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Embalming in Memory:
Mourning, Narrativity, and Historiography in the Nineteenth-Century United States

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ABSTRACT

Embalming in Memory:
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This dissertation argues that mid-nineteenth-century definitions of personhood, citizenship, and nationality were largely constructed through the tropes and narrative structures of sentimental mourning. This argument is developed through examinations of a wide range of materials, including novels and first-person narratives, newspaper and magazine articles, medical and scientific texts related to embalming, and legal cases that sought to regulate citizenship. Reading across these texts, this dissertation trace the emergence of two literary tropes, the deathbed tableau and the metaphor of the dead beloved "embalmed in memory," in private, public, political, scientific, racial, and gendered discourse. As a study, ultimately, of narratives and of the status of *narrativity* itself, this dissertation argues that because identity is always constructed in part around losses—of others and of self, mourning sustains a uniquely rich relationship to the formation of the stories through which we define ourselves as individual and as social or political beings.

The first section of this dissertation defines and examines two modes that I refer to as sentimental and counter-sentimental narrativity. The two chapters in this section examine antebellum texts in order to argue that while sentimental narrativity expresses a cultural fantasy of wholeness, sacred domesticity, and transcendent spirituality, counter-sentimental narrativity emerges as a vein within sentimentalism that both espoused and struggled against the limitations

of sentimental tradition. Section two considers the context of the American Civil War and the authority that sentimental mourning exerted in shaping how the meaning of wartime death was understood and narrated in nurses' memoirs and in public elegiac speech. Every chapter turns on the role of commemoration in how individual and cultural histories are narrated.

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and often invisible.

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that a deep understanding of death is a necessary complement to any full-hearted philosophy of life for which we also share a passion. Sarah Steck has always provided a compassionate complement to the hardness of logical thought and has contributed more than she knows to my thinking about communal mourning in the past and present. My sister Vanessa inspires me not to cloister myself in stale ideas but to go out into the world to test their political possibilities. My sister Nicole reminds me of all the other reasons to get out of my garret and. Katherine has taught me by example of the strength of sheer will power to reach toward what is possible even if its conclusion remains elusive.

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For my family,

and for Nathanael.

INTRODUCTION

"[The soul] only returns to itself, in both senses of assembling itself and taking itself, becoming conscious [s'eveiller], in the sense of consciousness of self in general, through this concern for death. . . . For it is thus that the soul separates itself in recalling itself to itself, and so it becomes individualized, interiorized, becomes its very invisibility." (Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, pp. 14-15)

The fundamental thesis of this project is that mourning work was central to how mid-nineteenth-century Americans conceptualized themselves as individuals, as social beings, and as political subjects. This assertion has several ramifications. First, it suggests that broad shifts in American culture are detectable in changes in how individuals mourned the dead. Second, it implies that mourning mediated certain relationships between the living and their broader social worlds. And third, it presumes that mourning was an especially crucial cultural measure of American society during this period, particularly in how national identity was imagined and narrated. As a cultural history, this dissertation illustrates how each of these was legible in nineteenth-century American society.

At the same time, as a theoretical treatment, this dissertation makes the larger assertion that the rituals and presumptions that legislate how the living treat the dead—both en masse and within smaller identifiable subcommunities—provide a distinctive barometer of socio-political constructions of authority (including that of authorship) and identity (as gendered, racialized, and so on). For example, antebellum sentimental culture generally associated mourning work with the feminized domestic sphere. In practice, however, this was only partly true. At the same time,

this ideological presupposition helps explain why, when confronted with the crisis of Civil War, it was women—on the home front and as battlefield hospital nurses—who predominantly narrated the conditions of death and mourning. The extensive descriptions that nurses' memoirs detail of hospital deathbed scenes and the agonies of death are almost entirely missing from the diaries, memoirs and letters of male doctors, soldiers, and even chaplains, all of whom encountered death in great quantity. The thematics of mourning, furthermore, extended beyond the material conditions of physical death. The same narrative structures and idioms of mourning that pervaded antebellum literary depictions of grief were adapted and very differently deployed by African-American writers throughout the nineteenth century to describe the conditions of enslavement as a living death.

One might be tempted to ask, "Why mourning?" Is there something distinctive about this constellation of social rituals and iconography, or do all cultural conventions generally provide such a rich barometer of the relationship between the individual and his or her socio-political milieu? Could we just as well consider birthing, baptismal, marriage, or other rituals? While each of these provides a lynchpin that binds individual experience to deeply held notions of history, community, family, and spirituality, however conceived, none has the same resonance as death. Viewed biblically, scientifically, or otherwise, mortality is the founding condition of life before it is mediated by any individual differentiation (gender, ethnicity, disability, etc…). To be human is to be mortal. In this way, as Kant points out, we are no different from animals. Perhaps this is why religion often hinges on the very question of mortality and immortality: spirit is first defined by its enduring aspect and it is in this that we imagine ourselves to ascend above other earthly creatures. That divide between the earthly and the eternal immortal is a foundational component

of the sentimental matrix through which this study will read and interpret diverse literary, ephemeral, autobiographical, historical, and historiographical texts.

This study assumes that there is a crucial and complex relationship between writing and mortality. Susan Stewart considers this question from a perspective that is at once philosophical and psychological: "while speech gains authenticity, writing promises immortality, or at least the immortality of the material world in contrast to the mortality of the body. Our terror of the unmarked grave is a terror of the insignificance of a world without writing" (*On Longing*, p. 31). If we are Christian, as was much of sentimental cultural expression whether its proponents were individually religious or not, the tenets of resurrection guarantee our immortality. But even so, the tangibility of writing leaves a trace in the earthly world that will transcend one's transition from the material to the ethereal.

How does writing, or narrative-production as this work will think of it, counter-act the loss implicit in death while testifying to and guaranteeing the longevity of the text as a memorial or monument? While a philosophical answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this study, I present numerous examples of writing-as-monument within thickly historicized contexts in order to suss out this question in cultural and narrative terms. On example is the argument I develop in chapter three that because the Civil War redefined how, where, and under what conditions (and in what vast numbers) people died, Americans responded by adapting antebellum traditions of sentimental mourning (particularly in the North) to the larger project of redefining the nation-state and the notion of its ideal citizen. Mourning thus addressed not only the conditions of death, but also the socio-political implications of mass deaths in the service of an abstract national cause. Strictly speaking, mourning does not address death itself, but rather

the condition of grief or hardship due to loss for those who are left behind by the deceased. It is, in this sense, a secondary result of death, and also a secondary result of any deprivation that fundamentally affects an individual's, or a society's, relationship to itself and to its larger context.

Enslavement is an almost perfect example of how mourning may well extend to oneself. As a study of narratives and narrative-production this dissertation argues that because identity is always constructed in part around losses, of others and of self, mourning sustains a uniquely rich relationship to the formation of the stories through which we define ourselves as individual, social, and political beings. This is a founding principle of Freudian and later theories of psychoanalysis, as Peter Homans shows in his significant work on mourning in psychoanalytic thought, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis*. Homans argues that "the experience of object loss [is] the central intellectual theme of psychoanalysis as a whole" (*The Ability to Mourn*, p. 4).

Likewise, it is a cornerstone of some narrative theory, including Peter Brooks' argument that all stories are constructed with a view toward that moment at the end of a story, or at the end of life, when we have the benefit of full retrospection. As readers and as mortals, we believe that, from this projected end-point, all the middle-points of the story or of our lives will suddenly gain the full weight of meaning that the conclusion bestows. Was this story a comedy? Was our life a tragedy? We will not know until it is over. As such, Brooks' psychoanalytically-informed narrative work argues, we live in a condition of anticipation of retrospection. In many ways, death, as the conclusive moment that lies both inside and outside of lived experience, is intimately tied to how we conceive of ourselves and find significance in our lives.

Likewise, mourning brings us closer to this experience of death and all its ramifications. "Mourning," Freud notes, "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on" ("Mourning and Melancholia," p. 243). The occasion of loss, as Freud's theorization of mourning attests, threatens the integrity of the self, and thus presents a conundrum of profound importance. This experience of loss, Freud shows, pulls the mourner away from the world of the living into a kind of limbo, and the work of mourning must successfully disengage the mourner from her investment in the lost object in order to enable her return to the world of shared experience. The ritual process of mourning operates according to a closed narrative structure whose meaning is fixed: the mourner brings forward memories and images of the lost object and establishes a new relationship to each.

Like much of Freud's theorization of the mind, his explication of mourning assumes that the mind works metaphorically.[1] As a whole, this ritual operates in an imagistic register in which static images stand in for more complex associations. The image is like a semiotic sign; by performing a shift in relationship to this sign, the mourner is able to magically conjure a new relationship to its referent. Therefore, this procedure satisfies the requirements of ritual because it enacts in time a structured series of actions, each one of which performatively enacts (imagistically; metaphorically) a shift in value, meaning, or connotation. Thus the mourner narrates a story to herself about the lost object, and in the process of telling the story, the images that are called forward to stand in for this lost object gather a new set of connotations and

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[1] Freud's theory of the oedipal complex, for example, describes the world of the self in terms of a set of metaphoric or symbolic relationships. In each case, Freud's psychoanalytic inquiry seeks to determine what is hidden behind each mask. Symptoms, equally, work as metaphoric substitutions that mask something that cannot be faced directly.

achieve a degree of closure. In a sense, this closure also looks like *suture*.[2] Suture brings together "edges" or "lips" that have both covered the wound, and been the wound itself. In the former sense, the wound remains present, only covered. In the latter sense, the wound can be "brought together" or "closed." However, there is also the threat that this suture might re-open again.

The logic of sentimental mourning is to imagine a complete and satisfying closure, an absolute conclusion that replaces the injury of loss with a fantasy of reconstitution. This way of taking the sting out of loss is apparent in most of the texts examined here. For example, in the consolation manual, *The Sacred Flora*, discussed in chapter one, the loss of a child is consoled through the anticipation of the reunion of the family as a whole in heaven. It does so by creating a figurative monument that takes the place of the lost one and survives him or her, thereby acting as the material embodiment of something ethereal and eternal in accordance with the precept that "Immortality" is "the greatest of all truths" as the 1846 consolation manual, *The Sacred Flora*, declares (*The Sacred Flora*, p. 15). If truth and the ultimate reality exist in the world beyond, then earthly life finds its profoundest meaning in relation to that divine unknown. In this sense, the context of truth and significance that lend everyday life its tinges of meaningfulness is always deferred and only indirectly accessible. This helps explain why sentimental culture is so

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[2] Suture, according to the OED, is primarily a noun, and secondarily a transitive verb. In both grammatical modes, suture has several realms of formal significance, including medical/surgical, zoological (e.g. the suture is the gap/meeting of between the upper and lower clam shells), and geological (e.g. the suture of two geologic plates). In each case, suture refers both to the gap and to the joining, e.g. of the "lips of a wound". Though stitches might be made, the previous existence of the gap cannot be erased; the joining also bears the mark of the wound, so that the wound in a sense continues, only in another form. My interest in this term derives from Kaja Silverman's discussion of suture in a semiotic/filmic context in *The Subject of Semiotics*. Some definitions of suture under the heading "1. a. Surg. The joining of the lips of a wound, or of the ends of a severed nerve or tendon, by stitches; also, an instance of this; a stitch used for this purpose" (OED) offer an interesting and complex model of how a wound may be closed, and of how it can never be closed: "1617 MIDDLETON & ROWLEY Fair Quarrel V. i, I closed the lips on't [sc. the wound] with bandages and sutures. 1804 ABERNETHY Surg. Obs. I. 36 The edges of the wound were brought together by one suture. 1879 St. George's Hosp. Rep. IX. 447 The abdominal wound was closed by silver sutures. 1887 L. OLIPHANT Episodes (1888) 204 My right arm was bandaged to my side, so as not to open the sutures." (*OED Online*, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

preoccupied with death and mourning, for it is through the gateway of death and the spiritually rich work of mourning that mortals may access that seductive realm of truth, meaning, and eternality. This gives death, even one's own death, a significance above and beyond the experience of loss: it accesses the sacred and the transcendent.

NARRATIVITY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

If enveloping and preserving describe the first of two important dynamics here, the second is what I refer to as "narrativity." This term denotes the dynamic process of producing a story as well as all the concomitant processes that accompany and interweave themselves with narration. "Writing," for example, is a simple word whose primary denotation is a physical act but whose connotative meanings include the imaginative processes that precede and supplement physical writing. Likewise, when I use the term "narrativity" I mean not only the work of constructing a plotted tale, but all the secondary processes of narrative-production including the networks of relationships between writerly selves, written selves, others, communities, Gods, nations, and so on. In short, narrativity is here presumed to be part and parcel of processes of identity-production.

Hayden White defines narrativity as the human impulse to represent reality by providing an historical dimension. The movement that White traces in "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" from the annals to the chronicle to the history tracks an emerging concern with the law and social struggle. According to this argument, narrativity provides a framework for describing and responding to conflicts that arise in relation to authority.

Therefore, White concludes, historicity and historiography are intimately connected with narrativity: the need to examine history to find causes and results is satisfied through the structuring framework of narrative.

Following from the assumption that narrative production is as much an instinctual human activity as any other, White seeks to track the relationship between narrativity and historiography. Far from being distinct and separate aspects of a history, content and form are mutually constitutive categories that transmit ideological presuppositions at least as much as they relate information. Reflecting on Hegel's assertion that the narration of history always invokes the question of the law, White argues that "historical self-consciousness, the kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as a history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in law, legality, legitimacy, and so on" because the narration of history emerges from a tension between "desire and the law" (*Content of the Form*, p. 14, p. 13). "Law" in this sense refers to systems of authority whether governmentally legal or morally disciplinary. Ultimately, White shows that the modern state is the political entity that requires the wholeness and completeness that only narrative can provide as a culture seeks to make sense of how its past informs its present. Narrativity is the discourse of history, he concludes.

My use of the word "narrativity" borrows from White's contention that narrative-production sustains an essential relationship to authority and historiography. It further presumes that historiography may, as in the case of writers from Susan Warner to Herman Melville, take the individual as the site of struggle wherein social conflict is played out. In its examination of the convergence of mourning and identity, this dissertation pays close attention to how narratives are produced always with the understanding that the production of stories not only provides an

explication of authority, but also creates and sustains fantasies and veneers. My use of the word "narrativity" implicitly asserts that narrative production is a complicit dynamic between the forces of literary convention, where it conforms to cultural ideology, and the formulation of character. By "character" I mean the development of identity both in the sense of sincere self-expression and, at the same with, with the implication of invention a fiction. Narrativity both creates a fantasy and masquerades it as reality.

This dissertation reformulates White's claims by examining how narrativity mediates between the individual and the notion of history. It does so in two sections. The first defines and examines two modes that I refer to as sentimental and counter-sentimental narrativity. The two chapters in this section examine antebellum texts in order to argue that while sentimental narrativity expresses a cultural fantasy of wholeness, sacred domesticity, and transcendent spirituality, counter-sentimental narrativity emerges as a vein within sentimentalism that both espoused and struggled against the limitations of sentimental tradition. Section two considers the context of the American Civil War and the authority that sentimental mourning exerted in shaping how the meaning of wartime death was understood and narrated in nurses' memoirs and in public elegiac speech. Every chapter turns on the role of commemoration in how individual and cultural histories are narrated.

"Embalming in Memory": The Logic of Sentimental Mourning

One of the core ideas of this dissertation is that of "embalming in memory" which expresses figuratively the process by which sentimental narrativity incorporated and narrated loss. Figurative embalming was one of the most significant and has become one of the most critically overlooked tropes of sentimental mourning. It predated the culmination of scientific

progress that enabled the widespread use of physical embalming during the Civil War. This progress in the technology of physical embalming answered logistical and psychological needs presented by the exigencies of war. Well before 1861, however, a metaphorical version of embalming existed in literary and non-literary sentimental discourses. The widely used term "embalming in memory" expressed a singularly sentimental response to loss in the antebellum United States.

The sentimental texts examined in this study express two key reactions to loss: the need to mourn and to address one's sorrow on the one hand and the desire to reach beyond the limits of mortality on the other. The use of memorial objects to stand in for the lost one not only functions as sentimental monumentalization; rather, these material reminders sustain a much more dynamic relationship to the world of the living according to a logic explored in every chapter of this study, that of "embalming in memory": that which is to be remembered is imagined as a whole, vibrant physical instantiation that is enveloped, contained, preserved, frozen in time, and thereby calcified into a single, constant relationship to the world of the living. This phrase's full import and a more extensive definition are developed over the course of this study as a whole. It is, in many ways, the key term underlying each of the four chapters.

SECTION ONE: SENTIMENTAL AND COUNTER-SENTIMENTAL NARRATIVITY

Loss was at the heart of nineteenth-century American sentimental narrative expression, and it was frequently mapped onto narrative representations of the body. It was the point of departure for imagining personhood in terms of gender and race, and it formed a rhetorical

backdrop for how the nation-state was imagined. Loss was, and is, a condition that demands remedy.

Chapter one will discuss this formal mode of expression as a new concept that I am calling "sentimental narrativity." In sentimental narrativity, mourning provides psychological relief at the intradiegetic level (within the narrative world of the text) while providing a structure at the level of the story's narration that converts the immanence of crisis into a temporal process of redressing loss through récit (the recitation of the story). As a narrative structure that counteracts loss, the process of mourning converts a crisis that threatens to supersede the containment of structures, whether psychological or communal, into an imagined solution that is unfurled over time. Mourning possessed the distinctive dialectical capacity in the sentimental imagination to address this condition of loss at multiple levels, from the psychological to the diegetic (at the level of narration), and from the individual to the imagined national community.

The first chapter's work draws on criticism of the past several decades that has recognized that sentimentalism was a cultural as well as a literary phenomenon. Critics have also already shown how profoundly sentimentalism is misread if its points of resistance are not accounted for. For example, Joanne Dobson's readings of *The Wide, Wide World* provide an important consideration of where and how a sentimental text may narrate compliance at the same time that it explores opposition and defiance. This chapter's contribution to the excellent and nuanced work that has already been done on all of these questions is to show how profoundly loss and mourning lie at the heart of sentimentality as well as its doppelganger, counter-sentimentality, a concept that I will develop further in chapter two.

The most significant work to elucidate the role of mourning in antebellum America so far

has been done by Mary Louise Kete, whose S*entimental Collaborations* argues that sentimentality sustains a singular relationship to mourning, asserting that it "structures a collaboration through which individuals can join together in solving the seemingly local problem of grief in the face of death" (*Sentimental Collaborations*, p. 3). Kete's work elucidates the power of sentimental mourning figuratively to counteract death through the reconstitution of community. With an emphasis on the collaborative cultural work of sentimental mourning, Kete shows how much narrative expression and cultural life interpenetrated each other. Her work is especially concerned with texts like gift books that were collaboratively produced within small communities of family and friends. This context forms a kind of ideal microcosm of sentimental culture.

While Kete's book does not extend far beyond this framework, it does provide a foundation for this dissertation's consideration of how sentimental narrativity structured discourse in much different contexts where the experience of personhood conflicted with the most traditional sentimental constructions of identity, as was the case for many of Herman Melville's characters, many women like Emily Dickinson, and numerous others whose class, race, or other characteristics excluded them from inclusion in the imagined community that undergirds the collaborative work of mourning that Kete describes. This disparity is explored in the present study as a difference between sentimental and counter-sentimental narrativity. Sentimental narrativity will be chapter one's primary focus while chapter two will define counter-sentimental narrativity.

Kete's significant formulation fits within a critical tradition that examines sentimental narrative in its most powerfully evocative setting: white, middle class domesticity. While her

extensive examination of more mundane and less "elevated" texts strongly suggests the power of sentimental mourning to formulate consensus while suppressing discord, she does not take into account the strains of sentimental narrativity that inform and lend familiarity to those who found themselves exiled from the traditional sites of domesticity, both local and national, where her albums of family verse were compiled. Exile does not provide its own alternate language; rather, as the counter-sentimental texts this chapter will examine can attest, it uses the components of dominant languages and narrativity in an attempt to make the illegible legible, including subjective interiority and bodily presence.

In the form of counter-sentimental narrativity, sentimentalism influenced modes of narration that departed from the sentimental genre as expressed in domestic novels and gift books. While sentimental narrativity moves through trial to uplift, counter-sentimental narrativity achieves its conclusion with considerably more difficulty. For my purposes, counter-sentimentalism both derives from and overturns the ideological presuppositions of sentimentalism. The sentimental consolation manuals and novels examined in chapter one seek out security in the home as the site for self-understanding and expression. By contrast, the counter-sentimental mode reveals this to be an unachievable fantasy and views domesticity as the very opposite of self-fulfilment, as in Herman Melville's 1852 *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* which I examine in chapter two.

If the sentimental home is, ideally, where primordial identity is established through family heritage and where it grows under loving if disciplined guidance, then Melville's novel gives the lie both to the contiguity of identity and family or community and to the possibility of defining oneself as an individual within this context. In *Pierre*, the possibility of coming to know

oneself or to express oneself is endlessly deferred or disrupted. Likewise, houses may exist but the idealized notion of "home" has no material referent. The sentimental parallel between identity and domesticity is thus overturned in counter-sentimental narrativity which tends to thematize a struggle to achieve a sense of self that corresponds to a condition of homelessness or dislocation from any sense of origin. If sentimentalism bends toward unification and integration, counter-sentimentalism, put very simply, is both invested in these ideals and, simultaneously, finds them unattainable.

Sentimental novels are generally shot through with strands of counter-sentimentalism: in *The Wide, Wide World*, even as Ellen's progress toward spiritual fulfilment is bolstered and disciplined by Alice and John Humphreys, the novel's young heroine only ever finds a domesticity that embodies the sentimental ideal at the close of the novel. Her struggles along the way, including her ambiguous relationship to John and her perpetual removal from one unsatisfactory household to another, belie a certain discomfort with the realities of domestic life and an acknowledgement on the part of the novel that one is not necessarily safe at home, even in households that are filled with love and tenderness as is that of Ellen's mother's distant family, the Lindseys of Scotland.

The characters of *Pierre* share Ellen's vagrancy. Counter-sentimentalism as expressed in Melville remains concerned with the promise of domesticity as imagined in *The Wide, Wide World*; however, Melville's novel finds that domesticity both must be unmoored from the strictures of tradition and of false representation in order to have meaning again. *Pierre* begins as a cohesive narrative, and as its founding myths come apart, the narrative itself seems to dismantle itself. Home, history, and identity devolve in tandem into a condition of total

disruption when Isabel unmasks Pierre's family secrets. It is in Pierre's re-creation of a very different kind of home that attempts to bypass the need for secrets by incorporating the unholy trinity of Pierre, Lucy, and Isabel, that the narrative expresses a continuation of the sentimental typology of domesticity as the foundation for identity. Even in its zeal to expose the falsity of the narrative's early pretensions, Pierre seeks to set up a new world of being that takes refuge once again in a parody of familial relations. This move coincides with Melville's creation of a rowdy and radical domesticity in *Moby-Dick.*

Women's relationships to the local home may, as recent critics have argued, provide her with a powerful platform for critiquing the condition of the nation-state. But at the same time, the compulsion with which women's identities in domestic fiction are constructed through paradigms of loss suggests a deeply troubled alignment between feminine identities and the state. The key to discerning this pattern in domestic fiction is the recognition that the formation of identities, as in the case of Ellen in *The Wide, Wide World*, begins with an evacuation.

What is yet more interesting, however, is that this evacuation can also be read as a rhetorical capitulation that masks a resistance to self-reformation around strictly gendered criteria. The struggle to adapt to gendered identity, in the sense of ideal femininity, leaves behind a trace of loss in Ellen and other heroines of sentimental domestic novels. This trace is legible in precisely that quality that makes these heroines so ideal: their adaptability. The ability to inhabit a cultural ideal turns out to be a way of functioning that masks an underlying resistance to capitulation. This adaptability is also a byproduct of a homelessness that ironically prepares these heroines to take up their roles as paragons of domestic efficiency. When literary domesticity extends to the national context, homelessness is a figure of statelessness. Similarly, adaptability

figures a formula for citizenship based on an identity that is discontinuous with nationality since, flexible and changeable as it is, the adaptable heroine could prepare herself as a citizen of any country.

In her landmark 1984 essay, "Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah: Domestic Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," republished in her 1992 book *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*, Gillian Brown asserts that the organization of domestic space in Stowe's novel models an ideological and political response to the institution of slavery. Brown argues that within the narrative imagination of Stowe's novel, the chaos of the immoral institutions beyond the limits of the household may be subverted within the space of the home where familial love can reign in place of dehumanizing economic systems. For Brown, then, domestic space in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* serves simultaneously as a battlefront for abolition and as a proving ground for matriarchal political power.

Brown shows that the genesis of this subversive power originates in the "mother-love built on an excess of supply rather than the excess of demand and desire upon which both the slave economy and Northern capitalism operated" (*Domestic Individualism*, p. 512). Brown's essay proposed a new perspective on Stowe's criticism through an insightful reconsideration of the much-discussed separation of feminine and masculine spheres. She shows that Stowe's novel is a critique of the marketplace and its role in the diminishment of humanity through enslavement. Proper domesticity thus overturns the immorality of capitalistic departure from any fixed moral law by instituting a household system of order that accords with the humanitarian, egalitarian principles of mother-love as exemplified by Rachel's Quaker kitchen in Stowe's novel.

Brown's work identifies a site of powerful and effective resistance within the sentimental canon to counter the assumption that the feminine sphere existed as a margin to masculine culture. In doing so, it implicitly points to an easy pitfall for scholars of nineteenth-century studies: the assumption that sentimentalism was an essentially conformist and politically ineffective cultural and literary mode. When this project declares a difference between sentimental and counter-sentimental narrativity, it does not mean to suggest that texts necessarily fall into one mode or the other.

On the contrary, the works I examine are generally hybrids of the narrative modes and cultural assumptions from which they emerge while also incorporating the unique vision of the author(s) in the course of writing and revising. Texts like Stowe's that emerge from eras of roiling debate and then turn to face the cultural conflicts underlying those debates would seem to be more than usually predisposed to finding themselves caught between conservative and progressive habits and dynamics. In the view of the present study, Stowe's novel relies heavily on the pre-established norms of sentimental narrativity while, at the same time, the very conflict between that mode's conservative communalism (implicitly based on a form of exclusion) and the novel's assertion of humanitarian values of inclusive egalitarianism must necessarily result in hybrid forms of narrativity.[3]

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[3] I explore the nature of this hybridity further in Chapter Four's consideration of the generic and cultural situation of nurses' memoirs during the Civil War.

SECTION TWO: SENTIMENTAL NARRATIVITY AND REDEMPTIVE DOMESTICITY DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Nurses' memoirs thematized death much more insistently than the writings of soldiers, officers, or surgeons.[4] While these men's descriptions of wartime experience describe watching comrades die or take note of the bodies of the dead and wounded strewn upon the battlefield, their treatment of death and mourning is generally topical. By contrast, when nurses wrote about death in this context, they emphasized the recuperative work of mourning. While other genres of Civil War writing tended to treat death as a technical or military aspect of battle, or as a sanitary problem, nurses address mourning as a persistent and significant aspect of wartime experience. Many nurses' memoirs describe their first encounter with battlefield hospitals as a confrontation with the faces of the dying and the bodies of the dead. Partly because more than half of Civil War deaths were the result of disease in both the North and the South, and partly because many soldiers who survived battle died later of infection, hospitals were as much centers of dying as they were institutions of recovery.

What does it mean that nurses' memoirs seem to focus on those soldiers who die rather than on the stories of triumph of those who survive? Survival and success would seem to be a more compelling subject for writers whose patriotic attachment to the Northern cause is frequently reiterated. From a twenty-first century perspective, death is likely to seem like failure.

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[4] Of all the memoirists of the war, chaplains produced the accounts most similar in style and preoccupation to nurses. This is not surprising if we consider that the antebellum sentimental genre to which nurses' memoirs owe the greatest generic debt encompassed, as Ann Douglas points out, the evangelical writings of clergymen as well as many women writers like Stowe and Warner (Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*). However, compared to the "several hundred" women who wrote of their experiences in the hospitals, only eighty-one of the 2,398 commissioned chaplains in the Union army wrote memoirs or histories of their experiences ("The Inhospitable Hospital," p. 364; *The Spirit Divided*, p. xvii).

It is precisely the kind of failure that the administration of President George W. Bush sought to hide from the public eye during the first years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[5] The accounts of chaplains, doctors, officers, and most soldiers themselves, take as their object the conditions of battle from a wide perspective that includes, but rarely focuses on, dying, death, and mourning. In contrast, nurses record the encounter between the caregiver and the soldier in the hospital as a significant and even intimate interaction that involves the communication and exchange of sensibility and singularity between two individuals.

Mass violence threatens to erase the specificity of individuality. The dying soldier, unlike the recovering soldier, requires an articulation of meaning that recuperates his death from the anonymity of mass wartime deaths. Nurses' memoirs address this problem by insisting on the singularity of each soldier and by framing their scenes of dying soldiers as parables of martyrdom. In this context of wartime violence, the scale of death evokes the same problems again and again: "What overwhelming need can justify so much dying?"; "What kind of meaning can compensate for such losses?" While each soldier's death is yet "another added to the many thousands given for the life of the nation," the narrative structure of the deathbed tableau

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[5] In their article, *A War Over Meaning*, Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell argue that the fierce cultural debate over the American incursion into Iraq is always inflected by the problem of how to interpret the meaningfulness of this war's death toll. Although President George W. Bush asserted that these deaths are "sacrifices on behalf of eternal principles," his claim did not quell the public demand for a meaningful understanding of these deaths. The dead thus pose a problem for Americans who are both the public that Bush's policies represent and also, as Lifton and Mitchell point out, secondary victims of the war's death toll.

"Americans are survivors of the war on either of two levels: directly as soldiers or family members of those killed, or remotely, as compatriots of the dead in a war that is also 'ours.'

"Survivor meaning is very much at issue in the official Pentagon ban on photographing American corpses or their caskets and in the refusal of the president and his cabinet members to attend military funerals. Blocking out the images of these deaths serves to glorify and ennoble the war" (Lifton and Mitchell, p. 448).

In this twenty-first century context, the bodies of the dead threaten to unhinge the administration's assertions of what these soldiers' deaths signify. The power of dead bodies to signify beyond the official meanings assigned to them means that, in the context of fierce debate about the "principles" upon which the necessity of this war was staked, the Bush administration benefits more from hiding than from officially commemorating the war's dead soldiers.

converts the event of death into a process that unfolds over time and that insists on the singular experience of the soldier and his relationship to the nurse (*Three Years*, p. 46). By attending to dying as a humanizing process and by attending to the particularity of soldiers, these narratives seek to transform death's presentations of mortality into assurances of immortality.

Parallel to these texts' figurative domesticity is the containing structure of sentimental narrativity that redresses loss and death through the same well-formed tropes of spiritual transcendence featured in the successful sentimental novels, stories and poems produced for mass consumption in the antebellum period. Sentimental narrativity, as discussed in chapter one, structures a movement from loss and bewilderment to transcendence and clarity. Death is always significant because it is a portal to the divine. As a structuring mechanism, sentimental mourning provides a script that determines how loss will be redressed and how death can be understood. Sentimental tropology of domesticity, on the one hand, and narrative formulae of sentimental mourning on the other, consistently structure the memoirs in which Northern Civil War nurses struggle with the implications of pervasive devastation and national fragmentation.

Four years before President Lincoln's assassination in April of 1865, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth was hailed as the first martyr of the Civil War. A reported ten thousand mourners gathered around his casket in New York City alone. In the same way that public mourning for Lincoln expressed and engaged with anxieties about national upheaval, Ellsworth's death provided a potent symbolic nexus for northerners seeking to establish and enunciate a coherent ideological foundation for northern aggression against the South in May of 1861. Chapter four will examine how, in both cases, public mourning proved to be a most effective vehicle for transforming the discrete event of death into a forceful ideological statement of cause. I argue

that antebellum structures of mourning provided a powerful blueprint for Americans, particularly northerners, faced with a crisis of meaning. I show that this can be traced through the emergence of the technology of embalming whose practice was coextensive with the symbolic power of the antebellum metaphorics of "embalming in memory."

Ellsworth was not only the first Northern martyr killed by a Southerner as political schism gave way to fratricidal war, he also was one of the first public figures in U.S. history to be embalmed. By looking closely at the commemoration of Colonel Ellsworth as the first northern martyr, I examine how Americans deployed the work of mourning to narrate and make sense of the relationship between the Union cause and the deaths that this righteous purpose entailed. Ellsworth's case is especially unique because it inaugurated the wartime practice of embalming the dead. For the same technological and financial reasons that made the Northern army more resilient while Southern soldiers starved, embalming was practiced to a much greater degree in the Union army during the war. While embalming of bodies was never widespread in the North during the war, it became a visible and viable practice. While this technique was touted as a pragmatic solution to the problem of returning the bodies of dead soldiers to their homes, I show that in Ellsworth's case, physical embalmment served a host of other ideological and symbolic purposes in May of 1861. In the same way that antebellum sentimental culture fetishized the corpse as the sacred center of mourning ritual, Ellsworth's body became an icon of the northern cause and a focus of widespread attention. This preoccupation with the physical remains of the dead, I argue, functioned symbolically to establish and stabilize the assertion of northern unity in the face of national division by attaching ideology to a material symbol.

This chapter's focus lies at the convergence of national identity, mourning tradition, and

political commemoration. I argue here that the public commemoration of the first northern martyr of the American Civil War, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth, illustrates how the work of mourning may become the platform upon which a political agenda may be built. I am particularly interested in how wartime commemoration retained distinctive formulaic and structural aspects of antebellum mourning, particularly the centrality of the sacred body of the dead and the deathbed tableau, and adapted them to address the crisis of civil war. While I begin by looking at the primacy of the sacred body and the deathbed tableau in northern antebellum mourning tradition, my argument's ultimate focus is on the ways in which the sentimental iconography of mourning grounded political discourse in the public sphere. In the same way that the antebellum deathbed scene constructed the dying and dead body as a focus for sympathetic transformative identification, I argue, the radical new technology of embalming the dead transformed Ellsworth, and the thousands of embalmings that followed, into representative citizens whose very bodies seemed to instantiate the ideological imperative of defending the idea of Union from disintegration. Like the assassinated body of President Lincoln four years later, in May of 1861, Ellsworth's embalmed body circulated among public mourners as it lay in state four times along a train route from Washington to New York. What makes the embalming of Ellsworth remarkable, I show, is that this technique of preservation was widely reviled up until the opening acts of the war as an invasion of the sacredness of the body. The antebellum ideal of divine naturalness was thus overwhelmed by the need to display a martyred body whose very physicality embodied the North's moral imperative against a rebellious South.

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CHAPTER ONE:
THE NATION'S HEART:
EMBODIMENT AND THE SENTIMENTAL DIALECTIC

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SENTIMENTAL NARRATIVITY

The frontispiece of Susan Warner's 1850 novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, encapsulates the central psychological and spiritual condition of the novel's protagonist, the young girl Ellen: although she is orphaned after her father sends her away and her mother dies, she is transformed by her mother's ghostly presence as an emissary of heaven. In this scene, the graveyard becomes

the entryway to the beyond.[6] At the central point in the image, between a gravestone set in the lower left corner and the yawning sunset set behind clouds that open up toward the heavens, Ellen's mother shields her daughter from the bright light beyond with her wings. This central point between the earthly reality of death and heavenly transcendence is where the events of the novel take place, in the "wide, wide world" as the three-dimensional title that stretches along the ground suggests. In a sense, this image is a pictogram of ideal sentimental mourning: rather than fixing her gaze on the gravestone, and therefore on the anguish of loss, Ellen lifts her eyes and accepts guidance from the bible she holds to her bosom and from her mother's angelic touch. The sentimental imagery of the dead being raised to heaven by winged angels and the presence of angels as invisible earthly guides were common tropes that communicated an appropriate stance toward death: grief that lingers on earthly loss and sorrow ignores the divine gift of rebirth.

The fantasy engaged by this image hinges on eternality. Loss is entirely bypassed as Ellen and her angelic mother seem to exist in a space outside of time and beyond the restraints of the earthly. In one sense, this is a pictographic way of imagining where Ellen's ethereal soul exists: in communion with immortal spirituality. Imagistically, this seems to place Ellen squarely on the other side of mortality. This seeming incongruity powerfully expresses the parameters of

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[6] The trope of the graveyard carried particular resonance in sentimental culture. Following the establishment of the rural cemetery movement with Mount Auburn Cemetery (Cambridge, Massachusetts) in 1831, the graveyard moved from the church environs to a separate space where death, memory, and nature were melded into a harmonious site for quiet contemplation. In strong contrast to the American Puritan assessment of the human relationship to death, these spaces were inspired by the influence of British Romanticism on American sentimental culture. While Puritan tradition had sought to set limits on the potentially overwhelming influence of mourning, the evangelical Second Great Awakening (1790 to 1840s) set out a new role for mourning as a potentially cohesive, rather than potentially disruptive, cultural experience. In accordance with this shift, the rural cemetery movement cherished the dead and sought to continually re-assert their presence in the world of the living. As Ann Douglas notes, the notion of the rural cemetery was "not so much that the dead are alive as that they are altogether accessible to the living" (*The Feminization of American Culture*, p. 251).

sentimental mourning. Mourning does not console the absolute loss of a loved one; rather, it is a process of reaching out toward the world beyond in which the dead reside in perpetuity. In other words, the sentimental work of mourning figuratively conjures an in-between space in where mortality folds into immortality. This is, in fact, what makes sentimental mourning singular. While it borrows from the same Christian imagery of death and resurrection that had been in use for centuries, sentimental mourning is unique in its emphasis on consolation as a condition of simultaneously existing in the mortal and immortal worlds. Ellen's mother is never fully gone; likewise, Ellen's continuing connection to her mother gives her entry into an enlightened perspective. This frontispiece also gestures toward the metaphoric nature of the text. While its events take place in an earthly realm, they must be read as material manifestations of the eternal world. This sentimental text depicts human events as a key for reading a divine code. Both sentimental mourning and its narrative depiction are powerful modes for discussing and understanding that eternal world whose presence is, like Ellen's mother, always just in the background of the plot of *The Wide, Wide World*.

