the war itself, was symptomatic

[63] Shurr, p. 13.

of the nature of existence. It was not the real cause of the war.

Although as neither patriot nor citizen did Melville discuss the causes of the war, as poet he believed that both fate and necessity played a part in causing the Civil War. In Battle-Pieces, for example, he makes eight references to fate and two references to necessity. In "On the Slain Collegians," he writes that "well the stripling bore their fated parts / (The heavens all parts assign)" (p. 105). Lee in "Lee in the Capitol" says that "North and South were driven / By Fate to arms" (p. 150). Lee also feels that his hour of trial is "come of Fate" (p. 145). Now that the war is over, he will follow Fate (p. 149). Melville's position in Battle-Pieces is, as the quotations cited above indicate, that the war was ordained by fate, for "it is man's own creation of history that is fate."[64] "Fatalism," he writes, "presumes express and irrevocable edicts of heaven concerning particular events" (Mardi, p. 425). This does not imply, necessarily, however, that the outcome of those events is determined. Melville was not a pure fatalist. In fact, in his works the pure fatalists are either those, such as Ahab, Pierre, and Mortmain, who see too much of the complexity of life and find their end in a tragic death; or they are those completely innocent and childlike characters, such as Billy

[64] Stern, p. 198.

Budd and John Marr's friends, who see too little of the ambiguities and conflicts of life. Ishmael seems to best state Melville's lifelong position on the subject of fate. While Melville uses the term "chance" here, it does not appear that he means accident or luck but that he uses it to mean "fate." Ishmael muses,

> Chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events (p. 212).

In other words, while fate, or chance as Melville calls it, is a very powerful influence in the universe, it works within the bounds of natural law and free will. Those men like Ishmael and Lee in Battle-Pieces are Melville's balanced characters who attune their free will to the edicts of fate. Others, like Sherman, attune their free will to necessity.[65]

Since Melville believed that fate, free will, and necessity are in no wise incompatible, and that all interweavingly work together (Moby Dick, p. 212), necessity and free will also played their respective parts in the Civil War. In "The Conflict of Convictions," he writes that "strong Necessity / Surges, and heaps Time's strand with wrecks" (p. 5). He immediately follows these lines, however, by an allusion to free will. "The People spread like a

[65] Goforth, pp. 90-91.

weedy grass, / The thing they will bring to pass" (p. 5). Fate ordained the war, but necessity and free will helped to determine the outcome. "Necessity," according to Melville, "holds that all events are naturally linked, and inevitably follow each other, without providential interposition, though by the eternal letting of Providence" (Mardi, p. 425), and we are told in Battle-Pieces that "God He keeps the middle way" (p. 7). When Melville says that "all events are naturally linked," he appears to be saying that anything that is inevitable or unavoidable as a result of natural law is a product of necessity; and he attributes man's inclination to make or to provoke war to necessity. Man's natural belligerency is equated with the belligerency of spiders, vixens, and tigers; for "all this existeth of necessity" (Mardi, p. 441). In Battle-Pieces, necessity drives men and events; therefore, "war yet shall be, and to the end" (p. 40).

All men have the potentiality for good or evil, even the naturally depraved; for free will is "free to ply her shuttle between given threads" (Moby Dick, p. 212). Man has free will insofar as he

> . . . is allowed freedom by the history handed down by his fathers, and insofar as his heart or heartlessness, mind or mindlessness, are operative upon specifics in the present circumscribed by the demands of mortal history. . . .[66]

[66] Stern, p. 198.

Babbalanja in Mardi explains this point to Media when he tells the story of Willi, fool of one King Normo. According to the story, one day Normo told Willi to go wait for him under a certain tree. When Willi asks if he may walk to the tree on his hands, the king replies that he cares not how he gets there so long as he does (p. 429). In other words, the king, perhaps equivalent to fate, sets the event in motion, but Willi is free to act as he wills. So man is free to choose how he will conduct an affair set in motion by fate. For example, Melville writes in "The March to the Sea" that it was "Treason's retribution / Necessity the plea" (p. 455). While the soldiers pretended to be driven in their scourge of the South by necessity, this line seems to indicate that this is just an excuse for their behavior. In the case of the Civil War, man unleashed his ferocious instincts; he dragged the war on and on; he hated his brother because he chose, out of his natural inclination, to do so.

