Faculty of English

Sound in Conflict:

Lyric Poetry and the American Civil War

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<u>Declaration</u>

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

<u>Abstract</u>

This dissertation investigates the acoustic resources of lyric poems written during and about the American Civil War, and asks how closely related these acoustics were to their historical environment. I thus attempt to redress the dominant visual and material responses to Civil War aesthetics, in favour of attention to its sounds. I also set out to discover whether lyric poetry, now held to be an essentially sounded medium, can be understood as part of the boom in sound technologies that textured the nineteenth century. These two aims can be drawn together into one question: did the lyric poetry of the Civil War *record* anything? To answer this question, the dissertation positions itself at an intersection between sound studies, historical poetics, and lyric theory, examining whether the playful sound experiments noted by current writers on lyric were in conversation with their historical moment, even to the extent (and this is the proposal of some sound studies practitioners) that the poems can be used as acoustic evidence of particular Civil War soundscapes.

The dissertation is made up of three chapters, structured around the three sounds that lyric poems have been held as making or containing: rhythm, rhyme and voice. The first chapter investigates the rhythmic patterning of Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps* (1865), and its potential origin in Whitman's theories of health and his work in army hospitals. The second chapter takes on rhyme, via a paired reading of Herman Melville's *Battle-Pieces* (1866) and Laura Redden's *Idyls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (1863). I argue that Melville was invested in rhyme as nonsense, and that Redden investigated the possibility of untying rhyme from sound, thus strengthening the prospect of a deaf Civil War poetry. The third chapter turns to the Civil War poems of Emily Dickinson and Paul Laurence Dunbar, and asks how they set about preserving or recovering the voices of Civil War soldiers. I conclude by looking at the place of Dunbar's poems in the early market for recorded sound. The dissertation ultimately contends that while the poems discussed do not *record* their environment, their experiments with form and sound do let them work as a historiographic instrument, and that 'lyric' thus remains a valuable and informative way of reading Civil War literature.

Table of Contents

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Introduction

> Silence and solitude may hint
>   (Whose home is in yon piney wood)
> What I, though tabled, could never tell—
> The din which here befell,
>   And striving of the multitude.
> The iron cones and spheres of death
>   Set round me in their rust,
>   These, too, if just,
> Shall speak with more than animated breath.
>   Thou who beholdest, if thy thought,
> Not narrowed down to personal cheer,
> Take in the import of the quiet here—
>   The after-quiet—the calm full fraught;
> Thou too wilt silent stand—
> Silent as I, and lonesome as the land.
>   (Herman Melville, 'An uninscribed Monument on one of the
>   Battle-fields of the Wilderness', 1866)[1]

Where Melville's titles usually get straight to the point, this one comes with a problem. Is 'An uninscribed Monument' what the poem is *about*, or what the poem *is*? In the tradition of what might be called 'monument poetry' this ambiguity is always in play, but rarely to such an extreme. Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Ozymandias' (1818) is twice mediated: the 'I' of the poem meets a traveller who himself met the monument and its inscription.[2] The distance between poem and statue is doubly driven home. A more immediate predecessor, Walt Whitman's 'As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods' (1865), also holds its monument at a distance.[3] Whitman recounts his chance encounter with a rough grave-marker nailed to a tree during a retreat from battle. It bears an inscription: '*Bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrade*'. These words lead Whitman to 'muse' (or wonder) as he wanders, making this a poem very much *about* a monument and the reading of it. Melville's poem, meanwhile, puts mediation aside. Where Shelley's statue declares 'My name is Ozymandias' and Whitman is able to 'easily […] understand' the marker's '*my*' as the my of a soldier, the 'I' in 'An uninscribed Monument' is the monument itself. It goes 'uninscribed' with any particular name because its identity is marked by its speaking; while not a King of Kings, it is at least a monument of monuments.

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[1] Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866; New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), p.173. Further references will be to this edition.
[2] *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat and Nora Crook, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), III, p.326.
[3] Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps: The Complete 1865 Edition*, ed. Lawrence Kramer (1865; New York: New York Review Books, 2015), p.77. Further references to poems from *Drum-Taps* will be to this edition.

But that 'I' is also, of course, the poem. The double identity operates smoothly because monuments and poems are alike in being silent. In the conceit the monument is a speaker, but it nevertheless notes that it cannot make a sound; though 'tableted' – written upon – it can never relate the 'din' of the Battle of the Wilderness. The monument/poem ends by wishing for its reader to be as 'Silent as I'; it proposes a silent reading encounter. A poem as both silent and speaking had become a key productive paradox for lyric in the century leading up to *Battle-Pieces*.[4] Shelley's traveller, for example, reports the inscription on the statue, but does not enclose it in speech marks. The inscription thus becomes partner to the poem itself: while a poem might be said to have a 'speaker', it would be odd indeed to format it as speech. Melville makes of this paradox an absurdity by having an inscription comment on its own silence. The monument is aware of certain war noises, but does not play them back, because, like a poem, it has no means to. So when the monument asks us to pay attention to 'the quiet here', that 'here' is both *there*, in the Virginia Wilderness, and *here*, in front of us, on the page. It is, though, a 'calm full fraught', because some noises are trying to emerge. For one thing, there is a rhyme scheme. While it takes a few lines to get going (with the stray 'hint' never receiving a partner) the run of abba rhymes soon becomes clear, and the poem ends on a conclusive couplet. Alongside neat rhymes like 'rust/just' and 'stand/land' are multiple instances of rhyme pairs in which the rhyming syllables do not look alike: 'wood/multitude', 'cheer/here' 'thought/fraught'. In order to know that these words rhyme, it seems the reader must be hearing them, and that 'the quiet here' is not all that quiet.

In its riddling thickness, 'An uninscribed Monument' could stand up to much more scrutiny, but for now I will amplify just a few of the questions it poses. Is a poem a sound object, or is it silent? And if it is sounded, is it in fact able to 'tell' a 'din' to its readers, like a kind of sound-recording technology? How would that telling work? These are the fundamental questions that this dissertation sets out to answer, within the field of lyric poetry of the American Civil War. 'Lyric poetry' is a term which needs unpacking with each new outing, and I will make some steps towards a working definition below, but first I will suggest why I think the questions above are pressing for Civil War studies, via an encounter with the fraught field of Civil War sound histories.

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[4] See for instance John Stuart Mill's 1833 definition of poetry as witnessed solitude, heard silence, in 'What Is Poetry?', *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. Thomas Collins and Vivienne Rundle (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999), pp.1212-1227.

I. Shadows and Ghosts

While much of the American Civil War can be seen, practically nothing of it can be heard. This is in the first instance a problem (or perhaps merely a fact) of technology. The first photograph was taken in 1825; the first phonograph record was not made until 1877.[5] The Civil War, 1861-1865, lies between the former two dates: well after the first, just too early for the second. Although the Crimean War was the first major conflict with a significant photographic record, the Civil War was the first in which photography became a key medium by which events were related to publics while they were ongoing.[6] It would be slightly inaccurate, though, to describe the Civil War as 'photo-documented'. Long exposure times meant that all photographs required

Figure 1: 'General Sherman's Advance', Harper's Weekly*, 21 May 1864, p.1. Exposure times made it impossible for cameras to capture a gun in the midst of firing as is depicted here.*

some degree of posing, and the battlefield scenes exhibited to civilian audiences had almost exclusively been captured after the fighting had ended at any particular engagement. But we still have a rich archive of photographic representations of the War, which while patchy and focussed

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[5] For accounts of the early histories of these technologies see Robert Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A Social & Aesthetic History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (1999; New York: Routledge, 2017) and Matthew Rubery, 'Thomas Edison's Poetry Machine', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 18 (2014), 1-25.

[6] Bernd Hüppauf, 'The Emergence of Modern War Imagery in Early Photography', *History and Memory*, 5(1) (1993), 130-151.

on the white male subject at the expense of others, still provides a valuable insight into how the War was, in both senses of the word, staged.[7]

Furthermore, it is not as if photography existed at the expense of other visual media. Prior to and alongside the novelty of photographs was the massive popularity of illustrated newspapers and magazines. *Harper's Weekly* would frequently have an illustration making up its entire front page, often depicting action that a photograph could not (see Figure 1). There has also been a recent surge in attention to the War's material objects. Kristen Treen, for example, has shown precisely what one of Melville's 'iron cones' might be able to tell us, and her new project asks us quite literally to keep an eye out for hitherto ignored Civil War monuments.[8] For the more general audience, too, the Civil War arrives as spectacle. In 2019, the new American Civil War Museum opened in Richmond, combining two previous institutions, the American Civil War Center and the Museum of the Confederacy. Andrew Davenport describes the museum's impact:

> The American Civil War Museum literally brings visitors face-to-face with the past. Historic photographs of legendary and workaday Civil War-era Americans, enlarged and resplendently colorized, decorate the foyer walls at the entrance to an exhibition space. Here, visitors look directly into the impenetrable gaze of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, the calculating blue-eyed stare of Jefferson Davis.[9]

More than just a visual object, the Civil War has started to look back. Monumentalised in this $25-million museum is the promise that a visual encounter with the Civil War will always pay off, because the array of visual material on offer is expectant of study. The gaze of Frederick Douglass might be 'impenetrable', but it is at least there to challenge the viewer in a constantly renewed transaction.[10]

Sound has no such luck.[11] When Edison wrote his first sales-pitch-cum-manifesto for the phonograph, he claimed the device could capture what had been 'hitherto fugitive'.[12] Until the

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[7] On photographs as 'representations', see Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p.79.

[8] Kristen Treen, '"A Shell and What Became of It": missile narratives and commemorative trajectories at Gettysburg', *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, 70/71(4) (2017), 453-470; 'An alternative history of American Civil War monuments', *Apollo Magazine*, 3 July 2020, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/american-civil-war-monuments/> [accessed 22 March 2021].

[9] Andrew M. Davenport, 'A New Civil War Museum Speaks Truths in the Former Capital of the Confederacy', smithsonianmag.com, 2 May 2019 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/civil-war-museum-speaks-truths-former-capital-of-confederacy-180972085/> [accessed 17 March 2021].

[10] For a recent example of these encounters, see Kathleen Diffley and Benjamin Fagan, ed., *Visions of Glory: The Civil War in Word and Image* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019).

[11] Gavin Williams's recent collection, *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), is a fine example of the kind of study still missing for the Civil War.