Warner's novel is iconic of the structures and tropes of sentimental narrativity. I characterize this mode by its emphasis on the main character's experience of loss and mourning, which provide foundation upon which a well-rounded, adult, spiritually rich identity is built. *The Wide, Wide World* presents Ellen's novel-length struggle to accommodate the bereavement that her mother's death has occasioned. Loss, mourning, and spiritual rebirth form a cycle that the novel repeats several times. Warner narrates Ellen's progression from a girl whose sensibilities lack structure and discipline to a young woman whose balance is ensured by spiritual enlightenment as a story of Ellen's heart where that physical center is also imagined as her

spiritual and moral center. Loss prepares her heart to receive divine guidance.

At the same time, the novel struggles to define the absence that haunts Ellen over the course of the novel. Enmeshed within the novel's sentimental narrativity, a subtle but persistent question emerges: does spirituality fill the absence left by Ellen's mother, or does the discipline of faith merely adjust Ellen to the reality of loss? As much as Warner's novel is a treatment of sentimental personhood, it is also a lingering reflection on the condition of loss. The salves that mid-nineteenth-century elegies and consolation manuals present to assuage loss do not immediately resolve the problem of grief. Instead, grief is an initial step toward a fuller recognition of the transcendent world and of one's place within it. The closing citation of the novel's original, but suppressed, final chapter comes from Longfellow's poem, "Resignation":[7]

This life of mortal breath

Is but the suburb of that life elysian

Whose portal we call Death—

(*Wide, Wide World*, p. 583)

Death is but an extension of life; indeed, life is but a precursor to the kingdom to come on the other side of mortality. Therefore, a preoccupation with earthly concerns threatens to distract one from the vital work of spiritual self-preparation. The lesson presented in this conclusive statement coincides with Ellen's ultimate interpellation into ideal domesticity as her brother-figure-cum-future-husband John places her at the center of his household to be his "steward in all

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[7] Warner's original final chapter of *The Wide, Wide World* was not published with the body of the novel until the 1987 Feminist Press edition edited by Jane Tompkins. According to this edition's "Note on the Text," there is no evidence that this omission was strictly practical for Putnam when faced with publishINGed a longer than expected book. This last chapter broaches the reality of Ellen's marriage to John, which remains an indefinite possibility. As such, it departs from the pure innocence of the rest of the novel and posits Ellen as a woman whose spiritual maturity has emerged at the same time as her sexual maturity.

that concerns the interior arrangements of the household" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 582). John's citation of Longfellow echoes the novel's thoroughgoing concern with death as constitutive of the very meaning and structure of living. This thematic preoccupation plays out at the level of narrative in this and other sentimental texts whose central concerns involve making sense of life through a confrontation with death. Like many consolation manuals of this period, including Nehemiah Adams's *Agnes and the Little Key of her Coffin* discussed later in this chapter, Warner's novel seems to be asking: what is the meaning of loss, and how do we make sense of death and mourning? The answer provided by sentimental narrativity consistently is to present mourning as a process of replacing the lost beloved with the promise of transcendence and immortality. In *The Wide, Wide World*, it is through the work of mourning her mother that Ellen effectively develops the self-discipline of spiritual enlightenment.

Consolation literature often broaches relatively brutal scenarios. Ellen's orphaned course is mild compared to some stories as in *The Drooping Lily* (1838), in which the young boy Frederick who dies at the end of the tale is the child of a profligate father and a deceased mother who had, herself, been sent off to a wealthy aunt upon the death of her own mother. The layering of death upon death concludes with the return of the now-converted father, whose presence consoles Frederick's surviving grandfather who has narrated the story of compounded loss. In *Agnes and the Key*, as in *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Drooping Lily*, a child's death sets her parents on a path to renew their connection to the divine through an acceptance of their child's death. The severity of loss reminds each text's mourners

NARRATIVE MONUMENTALIZATION AND TEXTUAL EMBALMING

In the antebellum context, metaphoric "embalming in memory" exemplified the sentimental vision of turning the dead into monuments within the world of the living. This is everywhere apparent in Henry Bacon's 1845 consolation manual, *The Sacred Flora: or Flowers From the Grave of a Child*, whose tone is set by an epigraph from Wordsworth:

A book upon whose leaves some chosen plants,

By his own hand disposed with nicest care,

In undecaying beauty were preserved;

Mute register, to *him*, of time and place,

And various fluctuations in the breast;

To *her*, a monument of faithful love . . .

(Wordsworth, "The Excursion," lines 205-210; as cited in Bacon, p. i)

This passage from Wordsworth's long poem "The Excursion" describes the single request made by a dying man who temporarily has recovered from fever through recourse to nature and fresh air. The young man's suffering in body is the result of rejection by a woman he has unsuccessfully wooed. Following the advice to expose himself to the healing powers of nature, his death is delayed, though still expected, and he thus has time to consider his situation. Like so many figures in Wordsworth, the youth is described as wandering in nature in a kind of suspended existence of reverie and self-reflection, requesting that his former lover accept the book described in the passage Bacon cites "from his dying hand."

Wordsworth's lines evoke the very dichotomy that Bacon's book seeks to break down

between life and death. The man's reprieve from immediate death, through the healing work of nature, gives him the time to attempt to secure his own figurative immortality by transmitting the traces of his own heart's emotions, sketched out in preserved flora, to his beloved. For her, his emotive register is "a monument of faithful love." What for him is personal becomes a general, iconic testament to love when it is recorded in textual form. In this way, Wordsworth's poem imagines that textual representation encapsulates and monumentalizes the emotions it records. In a sense, the creation of a monument creates an eternal documentation of experience that may be re-activated upon reading. It is the power of the emotions themselves combined with the poet's ability to communicate them that gives them resonance and meaning beyond the local context of individual emotion. To monumentalize is to record an eternally and universally meaningful representation of an individual and local experience or sentiment. In the case of Wordsworth's poem, love itself emerges as immortal, even if unrequited. Its power is doubled by the rejecting woman's acceptance of his testimony of love even if she cannot return this love.

In Wordsworth, this book of leaves evokes a measure of pathos, affirms both the regenerative and expressive powers of nature, and, in a last line omitted from Bacon's epigraph, celebrates the power of poetry. In "The Excursion," the full end of the stanza, and of this tale, reads: "To *her*, a monument of faithful love / Conquered, and in tranquillity retained!" ("Excursion," lines 210-211). The reference to a love retained in tranquillity echoes Wordsworth's famous assertion in his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (*Lyrical Ballads*, p. xxxiii). Emotion is both a challenge to and the prerequisite for poetic production. The process that Wordsworth's poetic formula describes of a

feeling that is experienced, quietly retained, then powerfully recalled and re-experienced is rendered metaphorically as the cycle of collection, preservation, and renewal of feeling embodied by the book's role in the story of spurned love and tragic death.

In the Wordsworthian context, the intervening force here is nature, which stands in a problematic relationship to the preservative work that extracts leaves from their proper domain and freezes them in a kind of false extension of existence. The suggestion that this form of preservation is somehow unnatural comes in the inability of the man in Wordsworth's poem to make a meaningful connection to the object of his love. His sentiments may have powerful meaning, but their communication to his wished-for lover does not complete them. The man is left to commune with nature in an abbreviated form of love that evokes both the powerful source and the isolation of Romantic emotion that is at the source of poetic inspiration. This sense of problematic abbreviation can also be traced through the language: his "mute register" becomes her "monument," a word that lexically includes and alludes to the muteness of his incomplete love. The muteness of his register suggests that his love was not at all muted or subdued in the first instance. The language of this passage suggests that the monumentalization of love may itself embalm in memory. This lexical degree of signification thus accompanies the overtones of nature's truncated regenerative cycle.

Bacon's choice of Wordsworth shows both the debt that nineteenth-century U.S. sentimentalism owed to the Romantics and one of the crucial points of divergence. While Wordsworth's emphasis is on poetic production as the encapsulation in leaves, which figure here as symbols of unrepresentable emotions, Bacon's text seeks to break down the division between the mortal and immortal worlds in exemplary sentimental fashion. In a typically Wordsworthian

metanarrative move, Bacon's omitted last line of "The Excursion" rounds out both the story and the significance of this embedded tale by defining the very practice of poetic expression that the poem is itself enacting. By the same token, Bacon's borrowing of this extract re-enacts the man's gathering and pressing of leaves insofar as Bacon picks from Wordsworth's corpus in order to memorialize his own sentiment. For Wordsworth, poetic production is like nature's regenerative power because it enshrines words and emotions that would otherwise have died away. By contrast, the sentimental tradition of borrowing that Bacon enacts here points to a quality that Wordsworth's context does not emphasize: the communality of the sentimental imagination. The Wordsworthian formulation of Romanticism is much more focused on the figure of the individual. This aspect of Romanticism found a much stronger American expression in Transcendentalism whose emphasis on the figure of the poet likewise linked individualism and artistic expression. In contrast to both British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, the American sentimental tradition almost always imagines that meaning and importance emerge from a community. As Mary Louise Kete shows, sentimental traditions such as the gift book created miniature communities around remembrance volumes in which various members of a family or circle might record their poetry and thoughts, or preserved flowers and hair.

In the sentimental context, in strong contrast to Wordsworth's Romantic imagination, poetic production is a distinctly communal process that binds its participants together. Emotion is not transferred from the breast of the poet to the reader through lyrical expression; rather, feeling is imagined to circulate and to be shared within a group. Preservation of emotion thus plays a different role in Bacon's re-contextualization of Wordsworth's lines: here, devoted love is consecrated not simply to the lost beloved but to the wider community through the creation of a

consolation manual that draws on Bacon's own experience of losing a child in order to imaginatively reach out to a broad, collective audience. This way of imagining narrative production as a community-building process underlies the way nurses who recorded their Civil War experiences in the hospitals saw their narratives as participating in a collective work of mourning quite apart from their individual emotions or experiences, as discussed in chapter four.

Both the man's book of leaves and Bacon's book of "sacred flora" function as monuments insofar as they identify and preserve significant sentiments. As such, both texts supersede the muteness of death that may be figured as the silence of the grave. In "Autobiography as De-facement," Paul de Man posits that Wordsworth's "Essays Upon Epitaphs" mediates the difficult relationship between life and death through "a series of transformations" that untie the "either/or" dichotomy such that "[o]ne moves, without compromise, from death *or* life to life *and* death" ("Autobiography as De-facement," p. 925). De Man argues that prosopopoeia is the figure of autobiography in Wordsworth insofar as Wordsworth's tombstones *speak* when illuminated by the sun who, in turn, *sees*. What de Man illuminates here is Wordsworth's play in the space between muteness and speech in the case of mortality, which, de Man argues, maintains its significance and destructive capacity even as death's relationship to life is converted from an oppositional one to a mediated one. Speaking of "Essays upon Epitaphs," de Man writes, "The existential poignancy of the text stems from the full acquiescence to the power of mortality" ("Autobiography as De-facement," p. 925). The tombstone is expressive precisely to the extent that it is read; and in Wordsworth, nature intervenes to perform this renewing act as the sun falls across the stone. Or, more accurately, in the process of reading Wordsworth's account, the reader activates this renewal. This is precisely

where Wordsworth intersects especially profoundly with Bacon's text: if Bacon is constructing a lexicological monument on the model of Wordsworth's botanical one, it is activated through readership.

Like Wordsworth, the poignancy of Bacon's text derives from its consciousness of the power of mortality. Also like Wordsworth, Bacon seeks to mediate the divide between life and death to encompass not life *or* death but, rather, life *and* death. To make the one coextensive with the other also borrows from the transformative imagery of nature; however, in Bacon this is a *divine* nature in a very specific sense, that of the sentimental impulse in the antebellum period. The power that Wordsworth ascribes to the sun, to *see* in such a way that the dead may *speak* lies strictly with the figure of a beneficent God under whose authority Bacon is allowed to imagine the extension of mortality into immortality.

In contrast to the Romantic and Transcendental visions of spiritual enlightenment as a distinctly individual experience, perhaps in communion with the eternal aspects of nature, *The Sacred Flora* casts itself toward the sentimental promise of redemption and reunion with God:

> The name of *"Flora"* has been given to little volumes in which culled flowers have been pressed, as memorials of persons, times, and scenes, connected with incidents in the life of the owner of the book; and sentiments, corresponding with the poetic language of the flowers, are recorded beneath or around them. The author of the little book here presented to the reader, has selected the name of '*Sacred Flora,*' because the sentiments he wished to express, springing as they did around the grave of a precious child, seemed to him well symbolized by such memorial flowers as those to which allusion has been made; and he trusts, that

thus gathered, they will be found truly the flowers of Christian thought and sentiment. In preparing a memorial of an angel spirit, whose life on earth was that of a spring-flower—sweetness and beauty, he would fain believe that he has done a work for other hearts as well as for his own. He would console the bereaved, and furnish preparatives against the trial hour to those who have not as yet seen the dark wing of Death shadowing the brightness of home. (*The Sacred Flora*, pp. v-vi)

This introductory paragraph first draws a parallel between books given the name "Flora" and this book, which is a "Sacred Flora." A "Flora" is a volume that houses flowers which act as "memorials," material traces of the "persons, times and scenes" of the past which are now embalmed or frozen in time—kept alive in a sense, or at least present. Flowers are a kind of language, a metaphoric system that signifies a set of attachments to invisible, now-absent signifieds. Around or beneath these enshrined symbolic flowers are written the sentiments to which these flower-symbols correspond. Thus, the "Flora" is a kind of textualized crypt, following the same logic as so many other material objects of sentimental mourning culture like mourning rings and mourning photographs. By entitling his volume "Sacred Flora," the author intends to suggest a parallel spirit of memorializing once-living, now-gone associations through the highly metaphoric language of flowers. If the "Flora" draws on material objects to retain the sentimental trace of absent objects of affection, the "Sacred Flora" was generated by one particular now-absent object—a lost son.

The play between lost objects or persons and present sentiments is solidified in the manipulation of material objects (flowers): tangible signifiers that signify doubly—first recalling

the lost person (or association), and second corresponding to the lexicographical transcription of the sentiments that this association calls forward in the shape of the preserved material object. The flowers are encoded artifacts of the person who has been lost and the sentiments associated with him or her. The words describing these sentiments decode the signifying flower which itself enshrines and represents the presence of the lost objects: absent object—>flower—>words—>sentiment. The reiterative quality of this system, for which flowers are not sufficient without words as a kind of redundant insistence, follows a familiar elegiac logic of the emphasis on language to express the ineffable at the same time that the reiterative quality of elegiac language reveals its inability ever truly either to restore the absent object or to express the depth of the experience of loss.

The preservation in book form of the sentiments, figured as "sacred flora," of his own mourning experience is edifying because these experiences, springing as they do "around the grave of a precious child," are imagined inherently to provide evidence of the divine bridge between the mortal and immortal worlds. This linkage is effected metaphorically and figuratively through language that, like the frontispiece to *The Wide, Wide World*, imagines the perpetual presence of the eternal in the earthly world. The deployment of a botanical tropology figures nature's regenerative powers as an expression of the divine order in earthly forms. As occurs in many historical periods through diverse metaphorical constructs, and with the transcendentalists also in this period, the natural world is a kind of iconographic language that encapsulates divinity in earthly, mortal terms. As sentiments that emerge like flowers from the grave, Bacon posits his feelings as themselves evidence of the transformative and regenerative power that nature borrows from Godly power.

Bacon's is a typically domestic vision: he natural is housed within the domain of the divine world. His volume is dedicated to his wife, "whose 'Flora' first suggested this work . . . with the prayer that mutual sympathy may ever lighten earth's unavoidable trials and sorrows, till the golden circlet, with all its jewels, shall be complete in Heaven" (*The Sacred Flora*, "Inscription"). The "golden circlet" of the family figuratively is reconstituted in the process of producing the book in a way that anticipates the family's final reunion in heaven. Until the "golden circlet" is reconstituted in heaven as the enclosed family circle, the diminishing family on earth retains its shape as the dead remain present in symbolic form much like Ellen's angelic mother. This metaphor recalls the tradition of mourning portraiture including paint and photography that retained the image of the absent family members within the domestic context as a kind of spiritual presence. Bacon's text is inscribed to his wife, the mother of his slightly depleted family circle.

At the same time, it is transcribing or even standing in for that imagined circle in its perfect, reconstituted form. In this way, the text is working as a monument or token, like mourning rings or portraits, by filling the absence left by the dead with a symbolic image of a whole and present family. Once again, around the language of death and mourning is a rhetorical turn of substitution of material objects for absent loved ones, especially children. The need for this replacement is perhaps somewhat clarified here by the sanctity of the "golden circlet" which defines not only mother but also father. This replacement works according to a logic similar to that set out by Wordsworth in "The Excursion": if death or loss leaves a gap, a text that is a kind of vessel for sentiments may stand in the place of the lost or absent beloved. Because the sentimental imagination conceives of death as merely a passageway to the eternal, the lost are

never completely lost. The text thus doesn't take their place permanently; rather, books like Bacon's *The Sacred Flora* are symbolic representations of an ideal family that take the place of the dead, but only temporarily because death is in no way final.

The equivalence of flower and sentiments so easily is assumed here that the author describes "sentiments" themselves as sprouting up around the grave. First of all, this metaphoric connection sneaks in an organic flavor to the layering of meaning, thus implying that the words of this volume, now held in the hand or placed upon the table of the reader, emerged directly and through natural processes (flowers—progeny—sentiments) from the grave and were faithfully transcribed onto the page. Furthermore, the "memorial flowers" that will symbolize the sentiments that bloomed around the grave (a logical inversion that solidifies the strength of the metaphoric association) are fit representatives for these sentiments. These nodes of metaphoric association (flowers, sentiments, etc.) recirculate under new auspices when a third (at a minimum) mode of association enters: the book is now the memorial for the departed "angel-spirit," whose flowers (signifying texts) are fit to symbolize the sentiments that emerged from the grave (the potent site of loss and spiritual presence in uneasy simultaneity), and the life of this "angel-spirit" was but a "spring-flower."

The methodology of meaning here operates according to a distinctly metaphoric logic, that of simultaneous association. Simultaneity, or synchronicity, implies a timelessness in which the lost might be figuratively restored to presence as they are associatively recalled through flowers. But not just living flowers or the continual blooming of a plant; it is the memorialization, the figurative embalming, of the flowers in the "Flora" that transmits to them the quality preserving a trace of the past for present experience. Life on earth is, in a cosmic

sense, an instantiation of God's will so that time and all contingencies dissolve into a massive holistic system of meaning organized around the will of the invisible everpresence and omnipotent divinity. Every object and experience on earth is, then, significant to the degree and in the sense that it incarnates, in the material shapes of the earthly world, the will and presence of God, whose very absence from the local attests to his presence in the cosmos.

Bacon's text is suffused with an idiom of preservation that overlays individual memory with collective memory. In turn, in the passage below, the imagination (thoughts, memory, affection) enables a kind of extension of time by which past sentiments (figured as scents fixed in pressed flowers) are reanimated and re-experienced. This defines the ways in which Bacon's book becomes a monument: through a preservation of the dead, their vitality is fixed on the page to be re-experienced each time the book is opened and re-activated.

> But in the *Sacred Flora*, where thoughts are flowers, where memory is the keeper, and affection is the poetess—all the gems are of unfading brightness, and shine as beautifully as did the precious stones in the High Priest's breastplate. We can breathe upon the pressed flowers there, and they will not refuse to smile, or to scent the air with fragrance. They are embalmed as no Egyptian ever yet embalmed his dead, and we can have a clearer hope of their resurrection than he had of the reanimation of the cold clay after a thousand years. We speak, and lo! thoughts culled in years gone by, bloom again, as the fairy made the desert to be jewelled with roses. (*The Sacred Flora*, pp. 26-27)

Temporal progression either is suspended or rendered immaterial in this passage. These "gems" recall the "jewels" of the "golden circlet"—they are the dead children awaiting their resurrected

family in eternal life. While these gems may reside only in memories of the past in earthly time, in eternal time they exist in a kind of perpetual present toward which this passage figuratively gestures. Memory is thus one figure for this eternal life because it is where the dead are preserved. Memorial books give these memories a metaphoric instantiation. Those whom we must cherish in memories of the past exist even in the present in eternal time. Absence is here compensated for through a figure of perpetuity that accesses the divine realm to imaginatively hold onto the dead within the confines of earthly experience.

Two other tropes correlate to memory in this passage: resurrection and embalming. The first defines the function by which the terminal nature of death has been precluded or obviated by Christ's martyrdom. It is figured here through the metaphor of natural rebirth, as when "thoughts culled in years gone by, bloom again." The reference to embalming, on the other hand, derives much of its significance from a much more specific geographic and historical context than could any reference to resurrection. Like the classic Christian theme of resurrection, the notion of metaphoric embalming, particularly in the sentimental tradition, is a figure of the regeneration of life beyond death. This is in contrast to a gothic conception of live burial, as in Poe's story "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which entombment signals the perpetuation of a state of horror. Metaphoric sentimental embalming imagines that by holding onto a memory of the lost, and by figuratively keeping that memory whole and embedded within the psyche as Ellen holds onto her mother, the mourner remains in touch with eternality while, at the same time, the dead are reborn in the memories of the living. Bacon's book both captures the memory of the dead, in the same way that it figuratively presses and seals flowers against decay, and reactivates these memorialized dead within lived experience. Sentimental memory is not a relationship between the present and

the past; rather, that which is remembered remains perpetually present.

During the antebellum decades in the U.S., the technology of embalming existed in the collective understanding almost exclusively in reference to Ancient Egypt. This was due, in large part, to vigorous European archeological explorations in Egypt, which were followed with great interest in the U.S.[8] Metaphorically, as I will discuss in detail in chapter three, the term "embalming" had resonated strongly in the English language for some time, and not only in the U.S. In the U.S. context, however, this resonance happened to coincide with the rise of a distinctly American species of sentimentalism. At this point of intersection, the metaphor "embalming in memory" sustained great significance, as examples presented in chapter three attest.

In Bacon's reckoning, the sort of metaphorical embalming by which pressed flowers may become alive again, is more powerful than the Egyptian technology. For the Christian, sentimental reader, the Egyptian practice of embalming would only have been a pagan fantasy of providing for the dead in the world beyond. By contrast, Bacon's preserved "flora," like pressed flowers, symbolize a vision of divine nature by the dead are destined never to decay. Bacon's language here anthropomorphizes and seemingly animates these figurative flowers, ("they will not refuse to smile"), thus indicating that this metaphoric embalming is not a function of static memory by which the dead remain dead; rather, Bacon's is a revelation of numinous

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[8] As early as the mid- to late- 18th century, mummies and Egyptian history were already garnering attention. In 1737, Alex Gordon published an article recounting his discovery of several mummies in Egypt, one of which he brought back to England with him. Interest in ancient Egyptian culture grew with Napoleon's arrival into Egypt in 1798 when several scholars accompanying him recorded and published further information about the exotic pyramids, monuments, and tombs that Napoleon's marauding army witnessed. Accounts of mummies, including discussion of embalming, appeared in antebellum journals, as, for example, in an 1829 article, "Egyptian Antiquities," in *The North American Review*. For more detail, see Kathryn A. Bard and Steven Blake Shubert's *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*.

resurrection. According to the sentimental logic of this passage, those embalmed in memory are not simply tokens that exist merely within the remembrance of the mourner. Embalming is imagined to be a numinous process by which mortality is superseded and it retains "gems" in a state of "unchanging brightness." To press a flower, literally or figuratively, to imagine the dead as gems, or to cherish memorial reminders like hair, is to conceive of a surrogate object with the power to reanimate the memory and the presence of the dead.

The logic of "embalming in memory" thus sought to resolve the problem of absence by imaginatively bridging the mortal and immortal worlds. Like that of the transcendentalists, the sentimental idiom refracted the question of mortality through the lens of the natural. In contrast to the transcendental mode, however, Bacon presents sentimental nature through a botanical symbolism that encodes the preservation of the dead within the circle of family and community in the mortal world. At the same time, temporality is superseded. Sentimental metaphoric embalming describes a kind of encryption of the dead within living experience.

The Rhetoric of Metaphoric Embalming

As part of the logic of sentimental narrativity, which compensates for the crisis of loss through a narrative structure that figuratively returns the mourner to the embrace of the community, metaphoric "embalming in memory" converts grief and absence into consolation and eternal presence. Although this trope has rarely if ever been identified as a significant aspect of sentimental culture, even a cursory search in the relatively new "Sabin Americana" Internet electronic database of the terms "embalm*" or "embalm* in memory" specifying the years from 1830 to 1865 will return from almost 200 to over 1000 textual citations depending on how the

term is searched.[9] The power of this concept in this period of American letters and culture cannot be overstated. While the present study does not examine other sets of source material in any depth for comparative purposes, a somewhat cursory consideration of electronic databases of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British sources confirms that this metaphor was also popular in British letters and culture.[10]

In the U.S., "embalming in memory" circulated as a cultural trope in the decades before the Civil War in elegiac poetry and other memorial discourse (including obituaries and other commemorative writings), but also as a description of how cultural memory works. What makes the American context unique is that when the technology of embalming quickly emerged in the early years of the Civil War, it physically enacted the symbolic resonance of "embalming in memory." In a broad sense, this metaphor was deployed at least as early as the seventeenth century, for example in Cotton Mather's pamphlet memorializing John Wilson: "Some Offers to Embalm the Memory of the Truly Reverend and Renowned John Wilson; The First Pastor of Boston, in New England; Interr'd (and a Great Part of His Country's Glory with Him) August 11, 1667. Aged 79."[11] A contemporary British example was *Melius Inquirendum*, a tract first published in 1678 in which Vincent Alsop asserts that the "late Proclamation against Dissenters" by "some Church-men" will "embalm their memories to all succeeding Generations" (*Melius Inquirendum*, p. 65).[12] In both cases, and most geographic and historical contexts, the trope

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[9] This search was conducted between June 10 and June 14, 2008. The Sabin Americana Database is composed of over 29,000 full-text primary sources dating from 1500 to 1929. Its focus encompasses everything from religious tracts to social texts and literary texts.

[10] This search included the "Victorian Prose Archive," the "Internet Library of Early Journals," and "19th Century British Library Journals."

[11] Published in Specimens of American Poetry, 1829.

[12] Alsop was a prominent nonconformist. This text responded to John Goodman's tract on the same subject, the treatment of Protestants by Catholics and the dangers posed to England by "popism."

refers to public, collective memory. This is part of what makes it especially significant as an antecedent to the technological practice of embalming during the Civil War. During the war, the technology of embalming functioned to facilitate public as well as private mourning. The emphasis of metaphoric embalming on the communal was also important to the symbolic power of wartime corporeal embalming.

At the same time, in antebellum America, this phrase acquired a uniquely sentimental connotation that referred to local, domestic, and personal sentiments. In one typical example, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's 1830 novel, *Clarence, or A Tale of Our Own Times*, describes Gertrude's father as "embalmed in her heart as the sanctity of filial love" (*Clarence*, vol. 2, p. 106). Embalming here denotes the intimacy of "filial love" as a sentiment that enshrines the other within the self. One might conclude that the disappearance of this way of thinking has accompanied, or perhaps precipitated, the disappearance of the metaphor "to embalm in memory" from modern-day discourse. For the sentimental age, by contrast, this idiom captures a distinct sense of the internalization of emotion that binds community together through strong emotion.

In an example from Lydia Maria Child's a story, "The Beloved Tune," published in an 1847 collection, embalming describes a form of capturing and preserving a sacred emotion. Describing, in very romantic tones, the growing love of Dora and Alessandro, Child's story describes the emergence of an idyllic love that produces a child, Fioretta (from the Italian for "flower"). In the closing scene of the story, as Alessandro teaches music to Fioretta, Dora captures the transcendent beauty and emotion of the moment in a sketch: "As the father shrined within his divine art the memory of their first hour of mutual love, so the mother has embalmed

in *her* beautiful art the first musical echo from the heart of their child" ("The Beloved Tune," p. 125). The aesthetic expression of emotion in this story represents the channeling of strong emotion into productive avenues, such as art and child-development. It also provides the opportunity to encapsulate sentiment and to re-present it.

This logic is carried on when, in the next and final paragraph, Dora dies. In her death, Dora seems to seal the sacred family circle:

All is still—still. Their [the family's] souls are kneeling reverently before the Angel of Death. Heavy sunset guns from a neighbouring fort, boom through the air. The vibrations shake the music-box, and it starts up like a spirit, and plays the cherished tune. Dora presses her daughter's hand, and she, with a faint smile, warbles the words they have so often sung. The dying one looks up to Alessandro, with a deep expression of unearthly tenderness. Gazing thus, with one long-drawn sigh, her affectionate soul floats away on the wings of that ethereal song. The memory that taught endurance unto love leaves a luminous expression, a farewell glory, on the lifeless countenance. Attendant angels smile, and their blessing falls on the mourners' hearts, like dew from heaven. Fioretta remains to the widewed [sic] one, the graceful blossom of his lonely life, the incarnation of his beloved tune." ("The Beloved Tune," p. 125)

The embedding of sentiment in physical instantiations weaves a web of interconnectedness through shared emotion over the course of this short, final scene. Notably, such a scene hardly requires detail in this period when deathbed tableaux pervaded literary and nonliterary writings. The unfolding of the narrative's structure has posited a vital familial connectedness so strong that

it ultimately compensates for the loss of the mother. She is so effectively enshrined in the "beloved tune," in the "memory that taught endurance unto love" that "leaves a luminous expression . . . on the lifeless countenance," and in Fioretta who remains as an "incarnation of his beloved tune" that is itself the aesthetic representation of Dora. The effect of such layering is to insist upon the possibility for absence to find compensation in earthly manifestations that secure the eternal presence of the dead. In this story, the logic of sentimental narrativity is expressed through the powerful metaphoric connotations of "embalming in memory," which is the function by which sentiment is secured to take the place of those who are absent.

Mourning and the Limits of Sentimental Personhood

Unlike "The Beloved Tune," but like *The Sacred Flora*, Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* begins with death and proceeds in an attempt to accommodate the experience of mourning. In *The Wide, Wide World*, the confrontation with death is explored implicitly in Ellen's struggle to negotiate her place in the world through her mourning work for her mother. Warner's novel draws from a rich cultural reservoir of mourning manuals, elegies, gift books, and other materials produced to address, describe, and console loss and mourning. These latter texts deal more directly than Warner's with the meaning of the shadow cast by bereavement. In all of these works, the limits of self are attentively examined at the cusp between life and death. In the sentimental imagination, as in many other historical cultural contexts, the state of mourning places one in the limbo between the world of the living and the world of death, however it is imagined. An examination of some of the popular texts of this period reveals how profoundly sentimental discourse imagined personhood to be constituted through loss and mourning. Through extensive and often effusive reflections on mourning as both a state of being and as a

dynamic progression, mourning manuals, elegies, gift books, and numerous other antebellum sentimental texts sought to frame the shape of the individual in relation to the antipodes death and immortality.

Within the sentimental paradigm, death is one of the foundational and formative limits of personhood. In the 1857 parabolic text by Nehemiah Adams, *Agnes and the Key of Her Little Coffin By Her Father*,[13] these limits are set out through a typical sentimental dichotomy between death and life that is transcended through mourning work, usually in a domestic setting. To some extent, this fundamental duality is set out in order to instruct mourners not to dwell on death because it threatens to overwhelm the living with unresolved grief. The separation of the living from the dead is the natural boundary of mortal experience, and it is thus formative of the mortal world. Whatever longing the mourner may have to re-connect with the dead, particularly in the case of a dead child, the loved one's absence from the living world must be acknowledged. The insistence on this borderline in sentimental fiction, poetry, and non-fiction insulates the living from the dead. In *Agnes and the Key*, the loss of a child is particularly difficult because such a drastically abbreviated life seems to violate one's faith in a benevolent God and seems to impose a cruelty to the parents if not to the child. Sentimental mourning manuals often treat the problem of parents mourning a child with particular attention. They do so in part to impart that over-indulgent bereavement is a sign of doubting the omniscient good will of a God whose will may be obscure but must be trusted. The insistence in consolation manuals like Daniel Clarke Eddy's *Angel Whispers* (1853) that the death of a child demands an especial commitment to faith suggests that grief-stricken parents must be vigilant about maintaining their connection to the

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[13] The second and subsequent editions of Adams's book were published under the title *Agnes and the Little Key, or Bereaved Parents Comforted and Instructed By Her Father*, a title that more directly communicated the genre and intention of the text as a consolation manual.

world of the living. In *Agnes and the Key*, Agnes' parents spend the length of the story negotiating a relationship to their dead daughter that maintains her place in their hearts and household while defining a separating boundary between the living and the dead. As for Ellen in *The Wide, Wide World*, this process defines their development as individuals in parallel to a deepening understanding of their faith. Sentimental personhood is not imagined to overcome loss; rather, it is greatly formed through the process of mourning that provides both a boundary and a bridge between the mortal and immortal worlds. Ultimately, the mourner becomes keenly aware of the immortality in his or her own soul.

In some iterations of the sentimental imagination, death is the punishment for sin: were there no sin introduced to the world through Adam's fall, death either would not exist or would not have the same bitter significance. *Angel Whispers* is typical of this distinctly sentimental genre in its insistence on this precept from 1 Corinthians (15:56-57): "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (as cited in *Angel Whispers*, p. 13).

> While God has left us in ignorance of what would have become of the body, whether it would have remained here, or been removed in some other way to heaven, we are not left in ignorance of the fact, that death, in its present dreadful forms, was introduced into the world by sin, and that sin gives to it its sting, and its terror, and its dreadful dominion. Were there no sin, there would be no fear of dissolution. If death was the appointed passage from earth to heaven, from terrestrial to celestial life, man would lie down and die as calmly as he retires to sleep; he would enter the grave with as much composure as he now enters his own

dwelling, shutting the door behind him. (*Angel Whispers*, pp. 16-17)

Sin is the origin of both corporeal pollution and dissolution. Without sin, Eddy considers, the body may have had a place in heaven. But because sin entered into human experience through the body, Adam's fall and the consequent general pollution of every human body divides the mortal body from the immortal soul. In a sense, the experience of the body encodes the boundary between life and death because it bears the marks of sin in its very death. The terror that death brings about is the experience of God's punishment for sin fitted out for each individual in the form of his or her death. Death marks sin in the deterioration of one's very body.

The so-called "good death" of American Christianity after the Second Great Awakening (1790 – 1840s) thus promises the release of the soul from the sinful body thanks to Christ's martyrdom and God's resurrection of Christ. It is in this release and its evocation of immortal heavenly life that both mourners and the afflicted (those anticipating their own deaths) are encouraged to find consolation. To die a "good death" meant to recognize and repent for one's sins so that death could indeed be the release it was meant to be. As Frederick Augustus Kemper notes in his manual for the ailing, *Consolations of the Afflicted*, death presents a sacred choice:

My dear fellow sufferer, I now address you as one just come out of the furnace of affliction. "Behold thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee?" It is seriously to be hoped that your afflictions have been sanctified unto you, and have had a sanctifying effect upon you.—That you can say from the heart, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray." (*Consolations of the Afflicted*, p. 64)

In all Christian traditions, death and affliction are, of course, the two paradigmatic tests of human

submission to the will of God. It is a particularity of sentimentalism, however, that mourning—whether for someone else or, in anticipation, for oneself—provides such a singular way for personhood to take on and test its limits. The "good death" is the marker of a soul that has embraced the "statutes" of which Kemper speaks.

Although the notion of the "good death" existed in one form or another long before the antebellum period, by the mid-nineteenth-century it became a formulaic component of the American sentimental mourning script. As Drew Gilpin Faust writes, by the time of the Civil War, the "good death" had taken on such specific dimensions that letter-writers reporting soldiers' deaths to their families at home could predict what they would be hoping to hear: that "the deceased had been conscious of his fate, had demonstrated willingness to accept it, had shown signs of belief in God and in his own salvation, and had left messages and instructive exhortations for those who should have been at his side" (*This Republic of Suffering*, p. 17). This good-ness benefits not only the dying but the living as well.