Man's freedom is restricted by necessity or his own inclinations. For example, in the story mentioned above, Willi, while he is free to move to the tree on his hands, soon realizes that his freedom is restricted by natural laws, namely, that hands are not designed for walking. In like manner, while the men who fought in the Civil War were free to choose how they would act, they were restricted by natural law--their own inclination to do evil. While King

Normo did not in the case mentioned above overrule Willi's necessity or his free will, he might have done so. This would not have meant that Willi had no natural inclinations nor any free will; it would have simply meant, as Melville said, that "chance [fate] by turns rules either" (p. 212). Melville appears to have believed that fate and necessity played their parts in the great historic tragedy of his time, the American Civil War. Fate set the war in motion; the moral condition of man made his actions inevitable; but Melville also seems to believe that man had some influence, at least on the intensity of the conflict.

By avoiding writing about slavery as the moving cause of the war, Melville identifies himself as a citizen who was seeking to reunite his country. For if the Northerner realizes that the Southerner had little to do with causing the war, Melville believes that he will be more inclined to forgive him for his part in the war. By the same token, the fact that Melville identifies the cause of war as fate reveals him as the poet of the war.

Just as some of the poems present conflicting points of view about the war and its causes, so some indicate that Melville is unsure in his presentation of the South. As patriot he wrote highly emotional pieces celebrating the Northern causes and her soldiers. As citizen, however, he realized that the war was

> . . . a triumph, too, over a people for years politically misled by designing men, and also by some honestly-erring men, who from their position could not have been otherwise than broadly influential; a people who, though, indeed, they sought to perpetuate the curse of slavery, and even extend it, were not the authors of it but (less fortunate, not less righteous than we) were the fated inheritors; a people who, having a like origin with ourselves, share essentially in whatever worthy qualities we posesss [sic]. No one can add to the lasting reproach which hopeless defeat has now cast upon Secession by withholding the recognition of these verities (p. 464).

Before he finished writing Battle-Pieces, Melville was not even sure that the South warred for the wrong and the North for the right. As well as in the "Supplement," in "On the Slain Collegians," he says concerning the young soldiers of both North and South:

> Each went forth with blessings given
> By priests and mothers in the name of Heaven;
> And honor in all was chief.
> Warred one for Right, and one for Wrong?
> So put it; but they both were young (p. 104).

In the last poem in the volume the poet concludes that the North must forbear the old upbraiding that "'The South's the sinner!' Well, so let it be; / But shall the North sin worse, and stand the Pharisee?" (p. 155). "It is enough," Melville concludes in the "Supplement," "if the South have been taught by the terrors of civil war to feel that Secession, like Slavery, is against Destiny; that both now lie buried in one grave; that her fate is linked with ours; and that together we comprise the Nation" (p. 461).

Just as Melville is unable to sustain his position in the Patriot's Cycle that the North represents the right in the war, he is also unable to continue his assertion that God supports the North. For example, in "Aurora-Borealis," he implies that God is just as responsible for the North's military reverses as He is for her victories. Here Melville is describing a cartoon that appeared in Harper's Weekly, May 25, 1861. The cartoon was entitled "A Rebel General Startled in His Camp by the Beautiful and Unexpected Display of Northern Lights." Melville uses the display of the aurora borealis that was seen near Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December of 1862 to symbolize "the dissolution of the armies at peace" (p. 98). In stanza two of this poem, the poet writes:

> The phantom-host has failed quite,
>   Splendor and Terror gone--
> Portent or promise--and gives way
>   To pale, meek Dawn;
>   The coming, going,
>   Alike in wonder showing--
> Alike the God,
>   Decreeing and commanding
> The million blades that glowed,
>   The muster and disbanding--
>   Midnight and Morn (p. 98).