[12] Thomas Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', *The North American Review*, 126(262) (1878), 527-536, p.527.

phonograph, a sound's disappearance began with its first vibration. For any study of pre-phonographic periods, then, we rely almost entirely on ear-witnessing – not recordings but written records. Here arrives the problem of one medium or form of data – sound – being carried across to us by a different medium altogether – written text. Something is inevitably lost in the remediation. This is a persistent issue among the few direct engagements with Civil War sound. The cover of the paperback edition of Mark M. Smith's sensory study, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege* (2015), is laden with tromp l'oeil splashes of mud and blood, promising a direct, un-sanitised encounter with the War's harsher realities.[13] Smith's first chapter, 'The Sounds of Secession', is a narrative retelling of the firing on Fort Sumter, focussed on piecing together the event's soundscape. His writing is deft, and the argument that the War would have brought a direct shift in acoustic experience for the population of Charleston is compelling. The chapter frequently falls back, though, on metaphors of sound to compensate for the dearth in actual acoustic evidence. While the discussion of 'political voices', the tying of tongues, and the silencing of enslaved people is vital, it emphasises how quickly sound is displaced into something other than itself, where the visual can remain in its proper zone.[14]

I will return to Smith and the thorny ground of sound-recovery later, and will pivot for the moment to a stranger book: Charles D. Ross's *Civil War Acoustic Shadows* (2001).[15] It is a generous piece of scholarship on an odd, even arcane, subject. An 'acoustic shadow' is a phenomenon wherein a sound disappears in particular places where it should be audible. Ross recounts numerous reports of this phenomenon occurring near major Civil War battles. Within 'plain sight' of the cacophonies of shelling and musket fire, everything would go quiet.[16] These silences were caused, Ross suggests, by combinations of sound absorption, wind shear, and temperature gradients: where sound *should* have been, circumstances conspired to send it elsewhere. It is not a long book nor one much cited, but it stands, I suggest, as a useful representative of the study of Civil War sound. Sound seems to thwart our attempts to recover or imagine it: even when we listen, there's not much to hear. This weirdness can inspire extreme tactics. John Sabol's *Burnside Bridge: The Excavation of a Civil War Soundscape* (2013), for example, positions its work squarely in

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[13] Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). This builds on Smith's earlier book, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[14] Smith, *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege*, p.18, p.28. A former student of Smith's has recently published another work of Civil War sense-scaping: Evan A. Kutzler, *Living By Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

[15] Charles D. Ross, *Civil War Acoustic Shadows* (Shippensburg, PA.: White Mane Books, 2001).

[16] Ross, p.3.

the zone of the paranormal.[17] Sabol recounts his listening for the 'ghosts' of soldiers at an Antietam battlefield, in a dense acoustemological register with frequent citation of works of sound studies. It would be easy to dismiss the book, a project of the 'C.A.S.P.E.R. Research Center', as a piece of arcana, and I won't linger long on it, but the text does hint at one of the problematic logics of sound studies. Sabol deems written 'earscape references' insufficient, and argues that we should instead open ourselves up to a much wider, more spectral, range of frequencies: 'a hauntscape'.[18] The often frustrating search for sound can lead to the imagination taking charge, potentially at the expense of accuracy.

One more oddness of Civil War sound is worth noting before I move on. For many soldiers, the War would have got quieter as it progressed – not because of a reduction in the production of decibels, but because of their gradual deafening. While medical understanding of deafness was rudimentary, it was known by the time of the Civil War that sustained exposure to loud sounds led to the gradual degradation of hearing.[19] For the infantryman and artilleryman, pummelled for hours on end by musket cracks and the concussive blasts of cannon, a certain amount of hearing loss would have been inevitable, as Harry Lang shows in *Fighting in the Shadows*.[20] 33% of Union soldiers would eventually be diagnosed, and hearing loss was acknowledged in the General Law of 1862 as an eligibility criterion for military pensions, making the Civil War a key moment in the history of deafness.[21] There is more study to be done, following Sewell et al.'s data-driven article and Lang's encyclopaedic book. But here I want simply to note that the War lessened or destroyed the ability of many of its participants to act as ear-witnesses. As a zone of historical acoustic inquiry, it is not just scarce of evidence, but was actively hostile to the gathering of that evidence.

II. The Unsounded War

My attempt so far (albeit frustrated) has been to focus on battle sounds. These are perhaps what come most swiftly to mind from my shorthand phrase 'Civil War sounds', due to the metonymic

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[17] John Sabol, *Burnside Bridge: The Excavation of a Civil War Soundscape* (Brunswick: Ghost Excavation Books, 2013).
[18] Sabol, p.43.
[19] See, for example, Joseph Williams, *Treatise on the Ear* (London: John Churchill, 1839), p.211. Williams mentions '[a]rtillerymen, blacksmiths, blasters in mines' as common sufferers of gradually acquired hearing loss.
[20] Harry G. Lang, *Fighting in the Shadows: Untold Stories of Deaf People in the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2017), pp.194-205.
[21] Ryan K. Sewell and others, 'Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862 to 1920', *Laryngoscope*, 114 (2004), 2147-2153, p.2149. See also Scott McIlwain and others, 'Heritage of Army Audiology and the Road Ahead: The Army Hearing Program', *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(12) (2008), 2167-2172.

relation of war and battle. The Civil War was (among many other things) a series of battles, and the state of military technology meant that certain sounds, such as muskets, cannons and bugles, would have dominated. These were accompanied by human and animal sounds, of discipline, of aggression, of fear and dying. But this is still a very narrow realm of enquiry, and one which finds itself inevitably tangled up in the problem of sound's transiency. Is there value, then, in expanding our auditory attention to something like poetry, as a form in which sound might linger intact? In one regard, the answer is an emphatic yes. Poetry was without doubt a part of the Civil War soundscape, in the form of the patriotic ballad. As Faith Barrett has shown, there was an ongoing 'permeability' to the 'boundary between poem and song'.[22] Any published poem in a suitable form was liable to burst into sound as song, and many were written with that possibility in mind, charged by their authors with various 'voice-effects'.[23] While not every poem would *become* a song, they could still invoke 'the spectral presence of singing people': an imagined shared community.[24]

This leads me to note that the one Civil War sound which has endured more than any other is, unsurprisingly, music. Civil War sheet music is an almost unassailable piece of acoustic evidence, and there have been several rich studies of its forms and usage.[25] A different version of this dissertation could well have taken music as its subject, and asked what kinds of historiography a marching tune might perform, or whether different settings of the same poem had different political motivations. But this is a textual study foremost, and I have thus kept music as an incisive but only occasional interlocutor. While the fungibility of poem and song was an insistent phenomenon, I worry that the exchange was unbalanced. In exerting influence on ballad texts, martial and popular music diminished those texts' capacity to mean via sound. The acoustic transaction between melody and text is preordained: poetic rhythm becomes crotchets and quavers, rhyme is beholden to cadence. The exchange is agreed upon in advance, and there is little room for poetry to do other, trickier kinds of listening.

Alongside the newspaper poems waiting to be sung was another type of poetry, knotty with formal experiments which would disrupt any putting-to-music. This poetry is the main subject of

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[22] Faith Barrett, *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p.9.
[23] Barrett, p.10.
[24] Eliza Richards, *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the U.S. Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p.129.
[25] See, for example, James A. Davis, *Maryland, My Maryland: Music and Patriotism during the American Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), and Christian McWhirter, *Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

my dissertation, and is the poetry I will refer to as lyric. Although it might seem odd to characterise lyric poetry, literally 'of the lyre', as somehow opposite to poetry set up to be sung, I am certainly not the first to do so.[26] In her entry on 'lyric' for the *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), Virginia Jackson tracks the word back to its origins as an Alexandrian cataloguing term for poems once, but no longer, sung.[27] Jackson writes that lyric was 'from its inception a term used to describe a music which could no longer be heard, an idea of poetry characterized by a lost collective experience'. This original sense made a comeback in the nineteenth century, when lyric became 'a default term for short poems, a practical name for verse that did not […] conform to the popular standard of ballads or hymns'.[28] While I defer to Jackson's argument that lyric is not, ultimately, a thing, but a specific way of reading developed within twentieth-century academic institutions, I do believe that this way of reading gravitates towards a particular kind of thing to-be-read.[29] That thing, as I will tease out over the course of this dissertation, is a type of poem which remains cynical or wary of sound as a poetic resource even as it deploys that resource in novel ways, even to excess.

In a more immediate sense, though, my separation of something I'm calling lyric from popular ballad is a response to one of the foundational (although not unproblematic) studies of Civil War literature: Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore* (1962).[30] Wilson turns to poetry quite late in his study, and offers a stern judgement:

> It is a striking phenomenon of the period that the declamatory versification of public events should completely have rendered inaudible, should have driven into virtual hiding, the more personal kind of self-expression which has nothing to do with politics or battles, which was not concocted for any market and which, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the writer, was likely to take on an unconventional form.[31]

By entertaining Wilson's distinction between poems in an 'unconventional form' and the 'declamatory versification of public events' I do not mean to defer entirely, or even mostly, to his account of Civil War literature. As a single rebuttal to stand in for many, I will point out that Wilson proposed that Emily Dickinson 'never, so far as I know, refers to the war in her poetry'.[32]

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[26] 'Lyric' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111676> [accessed 18 March 2021].
[27] Virginia Jackson, 'Lyric', in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp.826-834, p.826.
[28] Jackson, 'Lyric', p.832.
[29] See Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* ((Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[30] Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).
[31] Wilson, p.487.
[32] Wilson, p.488.

While the first article drawing specific attention to Dickinson as a war poet did not appear until 1965, Wilson writes in detail about Dickinson's letters to Higginson, one of which contains a war poem.[33] Suffice to say, *Patriotic Gore* has become something of a historical document in itself. Nevertheless, Wilson's unapologetic paean for idiosyncratic expression does ring true.[34] While I fundamentally disagree that such poems have 'nothing to do with politics', I do agree that there was a kind of poetry which did not believe standard versification could automatically shore up a poem's worth in such a politically-charged moment in time, and that 'inaudible' is not the worst word to describe it. As I will propose below, what is 'unconventional' about many of the poems I discuss is scepticism towards sound as a resource, and a corresponding distance from the song/poem fungibility described by Barrett. While Wilson probably employed 'inaudible' only metaphorically, it is a useful marker-word for these poems which land oddly and often chaotically on the ear.

Recent monographs on Civil War poetry have unilaterally positioned themselves as rebuttals to Wilson's. Barrett's *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave* (2012) makes its opposition clear:

> Wilson argues that there is not enough poetry of introspection, but as I will go on to suggest, the permeable boundary between public and private in [popular verse] means that poets writing at all levels of expertise and experience move back and forth between writing from the self and writing to and for the nation.[35]

Barrett goes on to tease out a vibratory quality in the lyric 'I' of popular verse, finding in it a radical claim to authority from authors otherwise relegated to a limited sphere of subjects.[36] She thereby builds on the work done by Alice Fahs in *The Imagined Civil War* (2001). In another direct rebuttal of Wilson, Fahs argues that the Civil War 'catalysed an outpouring of war-related literature that has rarely been examined'.[37] This outpouring is, she goes on to show, well worth

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[33] 'The only news I know / Is bulletins all day / From immortality'. Odd that Wilson, on the lookout for densities of style, apparently didn't spot the 'bullet' in 'bulletins'. See L290, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1958), II, p.184 (early June 1864). The first article arguing directly for Dickinson as a war poet was Thomas Ford, 'Emily Dickinson and the Civil War', *University Review of Kansas City*, 31 (1965), 199-203.