In both *Angel Whispers* and *Consolations of the Afflicted*, as in the case of the fictional Ellen in *The Wide, Wide World*, how one handles the situation of grief is prime evidence of one's willing internalization of the precepts of faith. By contrast, for Eddy and Kemper, the meaning that death lends to mortal life always derives from sin. Warner, Bacon and Adams are less concerned with sin than; instead, *The Wide, Wide World*, *The Sacred Flora*, and *Agnes and the Key* focus more intently on the positive and edifying aspects of death and mourning. These latter three works represent the move inspired by the First and Second Great Awakenings in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries away from a Puritanical focus on sinfulness and toward an emerging belief in a benevolent God who assured the soul's ascent to heaven. In *Culture and*

Redemption, Tracy Fessenden notes that as this latter perspective emerged, it brought with it an evangelical quality as expressed both in the energetic revivals of both Great Awakenings as well as in the sentimental literary and cultural tradition. This evangelicalism expressed itself in the sentimental valorization of sympathy, positive influence, conversion, and feminine domesticity as the heart of individual and cultural morality. The sinfulness emphasized by Eddy and Kemper betrays residual aspects of Puritan ideology such that the death of a child or one's own death is tied directly to human wickedness. Evangelical eyes, on the other hand, view the negative experience of bereavement as an opportunity to reaffirm faith and identity. But Eddy and Kemper are still very much products of the nineteenth century in their avid concern for the psychological, not only the moral, condition of their readers whether afflicted with grief or illness; each work seeks ultimately to console, not to judge.

According to Bacon in *The Sacred Flora*, infants personify the ideal sensibility, which he defines as "that tenderness of feeling which is essential to a correct reception of an affectionate religion" (*The Sacred Flora*, p. 14). If the example from "The Beloved Tune" illustrates how the absence of the dead may be compensated for through the retention of a strong, symbolic sentiment, then Bacon's text reminds us of what sentiment signifies: a condition of receptiveness to supernatural influence. What we in the twentieth century think of in very personal terms as a form of emotional response correlates in this period to something much less individualized and much more a function of one's receptiveness to the other, especially to the divine other. The power of such "tenderness of feeling" to complete what Bacon called "the golden circlet" in *The Sacred Flora* by filling in the place of the mourned one attests to the role that mourning sentiment plays in defining not only relationships but the parameters of personhood in texts like

The Sacred Flora, "The Beloved Tune," and in other commemorative writings such as *Agnes and the Key*.

In Adams's text, the key itself becomes the figure of this struggle as two parents grieve over the death of their young daughter. As with many other aspects of mourning tradition in this period, burial was becoming more decorative. Adams notes that coffins for children had recently become more ornate. In the best tradition of sentimental fetishization of memorabilia, these newer, more ornate coffins were locked with a key that was then given to the grieving parents as a keepsake. Adams's text explores the distinct difficulty that this key presents. It exists precisely at the dividing line between the living and the dead—it seals death away from life; and yet, at the same time, it presents the possibility of re-opening the coffin. Marking the boundary between life and death, the key circulates within the mourning house and represents both the absence left behind and the impossibility of filling this absence with a mere token. This is, in Freudian terms, the boundary between mourning and melancholia.

This drama becomes a distinctly domestic affair in *Agnes*. It plays out partly as an attempt to make the unfamiliar more familiar and domestic as a form of accommodation. The narrative representation of the coffin presents one such example:

It is known, and some of you to whom I speak have had painful opportunity to know, that there has been, of late years, an improvement in the little depositories in which we convey the forms of infants and young children to their last resting-place.

Their shape is not in seeming mockery of the rigid, swathed body; the broken lines and angles of the old coffin are drawn into continuous lines; they

look like other things, and not like that which looks like nothing else, a coffin; you would be willing to have such a shape for the depository of any household article. Within, they are prepared with a pearly white lining; the inside of the lid is draped in the same way; the same is on the inside; and a lock and key supplant the remorseless screws and screw-driver. (*Agnes*, p. 15)

The sense that the "screws and screw-driver" show "remorselessness" suggests a desire to avert the finality of death. The word "coffin" is used here as the antithesis to this "depository" that is a "resting-place" for the "forms of infants and young children." The metaphoric language of this passage insulates this object from any sense of absolute absence. As this text notes, a "depository" is nothing more than a receptacle as in a domestic setting where it may hold some "household article" that one intends to reclaim for use at some later time. Furthermore, this container's "continuous lines" suggest less of a break than the coffin whose unique shape is consecrated to the world of the dead, and which thus breaks with the world of the living. The rounded shape of the child's coffin, an "improvement" of "late years," suggests something more like a bed, a crib, or some other object that could fit into the sacred domesticity of the household.

If death can become so domesticated that containers for the dead become aligned with any number of locked boxes holding household jewels or papers, then those whose bodies have been entombed in such boxes seem not to leave the domestic sphere. Instead, they become part and parcel of familiar treasures that may be kept under key and out of sight but which are nevertheless more or less within arm's reach. The softness and familiar domesticity of the non-coffin's decor, the antithesis to the coffin's position beyond the boundary of everyday life, makes it metaphorically contiguous with the interiority of the house. These infants and children are

placed in proximate domestic spaces that are recognizable models of the larger houses they are leaving. This physical interior is a figure of interiority as such, and, in particular, of the psychological interiority that, like the depository's pearly satin, becomes a secondary "resting-place" for the dead child.

Ultimately, domesticity itself, figured as an interiority that combines physical and psychological interior spaces structures an approach to death that denies its finality by figuratively integrating the dead into the space of the living; or, at least, into an approximation of that space. This is how renewal is imagined: death is a suspension of animation, the dead are wrapped in the idiom of domesticity and even in its drapery and decor, the body is imagined to be entering a static realm where change is resisted. The only way in which a key is imaginable is if the interior of the container is imagined not to change over time. The interior of the box, and the person it holds, is held in a condition of perpetuity without change in the imagination of the mourner.

THE GHOSTLY PRESENCE OF SENTIMENTAL FEMININITY

> Not dead, not sleeping, not even gone,
> But present still.
> And waiting for the coming hour
> Of God's sweet will.
>
> (Stowe, "Only a Year")

Psychologically as well as spiritually, interiority in Warner's novel is constructed around loss. The loss of her mother propels Ellen into an extended work of mourning that is the foundation for her self-development. The reparative work of mourning coincides with Ellen's

evolution as a sentimental subject. Several critics, including Joanne Dobson and Marianne Noble, have noted that Ellen learns the principles of self-evacuation and discipline that undergird her inculcation into the "cult of true womanhood" from her ailing mother before experiencing the separation that will divide them forever. At this "first real trial" for a girl as yet "untamed at all by sorrow's discipline," Ellen's grief is overwhelming: "she was a child of very high spirit and violent passions, . . . and in proportion violent was the tempest excited" by the separation as Ellen visits her mother's bedside for the last time before she is removed to live with her father's sister (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 63). Noble notes that Warner draws Ellen's maternal identification according to traditional sentimental imagery of the "rich consolation" of "a wonderfully complete union" that contrasts with the cruelty of the paternal "nom-du-père" as defined by Jacques Lacan (*Masochistic Pleasures*, pp. 106-7).[14] According to Noble's reading of Warner's novel partly through the lens of Lacan, Ellen's struggle to develop a fully realized feminine identity is several times crushed: both by the submissiveness imbibed through her maternal identification and by the cruelty of her father's estrangement and abandonment. These formative dynamics do, however, help to shape the young girl into a female subject prone to absorb and adapt to the expectations and discipline of the patriarchal culture around her. Notably, this reading recapitulates the traditional sentimental divide of the feminine interior that contrasts with the masculine exterior: without the protection of the loving mother, Ellen's exposure to the cruelty of the "wide, wide world" forces her to adapt and assimilate rather than develop and

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[14] Lacan's theorization of the "nom-du-père," or "name of the father," first appeared in his 1955-1956 seminar on "The Psychoses." The "nom-du-père" functions as the central term in what Lacan terms the "symbolic order" through which one's identity and place in relation to others is established. The father serves as the symbol of authority that anchors and stabilizes psychological and social organization. Noble places an emphasis on the sentimental idealization of maternal love that, in Warner's novel, compensates for the remoteness of Mr. Montgomery's paternal authoritarianism.

individuate. For Noble, survival requires a form of masochism that renders the female subject legible and palatable to a mass, paternalistic culture.

In this final section of the chapter, I take issue with this reading of Ellen's masochistic tendencies and argue that the script of sentimental mourning provided a distinct structure for Ellen to navigate between self-evacuation and overt self-assertion. Ellen's internalization of an image of her mother as a living, dynamic presence gives her a language for self-understanding and self-expression. In contrast to the self-discipline that Noble in particular emphasizes, my interpretation challenges the idea that Ellen's identity develops solely or primarily in relation to self-evacuation.

Within the lexicon of this sentimental novel, mourning is an enriching experience. Sentimental mourning as narrated in Warner's novel provides a rubric through which Ellen can define and develop her character, using this term in its nineteenth-century sense. By using the word "character" I mean to suggest the problem that grows up around a crucial split between Ellen as a "self-actualized" identity, as contemporary psychologists might imagine, and the carefully crafted façade in which she becomes so enshrouded that the shell and the purported true self within become indistinguishable. In other words, the question that Noble and other frustrated readers inevitably encounter is: to what extent does Ellen's development as a subject become a liberation (she is, after all, seemingly independent and happy at the close of the novel) and to what extent has she simply mastered the skill of fortifying herself within the parameters of ideal sentimental womanhood? Especially, but not only, because we are dealing with a novel, this question is impossible because there is no "real self" outside the composite structure of the façade. Thus, insofar as Ellen's entire identity is formulated in relation and reaction to severe

grief, within the schema of the novel that houses and forms her, this identity is constructed of the ideal materials of spiritual humbleness, feminine rectitude, rigid self-control, and the serenity of faith. On the one hand, this means that Ellen is very vulnerable to the forces of abandonment, cruelty, and even covetousness that she experiences as she migrates from one home to another. At the same time, her strength is meant to come from her reliance on a faithful and benevolent God whose goodness must be imagined as the ultimate reason and explanation for her experiences.

As readers, we may lose sight of Ellen's agency in this process. We are especially likely to do so if we read mourning in twentieth- or twenty-first-century terms: as a condition of absolute loss. For Ellen, mourning provides precisely the kind of angelic, supernatural guidance that is figured in the frontispiece to the novel, discussed above. As a strongly established social script, it is mourning that gives the novel its throughline. Contemporary readers can see this so long as we understand that Ellen's spiritual journey is at every step structured and enabled by her originary, and sequential, experiences of loss. We must see her within her sentimental context in which earthly loss is converted into spiritual gain. What we may read as her self-evacuation of interiority or individuality misidentifies the symbolic meanings of loss upon which the novel builds its world.

Should we accept the novel's earnest assertion that Ellen's earthly losses, including her development of a rigid self-control that amounts, at times, to a kind of obliteration of singularity and difference, are all in the service of a higher cause that benefits her much more than it hurts her? This is the claim that retroactive readers, particularly those of us very concerned about the possibilities offered to women, wish to question most fervently. I do not propose to accept the

novel's proposal at face value. At the same time, our problem in reading this novel's negotiation of a space for feminine identity has been severely hampered by our failure to take into account precisely what loss meant and how it was formulated and resolved according to the sentimental idiom of the novel that scripted Ellen's very existence.

Ellen progressively learns to mediate her relationship to loss by becoming the agent of her own self-denial and self-effacement. The primary dynamic by which she acquires this skill is through the incorporation and retention of the maternal image according to the phenomenon that Freud describes as "melancholia." Incorporation is distinct from introjection for Freud who defines the former situation as an unhealthy embedding of the other within the self while the latter describes a healthier condition of retaining and digesting aspects of the lost other. Incorporation refuses to accept that the other is absolutely lost while introjection negotiates that loss successfully. If identification "endeavors to mould a person's own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model," then melancholia occurs when the introjection of this object persists in a negative form that attacks the ego (*Group Psychology*, p. 47). While Freud traditionally describes melancholia in terms of a love object, and of object love, which is distinct from the object of identification, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), written four years after "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud describes one form of identification that takes place through the process of incorporation. This occurs when, on the cusp of sexual identity, the subject internalizes an identification of the parent, rather than following the course of the Oedipal complex and transforming this relationship into one of libidinal desire. While for Freud this process is characterized by a young man's faulty navigation of the Oedipal crisis, in Ellen's case, her mother has figured in both the maternal and the paternal

roles. Noble's analysis of masochism in Warner's novel is especially salient here, as she notes that Ellen learns from her mother how to exercise the self-discipline that will be replicated in the masculine and erotic discipline of John Humphries later in the novel. This process begins with Ellen's loss of her primary object of both identification and desire, so that Ellen's internalization of self-discipline is predicated not only on an emulation of her mother, but on the insupportability of the experience of loss that she resolves by taking within herself the lost object and retaining it there as a protective amulet against further losses.

As "[h]eart met heart in that agony," the complete identification of daughter with mother is made clear: "for each knew all that was in the other; . . . it almost seemed to [Mrs. Montgomery] that soul and body must part company too when [mother and daughter] should be rent asunder" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 63). This shared "inarticulate" moment, in which words are useless but bodies commune in mutual, silent communication and understanding, describes a classically sentimental sympathetic connection formed through shared pain and loss. The extremity of loss provides the grounds for a profundity of feeling.

The attachment between mother and daughter is figured as a bodily one whose severing feels like the loss of a part of the self. Twice the narrative depicts the "parting between soul and body" in this passage, first to describe Mrs. Montgomery's impending death and then again to describe the sensation of being "rent asunder" from her daughter (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 63). One's own death, in other words, is equated here with the loss of the beloved. While for Ellen's mother this separation is almost the same thing as her own death, for Ellen this "first real trial" is a foundational lesson in both the language of sympathy and the experience of a loss of self that will become a critical component in her development into a female sentimental subject.

Ellen's incorporation of her mother's image fits squarely within the sentimental fetishization of memento mori. Talismans were common foci of communal experience in antebellum culture. Objects raised to the status of sacred memorabilia included locks of hair, lockets, mourning rings, gift books recording contributions by several members of a family or group, and photographs of the dead.[15] The mourning photograph is a singular example of how technological progress was adapted to suit a cultural mode of memorialization. In her essay, "Then When We Clutch Hardest: On the Death of a Child and the Replication of an Image," Karen Sànchez-Eppler suggests that the image of the dead child that is held within the heart of the middle-class domestic circle acts as an open wound that provides access to a collective emotional interior that is simultaneously framed and thus in some sense contained. Almost all photographs of the dead from this period are of children because there was often an especially great need to memorialize them and, at the same time, the likelihood that a keepsake image of a child already exists is small. Sànchez-Eppler identifies the dead child as "the most powerful sign of right sentiment" because it marks the strength of the human bond of sympathy within the sacred domestic sphere ("Then When," p. 66). As she points out, the image of the dead child is iconic in sentimental literature: it is the very figure of the consolidation of a community around a purifying ideal. The embrace of the community that circles around the deathbed functions as a metaphoric frame that both provides access to a continuing relationship to the dead also encloses or encircles the dead in a kind of fond embrace. In the next section's reading of *The Wide, Wide, World*, Ellen's heart becomes a kind of center for the moral and corporeal veins of the novel's narrative progression. It is this heart that mourns and that is, in turn, guided and embraced by the

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[15] This was not a distinctly American phenomenon, of course. It had its roots in Christian traditions dating back at least as far as the Middle Ages; furthermore, every culture has cherished keepsakes of the dead. The sentimental tradition, however, had its own language and way of imagining the relationship between these objects and mourning.

novel's small idealized community of Ellen, Alice, and John.

In this context, memorialization held onto the dead as unchanging idealized images that were incorporated into everyday life in the same way that Ellen takes hold of her mother's image and retains it in her heart. The ghostly presence of this internalized mother recurs in the novel in subtle ways. This is true not only when Ellen conjures her mother's presence when faced with a crisis, this maternal image is inhabited for a time by Alice who also dies in her turn, and then appears at the close of the novel in the face of the Madonna with child in a scene discussed later in this chapter. Ellen's mother falls into a typology of sentimental memorialization by which the dead are remembered as unchanging, idealized images whose presence is retained and cherished in everyday lived experience.

The Kaleidoscopic Quality of the Sentimental Heart

If Ellen's interiority is constructed in this novel as an open wound, then the figurative locus of this wound is the heart: that iconic sentimental organ that is both stirred to fellow feeling and which also resists giving itself up to the self-discipline required for Ellen's formation into a proper woman. Figuratively, this heart is both enclosed within the self and is at the same time a kind of open wound that not only retains the strong imprint of its losses but also clutches at these losses. According to this logic, the interiority of self, which is also a function of domestic rhetoric, is the site where the specificity of identity is constructed in social terms. Sentimental narratives, including many elegies, dramatize this process of identity-formation through which self-development and acclimatization to the world's difficult realities rectify early losses. The heart is the icon of physical sensation, psychological feeling, biological life, subjectivity, moral orientation, and home—it rhetorically integrates all the aspects of sentimental subjectivity in

order to configure an interiority that is aligned with appropriate exteriority. Its harmonious existence is thus the sign of an accordance of interior sentiment with external life.

Both sentimental and counter-sentimental narrativity explore questions of identity through rhetorical figurations of interiority and of the body. In the case of Ellen, interiority may seem to be expunged in order for a subject to become appropriate to the demands of sentimental narrativity. Sentimental novels like Warner's dramatize this process of identity-formation by articulating how early losses are rectified through self-development and acclimatization to the world's difficult realities according to the demands of sentimental culture and narrativity.

In Warner's novel, Ellen's heart signifies her most authentic interiority at the same time that it figures her inseparability from her mother. This physiological organ is simultaneously an emotional and moral index. The connection between mother and daughter is solidified when "heart [meets] heart" in their final embrace. Mourning the loss of her mother, Ellen shapes her life and herself in reaction both this connection and to its loss. As such, living in a condition of perpetual grief, loss becomes the kernel from which Ellen's adult self grows.

Warner's bildungsroman recounts a development of self that evacuates those aspects of identity that do not accord with her internalized ideal mother, replacing them with behavior that synchronizes with the objects and precepts that comprise her mother's legacy to her. Her heart, which figures prominently early in the novel as an indicator of her inmost feelings over which she struggles for control, substantially changes as an indicator of interiority over the course of the novel. In early chapters, Ellen's heart betrays the disordered emotionality that a soul undisciplined by faith cannot help but suffer. Ellen's heart is perpetually jumping, throbbing, or emptying itself of tears. After Ellen's separation from her mother, her heart gradually takes on a

more measured tone. It continues to reflect her hidden interior, but it ceases to bound out of control. Its rhythmic tempo indicates Ellen's emerging harmony with the world around her.

By the close of the novel, Ellen's heart has come to signify self-mastery. When Ellen strives to "keep back a show of feeling that would distress and . . . displease him [John]," the novel attests to a re-ordering of the hierarchy of self and emotion in recounting that, in this case, "Ellen wrote the words [of a prayer] on her heart" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 565). In this case, in contrast to early depictions in which Ellen struggles for mastery over her heart's dramatic upheavals, Ellen is now figured as the agent of her own emotional control. The feelings she seeks to control would seem to be the seeds of an adult love between Ellen and her adoptive brother John. In seeming anticipation of this unspoken possibility, John asks Ellen to subscribe to three precepts: to maintain a full correspondence with him, to avoid reading novels, and a third, which must wait until the proper time. Because Ellen is not yet of age, the question of marriage must be deferred. Indeed, this question was so emphatically delayed that it never came to fruition in the 1850 edition.[16]

A love that implies a base, material intimacy can hardly find expression within the idiom of the story. More than simply a sentimental novel, Warner's text is a manifesto of faith and a tool for conversion. For this reason, hearts and their physiological counterparts, bosoms, express almost all physicality in the novel. Hearts may beat wildly or may calm down, but the word "heart" very rarely refers to the physiological organ without invoking its metaphoric significance as an emotional or moral barometer. In one rare case, Ellen's "older sister" Alice gives a lesson in biology that becomes a parable for the transience of human life. Trees, Alice explains, require

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[16] In the Feminist Press edition of 1987, Jane Tompkins reinstated the novel's missing last chapter in which Ellen returns to America to be with John.

leaves just as humans require "a heart and lungs" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 186). Leaves, like people, serve their purpose and then die. In this archetypal allegory, not only is nature aligned with God, the physicality of human life is the very sign of mere mortality. Having a heart itself implies both service to God, in the same way that the leaves serve to sustain the tree, and the inevitability of passing out of usefulness to death.

Following the evangelical tradition that itself retains some of Puritanism's disgust with the baseness of the physical self, Warner's novel does not bother to narrate the life of the body, whose experiences distract from ascension to higher spirituality. Descriptions of the body or its parts are therefore rarely evoked in the novel. When this happens, it is within the safest contexts of familial intimacy. As Ellen is adopted by one family after another, familial nouns like "brother" and "father" continually define any physical closeness in order to clarify the innocence of these relationships. In the midst of this disembodied atmosphere, when Ellen encounters John, their bodies touch in the way bodies almost always encounter each other in this novel: heart to heart. Here, however, the novel allows a slightly less wholesome possibility to enter into the text:

> Ellen had much ado to command herself at the tone of these words and John's manner, as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her brow and lips. She strove to keep back a show of feeling that would distress and might displease him. But the next moment her fluttering spirits were stilled by hearing the few soft words of a prayer that he breathed over her head. It was a prayer for her and for himself, and one of its petitions was that they might be kept to see each other again. Ellen wrote the words on her heart. (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 565)

John's third, as-yet-unspoken commandment lingers and forecasts the possibility of adult

intimacy. The rhetoric of this passage expresses much more than the text itself purports to allow. The evocation of self-control expresses the possibility of emotional or physical attraction is expressed through. Control is here contrasted to physical acts of intimacy that could still qualify as merely familial. It is thus not the acts themselves, but the challenge they present for self-mastery that indicates what significance they might carry. For Ellen's part, it is not clear whether it is the feeling produced by this contact or its display that might displease John. Furthermore, while John may not be displeased, Ellen assumes that he will be distressed. While this subtle difference does not call attention to itself, it does allow for a double understanding of distress's larger possibilities, ranging from suffering to trouble to some kind of upset or torment. Upset and torment may both suggest that the difficulty lies not with the stimulus but with one's reaction to it. Torment, in particular, may describe a condition in which desire must be denied or cannot be fulfilled. John's possible displeasure is thus contiguous with the possibility of a pleasure that is experienced but must be foresworn.

In both Ellen's expression of emotion through self-denial and in her concern about what feelings she may awaken in John, the physicality of this scene expresses the muffling of emotion and the prohibition of heightened sentiment. The tension of restraint is finally released through prayer. It is these words, not the sensations that precede it, that Ellen writes on her heart. Language and narrative, particularly as prayer and parable, exert control over unarticulated physical experience. This very late scene recreates Ellen's progressive development of self-management by moving from the impetuousness of some kind of desire to a linguistic mastery of the heart. The heart thus eventually becomes an organ that expresses the internalization of power and control where once it had been the location of conflict between interior and exterior

demands.

That this occurs rhetorically and narratively is itself significant. In Warner's 1850 edition, this passage occurred only a few pages before the close of the novel. Between this passage and the novel's conclusion, Ellen repeatedly guesses at and surmises the meaning of John's words, actions and countenance without quite understanding toward what end they are leading. A sophisticated reader has already guessed that John's third precept for Ellen's disciplined adherence will be marriage. Warner's written but unpublished final chapter bears this out. The implication that Ellen will marry John appears in the original's final paragraph in which we learn that Ellen never disappointed her brother, and that "three or four more years of Scottish discipline wrought her no ill; . . . and then, to her unspeakable joy, she went back . . ." (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 569). This final passage through a more dangerous form of physicality proves to be a test of Ellen's ability to convert dangerous sensations into lofty sentiments, and the figure of her success is her well-tamed heart. Figuratively, the sentimental heart in Warner's novel lies on the boundary between interiority and exteriority, that at the same time joins the individual to the community, and that further provides a link to divinity through an internalization of God.

While home is where the heart is, an 1844 consolation manual reminds its readership that, within the sentimental lexicon, the heart *is* the ideal home:

And what is home! It is the resting-place of the heart, — the centre of the
affections. If, in early life, Providence leads us from the parental roof, how does
the heart yearn for home, when sorrows arise. (*The Cyprus Wreath*, p. 45)

Ellen's vagabond condition in the novel is explained through this metaphoric alignment of home and heart, in particular insofar as the heart is an index of spiritual submission to divine will. A

peaceful heart is a compliant heart. Ellen's geographic homelessness corresponds to her disconnectedness from God, and her journey charts a pilgrim's progress toward a self-knowledge and salvation. Before Ellen departs to live with her aunt, Mrs. Montgomery's final words to her are: "God bless my darling child! and make her his own,—and bring her to that home where parting cannot be" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 64). Like John's prayer at the end of the novel, this plea is expressed while the two clutch each other. Also like John's prayer, this human connection is divinely mediated so that emotionality itself is channelled through religious conviction. Love is God's domain on earth; He lives in every spiritually enlightened heart and he participates in every act of fellow-feeling. Living without a connection to God induces a condition of homelessness in Ellen. Thus, Mrs. Montgomery notes that Ellen's separation from her family may well be her perceptive God's method for turning her heart away from earthly preoccupations and toward Him.

In the end, the plot of Warner's novel turns on the replacement of Ellen's mother, an absence, with the growing presence of God. The rhetoric of the heart that encodes this substitution defies any rational logic of belief or faith; rather, the maternal link is one of attachment and this link is maintained while its object is replaced. Ellen's only mistake was to take her mother into her heart, thereby limiting herself to an earthly connection that blinded her to the expansiveness of an eternal, spiritual connection. This sentimental God is the ultimate parent, taking on aspects of the intimate maternal attachment in combination with the disciplinary commandments that come later in Ellen's education through her relationship with Alice and John.

Loss is therefore integral to the formation of Ellen's identity as an ideal young woman of

sentimental virtue. Ellen spends the entire novel in a condition of mourning: first and foremost she mourns her mother, but she also continually loses her adopted families and finds herself endlessly displaced from any condition of domestic stability. The novel repeatedly insists that domestic comforts threaten to disconnect Ellen from her spiritual condition. The ultimate home is the eternal "long home"; on earth this world lives within the hearts and imaginations of the faithful. Death is the phase of transition between these worlds; it is a portal through which the eternal world is accessed. And mourning partakes of the power of death to open the degraded earthly world to the powerful significance of the eternal world. Ellen's perpetual condition of mourning signals a continuing condition of receptivity.

Sentimental Mourning and Divine Epistemology

Ellen's work of mourning is also a process of coming to an understanding of truth as part of the domain of divine transcendence. When Alice has died, and Ellen thereby has lost a proximate mother and sister, her agitation of grief is countered by a consoling voice: "Behold I create new heavens, and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 442). The lesson that the earthly world is the forgettable antecedent to the heavenly one is reiterated throughout the novel. From Warner's novel to the antebellum consolation manuals and elegies that appeared in ladies' journals like *Godey's Ladies Book*, mourners are reminded that truth exists in the kingdom of heaven and is accessible through attentive reflection on the significance of immortality.

The God conjured in these texts fills and transcends the world thereby giving it order,

meaning, and truth with His supernatural presence. These texts equate death with eternal life and assert that proximity to a deathbed or the experience of mourning open one up to the transcendence of the world beyond. This world is where truth and order reside because it is where life began and also where it continues. Bacon, in his *Sacred Flora*, touches on this theme repeatedly, as in this passage where the dead infant and the bible laid in its coffin together prepare the mourner to become a reader and interpreter of divinity:

> I have just returned from an infant's burial. As I entered the home of sorrow, and saw the gathered weepers, my eye caught sight of the Bible laid on the little coffin. . . . How silent are both the infant's face and the book! To gaze on the one prepares us to read and to feel the unspeakable worth of the other. . . . If memory is busy to array before us the past, … and we weep, weeping the more bitterly because our tears are in vain,—then shall the spirit of that book bring to our vision the future, and we shall not say of it that it is all mysterious and so distant! It will be brought near, and be made plain in as far as our actual necessities require …
>
> (*Sacred Flora*, pp. 124-125)

Mourning is a point of contact with divinity. It is even imagined here as a hermeneutics through which immortality and truth are perceived in the very face of mortality. For Bacon, in this passage and elsewhere, not only does biblical revelation console grief, the experience of deep loss and absence when viewed through the lens of enlightened truth helps the mourner to decipher the invisible as well as visible traces of God in earthly life. The future and that which is mysterious will be laid plain. Sentimental knowledge relies on a kind of divine epistemology whereby all meaning and all knowing derive from immersion in a divine spirit.

Likewise, through mourning in *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen comes to know and understand that the world is carefully ordered around principles and dynamics that may not be directly visible, but which are indirectly accessible through communion with God. Every time Ellen's heart moves her to behave well, and each time John reminds her that her heart communicates to her an intrinsic knowledge of right and wrong, the novel expresses a faith in a universe structured and maintained by a benevolent and all-powerful creator. Mourning, more than other activities or "moods of mind" as Bacon terms it, gives one the ability to read and understand the presence of divine will in everyday life (*Sacred Flora*, p. 112). Near the close of Warner's novel, Ellen's interpretive power is demonstrated as John again instructs her as they reflect on side by side paintings of Corregio's Magdalen and a simpler rendering of the heads of the Madonna and child. While the beauty of the first is magnificent, it is the second that expresses the "immaterial soul" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 578). Here, the "true" and the "beautiful" are wedded together and can be read in the faces of the Madonna and Christ (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 579). As John explains, in accordance with the nineteenth-century logic of phrenology, the aesthetic perfection of the two faces signifies moral perfection so that their "humanity" indicates "divinity" (*Wide, Wide World*, p. 579). This knowledge has come to Ellen not through an aesthetic education but, of course, through her novel-long search for the key to interpreting and understanding her world and her place within it. As an orphan, Ellen is sent out into the chaos of the wide, wide world, and her grappling with loss marks out her course. It is on the faces of her mother and of Alice that Ellen learned to read from the sentimental book of moral perfection.

CHAPTER TWO: COUNTER-SENTIMENTAL NARRATIVITY AND CONTINGENCY IN MELVILLE'S *PIERRE*

COUNTER-SENTIMENTAL NARRATIVITY

If sentimental narrativity imagines personhood to be constructed through a process of mourning and negotiating loss, in counter-sentimental narrativity, personhood derives from an originary condition of loss that comes, in part, out of an exclusion from the very language of sentimental personhood that establishes political, legal, social, and psychological legitimacy. In both cases, identity is formed through a foundational confrontation with loss. If sentimental narrativity imagines that mourning can remedy loss, then a co-existing counter-sentimental narrativity in this same period deployed the same structures and addressed the same cultural anxieties without imagining the closure that sentimental narrativity offered. Counter-sentimental narrativity also refracted the sentimental fantasy of the structures of power and its concomitant ways of imagining gendered and racial identities. This alternate mode also poses pressing questions that move from intra-narrative expression to extra-narrative questions about the place of people whose exclusion from the sentimental republic leaves them outside of sentimental narrativity. This way of telling a story is thus most palpable in texts that emerge from sentimental culture while at the same time resisting some of its ideological presuppositions, especially those that bend sentimental narrativity toward conservatism and homogenization.

In the mid-nineteenth century, sentimentalism was a part of the broader cultural

landscape. The sentimental republic as imagined in Susan Warner's novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, in antebellum consolation manuals, as well as in the nurses' memoirs and elegiac treatment of the soldiers was not necessarily founded on restrictedness; however, the ideology of communality and sympathetic union was based on a sense of same-ness that was exclusionary by default. This is most evident in the sheer invisibility of other groups in how texts imagine the world. As texts like Warner's explored the interiors of identity and of domesticity, their focus was insular. Resistance to this vision gave rise to legal cases such the Cherokee Nation (1830-31) and Dred Scott (1857) decisions. In these two cases, Native Americans and African-Americans respectively attempted to declare independence and to assert equal protection under the Constitution. Because so much of mid-nineteenth-century political discourse borrowed from sentimental language, its language for describing community and nation often suffered from the same homogenization as many sentimental novels. This is by no means true across the board for either political speech or literary expression, the prominence of sentimentalism and its essentially conservative ideology bolstered an image of the union that was exclusive by default. When either the Cherokee Nation or Dred Scott sought to claim inclusion in this sentimental republic, the authority of the courts determined that the language of liberation did not extend to protect Native Americans or African-Americans.

While counter-sentimentalism was generally a powerful vein in African-American narratives of the mid-nineteenth-century, it was not always a defining characteristic for each text. For texts like Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868), for example, sentimentalism figured quite differently than in *The Wide, Wide World*; instead of uplift, Keckley's memoir anticipates the emergence of realism as the

dominant literary mode. Likewise, what I identify as a counter-sentimental tendency in certain texts is not significant in *Behind the Scenes* because it is not a text that implicitly or explicitly fundamentally deals with the disruption of identity as a function of narrative expression. Julia Stern has discussed the aspects of counter-sentimentalism present in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) in terms of a gothic condition of what she calls "mourning-become-melancholia" (*Live Burial*, p. 65). In Jacobs, identity is profoundly contested for her autobiographical protagonist, Linda, who seeks to escape not only the physical bonds of slavery but also its psychological and self-narrating limitations. One very complex example is Harriet Wilson's first American novel by a black woman, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out in his introduction, this text sustains a complex tension between the autobiographical basis from which much of the novel was drawn and its purported fictiveness. This is visible, Gates points out, in the oscillation of chapter titles between the first- and third-person tenses. Wilson's story is in many key ways a sentimental text that concludes by overtly called for her reader's "sympathy and aid" in a move that recalls Stowe's abolitionist mandate in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*Our Nig*, p. 130). Its counter-sentimental elements center on the tension at the level of narrative authority in the slippage between the autobiographical and expository voices of "I" and "she (Frado)." As in these examples, counter-sentimental narrativity often arises in texts penned by black Americans in the mid-nineteenth-century because social and political disenfranchisement is very often transmitted into how stories are told thus becoming legible at the level of narration if not also in the content of the tale or autobiography. While some texts like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* grapple with this question in more overt terms that span both content and form, others, like *Our Nig* exhibit some

of the tendencies that made counter-sentimental narrativity a kind of gothic echo of sentimental narrativity's flat idealism.

In Melville's *Pierre* both a sentimental strain and a great deal that works against it are easily apparent to any reader. While the novel opens as if in the midst of a sentimental idyll, where human relationships are formed around sympathy and where domesticity is a ruling component of relationships and sense of self, the seemingly stable ground therein set out begins to unravel and the very foundations of social, familial, and psychological contexts of identity are dismantled. At the same time, at the level of form, the paradigmatic hallmarks of sentimentalism such as imagery of domesticity and a plotline based around mutual sympathy lose the power to assure this stability. In *Pierre*, the disintegration of identity is expressed at the level of narrative form: the reliability of the narrator and the capacity of the narrative voice to express a secure world, at the level of narration, is expressed and mirrored in the increasing difficulty that characters have, at the level of plot, in communicating or receiving clear sensory or linguistic signals. In these ways, the very problem of identity becomes a concern that is addressed in both the form and the content of narration. As a novel that deploys sentimental narrativity in the novel's opening, seemingly as a parody of an idealistic proposition of what life would be like in a sentimental idyll, and that chronicles its destruction at multiple narrative levels, this novel provides an ideal context for defining the dynamics of counter-sentimental narrativity as an expression of resistance to sentimental narrative form.

However, Melville did suffer from an altered relationship to the marketplace as his writing moved away from the travelogue genre of *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) toward writing that challenged the generic assumptions of his prospective audience. *Pierre* offers itself in many

ways as a novelistic parody of literary traditions that, like his protagonist Pierre, ultimately seeks to separate itself from convention in order to blaze an individualist trail. This is what Gillian Brown describes as *Pierre*'s "anti-sentimental" quality. For the purposes of my analysis of counter-sentimental narrativity, Melville's novel is not interesting for its resistance to sentimentalism as such. Rather, it is the disruptions around the issue of identity that the novel evinces at the level of form that I seek to trace as I further define counter-sentimental narrativity.

While Melville's *Pierre* is built in part on a bildungsroman structure by which identity is set out and developed, at some point both novelistic contiguity and the stability of identity are undermined. This registers in the way each story is told as expectations are inverted and the progress of narration, particularly in *Pierre*, regresses instead of progressing. These disruptions register on at least three levels: at the level of representations of the sensory body and its incorporation of disembodied sensory information, such that sensory information is consistently unreliable to confirm or establish presence or absence; at the level of intradiegetic narration, such that the stories that connect personages or characters to points of origin are persistently disrupted in ways that indicate a fundamental disruption of identity itself; and finally at the level of the narrative as a whole such that a different but analogous kind of absence—that of a traditional novelistic narrative structure—reflects the irresolubility of a fundamental conflict in these texts between fantasies of presence (and all that signifies for individuals and for American social and political structures) and a fundamental mistrust of any such claim to presence. This conflict, like the uncanny sounds and sights and disjunctive internal narratives that haunt the novel, presents a thoroughgoing critique of the assumptions about being, experience, memory, history, sociality, and political life that reigned in the post-Enlightenment culture of antebellum America.

This chapter traces the legal, political, and psychological implications of the situation of always-already experiencing a condition not only of loss but of self-loss. If sentimental narrativity imagines that the work of narrative closure, like the work of sentimental mourning, can create a closed semiotic system, then counter-sentimental narrativity fixes on the discordances and discrepancies between sentimental categories and lived experience. At one level this is a question of social and political disparity between the bourgeois white culture of nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism and those who were excluded. If sentimentalism formed one of the major strains in public discourse that structured how segments of the American population spoke to itself, then those whose experiences left them outside this social and semiotic system were forced to somehow speak through this language but with a difference.