God, this verse implies, had a hand in "decreeing and commanding" "the muster and disbanding" of all the troops, both North and South (p. 98). God is like the aurora borealis in that He inspires both "Splendor and Terror,"

"portent" and "promise" (p. 98). He brought both the "Mid-night" of the war and the "Morn" of its end.

The "Fall of Richmond" is often cited to prove that Melville believes that God is on the North's side. While, as we have seen, this is sometimes true in Battle-Pieces, it is not true here. In the first place, Melville is recording how the tidings of the fall of Richmond were received in a Northern metropolis. The lines "Sing and pray," "Bless his glaive," and "God's way adore" (p. 89) are ironical.[67] This idea is borne out by the fact that they are in italic type, usually another voice in Battle-Pieces, and by the fact that Melville parodies Browning's optimism when he writes: "But God is in Heaven, and Grant in the Town, and Right through might is Law" (p. 89). The verses indicate that the people believe that God has had a definite hand in helping them quell "the helmed dilated Lucifer" (p. 89). The ironical tags at the end of the stanzas, however, imply that if this is so, God is Himself evil. Edmund Wilson feels that Melville has much in common with Browning and was influenced considerably by his works, and it is true that they both loved harsh, jagged sounds and rhythms. This

[67] Gene B. Montague, "Melville's Battle-Pieces," Texas University Studies in English, 35 (1956), 112.

line indicates that Melville had read Browning and was perhaps encouraged in his anti-poetic style by him.[68]

Finally, "A Canticle," quoted in its entirety below, is often cited to prove that Melville credited the Northern victory to God's intervention:

O the precipice Titanic
  Of the congregated Fall,
And the angle oceanic
    Where the deepening thunders call--
      And the Gorge so grim,
      And the firmamental rim!
Multitudinously thronging
    The waters all converge,
Then they sweep adown in sloping
    Solidity of surge.

The Nation, in her impulse
    Mysterious as the Tide,
In emotion like an ocean
    Moves in power, not in pride;
And is deep in her devotion
    As Humanity is wide.

Thou Lord of hosts victorious,
    The confluence Thou hast twined;
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.

Stable in its baselessness
    When calm is in the air,
The Iris half in tracelessness
    Hovers faintly fair.
Fitfully assailing it
    A wind from heaven blows,
Shivering and paling it
    To blankness of the snows;

[68] Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 324.

While, incessant in renewal,
The Arch rekindled grows,
Till again the gem and jewel
Whirl in blinding overthrows--
Till, prevailing and transcending,
Lo, the Glory perfect there,
And the contest finds an ending,
For repose is in the air.

But the foamy Deep unsounded,
And the dim and dizzy ledge,
And the booming roar rebounded,
And the gull that skims the edge!
The Giant of the Pool
Heaves his forehead white as wool--
Toward the Iris ever climbing
From the Cataracts that call--
Irremovable vast arras
Draping all the Wall.

The Generations pouring
From times of endless date,
In their going, in their flowing
Ever form the steadfast State;
And Humanity is growing
Toward the fullness of her fate.

Thou 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 (pp. 90-92).

Melville notes that "A Canticle" is "significant of the national exaltation of enthusiasm at the close of the war" (p. 90); it is not significant of his own. When critics quote lines from this poem, they nearly always quote from stanzas one, two, three, six, and seven. Stanzas four and five are ignored, but surely these are indicative of Melville's view, not the people's. He realizes that while Iris, the rainbow, symbol of the end of the war or the triumph of

good, has faintly appeared, it is assailed by the snow, continuing evil or war. The Iris finally seems to prevail, but this is not really so. Wise men, such as Melville, are well aware that

> The Giant of the Pool
> Heaves his forehead white as wool--
> Toward the Iris ever climbing (p. 92).

In short, the people may think that the war is over and that God has given the victory. Melville, on the other hand, realizes that the war may not be over and that it is too early for rejoicing. He also sees beyond the war as such to realize that the potentiality for war is ever present.