[34] It is a paean with a long history. Stephen Crane was one of its inaugurators; on reading battle accounts in *Century* magazine, he remarked in a huff: 'I wonder that *some* of these fellows don't tell how they *felt* in these scraps!' (Corwin Linson, *My Stephen Crane*, ed. Edwin H. Cady (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1958), p.37).

[35] Barrett, p.11.

[36] Barrett, p.87.

[37] Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), p.1. Fahs also positions her text as a rebuttal of Daniel Aaron's *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), claiming that the Civil War was 'far from being an "unwritten war"'. I believe this is a slight misrepresentation of Aaron. His title refers not to a general lack of writing, but to the perceived lack of an 'epic' work of Civil War literature.

the examining, shaping as it did 'a cultural politics of war'.[38] Eliza Richards, in *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the U.S. Civil War* (2019), takes a slightly different tack, arguing not only that Wilson has missed the trick with much of the verse he ignores, but that the poetry he lauds should not be held separately at all. Popular and experimental poetry, she argues, 'form a continuum' in their translation of battle news into verse, albeit that writers like Dickinson, Whitman and Melville more regularly shift attention 'away from war's immediacies and toward its linguistic effects'.[39]

What coheres across these monographs is an emphasis on Civil War poetry as 'network', to take another term from Richards.[40] A group of poems might be able to know things, and do things, that individual poems cannot. And in order for such a network to exist, these poems must have a shared investment in regular form as political tool. How do we square this, though, with something like 'An uninscribed Monument' – a 15-line poem, with most of a sonnet's rhyme scheme but little of its rhythm, which frets about the impossibility of recording conflict? This is, surely, different in kind to popular verse which took on particular forms with the assumption that they would afford a kind of authority or entry into a shared politics. Such a distinction is not a value judgement, by any means. Rather, I mean to ask what we can do with poems which seem fascinated by their own inadequacy as records or documents of war – poems in which sound is in conflict with its circumstance. I try to follow Richards in her push for a renewed attention to the 'politics of form' in American poetry.[41] But while for Richards this manifests in close study of the innovations in poetry as network, I want to pay attention to poems which by experimenting with form amplify that form's potentially problematic politics: poems which find rhythm to be compulsive, rhyme trivial, and voice impossible to recover. I believe that lyric, in the terms I have begun to define it, thus remains a valuable category with which to encounter Civil War literature.

Taking a step back, I will return to the various questions in play. Was poetry an experienced part of Civil War soundscapes? If so, was lyric poetry more or less noisy than ballad verse? Furthermore, can we take lyric not only as a sound object but as a *recording technology*, capable of housing other sounds within it? Or does its introspection into its own sounds frustrate this function? These are the questions addressed and answered throughout the dissertation. In order

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[38] Fahs, p.1.
[39] Richards, p.14.
[40] Richards, p.14.
[41] Richards, p.129.

that each chapter might get going more directly, I will lay out below a collection of accounts of what sound in poetry has more widely been held as being able to do. This will be the ground of my discussion, from which I will pursue the particular valency of poetic sound to encounters with the Civil War.

III. Sound Studies

R. Murray Schafer begins his manifesto for the soundscape as an object of study with a quotation from Whitman:

> Now I will do nothing but listen…
> I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following,
> Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night…[42]

As Schafer's ellipses hint, this is an edited extract: he quotes lines 1, 5 and 6 from part 26 of the 1891 'Song of Myself'. In a book about sound and how we can talk about it, this cutting sits uncomfortably. By removing lines 2-4 of the poem, Schafer cancels out its own functioning as a potential sound object. No longer 'running together, combined, fused or following' (surely a coded reference to Whitman's own technique), the lines are instead cherry-picked for handy phrases which Schafer implicitly ventriloquises in order to summarise his project. Line 2, absent from this quotation, declares an intent to 'accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute towards it'. This is a promise that 'Song of Myself' will not only write *about* sound but will itself *record* sounds. Or, at least, that experienced sound will in some way 'contribute' to its form. But that form, in Schafer's quotation, has been marred, and so has Whitman's poem as sound object. Before *The Soundscape* has even properly begun, then, Schafer inadvertently points to the problem of where poetry will fit within what would become the field of sound studies: as evidence, commentary, or sound in itself?

In 2005, Michele Hilms felt wary enough to title a review article: 'Is There a Field Called Sound Studies? And Does It Matter?'. The study of sound, she wrote, 'exhibits a strong tendency to remain […] always emerging, never emerged'.[43] Flash forward to 2021, and the field has, I think it safe to say, escaped that tendency. With a *Handbook,* a *Reader,* a *Companion,* and enough

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[42] Quoted from R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977; Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994), p.3. For the poem intact, see Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* ed. Jerome Loving (1891; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.51.

[43] Michele Hilms, 'Is There a Field Called Sound Studies? And Does It Matter?', *American Quarterly,* 57(1) (2005), 249-259, p.249.

conferences to decimate a travel grant, anyone wanting to declare themselves as 'doing sound studies' will find themselves in good company.[44] Like any field, though, sounds studies has struggled to define itself neatly, as Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard narrates in his piece, 'What is Sound Studies?'[45] I won't try to offer yet another definition of what sound studies *is*, for risk of being recursive. What I understand it to *do*, though, in brief, is to ask us to treat sounds, their production, and their reception as historically, politically and ecologically meaningful phenomena. Just because any one sound doesn't stick around for long does not mean they should slip from our enquiries. That is the starting point, and from there the field splinters off as fields are wont to do. But there is a fundamental problem with even this simple prompting. If we are not listening to our own acoustic environment, or putting on headphones to analyse a recording, what exactly have we got to deal with in terms of evidence? Part of the importance of sound studies is surely to encounter sound *as sound*. Schafer warned, early on, that 'no silent projection of a soundscape can ever be adequate'. The first rule of soundscaping, he wrote, should be: 'if you can't hear it, be suspicious'.[46]

This warning has, unsurprisingly, gone largely unheeded; it is not as if sound studies researchers have conscientiously agreed to ignore history before 1877.[47] It's just a matter of justification. In his essay 'Echo' for *Keywords in Sound* (2015), Mark Smith takes up the problem of evidence and debates two possible solutions.[48] The first is re-creation. In a handy example, Smith asks whether instead of relying on the ear-witnessing of Civil War battles we should rather be trying to re-create 'that same cannon boom using salvaged cannon and gunpowder from the period'?[49] His pernickety phrasing predicts his conclusion: this way madness lies (or worse, I fear, the joining of battle re-enactment groups). The other solution, and the one Smith favours, is to assume print capable of 'recording sound'. Writers, he proposes, 'could use, quite deliberately, the printed word to convey and even reproduce the sounds of words and events'.[50] To suggest that writers could use the 'the printed word to convey […] the sounds of words' is fairly non-radical. I will

[44] Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2012); Michael Bull, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[45] Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, 'What Is Sound Studies?', *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, pp.16-23.
[46] Schafer, p.132.
[47] And gladly so. The fruits of ignoring Schafer's warning are manifest in studies like Richard Cullen Rath's *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) and Alain Corbin's classic *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (1994; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
[48] Mark M. Smith, 'Echo', *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp.55-64.
[49] Smith, 'Echo', p.56.
[50] Smith, 'Echo', p.61.

discuss this further below, but printed words do, more or less, encode their own sounds within them. How else would we be able to guess at the pronunciation of newly encountered words? But Smith's other claim, that printed words could 'convey and *even reproduce*' the sounds of '*events*', is much more drastic. His essay doubles down on this mimetic reading, suggesting that '[a]ural metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, and everyday descriptions did the work of recorded sound admirably well'.[51] This is backed up with a gesture towards the descriptions of bullets given by Civil War soldiers – 'like buzzing bees and swarming insects'. I do concur with Smith's ultimate point: could a perfect recording of those bullets be magically conjured for study, the metaphors soldiers used to describe them would still be more valuable.[52] There is simply much more such metaphors can tell us. But something troublingly metaleptic remains afoot. A metaphor or simile of a sound, however telling, does *not* do the work of 'recorded sound'. We can't feed the word 'whizzing' into a computer audio program and get out of it the frequency range of a Minié ball. Literary texts, and especially poems, make their own sounds – if they make any sounds at all.[53] Their metaphors and similes might be able to tell us about how a sound was received, but to say they preserve the sound itself is surely to move into fantasy.

One way out of this tangle is to quibble with the paradigmatic account of sound technology I have been leaning on thus far. It is easy to stray into a narrative wherein 'recording' is the be-all and end-all of acoustic innovations, and Edison and co.'s wonky tin-foil box becomes the protagonist at the expense of all other characters. Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* (2003) offers a key intervention into this narrative. His account of nineteenth-century sound technologies in North America positions the phonograph as merely one manifestation of an ongoing cultural commitment to 'audile technique'.[54] Instead of a pyramid with the phonograph as its capstone, we get something more democratic: a *field* of technologies, where the phonograph and telephone exist alongside the stethoscope and ear trumpet as articulations of the cultural imagination.[55] There is some value, I think, in considering ongoing experiments in lyric as part of this field.

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[51] Smith, 'Echo', p.62.
[52] Smith, 'Echo', p.62.
[53] A paraphrase of John Hollander's dictum: '*words can only "sound like" other words, and it is thereby that they sound like nature if at all*' (John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (1975; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.120, emphasis in original). See also Adam Piette's wry reminder that onomatopoeia should not be used 'to justify a dark faith in phoneme demonology' (Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.9).
[54] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p.23.
[55] Sterne, p.25. See also Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Gitelman shows that the phonograph was at least partly predicted and pre-empted by innovations in stenography.