CONTINGENCY AND SENSORY DISRUPTION IN *PIERRE*

In Melville's *Pierre* loss is constitutive of all identities, histories, and even landscapes in ways that fit with this novel's contemporaneous sentimental bestsellers: *The Wide, Wide World* (Susan Warner, 1850) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1852). In these sentimental bestsellers of the 1850s, as in a number of other less prominent texts that are now collected under the heading "sentimentalism," including consolation manuals and sermons, loss and absence create a problem that demands solace or some form of restitution. In Melville's novel, however, loss cannot be consoled and figurative absence cannot be repaired. Instead, the deployment of this sentimental mourning script implicitly arrives at a somewhat contrary finding: absence cannot be recovered any more than presence can be assured or made to remain

stable. Presence and absence, the proposed components of a crucial dichotomy that underwrites such sentimental tropes as "embalming in memory" and such historical, material phenomena as the technology of embalming fallen soldiers during the Civil War (footnote), become untenable *terms* in *Pierre*.

As Brown notes in "Anti-sentimentalism and Authorship in *Pierre*," in *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*, *Pierre* sets itself against sentimentalism as a cultural institution that denies individuality for both his character, Pierre, and the writer, himself, as competitors in their fictive and historical literary marketplaces where the cards are stacked against them. Brown ultimately shows that the masculine, individualist rebellion that Pierre launches is, ironically and against his every intention, a natural extension of the logic of sentimental domesticity. Pierre reinvents a community of one that cannot finally escape from either sentimentalism as an institution or from the marketplace as a force and function in the creation of identity. Brown's important revelation that Pierre's rebellion lands him squarely back within the terms that he seeks to escape, and from which, by extension, Melville the writer cannot break free, contributes to her book's larger consideration of how identity was both formed and formulated in nineteenth-century America through tropes of domesticity.

In contrast to Brown and other considerations of *Pierre*, I am not concerned with the novel's "anti-sentimentalism" as a stance; rather, I argue that Melville's counter-sentimental narrativity dismantles certain essentializing sentimental mythologies. While the novel unfolds as if to satisfy the requirements of sentimental typology, both plot and structural elements ultimately disassemble this schema: the idealized pairing of Pierre with Lucy is undermined by

the appearance of the shadowy and mysterious Isabel; likewise, Pierre's vaunted good character disintegrates under the eruptive pressure of unattainable desire; the traditional function of the sentimental narrative to reveal truth serves instead as an object lesson in our readerly fantasies of an orderly and knowable world. The sentimental narrativity epitomized in the mourning-work of Ellen in *The Wide, Wide World*, the construction of a mutual relationship between narrator and reader in consolation manuals like the *Sacred Flora*, and the recourse both narratives take in their faith in an immortality beyond death signifying an overarching world order under the benevolent care of a paternal God, all constitute aspects of sentimental narrativity that are founded on just this fantasy about the stability of the transcendent.

This is the implicit epistemological claim of sentimentalism: while we may not have access to full knowledge, participation in the kingdom of God means that we have access to illumination because absolute truth exists and possesses a name, a creator, and a regulator. It is precisely at the site of this claim of the individual's access to ultimate meaning and of the narrative as a vehicle for communicating truth that *Pierre* dismantles the mythology at its thematic and structural roots. In this way, Melville's novel is simultaneously speaking through and contesting its literary and cultural contexts.

The novel's attack on sentimentalism is an assault on the constructedness of idealized narratives and the aestheticization of enshrined values. Lucy embodies both of these characteristics during the first half of the novel; during the second half, however, she is able to escape from the confines of narrative expectation along with Pierre and Isabel. As the novel turns away from its initial sentimental template, the character of Lucy, who had at first been defined by generic convention without much evident depth, changes as well. The uneasiness with which

this character fits into the radical new domesticity that Pierre creates indicates the rigidity of sentimentalism itself. In an important sense, *Pierre* is not only counter-sentimental; the novel searches an alternative epistemology through a divergence from sentimental typology. In certain ways, *Pierre* undermines any claim of stable epistemological assumptions. That is to say, the possibility of knowing, upon which all fictional plots are structured, is itself taken apart. As in the *Narrative*, *Pierre* thematically foregrounds the mediating role of language. Ultimately, communications between characters and the very reliability of perceived sensory information becomes disrupted enough that instead of accumulating meaning, as in sentimental narrativity, the novel's significatory possibilities ultimately dissipate.

Crucially, this aspect of the novel is strongly tied to a thematics of death and hauntedness. Mourning is a crucial point of departure because, in sentimental culture, mourning expressed the ultimate degree of truth and access to a coherent and meaningful relationship to transcendence. The ideal of a cogent and rational world filled full with divine meaning is precisely the target of the novel's counter-offensive. The sentimental work of mourning signified a portal between the human and supernatural the numinous. As the site within the sentimental paradigm where humanity has closest access to something like the ultimate truth, the imagined power of mourning as a cohesive and collaborative project between sympathetically bound individuals is converted, in Melville's novel, into a process through which genealogies, human bonds, communities, and identities all come unbound.

Sensory Contingencies and the Collapse of the Presence/Absence Binary

In his assertion to his publisher that *Pierre* would be a popular success, Melville hailed his forthcoming novel as "being a regular romance, with a mysterious plot to it, & stirring

passions at work, and withall, representing a new & elevated aspect of American life" (*Pierre*, p. 367). The romantic plot of Melville's novel turns, at least at first, on the idyllic love between Pierre Glendinning and the beautiful, clear-eyed Lucy Tartan. This story, with its modest passions, is situated within the pastoral landscape that bears the traces of the rich familial genealogies. This novel's romantic plot ploddingly reiterates the opening stages of a recognizable sentimental narrative arc. The devoted love between Pierre and Lucy is only the latest in a long history of consecrated marriages that, like Pierre's mother and deceased father, will become enfolded into the world of heritage and tradition. Pierre and Lucy will become, like their parents before them, bastions of tradition and, in a sense, monuments to the past in their fulfilment of a romantic ideal in which the domestic and the communal will be affirmed. This reiteration of sentimental typology is executed with such precision that it is possible to choose not to read the sardonic subtext that is already emerging.

Pierre twice visits Isabel and listens patiently as she attempts to tell her fragmentary story in stops and starts. As she proceeds, Isabel repeatedly arrests her progress with the appeal, "Let me be still again" (*Pierre*, p. 121). The discontinuities that mark Isabel's telling redouble the indeterminacies inherent to the story itself. What these scenes convey is less a story of Isabel's origin, which is the kind of story that Pierre hopes will confirm that Isabel is his sister, than the mysterious workings of a psychic interior that is uncannily alienated from its own past. Isabel reports not only on the events she remembers, but also on her difficulty in remembering these events: "Always in me," she declares, "the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities" (*Pierre*, p. 117). Isabel's history, if it is to gain the structure and coherence of a meaningful narrative must become a communicable unit that can be transmitted to and absorbed

by her interlocutor, her brother. It is thus at the moments when the narrative must be arrested, and in Isabel's bearing witness to her own mysterious inability to communicate more than her experience of a kind of redactive memorial process that the precarious quality of memory is revealed. In other words, memory seems to occur as a reliving in the present moment of an experience of remembering that inhabits the mind and, in Isabel's case at least, entrances the body.

Isabel's continuation of this thought indicates the degree to which the subject matter of memory becomes enmeshed with the process of remembering:

Never have I recovered from the effects of my strange early life. This it is, that even now—this moment—surrounds thy visible form, my brother, with a mysterious mistiness; so that a second face, and a third face, and a fourth face peep at me from within thy own. (*Pierre*, pp. 117-118)

As if the processes of memory could transform the ethereal past into a material shape, Isabel's experience of memory now "surrounds" Pierre's "visible form" and produces the kaleidoscopic impression of a series of faces emerging from Pierre's. In one sense, these faces could be the genealogical origins whose traces are recognizable in Pierre. In other words, perhaps Isabel is seeing traces of her lost and mysterious father in Pierre's face, and this would seem to bolster her conviction that she shares her paternity with Pierre. Or these faces may simply be refractions of Pierre's own face caused by the "mysterious mistiness" that surrounds him in Isabel's perception. Whether the figurative haze induced in Isabel by the experience of remembering conjures genealogical relations or multiplies Pierre's own face, the process of remembering here follows the logic of multiplication and dispersal rather than that of confluence and consolidation.

As she finishes describing her experience of the process of remembering, the diachronic frame of historical memory is transformed into a spatial landscape so that memories, now loosed from time's logic of subsequence, are physical shapes that crowd around Isabel:

> Now dim, and more dim, grows in me all the memory of how thou and I did come to meet. I go groping again amid all sorts of shapes, which part to me; so that I seem to advance through the shapes; and yet the shapes have eyes that look at me. I turn round, and they look at me; I step forward, and they look at me.—Let me be silent now; do not speak to me. (*Pierre*, p. 118)

These shapes, like the faces that emerge from Pierre's, can be read as the ghostly traces of familiar and familial persons now departed. The past has transposed itself into the present as if Isabel herself partakes of something timeless. Certainly, her past cannot be established either by her memory or by any material evidence. For Isabel, memory is not a possession to which she has access. Instead, as the eyes watching her seem to indicate, Isabel is more the object that the subject of her own memory._ Furthermore, remembering is a process that produces the opposite of knowledge; instead of situating Isabel as the daughter of Pierre's father, memory is an overwhelming experience of heightened self-awareness in the moment.

Her narration seems to conjure ghostly faces and shapes that regard her as though Isabel were the object of *their* fascination. Ghosts of this kind are strange familiars; they are uncanny because their unfamiliar strangeness belies their familiarity. After all, although they seem to emerge from a mist, they are in fact products of Isabel's memorial imagination. The uncanny does more than describe a relationship between, for example, Isabel and her history or the images that seem to surround her. The uncanny is above all a mode or experience of reading that

raises an unnameable feeling precisely like the one that seems to afflict Isabel. Thus, the novel points not simply to the unreliability of history; rather, the question is one of reading and writing one's own history, from which one is hopelessly unmoored, in the very moment of wishing to establish a stable sense of self.

The urge to monumentalize, to capture and solidify images and faces, to celebrate the past, and to see the past as the determining pattern for the present and future is the dominant mode of making sense of identity in this novel. The monument, which figures so prominently in the sentimental logic of embalming in memory, encapsulates the past as a solid object whose meaning, in turn, fixes relationships between the present and the past, between the individual and the past, and between the individual and his or her context. In *Pierre*, the past is rendered genealogically, and it is in family and domesticity that the fixity of monumentalization takes over. Pierre's mother expects him to adhere to the system that produced him, and Lucy is the means by which that will begin to take place.

As Isabel's relationship to her own memory is revealed to be one of alienation, the status of history itself is implicitly called into question. The question of Isabel's individual history is, of course, a problem of corroborating her lineage so that her claim on Pierre's affections and aid can be both justified and sanctified. And yet the effect of Isabel's mode of remembering is diffraction rather than conclusion. If the major question here is "Who is Isabel?," then the novel at first purports to offer an answer through an informational autobiographical narrative only to remove the very grounds upon which such information or even autobiography could be built. Isabel seems to be in a perpetual state of self-rewriting. She seems to be reforming herself again and again from the fragments of memory available to her at any given moment. When

remembering becomes a phenomenological experience of haunting for Isabel instead of an ordered relationship to events of the past, the process of narrative-production becomes more important than the content or coherence of remembered events. The shapes and faces from the past that crowd around Isabel have been loosed from their sequential moorings; as a result, they become ambiguous. While Isabel is able to provide more concrete impressions of moments of her past, the places and experiences remain nameless, leaving Pierre to "condense her mysterious haze into some definite and comprehensible shape" (*Pierre*, p. 136).

As the informative quality of narration diminishes and fails to confirm any clear mode for identifying or understanding Isabel, and as memory becomes the subject rather than the mode of Isabel's telling, narrativity as the process of story-production takes precedence over narration as the process of relating a story. This subtle difference, between story-production as a perpetual condition, like Isabel's continual grasping at fragments of memory, and the telling of a stable story that progresses over time, draws attention to the tenuousness of the relationship between the storyteller and the story. This relationship, which pretends to be absolute such that the subject and his or her story are inextricably linked, is shown in these scenes to be a fantasy produced by the work of narrativity.

Disembodied Voices and the Disintegration of Sentimental Epistemology

In *Pierre*, disembodied voices abound, as do unidentifiable sounds, faces, and experiences of sensory confusion. The dichotomy of presence and absence is perhaps most effectively collapsed through the novel's modes of depicting bodies and their relationships to sensory experiences. The experience and interpretation of sensory information, which usually serves to assure the presence not only of the other but also, by implication, of the self, is often

interrupted or confused in the novel. Sensory experience itself emerges from unidentifiable origins on the one hand, and the ability of the bodily apparatus to correctly define and interpret this information is equally fraught on the other. Therefore, the limit at the edge of the body that defines the boundary between self and other persistently disintegrates. This collapsing boundary is evocative of the novel's larger diminishment of the stability of both concepts: presence and absence.

The ways in which tales, narratives, and histories are related within the novel always dramatizes at a metanarrative level the silences and interruptions that mark the creeping in of absences that cannot be repressed. Isabel's story, for example, proceeds erratically, always haunted by the figure of its own potential inaccuracy and the possibility that she may not be able to continue. Silence here is a figure of the absence or loss that haunts but which can never be incorporated because it is, in turn, the figure of the unknowable and unspeakable. The past continually collapses into the present, while the present moment of narration repeatedly digresses into the narrative past tense. This often happens through figures of sensory experience in which voices emerge or faces recur without a temporal or spatial frame.

Furthermore, histories, though frequently cited, are always unreliable: their conclusions are replaced with mysteries that can neither attest to the end of what is known nor relate a final set of facts. Rather, the movement of Isabel's narrative from silence to mystery, by way of figures of false perceptions, mixed languages, dreams, dumbness, coffins, and unknowability itself, dramatizes the impossible fantasy of a stable and discernible relationship between self and history, or between history and experience, or between past and present. Origins remain indeterminate but always crucial. The sentimental literary convention by which identity is

developed and expressed through narratives of memory and family history is overturned. The novel's narration is increasingly disturbed by interruptions and reversions that controvert the expectations set out in the novel's bildungsroman-like early development. Instead of progress, for example, Pierre's story proceeds forward in lived time while regressing into the past in narrative time. The secure terms that are traditionally presented as the pillars of identity are here undermined.

If memory can take hold of the subject, then memory is not longer a vehicle for historical verifiability. Instead, the objects of memory become like ghosts, and the experience of remembering becomes more like a phenomenology of being haunted. The mysteriousness of the unknown pervades the novel as a kind of mistiness that, as in other gothic contexts, shifts the focus of narrativity, perception, and mystery from the objects that are narrated, perceived, or investigated to the subjects who perform these actions. The mystery focuses on the resolution of a problem. Through the scenes of Isabel's storytelling, as Melville's novel shifts focus from narration to narrativity, the mysteriousness of Isabel's incongruities, temporal collapses, and strange wanderings infects the ambiguous structure of the novel named. If the mystery plot desires to resolve a question, mysteriousness as a mode takes the place of temporal progression.

Almost any scene that thematizes the problem of discovery picks up the terms that circulate most insistently in the two scenes of Isabel's narrative disclosures in Books VI and VIII. These include permutations of the words: "nameless," "silence," "wondering," "wandering," "strange," "death," and of course "mystery". When the narrative that makes up Melville's novel closes, it is Isabel's heavy black veil of hair that first buries Pierre. The density of images of faces in these two scenes is also echoed throughout the novel. Faces, like those of

the Paternal Glendinning in his two divergent portraits, are some of the most unstable and mysteriously reflective surfaces in this novel. Face-reading, or physiognomy, proves to be as unreliable as the shapes in Isabel's memory. Something, certainly, is conveyed, but the nature of that something may be unknown, unknowable, or simply unspeakable. In other words, at the levels of language, imagery, and plot, Isabel as a character is thematically, linguistically, and tropologically somewhere very near what would be the center of the novel's mysteriousness if such a center made any sense. The questions that lent this novel the "mysterious plot" identified by Melville in his letter to his publishers were: "Who or what is Isabel? Is she Pierre's half-sister?" These questions are never resolved because the mystery plot has been replaced by a mysterious mode of plotting.

Isabel is not exactly the figure of mystery. Rather, she is associated with mystery. She fits the pre-figured image that Pierre sees in his reveries in the woods, and she fills a space of absence. Her arrival is first anticipated by Pierre when he mourns his lack of a sister: "He who is sisterless, is as a bachelor before his time" (*Pierre*, p. 7). When asked by his mother to explain his mood, which has been overshadowed by his first sighting of Isabel, he replies, in Shakespearean language, "It was nothing, nothing . . . just nothing at all in the world" (*Pierre*, p. 48). Isabel is not easily discerned as a character within the novel. The novel gives her very little distinct shape; instead, the reader forms a vision of her always in relation to, and through the eyes of, other characters. She fits the shapes that pre-figure her within the novel and within Pierre's imagination. She is, in this sense, much like the chair-portrait of the elder Glendinning in his youth, which both Aunt Dorothea and Pierre hear speaking to them. She is a reflective surface which transmits, if somewhat obscurely, the projections of others. If she is at or near the

center of the novel's mysteriousness, she can only be a figure for that mystery to the extent that we, as readers, seem to need to identify a center of mystery. Isabel brings with her a gothic mist that transforms both the plot of this novel and also its mode of plotting.

Mourning and Monumentalization

In the counter-sentimental narrativity of *Pierre*, much as in sentimental narrativity, the trope of "embalming in memory" functioned to secure a relationship to the past, but with a difference. In Melville's novel, the sentimental tradition of holding onto the past as a living part of present experience emerges as a Gothic inversion whereby the past and its secrets gain power over present fantasies of stability and control. At the same time, the counter-sentimental does not simply rename the Gothic elements in sentimentalism or in *Pierre*. As noted in my introduction, counter-sentimental narrativity as I define it does not follow Gothicism to the point of revealing sentimental fantasies of domesticity to be fundamentally untenable. As a strain within sentimental narrativity, the counter-sentimental tells a story in which recourse to a sense of home and a relief from homelessness or exile remain central preoccupations of the narrative. In *Pierre*, while I discuss above the Gothic elements of displaced voices and disrupted communication, I am ultimately concerned here with how aspects of the sentimental return but through a distorted lens that accords with my definition of counter-sentimental narrativity.

Pierre ultimately returns to the sentimental logic of "embalming in memory" that valorizes a form of memorialization that holds onto the past and even to the work of mourning for what is gone or impossible. Despite the revolutionary tendencies within the novel, including its resistance to the literary marketplace and its escape from the sentimental mold, its concluding attempt to resurrect a kind of domesticity is within the counter-sentimental tradition. The

promise of domesticity remains potent as the site where identity may emerge.

Like the religious imagery of resurrection, the metaphor of "embalming in memory" implied the importance of looking beyond the immanent or earthly toward other, higher spheres of meaning and virtue. In the same way that death lent a divine outline to the corpse, memorialization encapsulated the virtues of the dead within living memory. It is not only an apt metaphor for sentimental mourning, in Melville's novel it is also powerfully evocative of a sentimental historiography. The monumentalization of the past, according to this logic, freezes us at an impasse in which, like Isabel, we are overwhelmed by the instinct to produce narratives, which can never bridge the gaps in a history that is rewritten for every context in which it is related.

After the plotting of passionate stirrings and mysteriousness has led Pierre to marry Isabel in order to properly return her to her place within the Glendinning genealogy, which leads inevitably to his exile from the house of Glendinning and his removal to quarters in a hotel, Pierre opens up the trunk containing what he calls "mementoes and monuments of the past" (*Pierre*, p. 197). He is first confronted by the chair-portrait, "lying on top of all the rest, where he had secreted it some days before. Face up, it met him with its noiseless, ever-nameless, and ambiguous, unchanging smile" (*Pierre*, p. 196). Discerning now lineaments there that remind him of Isabel, he is disgusted for reasons that he, of course, cannot name to himself. The unknowability of Isabel's provenance, in the face of the filial, incestuous desire that grows up between Pierre and Isabel, proves to be, in fact, an unspeakability. As he turns to the portrait in disgust, he addresses it in a long soliloquy:

It shall not live. Hitherto I have hoarded up mementoes and monuments of the

past; been a worshiper of all heir-looms; a fond filer away of letters, locks of hair,

bits of ribbon . . . but it is forever over now! If to me any memory shall henceforth

be dear, I will not mummy it in a visible memorial for every passing beggar's dust

to gather on. Love's museum is vain and foolish as the Catacombs, where

grinning apes and abject lizards are embalmed. . . . How can lifelessness be fit

memorial for life? Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and

since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands

untrammeledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present

fancy to whatever end! (*Pierre*, pp. 197-99)

This revolt, as Pierre sets fire to the portrait, proves to be one mode of revolt against the

sentimental monumentalism of the past. What happens, Pierre seems to be asking in this passage,

if the bastions of tradition, and of paternity, can be shirked off. Monumentalism of the past

reaches back in this novel not only to the names and paternal hierarchies of the Old World, but

also to other imaginary primordial and philosophical pasts. Referring equally to Greek times,

mythological figures, and Isabel's possible French lineage, the novel asks broader questions

about the status of history and the tenacious propensity of mid-nineteenth-century Americans to

attempt to take hold of the past as a determining model for the present.

At the close of the novel, Pierre's dead body, whose very name means "stone" in French,

is finally enveloped by Isabel's black veil of hair as "her whole form sloped sideways, and she

fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon vines. Fin"

(*Pierre*, p. 362). The turn toward a mode of plotting that remains indeterminate itself becomes a

response, if not an antidote. Despite the Shakespearean death scene that closes the novel, Pierre's

assertion late in the novel seems to express the narrative's fragmentary and unsatisfying structure. "Here, then, is the untimely, timely end;" he exclaims from his cell, "Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle! Nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel, though each hath its last lettering! It is ambiguous still" (*Pierre*, p. 360).

CHAPTER THREE:
ELEGIAC NURSING IN THE SENTIMENTAL REPUBLIC:
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND
CONSOLATORY NARRATIVE PRODUCTION

CONVALESCENCE AND CONSOLATION

> It was about ten o'clock in the morning before we entered Gettysburg, and a more distressing scene can hardly be described. Every house was a hospital, and through the open doors and windows were seen wounded men in every attitude. People were going from house to house with hasty steps and distressed countenances, as though their whole business was to care for these poor sufferers. Long trains of ambulances were conveying the less severely wounded to the depot, and those who were able, were hobbling along on their crutches as best they could. Rebel prisoners, in squads of two or three hundred, with picks and spades, were starting out, under guard, to bury their dead. Sisters of Charity were pressing on, intent on their duties. (*Hospital Scenes*, pp. 16-17)

For Civil War soldiers, life in camp and on the battlefield meant constant exposure to the mangled bodies of the dying and dead, to hurried mass burials as armies retreated or decamped, and to a general landscape of devastation. Of the three million Northern and Southern soldiers who went to war, at least 618,000 died.[17] Thirty-five percent of Northern whites between the ages of 18 and 43 fought in the Civil War, and of these one in six died. Confederate statistics are even more striking: sixty-one percent of Southern white men between the ages of 18 and 43 were

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[17] These and the following statistics, generally agreed upon, are cited in Maris Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost The Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War*, ed. Maris Vinovskis, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 1-30. Note that other historians, including James M. McPherson in his landmark book *Battle Cry of Freedom*, cite 620,000 or more dead (*Battle Cry* 862).

enlisted. One quarter of these men died. In total, about six percent of Northern males between 13 and 43, and about 18 percent of Southern males, never returned home from the war. The only other American conflict whose mortality rate begins to approach this degree of devastation is the Revolutionary War in which 118 individuals per 10,000 died to the Civil War's 181.7 individuals. Such a war, with a per capita death toll slightly higher than that of England in the First World War, produced landscapes of misery like those described above, as well as an overwhelming number of wounded survivors. The mortality statistics of the war tend to obscure the fact that fewer than half the deaths took place on the battlefield. The Battle of Antietam, which remains the single bloodiest day of United States military history, with between 6,300 and 6,500 Union and Confederate soldiers killed, also resulted in about 15,000 wounded soldiers who initially survived the battle.[18] Among these wounded survivors, many would have limbs amputated, a good number would eventually die of disease, and almost all would find themselves passing through the hospitals under the care of nurses.

When some of these nurses came to the work of narrating their experiences, they imagined the hospitals as transformative spaces where death, destruction, and national fragmentation were countered through convalescence, consolation, and transcendence. While the hospitals were in truth chaotic, transitional, and oftentimes mobile spaces with diverse and transient populations, nurses' memoirs focus almost exclusively stable and intimate stories of nurse-soldier relationships. In turn, the devastation to the Union that played out on battlefields not far away, and that marked the bodies these nurses cared for, was figuratively transcended through narratives constructed as extensive works of sentimental mourning. Such scripted

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[18] James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 3.

consolation compensated for the anonymity and destructiveness of war by insisting on the specificity of soldiers and on the transition from death to eternal life promised by sentimental mourning, derived as it is from distinctly American evangelical Christian theology. In narrating their experiences through this lens, these nurses ultimately construct a fictive sentimental republic in which wounds are sutured and healed and the whole nation figuratively passes through and survives the transition from life to the transcendent perpetuity beyond mortality.

In the attentive records of nurses, death is presented as a problem that is partly resolved through detailed narrativization of dying as a redemptive and regenerative process. The processes of dying and of mourning become occasions for these nurses to institute a discursive structure of meaning that seeks to counteract the many metaphoric losses—of home and country at the very least—that each soldier's death implied. Civil War nurses' memoirs focus so insistently on these themes that they sometimes seem to be in danger of falling into what we might now identify, after Freud, as a melancholic disposition. Yet, in each case, loss is recuperated under the signs of patriotism on the one hand, and spiritual transcendence on the other.

The two themes—patriotism and spirituality—are intimately linked in these records as two forms of faith or belief in the power of broader structures to endow individual life and death with significance and immortality. As a melding of multiple cultural and literary genres, nurses' memoirs respond narratively to a social need to convert loss into gain, chaos into order, and mourning into meaning. From the perspective of this study, this objective is interesting insofar as it reveals the cultural conditions that produced these texts.

In these nurse-narratives, the hospital is re-imagined as a large functioning household that

is organized and maintained by nurses and consecrated to the work of humanizing and domesticating this corner of the wartime landscape. Soldiers generally figure as the children of this household because it is for their care that the hospital exists. In these memoirs, nurses linger at bedsides in place of mothers, sisters, and wives. More important than the recovering soldiers are the dying soldiers at whose deathbeds these memoirs spend a great deal of time. Dying soldiers demand careful and detailed consideration in almost every memoir penned by a Northern Civil War nurse. The dilemma presented by the dying soldier is a problem of meaning: death requires a context of meaning strong enough to counteract its horror. These texts respond by imagining these scenes as housed within a feminine domesticity that contains and soothes its convalescent and dying soldiers.

With hands that care and also write, most nurse-chroniclers ultimately frame themselves as nothing more than midwives of masculine experience and deflect their roles as authors. Such insistence on the evacuation of authorship at the outset of the text reflects an anxiety about what role nurses played in the hospitals. Most accounts open with dedications to the soldiers, and a good number declare the importance of the task of recording their experiences in the hospitals. These texts seem, from their first pages, to be consecrated to attesting to soldierly heroism. Along with these dominant themes, some round out their introductions with an appeal for money and supplies for the soldiers and hospitals in need. Much like one wartime journalist's description of Mathew Brady's battlefield photography as a kind of "embalming" of the dead to preserve them for heroic commemoration, these narratives each seek to capture and display, like antebellum post-mortem memorial photography, tableaux of the soldiers' martyrdom and brave

suffering.[19]

Ultimately these structuring mechanisms function ideologically to imaginatively redress the fragmented condition of the Union. Through the trope of domesticity, an image of a renewed Union is constructed from the fragmentary experiences of hospital life. The detailed scenes in which these accounts structure soldiers' transitions from earthly life to eternal life supersede the finality of death. These narratives conjure a world beyond death where a more perfect community exists and where the relationships broken in death with be restored forever. The re-unification of family is repeatedly thematized such that the nurse becomes the mother/wife/sister of the soldier and attends to him as any of these women at home would have. The re-unification of the nation is imagined as an extension of this familial domesticity.

The insistence of these narratives on deathbed scenes encodes a struggle to depict, and ultimately resolve, the dangerous finality that both death and southern secession threaten. These texts, not unusually for this time, never imagine what a divided Union would look like. A successful secession remains unnameable and unimaginable. But they insist upon the sanctity of this Union's continuing integrity. Only rarely, again not atypically for this time, do nurses' memoirs proclaim the Union army as the great liberator of the slaves. President Lincoln hardly exists in this genre, and when he does appear he is an idealized figure. The real context of political divisions, like the realities of military movements, makes very little impact on the world of these texts. Some do discuss these questions in passing, but even then these questions are folded into a continuous narration of life within the hospital. To the extent that these texts are

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[19] "Brady's Photographs of the War." *The New York Times*. September 26, 1862, p. 5.

polemical, they follow the example of the sentimental literary tradition more than that of the pamphleteers: political and ideological content is expressed at the levels of narration and plot.

Narrative Hybridity and Transformation in Nurses' Memoirs

Generically these texts are composite: they borrow components from distinct literary genres including sentimental parable, historical memoir, poetry, spiritual guide, consolation manual, and autobiography. Such a complex generic status would not have made these texts especially unique in a period when consolation manuals and gift books, for example, combined parables with autobiographical writings and poetry with spiritual directives. Much like the popular antebellum consolation manuals, the theme of death is expressed at the level of structure. Consolation manuals of the antebellum period generally embraced diverse genres, from elegiac poetry to personal reminiscence to evangelical sermonizing. These texts did not seek to depict death so much as they soothed the grief of the reader. The process of reading itself was transformative. As Henry Bacon declares in his manual, *The Sacred Flora; or, Flowers from the Grave of a Child*, published in 1846:

> [The author] would hope that this volume might be a book for the affections; a
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> manual for solitude; a friend whose words shall speak peace to the troubled
>
> elements of grief, when the memories of the past rush with violence over the soul,
>
> and the vacancies of the present are deeply felt. If so, it will do good to many a
>
> parent; it will be welcome in many a home; it will bring Jesus to the weeping
>
> Rachels. (*The Sacred Flora*, p. vi)

The power of the book is not in its ability to depict or emplot death; rather, the book itself serves as a conduit between the writer and the reader. The book also takes the place of the absent one to

fill the "vacancies of the present." The reader is imagined coming to the book overcome by the past and in a condition of loss.

Deathbed scenes in literature and private writings show that presence at the bedsides of the dying was considered edifying; children especially could witness and partake of death's spiritual transcendence from what one consolation manual by Henry Bacon describes as "a world of imprudence, disease, and sin" to the eternal world beyond (*The Sacred Flora*, p. 100). In texts like Bacon's, the mourner's focus on grief is chided and shifted toward terms like "reunion," "redemption," and "heavenly home": "Thus comforted, the heart becomes regenerated" (*The Sacred Flora*, p. viii). While biological death belonged to the corrupted earthly world, the spirit's release from the body signified rebirth for the mourner and the mourned alike. In their combination of various generic forms, consolation manuals embraced the particularity of individual experiences and a diversity of distinctive voices in books the ruling principles which were community and rejuvenation.

Nurses' memoirs during the war display the same preoccupations in their valorization of the importance of binding the community together, the ethic of attending to the particularities of experiences that are at the same time universal, and the redemptive possibilities of a multi-generic communal text. In both cases, the consolation manual and the nurses' memoir represent death at the level of thematic content while addressing its distressing effects at the level of form and structure. The Union that is imagined in these texts can be traced through the lapses and absences of their content. In reality the hospitals were complex, hybrid, transient spaces. Whether hospitals themselves shifted camp or not, their population was diverse and ever-changing. Both geographically and ideologically they lay somewhere between the battlefront and

the homefront; as such, they took on aspects of both. At the level of organization, military authority cooperated, often uneasily, with non-military organizations like the U.S. Sanitary Commission that were funded and staffed by civilians. Doctors might be commissioned officers, contract workers, surgeons, or surgical assistants. Nurses, too, were a diverse group, while many came through official organizations such as the Sanitary Commission, a number came singly or in small, unofficial groups with a desire to help. A variety of other people, including fugitive or liberated slaves, chaplains, cooks, women working in more menial positions, and transient family members of soldiers, some of whom stayed for some time and helped out generally, could be found in the hospitals at any given time.

Nursing and the Marketplace: The Contexts of Narrative Production

The nurse-narratives published during and after the Civil War account for a limited perspective on women's activities in the hospitals during the war. According to Jane E. Schultz, twenty thousand women served as everything from matrons to laundresses in Civil War hospitals ("Inhospitable Hospital," p. 364). The several hundred who penned memoirs were overwhelmingly middle-class white women who had the luxury of leaving home to attend to the wounded at the front. Unlike many other women who worked in the hospitals, this cadre of nurses was made up almost exclusively of volunteers. By contrast, their paid counterparts tended to come from lower income groups and usually performed more menial work. Those women who went on to narrate and publish their experiences had the luxury of imagining their work in idealistic terms. For women with the means to volunteer, nursing was only partly a medical activity; it was also a way of exercising patriotic *affection*. To receive money in turn would have constituted crass volunteering. Like Louisa May Alcott, these bourgeois white women had the

luxury of viewing their work in terms set out by the sentimental culture that pervaded the middle-class Northern cultural experience in the mid-nineteenth century United States. The cultural training of these nurse-narrators prepared them to view their experiences in ideal rather than material terms. These texts are thus rife with language of heroism, patriotic fervor, and an imagined collective engagement with an ideology of national union.

Raised as part of the third or fourth generation of a new republic with the necessary skills to attend to both ailing soldiers and kitchen management, the nurse-narrators brought with them a keen sense of the significance of their work. The predominantly middle-class backgrounds of these nurses would have provided a sturdy education in the domestic arts as well as access to the mainstream literary fare of the period, especially domestic novels such as *The Wide, Wide World* (1850)*, Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)*,* and *The Lamplighter* (1854). Literary consumption was normative within the consumer culture of mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois society. For this class at this time, what one read intersected in significant ways with whom one was or, at least, with whom one wished to be. Readers and writers of sentimental literature collaborated in the production and consumption of the cultural current of sentimentalism. This partly explains why Susan Warner, the author of the best-selling novel to date in 1850, *The Wide, Wide World*, indicates that her young heroine has grown into moral maturity by making her reject novel-reading. Warner herself, like Stowe, considered her work as a form closer to the parable than to the novel. While the novel entertains and distracts, and may over-stimulate its reader, the parable enters the heart of things and directs its audience in worldly and spiritual life. It is this sentimental tradition that informs these nurse-chroniclers' assumption that narrativization of their experiences, and those of the soldiers by extension, might intervene significantly in cultural

awareness and memory of the soldiers. Thus, these nurses import structural and tropological aspects of the sentimental tradition, and in doing so they implicitly activate this writerly-readerly relationship by which writers and readers collaborate to produce significant cultural change. Of these, the most significant come from mourning traditions. The trope of the deathbed functioned in the sentimental imagination as a touchstone of spiritual connection. When nurse-narrators frame their experiences in terms of this tropology, they draw on a powerful cultural semiotics for imagining renewal and transcendence.

The texts discussed in this chapter are exclusively memoirs written by nurses who came from Northern states to work in Northern hospitals, whether in Pennsylvania or Washington, D.C., during the Civil War. This chapter does not consider the memoirs of Southern nurses, though they are in many regards indistinguishable from Northern narratives, because it investigates a particular relationship between these writings and a distinctly Northern interpretation of the war's meaning. Such a study of the relationship between Southern memoirs and Southern interpretations of the war would prove to be at least as interesting, and would form a very useful counterpoint to this chapter's investigation. However, this chapter's analysis opts for depth rather than breadth in order to look closely at the language of various memoirs in relation to one historical context. This choice is thus based on the assumption that the Northern and Southern experiences of the war, and constructions of the war's meaning, were distinct. This choice also respects other, more material differences that would complicate an aggregate analysis. First, as Alice Fahs points out in her book, *The Imagined Civil War*, Northern and Southern literary productions during the Civil War were distinctly separated by the South's increasing lack of resources for producing and publishing writings. Furthermore, life in Southern

hospitals, as in the South as a whole, diverged greatly from Northern experience as the war went on and as the condition of the South and its army became more and more desperately impoverished. When this chapter refers to nurses or hospitals generally, it is thus referring only to Northern nurses and hospitals.

These texts also mark a significant moment in women's participation in the literary marketplace. While theirs were not the only accounts of wartime experience published, their perspective was unique. As women publishing accounts of their own experiences within an emerging genre of wartime narratives, they came up against unique challenges. As Alice Fahs points out in *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*, most of the literature dealing with women during the war focused on the challenges of women at home. Their experiences and suffering formed part of the story of the toll the war took on the country as a whole; furthermore, these women signified the country which boys left home to aggressively protect. In popular poetry and stories of women at the home front, women figured as part of the call to arms and, to some extent, as joint sufferers in a destructive war. By contrast, the women giving service in the hospitals did not easily fit into either of these two categories. Their participation in the war was more direct, and in many ways more active, than women left behind on the home front. More significantly, rather than figuring as the subjects of stories, or as recorders of their own patriotic or elegiac sentiments, nurse-narrators crafted records that combined aspects of sentimental domesticity with historiographical narration.