Melville was ambiguous about God, who He is, what His relationship to the Civil War was, and what His relationship to good and evil is. Probably Melville saw God, like His universe, as an amoral, all-inclusive being. He is a God who does not see good and evil as separate entities. He, Himself, is an embodiment of both.[69] He is indeed the creator of both.[70] The best man can know about God is that he cannot know what God thinks or what He does. This is especially clear in <u>Battle-Pieces</u>. In the simpler pieces in this volume, Melville can say that God supports the war as a good cause. In the final analysis, however, Melville

[69] Bowen, p. 116.

[70] Janez Stanonik, <u>Moby Dick: The Myth and the Symbol, A Study in Folklore and Literature</u> (Ljubljana, Yugoslavia: Ljubljana University Press, 1962), p. 152.

simply does not pretend to know who God is or what part He plays in the war. In fact, He may not play a part. In "The Conflict of Convictions," the poet says "He keeps the middle way" (p. 7). The poems in which Melville implies that God supports the North were written early during the composition of the battle-pieces; and Melville was, for a time, swept along with the religious fervor that often accompanies war. He may have felt that the mood and themes of his war poems called for a token adherence to faith or that people function best during war under a childlike faith. In reality, his decision to allude to the Christian faith probably came out of his patriotism and a deep-seated desire to be accepted as the poet of the war. He probably felt he had to identify with the majority of the people's feelings about religion in order to get a hearing for his war poetry. Once Melville decided, however, that the South was not the representation of evil and once he was unsure just who God is and what role He played in the war, he was forced to abandon the position that God aids the North in the war.

In the final analysis the three cycles of <u>Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War</u> are all interrelated. Though the poems in the Patriot's Cycle are often unthinkingly partisan, the majority of these poems, the eulogies, contribute indirectly to the Poet's Cycle; for Melville's obsession with war heroes resulted from the fact that he believed the hunter

and the warrior are most likely to become men of enlightenment. Their constant association with evil and death enables them to see that evil is an ever-present reality, for "what like a bullet can undeceive!" (p. 41). Just as the poet understands the metaphysical realities of life, so does the man who has faced death and survived.

The Poet's Cycle is also related to the Citizen's Cycle in its emphasis on the nature of man. If the Northerner realizes that the Southerner is truly his brother in that they are both ploys in the universal scheme of things, then there is no need for continued hatred and abuse. They are both victims. Once man realizes and accepts the truth about himself, then he can understand, love, and tolerate others. Once he begins to love, no more his "splintered heart and maddened hand" are turned against the wolfish world (Moby Dick, p. 50). It is Melville's belief that "love is all in all" (Mardi, p. 629). Only by accepting oneself can one accept others. Only by being reconciled to his true nature can man be reconciled to his fellow men. Only by being reconciled to himself can the Northerner be reconciled to his Southern brother. The three perspectives of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War are beautifully interwoven, even in their differences.

That Melville wrote Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War as patriot, citizen, and philosopher-poet does not

establish that he was almost schizophrenic in his portrayal of the war.[71] What it does demonstrate, first of all, is that his depiction of the war resulted from his being a human being. He, like any person in a country torn by civil war, had deep-seated loyalties that grew out of his heritage. That he was able to sublimate these feelings in a benevolence for his whole country, however, attests not only to his stature as a person but to his great humanity. Finally, that he could see the war as more than a partisan conflict demonstrates Melville's universality. As poet of the American Civil War, Herman Melville manifests not only his complexity but also his greatness.

[71] Wystan Tremayne Curnow, "Melville's Poetry to 1876," Dissertation Abstracts, 33 (1973), 1719A (University of Pennsylvania).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Civil War, as does any great event, inspired much poetry. In 1866, the same year that Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War appeared, two collections of poetry were published. William Gilmore Simms edited War Poetry of the South, and Richard Grant White collected Poetry: Lyrical, Narrative and Satirical of the Civil War, a volume that contained primarily pieces from the North. In addition to Melville's volume of Civil War poetry, Henry Howard Brownell published War Lyrics and Other Poems in 1866; and Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps appeared in 1865. Herman Melville's small collection of Civil War poems, published in August, 1866, was, therefore, only one of 60,000 books and articles about the war that have appeared since the Civil War ended April 9, 1865.[1] Although Battle-Pieces was little noted nor remembered in Melville's own time, and though too few are aware of its existence today, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is important.