If describing poems as sound recording technologies is too great a leap, we might instead think of them as sound *instruments*. The musical/scientific quibble is, I hope, productive. Poems are aesthetic productions before they are scientific ones, and while an author does not 'play' a poem, a sense of language as something that can be played with and upon – instrumentalised, indeed – is useful. Instrument in its more scientific sense, meanwhile, takes on the vital parts of Smith's argument without overstepping into a world where we can put a needle to poems and get sounds out of them. The poems I discuss in this dissertation attend to the sounds of their environment, and often record something *about* those sounds, even if they don't do any specifically phonographic work. They can be held as a kind of sound instrument: 'transducers' converting data from one form into another.[56]

IV. Historical Poetics

What remains odd about Smith's account among others is the determination to treat poetry as something which might help us *do* sound studies, as opposed to something which might be the object *of* sound studies. A less fraught response to the function of sound in poetry, which takes up a variation of the latter position, comes from the discipline self-styled as 'historical poetics'. Its inaugurators propose that the formal trends of verse – to be tracked down in things like treatises on meter, school textbooks, poetry reviews – are meaningful features of their political moment, as opposed to arbitrary and transhistorical aesthetic features. Meredith Martin puts it well:

> I want to reiterate that 'meter' in the nineteenth century meant different things to different communities, as well as to different poets, and that a poet's use of meter almost always implied a concept of the community and the nation. By stabilizing, attempting to define, or grappling with their use of meter, poets and prosodists were often attempting to define, transform, or intervene in an aspect of national culture.[57]

If we accept for the moment that meter is an acoustic property of poetry, then Martin's starting point here seems very similar to that of sound studies. Meter is meaningful, is the argument – not necessarily in a mimetic fashion where certain meters might sound *like* something, but in being itself a cultural production argued over, experimented with, fought for. Martin's study ends up at the First World War, which she argues saw a coming-to-a-head of many of the nineteenth-century tussles over what an English meter might be, and might do. The conflict saw an uptick

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[56] Sterne, p.22.
[57] Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.4.

in amateur versifiers employing prosodic lessons learned at school to contribute to a mass of patriotic poems. Martin does not suggest looking to these poems as repositories of evidence, but as evidence *in themselves*. We can apply this to 'An uninscribed Monument'. Where a sound studies researcher might focus on the implications of battlefield 'din' in contrast to the 'quiet' of later mourning, a historical poeticist (to coin a phrase) would spend more time with the poem's oblique relation to the sonnet form and the sonnet's frequent deployment for memorial verse. Historical poetics is thus a kind of meta-study of sound in poetry, with the premise that if poems are evidence of anything it is first and foremost of trends in poetic technique. While those trends might occasionally lean towards the mimetic (sound has of course for long periods been held as 'echo to the sense'), as critics we need not conclude one way or the other, and can apply 'different approaches' to 'different centuries'.[58]

While there has not yet been a self-declared and sustained application of historical poetics to the American Civil War, the War does lurk at the discipline's edges.[59] Historical poetics began (as much as any such thing can, discretely, begin) with a discussion of Sidney Lanier's *The Science of English Verse* (1880).[60] Yopie Prins describes her discussion group's burgeoning appreciation for Lanier's odd text, and their ultimate agreement that 'there is something productive about his dysprosody, which conceives of poetry without a speaker'.[61] We would not discover, though, from either Lanier's text or Prins's analysis of it, that Lanier fought for the Confederate army.[62] The relevance of Lanier's service to his prosodic work is the sort of thing a historical poetics of the Civil War might usefully try to discern. As the very start of an idea, I'll note one of Prins's conclusions:

> Lanier returns to English verse not to measure the rhythmic experience of a subjective body but to imagine a national body. Idiosyncratic as his treatise may be, Lanier is less interested in individual poetic thinking than in poetry as collective thought: prosody as recognition rather than prosody as cognition.[63]

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[58] Sound as 'echo to the sense' was proposed by Alexander Pope in his 1711 'Essay on Criticism' (Alexander Pope, *The Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.29); Yopie Prins, 'Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and "The Science of English Verse"', *PMLA*, 123(1) (2008), 229-234, p.233.

[59] Barrett and Richard's books are engaged in a version of this work, but do not declare themselves as such.

[60] Prins, 'Historical Poetics', p.230. Virginia Jackson's article for this special issue also steers via the Civil War, focussing on Melville's 'The Portent'. Virginia Jackson, 'Who Reads Poetry?', *PMLA*, 123(1) (2008), 181-187.

[61] Prins, 'Historical Poetics', p.232.

[62] Lanier's service is mentioned, but not pursued, in Max Cavitch, 'Slavery and its metrics', *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Kerry Larson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.94-112, p.99.

[63] Prins, 'Historical Poetics', p.233.

For a southerner in 1880 to 'imagine a national body' was not as straightforward as Prins's short article is compelled to make out. What kind of nation would Lanier's prosody welcome? Is his deployment of 'English' verse in part an attempt to champion an old-world romanticism of the southern states in the face of Reconstruction? The 1880s are probably a better place to do this kind of investigation than the War years themselves; in my reading I have yet to discern a notable 'Confederate poetics' in play between 1861-1865. Much of the literary culture of the United States was homogenised between the North and South at the start of the War, due to the majority placement of publishers and printers in the North.[64] The opportunities and financial incentives for southern authors to develop a unique poetics in opposition to their northern counterparts were thus very slim indeed. A direct and sustained historical poetics of the Civil War, then, would in fact be better targeted at the years *after* the War, when a southern literature, unique in form, became a key proposition.

Prins has gone on to propose that historical poetics should be held not as an 'ideology' but as a series of 'parallel experiments' in things like 'genre theory', 'the history of prosody' and 'poetry as media'.[65] I feel that I can propose this dissertation as one of these experiments. I turn throughout to things like reviews, forewords and anthologies in order to work out what poems were thought to be able to do with their forms, and thus where the poems I discuss fit within Civil War verse cultures. While I don't find an obvious tussle between northern and southern meters, I do find that patterns of rhythm and rhyme had a part to play in the war effort. This experiment has its problems, though. The poems I examine all find ways of pushing back against, parodying, or acting in excess of the period's normative poetics, and thus often seem to function as their own formal authorities. Does historical poetics as a reading technique allow such poems enough room to operate? Or, by in essence claiming that *every* poem was to some degree formally experimental, does it dilute the possibility of a particular poet or group of poems standing in conscious opposition to the verse culture from which they emerged?

A version of this question was taken up in a back-and-forth series of essays by Prins and Simon Jarvis. Jarvis responded to Prins's initial 'Historical Poetics' article in a 2014 essay, 'What Is Historical Poetics?'.[66] It is an oddly-situated rejoinder. As Jarvis chooses to remark, he is

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[64] Michael Winship, 'The American Book Trade and the Civil War', *A History of American Civil War Literature*, ed. Coleman Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.17-32.

[65] Yopie Prins, '"What is Historical Poetics"', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 77(1) (2016), 13-40, p.16.

[66] Simon Jarvis, 'What Is Historical Poetics?', *Theory Aside*, ed. Jason Potts and Daniel Stout (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), pp.97-116.

'fulfilling a commitment to participate in a collection of essays about theory'.[67] To use this commitment to respond to a short article on poetics published six years earlier suggests a real urge to argue. He states his sticking point early on:

> Gossip, correspondence, manuscripts, printing, editing, reviews, metrical theories: all these represent essential evidence about the historical meaning of verse-thinking. Yet they remain liable to be exceeded or corrected by what happens in that verse-thinking itself.[68]

In essence: a poet's body of work has the last word on how its words work. Pope, as so often, forms Jarvis's example. Reading Pope, he suggests, 'means developing a peculiar competence in Pope-reading: prosodic gestures, since they have no fixed or natural value, take on a value which we learn to hear through a whole authorship'.[69] Prins, in her neatly-titled follow-up "'What Is Historical Poetics?'", suggests that she and Jarvis are really reading from 'two sides of the same coin'.[70] Where Jarvis invests in 'technique', Prins invests in 'genre', but these are both phenomena which can't be extracted from the history and politics of versification. This dissertation takes impetus from both kinds of reading. On a macro-level, it is of course an exercise in generic reading, the genre in question being 'Civil War poetry'. The trends of Civil War verse inevitably exerted an impetus on its poets, however suspicious they were of that impetus. But I also believe, and here I lift from William Empson, that one 'must rely on each particular poem to show you the way in which it is trying to be good'.[71] The poems I investigate are not merely instances or specimens of their verse cultures; they are historiographical as well as historical objects, and they do their historiographical work via technique. As Prins writes, if historical poetics is to proceed it must read from the 'inside out' as well as the 'outside in'.[72] I try to keep this recursive loop in play.

There remains, though, another account of how sound functions in poetry – an account which views a poem's history from a distance. One way of summing up historical poetics' reason-for-being would be as an exercise in recovering historical listening techniques, in replicating how meter, rhyme and voice were heard in particular periods. But is this entirely possible? To listen to a poem, if we can, is to listen with our present ear. Below I suggest that modern lyric reading, which has styled itself as a kind of listening, relies on an encounter based in large part on the

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[67] Jarvis, p.101.
[68] Jarvis, p.101.
[69] Jarvis, p.112.
[70] Prins, "'What Is Historical Poetics?'", p.15.
[71] William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p.7.
[72] Prins, "'What Is Historical Poetics?'", p.14.

auditory imagination, and that this imagination strays away from the close paying of historical attention.

V. Lyric Listening

In *The Sound of Poetry and the Poetry of Sound* (2009), Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin pointed to a 'large-scale indifference to sound structure in the current discourse on poetry'.[73] Perloff had originally made this remark at the 2006 MLA presidential forum, and it seems that she had predicted a shift which arrived faster than expected.[74] In 2007, squarely between the first and second outings of this call for a sounded study of poetry, Mutlu Blasing published *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words*, which made a case for lyric as a fundamentally acoustic phenomenon:

> If the 'subject' is a verbal object that is, above all, sounds, it is an acoustic event. The lyric poem, where the poet is presumably speaking to himself or to no one in particular, depends, in fact, on being heard by a 'you' as an 'I' speaking. The reason the lyric poet turns her back to the audience, without which she cannot exist, is that she *must* be heard.[75]

Even in context Blasing's arguments are knotty, and out of it especially so, but I take her suggestion here to be that sound is the action which lets us know a poem is, in some way, going on. In her full account, lyric plays on our earliest experience of language acquisition by breaking the sound-sense linkage and activating an infantile pleasure in sound for sound's sake. Far from a 'large scale indifference', then, the book argues that sound patterning is what allows poetry to exist in the world as a distinct, recognisable phenomenon. And while Blasing's emphasis on infant language acquisition has not been taken up in its entirety, her model of lyric as a prefacing of acoustic pattern over semantic sense is now very much the norm. Jonathan Culler has condensed the idea into perhaps its shortest possible form: sound, he writes, 'is what happens in lyric'.[76] In the theory of the lyric poem as event which Culler has offered, sound is what actually *occurs*. And we don't need much history if this is the case. In 2006 Perloff pointed out ruefully how few students could identify an 'ode' or 'terza rima'.[77] But in Blasing's account, lyric appeals

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[73] Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, 'Introduction', *The Sound of Poetry and the Poetry of Sound*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.1-17, p.2.

[74] Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin, 'The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound: The 2006 MLA Presidential Forum', *PMLA*, 123(3) (2008), 749-761, p.750.

[75] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.30.

[76] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p.137.