While these texts have sometimes been made to stand in for women's experiences as a whole in Civil War hospitals, as Jane E. Schultz points out in her book *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*, the population of women working in nursing and

convalescent aid in the hospitals was quite diverse. While most, though not all, published accounts of nursing in the North were penned by middle-class women, a great number of other women assisted in the hospitals in various capacities. By contrast, a whole class of women who worked in more menial hospital jobs generally came from less well-to-do backgrounds and thus didn't benefit from the same educational advantages. The advantages of a middle-class education would have been two-fold for those women who did go on to write memoirs. First, a middle-class background meant that many of these already enterprising women were comfortable in the literary and cultural idiom of sentimental writing. For such women, the impulse to contribute their experiences to the emerging genre of wartime writings would have seemed worthwhile. Their records, however, represent a somewhat limited range of women's experiences in Northern Civil War hospitals. Of the women who worked exclusively or primarily in other areas of service, from laundry to kitchen duty, very little appears in these memoirs.

While this chapter draws on over a dozen nurses' memoirs, two accounts provide its primary textual material. The 1864 narrative *Hospital Scenes after the Battle of Gettysburg* was published by the Lancaster [Pennsylvania] Daily Inquirer Steam Job Imprint on behalf of the local ladies' society, the Patriot Daughters of Lancaster. This organization was formed at the beginning of the war and encompassed hundreds of volunteers. It organized a number of other local organizations in the region and devoted itself to serving Union soldiers from throughout the North in several capacities. The Patriot Daughters raised funds, gathered donations, and organized group labor to provide materials like food and supplies to hospitals. Members of the group also served in the hospitals, particularly during the campaigns in the Cumberland Valley, which comprises Hagerstown, Gettysburg, and Shiloh. By 1864, in order to replenish their funds,

the Patriot Sisters had good reason to anticipate that a nursing memoir would find success with a public that had already proven its interest in wartime memoirs. Although *Hospital Scenes* would seem to have been a canny entry into the literary marketplace, it is structured as a first-person narrative whose tone is personal and whose subject matter feels distinctly intimate.

This text in no way reads like an historical account. Its anonymous first-person narrator presents her experiences within a distinctly domesticated idiom that borrows directly from the formulae and structures of sentimental narrativity discussed in the previous chapter. In terms of form, by taking up a first-person narrative, rather than choosing to present an anthology several different nurses' experiences, *Hospital Scenes* focuses its narrative in intimate terms for its readership. The narrative moves from an idyllic June afternoon into the morass of war. In a sense, as the subject grows from mundane activities into the reactions of Lancaster, the subject matter of the text shifts from individual pleasures to the devastations of war. The persistence of the first-person narrative voice as our narrator devotes herself to nursing shapes the account around the specificity of nurses' power to alleviate suffering and, ultimately, to stand in for mothers, sisters, and wives: "As soon as I came to him he said, 'Write your name on this piece of paper for me, and if I live I want it, if I die send it to my mother, and tell her that though far away in Pannsylvania, I have found those who have been as kind to me as sister or mother'" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 37). The subject-matter of this narrative is, typical of this emerging genre, focused on the details of nurse-soldier relationships with a particular emphasis on dying soldiers. In structure as well as subject, *Hospital Scenes* accurately presents the distinctly domestic contexts through which nurses' memoirs represent the hospital as the antidote to wartime destruction.

Anna Morris Holstein's 1867 *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* was published by Philadelphia's J. B. Lippincott whose 1864 *Notes of Hospital Life from November, 1861, to August, 1863* had convinced him of the public appetite for wartime stories. Interestingly, the narrator of *Notes of Hospital Life* remains anonymous while introducing her account by responding to an imagined friend's admonition that no more stories of the war were necessary. Likewise, when Holstein published her narrative, she did so under the pseudonym "Mrs. H." For women whose willingness to serve in the hospitals subjected them to accusations of unladylike behavior, entry into the literary marketplace was fraught with the additional danger of seeming to aggrandize, and perhaps even profit, from one's experiences with the soldiers. In dealing with Holstein's account, this chapter will consider the problem of anonymity and literary production for nurses' whose narratives were as much histories of the war as they were records of individual experiences.

Among the many other memoirs from which this chapter implicitly draws, three memoirs serve as significant examples. By the time Louisa May Alcott volunteered as a nurse in 1862, she had already confronted many of the struggles of mid-nineteenth-century women for whom life within marriage seemed too constrictive while life outside of marriage presented few opportunities. Alcott was assigned to the relatively unpleasant and unsanitary Union Hotel Hospital in Georgetown where after only a few weeks she contracted typhoid fever and was forced to return home. Nonetheless, Alcott famously took advantage of her most extensive foray outside the familial context to produce her first literary success. *Hospital Sketches* was first written for the antislavery paper *The Commonwealth* before becoming a book. In ways that do not impinge on the present study but which bear consideration, and as Elaine Schowalter notes in

her introduction to *Alternative Alcott*, Alcott's narrative framework for *Hospital Sketches* reveal an emerging sophistication in her handling of nineteenth-century women's struggles with authorship and female narrativity. Although Alcott claimed she had not fictionalized her experiences at all, she chose the relative safety of framing her narrative through the figure of Tribulation Periwinkle who emerged in the second, book version of *Hospital Sketches* as both a convenient framing structure and as an expedient mechanism for deflecting autobiographical narration. Compared to other nurses' memoirs, Alcott's narrative sustains an unusually jaunty tone and a more polished narrative surface. More than most other narratives, Alcott provides a narrative interpretation that is more self-consciously a reconstruction of memory through which the significance and larger context of events becomes more evident with hindsight. Through the figure of Trib, Alcott's text structures its scenes as the memories of an older woman whose return to Washington brings her back in touch with her experience of many decades earlier. Alcott also provides one of the most evocative deathbed scenes of these narratives, in part because she provides a fuller context of her relationship with the dying soldier, John, which eloquently draws on classical references even while deploying the same sentimental tropes of the deathbed tableau. In a sense, Alcott's rendition of the deathbed scene is ultimately too well crafted to fit into this chapter's ultimate analysis. Despite the ways in which *Hospital Sketches* is exceptional within this genre, Alcott's struggles with feminine narrativity and the literary marketplace were as typical as her recourse to the tropology of deathbed tableaux and the framework of mourning as modes of making sense of the war. Interestingly, the fact that Alcott's *Sketches*, published in the middle of the war, framed the narrative through a figure who views her work in retrospect also partakes of this genre's abiding interest in depicting the war as merely

a struggle within the larger, continuing national narrative of a unified United States. This chapter will discuss in more depth this question of anticipating a retrospective moment at some point in the future, when the U.S. will have been reunified, in relation to the narrative work of these nurses' memoirs.

This chapter briefly considers two other memoirs, those of Elvira Powers' *Hospital Pencillings: Being a Diary While in Jefferson General Hospital, Jeffersonville, Ind., and Others at Nashville Tennessee, as Matron and Visitor* (1866) and Jane Stuart Woolsey's *Hospital Days: Reminiscence of a Hospital Nurse* (1868). Powers was one of seven Union nurses who published their narratives between 1866 and 1870.[20] Like most of these women, Powers was an unmarried woman who pursued profit through publication, first through partial publication in the *Chicago Covenant* and later through publication of the full diary in 1866 with a Boston publisher. Like many of her fellow nurse-narrators, Powers insists on the veracity of her account and, as if to ensure that she will be believed, published her account in its original diary form. Similarly, Kate Cumming's Southern memoir of the same year, *Journal of Hospital Life* (1866), was simply a published diary. Like Powers, Cumming hoped that profits from her book would help keep her afloat after the end of the war left her searching for means. Finding no profit in the South Cumming travelled north hoping to find a publisher there, but Northern publishers were not yet prepared to publish her distinctly Southern story. Both Powers and Cumming pursued financial reward through publication, and both seem to have hoped to successfully navigate between the Scylla of seeming egotism and the Charybdis of seeming to fictionalize that together made the literary marketplace particularly challenging for women publishing nurses' memoirs during and

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[20] This section draws on information documented by Schultz, *Women at the Front*, Chapter 7.

after the Civil War.

One alternative mode of publication for women struggling to preserve modesty was offered by Frank Moore's 1866 *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* for which he solicited submissions by a number of Northern women, including the prominent Mary Ann ("Mother") Bickerdyke and Clara Barton who never replied.[21] Moore's biographies were unpaid and based on his correspondence with and submissions by nurses themselves, other workers, and testimonials from soldiers. While Moore's overt purpose was to celebrate the women of the war, his 596-page publication in eight volumes certainly profited from a hungry public which bought up five editions in less than four years. Ultimately, few of these women went on to write their own texts, and none were paid for their submissions.

In contrast to writers like Powers, Woolsey's *Hospital Days* (1868) was never intended for a wide audience, but then Woolsey came from a well off New York family of abolitionists. Both of her sisters, Abby Woolsey and Georgeanna Bacon, also served during the war. Unlike many less well-off volunteers, these women had some degree of agency over where they were placed. This had also been the case for Anna Holstein who, like several other volunteers, had come to the idea of volunteering through her husband's service at the front. Perhaps because of this difference in intended audience, Woolsey' narrative strikes a much more matter-of-fact chord than do most others: "Seeing the men constantly . . . and talking with them, writing for them, helping them invent occupations and amusements, hearing their 'views' on public questions and witnessing always their wonderful courage and cheerfulness, were never-failing

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[21] *Women at the Front*, p. 232. Both Bickerdyke, a Quaker widow, and Barton had become familiar bywords for fiercely independent nursing during the war. Their inclusion in Moore's volume would certainly have given it some stature. As it was, biographies of both women were ultimately written, though neither every wrote her own narrative of her war experience.

sources of refreshment and pleasure" (*Hospital Days*, p. 85). Woolsey attends to more macroscopic questions than many, focusing in many passages on the ever-evolving systems put in place to organize nurses' care of their patients. For the audience of the 100 copies printed privately in 1866, this text would seem to fit within a closed society of well-to-do reformer-minded progressives sharing information. By way of contrast, this text puts into starker relief the overwhelming tendency of most publicly published narratives to focus on the intimate relationships between nurses and soldiers, particularly around problems of dying. This text was not in communication with a broader audience from whom it solicited either the desire to contribute, the desire to purchase, or the desire to imaginatively collaborate in readerly consolation.

While the great majority of texts were written by women, including many entries in Moore's volumes, during or just after the war, a few exceptions remain. Most notable is Walt Whitman's 1875 *Memoranda During the War*, which amalgamates Whitman's observations from late 1862 until 1865 at various hospitals and in a variety of settings. One of the many ways in which Whitman's account differs from the cumulative norm of Northern nurses' memoirs is in its insistence that sentimentalism is abandoned in the face of a soldier's certain death: "There is no fuss made. Not a bit of sentimentalism or whining have I seen about a single death-bed in hospital or on the field, but generally impassive indifference. All is over, as far as any efforts can avail; it is useless to expend emotions or labours" (*Memoranda During the War*, p. 32). But Whitman's account here is not as different as it may seem. He is speaking of doctors who hold fast to their patients until death is certain only until death is certain, at which point the "surgeon abandons the patient" (*Memoranda During the War*, p. 32). This is a diagnosis most nurses, who

speak little of doctors and generally not in glowing terms, would certainly have endorsed. Here it is left to Whitman to make sense of death once the doctors have "yield[ed] the field" (*Memoranda During the War*, p. 32), just as nurse-narrators, too, took it upon themselves to craft a meaningful response to death. At the same time, Whitman does contextualize these deaths a bit differently in his account. In the section "Death of a Wisconsin Officer," he contrasts his own sensitive awareness of death ("Tread the bare board floor lightly here, for the pain and panting of death are in this cot!") with the "ordinary chat and business of the Ward [that] a little way off goes on indifferently" and the doctors who will attend to the body but not to the soul of the dying man (*Memoranda During the War*, p. 31).

DOMESTICATING DEATH

> While talking, the disagreeableness of the situation was all forgotten, and thinking only of far-off hospital scenes,—the lonely, dreary couch of the wounded or sick man, uncheered by loving care of wife or child, —the weary tramp of the sentinel, or the wretched life of men in trenches, I could do nothing less than tell to other women the story that I knew so well,—of want, of suffering unparalleled, of bravery and endurance unequaled,—and then remind them how much was in their power to soothe and comfort those on the battle-field, or hospital, but the preparation of articles for their use. (*Three Years*, pp. 54-55)

Civil War hospitals constituted spaces where the margins of battle and domestic life overlapped. This division was not always clear during a war in which, in the South more than in the North, fighting often converted inhabited and private lands into battlefields. As the above citation suggests, in many cases "[e]very house [became] a hospital" to accommodate the wounded. On the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Armory Square Hospital complex

housed over 1,000 beds in twelve wooden pavilions and overflow tents. The average Civil War hospital was made up of long tents that were semi-permanent over the course of the war. Most, including the Armory Square Hospital, were dismantled at the end of the war. Often, private buildings were converted to public use as hospitals as was the case with Smith's Barn at Antietam. Hospitals often grew up around battlefields either as small tent cities or in converted buildings. They were in every way a temporary space serving the necessities of war. Their surgeons, nurses, staff, and patients were also constantly in flux. The population of the hospital could easily comprise rebel soldiers and in some cases Southern women who came to care for them, women of different classes cooking and cleaning throughout, convalescent soldiers acting as helpers, and even fugitive slaves, particularly during the latter half of the war.

While death in the context of battle was often gory and generally agonizing, life and death in Civil War hospitals was comparatively sanitized. The introduction of innovations in sanitation made by Florence Nightingale during the Crimean war into the Civil War hospital greatly reduced soldier mortality.[22] Nightingale's influence on Civil War nurses in the U.S. was manifold. Importantly, Dorothea Dix, who served as Northern Superintendent of Women Nurses from 1861 to 1865, had followed Nightingale's career closely and ultimately fulfilled a long-felt desire to visit Nightingale in the 1850s where she toured European hospitals in the Crimea (*Women in the Civil War* 23; see Brown, *Dorothea Dix*). Nightingale's innovations were

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[22] The British reformer Florence Nightingale's institution of sanitary conditions for soldiers during the Crimean War (1853-1856) reshaped British army policy and greatly reduced mortality rates in army hospitals. According to her own calculations, which are widely cited in twentieth century texts as being correct, improved sanitation and hospital care radically reduced the mortality rate during the Crimean campaign from 600 in 1,000 during the first seven months to 22 in 1,000 by the war's end (Willcox 910).

 Nightingale achieved great renown in the United States as well as in Europe. From the 1850s until the end of the century *Harper's Monthly*'s Editor's Table referred to her repeatedly as an icon of ideal womanhood for her devotion to good works and, notably, for her disinterest in the question of women's suffrage.

translated in the U.S. context into the creation of the United States Sanitary Commission, which managed much of the Northern nursing effort. The Sanitary Commission grew as local Ladies' Aid Societies merged together. It was the war itself that cemented this first centralized body for systematizing the work of hospital care.

Despite relatively limited understanding of the science of bacteria and sepsis, over the course of the war the Commission instituted policies that critically affected the survival rates of wounded and ill soldiers. It did so by drawing on popular ideas of propriety—both physical and psychological—that held sway at the time. The standards of physical sanitation set out by forebears like Nightingale who discovered in practice that hygienic standards for food, water, bandages, and medical treatment in general could make a significant difference in mortality rates. At the same time, mid-nineteenth-century ideas of the sanitary body had more in common with early modern notions of the humors than with later scientific bases for understanding the genesis of disease. According to Lisa A. Long, the reigning theory that one's physical body bore the signs of one's moral and psychological condition influenced how medical and Sanitary Commission officials diagnosed the condition of the troops: "Physical diseases that subsequent generations would know were caused by germs were perceived as being of the same etiological order as the distress and misbehavior caused by loneliness, dissatisfaction, or so-called immorality. All manifested themselves in polluted bodies and unmanageable behaviors" (*Rehabilitating Bodies*, p. 85). What doctors and nurses could not articulate at this time was the germ theory that Louis Pasteur was just at this time developing in France. The idea that broth left out from lunch to dinner, unclean bandages, and unsafe conditions for waste disposal could all pose mortal risks through disease was only partially understood. Thus, even as many nurses write

about attempting to revise less sanitary systems of dealing with food or bedsheets in order to improve general cleanliness, their work derived from a limited scientific understanding of the genesis of disease. At the same time, it was often the nurses and the work of the Sanitary Commission that systematized the hygienic conditions that helped limit sepsis and other conditions that could lead to higher mortality rates.

Despite innovations in hospital sanitation, the work of nursing depicted in the memoirs focused on the non-medical aspects of nursing care in Civil War hospitals. Nursing in northern Civil War hospitals could best be described as *palliative*, to use a contemporary term. Palliative care attends to the symptoms and problems of illness without attending to the underlying problems. It works to ensure the comfort of the patient without addressing the etiological cause of pain or discomfort. In contemporary use this term often applies to end-of-life or hospice care when the uppermost consideration is the comfort and psychological well being of the patient. The range of tasks performed by the volunteer nurses stationed in Civil War hospitals generally included washing soldiers' bodies, cleaning and bandaging wounds, organizing materials both at home and in the hospitals like clothing and food, reading and writing letters on behalf of soldiers, spiritual consolation, and attending at the bedsides of the ailing and dying. Volunteer nurses, as were most of those who wrote of their experiences, were almost always middle-class women who arrived in the hospitals armed with domestic knowledge that any Northern woman of this class would presumably know.

Anna Holstein articulately describes the need that volunteer nurses saw themselves as fulfilling when she details how she overcame her instinctive resistance to nursing wounded soldiers:

> But when my husband returned [home from Antietam], . . . with the sad story that
> men were actually dying for food, home comforts and home care; lying by the
> roadside, in barns, sheds, and out-houses; needing everything that we could do for
> them, I hesitated no longer, but with him went earnestly to work in procuring
> supplies of food, medicine, and clothing. (*Three Years*, p. 11)

What these soldiers lack, and what Holstein has to offer, is "home care" away from home. The soldiers here described are both injured and homeless. In addition to their training in domestic arts, the nurses are somehow expected to provide domesticity itself. The "everything that we could do for them" is not imagined to be a subsidiary function of medical treatment; on the contrary, Holstein imagines her work in domestic rather than institutional terms. It is as though she is responsible for reconstituting a lost domesticity.

But the work of nursing will prove to be at least as institutional as domestic. In the same way that the image of the "Lady with the Lamp" bending over injured soldiers greatly underestimated Nightingale's institutional contributions to British nursing, Civil War nurses often attended to procuring, organizing, and administering "supplies of food, medicine, and clothing." Domesticity, the restoration of a home to the homeless, proved to be a portable function of the feminine presence at the battlefront. In one sense, nursing at the battlefront hospitals institutionalized domestic work, but this logic worked in reverse as well. In Holstein's eyes, nurses domesticated the institutional context of warfare by humanizing it.

When sick and injured bodies were delivered into the care of nurses, clothing was stripped off, the body was cleaned and freshly dressed, and finally food was prepared and served. Injured soldiers usually arrived in waves so that treatment of emergencies generally happened

immediately. For days and weeks afterwards, nurses devoted themselves to helping soldiers recover. While a good number of these soldiers recovered well enough to return to the battlefield, and some returned home with their injuries, but many remained in the hospital convalescing or slowly dying. For those who remained, nurses' memoirs describe the hospital as a kind of proximate home in which feminine orderliness and compassionate humanity replaced the chaos and brutality of the battlefield.

To judge from these memoirs, once injured soldiers entered the world of the hospital, the events and contexts of war that preceded entry into the hospital seem to dissolve – these subjects were are never discussed. As patients, the injured soldiers are described as heroic and manly, but not for their bravery in battle. Instead, they are praised for their fortitude, grace, and piety in the face of illness, injury and death. Tales of battlefield heroism appear very rarely and almost always to attest to the humanity of a soldier who has saved another soldier from dying or suffering. Battlefield bravery in the face of the enemy is discussed very rarely. Once injured soldiers have arrived in the Civil War hospital, their narrator-nurses consider and reflect on their subjects within a hospital world that is detached – if not disconnected – from the contexts of war and battle.

While this world is also detached from the familiarity of home, many nurses who wrote memoirs declared that their express purpose was to facilitate this familiar but lost domesticity as much as possible: "As I passed through the first hospitals of wounded men I ever saw, there flashed the thought---*this* is the work God has given *me* to do in this war. To care for the wounded and sick, as sorrowing wives and mothers at home would so gladly do, were it in their powers" (*Three Years*, p. 11). The world shared by nurses and patients in wartime hospitals thus

became a kind of marginal space built up through the imaginative work of nurses who constructed a *world* that drew materially and psychologically from a nostalgic vision of home while also adapting this vision to the reality of war's close proximity.

The institution of order is a ruling theme across all of these memoirs. This process is described by the anonymous narrator of *Hospital Scenes After the Battle of Gettysburg* as a series of material improvements through which the conditions of dirty, suffering, seemingly abandoned injured soldiers are addressed.

> I walked up to the Hospital steward . . . and asked him what his patients most needed; his reply was, 'Everything. These men are now lying, with the exception of having their wounds dressed, as they were brought in from the battle-field.' Some were on a little straw, while most of them had nothing between them and the hard boards but their old thin, war-worn blankets; the more fortunate ones with their knapsacks under their heads. And when you think that they were, almost without exception, serious amputation cases, what must have been their sufferings! I went back to the rooms, and we all commenced assorting the pillows, shirts, sheets &c., sending at the same time to the Commissary for some bed-sacks, which the men attendants filled with straw.
>
> When our patients were washed and dressed, and placed in their new beds, with a fresh white pillow under their heads, and a sheet thrown over them, they looked their gratitude which was more eloquent than words. One of us handed them each a handkerchief wet with cologne, and we left them to make arrangements for their supper. . . . They all said that they had never met with such kindness, and that that

meal had been the first glimpse of home life they had enjoyed since they entered

the service two years ago. (*Hospital Scenes*, pp. 24-25)

While the work of nurses began with the care of the soldier's body, the ultimate aim of convalescence, as this passage suggests, was to provide as much of a "glimpse of home life" as possible. The "everything" that these soldiers need turns out to be the ordering and softening work of domestication. These physical comforts denote the reassurance that soldiers have not in fact been abandoned, despite appearances, once their serviceability in war has been exhausted. They are gently introduced into a world that is built around caring for their needs. These needs are best identified through empathetic identification: "What must have been their sufferings!," our nurse-narrator proclaims as she begins to consider what her charges "most need." If we can trust our nurse's intuition, then her provisions suggest that what is most needed comprises more than a physical re-situation in a more comfortable and sanitary context. The move from supplying sheets to supplying "home" occurs very quickly and without any need for explanation or elaboration.

The move is a metaphoric one that hinges on the reincorporation of the soldier's body into a context of meaning. Wounded soldiers often found themselves gathered together and deposited at the edges of battlefields, roadways, and train platforms while awaiting transportation to hospitals. Incapacitated and often immobile, the wounded soldier was transported from the battlefield to his next stop in a way that uncannily resembled that of the heaped bodies of the dead soldiers on their way to burial places. As a group, wounded soldiers had been excised from the military chain of command and the geography of the battlefield where they had until recently fulfilled a role while physically occupying a position on the field.

Plainly, the only mid-nineteenth-century sphere in which men's competency could reasonably be subsumed by feminine caretaking was the domestic sphere. While historians and literary critics have debated to what extent the feminine and masculine spheres were in fact separate in practice, Lora Romero has shown that the ideology of this separation fulfilled a broad cultural fantasy. According to Romero, domesticity was "one of the most entrenched value systems of early-nineteenth-century bourgeois society" (*Home Fronts*, p. 6). The early association in the narrative cited above attests to the cultural power of domesticity and its appeal during a time of social upheaval. The fact that the security of social place, having been lost on the battlefield, could be recovered through domesticity suggests that "home" was both a literal place and a cultural topos. This location in the cultural imagination seems to have been experienced, at least in this context, as a more fundamental or originary context for understanding one's self and place. Romero asserts, "ironically, making domesticity into an identity gave middle-class women a surprising amount of mobility. As an identity, rather than simply as a fixed location for women's lives, domesticity could – and did – travel" (*Home Fronts*, p. 25). Nurses did not so much create a gratifying "glimpse of home life" as much as they replicated a broadly shared simulacrum of domesticity as a portable and instantly recognizable ideal.

If *everybody* belongs at home, then a home, once created, becomes a place where *anybody* can find his or her place. However, this *anybody* refers to a fantasy of *everybody* that in truth exists only within a relatively restricted world. *Anybody*, too, proves in practice to be attributable to only a restricted group, namely those who are allowed to participate in this white, middle-class social fantasy. This formulation, therefore, necessarily excludes a great many

people including African-American nurses and soldiers and lower-class white nurses who worked for pay, unlike most nurses-turned-narrators who fit comfortably into mid-century bourgeois society.

The image of the Civil War nurse that persisted well into the twentieth century, and which continues to influence our historical understanding, replicates the wartime period's idealization of the white middle-class nurse who cares for soldiers in a proximate role of mother, sister or wife as a volunteer. In truth, many gradations and types of hospital work lurked beneath and behind this image to carry out the work of caring for soldiers. In this sense, then, the domesticity of the Northern Civil War hospital had a great deal in common with the socio-cultural makeup of the Union as a whole: the focus on the bourgeois work and culture of the urban or semi-urban white middle class as representative of material, cultural, and military production belied the labor and influence of African-Americans, rural populations, the lower classes, immigrants, and Native Americans.

Schultz shows that of the more than twenty thousand women who fulfilled the very real physiological, material, psychological, medical, and spiritual needs of Northern and Southern soldiers during the war, only a small group penned the memoirs that helped bolster the image of the caring, white, volunteer nurse who could figure as the missing mother, sister or wife whom the ailing soldier was presumed to need. In skipping past these realities in her description of making the wounded soldiers "at home," our nurse-narrator in the above citation reveals by omission how significantly the weight of domesticity falls into the symbolic hands of the white woman who acted as family, and how powerfully her own hands figuratively shape and invigorate the work of convalescence, even as the actual system of labor within the hospital was

much more complex.

<u>Narrating Domesticity</u>

The omission of scenes labor itself throughout almost all nurses' narratives applied to nurses as well as to other hospital workers. Relatively few texts foreground the labor of hospital work.[23] Nurses' narratives almost universally omit some of the more technical and medical details of treating soldiers whose wounds needed cleaning or whose bodies were deteriorating from ailments, including dysentery, which ultimately killed more soldiers than minié balls.[24] This may be because, as Lori Ginzberg observes, as the "Civil War truly elevated nurses' status in the form of pay and government authorization, nurses came to epitomize the tension between the traditional emphasis on sentiment and womanly feeling on the one hand and the new values of scientific care on the other" (*Women and the Work of Benevolence*, p. 143). The contradiction that Ginzberg describes emerged from the marginal positioning of the hospital. However domesticated this space could be made to feel, the hospital existed within a martial context. In reality, patients' bodies were oozing substances, burning up, losing appendages, and often requiring intimate washing. Contact with the nakedness and illness of these bodies was simply unnarrateable for nurses writing of their experiences. Naturally, such details of "scientific care" found their place in the writings of doctors and surgeons intended as contributions to medical knowledge. While the nurses' work combined elements of both the traditional feminine and the

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[23] One notable exception is the narrative of Hannah Ropes, *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes*, in which she describes her role in maintaining a complex food service system for the soldiers. In this case, however, Ropes' narrative makes much of how this system was tailored to the needs of individual soldiers.

[24] Minié balls, co-developed by the Frenchman Claude-Étienne Minié, revolutionized warfare during the Crimean and especially the American Civil War. Made for use in rifles whose grooved barrels could assure far greater accuracy at a distance, these bullets wreaked greater damage at farther distances than had before been conceivable. They are largely responsible for the high rate of amputations during the war, and for the war's high battlefield mortality rates.

newly scientific, only the former aspects were addressed in their narratives. In this way, nurses preserved the veil behind which traditional boundaries were of necessity breaking down to give way to urgent need. While nurses made crucial contributions to the physical recovery of soldiers, this work could not easily be narrated for the simple reason that the ways in which nurses physically handled soldiers, and the boundaries of surface propriety that were necessarily broken, would not have made suitable narrative material for women as readers or as writers.

In these memoirs, nurses' mourning both stands in for and sympathetically extends the mourning of those women who are absent: "By [one soldier's] lonely bedside, I wept bitter tears for the home so darkened, the light of another's life departed, and the sorrowing sisters of whom he spake" (*Three Years*, p. 16). At the same time that the death of "William P.C. of the 12th New York State Volunteers" is insisted on as a unique death that confirms the singularity of the soldier, William P.C.'s death is presented as representative and ideal. This scene turns on three distinctly sentimental themes: spirituality, mother-love, and redemptive mourning. By noting the soldier's desire to have scripture read to him, and by affirming that he passed "calmly and trustfully . . . into the spirit land" (*Three Years*, p. 16), Mrs. H. denotes William P.C.'s appropriateness as an object of sympathetic identification and mourning. But even as she makes the soldier into an iconic figure of a martyred hero, her narrative simultaneously foregrounds the work of mourning—*her* work of mourning—as an interpretive key to reading and understanding how to make sense of the soldier's death.

The aura of domesticity that Civil War nurses lent to the work of mourning was significant at several levels. First, for soldiers, nurses replaced absent women family members. Second, at hospitals, nurses performed work that men, even chaplains, did not perform. While

chaplains sat at the deathbeds of dying soldiers, only nurses dealt the bodies of the dying for the hours or days before death. Third, the work of mourning performed by these nurses allegorically represented the feminine portion of care that the nation administered to her sons and soldiers. For this last reason, nurses' memoirs provided a context of meaning through which the deaths of soldiers could be contained within a broader story about the necessity for the Union's survival. Following from the antebellum age in which sentimentalism, spiritualism, and domesticity affirmed the significance of the feminine sphere, even if this sphere was certainly permeable and contested, mourning was a powerful formulation of female caretaking.

The formulation of antebellum sentimental mourning, as discussed in the previous chapter's analysis of antebellum sentimental narrativity, converted the anxieties and traumas associated with death and mourning into a plotted narrative with a beginning, middle and conclusion. According to this logic, the end-stop of death could be coded as a process whose through line began in the lessons of illness, continued with the spiritual uplift of recognizing one's immortality and return to the "long home," and continued forever in the infinite light of God's domain. Because this narrative framework turned on an axis of redemption and perpetuity, the negativity and finality of death were thereby overcome.

I argue elsewhere that the strength and broad appeal of the recuperative possibilities of sentimental mourning would seem to belie a particular anxiety about the negative spaces that death inevitably exposes: the possibility of an unnecessary or even lonely and spiritually destitute death. In both cases, death would seem to have become detached from any context of significance that affirm the necessity, however tragic, and the impossibility of dying without the companionship of an infinite and redemptive God.

The possible negativity or precariousness of death is counteracted through an insistent narration of death as a return "home." Indeed, throughout these narratives, the idea of "home" is imbricated within a complex network of references. "Home" may be the place of origin from which a soldier comes and to which it is hoped he will eventually return. "Home" may also refer to the popular term "long home" referring to the world beyond death is every human's eventual destination. Elvira J. Powers writes of a dying young man who asks her to "write to his people and tell them 'good bye,' and that he was 'going home'" (*Hospital Pencillings*, p. 14). "Home" is a fictive or imaginative location that is either originary or eventual, but which is never one's present location. The significance of "home" in these texts is thus to constantly move either forwards or backwards in time to an imagined location of stability and continuity in sharp contrast to the contingency and precariousness of both the battlefield and of the nation at war with itself. Home is always some alternative location either in space or in time where a connection to something eternal is assured.

> And when, before the last summons came to call them to their final home, we
> ministered to them, our painful duties were lightened by the assurance that
> religion was no new thing to most of them; and that, in their Northern home,
> unceasingly ascended for these dear, dying ones, prayers for their everlasting
> salvation. (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 31)

Both the "final home" and the "Northern home" are contrasted against the "painful duties" and "dying ones" of the present. Here a logic of transcendence, in this case specifically religious, assures a continuity from the past (the "Northern home") to the future ("their final home"). At both the origin and the end of struggle is salvation and transcendence of the pain and death of the

present moment.

Domesticity thus suggests an alternate dimension of national identity in these memoirs. As Amy Kaplan has shown, domesticity and national identity were intricately linked in the mid-nineteenth-century United States.[25] In these memoirs, this link seems at times to be frayed or endangered. Kaplan's essay suggests that what is at stake in this association is, in part, a continuous sense of nationhood despite, on the one hand, the diversity of territories and peoples it incorporates and, on the other hand, its imaginary inclusion of territories that have not yet been politically incorporated. In these nurses' narratives, the fraying of this image of wholeness may be all the more dangerous if, following Kaplan, we presume that the reality beneath this ideal is already composed of disparate and conflicting parts.

The national "home" remains a meaningful beacon in these texts. Jane Stuart Woolsey notes that in January, 1864, soldiers passed around a copy of the newspaper that carried news of the Emancipation Proclamation and of Lincoln's annual address of December, 1863 from bed to bed while discussing these questions as well as legislation pertaining to soldiers' pay and peace plans. Woolsey specifically cites part of the closing of Lincoln's address, "We do honorably recognize the gallant men, from commander to sentinel, to whom more than to others the world must stand indebted for the home of Freedom disenthralled" (*Hospital Days*, pp. 108-109). In this speech, Lincoln also declared that "the crisis which threatened to divide the friends of the Union is past" (*Collected Works of Lincoln*, p. 50). These soldiers, partaking even from their sickbeds of democratic discourse and the exercise of political will, as Woolsey proudly notes, are

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[25] Kaplan, in "Manifest Domesticity," focuses on the linguistic and cultural links between the national preoccupation with domesticity and the principle of manifest destiny through which the nation's right to grow figuratively incorporated those aspects of open territories with which it identified (the western lands) while, at the same time, rejecting those aspects of domestic reality that it wished to expel from the interiority of domesticity (Indians and African-Americans in particular).

thus double figured as the bulwark against the Union's disintegration. They are, in Lincoln's speech, those whose struggles (and deaths) have liberated the "home of Freedom." They are also agents of freedom through their exercise of the political rights guaranteed to them by this "home." The diverse incarnations of home that circulated through and around the space of the hospital thus linked together the individual and the political, the past and the future, the home and the battlefronts, and death and life. The deaths of soldiers preserved the life of the home of freedom. Likewise, the deaths of soldiers were guaranteed meaning and immortality through the figures of both religious and political transcendence of the pains, deaths, and specificities of the moment.

Deathbed Scenes: Toward a Theory of Narrative Suture

> [The soldier] told me that he knew he was going to die; that for two long nights he had laid [sic] there alone, thinking of his state; he knew he was a great sinner, he said, but he trusted that, for Christ's sake, he might be forgiven. He had an old mother; would I write her? I did, while he dictated the words. I am sorry I did not keep a copy of the letter, so full was it of love and patriotism. Love for his old home, love for his mother, love for his country (for which he said he gloried in dying,) and love for his Saviour, who had suffered and died to redeem him. (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 29)

One of the most powerful sentimental tropes for the figurative domestication of death was the deathbed scene. The above passage echoes the sentimental narrativity characteristic of much of antebellum literature and culture. One standard composition of the sentimental deathbed scene includes a male sinner whose impending death leads him to reflect upon his life and recognize his sinfulness. While the sinner may be a woman, the pairing of a base male sinner whose rebirth into proper Christian morality is facilitated by an angelic woman's guidance. In

this scenario, recognition of a life beyond death gives him hope for redemption. As he turns back to his earthly life with this new awareness, he seeks to make meaning of his life. In so doing, he also seeks to console those whom he will leave behind with the assurance that his life has been meaningful. Redemption and meaning are inextricably linked to each other. Together they assure that both the dying soldier and his mother will find comfort in the possibility that the soldier's life has not been in vain. In one sense, his death, modeled as it is on the exchange of life for meaning that Christ's martyrdom set out, secures the significance of his life precisely to the extent that the soldier's earthly, physical life is forfeited.

In each case, death is a predicate of meaning through an economy of exchange under the sign of transcendent values: home (including all the resonances of an "old" or primordial home), mother, country, and Saviour. Each term relies on the next for full definition: the home is only a home because it is where the mother is; the mother is maternal only in a context where maternal love is protected and housed; the country's identity is ultimately ensured as a function of transcendent, or divine, existence; and the Saviour is the door-stop of meaning or what Derrida calls the *transcendental signified* that is the ultimate stabilizing referent of all appeals to meaning.

The nurse becomes the boy's witness and guarantor of his transition from earthly life to that beyond:

> He did not fear to die, he said, but the thought of dying alone, with no one to care
>
> for him, had added to his agony; but now, if I would stay with him until all was
>
> over, he could patiently await the summons. I promised him I would, and though
>
> he lingered all day, I did not leave him until nearly dark, when, with a short

prayer, commending his soul to God, he passed from time into eternity. (*Hospital*

Scenes, p. 29)

Why does death demand a witness? Why does the passage from "time into eternity" require an

escort? What need does this short prayer satisfy? The presence of an attendant facilitator, like a

midwife of death, ritualizes the event of death. Ritual forecloses the dangerous contingencies of

experience that are associated with the singularity of an event, like death, by wrapping it into a

foreordained and familiar structure.

The transition from life to death demands a witness. This act of testament is characteristic

of the sentimental deathbed tableau. As witness, our nurse-narrator plays several distinct roles.