[1] James I. Robertson, Jr., ed., "The Concise Illustrated History of the Civil War," special edition of "American History Illustrated."

Battle-Pieces, first of all, is of consequence as a work of art in its own right. It is a unified work of art because its style is fitted to content and because its overall structure reinforces its themes. Very closely interrelated to the importance of Battle-Pieces as a work of art in its own right is the fact that the volume is important for what it reveals about Melville as artist, as American, and as philosopher-poet. As an artist, Melville was innovative as well as diligent. He had very definite beliefs about poetry and its function in society, and he also had theories about composition, structure and form which he worked hard to put into practice in Battle-Pieces. In addition, Battle-Pieces gives us important insight into Melville as an American during the Civil War. Melville was decidedly patriotic in that he fully supported the North and her soldiers. Simultaneously, he experienced the war as an American citizen who was very much concerned that America's future not be jeopardized by a division in spirit if not in fact. Finally, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War discloses that Melville the philosopher-poet could depose Melville the American and, by so doing, create a timeless account of the Civil War.

Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War should be recognized as a highly effective work of art. Its "slow, weighty,

tight, and rather toneless lines"[2] are suitable to the age of mechanism where all goes by "crank, / Pivot, and screw, / And calculations of caloric,"[3] and to the subject of war in which

> Turned adrift into war
> Man runs wild on the plain,
> Like the jennets let loose
> On the Pampas--zebras again (p. 65).

The prosaic terms from business, industry, law, and mathematics, as well as those strange words coined just for the occasion, further emphasize the horrors of mechanized war. No other terms could so well describe those young soldiers who died unabated "boys" (p. 105) or those who died "enlightened by the vollied glare" (p. 11). What better could describe those who go into battle "in Bacchric glee . . . / Moloch's uninitiate" (p. 10) or those whom bullets "undeceive" (p. 41).

In its imagery, Battle-Pieces is often grimly unromantic also. Though many images involving storms, stars, rivers and seas are conventional, others are fresh and compelling. The picture of the nation's capitol as an iron dome with rust on it--"Ha, ha, the rust on the Iron Dome!" (p. 5)--is as

[2] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 264.

[3] Herman Melville, Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), p. 40. All future references to this volume will be cited in the text.

thought-provoking as it is striking. John Brown's "streaming beard" is a vivid "meteor of the war" in "The Portent" (p. 3). Some of Battle-Pieces' most original images appear in "The Armies of Wilderness," side by side with purely conventional ones, such as "the Pillar of Smoke that led / Was brand-like . . ." (p. 69). In one instance, however, Melville writes that "a hand reaches out of the thin-laid mould / As begging help which none can bestow" (p. 64), of "dead faces--white / As pebbles in a well" (p. 68), of "mirth in a camp, / So like a white tent to a shroud" (p. 65). In one image, Melville grotesquely contrasts death with birth when he writes:

> In glades they meet skull after skull
> Where pine-cones lay--the rusted gun,
> Green shoes full of bones, the mouldering coat
> And cuddled-up skeleton (p. 67).

Real horror is evoked by this skeleton curled in a fetal position. What can be more terrible than to be reminded both of youth and death at the same moment!

Melville, like others, such as Poe and Whitman, used symbols as the links between the visible and invisible worlds. By using the war as a consciously chosen realistic symbol, Melville conveys his attitudes to the invisible worlds of "intellect, faith, doubt, belief, fear, rebellion, and acceptance."[4] On the other hand, like Emerson, Melville

[4] Dan Vogel, "Melville's Shorter Published Poetry: A Critical Study of the Lyrics in Mardi, of Battle-Pieces, John Marr and Timoleon," Diss. New York University 1969, pp. 302-303.

believed that the language and subjects of poetry could and should be found in the everyday world and though he could not break completely with effete diction and prosody, he did break into prosodic freedom as "Donelson," "The Conflict of Convictions," and "The Armies of the Wilderness" prove. Battle-Pieces, therefore, is a link between the poetry of "enhanced musicality, incantory diction, indirectness and allusiveness of symbol of Poe and Whitman and the colloquial, antipoetic, gnomic poetry of Emerson and Dickinson."[5] The former trend can be seen in the battle-pieces in "A Canticle" and the latter in such poems as "Shiloh" and "Malvern Hill," for Melville used the style that he felt best communicated his meaning. His conflicting forms also expressed his contrasting, changing ideas. Though he believed that in form art endures, he felt that if he were to mirror life realistically he must wrench those forms.