[77] Marjorie Perloff, 'Presidential Address 2006: It Must Change', *PMLA*, 122(3) (2007), 652-662, p.658.

and startles because it resummons our *infant* response to the sound of language, and scarce are the infants with an ear for medieval Italian rhyme schemes. Where Perloff calls for the restoration of a historical ear, for Blasing the modern ear is just fine: it is the sound patterning in itself that matters, largely irrespective of any particular historical valency.

This is not a tension that can be solved in this introduction. I want to lean, though, on the underlying premise of Blasing's argument and of the more general lyric listening which took root around Perloff's call for a new emphasis on sound in poetry. For the theory of the poem as sound-occurrence to work, a poem must always make a sound. But when and how does this actually happen? Either the poem is read aloud, whether to oneself or to an audience, or it is read silently. In the former case there is certainly a sound to fix on, but is it the sound of the poem, or the sound of the performer? Charles Bernstein has offered a useful tempering of this question. He proposes that poetry readings 'foreground the audible acoustic text of the poem – what I want to call the audiotext'.[78] This audiotext is not the same as the performance itself, and they invite different kinds of study. Bernstein is careful to separate orality – 'breath, voice, speech' – from aurality, the sound of the writing activated by reading aloud.[79] It is a handy navigation of a tricky Derridean thicket: there is no sense that either voice or print is pure or ideal – they are simply two routes into the text's sound world. But does Bernstein's idea of the audiotext imply that the written poem *is* a sound object, albeit a paradoxically silent one, or that a poem *notates* sound? The former, although tempting to entertain, is not sustainable: written poems don't make a noise – put a microphone to them and the decibel meter will come up zero. So it must be the latter. In *The Soundscape*, Schafer describes two kinds of acoustic notation: 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive'.[80] For Bernstein's theory to work smoothly, poems must be a prescriptive notation, something which in Schafer's words 'gives a recipe for sounds to be made'. Certain poems do try to prescribe sound data directly; consider, for example, Gerard Manley Hopkins's diacritics. But this example, if anything, proves how *non*-prescriptive written text is in general. Hopkins was worried that without markings a poem's rhythm might go missing.[81] While alphabetic writing is fundamentally a prescriptive notation, it is prescriptive of only the barest acoustic skeleton which

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[78] Charles Bernstein, 'Introduction', *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.3-28, p.12. Bernstein's 'audiotext' is 'specifically extending Garrett Stewart's term *phonotext*' from *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Stewart's phonotext happens inside the head, as a part of silent reading.
[79] Bernstein, p.13.
[80] Schafer, p.123.
[81] On his first experiment with sprung verse, Hopkins remarked that he 'had to mark the stresses in blue chalk'. *Had* to, lest those stresses disappeared. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.108 (5 October 1878).

gives way easily to lexical reception. So how can we talk meaningfully about the 'sound' of a poem, let alone declare that sound is what makes that poem a poem in the first place?

A fine path through this problem has recently been woven by Angela Leighton in *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (2018).[82] As Leighton's punning title hints, our encounters with the sound of poetry can border on the hallucinatory: those 'things' might seem to be out there in the world waiting to be heard, but their source is almost impossible to find, and they might ultimately reside in the reader's head. The idea of lyric listening, then, that the right way to read a poem involves turning of an ear to it, is problematic:

> […] the ear hovers somewhere between a literal and a metaphorical faculty in the work of reading, between a sense perception, alert to real noises, and a figure for hearing which might pay attention to sounds on the page that are self-evidently inaudible.[83]

Even this might be to put it too mildly. Certainly my ear might be 'alert to real noises' while reading a poem, but the noise it perceives is much more likely to be a passing car or chime from my laptop than any noise from the poem. In Don Ihde's account of the phenomenology of listening, to be a listening subject is to perceive between the horizons of silence from which a sound emerges and into which it fades.[84] This thinking doesn't map easily onto the experience of silent reading, where nothing ever breaks that silence. If reading is to 'pay attention to sounds on the page that are self-evidently inaudible', what we are really doing is *imagining* those sounds, and then listening to that imagination.[85] While this might *feel* quite similar to listening to an actual voice, and might run through some of the same channels of the brain, the reader is still doing the voices themselves, for themselves as audience.[86]

Another sentence from Leighton puts it almost as well as it can be put: '[b]etween the silence of the page which greets us, and the sounds we recall or imagine and for which we might still listen at the end, literature happens'.[87] I do not mean to claim that written poems cannot encode or hint at sound. But I do believe that when we comment on the 'sound of a poem', its phonotext,

[82] Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018).
[83] Leighton, p.2.
[84] Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p.108.
[85] For an account of this loop from a psychological perspective, see J. David Smith, Daniel Reisberg and Meg Wilson, 'Subvocalization and Auditory Imagery: Interactions Between the Inner Ear and Inner Voice', *Auditory Imagery*, ed. Daniel Reisberg (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), pp.95-120.
[86] For an argument for the similarity of experience between real and imagined sound, see Malcom Riddoch, 'Imagining the Sounds Themselves', *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination,* ed. Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, Mads Walther-Hansen, and Martin Knakkergaard, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), I, pp.55-77.
[87] Leighton, p.6.

we are in fact commenting on our own inner performance and concurrent inner reception of that performance, both of which are ultimately dependent on our unique, idiosyncratic paying of attention: an attention which might not be sounded at all. Another upshot of the sounded theory of lyric is the implication that only the hearing population can encounter lyric poems on the terms of their operation. This has been critiqued by numerous writers, and I would simply add my agreement that a lyric theory which practically forbids its texts to the D/deaf population is unworkable.[88] At various moments in this dissertation I am essentially arguing for a version of Lennard Davis's 'deafened moment': 'a contextual position, a dialectical moment in the reading/critical process, that is defined by the acknowledgement on the part of the reader/writer/critic that he or she is part of a process that does not involve speaking or hearing'.[89] Any attempt to hint at sound comes from the starting point of silence, and can thus be highly intentional. The poets I encounter are all invested in the failure of poetry as sound object or acoustic notation: their poems stand in productive opposition to the kind of verse which assumes a preordained acoustic transaction between text and reader, one where the parameters of attention are set in advance. When their poems do advance towards sound and prompt their reader's aural imagination, it is with various political motivations, and these motivations are what I set out to investigate.

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The three chapters of my dissertation take up three sounds which lyric poems have been assumed to make: rhythm, rhyme and voice. In each chapter I focus on a poet or pair of poets whose work tested that sound against the epistemological demands of the Civil War. The first chapter reads Walt Whitman's rhythmical experiments in *Drum-Taps* (1865) as a culmination of his hospital work and time spent in proximity to infantry. It has often been remarked that *Drum-Taps* contains more instances of rhythmical, even metrical, verse than Whitman's earlier publications. I take up this noticing and ask why. Using a newspaper column on health, exercise and diet only recently attributed to Whitman, I show that he held rhythm as a key element in a healthy lifestyle. The Civil War, with its ranks of marching soldiers, manifested this theory on a grand scale. When Whitman went to work in the Washington, D.C. hospitals, he brought rhythm with him as a restorative, ensuring he was present for the patients on a regular schedule, and

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[88] See, for example, John Lee Clark, 'Melodies Unheard: Deaf Poets and Their Subversion of the "Sound" Theory of Poetry', *Sign Language Studies*, 7(1) (2006), 4-10, and Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), pp.29-33.

[89] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p.100.

reading them declamatory poetical pieces. It is thus no wonder that *Drum-Taps* shows marks of a new rhythmicality. The poems are lithe and independent, but are motivated and got going by small pockets of rhythm. I end the chapter by reading Abraham Lincoln's death and its mourning as rhythmical events which Whitman used the unusually predictable form of 'O Captain! my Captain!' to navigate.

The second chapter, on rhyme, is based on extended readings of the Civil War work of Herman Melville and Laura Redden (also known as Howard Glyndon). My presiding question is how rhyme, founded as it is on predictability and neatness, meshed with the vicissitudes of war. I take up the first reviews of Melville's *Battle-Pieces* (1866), which mark him down as a uniquely bad rhymer, and show, instead, that he was thinking hard about rhyme as a sort of wilful nonsense. In a deliberately provocative move, I read his most complex war poem, 'The Portent', as a kind of limerick, which promises knowledge only to tell us nothing, and shows up rhyme as an absurd trick. Ultimately, I find in Melville a belief that war poetry is always doomed to fall short of its subject, with rhyme as a symptom of its inherent inward-lookingness. Melville's rhyme thus makes its case by taking risks, and I bring Laura Redden, an under-studied poet who lost her hearing after a childhood illness, into the chapter as a counter to this. In a culture suspicious of deaf people's humanity, let alone their poetic ability, Redden was unable to take the risks with rhyme in her poetry that Melville could in his. Although compelled to use accurate, safe rhyming to prove her skill as a poet, I find that Redden also used rhyme to throw suspicion on the very notion that verse is an inherently sounded medium. I position her poems within ongoing debates on deaf education, and show that they follow the argument for detaching sound from the meaning of words. This, in turn, casts suspicion on any claim we might make that a poem could record a particular Civil War noise.

In the third chapter I turn to voice, and perform a sequential reading of Emily Dickinson and Paul Laurence Dunbar. The Civil War posed a unique challenge for poetry as a medium whose readers trusted it in some way to store voice. With a generation of young men sent to die on battlefields, there came a crisis of last words going missing. The genre of the 'dying soldier' poem was, at least in part, a way of mitigating this loss: poets could imagine the words of soldiers whose deaths went unwitnessed. I follow the recent cementing of Dickinson as a Civil War poet (or at least a writer of Civil War poems), and argue that the new chanciness of death was a catalyst to her poetic output in the 1860s. It was during the Civil War that Dickinson expressed her fear to Higginson that readers would assume *her*, and not a 'supposed person', to be the

subject of her poems. I read 'supposed person' as a phrase in close conversation with its wartime context. Away at war, each soldier became a person that their family at home had to 'suppose', to assume to exist. I find this to be a useful tension in which to hold Dickinson's poems. If they do have a voice, it is one that lives only for the moment of the poem's happening.

From here, I move forward to the 1890s and Paul Dunbar's poems of Civil War memory. I find that Dunbar has been characterised by his recent readers as post-phonographic. In an attempt to revitalise his dialect poetry, various claims have been made for Dunbar as amplifier or ventriloquist of black voices from the antebellum and Civil War periods. I believe that these claims rely on a problematic slippage of the term 'voice' across its various meanings. Just because Dunbar was thinking about voice in its acoustic sense, does not mean he was attempting to speak on behalf of a political group, and vice versa. I suggest that Dunbar ended up as a dialect poet of some reluctance, after he realised that verse in traditional 'lyric' diction inevitably coded its subjects as white. And while his dialect poems are complex, especially when they show up their written-ness, they could never truly escape their consumption as a kind of minstrelsy. My conclusion turns to the phonographic afterlife of Dunbar's poems and the posthumous culmination of his fear of being unvoiced, or perhaps *over*-voiced, by dialect verse. On record, the poems became documents of an imagined antebellum past within a culture of auditory nostalgia for the Civil War.