First, she assumes a role as intimate confidant and shepherd. Second, she takes on a familial

role—one that is distinctly feminine—by standing in for the absent women of the family. She

also plays a historiographical role as a recorder of historical events. Finally, this witness is also

integral to the scene as an agent of transformation. As she transcribes the soldier's letter, not only

is she moved by its "love and patriotism," she transmits the "sad pathos" of the soldier's story in

both the soldier's letter to his mother and in her own first-person memoir of her nursing

experiences. The act of witnessing is thus imbricated with the production of a narrative that is at

once publicly historiographical and intimately emotive.

In scenes such as this, nurses bridge the divides between home and front, between the

living and the dead, and between "time" and "eternity." Our nurse-narrator in this scene has

assumed a number of roles: as a witness, she has participated in the soldier's transformative

moment in which his sins give way to his redemption and his death is made meaningful; as a

writer, she has consoled the boy's mother, as well as her reader, with the assurance that the

soldier's death may be understood in terms of the Saviour's martyrdom; and, finally, as a woman she greets the soldier's mother the next morning and ushers her to her son's grave.

Perhaps these texts revolve so much around death because the war's accumulation of dead bodies threatens to destabilize the solidity of the Northern cause. If, as I've suggested, these memoirs seek to bring order to the chaos of war and death by working through repeated scenes of mortality and consolation, then those moments when the pain of bereavement seems inconsolable provide a key to understanding what is at stake here. At times, irresolvable grief seems to exceed the capacity of the structures—both socio-political and spiritual—that would ensure that each soldier's death is of consequence. The examination in Chapter Four of strategies of mourning for the first Northern martyr of the Civil War argues that, because death instigates the potential crisis that life may be forfeited without purpose, it demands the most rigorous assurance that loss of life is in fact the site of terrific importance and is an occasion for profound reassurance. In nurses' memoirs like *Hospital Scenes after the Battle of Gettysburg*, the pervasiveness of death is almost always narratively resolved through the schema of the deathbed tableau which provides a structuring formula that assuages the anxieties raised by war's production of dead bodies.

Narratives in general, and sentimental plots in particular, are mechanically structured through distinct scenes that congregate and focus the themes and ideas of the story into detailed tableaux. Importantly, scenes structure narrative events toward a coherent meaning or message. In this case, endless suffering is transformed into a series of poignant moments, each of which demonstrates, in sometimes monotonous repetition, the primary sentimental values of humane sympathy, spiritual redemption, heroic sacrifice, and its pair, feminine caretaking. This is

accomplished through a kind of narrative suture. Suture is a mode of repair in which the two lips of a wound are re-joined; although a scar may remain, the skin repairs its continuous surface. In a narrative context, suture may be thought of as a parallel process through which the fragmentary nature of experience is integrated into a continuous narrative.

As sentimental texts, these narratives enfold their accounts of the war into a domesticated symbolic paradigm based on sympathetic identification and martyrdom. By shifting focus from the context of war to the localized space of the deathbed, the Northern cause is resolved and articulated through confrontation with the deaths of individual soldiers. The same structure of affect, sympathetic identification, and spiritual martyrdom that made Stowe's depiction of Little Eva's death so powerful in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* operates in these texts to transform death into an event laden with spiritual significance.

The narratives produced by nurse-chroniclers are rife with the kinds of deathbed tableaux that were very popular in antebellum sentimental novels and poetry. The deathbed tableau, as I have shown in previous chapters, was a familiar and powerful literary and cultural trope employed in these genres. Thematically, such scenes first expressed the emptiness exposed by loss and then compensated for this absence by invoking eternal life in heaven and the comforts of communal life on earth. Furthermore, as in the example of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, dying itself is a process that provides survivors with the opportunity to absorb something of the divine otherworldly wisdom that comes even to Stowe's young heroine, Little Eva. As in these antebellum examples, nurses' memoirs generally focused on the stories of the dying, the dead, and the survivors. Some narratives, like that of Holstein's *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* (1867), read at times like a series of deathbed tableaux of varying

lengths. What is finally at stake in these Northern nurses' memoirs is a great deal more than is ever explicitly stated: a reification of wartime experience into familiar patterns and idioms that implicitly connote a now-nostalgic world of wholeness and familiarity.

FIGURING COLLECTIVITY: THE REPRESENTATIVE NARRATIVE VOICE OF THE NURSE'S MEMOIR

> "[I]n these war times the hum drum life of Yankeedom has vanished, and the most prosaic feel some thrill of that excitement which stirs the nation's heart, and makes its capital a camp of hospitals." (Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*, p. 35)

If the deathbed tableau provides a structure through which these accounts frame soldiers' deaths within a broader context of patriotic meaning and eternal life, the mechanics of narration are of equal importance in how these memoirs communicate at the level of form. By deflecting any claim to authorship, many nurses' memoirs responded to a situation shared by most women writers in the nineteenth-century United States. Ultimately, this strategy formed part of how these texts positioned themselves in political terms as part of a Northern public whose collaborative work of mourning moved from the particularity of deathbed scenes to the generality of a national community. Anonymity functioned not only in gendered terms to preclude unseemly feminine behavior, it also functioned in the same way that tombs for unknown soldiers raise the specificity of the individual to the level of a shared generality. In both ways, these memoirs constructed imagined relationships to their readership that participated in larger imagined political contexts.

Anonymity, Pseudonyms, and the Hazards of Feminine Authorship

"I must regret the necessity of any mention of self; but the nature of the subject requires this, and without it, very frequently the point to be established would be lost. I have omitted many incidents from this very objection, but it would be unjust to the cause which I have at heart to do more, and I must therefore trust that the reader will believe me, when I say that any such allusion arises from necessity, not taste." (Anonymous, *Notes of Hospital Life from November, 1861, to August, 1863*, p. xiii-xiv)

Authorship held certain dangers for women writing works that were more than simply memoirs of private life. Authorship always exists in relationship to authority. Authorship posed a particular danger for mid-nineteenth-century women who must avoid seeming to attract attention to themselves. The putative causes for these texts were thus expressed in broad terms: the Patriot Daughters of Lancaster and others sought to raise funds, and many carried an opening epigraph declaring the soldiers as the proper narrative subjects and deserving objects of praise. Emily Souder, for example, reiterated this commitment of her text to broader causes in both her title, *Leaves from the Battle of Gettysburg: A Series of Letters from a Field Hospital and National Poems*, and in her book's epigraph:

To

the Defenders of our Flag,

on land and sea,

who have fought with unparalleled bravery and

suffered with unequalled fortitude,

and to the memory

of those who have laid down their lives

on the altar of their country,

these pages are gratefully inscribed.

(*Leaves from the Battle of Gettysburg*, title page)

This epigraph dedicates the book to the work of memorializing the death. In this way, Souder frames her own memories as part of the collective accounting of the nation's (specifically the North's) experiences during the war. This context provides an acceptable rationale for publication of a nurse's experiences in the hospitals.

Anna Morris Holstein, writing under the pseudonym "Mrs H," presents the rationale for her nursing narrative by presenting herself as an unexceptional chronicler of hospital life:

> This simple story of hospital scenes, and the unpretending sketches of the few brave soldiers to which they allude, is arranged from the meager notes which were hurriedly written at the time they occurred, when there was not the most remote idea of ever preparing them for publication.
>
> The events of the war are "graven as with an iron pen" upon my memory. To preserve some slight memento of them for friends at home, was the primary object of these notes: to gratify the same persons they are now grouped together.
>
> (*Three Years*, p. v)

By assuming this posture and by adopting the pseudonym "Mrs H," Holstein avoids any semblance of immodesty. In doing so, she can claim a degree importance for her text that does not transgress the boundaries of femininity by seeming to draw attention to herself. This performative act of self-effacement displaces the focus of the text from its author to its subject matter: the heroic and martyred soldiers in the battlefield hospitals. The tension evident in this passage reveals the boundary that these texts traverse between the modesty demanded by prototypical American femininity and participation in public life through publication of nursing

memoirs. First, by translating her relationship to these events from one of participant to one of chronicler, Holstein presents herself as merely a component part of the hospital setting that forms a backdrop for the staging of the soldiers' heroism. This positioning is typical of this and other memoirs which, with titles like *Hospital Sketches*, *Hospital Pencillings*, *Leaves from the Battlefield*, and *Hospital Scenes*, place the nurse-memoirist in the neutral position of utilitarian hand both as a nurse and as a memoirist.

Such modes of deflecting the act of authorship and the authority that it implied were standard for writers of memoirs. As such, they shared a concern that some of their predecessors had solved through pseudonymous publication. A number of mid-century women writers published their work pseudonymously, including the prominent novelist Susan Warner (as Elizabeth Wetherell) and the columnist and novelist Sarah Payson Willis (later Parton, as Fanny Fern). When her identity emerged soon after her pseudonymous publication of the thinly-veiled autobiographical novel, *Ruth Hall* (1854), she was harshly criticized for her lack of filial loyalty in her candid depiction of family and acquaintances. In this case, a pseudonym did not provide Willis with a reasonable defense; rather, her adoption of another name became another dimension of her guilt. Numerous less well-known women published stories, poems, and other pieces to gift books or other publications under pseudonyms or anonymously.

For nurses, the need to protect themselves from seeming self-interested or self-aggrandizing was strong enough that a number of women refused to take part in Frank Moore's 1866 *Women of the War: Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* even when their contributions were solicited. Moore himself helped solve this problem by appealing to soldiers themselves to write testimonials attesting to their treatment by the nurses. This served as one form of protection for

nurses who did allow their biographies and descriptions of their wartime nursing to appear in Moore's book. In many ways, the story of these memoirists fits into a larger story of the turbulent emergence of women into the literary marketplace in the nineteenth century.

The manufacture of a neutral first-person position has political as well as narrative implications. The nurses' dedications and careful modesty anticipate and attempt to frame the relationship between the reader and the text. Holstein's narrative opens with an appeal to its audience as a plural populace of readers who, together, make up a faction that is more than simply readerly; it is also political:

> When the first sounds of war were heard, and there dimly dawned the startling
>
> fact that traitors were imperiling the life of the nation, we all remember how
>
> thousands rushed to arms at our country's call, eager to proffer aid in this her hour
>
> of need. City, village, and country alike gave, as their first offering, their young
>
> men, the pride and strength of the land. (*Three Years*, p. 9)

The text opens up its field of discourse by moving quickly from the specificity of the nurse touched by war to the macrocosmic dimension of the nation as a whole. Like the passage from particularity into collectivity, the careful neutrality of Holstein's narrative positioning of her authorship invites her readership to imagine itself as part of a national community.

Likewise, in this passage as throughout Holstein's narrative, the nation is often figured in terms of the physical land—precisely that which is materially contested—with such insistence that "land" seems to be the most stable signifier for "nation." The "pride and strength of the land" proves to be its "young men" who, "vowing true allegiance to the best government the world has ever yet beheld . . . have sealed it [on many far-off battle-fields] with their blood"

(*Three Years*, pp. 9-10). As in President Lincoln's memorial address at Gettysburg, this language imagistically attaches these soldiers to the very land that raised them and to which they fall again in death. In both cases, it is death or blood that seals, or consecrates, the meaning of the struggle that begets death.

The Destruction of the Sentimental Idyll

All around was in the height of summer beauty; the birds sang in the clear morning sky, and the stately hills looked down on orchards laden with their crimson fruit. Though late in the season, the harvest was just yielding to the sickle. All here was beauty, quietness, and peace, whilst all beyond was desolation, destruction, and war. Here we listened to the sweet songs of birds, whilst within a few miles, the air was laden with shrieks of the wounded and groans of the dying. (*Hospital Scenes*, pp. 13-14)

This passage calls up a classic dichotomy of war writing: the fecundity of peace that contrasts with the destructiveness of battle.[26] It describes the memory of an idyllic scene in the Cumberland Valley through which the volunteer nurses of the Patriot Daughters of Lancaster pass on their way to minister to soldiers just as Gettsyburg is getting underway in June, 1863. This contrast dramatizes a link between the loss of human life and the destruction of lands. Because the territories of the United States are partly constitutive of the imagined national community, their destruction here thus calls up not only the deaths of soldiers, but also the fragmentation of the contiguous space and the imagined community of the nation. The expansive image of the nation while westward extension began before the war legislated the rights of

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[26] These images and their history in war writing are discussed extensively in Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

Indians, states' rights, and land allocation based on an image of the nation's eventual development that far outstripped its actual land holdings even by the time of the Civil War. A number of conflicts resulted from settling new territories, from Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831) to John Brown's activities in Kansas (beginning in 1855) and his raid at Harper's Ferry (1859). Likewise, numerous compromises attempted to avoid sectional violence from the Missouri Compromise (1820) to the Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Act. These moments represented ruptures in the myth of a co-extensive imagined nation whose territories correlated to one United States, even if the "United States" were still grammatically plural in the antebellum period. If the image of national identity was expansive, then its territorial reality was ever-changing and ever-conflicted. By the end of the first year of war, the continuity in time and contiguity of territory of the United States, not to mention its cogency as a shared idea in the minds of its inhabitants, was severely fractured.

The idyllic imagery of this passage thus pertains less to reality and more to a nostalgic fantasy that the United States were indeed peacefully united before their fall into disruption and violence. In a sense, this is the idyll before the fall that the United States might be imagined to have been before the war. As such, it calls out to an imagined community that persists to the moment of observation but which is endangered. Those who remain on peaceful lands are either removed from the battles that are passing through the states, or they are on the cusp of experiencing "desolation, destruction, and war."

Natural beauty is here linked to the ripeness of fruit. This is not a romantic, sublime and humbling vista of rugged splendor. Rather, it is a view, seen from an imagined distance, of the beauty and peace of a productive relationship between a large, varied landscape and human

labor. While the sublime imposes a sense of awe that overpowers the spectator, the beauty of this scene is on the same scale as its observers. The effect is to depict a harmonious relationship between the land and its human inhabitants. As a productive, cultivated landscape, this vista is emblematic of the cultivation of wilderness to make room for independence and freedom that formed a significant aspect of the mythology of American settlement. From a point high above and at a distance from the scene below, our narrator removes us to a position that encompasses both the residual sentimental idyll and the signs of its destruction, signalling less a passage from one stage to another but instead suggesting that the idyll remains even as war takes its toll. This spirit of continuity despite the danger of national fragmentation recurs in the Civil War nurses' narratives through several interrelated tropes: as witnesses who will outlive the war, nurses assure a connection between the nation's past and its uncertain future; as letter-writers, nurses repair broken familial connections between the battlefield and the homefront; as midwives to the regenerative work of mourning, nurses transform death from an endpoint into a passage; and as narrators, nurse-chroniclers assure the perpetuity of the story of the nation's trial by fire.

The unifying image of the idyll corresponds to a spirit of nostalgic reunification in these texts. Despite the Unionist sentiments that most Northern nurse-narrators express, their collective vision is generally inclusive of Southerners whose aggression remains an intra-national struggle. Significantly, the Northern hospitals were the only places where both Northern and Southern soldiers consistently cohabitated without fighting each other:

> About one-third of the camp were rebels; this proportion was almost uniformly
>
> kept up; rebel ladies from Baltimore and other places were permitted to come and
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> wait upon their own wounded; as matron, it was part of my duties to attend to the

distribution of delicacies, etc.; I have waited upon them hour after hour, as kindly

as I ever did upon our own loyal men. All this was before I had been among those

who were starved in Southern prisons; after having seen them, the task might have

been a difficult one. The orders were imperative in the hospital: no difference was

permitted in the treatment of the two. (*Three Years*, p. 44)

While hospitals were expected to practice tolerance and to assure equal treatment Holstein recounts the ways in which this principle was repeatedly challenged. At times, the tension of forced cohabitation led hospital staff to remove offending rebel soldiers from Union soldiers who complained that they had "'enlisted to kill rebels' and would not have them under the same shelter" (*Three Years*, p. 44). At the same time, several Union soldiers who had been forced into service by desperate Southern armies found themselves released upon arrival with other wounded rebel soldiers in Holstein's hospital. Because the hospital is a cooperative community of convalescence, the particularities of its diverse population must be subordinated to the survival of the collective. Thus, while nurses including Holstein describe abiding tensions, it rarely erupted into violence in these hospitals.

While the hospital could not, even for the most egalitarian nurse, represent a space of idealized democratic egalitarianism in which difference can truly be erased, it was often a unique place where differences could exist in unprecedented arrangements. Holstein tells of eight hundred rebel soldiers brought in as Union prisoners under guard by a black regiment, "the most humiliating thing to *them* that could have occurred" (*Three Years*, p. 72). This reversal draws the attention of a fascinated hospital staff that gawks while "one of our men, recognizing his former owner, ran up with a pleased look to speak to Massa Charles, but he refused to recognize him"

(*Three Years*, p. 72). Even if Massa Charles refuses to recognize his former slave, their audience recognizes precisely what is happening at the frontier between the North and the South. The Massa may choose not to recognize his former slave, but, in this marginal space, the freedman's recognition has the implicit power to compound his humiliation. Like all irony, this scene turns on the meeting of two familiar elements—master and slave—under radically new circumstances that reveal the reality underlying a former relationship. Mastery and enslavement turn out to belong not to a natural order of things, but rather to a socio-economically constructed hierarchy based on an ideology of a natural order based on difference. Significantly, such a scene is very unlikely anywhere but in this liminal realm. The North obeyed its own hierarchies even if slavery was not part of that system. Ruptures like war routinely disturb settled social orders in ways that give rise to realms where relationships may be inverted. For those inhabiting Civil War hospitals, the settled hierarchies of both the North and the South lost the force of determining the *status quo* such that they could become the setting for radical new possibilities even before the larger national context would be ready to routinely imagine such new scenes.

In *Hospital Pencillings*, Elvira Powers recounts a surgeon's tale of a Union soldier who has ensured the survival of a rebel soldier from the same battle by covering him with his own coat and refusing to be treated first. In this case, both soldiers lost limbs to amputation, and both died. Soon after, this surgeon continued, he came across a similar situation in which the roles were reversed when a Southern soldier refused treatment until a companion Northern soldier brought in with him was attended to first, even to the extent of refusing morphine to allay his pain in the meantime. These soldiers both recovered. In a third tale related by the same surgeon, a Southern soldier hears a Northern soldier reading the Bible to himself in his hospital bed and

asks to be placed next to the Northern soldier if nobody objects. Nobody does. These three tales, related by a surgeon to Powers, present a balanced narrative in which heroism is attached to the values of egalitarian humanism. But such values, for both Holstein and Powers, survive only insofar as resources permit. As Holstein notes that had she known the condition of Union prisoners she may have found caring for Southern soldiers to be more difficult, Powers repeatedly criticizes the government's insistence on moving even very ill Union soldiers out of Southern hospitals in order to make room for rebel soldiers injured during Sherman's fiery descent toward Atlanta.[27]

Imagining the National Collective

In the same way that the nation may be imagined simultaneously to contain its idyllic integrity and scenes of that idyll's destruction, the very war that brings about such destruction and fragmentation also induces an experience of purposeful unification for its (Northern) inhabitants. Thus, the very idea of war was, within these contexts, contiguous with an experience of unification. In her narrative, Alcott makes note of the "thrill of that excitement which stirs the nation's heart, and makes its capital a camp of hospitals" (*Hospital Sketches*, p. 35). This city of hospitals in the nation's capitol, working to rehabilitate the injured within the geographic heart of the nation, could almost be imagined to be working to rehabilitate the injuries to the geography

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[27] On January 22, 1865, Elvira Powers noted that the Jefferson Hospital (Jeffersonville, Indiana) where she was working was receiving large transfers of soldiers by boat from southern hospitals where Sherman determined space must be made for rebel soldiers: "'War is cruel, and cannot be refined,' was the defensive shot fired by Sherman at Atlanta. Still it seems a pity that men should be sent out from Nashville hospitals, in a dying condition, to make way for rebel prisoners. Why could not some private mansion be used for that purpose, whose owners are known to have taken the oath merely to save their property?" (*Hospital Pencillings*, p. 161).

of the United States.[28] Such a thrill of excitement linked to the vitality of the nation suggests that war, even a civil war, mobilizes a sense of unity and purpose. Particularly within the unique space of the hospital, the possibility for dual, seemingly opposed, realities to exist at once would seem to have been not just possible but necessary.

The disruption of normalcy, particularly imagined as a transgression of sacred domesticity, opens the story of the anonymous author of *Hospital Scenes after the Battle of Gettysburg*. This nurse-narrator, writing on the part of "The Patriot Daughters of Lancaster," dramatizes the imposition of the arrival of war on the routine daily life. The onset of war signals a shift from the comforts and familiarity of private life into an immediate preoccupation with civil order as the inhabitants of Lancaster, Pennsylvania act "first, to secrete everything they could from the invaders, and then to secrete themselves, or at least to send the timid members of their families to more distant cities" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 3).

Following the arrival of the war as a chaotic interruption of the security of domesticity, descriptions of the self-preservationist measures taken by some in the town gives way to a communitarian impulse. The danger of nearby invaders recontextualizes the stage of narrated experience from the mundanity of domestic predictability (entertaining friends at home outside the "usually quiet city" of Lancaster) and opens up the stage of shared historical experience. Grammatically, this shift is marked by the shift in the subject from the first-person singular "I" to the plural "we" as the affective toll of the crisis is registered: "We really began to tremble" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 4). As troops are called up by the governor, "we had little time to think of

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[28] When the war began, Washington was still a relatively undeveloped area with limited hospital facilities. As the war got underway, regimental hospital tents swelled with soldiers sent north from field hospitals at Southern battlefields. By 1862, a large complex of hospitals cared for around 20,000 wounded soldiers. By the end of the war about 50 hospitals had been established in Washington, from the large Armory Square complex to small taverns and hotels relegated to medical use.

ourselves; there were others to be cared for" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 4).

The disruption of predictability is countered by a collective generalization of the feminine and masculine separate spheres. As regiments of local young men are organized and furnished from community supplies, women gather and organize supplies to sustain and care for them. Masculine and feminine identities become generalized as the women compensate for young men "who had neither mothers nor sisters to interest themselves in their behalf" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 4). Community is defined through the retention, on a mass scale, of predictable categories of identity that assure the productivity and continuity of that community. Caring for others above oneself might the very definition of participation in a sentimental community. The accession of individuality to the demands of the collective also articulates and strengthens the separation between what is inside and what is outside. In this text, emphasis on gathering together—of supplies, of individuals—confirms the separation and implied moral disparity between the peaceful town and the invading rebels. While such tropes and habits of narration are quite common, this text makes a choice like that of so many others in opting to emphasize the dispersal of individual identities into the consolidating foundation of collectivity that assures an ideational, if not actual, protection against invasion from the outside.

That collectivity is a prime thematic and moral preoccupation in this and many other nurses' narratives is hardly surprising considering the major issues of the war. What is at stake here may be seen as a microcosmic expression of the broadest problem confronting Northerners seeking to articulate a morally defensible position against Southern cries for secession based on states' rights. This debate had circled around a tension between the rights of the individual, or community, and the limitations that a centralized government could place upon those rights in

the name of perpetuity and national unity as articulated by Lincoln in his First Inaugural Address.

In a very reduced sense, for Northerners individual freedoms could only be assured through the protection of the central government whose adherence to the founding principles of the Constitution provide the force of money and power that guarantees the ability of individuals to exercise these rights. Therefore, the secession of the South would not only undermine the basis of money and power that a centralized government requires, but would more dangerously seem to delegitimize the constitutional foundations of that government. For Southerners, by contrast, the rights of individuals and discrete factions are meaningless if they do not allow those who've entered into a mutual agreement (as between states) to withdraw from that agreement once the central government adopts the policies of one faction (like the abolition of slavery) and attempts to enforce their generalization upon all factions (if not in the South, then certainly in the open western territories). Imagining collectivity provides a magical solution that avoids the thorny problem of who is included or excluded; at the same time, it provides a stabilizing phantasmatic national community. In this way, as much as through the language of sentimental mourning, nurses' narratives imaginatively sutured the fragmentary literary and geographic surfaces by making the soldier's body co-extensive with the national body politic.

Temporal Displacement and Imaginative Re-Union

If national union is imagined nostalgically in antebellum, pre-secessionist terms, then the rebel soldiers represent not only the dangers of battle but also the encroachment of the dividing line between North and South into secure territory. This problem is often figured in imagery that contrasts pastoral peacefulness against scenes of nature laid waste. While nurses certainly

witnessed some degree of violence, including participation in the wartime activity of watching battles from afar, their depictions of violence are almost always communicated through static scenes of nature in pre- and post-lapsarian conditions. The thematization of the arrival of the invading rebels as a disruption of normalcy imagines historical events as antithetical to a perpetual and insulated present moment outside the sweep of events. The narrative's progression extends the theme of chaotic disruption by evoking the classic conflict between nature's idyll and man's violent destructiveness. This scene, though early in the text, recounts only the bloody detritus of battle:

It looked very lovely in the distance, surrounded as it is by hills and groves, and every element of natural beauty. And as we gazed upon the white tents of the different Corps' Hospitals, glistening in the bright rays of a July sun, as far as the eye could reach, the scene became intensely interesting. Here, where now wave upon wave of sorrow rolled over the suffering thousands that lay in these tents crippled or dying; here, upon these very fields and valleys, had stood but a few days before, like a dense forest, the dark masses of contending hosts in fiercest conflict; here, where nature had put on her gaudiest livery, and vied to show forth her Creator's glory, man, in his perverseness, had converted this lovely scene into a veritable Aceldama—a field of blood. (*Hospital Scenes*, pp. 15-16)

The white of the hospitals under the "bright rays of a July sun" contrasts against the "dark masses" whose imprint on the scene is marked as the "wave upon wave of sorrow" of the soldiers overshadows the formerly pastoral fields and valleys. The stakes of such a ravaging of nature are made clear here in these persistent waves. This sorrowful land is precisely the point: its status and definition are suspended and potentially unclear in the course of a prolonged war

that effectively highlights the tenuousness, rather than any assuredness, of the proposition of a unified nation of states.

If the nurses in the white tents attend to repairing the physical effects of battle, the nurse who recounts her surveillance of the outcomes of war—at this narrative moment through a panoramic view of the battlefield—seeks to console these waves of sorrow. In part, the broader danger that the arrival of the invading troops signifies is nullified through this narrative's decontextualization of the experiences it recounts. Although the events that open the narrative take place just before the Battle of Gettysburg in June 1863, nearly two years into the war, no single preceding event introduces this narrative. The war seems to begin the moment the "expected enemy" threatens to cross the bridge at nearby Columbia (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 5). It is as if the community had remained sequestered in the "lovely June evening" until the disturbance of invaders crossing the nearby Susquehanna River that echoes the crossing of the Potomac from the South into the North (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 3).

At moments, the experience of witnessing death during wartime seems almost unendurable. Scenes and descriptions of body-littered battlefields or families desperately seeking to recover the bodies of fallen soldiers confirm that not all experiences of death and mourning could be effectively consoled or contextualized. The narrator of *Hospital Scenes After the Battle of Gettysburg* describes gazing upon the "lovely spot" of Cemetery Hill and viewing the "havoc" of the battlefield:

> Here we gazed with overpowering awe upon those scenes that will become classic
>
> in the history of the world, to which the feet of travelers from other climes will
>
> reverently bend, as they now visit Austerlitz, Wagram, Marengo, or Waterloo . . .

And then, these scenes themselves, who can adequately describe them? Houses demolished, . . . artillery wagons crushed, broken muskets scattered in every direction, unused cartridges in immense numbers, balls of all kinds, ram-rods and bayonets, bits of clothing, belts, gloves, knapsacks, letters in great quantities, all lying promiscuously on the field; dead horses in great number, some torn almost asunder by cannon balls, some pierced in the side by grape shot, and others with their legs completely shot away . . . And then many of the human dead, whose mutilated bodies, still unburied, were lying in all positions. Some with their hands gently folded on the breasts, others reclining gracefully on their elbows, and others still leaning against trees, stumps or stones, as if wrapped in the arms of sleep, and given to sweet dreams" (*Hospital Scenes*, pp. 18-19).

The tatters of human life that are arranged in this passage are representative of the devastation to individuals and of the presence of dead human bodies that have not yet been surveyed by the narrative eye/voice. Lying "promiscuously," these object-remains suggest a distinctly human moral ambiguity. Just as the scene is introduced through a contrast between its designation as a "lovely spot" and the counter description "bloody field," the passage closes by moving back from the Gothic to the Romantic so that the human bodies described at first as "mutilated" are ultimately imagined to be posed "gently" and "gracefully" "as if wrapped in the arms of sleep, and given to sweet dreams." It is as if through narration, the devastations of the field can be first described and then revised within a new context of embrace, sleep, and transcendence. This embrace evokes a kind of containment, as if being seen and revered by the narrator can itself assure the restoration of these bodies' humanity through an exchange of feelings, which reflects

the heroism of the dead onto the living and, at the same time, reflects the sympathetic communion of the living back onto the dead. Indeed, these "sweet dreams" could accurately refer to the sort of nostalgic re-vision that the narrator conjures to console the ravages and ruptures that these bodies represent.

The rhetorical mode of simple descriptive listing, as if to attempt to account for a gathering of discrete elements that cannot be taken in all at once, is classically elegiac and seems to demonstrate the impossibility of taking in or describing such horrifying chaos. As in the earlier examples presented here, the narrator assumes a position above and removed from the scene with a sweeping gaze that avoids a visual fixation on disturbing details. Therein lies a tension between the wholeness of a panoramic gaze and the fragments that fill its scope. This perspective is immediately integrated into an historical narrativity. Like the assumption of a panoramic gaze, this recourse to historiography contextualizes this scene that is disturbing in its immanence and in the future it suggests by placing it within a narrative that runs from the past through to the future. Anchored by this narrative through line, this scene of destruction is refigured as an evanescent moment rather than as a defacing of the idyll that opens the passage from *Hospital Scenes* cited above.

This narrative means of surmounting the disturbing realities of the moment by encapsulating them within a larger temporal or spatial context parallels the strategy of sentimental mourning by which the finality of death is overcome by the promise of immortality. This parallel bears out when, at the close of the above passage, this scene turns quickly from mutilation back toward peaceful repose, "as if wrapped in the arms of sleep, and given to sweet dreams." This is a body that patently cannot be sleeping, and it is a body whose inability to

dream is evident at first glance. Dismemberment of this sort removes the possibility to imagine even wishfully a corpse to be merely asleep. The aesthetics of a peaceful death are thus supplied narratively where they are lacking imagistically. The warm embrace of sleep imagines the body to be whole again, and the passage furthermore attributes to these bodies the subjectivity implied by dreaming. The dream, however, is not dreamed by dead soldiers; rather, it is the fantasy of the speaker by whose artful narrativity destruction and fragmentation are quickly altered from promiscuous disorganization, "lying in all positions" to an integrated and ordered canvas. As such, not only are the bodies of the soldiers magically transformed, but the implications of such dramatic destruction to the sentimental idyll are bypassed through recourse to that narrative stand-by of American sentimentalism: the narrativity of transcendence. Transcendence of the material world applies a logic of salvation and a return to divine order that, through its promise of a coherent futurity, assuages the cataclysms and fragmentations of the moment.

Within this narrative schema, the landscape is static and inexorable. Although it shows the evidence of destruction, the land itself is perpetual. The viewer's "awe" combined with the repeated returns to the loveliness of the natural surroundings, in contrast to the context of sorrow and mechanistic destruction, evoke the Romantic sublime in combination with a darker turn toward the Gothic.[29] Through the figure of spiritual resurrection, the landscape itself is also

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[29] While the Romantic tradition fed directly into the American sentimental tradition, the Gothic mode is also present but in a very particular strain. American Studies scholars of the past twenty years have shown how forcefully the Gothic strain is present in American literature from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries in close connection with haunted ruminations on the fraught foundations of United States national history. If the Gothic represents some version of the return of the repressed, the repressed matter in American letters during this period was very often linked to the suppressed rights of slaves and Native Americans. Such suppressions were necessary in order for the nation to be founded in the image of the perpetuation of the "city upon a hill" as defined by John Winthrop. Gothic imagery of the land, therefore, in texts by Thomas Jefferson, Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville (especially in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*) provide precursors to this view of the land as representative of nationhood in both its splendor and its hauntedness. As Julia Stern notes in *The Plight of Feeling*, "The melodramatic luxuriation in heightened states of feeling and expression that characterizes sentimental

regenerated as death becomes meaningful. A human connection, which begins to pull the dead from their scene of chaotic destruction, like the "bloody field" of Aceldama cited in an earlier passage, is forged that restores the humanity that, in turn, enables transcendence. These bodies, like that of Ellsworth, bear the traces of humanity through the act of collective witnessing and mourning that enables collective transcendence and unity in the face of destruction and chaos. The perpetuity of the land figures the perpetuity of its people.

This symbolic process is localized in the next passage and is acted out in more detail when a group of nurses, who have just arrived to begin their work, pass by a group of mourners gathered around a fresh grave. Prominent in this group is a mother who demands to see her son's body to confirm that he is, in fact, dead. The group is opening one grave after another without success. She looks to the nurses "as though, if we could do nothing for her in her deep affliction, we might have some word of sympathy or consolation" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 19). The nurses offer solace, as almost every consolation manual of the time directed,[30] by "pointing her to Him who had said: 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee;' and by directing her attention to the peaceful scenery and quiet beauty that reigned around, said to her that if any of our sons had fallen here, we should willingly leave them to their rest, on this memorable spot,

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narrative often veils a brutal—if reprobated—form of violence and rage. Herein lies the connection between sentimental and gothic modes in the late-eighteenth-century American novel: the two exist in hierarchical relation, like geological strata, the gothic bedrock masked by a sentimental topsoil" (*The Plight of Feeling*, pp. 8-9).

[30] Consolation manuals were publications that usually included selections of poetry, first-person narratives, and sometimes images or overtly religious commentary. Their stated purpose was always to provide consolation to the bereaved, which usually meant those mourning the loss of a loved one but which sometimes addressed the "afflicted" or individuals who themselves faced death. Solace was offered chiefly through assurances that death was only a passage to transcendent life where the burdens and sinfulness of earthly life could be left behind. Mothers, in particular, are often chided in these manuals for focusing on their own experiences of loss instead of gratefully imagining their beloved children seated beside God in glorious, everlasting joy. In this one way, if not in many others, these manuals seem to bear the traces of an American Puritan approach to death as the domain of divine intervention upon which we ought not to dwell too much.

until the resurrection morn" (*Hospital Scenes*, p. 19).

CHAPTER FOUR:
BINDING A NATION'S WOUNDS:
EMBALMING AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MAY, 1861

> [F]rom these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
>
> -Abraham Lincoln, "Address at Gettysburg," November 19, 1863.

When John W. Forney of the *Philadelphia Press* recounted the funerary exhibition of the first Union martyr, Colonel Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth, in the East Room of the Presidential Mansion, he presented this static scene as a dramatic deathbed tableau reminiscent of such archetypal moments of antebellum sentimental literary mourning as the death of Little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 sentimental bestseller, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

> While gazing upon the scene and listening to the religious services over the bier
>
> of poor Ellsworth, many peculiar reflections suggested themselves. The most
>
> interesting figure of the group was General Scott. . . . Before him lay the dead
>
> body of one, almost a boy in years, who had died for his country; around him
>
> gathered the great ones of the land. There was the President, still a young man,
>
> with Mrs. Lincoln, whose grief could not be concealed; on his right, the Secretary
>
> of War, not yet sixty, and in the prime of health; leaning over the back of General
>
> Scott's chair, the Premier, Mr. William H. Seward, looking almost youthful at his

side . . . (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p.159)

As in the antebellum sentimental tradition, the corpse lies at the center of a circle of mourners whose congregation around and focus upon the martyred body confirm its unique significance. While Little Eva's fevered rosy cheeks represent her pure innocence and redemptive faith, Ellsworth's youth and patriotism are emphasized in Forney's description. The meaning of his death derives primarily from the context of commemoration here: the young man who died for his country (a decidedly fraught term in 1861) is surrounded by the grand political architects of the Union's survival**.** These "champions of the flag" as Forney calls them, ranging from Commodore Paulding of the Navy to the fiery abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, are enumerated here so that the collectivity of the mourners becomes the focus of the piece.[31] While Forney's tableau emphasizes the mourners, the character of the deceased is hardly a concern. Ellsworth is important insofar as he is the occasion for the political and military leadership of the Union to participate collaboratively in one of the most potent rituals of mid-nineteenth-century sentimental American culture.

This set piece is exemplary for its implicit reliance on the trope of the transformative power of mourning as the themes of death and grief, countered by youth and country, are ultimately resolved in an uplifting confirmation of the moral justness and fortitude of the Union cause:

And yet, upon the aged shoulders of this one man [General Scott] what an empire

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[31] Sumner's presence here signifies the triumph of abolitionist politics in Washington following the debates of 1850s over the introduction of slavery to western territories. Sumner's body had survived a savage physical attack in 1856 when Preston Brooks, the South Carolina Representative in the House, beat the senator senseless with his cane in the Senate Chamber. Macaulay's comment at the time that in any nation but America such an event would seem to augur civil war portended the violence of war that Ellsworth's death marked while also pointing to the inconceivability of such an outcome just five years earlier. Ultimately, both Sumner and Ellsworth became symbolic victims of southern aggression.

rests! As the clergyman prayed and preached for the country, for victory for the right, for strength and virtue in our rulers, and implored God to so govern that not one act of crime, like that at Fort Sumter, or the Baltimore bloodshed, or the Ellsworth assassination, should disgrace our cause, the battle-scarred veteran raised his gray head and seemed to feel that all is well, and that the end would be glorious as the most earnest patriot could desire. (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 159)

As Ellsworth's corpse lay in state first in the East Room, then in New York City, then in Albany, and finally in his home town of Mechanicville, New York, a number of witnesses published accounts of Ellsworth's memorialization for local and national periodicals. Furthermore, a number of songs were published in broadsheet form and sold widely. Each of these focused on the kind of rallying cry expressed by the clergyman in Forney's description cited above. Like Forney's published account of the first significant memorial service for Ellsworth, the widespread discourse in periodicals throughout the Union provided a way for northern Americans to collaborate in constructing the story of the war's causes and meaning.