Though they are powerful, the flashes of beauty in Battle-Pieces are not, in the final analysis, what make the volume important as a work of art. While the individual poems often fall short of good poetry because of slavish devotion to traditional verse forms, meter, diction and images, the volume never falters in its overall structure. From "The Portent" to "A Meditation" and even on through the

[5] Arvin, p. 267.

notes and the "Supplement," Melville's theme of reconciliation, like the theme of a symphony, is constantly re-introduced and amplified. From beginning to end, the perceptive reader of Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War recognizes not only that he is viewing a panorama of the American Civil War but that he is also witnessing the Civil War as a manifestation of the war between good and evil. Just as North and South must be reunited so that the American dreams of democracy can be realized, so man must be reconciled to the duality of existence so that he can fulfill his individual destiny. Melville carefully shaped his volume so that there can be no mistaking its meaning or its purpose.

Battle-Pieces is also important in its own right because of its content. Not only is this volume greatly superior to the Civil War poetry of minor writers, such as Brownell, but in some ways it even surpasses Whitman's Drum-Taps. In its purpose, themes, objectivity and universality, Battle-Pieces is first rate. For example, unlike Battle-Pieces, War-Lyrics of Brownell has no discernible purpose other than to laud the North, no conflicting emotions about war, death, or the South. The South is always portrayed as the "Serpent," "The Snake who can hiss but his day."[6] God enthusiastically champions the North; and, furthermore, Brownell makes no attempt to

[6] Henry Howard Brownell, War-Lyrics and Other Poems (1866; rpt. New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1972), p. 99.

elevate the war above its earthly causes or to use the war to comment on the nature of reality. Although it is only fair to acknowledge that Brownell's volume of war poetry is simply a collection of lyrics about the war, it is still far inferior not only to Battle-Pieces as a whole but to the individual lyrics in Melville's volume; for Melville poems rise above presenting the war merely as a partisan conflict. Brownell's, generally speaking, do not.

It is far more difficult to compare Battle-Pieces to Drum-Taps than it is to War-Lyrics. Without doubt, as an artist, Whitman is more consistent, more sure of his method than is Melville. At the same time, Whitman does not present nearly so complete, so objective a picture of the war as does Melville, though he does paint a more personal one. While Whitman records horror and revulsion at the death and destruction that the war brings, he, unlike Melville, is able to absorb and purge the tensions and contradictions which the war engendered in him by writing Drum-Taps. Whitman describes his volume of war poetry as a book that

> . . . is therefore unprecedentedly sad (as these days are, are they not?), but it also has the blast of the trumpet and the drum pounds and whirrs in it, and then an undertone of sweetest comradeship and human love threads its steady thread inside the chaos and is heard at every lull and interstice thereof. Truly also it has clear notes of faith and triumph.[7]

[7] Walt Whitman, quoted in What the War Did to Whitman: A Brief Study of the Effect of the Civil War on the Mind of Walt Whitman by Matthew F. Ignoffo (New York: Vantage Press, 1975), p. 45.

Though Melville does try at times, such as in "America," to be optimistic about the possible effects of the war, there runs through his volume no redeeming strain of love, nor does it sound any clear notes of faith and triumph. In this sense Battle-Pieces is more objective than Drum-Taps though one cannot say that Whitman was not objective in his thoughts about the South. Both Whitman and Melville attempt to transcend the Civil War as an earthly war, for both men believed that the poet has the responsibility of guiding his audience toward its destiny. Whitman's purpose in Drum-Taps, as in all his poetry, is to establish "GOODWILL BETWEEN THE COMMON PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONS."[8] Melville's purpose in Battle-Pieces is an even higher one. Across the pages of this volume can be written: GOODWILL BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH: GOODWILL BETWEEN ALL THE PEOPLES OF ALL NATIONS: CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN MAN AND THE IRONICAL DUALITY OF EXISTENCE. Because of its purpose, its themes, its objectivity, and its universality, as well as its style and structure, Battle-Pieces, as only a brief comparison with other Civil War poetry attests, commands respect as a well-conceived, unified volume of Civil War poetry.