Walt Whitman's Wartime Rhythms

At the end of the short-lived first edition of *Drum-Taps*, Walt Whitman looks back over the last few years of war, as if from the end of a long life:

> Not youth pertains to me,
> Nor delicatesse – I cannot beguile the time with talk;
> Awkward in the parlor, neither a dancer nor elegant;
> In the learn'd coterie sitting constrain'd and still – for learning inures not to me;
> Beauty, knowledge, fortune, inure not to me – yet there are two things inure to
>   me;
> I have nourish'd the wounded, and sooth'd many a dying soldier;
> And at intervals I have strung together a few songs,
> Fit for war, and the life of the camp.[1]

The posture of the poem is familiar. This is Whitman the rough, awkward in the confined spaces of polite society, 'constrain'd' by etiquette. It forms a counterpart to earlier poems similarly intent on eschewing establishment mores, and looks all the way back to the frontispiece of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, which shows a Whitman facing the reader, his face almost a sneer of derision at the staid author portraits from which this likeness emphatically departs. The poem itself operates on a willfully obtuse grammatical bending. Initially controlled by the 'Not [x] pertains to me' construction, this is replaced in line 4 by the contorted syntax of '[x] inures not to me'. The standard sense of 'inure to', i.e., to habituate by exposure, is present but upended. We expect the subject to inure themselves to an object. Webster, for example, suggests 'we *inure* ourselves to cold'.[2] Whitman reverses this formation, so that he himself is the undesirable thing to which the ideals of 'Beauty, knowledge, fortune' cannot accustom themselves. Also present is the legal sense of inure: to take effect, as in the transferal of property via a will. In this case the subjects of the sentence become objects of exchange. The lines are syntactically clumsy and fidget with their grammar.

When we at last emerge from the slew of negatives (Not, Nor, cannot, neither, not, not) in line 5, it is as if a knot has been unwound, and we can make some progress through straightforward

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[1] *Drum-Taps* was first published in April of 1865, but Whitman added a 'Sequel' in November, containing eighteen further poems. 'Not youth pertains to me' is the final poem in the original printing.
[2] Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (Amherst: J. S. & C. Adams, 1844), I, p.928.

propositional statements. But even here the poem is shifty. Whitman declares there are 'two things' which do inure to him, but goes on to describe three:

> I have nourish'd the wounded, and sooth'd many a dying soldier;
> And at intervals I have strung together a few songs,
> Fit for war, and the life of the camp.

In this formulation – one thing, a second thing, and at intervals a third – the 'songs' seem nothing but an afterthought: they are 'strung together' and Whitman must string the poem on for an extra couple of lines in order to include them. He seems keen to shrug off the importance of the war songs in contrast to the nursing work he performed in the Washington hospitals, but it is a fight against the odds.[3] As the last poem in the original pressing of *Drum-Taps*, it concludes a book which seems anything but strung together. Instead, *Drum-Taps* presents an almost novelistic journey through the Civil War, from its clangourous patriotic inception to its weary, wounded close. How, then, should we account for such a bathetic signing-off?

One way of explaining this un-Whitmanian reticence is to read it as a conscious attempt to package *Drum-Taps* for a market which was apparently unable to inure itself to Whitman's poetry. *Drum-Taps* was published to distinctly mixed reviews, unable to buck the trend of the earlier editions of *Leaves of Grass*. The criticisms were not new – Whitman wrote prose not verse, he lacked propriety and focus – but they were newly pointed.[4] Where before Whitman was simply viewed as a lost cause, now his humane, dedicated work in the army hospitals had given reviewers a hook from which to hang the coat of their criticism. A short review from the *New York Times* trots out a standard line, accusing Whitman of having 'no ear, no sense of melody in his verse', before going on to oppose this to his hospital work:

> Mr. WHITMAN has fortunately better claims on the gratitude of his countrymen than any he will ever derive from his vocation as a poet. What a man does, is of far greater consequence than what he says or prints, and his devotion to the most painful of duties in the hospitals at Washington during the war, will confer honor on his memory when Leaves of Grass are withered and Drum Taps [sic] have ceased to vibrate.[5]

The *Brooklyn Daily Union* arrives immediately at a similar point:

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[3] For a thorough account of Whitman's hospital work, see Robert Leigh Davis, *Whitman and the Romance of Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[4] For early reviews of *Leaves of Grass*, see Milton Hindus, ed., *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.21-96.

[5] 'Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps*', *New York Times,* 22 November, 1865, p.4.

> We have no mind to laugh at Whitman's poetry. We know that for four years of war he has done noble and beautiful service in the hospitals, bending his shaggy form to a thousand little offices of kindness and shrinking from nothing. But he is not a poet, if we know what a poet is.[6]

Whitman's work in the hospitals became for these reviewers a measure against which to judge his poetry. The hospital work was characterised by generosity, consistency and steadiness of purpose, and thus stood opposite to his poetry, which reviewers could dismiss as selfish, undisciplined and scattershot. The closing lines of 'Not Youth pertains to me', then, seem to be mounting a premature defence against these reviews, as if Whitman had predicted his verse would appear pale and idle compared to his years of hospital visits. The work of nourishing the wounded and soothing the dying thus takes the lead in the poem, and after that come the songs, which are brushed aside even as they are made part of the action which brought the poet praise. They are only 'a few songs', compared to the 'many' soldiers Whitman nursed, but they are, at least, 'Fit for war, and the life of the camp'. They are nothing of *literary* importance, but are still a contribution to the war effort: as selfless a gift as the fruit and candy Whitman dispensed in the wards.

What could thus be read as Whitman's attempt to circumvent criticism was, unsurprisingly, doomed to failure, as the reviews show. The bluff is let down by its terms: for Whitman's poems to be counted as a contribution to the War, they would have to be '[f]it for' such a task. 'Fit for' carries several senses in this poem. After the opening lines on delicatesse and the etiquette of the parlour, the phrase carries a sense of 'fitting in': of doing what is expected based on the context. But after the poem modulates to address war, the sense of 'fit for service' might take precedence. This is a bodily fitness, a guarantee that the subject can perform certain physical tasks. One of the aims of this chapter is to ask how we might think of Whitman's poems as either fit or unfit for the tasks they assign themselves.

The former sense of 'fitting in' offers itself more readily. For Whitman's poems to have been taken up as patriotic objects, there were certain forms and structures into which they would have had to 'Fit'. Whitman defers to some of these. Several of the standard modes or moods of Civil War poetry are on display in *Drum-Taps*, including the patriotic call to enlistment, the paean to democracy and the elegy.[7] But in another key sense, the poems are deeply unfit: they do not

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[6] 'Drum Taps', *Brooklyn Daily Union*, 23 November 1865, p.2.

[7] For example, 'Drum Taps', 'Song of the Banner at Day-Break' and 'O Captain! my Captain!' would fit these modes respectively.

submit to the metrical trends of their environment, and distance themselves from the poetic coterie. We can compare *Drum-Taps* to Julia Ward Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic': a Civil War poem with a rich history of fitting in. In November 1861, Howe and her companions were returning from watching a review of troops near Washington, D.C., where they had heard a group of soldiers singing 'John Brown's Body'.[8] The minister James Freeman Clark challenged Howe to write 'good words' for the tune; he clearly judged the present text and its lines describing Brown 'a-mouldering in the grave' to be uncouth. Howe took the suggestion and in the dim light of the next morning she fit her new words to the tune of the old hymn, in an act of contrafactum. The reworking was a remarkable success: the text was widely reprinted and 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' became the Union's unofficial anthem. Howe later recalled that she 'knew, and was content to know, that the poem soon found its way to the camps, as I heard from time to time of its being sung in chorus by the soldiers'.[9] Here, then, is a clear example of a text 'Fit for war, and the life of the camp'. While the sentiments of Howe's lyrics undoubtedly aided their wide uptake in comparison to 'John Brown's Body', they worked in partnership with a rhythmical closeness and familiarity.

Drum-Taps, by these standards, can only be designated unfit for the camp. Whitman did not submit to the rhythmical trends of the period and there are no poems in *Drum-Taps* which could be fit to a martial tune.[10] Whitman quietly admitted this in time, via a small alteration to the text of 'Not youth pertains to me'. The poem appeared in the 'Drum-Taps' cluster of the 1871 *Leaves of Grass*, but with the last few lines changed:

> I have nourish'd the wounded, and sooth'd many a dying soldier.
> And at intervals, waiting, or in the midst of camp,
> Composed these songs.[11]

Gone is any claim to fitness. Where before Whitman claimed his poems were written *for* the camp, here they are only written *in* the camp. And they are no longer 'strung together', with the ad hoc sense of a soldier darning socks, but 'Composed', carefully assembled. Whitman recognises his essential distance from the lives of the soldiers, and changes the status of the poems in *Drum-Taps* from rough and ready wartime matériel to refined literary material. What are we to understand, then, by the original label of '[f]it for war'? What did it mean in 1865? I believe

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[8] Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences 1819-1899* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), p.276.
[9] Howe, p.276.
[10] That is, a tune that could marched to. Whitman's words, including parts of *Drum-Taps*, have often been set to music, and rousingly, but they would be very hard indeed to fit to fife and snare.
[11] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p.249.

that a productive way to read the claim would be as a profound, sublimated, and ultimately frustrated desire to be part of a rhythmical community. Shortly before the War, Whitman had struck a wry, pensive mood in the 33rd 'Calamus' poem, remarkably similar in tone to 'Not youth pertains to me'. He laments that he has not invented any 'labor-saving machine', and will not leave behind him any 'literary success, nor intellect – nor book for the book-shelf'.[12] All that he can bequeath, he concludes, are 'these carols'. '[C]arols', which Whitman uses to mean something like 'songs', holds on to its original sense of a group dance, for 'comrades and lovers', as Whitman puts it. A carol is a song with a beat. So in the closing lines of both poems, we find Whitman looking directly to a metrical tradition which his work had hitherto rejected. And between them, we get *Drum-Taps*. I propose that *Drum-Taps* can be read as an attempt to enter a more traditional rhythmical community. It advances much further towards metricality than the editions of *Leaves of Grass* which preceded it, even if it cannot, ultimately, make itself '[f]it for war'.