Despite the significance of this event in May 1861, histories of the period have largely ignored this event and its broad impact on American culture both in 1861 and throughout the war. In this chapter, I show that our failure as historiographers to account for how the memorialization of Ellsworth both manifested and influenced cultural modes of mourning in mid-nineteenth-century America leaves a significant gap in our understanding of both the private and public lives of Americans in 1861. My examination of this event reveals a distinct and central link in the cultural imagination between mourning and imaginative constructions of

national identity at a moment when northerners were experiencing the vertiginous sensation of the Union's fragmentation. I show how northern reactions to this event emerged from collective anxiety about the loss of "that vital element of perpetuity" identified by Lincoln as his primary national concern in his First Inaugural Address less than three months before Ellsworth's death (March 4, 1861).

Although this colorful leader of the New York Fire Zouaves[32] was not the first Union soldier to die in the Civil War, he is often cited as the war's first casualty. But because he was the first victim of southern aggression, his name quickly became a compelling rallying cry for northerners.[33] Ellsworth's "assassination" as Forney terms it seemed to exemplify northern ill-treatment at the hands of southern brutality. For this reason, he was an ideal candidate for symbolic martyrdom. On May 24, 1861, just one day after the voters of the state of Virginia passed a referendum approving secession from the Union, the New York Fire Zouaves were ordered to lead the campaign of Union troops into Alexandria, Virginia. Though the Zouaves were assigned the mission of severing the telegraph wires that connected Virginia to the Confederacy, Ellsworth quickly diverted his mission in order to cut down a Confederate flag positioned on the roof of the Marshall Boarding House whose plain visibility from the White

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[32] The New York Fire Zouaves were named in honor of the New York fire houses from which a great part of the regiment derived.

[33] Several soldiers had been killed before Ellsworth's campaign in Alexandria. Two deaths occurred when a gun exploded during the 100 gun salute marking the Union troops' withdrawal from Fort Sumter: Private Daniel Hough died immediately and Private Edward Gallway died that night. On May 16, rioters attacked the 6th Massachusetts Regiment as it marched through Baltimore resulting in the deaths of four soldiers and twelve Baltimore residents (McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 285). Just a few days before Ellsworth's death, Colonel Abram S. Vosburgh of the 71st New York Regiment died of an attack of "bleeding of the lungs" unrelated to combat on May 20 ("The Secession Rebellion," *New York Times*, May 21, p. 1). Like Ellsworth's body, Vosburgh's was taken to the Navy Yard in Washington. Vosburgh's military funeral took place at the Navy Yard and was attended by President Lincoln. While Vosburgh's death did generate some press, it did not produce nearly the degree of attention as did Ellsworth's death. Most journalists didn't bother to report on Vosburgh's cause of death,: a very unheroic bodily frailty that led More importantly, while one New York times article did report on and briefly cite the eulogy Vosburgh received at his home church in New York, press coverage did not memorialize Vosburgh as it would a few days later for Ellsworth.

House and much of Washington had been noted by President Lincoln and others. With a small detachment of men and the *New York Tribune* reporter Edward H. House, Ellsworth was descending from the roof when the proprietor James W. Jackson shot him through the chest. Jackson was, in turn, quickly shot by Ellsworth's comrade and old friend Francis E. Brownell. Almost instantly these two deaths became emblematic for each side of the stakes of the impending conflict.[34]

For northerners, Ellsworth's death signaled the onset of war and the shaking of national foundations. To the extent that the North defined the nation in terms of union/Union, open hostility *clarified* the fissures of intra-national fragmentation. The horror of civil war is that it codifies the fragmentation of the nation that is no longer a whole at war with itself; but rather, becomes two separate wholes at war with each other. More concretely, however, impending *hostilities* heralded the inevitable byproduct of an impending war: death. I argue here that death always haunts the opening stages of armed conflict by implicitly challenging the ideology that inaugurates violent confrontation. Deaths are irrevocable and demand to be incorporated into a context of meaning that will compensate for the absences they produce.

Ellsworth's case was especially unique because it inaugurated the wartime practice of embalming the dead. While this technique was touted as a pragmatic solution to the problem of returning the bodies of dead soldiers to their homes, in Ellsworth's case, physical embalmment served a host of other ideological and symbolic purposes in May 1861. In the same way that antebellum sentimental culture fetishized the corpse as the sacred center of mourning ritual, Ellsworth's body became an icon of the northern cause and a focus of widespread attention. This

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[34] While northerners hailed Ellsworth and denigrated the southern scoundrel who had killed him, southerners raised a fund for the widow and children of "the martyr Jackson" (Randall 273).

preoccupation with the physical remains of the dead, I argue, functioned symbolically to establish and stabilize the assertion of northern unity in the face of national division by attaching ideology to the material symbol of the body.

The technology of embalming not only facilitated the transformation of Ellsworth into an icon of the emerging northern cause; it also sustained a significant, if vexed, relationship to the antebellum rubric of mourning. The very sacredness of the body that underwrote sentimental mourning simultaneously reviled any treatment of the body that violated its sanctity as a natural and divine object. In order to preserve the role of the body as the emblematic center of mourning, one of the fundamental presuppositions of the sacred sentimental body was violated. I show how the embalming of Colonel Ellsworth was thus paradoxically both conservative and radical. This duality reveals how effectively antebellum rituals of mourning could convert the chaos of early wartime events into a script of unified purpose and collective engagement in shared ideals. Finally, I conclude that the transformation of the work of mourning into a spectacle for mass consumption in the public sphere played a vital role in the ideological work of wartime northerners.

THE FIRST NORTHERN MARTYR

> We are heart-broken, and Virginia has contracted a debt that centuries of groveling cannot wipe out. We occupy Alexandria.
>
> -from a telegraph referring to the death of Colonel Ellsworth that was sent by Alex Stetson and printed in the *New York Times* on May 25, 1861, p. 1.

When he died at only 24 years of age, Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth's star was just

beginning to ascend. Ellsworth's interest in joining the military began early by all accounts, and at 21 he accepted a position as drillmaster of the Rockford Greys, the local militia of Rockford, Illinois. Around this time Ellsworth became acquainted with a veteran of the French Zouaves, Dr. Charles A. Devilliers, through whom he gained an interest in the Zouave uniform and drill styles, which were based on those of Algerian mountain tribesmen. This extravagant form of dress, the ballooning pants and belted sabres of which were ill-suited to actual combat, reflected a taste for the dramatic that was later echoed in Ellsworth's final symbolic act.

Following the success of his first experience as a drillmaster, Ellsworth founded the United States Zouave Cadets of Chicago in May 1859. His was a strictly disciplined outfit in which tobacco, alcohol, and any kind of lewd behavior were grounds for immediate expulsion. Through rigorous training and discipline, this group's celebrity grew and, after winning the national championship as the best-drilled militia in the United States, the Zouave Cadets toured twenty cities during six weeks, challenging local militias in contests that raised the national awareness of the Zouaves and of the country's many militias. Touring from Detroit to New York to Baltimore, Ellsworth's extravagant band of disciplined soldier-performers were at one and the same time representatives of their region and advocates for a collective awareness of the national importance of the network of local militias. By placing these disparate militias alongside each other and on a public stage, Ellsworth worked to further his image of the role these independent military associations should play in terms of the national military. Ellsworth wished for both the regionalism of the militias (Chicago in this case) and their national affiliation ("of the United States") to be equally important. This way of imagining military organization recalls the delicate balance that the nation's founders and their subsequent legislative descendants sought to

negotiate between regional and centralized loci of power and military might. Such a question was also embedded within the ideological struggle that was smoldering and close to eruption in 1859.

During this time, Ellsworth was devising a plan that sought to centralize control of local militias under a Bureau of Militia within the War Department. By first undertaking a kind of census of these diverse militias, Ellsworth hoped to establish "a uniform system of drill, discipline, equipment, and dress, throughout the United States" ("Ellsworth" 124). In these ways, Ellsworth's plan anticipated the increasing uniformity and centralization of the Union army's organization that became necessary as the war progressed. While the Union's military force was at first largely made up of regional regiments, by the end of the war so many regiments had been forced by the decimation of their numbers to join together, while wearing increasingly standardized uniforms, that regional identifications had significantly dissipated.

While Ellsworth's plan was never adopted, it was also in 1859 that he began perhaps the most important friendship of his short lifetime with the future president Abraham Lincoln. When Ellsworth's prospective father-in-law encouraged the young man to take up a career that would prove to be more stable, he moved to Springfield and began to work in the law offices of Lincoln and Herndon. John Hay, who became Lincoln's secretary after his move to the White House, noted in 1861 that Lincoln had "loved [Ellsworth] like a younger brother" ("Ellsworth" 124). Hay further notes that Ellsworth's attention while nominally reading law was in fact focused on his plans for militia reform. Lincoln kept Ellsworth under his wing by inviting him to accompany the presidential entourage from Springfield to Washington for the inauguration and by helping the young man to establish the connections that made possible his quick rise to fame.

After the fall of Fort Sumter in mid-April signaled the beginning of open conflict, Ellsworth was anxious to begin his heroic military career by raising a regiment and strategically placing himself at the line of combat. He traveled without commission or instruction to New York where, assured of the President's support, he formed and vigorously trained a regiment of New York Fire Zouaves that was eleven hundred strong. During the next six weeks, while Ellsworth moved south to Washington, southern states held a series of secession conventions. Virginia's convention had adopted an Ordinance of Secession on April 17 and the state had officially been admitted into the Confederacy on May 7. But it was not until May 23 that the voters of the state of Virginia approved this ordinance. On the night of May 23, Ellsworth received the order to prepare his troops to cross the Potomac into Alexandria, Virginia early on the morning of the 24th. Just as he had hoped, Ellsworth had managed to position himself at the head of the first crucial thrust of northern troops into the South.

Throughout his career Ellsworth had been attracted to the symbolic power of his undertakings, from the extravagance of the Zouaves to his declaration as he lay ill in early April that he "could ask no better death than to fall next week before Sumter" ("Ellsworth" 125). As Ellsworth prepared himself for the next day, he wrote two letters that anticipated the possibility of his demise, and which were found on his body the next day. In each he sought to console his prospective mourners while, at the same time, laying out the grounds for his commemoration. He advised his parents to "cherish the consolation that I was engaged in the performance of a sacred duty" (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 146). To his affianced he wrote, "God bless you, as you deserve and grant you a happy & useful life & us a union hereafter" (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 147). Furthermore, according to a close friend, Ellsworth

chose a newly-tailored uniform for this first major charge because he had "a presentiment that my blood is immediately required by the country - it is in this suit that I shall die" (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 148). Legend even has it that the bullet that killed Ellsworth was found to have dented a badge on his breast that bore the Latin inscription, "Non Solum Nobis, sed Pro Patria" ("Not for ourselves alone, but for country," Randall 263). In many ways, Ellsworth not only prepared for the possibility of his death, but seems almost to have hoped for it. By pursuing a much more symbolically powerful, if less important, mission in Alexandria, Ellsworth chose to imagine himself according to the logic of heroism that his letters and statements reveal. Death proved to be, as Ellsworth seems to have cannily predicted, the most compelling part of his legacy.

The young colonel well understood that the culture of sentiment, the familiar language on which he draws in the three statements cited above, invested the work of mourning with a tremendous power to evoke and express profound meaning. By helping to formulate the terms that defined the significance of his actions as part of a "sacred duty" that might require his life, Ellsworth participated even before his death in his own canonization as the first northern martyr. And, certainly, from the day of his death, writers commemorated the vibrant young man who had been "infamously murdered" as a martyr whose death proved the righteousness of the Union and demanded a vengeful response against the wayward and rebellious secessionists (*The New York Times*, May 25, 1861, 1).

A Note on Methodology

> The boast of Virginians becomes justified, and the ground becomes
> "sacred soil," when hallowed by blood like that of Elmer Ellsworth and
> Edward Dickinson Baker. These heroic men, falling gloriously on the

southern shore of the dividing river, call eloquently to their countrymen who, pressing on to avenge them, are too busy to weep for them. Not now shall their history be written. When the storm is over-past, and peace brings leisure for eulogy, it will be time to tell the story and educe the lessons of their lives.

-John Hay, "Edward Baker," *Harper's New Monthly*, December 1861, p. 103.

While the event at the heart of this chapter may seem to properly belong to the disciplines of history and sociology, cultural responses to Colonel Ellsworth's death become a literary question when we look at how the meaning of Ellsworth's martyrdom was codified within public discourse through a series of distinctly literary devices. Two sentimental tropes discussed in chapter one, the deathbed tableau and the sacred body, are key figures of transformative mourning and resurrection for writers who constructed the story of Ellsworth's martyrdom in 1861. A third sentimental trope, "embalming in memory," helps me to show later in the chapter how the physical preservation of Ellsworth's body enacted in material form a distinctly sentimental conception of memorialization. Finally, at the root of this chapter's argument lies the assumption, also explored in chapter one, that sentimental mourning provided a powerful cultural script for transforming loss and negativity into an experience of renewal and regeneration. The tropes listed above all serve, ultimately, to help produce this narrative effect. The question this chapter takes up and examines through the case of Colonel Ellsworth is how this script, so often rehearsed in antebellum literary and nonliterary texts alike, was deployed in the service of redressing the losses that Ellsworth death figuratively represented so that the work of mourning for Ellsworth helped northerners to imagine and articulate a narrative of Union identity in the face of national dissolution.

As Benedict Anderson points out, the "nation"—that modern construction of the past 250 years—relies on narratives of origin and identity just as much as do our modern formulations of individuality: "Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity—product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century—engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity'" (Anderson 205). But where do we find these narratives—where are they manifested in formulations that may be uncovered today? Certainly the literature of any period reveals both dominant and competing narratives of national and social identities. Our scholarly investment in canonical works derives, in large part, from their assignation as representative stories. But these same narratives are also manifest, in different form, in non-literary textual expressions such as memoirs, obituaries, newspapers, and popular magazines. Such genres have been of increasing interest to literary and cultural historians as new critical methodologies and cultural studies have legitimated new areas of study.

But what appeared at first to be a limitation proved ultimately to be a boon. Because the great majority of my information and understanding is limited to writings of the 1860s, I am forced to give up the historiographical tendency to compare what one might refer to as the "fictions of the historical moment" with the "realities that history bears out." In other words, the only "realities" that this project seeks to unearth are the stories that were told about Ellsworth in order to make sense of his death. What is fascinating, and also difficult, about these writings is that their reliance on first-person accounts (of Ellsworth's death, of his burial, etc…) means that there are certain unresolved differences that cannot be redressed precisely because the legend of Ellsworth emerged as a concatenation of stories from several witness accounts to an

iconographic narrative in the cultural imagination.

The "Colonel Ellsworth" under investigation here may be thought of as a cultural figure or image that was collaboratively produced through diverse contemporaneous writers in the image of a typical hero-martyr. This chapter is interested in this figure's history insofar as it contributes to an understanding of the image of Ellsworth that circulated in an almost uncanny form through northern cities in the form of the fallen hero's embalmed body. By the time this body circulated through northern states, it was already firmly attached to a narrative of valor and loyalty. If the idea of "Ellsworth" was easily fitted into a typology of the hero-martyr, then how did the preservation of the corpse perform a kind of "cultural work"[35] by becoming the embodied representative of this ideal? It is important to note that for his contemporaneous biographers in the press, Ellsworth's life story became interesting to writers after his death principally to the degree that it seemed to confirm that the young colonel's death formed the culmination of a life of courageous demonstrations of patriotism.

By the turn of the twentieth century Ellsworth had fallen almost entirely out of historiographical considerations of the Civil War. His first biographer, Charles A. Ingraham, was born in 1852 and had counted Ellsworth as a childhood hero.[36] His only other significant biographer, Ruth Painter Randall, found Ellsworth through her work on Lincoln.[37] Both biographies echo the relatively two-dimensional image of Ellsworth that this chapter chronicles through texts from the 1860s. Every chapter of Ellsworth's life seems to be simply a preparation

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[35] This term comes from Jane Tomkins' significant rethinking of the relationship between American literature and culture in *Sensational Designs*.

[36] See Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*.

[37] In her "Foreword," Randall notes: "In writing *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* and *Lincoln's Sons*, I necessarily gave some attention to Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth because he was so loved by the Lincolns that he was involved in their story" (Randall, p. ix).

for the great significant event of his life: his poignant death. It would seem, then, that while this image of Ellsworth is much less prominent than it was a century and a half ago, the image itself has changed very little.

What I am tracing is not a set of historical facts; at stake, rather, are the themes that made up the collaboratively constructed narratives that lent context and meaning to Ellsworth's death for northerners facing the inevitability of rebellious secession and a war between the states. Though periodical texts would appear to belong more to the historian's domain than to that of the literary scholar, what I am reading for—the hoped-for culmination of my interpretive work here—is an understanding of how cultural mythologies of national identity on the cusp of the American Civil War were significantly constructed around imaginative works of mourning. Thus, the more immediate a text's figurative relationship to its readership, the more valuable it is as a barometer of cultural expression.

The prominence of print culture in the manufacture and perpetuation of the kinds of "imagined communities" that Anderson delineates is born out in the investigations of cultural historians like Alice Fahs into the textual and cultural artifacts that acted as both projections and, thus, fantasy-imbued mirrors of a shared social experience of community that figured itself through the lens of "nationhood." Precisely where the boundaries of this "nation-state" existed, thus, was a primary concern as the audiences and allegiances of mid-nineteenth-century publications grew increasingly divergent. To the extent that print culture both reflects and constructs its audience's relationship to itself, one can trace the division of the nation in slow motion in the years leading up to 1861 when open hostility manifested in material reality a split that was already latent in the reorganization of communal identities—in particular around the

North-South polarity.

Reconfiguring the Sacred Corpse

> O'er Ellsworth's early tomb,
> And by his dark, funereal pall,
> Bid patriot life-buds bloom.
>
> -Charles William Butler, "Weep o'er the Heroes As They Fall"

From the moment Ellsworth fell, witnesses, writers, and mourners imbued his corpse with great significance. The *New York Tribune* journalist Edward H. House, who had accompanied Ellsworth on his mission, described how the colonel's faithful soldiers took pains to recompose the humanity of the body:

> We removed some of the unsightly stains from the Colonel's features, and composed his limbs; his expression in death was beautifully natural. The colonel was a singularly handsome man, and, excepting the pallor, there was nothing different in his countenance now from what his friends had so lately been accustomed to recognize gladly. (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 152)

The fact that the body retained both its naturalness and its familiarity in its facial expression suggests that these qualities inhere within the body itself even after death. Despite a sense of immanent danger, the task of clearing away the "unsightly stains" is necessary in order to reveal these recognizable qualities in their hero's face. By reconfiguring Ellsworth's humanity, and insisting on the continuity of something natural and recognizable in his face, House and his fellow Zouaves acted upon the sentimental presumption that identity is not erased in death;

rather, the singularity of the individual is retained in the bodily form of the dead.

The "naturalness" and "beauty" of the martyr's body reiterate the standard sentimental typology of the sacred corpse whose body is emblematic of something beyond the specificity of the individual. His description echoes Stowe's depiction of Little Eva after her death: "The heavy eyelashes drooped softly on the pure cheek; the head was turned a little to one side, as if in natural sleep, but there was diffused over every lineament of the face that high celestial expression" of "the long sacred rest which 'He giveth to his beloved'" (Stowe 258). As in Stowe's novel, House's description presumes a fundamental separation between the "celestial" trace inscribed in the face of the individual that remains recognizable, and the mortality of the corpse whose physical form must be reconfigured for proper deportment.

While the composition of the limbs and the restoration of the body to an appropriate position would seem to be a necessary humanizing gesture, both the soldiers and House seem willing to forget just how much the body's seeming naturalness and beauty depend on physical intervention. In a sense, these repositioners became the first of many to shape the body of the fallen martyr according a preconceived image. The numerous narratives about Ellsworth that began to circulate immediately after his death performed an analogous task. By first shaping Ellsworth into an icon, those who published accounts of his death and memorialization in newspapers and magazines sought to discern in the colonel's countenance a figure at once representative in its humanity and exemplary in its martyrdom.

As in House's description, the colonel's body was a prominent theme in these testimonials. Whether as a focal point for mourners gathered around a funeral bier, or as a body bearing the very "unsightly stains" that the Zouaves sought to remove, narrators of Ellsworth's

death and burial discerned in this body the traces of righteous martyrdom that justified an aggressive northern reaction. In other words, Ellsworth's body bore the marks that justified revenge. The rebelliousness and brutality of southern secessionist violence made it possible for Ellsworth's mourners to see his corpse as a sacred emblem of northern righteousness. One reporter, while reporting on the predicted movements of Ellsworth's remains to lie in state in New York, declared: "We are heart-broken, and Virginia has contracted a debt that centuries of groveling [sic] cannot wipe out" (from a telegraph sent by Alex Stetson and printed in the *New York Times*; May 25, 1861, 1).

In his First Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, President Lincoln had asserted in addressing his "dissatisfied fellow-countrymen": "You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors." Less than three months later, Ellsworth's corpse embodied the North's moral right to defend itself again southern aggression. So powerful and clear is the significance of Ellsworth's death that when he is covered, according to House, with the very Confederate flag he had just taken down, this "rebel flag, stained with his blood [was] purified by this contact from the baseness of its former meaning" (*Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves of '61*, p. 159). Ellsworth's escaping blood here becomes a figure for his departing spirit, which purifies the enemy's flag and redefines that emblem's very meaning. Ellsworth's body takes on an otherworldly, almost divine property of transformation.

In another witness's account, this martyred body's ability to evoke the tears of hardy soldiers confirms the bravery of their leader and substantiates a call for northern aggression:

We endeavored to keep the melancholy death of our leader from the ears of his

men, who had learned to love him as dearly as their rough natures could. Those,

however, who heard of his fate, vowed to avenge his murder. How harrowing was the scene! Strong men came and looked upon the pallid features of him whom they had seen a moment before full of health and vigor, and as they gazed a convulsive sob and unbidden tear told how sincerely the gallant spirit that had so lately tenanted that mortal frame was mourned. (*The New York Times*, May 26, 1861, 8)

As they identify with the colonel's demise, these troops, and the *Times*'s readers as well, are interpellated into a community of mourners. According to the logic of sentimental identification this account turns the body into a physical symbol of the meanings and emotions associated with the colonel's violent death. The physical proximity of the mourners who witness the death, share tears, and mourn together express this meaning through emotional outpouring.

But there is something remarkable in how a call for vengeance is embedded within this rather conventional sentimental elegiac language. In an extension of the familiar eucharistic association of the dead with transcendent meaning, Ellsworth's body becomes the emblem or the sign of the violence perpetrated against it. As such, it instantiates a call for an imperative response: revenge. Vengefulness is a strange appendage to sentimental mourning's more familiar emphasis on communalism. For example, the virtuousness of Uncle Tom in Stowe's novel is most eloquently displayed as Tom refuses to respond vengefully in either spirit or action to the violent whipping that will cause his death. The political efficacy for Stowe's audience of equating the slave's moral propriety with his passivity is obvious, and also suggests that the power of such a position lies in its seeming irreproachability. For an American readership one decade after Stowe's novel, the formulation of a case for violent reprisal within a language of

sentimental mourning would be at pains to establish the necessity for such an anti-communal, antagonist and violent response.

"Never Turn Black!": The Embalmer's Art[38]

> It is nature's yearning to preserve the chain that binds together our humanity—to keep the generations in mind of each other as the crowded ranks pass on in that never-ceasing march to the eternal home—that ever sundering yet never broken procession. . . . Hence the art of the embalmer, hence the funeral urn, hence the care for sepulture, hence that strong feeling against aught that would wrong these cherished memorials of our continuous existence.
>
> -from the "Editor's Table," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1854

In one sense, the embalming of Ellsworth's body reflected the same desire expressed in the obituaries above to discern tremendous significance in these physical remains. Much like Ellsworth's repositioners, however, this act of physical preservation ultimately made it possible for northerners to produce the significance that they seemed only to be discovering through gazing upon and mourning for Ellsworth. If the martyr's body became sacred the moment it fell then its artificial preservation extended and prolonged the meanings that the heralds and interpreters of this martyrdom attached to it. In particular, the call for vengeance that almost all elegists depicted as the empirical meaning of Ellsworth's death was tremendously strengthened because tens of thousands of mourners were able to witness the body that bore the traces of the violence that justified an aggressive response.

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[38] The broadside of Dr. Hutton & Co discussed in this section promises that "Bodies Embalmed by us NEVER TURN BLACK! But retain their natural color and appearance . . ." (see Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, p. 330). In the context of a period in which skin color was the most significant index of social identity, such a promise evokes a parallel between the decay of the dead (and unpreserved) body and the status of the living black body under conditions of what Orlando Patterson has defined as "social death" (Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

While Ellsworth's company of Zouaves and other northern troops continued to secure Alexandria, the colonel's corpse was transported back across the Potomac to the Naval Yard in Washington, D.C. Upon arrival in the city that boasted one of the few professional embalmers in the United States, Secretary of State William Seward encouraged President Lincoln to order Ellsworth's body to be embalmed. Dr. Thomas Holmes had advertised his services as an embalmer in Washington only a few weeks earlier at the beginning of May.[39] Perhaps Seward had seen Holmes' shingle, "Embalming the Dead—Dr. Thomas Holmes," and had noted it as a curiosity (Lowry 8). More likely, Seward was familiar with Holmes as the "celebrated Embalmist" whom the *New York Times* reported had "received a commission as surgeon in the United States army" only the day before on May 20, 1861: "His duty will be to embalm all those killed in battle whose bodies it may be desirable to preserve" (*New York Times* p. 5). However distasteful embalming might have seemed, its importance as a technological innovation for the preservation of bodies was recognized from the beginning of the war. In December of 1862, the *New York Times* published an army surgeon's directions for embalming the dead, proclaiming that "The modern processes by which the bodies of officers and soldiers of the army have been embalmed and restored to their friends is not the least of the blessings which science has bestowed upon the world since the beginning of the war" (*New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1862, p. 6).

Dr. Holmes has long been identified as the "father of modern embalming" because the technique he used to preserve Ellsworth became the basis for almost all embalming surgeons during the Civil War and afterwards (Lowry, p. 8). This method was much more invasive than

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[39] As Washington became a staging ground for southbound troops, Holmes saw the potential to capitalize on recent technical innovations in bodily preservation. Ultimately his shrewd predictions paid off and he became known as the "father of modern embalming," claiming after the war to have embalmed over ten thousand soldiers. See Lowry, *Embalming Surgeons of the Civil War*, pp. 8-9.

the several informal methods sometimes employed to preserve human bodies for short periods of time. Developments in embalming techniques during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had sought to replace as much of the body's organic material with chemical and inorganic fillers. Therefore, the most technically advanced methods retained relatively little beyond the body's recognizable surface. All of Ellsworth's bodily fluids would have been drained and replaced through the femoral artery with preservative chemicals, probably a solution of bichloride of mercury (Habenstein and Lamers, p. 211).

The invasive methods of the new preservative techniques like those employed by Holmes and, later, by the Brown brothers, had to make embalming seem to be congruent with, rather than opposed to, the sentimental ideal of the natural body that in death gained a symbolic association with the divinity of eternal sleep. The advertisement of Drs. C. D. and J. Brown deceptively promises "embalmment of human bodies without any mutilation or removal of any portion of the body" (see Appendix A).[40] This promise to avoid radically reforming the body, and to thus retain not only its shape but also its naturalness, implicitly responds to the antebellum discomfort with embalming's extensive interference with the body's essential purity. By opposing their "beautiful process of embalming" to attempts to merely retard decay, the brothers assert that the practicality of preservation is only one of embalming's virtues:

> But how different, with a body prepared by us: the remains of a dear and respected parent, of a beloved child, a bosom friend, snatched from their fond love by the cruel hand of death, hundreds of miles from home, whatever time may have passed from the moment the departed soul has been surrendered to his

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[40] This broadside advertisement was probably used soon after the Civil War. Embalming was advertised before the war, and its lack of any reference to soldiers suggests that it could not date from the war years. Even advertisements in cities far from the front focused on families' desire to recover the bodies of fallen soldiers.

Creator, the mortal remains will be kept in the most perfect and natural preservation, and that cherished countenance looked at once more, by those who may be lead to remember and repeat these holy words of consolation: "He is not dead but sleepeth" until we meet again in a better world. (see Appendix A)

Embalming makes it possible to endlessly retard and therefore to effectively elude the finality of death. This does not, however, interfere with the naturalness of the body; quite the opposite, the body's preservation is likened to eternal sleep. Furthermore, the broadside recognizes the importance of the face as a point of contact—the very recognition that Ellsworth's comrades expressed after his death. In order to make embalming palatable, the Brown brothers were compelled effectively to counter the impression that embalming was in conflict with the most deeply-held traditions of mourning that viewed the body's naturalness as coextensive with its sacred relationship to the divine.

The attention that Ellsworth's comrades paid to the naturalness and recognizability of his body after death anticipates in important ways the expectations that embalmers would strive to fulfill in their work on his and on other soldiers' bodies during the war. Asserting mastery of the "beautiful art of embalming the dead," a broadside advertising the firm of Dr. Hutton and Co. in Washington during the war unceremoniously flouted the coded language of naturalness that often masked the entrepreneurialism of this emerging class of quasi-medical professionals. Significantly, this firm's marketing placed greater emphasis than the Brown brothers on embalming's ability to preserve the body in a perpetual condition forever. So convinced was Dr. Hutton's firm of the perfection of its process that it offered to "exhume those bodies which we may embalm at any expressed period of time, knowing that each and every body thus exhumed

will prove an enduring monument to our skill" (see Appendix B). Despite the emphasis here, as in the Brown brothers' advertisement, on the body's likeness to "the countenance of one asleep," this broadside does not seek to submerge its claims of effectiveness under a mantle of sentimental language. The artistry and skill advertised here almost seem to usurp those of the ultimate Creator in their ability to explicitly cheat nature's processes. Because the Brown brothers were advertising to a post-war audience, their sentimental promises are directed toward a population whose need for embalming may not be apparent, and for whom embalming is more likely to seem a perversion of the natural, or divine, order.

The primary audience for Dr. Hutton's firm's advertisement is announced in the note: "N.B.—Particular attention paid to obtaining bodies of those who have fallen on the Battle Field" (see Appendix B). Those who are likely to respond include the scores of family members who traveled to the battlefront upon notification that their son, husband, or brother was ailing only to find him dying or dead. Because the processes of witnessing death and of mourning that I discussed in chapter one were effectively contiguous in antebellum sentimental culture, as is confirmed by the prevalence of the deathbed scene, the soldier's death on the battlefield threatened to interrupt one of most familiar cultural narratives. In the same way that Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide, Wide World* becomes the receptacle that contains and perpetually relives the process of mourning her mother that shapes her life experience, sentimental mourning was rooted in the belief that the bereaved absorbed and retained the spirit or essence of the dead. Whether this belief was imagined literally (as in the rise of spiritualism) or metaphorically (as in almost every sentimental elegy), the promise of the body's perpetuity in some measure promised to correct the rupture of this continuity that war had wrought.

Therefore, the broadsides of both the Brown brothers and Dr. Hutton's firm suggest that the logistical importance of physically preserving the dead always overlapped with other, less obvious cultural concerns. In both cases, the effectiveness of bodily preservation is not limited to the time needed for the corpse's return to the home front for burial. Instead, the corpse's eternality is emphatically asserted in each case. Furthermore, whether defined as an "art" or a "process," embalming is likened to an aesthetic creative process. It is extraordinary that Dr. Hutton's advertisement asserts that the exhumed body will be a "monument to [their] skill" as if the meaning of the corpse is suddenly up for grabs. Presumably the corpse should be a monument to the life of the spirit that has inhabited it.

But once the embalmer has the corpse in his hands, despite any claims to the contrary, its naturalness and place within organic cycles is interrupted. It is in moments such as these, when the aims of embalming go beyond pragmatic requirements, that embalming's artificiality is tacitly acknowledged. The human hand can almost be discerned usurping the place of the divine hand in a move that seems possibly to register a certain disdain for, if not bitterness against, a God whose earthly realm He has been allowed to degenerate into war. The promise of an eternal body, then, would seem in one way to retain the sentimental formula of spiritual perpetuity that mourning celebrated, while in another way the ability to produce this perpetuity through human technical ingenuity would seem to push outside the realm of the divine toward a secular horizon.

The ways in which embalming produced an image at the same time that it reconfigured the nature of the corpse, in both cases replacing the natural with the seemingly natural, is poignantly expressed by an anecdote concerning the treatment of Ellsworth's embalmed body in the White House. As the colonel's body was mourned, as Forney relates, in the East Room, Mary

Todd Lincoln placed a wax wreath encircling a photograph of Ellsworth upon the casket containing his embalmed body in the East Room. The positioning of a wreath made of wax, rather than the more traditional laurels, upon the casket would seem to insist on the identity or specificity of the man contained within the coffin. The casket itself was fitted with a glass window through which the head and shoulders of the corpse were plainly visible. While the placement of a wreath would hardly have been unusual, a wax wreath would have been more uncommon, and one that encircled a photograph would have been yet more atypical. In an almost uncanny sense, the artificiality of the wreath, combined with the representational nature of the photograph, almost seems to insist on the identity of the body contained within.

In the passage that opened this chapter, Forney's emphasis on the mourners in the East Room instead of the mourned suggests, the significance of this event lay in the symbolic nature of the gathering around a figure whose placement at the center of this group belied his position in life. The identity attached to this body would have been known, though not familiar, to most of the mourners in the East Room. Mrs. Lincoln's action subtly articulated the need to incorporate into collective memory an *idea* of Ellsworth that was just as artificially produced as the embalmed body and just as close to the original as a representative photographic image. The first lady's wreath metaphorically fixed the widely-circulated image of Colonel Ellsworth to the corpse as it was just beginning its own circulation by train further into the heart of the North. If the body itself cannot act as its own sign to denote its meaning and importance, then Mrs. Lincoln's action might reveal how powerful was the need to transform the body into a site of much more abstract cultural meaning.

DIVINE RITUALS AND NATURAL BODIES

> EMBALM, v.i. To cheat vegetation by locking up the gases upon which it feeds. By embalming their dead and thereby deranging the natural balance between animal and vegetable life, the Egyptians made their once fertile and populous country barren and incapable of supporting more than a meagre [sic] crew. The modern metallic burial casket is a step in the same direction, and many a dead man who ought now to be ornamenting his neighbor's lawn as a tree, or enriching his table as a bunch of radishes, is doomed to a long inutility. We shall get him after awhile if we are spared, but in the meantime the violet and rose are languishing for a nibble at his glutoeus maximus.

> (Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*)

Although it was radically new in form, embalming ultimately worked to enact a simulacrum of traditional mourning practice, and was in this way distinctly conservative in effect. The very sacredness of the body that underwrote sentimental mourning simultaneously reviled any treatment of the body that violated its sanctity as a natural and divine object. In order to preserve the role of the human form at the center of ideological mourning, one of the fundamental presuppositions of the sacred sentimental body was violated. The decision to embalm Colonel Ellsworth was thus paradoxically both functionally conservative, because it preserved the sacred body at the center of mourning ritual, and socially progressive in its unnatural violation of a body whose sacredness was strongly associated with its naturalness.

The use of arterial embalming to preserve Ellsworth's body transgressed a widespread interdiction against any violation of the integrity of the corpse. The human frame, while often treated with suspicion and discipline during life, gained a degree of holiness in death. While the bodies of several prominent individuals like Daniel Webster had been artificially preserved in the

United States before 1861, this was an extremely rare practice usually employed only under unusual circumstances.[41] The measures that allowed a body to remain above ground for an extra few days for memorial purposes would usually involve replacing internal organs with some kind of stuffing like sawdust. The newest methods of bodily preservation, and in particular the chemistry of arterial embalming, were developed in Europe by chemists like Jean-Nicolas Gannal whose writings on embalming were translated into English in 1840.[42] This translation introduced Gannal's method of arterial embalming through the carotid artery that he claimed to have pioneered.[43]

Embalming lay so far beyond the realm of cultural consciousness that, although the morality of dissection and cremation were debated by scientists and theologians in popular and specialized publications, the topic of embalming hardly appeared at all. Even as the lengthy "Editor's Table" for the April 1854 *Harper's* made a forceful argument in favor of the "sacredness of the human body," embalming is only briefly mentioned as an ancient practice,

[41] Even in this rare antebellum case, the notable outcome of preservation is the body's presentability to an audience of mourners: "although the countenance [of Daniel Webster] has slightly changed since then, the honored remains may easily be kept—as is the intention—so that all who attend the burial can look once more upon the features of the great departed" (*New York Daily Times*, Oct. 29, 1852, p. 4). The great statesman's legacy of maintaining the Union at all costs by mollifying southerners with the Compromise of 1850 and the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act had proven to be short-lived.