Melville's Civil War poetry is of significance not only because of what it is, but it is also important for what it

[8] Walt Whitman, quoted in Walt Whitman: Poet of Democracy by Hugh I'Anson Fausset (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 191.

reveals about its author. As an artist, Melville, like every great poet, was something of a trail blazer. In *Battle-Pieces*, he is by turns cynical, grotesque, abrupt, tender and rhetorical. His form is often rough and angular, his metrics crabbed and irregular. His poetry, however, often shows great concentration and originality. In these respects, in *Battle-Pieces* Melville comes close to the ideals of the twentieth-century poet. In addition, *Battle-Pieces* reveals that Melville was not a haphazard poet. Not only did he read, study and think about poetic form, but he constantly sought to employ his theories in his poetry. For example, his very concrete theories about structure and form, which he considered vital to any work of art, can be determined by a study of *Battle-Pieces*. An investigation of the composition process of the volume further indicates that Melville had well-conceived ideas about composing which he utilized in the process of writing *Battle-Pieces*. An examination of Melville's war poetry, therefore, can lead to no other conclusion that that, while he is not always successful in doing what he wished to do, Melville was an innovative artist who did not take his craft lightly.

Not only does an examination of *Battle-Pieces* show us Melville as a craftsman, but it also reveals him as an American who had complex feelings about the Civil War,

Though he can write patriotically, apostrophizing the North and her soldiers, he is at the same time horrified by the death and the pain that the war brings. Though he loves the North and supports her cause, his concern is no less for his entire country than for the North. Although he sees the South as wrong, he can laud her heroes, feel her pain and decry her destruction; for he realizes that she must be brought back into the Union if the dreams of America are to be realized. Because he was a complex man who saw the war from more than one viewpoint, Melville could not, like many other writers of Civil War poetry, present the war in simplistic terms. Finally, however, because Melville sees the war, not merely as an American, but also as a philosopher-poet, he is able to blend the several voices in Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War into one in his concern not only for his country but for all of mankind as well.

As the philosopher-poet, Melville saw the Civil War as an epic tragedy, symbolic of the war between good and evil in the world and, more than that, symbolic of man's war with the forces of good and evil, not only outside of himself but inside himself as well. Also, just as the Civil War ended America's idealistic illusions about reality, so must each person be enlightened about what he and his world are really like. Although some do refuse the quest, it is man's fate to seek to know what reality is. Once he is aware that evil

is as much a part of life as is good, man must react to that knowledge. He is not to react as does Ahab or Pierre or, conversely, as does Delano or Stubb; but he is to react as does Ishmael, the Major in "The Scout toward Aldie," or Lee in "Lee in the Capitol." In other words, man is to accept, but not without pain, the ironical duality of existence. He realizes the doubleness of Nature, of Time, of History, of his own convictions and he is often sad, but he is not angry. He may even be consoled by the good which he recognizes in Nature and Time and History; but, most of all, he is comforted by his brotherhood with his fellow men. Melville, therefore, sees in the Civil War not only America's problem but, symbolically, man's problem as well; for this reason he can be considered the "bard of Progress and Humanity" (p. 467).

Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War is, without doubt, a well-conceived, well-unified volume of poetry which illustrates important aspects of Melville: as an artist, as an American, and as a philosopher-poet. Many modern-day critics, as well as critics of Melville's day, have failed to see its beauty as well as its flaws; for they have not seen it steadily nor have they seen it whole. It is only as one studies Battle-Pieces in its totality, as one looks beyond the obvious to what Melville was really attempting

to accomplish with the volume that one fully realizes that "battle can heroes and bards restore" (p. 112). May "coming days / . . . not forget him with this song" (p. 52).

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