Whitman admitted this new orderliness in describing the manuscript to William O'Connor. *Drum-Taps* was, he said, superior to *Leaves of Grass*, 'being adjusted in all its proportions' and 'under control' with 'none of the perturbations' of *Leaves*.[13] It made this impression on certain readers, too. *Drum-Taps* was characterised as newly rhythmical in one of the more generous contemporary reviews:

> In Whitman's last collection, we observe a much greater regard for beauty of form than the *Leaves of Grass* displayed. The latter work was full of the ungoverned vigor of life-consciousness; the present exhibits a tendency to define this vigor by lines of beauty. We accordingly discover greater regularity of rhythm, and more unity of conception in the grouping of details.[14]

It is hard to believe this and other reviewers were reading the same book: where the *Watson's* reviewer found in *Drum-Taps* the rhythm of 'the column in march', Henry James, writing for *The Nation*, declared that each line of *Drum-Taps* 'starts off by itself, in resolute independence of its companions, without a visible goal'.[15] The two metaphors stand entirely opposite: soldiers marching in step versus stubborn vagrancy. *Drum-Taps*' new rhythmicality has since been spotted many times, though. In the first long study of Whitman's rhythm (published 1898), Pasquale

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[12] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p.108.

[13] *Walt Whitman: The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller, 6 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1961), I, p.246 (6 January 1865).

[14] '*Drum Taps* – Walt Whitman', *Watson's Weekly Art Journal,* 4 November 1864, p.34-5.

[15] Henry James, 'Mr. Walt Whitman', *The Nation*, 1, 16 November 1865, p.625-6.

Jannacone delineated what he calls Whitman's only three poems 'in definite rhythm and rhyme'.[16] These are 'Singer in the Prison', 'Ethiopia Saluting the Colors' and 'O Captain! my Captain!'. The latter two are both Civil War poems.[17] Among his next grouping – poems 'of clear rhythmic design' – Jannacone listed three more from *Drum-Taps* – 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!', 'Dirge for Two Veterans' and 'Beat! Beat! Drums!' – and the later 'Old War Dreams'. This points towards a strong link between rhythmicality and the Civil War poems.

Jannacone did not offer a theory as to why this link may exist, but Gay Wilson Allen (a proponent of Jannocone's work) went a short way to this end in his *New Walt Whitman Handbook* (1986):

> Both *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* are a great deal more conventional in form and style than earlier poems in the *Leaves*. Apparently the poet found more conventional metrics either convenient or necessary for the expression of his experiences and emotions connected with the war. Even 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' is a marching poem. But what is more natural than the poet's heartbeat would throb to the rhythms of marching feet – especially a poet who aspired to give organic expression to his own age and country?[18]

Allen's offerings of 'convenient or necessary' both open up interesting paths. '[C]onvenient' plays nicely on 'conventional' and asks what kind of poetic work requires convenience: perhaps the kind written as 'impromptu jottings', or 'at intervals in the midst of camp'.[19] For metrics to be 'necessary' implies that Whitman was called into a position of wartime service, no longer vagrant and free. It is a shame, then, that Allen ends his paragraph by heading off towards a vague Romantic conception of Whitman's throbbing heartbeat. Marching feet are certainly part of the puzzle, but Allen does not make any sustained attempt to ask how the constraint and order of army discipline might have ended up in the work of the poet of loafing and independence. Rhythmicality is spotted once again in *The Unwritten War* (1973), where Aaron marks Whitman as newly inured to the demands of popular taste: *Drum-Taps*, he writes, 'is more calculating and concessive than the earlier *Leaves*, not so verbally daring or radical or spontaneous.'[20] '[C]alculating' does extra work here in suggesting Whitman took on a

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[16] Pasquale Jannacone, *Walt Whitman's Poetry* (1898; Washington: NCR Microcard Editions, 1973), p.20.

[17] 'Ethopia Saluting the Colors', subtitled 'A reminiscence of 1864', was published in the 1871 *Leaves of Grass* in a cluster containing poems originally part of *Drum-Taps*.

[18] Gay Wilson Allen, *The New Walt Whitman Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p.241-242.

[19] We might look to the scene of sonnet-writing in *Parade's End* for another example of the convenience of form in wartime. It is near to hand, and near to ear: an acoustic pattern to retreat to in an otherwise chaotic soundscape. See Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* (1925; London: Penguin, 2012), p.314-315.

[20] Aaron, p.66.

mathematical approach to rhythm during the War; indeed, the description could be one of an army general, deploying resources carefully. Aaron suggests this is because Whitman had a more specific purpose in *Drum-Taps* than he did in *Leaves of Grass*: he wanted to present himself as 'patriot, mourner, healer, sympathizer, reassurer', and needed to temper the convulsions of his earlier work in order to address a nation in shock.

Between Jannacone, Allen and Aaron, then, we see a sketch of a theory of Whitman's wartime rhythms. All locate an increased rhythmicality in Whitman's Civil War poetry, and Allen and Aaron proffer micro-theories as to its provenance. Although we are now a distance in time from these accounts, the study of versification in *Drum-Taps* has not advanced much further. Lawrence Kramer, in his introduction to the 2015 edition of *Drum-Taps*, refers to a 'formalizing impulse' which adds 'a note of ritual' and aligns the poems with 'the Civil War era's popular verse', but does not pursue this any further.[21] Annie Finch uses Whitman's Civil War poems as examples for her theory of a metrical code, but does not treat *Drum-Taps* as a unique volume.[22] This chapter will take the identification of a new rhythmicality as its impetus, and attempt to provide a richer working theory as to its emergence. Allen, it is worth noting, goes too far by claiming that *Drum-Taps* is 'a great deal more conventional' than earlier publications. Besides the metrical 'O Captain! my Captain!' and the metrical-looking 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' and 'Dirge for two veterans', the instances of rhythm in *Drum-Taps* are just that: instances. We encounter individual lines, or pockets of rhythm with some frequency but little regularity. This chapter will ask whether these rhythmical instances might be Whitman's way of recording or engaging in a specific soundscape or sounded community, in this case that of Civil War Washington. In other words: are the metaphors of marching with which critics describe *Drum-Taps* merely a fortunate turn of phrase, or could they be read as a precise comment on the way the poems move, and the way they emerged from their environment?

Before embarking on this avenue of enquiry, though, it is worth exploring the shapes into which critics have tried to fit Whitman's poetry. By identifying these patterns, we can ascertain whether his War poetry was, in fact, uniquely rhythmical, and ask what service these rhythms performed, for Whitman and his reader.

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[21] Whitman, *Drum-Taps: The Complete 1865 Edition*, p.xviii.
[22] Annie Finch, *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

I. Scanning Through Whitman

Jannacone begins his book by lamenting the shortfalls of previous responses to Whitman's rhythm, which he views as vague, curtailed and unscientific. A paragraph describing these earlier attempts is littered with footnotes which intrude on the text like insects, suggesting that to write on this subject in 1898 was already to lift a rock on a shifting mass of opinion:
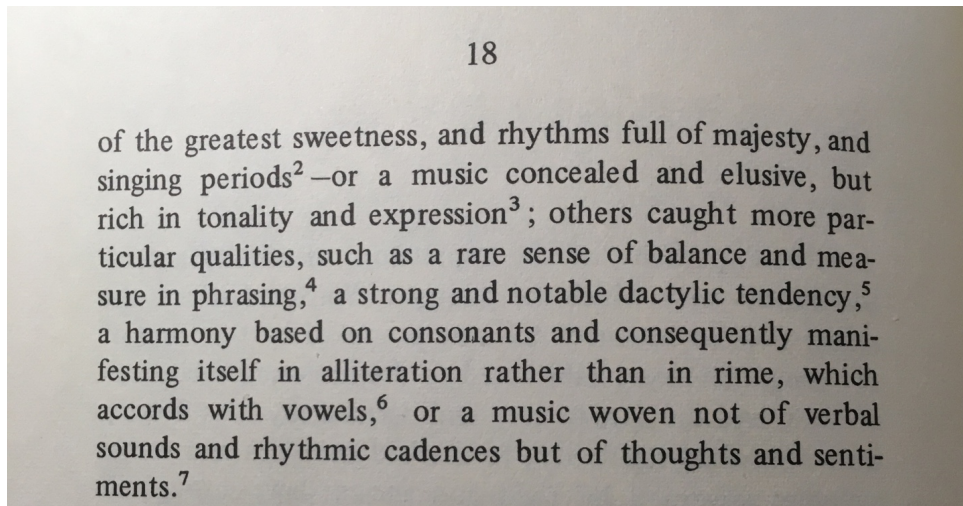
Figure 2: Pasquale Jannacone, Walt Whitman's Poetry*, p.18.*

What follows is an attempt to schematise Whitman's prosody by doing what others have failed to: scanning it according to traditional rules instead of relying on impressions. This exercise, of trying to ascertain whether Whitman's verse is preceded by some kind of recoverable pattern, became an industry which has remained healthy well into the twenty-first century. It is hard not to wonder why critics are so excited by the prospect of finding a scheme in the work of an author who apparently went to great lengths to distance himself from the very idea of all things scheming. The plethora of attempts almost suggests a narrative wherein Whitman lay on his deathbed and with his dying words revealed that the first person to find the prosodic scheme he had cunningly hidden within his verse would inherit a great fortune. There is no evidence for such a quest; scanning Whitman is a self-imposed ordeal.

It is an ordeal which requires a firm grasp on what meter is, and how we might find it if it's there to be found. Meter has come to be defined almost entirely by opposition to rhythm, and this opposition sits close to the surface in Whitman studies. Any number of binaries can be called upon to characterise the difference: design versus instance, schematic versus actual, norm versus intending. To risk a summation, it would be uncontentious to say that meter is the set of rules

from which rhythm can be recognised as deviating. In Roman Jakobson's words, the 'verse design determines the invariant features of the verse instances and sets up the limit of variations.'[23] This chapter will follow this prompt, taking meter to be a numerical scheme of stress and unstress with a basis in tradition, and rhythm to be experienced, actual instances of alternation. Following David Nowell Smith's piece in *Critical Rhythm* (2019) and the work of Caroline Levine (which I will address below), I will further be understanding *poetic* rhythm as a non-exclusive example of rhythm as a historical operative.[24]

One complaint about this scheme is that if rhythm involves a constant testing and breaking of the rules of meter, meter can hardly be said to exist. It becomes a promised but never realised abstract, or, in Annie Finch's term, a 'ghost'. I worry, though, that it is *rhythm* which is, in practice, more liable to spectrality. We can accurately describe the rules of iambic pentameter to classes of students, even if no poet actually writes long successions of perfect pentametric lines (thankfully for the reader). We also can pin down individual instances of a line being read out, thanks to recording technology. But according to Jakobson, rhythm is somewhere between those two:

> The verse design is embodied in verse instances. Usually the free variation of these instances is denoted by the somewhat equivocal label 'rhythm'. A variation of *verse instances* within a given poem must be strictly distinguished from the variable *delivery instances*.[25]

We can pronounce a poem however we like, so there's little use in analysing these delivery instances. How, then, can we get a fix on that foggy middle ground between abstract numbers and idiosyncratic articulation? The answer must be scansion, in all its differing and often contradictory forms, as a kind of hearing-on-the-page. Whitman raises a problem for scansion, as his verse forms one of the 'metrical crises' which John Hollander gestures towards in *Vision and Resonance* (1975).[26] The rules of meter, however one chooses to select them, tune the ear (and eye) of the scanner, telling them what to listen and look for. Whitman's verse breaks the contract, so that anyone setting out to scan his verse must first rewrite the rulebook, or risk forcing the verse into a pattern unfit for purpose: a risk to which several of the attempts outlined below fall prey.