[42] Jean-Nicolas Gannal, *History of Embalming, and of Preparations in Anatomy, Pathology, and Natural History; including an Account of the New Process of Embalming*, trans. and ed. Richard Harlan (Philadelphia: Judah Dobson, 1840). In 1840, the American educator Richard Harlan translated Gannal's *Histoire des Embaumements* which included a long description of Gannal's pioneering preservative methods. Harlan's interest in plague control and public health predicted later calls for a wider acceptance of embalming as a sanitary measure. Gannal's methods became mired in controversy when he was forced to admit that he used arsenic in solutions which led to a French decree, in 1846, that banned use of poisonous substances in embalming fluids. This controversy reveals how much more prominent the practice of embalming was in France at this time. American awareness of such controversies came later with the result that as early as during the Civil War embalmers sometimes advertised which embalming technique they followed. For example, the broadside advertising the Brown brothers (see Appendix A) touts the superiority of the "patented system of Dr. Sucquet, of Paris". Dr. Jean-Paul Sucquet played a large role in challenging Gannal's methods and helped to push legislation prohibiting non-medical professionals from practicing embalming.

[43] Gannal's patented methodology claimed to be the first to use the carotid artery, but this assertion was challenged by the French medical community. Arterial embalming had been possible at least as early as Dr. Frederick Ruysch (1665-1717), and had been applied as a means of preservation by Dr. William Hunter (1718-1783).

while dissection is featured as a very pressing social concern. The piece rails against the misuses of the corpse, asking whether the "necessities of medical science . . . [e]ven where the want is conceded, . . . might be purchased too dear" ("Editor's Table" 690). This argument exemplifies the popular sentiments of mid-nineteenth century Americans:

> It does no hurt to the dead, but it does an immense injury to the living. We refer not now to the more immediate pain given to the sensibilities. Severe as this is, there is an evil far greater in what may be styled the demoralizing consequences that must flow from the loss of that reverence which has ever been connected with all that reminds us of the departed. It is the tendency to mar, and, in time, wholly to destroy, a feeling most intimately associated with all that goes to make life serious, rational, and religious. It breaks up the sympathies which unite us with the dead and thus tend more than all things else to preserve the past as well as present brotherhood of the race. An increasing indifference to the grave and its sacred contents must produce a state of mind at war, in feeling, if not in abstract dogma, with some of the most solemn revelations of Scripture. We do not make enough of the Resurrection in our modern theology. ("Editor's Table" 691)

Dissection, which takes the body apart, violates its physical and moral integrity. By extension, the imagined integrity of society, and respect for the living individual, are endangered. This editorial issues a stern warning: To fail to remember and revere the dead is to endanger the bonds that hold together the world of the living.

The social concerns that drive this essayist to detail the dangers of promiscuous treatment of the "sacred body" are founded in religious doctrine. Preserved in collective memory, the dead

act for the living as a spiritual bridge to the divine world. Because even after death the body remains a sign of the divine miracle of resurrection, its treatment must mirror that of Christ's martyred body:

> HE was buried; even HE who was crucified. The sense and sentient life had departed; but with that sacred body there was yet connected the personality, even that Divine Personality, which reclaimed it from the grave, and bore it up to the right hand of God. ("Editor's Table" 693)

Through death, the mortal body re-establishes its link to "that Divine Personality" and in this way gains a numinous status as a reiteration of Christ's body. Because the individual body is analogous to both the body of Christ and to the body politic, interventions like dissection and embalming that violate its wholeness are unthinkable.

The sudden emergence of the technology of embalming during the Civil War signaled a major shift in the cultural work of mourning. Embalming of bodies had been, as Gary Laderman notes, "impractical if not inconceivable to the majority of the population" before the war (Laderman, p. 26). Yet this physically invasive preservative technique proved to be the only practicable solution to the crisis of mass death at the front. While wartime cemeteries were quickly established as battles began to produce corpses, it soon became apparent that even those bodies that could be identified may well find themselves in a poorly marked, or even mass, grave. And many dead were unidentifiable. At the same time, family members of soldiers who were ailing or presumed dead soon began arriving at the front to attend to their deathbeds or burial. Likewise, the problem of transporting the dead home presented a distinct challenge for the great many mourners who wished to return their soldiers home for burial. A practice that had

represented everything antithetical to sentimental mourning suddenly became the only way to preserve the semblance of traditional practice at a time when mourning was quickly becoming a national preoccupation.

Furthermore, embalming presented a body made whole again that then could be reintegrated into the body politic. As the war progressed, the bodies of soldiers increasingly became unidentifiable at the front as corpses were looted or companies moved on or were decimated in battle. The desperate need of private citizens to reclaim the bodies of their ailing or dead soldiers is widely attested to in accounts in newspapers, letters, and memoirs that describe family members traveling to the front or sending telegrams requesting information or the return of remains. For these reasons embalming, so unfamiliar to and even reviled by antebellum Americans, became a necessary and even sought-after solution to the crisis of mass and often anonymous death in battle. While any process that transgressed against the body, whose naturalness in death was associated with its proximity to divine transition, was considered to be abominable to most, ultimately the centrality of this body as a site of sacred attachment overwhelmed the prohibition against artificial preservation.

"That Vital Element of Perpetuity"

> 3. To preserve from decay or oblivion as if with balm; to perpetuate in remembrance.
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> -Third definition of "embalm," *Gutenberg Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*

"The beginnings of great periods have often been marked and made memorable by striking events," began John Hay's obituary of Ellsworth in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Hay,

"Ellsworth," pp. 119-120). Coming two months after President Lincoln's inauguration, one month after Fort Sumter, and one day after Virginians voted to secede from the Union, Ellsworth's death lent a face to the crisis that northerners faced in May of 1861. Like a number of other written commemorations, Hay's obituary asserts a distinct correspondence between the nation's founding and the crisis that Ellsworth's death seemed to augur:

> Out of the cloud that hangs around the vague inceptions of revolutions, a startling incident will sometimes flash like lightning, to show that the warring elements have begun their work. The scenes that attended the birth of American nationality formed a not inaccurate type of those that have opened the crusade for its perpetuation. The consolidation of public sentiment which followed the magnificent defeat at Bunker's Hill . . . was but a foreshadowing of the instant rally to arms which followed the fall of the beleaguered fort in Charleston harbor, and of the intensity of tragic pathos which has been added to the stern purpose of avenging justice by the murder of Colonel Ellsworth. (Hay, pp. 119-120)

In this poetic rendition of the events between Bunker's Hill (1785-86) and 1861, a flash of lightning captures two parallel scenes of American national history: the "birth of American nationality" and the "crusade for its perpetuation." The continuity between these two events is emphasized, rather than the threat of national fragmentation, with the effect that the impending civil war is portrayed in terms of a struggle within an always-whole nation instead of as a conflict between two distinct parties. This perspective is what one would expect from a northern writer, but it serves to show how northern constructions of the Union presumed a definition of "nation" that was all-inclusive and continuous, both geographically and historically.

Ellsworth's death not only arrived at the moment of crisis; it seemed to perfectly express the political terms of this crisis. The "perpetuation" cited by this *Atlantic Monthly* elegist corresponds to the "vital element of perpetuity" that President Lincoln had defined as the fundamental quality of American national identity in his First Inaugural Address less than three months before Ellsworth's death: "if destruction of the Union by one or by a part only of the States be lawfully possible, the Union is less perfect than before the Constitution, having lost the vital element of perpetuity." Lincoln's remarks implicitly assert that the founding ideology of the United States relied not on a narrative of national creation, but on the sanctification of a condition of unity that already existed. This mythology of a *de facto* confederation of independent but mutually interdependent states is endangered by secession because fragmentation threatens to dismantle the defining terms of the nation's founding. This figural construction of continuity seems to assume that the wholeness of the nation-state was not *established* but rather *confirmed* by the founding documents that describe the nature of this Union. This wholeness is the perfection of the Union that had not yet been achieved before the Constitution, but which had always been present as an image or idea waiting to be fulfilled. At one and the same time, this construction makes it possible to recognize the realities of the historicity of a country whose political and geographic borders had been continually redefined up until the moment of the Civil War while also evoking an ahistorical vision of the nation that had always already pre-existed its fulfillment.[44]

In May of 1861, collective mourning for Ellsworth effectively consoled widespread anxieties about national division and the dissolution of the Union. For northerners, secession

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[44] Such a formulation echoes the myth of American exceptionalism as old as John Winthrop's ordination of the New World as a "city upon a hill" to his fellow Puritans in 1630.

endangered not only the material and political integrity of the United States; it threatened to dismantle the stability of the conception of Union itself. And yet, such a stable conception was just emerging at this moment, especially under the pressure of outside attack. Even within the North, where the continuation of the Union under a central government was a fundamental concern, regionialism was beginning to give way to a nascent form of nationalism in large part *because* of the danger that secession posed.

In the same way that Little Eva's deathbed consolidated her disparate mourners – slaveowners and slaves alike – into a congregration of sympathetic believers, the iconographic circulation of Ellsworth's body through the north established a confederacy of mourners whose collective focus on the face of the martyr attested to the Union as always already whole. The northern perspective on secession, of course, relied on the assertion that the Union existed not as a federation of disparate entities, but as a singular whole made up of parts. Thus, secession was not only rebellious, but legally impossible for it retroactively revealed this "more perfect union" to have always already been in pieces.

Although Colonel Ellsworth has virtually disappeared from contemporary historiographical consideration, a writer in May 1861 felt confident in asserting that "long after the rebellion shall have become a matter of history, his [Ellsworth's] death will be regarded as a martyrdom, and his name will be enrolled upon the list of our country's patriots" (*New York Times*, May 25, 1861, p. 4). Numerous towns, children, and at least one company of soldiers ("Ellsworth's Avengers") were named in his memory.[45] Death itself was the foundation for

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[45] "This murder fired the northern imagination to a degree. The picture of Ellsworth's handsome face was everywhere familiar. It is an easy guess that hundreds, not to say thousands, of babies were named for him within the next few months, and to this day the name Elmer, starting from him, has not ceased to be a favorite" (Chapter XXV, Henry Ketchum, *Life of Lincoln*, 1901).

Ellsworth's prominence, and the preservation of his body underscored his marytrdom rather than any prominence in life. It was his representativeness, then, and not his specificity as an individual that embalming both literally and figuratively enabled.

Embalming in Memory

> The history of sepulchral architecture and funereal customs has here a deep foundation in the necessities of our nature and condition. We cannot bear that the transition should be so sudden and complete, as it is in its original, unadorned, and simple state. We would make the dead to "stay a little longer," by surrounding them with things which really belong to this world but which we have thereby consecrated to uses on the passage to the next. Why did the Indian lay the bow and arrow, and slay the dog, by the side of the dead? Why did the Egyptian embalm and emblazon? . . . We would connect them back, if we could, . . . and knowing that we cannot pass over the great gulf . . . we solace ourselves by creating imaginary wants for that only part of them that is still within our reach.
>
> -from "Mount Auburn," by G. T. C., *The New-England Magazine*, 1832

The preservative technology of embalming that emerged into popular consciousness during the Civil War enacted in material form a distinctly sentimental understanding of memorialization. While modern conceptions of mourning as expressed in Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" emphasize a healthy separation between the living and the dead, antebellum mourners found both solace and profound moral significance in retaining the dead in perpetual living memory. Memory of the dead was often embodied in physical reminders like mourning portraits or snippets of hair that could be contained in lockets or rings to be worn as part of a mourner's daily attire long past the designated period of mourning. Like the locks of hair that Little Eva dispenses to her mourners in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, these physical reminders both retained the physical aura of the deceased and attached a transcendent meaning to

that material reminder.

This mode of enshrining core cultural values in physical objects typified how sentimental mourning structured the relationship between the living and the dead. By holding onto the dead in an idealized form that is incorporated into living memory, sentimental culture replaced the individuality of identity with the reflected image of communal values. The dead did not disappear from the world of the living; rather, they remained enshrined in collective memory in an idealized form: "Let the pall of forgetfulness cover all the frailties which the past has witnessed, and let us be eager to preserve and embalm only the virtues of the honored and the dead" (*Half Century Discourse* 79). Community was often formulated in sentimental writings through the figure of the absent (one or ones) whose presence was repeatedly represented and insisted upon. The endurance of memory rectifies the mortal limitations of the individual because remembering, in the sentimental imagination, redresses loss and transforms absence into presence.

The deathbed tableau is such a powerful trope in sentimental literature and culture because its physical configuration eloquently captures the metaphoric attitude of sentimental mourning: the living are gathered together, encircling the dead, with their eyes all focused toward the dying or dead body whose movement toward death belies the transcendence of the spirit. In gazing, together, upon this figure, these mourners together recognize (or, in a sense, produce) the symbolic meanings that bind them together not only as mourners but also as citizens of a sentimentally-imagined communal republic. Mourning does not mediate simply between the individual mourner and the mourned; it negotiates the relationships between the community and the mourned and also between the individual and the community. Therefore,

memorialization is a collective mode of preservation.

In mid-nineteenth century America, this sentimental mode of memorialization, meaning the preservation of an image or idea within the shared imaginative realm, was the ideational precursor to the technology of embalming. As the Oxford English Dictionary attests,[46] while the metaphoric meaning of "embalm" has been present for centuries, its sense of enshrining as a mode of remembering was particularly evocative for sentimental writers.

A broad review of antebellum periodicals, novels, poetry, newspapers, funerary addresses, and songs reveals that while "embalm" was a relatively common word, it very rarely referred to artificial preservation of bodies. Discussion of embalming as a form of physical preservation most often appeared in articles in publications like *Harper's Weekly* and *The Atlantic Monthly* that discussed contemporary anthropological or archeological work in Egypt. However, the great majority of uses referred to the metaphoric sense of "embalming" to mean holding within memory. A fairly typical use of the word "embalm" may be found in Eliza Cook's poem, "Old Arm Chair" in which the speaker identifies the chair with every beloved characteristic of her (the speaker is presumably female) mother: "I've bedewed it with tears, I've embalmed it with sighs," she laments ("Old Arm Chair").

The 1854 *Harper's* meditation on the "sacredness of the human body" discussed in an earlier section argues that death and burial are "peculiarly Christian" and thus become

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[46] The Second Edition (1989) of the Oxford English Dictionary lists five definitions of "embalm, v." divided into two sections. The first section discusses the sense "preservation," in both the material sense of preserving a corpse and preserving in memory. Perhaps because the sources cited in these definitions extend only as far as 1877, the sense of embalming a body for preservation is listed as rare. The largely British examples employed by the OED trace the figurative meaning I describe here back to the 17th century, but none of these quite catches the secondary characteristic, so popular in the American sentimental context, that I make so much of here: the image of the dead that is enshrined in collective memory becomes emblematic of a certain idealized virtue or meaning. As I show, this sense parallels the sentimental fetishization of material reminders.

meaningful only in reference to the "whole language of Scripture in reference to the departed" which emerges from "the ineffable mystery of the resurrection" ("Editor's Table," p 693). This idea "is embalmed in metaphors, in words of pictorial significance, in verbal associations" such that Biblical language itself preserves the final matrix for understanding earthly life and death. This metaphoric "embalming" is aligned later in this passage with the Egyptian practice of physical embalming which also signals a preservation of meaning, "a nature's yearning to preserve the chain that binds together our humanity" ("Editor's Table," p. 693). The Biblical word provides a guide to the living by providing a numinous script for interpreting the earthly in divine terms in the same way that the preservation of the body reflects a metaphoric retention of the memory of the dead as a foundation for societal continuity.

Typically, this metaphoric formulation describes a call to others to embrace and remember one whose goodness or martyrdom deserves recognition beyond individual mourning. A telling example of this usage appears in an 1846 sketch of the English poet Leigh Hunt in the *American Whig Review*. While Mr. Hunt is praised for his political and social values, it is his mother whose good works "ought to embalm her in the memories of all" ("Leigh Hunt," p. 18). In distinctly sentimental language that contrasts with the rest of the piece the writer describes an "angelic act" of kindness toward a feeble woman on the street that must induce "a moisture in your eye and a pressure about your heart" ("Leigh Hunt," p. 18).

Likewise, readers of the September, 1855 issue of the popular journal *Godey's Ladies Book* are encouraged to "look back and endeavor to embalm the bright memories of these good and gifted women [writers who have recently died] in our 'Book' before the shadows of time have dimmed their glory" (*Godey's*, p. 273). Both of these examples celebrate the familiar trope

of feminine virtue to appeal to the reader's participation in a united veneration of these women who, like Little Eva, are models of sentimental values. The figurative terminology of "embalming" held special power in antebellum America because it so acutely described sentimentalism's insistence on the moral imperatives of mourning and memory. Like the religious imagery of resurrection, the metaphor of "embalming in memory" implied the importance of looking beyond the immanent or earthly toward other, higher spheres of meaning and virtue. In the same way that death lent a divine outline to the corpse, memorialization encapsulated the virtues of the dead within living memory.

Because "embalming in memory" figuratively unified a community of mourners, this metaphor was particularly potent in political speech. Thomas Jefferson deployed this sense when speaking of innocents who died during skirmishes between the Jacobins and the Feuilletants: "But time and truth will rescue & embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives" (*Works of Thomas Jefferson*, p. 128). In this example, the dead are "rescue[d]" from meaninglessness and obscurity by being "embalm[ed]" in collective memory. An example from Lincoln also activates a sense of "embalming" in national memory, but this time it is an idea that is preserved:

> Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just
>
> God, cannot long retain it. All honor to Jefferson to the man who, in the concrete
>
> pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the
>
> coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a mere revolutionary document
>
> an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there
>
> that to-day and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to

the very harbingers of reappearing tyranny and oppression. (Lincoln, "To H. L.

Pierce")

This 1859 letter that expressed belief in a cause for which many later historiographers would

embalm the name "Lincoln" in memory, signals one of the most powerful properties of the

metaphor "embalming in memory": it has the ability to represent continuity ("an abstract truth")

that counters the episodic stops and starts ("a mere revolutionary document") of historical

progress. That which is retained as a transcendent kernel is outside temporal or other limitations.

Through the communal work of memorialization—a process that is continuous and that binds its

participants together—social institutions, the nation in this case, maintain a perpetual identity

and purpose.

When the *New York Times* celebrated Mathew Brady's photographs of the war in

September 1862, it extolled "the efforts which our leading photographic artist has made, and is

making, to catch our armies 'living as they rise,' and, alas! to embalm our falling heroes ere they

fall" ("Brady's Photographs of the War," p. 5). Here, as in Lincoln's use, the enshrining of

soldiers in national memory metaphorically challenged the terminality of death, replacing

absence in life with presence in memory and the finality of death with the perpetuity of symbolic

(and aesthetic) representation. Like the hair jewelry and other material reminders that circulated

through sentimental culture, helping to facilitate communities through the work of mourning,

these photographs provide a history of "the 'great deliverance' of the land in all its terrible

beauty" as the nation undergoes, and survives (as the emphasis on "deliverance" suggests) a

fierce struggle against its potential dissolution.

The metaphorics of "embalming in memory" are thus coextensive with the physical

embalming of Ellsworth's body, with the photography of the battlefields, with the elegiac memorialization of the dead at Gettysburg and elsewhere, and with "that vital element of perpetuity" articulated by Lincoln. In each case, the continuity of an idea of the nation is redressed through figurative modes of compensation.

"The Nation Mourns Her Dead": A Union Congregation of Mourners

> The nation mourns her dead, not as in the peace-time, when one of her kingly ones went from a rounded and perfect career, leaving our sky brightened with his passage, and glittering with the new stars his hand had set in it. Then indeed she mourned, but it was with a proud and satisfied sorrow, as she inurned his ashes in her bosom and transferred his glory to her diadem, brighter for the tears with which she embalmed it. Now, we feel as if a strong and beautiful column had been shattered in our midst ere it was finished, and leaving a temple tottering for its support.
>
> -from an obituary address commemorating the Honorable Edward D. Baker by Mr. Riddle, Senator from Ohio, to Congress on January 22, 1862

The stories that diverse writers crafted to express what Ellsworth's death meant for northerners adapted familiar sentimental mourning iconography and narrative structures to enmesh this potentially disruptive event within familiar codes, to try to mediate the story and the meaning that may arise from this event. By the time of the Civil War, iconic sentimental novels and poetry had helped establish a standard narrative structure that moved from the grief and alienation of loss to the transformative experience of collective mourning. Through such tropes as the deathbed tableau, the suffering child, the contemplation of the grave, among many others, both fictional and other genres of writing activated this characteristic movement in order to dramatize the assuaging of grief through a reunion with both spirituality and community. In novels like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide*

World mourning was more than a literary theme; it was a narrative modality with a distinctive temporal progression that constructed a narrative of recuperation that countered the negation of death.

Antebellum structures of mourning provided a powerful blueprint for Americans, particularly northerners, faced with a crisis of meaning. Mary Louise Kete shows how sentimental mourning set out a rubric for negotiating the relationship between the individual, whose grief threatened social alienation, and the community. "Sentiment," she argues, "structures a collaboration through which individuals can join together in solving the seemingly local problem of grief in the face of death" (Kete, p. 3). She posits a critical distinction between the individual experience of grief and the cultural work of mourning that bolstered the primacy of collective social ideology over the concerns and preoccupations of the individual. Kete's work reveals the profound ideological power that rituals of mourning exerted in this period to define how individuals imagined their social roles.

My argument here goes further than simply suggesting that mourners in 1861 adapted familiar iconography to unfamiliar circumstances because that was most efficient. I have shown that while embalming addressed a specific cultural need to bear witness to the martyred body martyrdom that helped ignite the northern fervor for revenge, it was the writers who narrated Ellsworth's death for public consumption who expressed most powerfully the transformative power of sentimental mourning for Ellsworth. The continuity I wish to focus on lies not in the practices or tropes of mourning themselves, but in the transformative nature of mourning work in this period to assuage not only death, but the more abstract forms of loss that death may symbolically represent. Through these structures of narrative-production and familiar sentimental
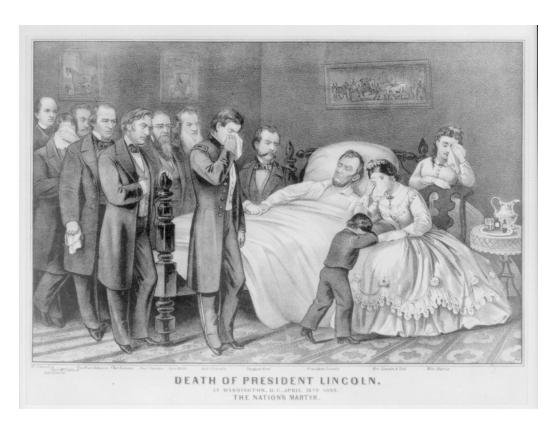
imagery, the writers who memorialized Colonel Ellsworth converted the danger of the crisis that his death represented into a familiar story of regeneration through collective sympathetic engagement literally and figuratively gathered around the martyr's corpse. What cannot be controlled in the material world is thus figuratively controlled or, at least, mediated, through narrativity.

CODA: BINDING THE PRESIDENTIAL BODY

As I've argued throughout this dissertation, mourning during the Civil War adapted tropes and processes of antebellum sentimental narrativity to a condition of national crisis. While Schwartz and other scholars have discerned the relationship between public mourning for Lincoln and the redefinition of the American republic, the technological and symbolic significance of embalming has been generally ignored. If the preservation of Ellsworth's body evoked a brokenness made whole again that resonated in 1861, then Lincoln's body resonated with this same power. The shape that mourning for Lincoln took was anticipated by mourning for Ellsworth four years earlier and must be read in that context.

Two famous Currier & Ives prints in the Library of Congress collection depict Lincoln on his deathbed. In one print, he is surrounded on one side by men from his political life and on the other by his wife, his son Tad, and another woman identified as "Miss Harris." In the other, men only surround him while the two women and Tad are just outside the door in the hallway. Handkerchiefs cover the women's faces. These two fanciful images of what Lincoln's deathbed must have looked like imagine two slightly different scenarios in two different rooms with Lincoln's bed angled differently in each case. In other words, while both drew on accounts of the deathbed scene, both seek to convey the symbolic importance of the event rather than its factual details.

In both images, the dying president is dressed in white and lying upon a white bed surrounded by dark figures (though the women in the first image wear white) and dark walls.

DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN,
AT WASHINGTON, D.C. APRIL 15TH 1865.
THE NATION'S MARTYR.

THE DEATH BED OF THE MARTYR PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
WASHINGTON, SATURDAY MORNING APRIL 15TH 1865, AT 22 MINUTES PAST 7 O'CLOCK.

While Lincoln lies still and sedate, it is the faces of the mourners who surround him that convey the tone of the two scenes: some cover their faces, some simply look on. In a precise sense, these are not portraits of Lincoln. They are better described as portrayals of a shared, public mourning. Ultimately these mourners are an extension of the public that bought and displayed these prints. In doing so, the American public (chiefly the Northern American public) memorialized its own grief at least as much as it commemorated a fallen leader. And it did so through the familiar sentimental lens of the deathbed tableau. In this case, the public, political sphere is enclosed within the domesticity of the deathbed scene. The logic of interpreting public life through the tropes of domesticity is part of the power of sentimental mourning.

In order to understand the full implications of Lincoln's embalming and the tour his body made back to Springfield Illinois, we must first look at how it resonates with mourning for Ellsworth four years earlier. If the journey that Ellsworth's embalmed body took from Washington to New York adapted the cultural tropes of sentimentalism to a moment of national crisis, it also set out a script for the more catastrophic event of mourning the president of the still-broken republic in 1865.

When Willie Lincoln died of typhoid fever in February, 1862 at the age of 11, his body was embalmed by Henry P. Cattell of the firm Brown and Alexander. In an account published in the *Home Journal* and then reprinted in Littell's *Living Age* in April, 1862, N. P. Willis recounts his trip to look at the body before the funeral, "for they had embalmed him to send home to the West—to sleep under the sods of his own valley—and the coffin-lid was to be closed before the service" ("The President's Son," p. 154). In keeping with the tradition of his age, Willis contrasts the sobs and distress of the mourners against the peace of the body who "lay, with eyes closed---

his brown hair parted as we had known it, pale in the slumber of death, but otherwise unchanged" ("The President's Son," p. 154). While grief is distressing, the face of death is a peaceful reflection of the same Willie, who was Lincoln's favorite, as ever. If the image of death as slumber is a standard trope of sentimental culture, embalming elevates this serenity to a perpetual condition. Not only is Willie *peaceful* as if only asleep, he will be so eternally, or so the magic of bodily preservation makes it seem. Mary Todd Lincoln, from her sickbed elsewhere in the White House, requested that the flowers in Willie's hands be removed and preserved for her. In accordance with the traditions of sentimental narrativity, Willis depicts this tableau of Willie's funeral in the East Room of the White House in natural terms: the dead boy is merely asleep and waiting to be sent "to sleep under the sods of his own valley." Mary Todd Lincoln's preserved flowers connote eternal memory.

Cattell also embalmed the body of the president when he was assassinated just over three years later in April, 1865. While Willie's death and burial were essentially private events, even if they played out on a semi-public stage, the assassination of President Lincoln was the ultimate public event that inaugurated a search for understanding that continues into contemporary scholarship. Today we think a great deal about how memory and commemoration figure in our reading and writing of history. In many ways, as a country we are still mourning Lincoln who is consistently rated as the best president of American history.[47] When he doesn't come in first, he is a close second. Barry Schwartz argues that Lincoln's stature as president took shape in the wake of national mourning: "Mourning ritual . . . *created* rather than *reflected* first impressions

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[47] In their study of presidential rankings from Arthur Schlessinger's 1948 poll of historians until the present, Robert K. Murray and Tim H. Blessing note that Lincoln consistently ranks first across various ratings by historians and polls of public opinion. This review appears in the first chapter of *Greatness in the White House: Rating the Presidents from George Washington Through Ronald Reagan*, "A Game for All Seasons: Past Presidential Polls," pp. 7-10.

of [Lincoln's] presidential greatness" (*Abraham Lincoln*, p. 23).

Schwartz's book details the link between the communal work of mourning Lincoln and the emergence of a national ethos in the minds of Northerners. It would seem inevitable that the coincidence of mourning the national leader of a fractured nation at almost the precise moment of its reunion could not help but link these two processes in the cultural imagination. How could mourning the Northern president, only just reinstated as the Southern president, not become a process of examining and attempting to reaffirm the cogency of the Union?

In the June, 1865 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the editorial front matter, the "Monthly Record of Current Events," acknowledged that Lincoln's death quickly re-shaped how his presidency was viewed:

> The murder of President Lincoln aroused a feeling of regret deeper than was ever
>
> before known in our history. Men and papers who had opposed his policy and
>
> vilified him personally, now vied with his adherents and friends in lauding the
>
> rare wisdom and goodness which marked his conduct and character. ("Monthly
>
> Record," p. 124)

This retrospective moment, which tracks the transformation of President Lincoln into the martyred president of the republic, leads directly into a description of grieving for the fallen leader. In particular, the body's preservation and its journey of public mourning are highlighted:

> It was decided that his body should be interred at his home in Springfield, Illinois.
>
> The long journey was one great funeral procession, lasting from the 21st of April,
>
> when the embalmed body left Washington, till the 4th of May, when it was
>
> entombed at Springfield. The ceremonies at New York, on the 25th, were by far

the most imposing ever known in that city. It was estimated that 60,000 people marched in the procession. The streets through which it passed were shrouded in black. ("Monthly Record," p. 124)

The link between the immediate reconsideration of Lincoln's legacy and the movement of his embalmed body through the streets attests to the symbolic power of this funeral procession. The circulation of Lincoln's preserved body figuratively unifies the Union that survived him in April, 1865 while simultaneously reframing the meaning of his presidency.

The power of the body itself to signify reunion is one of the subtle themes of Walt Whitman's elegiac "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Whitman conveys the power of the coffin's weaving pathway through the streets through stanzas formed as a litany of prepositional phrases:

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,

Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the
    ground spotting the gray debris,

Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,

Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown
    fields uprisen,

Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,

Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,

Night and day journeys a coffin. ("Lilacs," lines 26-32)

The landscape of Whitman's elegy extends far beyond the streets of the city to encompass the agricultural landscape of the nation as a whole. This serves in part to reinforce the poem's

deployment of the traditional elegiac trope of seasonal return and renewal. At the same time, Whitman draws an extended alignment in "Lilacs" between the body of the president and the body of the nation, which takes on the form of the land itself. In the poem's next section, the "States themselves" stand at attention as the body passes like "crape-veil'd women" ("Lilacs," line 36). The passing coffin calls the states to attention and gives them a bodily form that corresponds to the body of the president as it moves through Whitman's poem in series' of prepositional phrases. Whitman is not here concerned with the nature of the coffin, its draping, or its followers; instead, the environment through which the coffin passes is transformed and figuratively given bodily dimensions.

The advent of embalming during the Civil War indicated the emergence of a new relationship between mourning in the private sphere and memorialization in the public sphere. While the practices that governed the treatment of the body between death and burial varied by region, class, and religious orientation, antebellum American communities universally treated the corpse as the sacred remainder of a departed spirit. The body was traditionally laid out, cleaned, dressed—often in a simple shroud, and watched over during the night. This work was often, though not always, performed by women of the family or community. Whether women prepared the dead or not, these initial rituals surrounding death and mourning in this period were enmeshed within the domestic sphere. Once the body had been prepared, the body was transported, usually in the company of members of the community, from the home to either a place of worship or directly to the burial site. Once the usually quite simple burial service had been performed, interment followed.

The trajectory of this final journey from the earthly home to the heavenly home, ushered

by an encircled community, was interrupted by the exigencies of war. During the war, death on the battlefield left these dead outside of any effective burial system. Although wartime cemeteries were quickly established as battles began to produce corpses, it soon became apparent that even those bodies that could be identified would still likely end up in a poorly marked, or even mass, grave. Many dead remained unidentified. Looting of bodies was a constant problem, and very often the compatriots of the dead had either moved on or had been decimated in battle.

Because embalming restored the presence of the corpse to this process, it restored a sense of the sacred domesticity that had been symbolically central to antebellum ritual. While Ellsworth was embalmed as an actor in a national drama, for private purposes only the rich could afford to have their dead embalmed during the war.[48] Even the rich needed to be able to locate the soldier's body before it was hastily interred in a military cemetery or, more likely, in a mass or anonymous grave. Family members of soldiers who were ailing or presumed dead soon began arriving at the front to attend to the wounded and dying, and many nurses tell of family members who arrived too late. The number of embalmers available near the battlefront addressed this urgent need to recover the soldier's body, and to reincorporate it into the local world of the home and community. In a sense, these bodies made a symbolic journey that reversed that of Ellsworth: if Ellsworth moved from private consideration onto the public stage as a corpse for communal contemplation, then the fallen soldier moved from the violent battlefield back toward the private sphere. By returning the soldier's body to the domestic sanctum that anchored

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[48] As a result, embalming made it possible for some well-established families to bring their dead back to the family seat. As Oliver Wendell Holmes noted, "The slain of higher condition, 'embalmed' and iron-cased, were sliding off on the railways to their far homes; the dead of the rank and file were being gathere dup and committed hastily to the earth" (cited in Laderman, p. 114). As Holmes's remark implies, because holding onto the dead maintains a sense of continuity for families as much as for communities and nations, those of the wealthier families that didn't choose to buy replacement soldiers could at least retain the place of their dead within the family plot.

northern middle-class sentimental culture from the 1830s through the 1850s, bodily preservation reclaimed the soldier from the potential anonymity and dislocation of death and burial at the battlefront.

Embalming is perhaps the most apt example of how commemoration of the dead during the American Civil War was simultaneously nostalgic and politically potent. As the war progressed, the death toll rose beyond all expectation, soldiers' bodies were sometimes unrecoverable from the battlefield or were buried anonymously, and grievers were left without any familiar rubric for adapting to these conditions of loss. Embalming enabled an extensive mourning while also presenting a sanitized body that could safely travel from the front back home without seeming to bear the hideous scars of battle. In this way, the embalmed corpse could effectively represent all the most abstract ideals of war without presenting the conflicting bodily evidence that bodily decomposition might present. Perhaps the estimated 10,000 to 40,000 soldiers' bodies that were embalmed presented far less cognitive dissonance about the destructive nature of an ideological war than the scarred and decapitated bodies of its survivors, narratives that enshrined the memories of dead soldiers, from Ellsworth through to the end of the war, could reconfigure the image of the dead both materially and metaphorically.[49] Perhaps most importantly, these stories could enclose the dead in the warm embrace of collaborative mourning by seeming to provide a satisfying conclusion.

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[49] For details about the number of soldiers embalmed during the war, see Lowry, *Embalming Surgeons of the Civil War*.

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APPENDIX A

EMBALMMENT

OF

HUMAN BODIES,

WITHOUT ANY MUTILATION OR REMOVAL OF ANY PORTION OF THE BODY.

(PATENTED SYSTEM OF DR. SUCQUET, OF PARIS.)

DRS. C. D. & J. BROWN

Would most respectfully inform the Public, Undertakers, Societies, &c., &c., that they are the ONLY Representatives and Practitioners of the above beautiful PROCESS of EMBALMING Human Bodies in this City, and their Office is

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Acknowledged by the Medical Faculty and all Scientific men to be the only process of Preserving the Human Body. Numerous Testimonials and References can be seen at our Office.

To those who have heard of this most beautiful mode of preserving human bodies, it is useless to say anything of its unquestionable superiority over all other systems of embalmment. But, it is perhaps necessary to tell here, where our system is hardly known, that by this process, any one losing a parent, a relative, or a friend, will enjoy the consolation of having the body preserved for ages, without the least mutilation, in the most perfect state of preservation.

Although incredible as this may seem, it is but the natural effect of our chemical process, and perfect likenesses have been taken from persons dead for several years, who had been embalmed by our system.

This process will be found particularly valuable, when applied to bodies which are to be kept until the arrival of the parents or friends of the deceased, or, when the body is to be transported to some distance, a circumstance which happens every day. Until now, such remains could not be looked at without the strongest repulsion, on account of the dissolution that took place rapidly, whatever means were employed to retard it. But how different, with a body prepared by us; the remains of a dear and respected parent, of a beloved child, a bosom friend, snatched from their fond love by the cruel hand of death, hundreds of miles from home, whatever time may have passed from the moment the departed soul has been surrendered to his Creator, the mortal remains will be kept in the most perfect and natural preservation, and that cherished countenance looked at once more, by those who may be lead to remember and repeat these holy words of consolation: "He is not dead but sleepeth" until we meet again in a better world.

This is not the only benefit that will derive from this great discovery; it is a powerful anticeptic, which will save many from the deleterious effect caused by the presence of a body in decomposition, a source of disease much more frequent than is generally supposed.

It may also be useful to the magistrate, and help him in the proper researches for the fulfilment of his duty.

It will serve to keep bodies of unknown individuals until identified by those who are interested in it. How many families have heretofore suffered prejudices on account of the loss of a relative, who, having met with an accidental death, never could be identified for the want of proper means to keep their body for that purpose?

Persons desiring our services, or wishing to obtain the particulars about our charges, will please apply at our Office, **No. 469 Broadway,** or of any of the respectable Undertakers, who will give the matter his immediate attention. Those from a distance may notify us by telegraph, when their requests will receive prompt attention.

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