[23] Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), pp.350-377, p.364.
[24] David Nowell Smith, 'What is Called Rhythm', *Critical Rhythm*, ed. Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), pp.40-59.
[25] Jakobson, p.365.
[26] Hollander, p.197.

We must still ask, then, why there is such a rich history of attempts to scan Whitman's poems. Some of the justifications are set out below, but I propose that an underlying motivation is the fact that Whitman's verse presents us with a very unsettling experience of 'hearing' rhythm. In a more traditionally metered poem, part of the experience of that meter is visual: the regular layout of the lines persuades us of the poem's metrical shape. We can tell by looking, for example, that Howe's 'Battle Hymn' has some rhythmical patterning to it from the neat shape of its lines on the page:
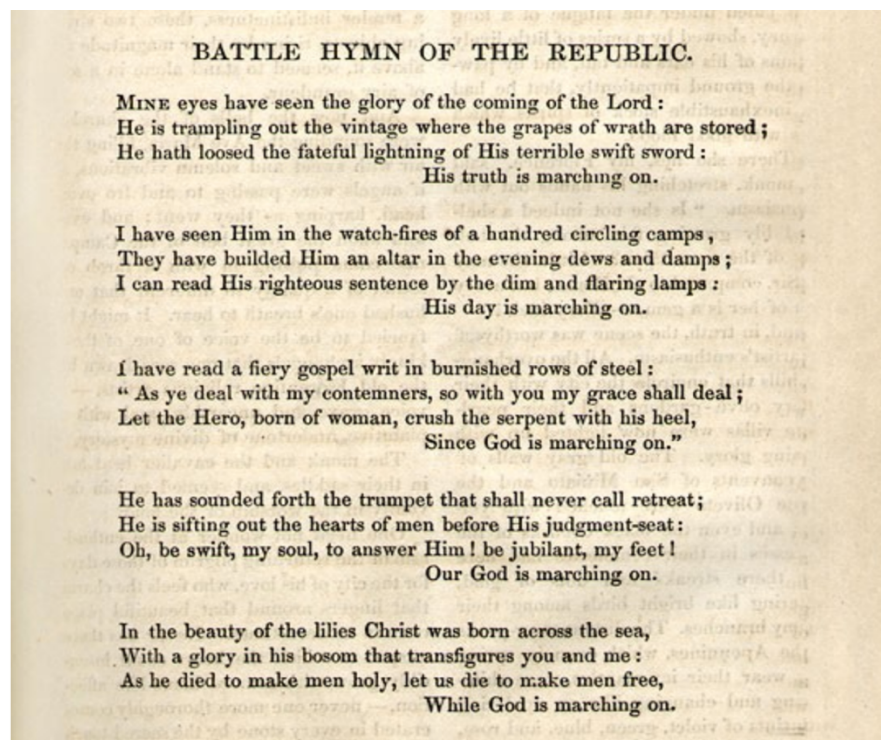
Figure 3: Julia Ward Howe, 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', Atlantic Monthly, *9(52), February 1862, p.145.*

With very few exceptions, we do not get this experience in Whitman.[27] The flashes of rhythm in *Drum-Taps*, when they come, are not signalled visually. Consider the opening to 'Shut not your doors to me proud Libraries':

> Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries,
> For that which was lacking among you all, yet needed most, I bring;

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[27] This is partly down to the limitations of print. Scully Bradley proposed that Whitman structured many of his stanzas as waves or pyramids, rising in length and intensity towards their centre then ebbing away again. Because Whitman's longer lines are practically always too long to fit on a standard printed page, they are dropped and indented: the pyramid structures are shorn of their capstone and we are deprived of this visual marker for rhythm. Sculley Bradley, 'The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry', *American Literature,* 10(4) (1939), 437-459.

A book I have made for your dear sake, O soldiers […][28]

The first line is ten syllables long, and in its inaugural position we might expect a pentameter, but receive no such thing. The second line then breaks into an emphatic four and three beats, as if it wants to be part of a ballad stanza. We cannot see this rhythm coming: there's no tradition in play in Whitman's verse which has us predicting that a long second line will be a fourteener. The third line arrives so laden with possible stress words it cannot be assigned a metrical label. This coming-and-going has the same semi-hallucinatory quality as encountering a moment of rhythm in prose.[29] The experience is intense, even bewildering, and the critical instinct is apparently to explain it away by finding a scheme within which these rhythmical moments can be predicted. A great deal of the experience of rhythm, even from the earliest encounters with it in nursery rhyme or song, is based on expectation and fulfilment: the rhythmic fragment in a Whitman poem is unexpected, and often goes unfulfilled by local repetition, even if a similar fragment occurs later in a long poem, jolting a half-memory of its precursor.[30] We experience what Jakobson calls *verse instances*, but have to second guess whether they can be verse instances in this case if there is no verse design into which they fit. Part of the experience of reading Whitman might be a distracting subconscious search for that design.

Indeed, to look back over the history of scanning Whitman is to find a time-lapse of opinion as to how we experience rhythm. What can we infer from the fact that we can recognise a Whitman poem not just from its long-lined appearance, but from the way it 'sounds'? When Whitman is parodied, as he was from early in his career, does this suggest a readily mimicable prosody, or a mimicable syntax and lexicon? Below, I break down the various responses to these questions. The shifting availability of Whitman's there-but-not-there rhythmicality means that his verse has been called up in the name of most, if not all, of the trends of prosodic analysis from the last two centuries, from traditional foot scansion to generative metrics to radical notions of 'thought rhythm'.[31] This section is not intended to represent an exhaustive survey of these studies (such a survey would require its own full-length project: the 'Whitman Prosody Archive' perhaps), but highlights a few diverse examples of what critics have heard in Whitman, and in turn asked us to hear. It is, in essence, a fitful history of fitting.

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[28] *Drum-Taps*, p.7.

[29] For accounts of this uncanniness, see Marjorie Perloff, 'Between Verse and Prose: Beckett and the New Poetry', *Critical Inquiry*, 9(2) (1982), 415-433, and Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words*.

[30] Kamile Geist, Eugene A. Geist and Kathleen Kuznik, 'The Patterns of Music: Young Children Learning Mathematics through Beat, Rhythm, and Melody', *YC*, 67(1) (2012), 74-79.

[31] Gay Wilson Allen, *American Prosody* (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p.221.

A full survey of responses to Whitman's prosody would begin with the reviews of his publications. I believe it is worth moving past these to a point where the commentary is less controlled by matters of taste. The history of poetic taste, is, of course, deeply important in its own right, and will be addressed later in the chapter, but this section aims to explore the validity of theories which purport to transcend taste, or at least begin from a position where there is no right or wrong rhythm. We might, in this case, start with Jannacone, who argues that the array of earlier opinion on Whitman's rhythm is pure vagary, backed up by no sustained attempts at schematisation. His solution is to be systematic and impartial: to subject Whitman's rhythm to 'analysis' and 'precise configurations', to spend time 'counting syllables and verses, and scrutinizing the structure of the rhythmic elements'.[32] He scans the verse using a division between long and short syllables based on classical scansion, which, as Allen laments in his introduction, 'robs the verse of its emotional intensity'.[33] What Jannacone ends up concluding from his mathematical approach is, oddly, that Whitman's prosody is essentially mimetic. Having counted out the meter of 'O Captain! my Captain', he asks: '[n]ow who does not sense the powerful effect of that cry, repeated and broken as though stifled by anguish in the throat?'.[34] Jannacone's project, born out of contempt for vagary, ends up going too far in the other direction: if rhythm is mimetic of a certain emotion or vocalisation, each line can only ever mean one thing. This reading is in conversation with the elocution manuals so popular in late nineteenth-century America, which advised students to find the key emotion in each word of a text, and then to speak the text with those emotions in their voice and bearing. For example, Philip Lawrence exhorted his students to 'remember that every important word has a particular sound that expresses the meaning', which in his explication of a line of Poe means speakers would have to convey four different emotions in as many words.[35] Rhythm for Jannacone seems to be a way of pointing to these 'important' words, and even of encoding their particular sounds. This is a self-fulfilling, circular exercise: if we read through poems and drop scansion marks on them according to how we think they should be pronounced, we find that they reveal exactly what we heard in them, because we had to hear it in order to do the scansion. That is, if we agree that scansion is basically subjective or provisional (a proposition opposed by generative metrics, but otherwise widely upheld), it becomes a feeble interpretive tool: the poem itself disappears between how we hear it and what we think that means.

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[32] Jannacone, p.19.

[33] Jannacone, p.9.

[34] Jannacone, p.28.

[35] Philip Lawrence, *The Lawrence Speaker* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1872), p.23.

A major shift in Whitman prosody studies came when Gay Wilson Allen proposed that instead of listening for sound patterns, and scanning Whitman's verse acoustically, we should scan it via its thought:

> The first rhythmical principle of *Leaves of Grass* is that of parallel structure: *the line is the rhythmical unit*, each line balancing its predecessor, and completing or supplementing its meaning. This 'parallelism' may be called 'a rhythm of thought'.[36]

Allen commits to this theory, and splits the 'rhythm of thought' into 'four types of parallelism': 'synonymous', 'antithetical', 'synthetic' and 'climactic'.[37] He does not, though, go very far towards explaining what we can then do with these types once we've spotted them. His 'tabulation' of 'When Lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd' shows no discernible pattern among the parallels, only that each stanza has some parallels within it. We can look ahead sixty years to find a consummation-of-sorts of Allen's theory. The experimental final section of Derek Attridge's *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995) takes thought-rhythm, or what Attridge calls 'phrasal movement', to its (il)logical extreme.[38] Attridge presents a process of dissection, remarkable in its potential to explain that trickiest of things: why certain poems succeed. It is a bravura display of a particular kind of close reading, and yields provocative results. I propose, however, that we should be wary of invoking phrasal movement in discussions of prosody. Indeed, it is one place where the boundary between poetry and prose might want to reassert itself. The fact that we could write two poems with identical phrasal patterns but entirely different acoustic patterns implies that whatever phrasal movement is, it is not rhythm. We could even do what Attridge does with poems to paragraphs of prose and get many of the same results. Allen's turn to thought rhythm, meanwhile, is tempered by an admission that there are also patterns of 'phonetic recurrence'. His reading caused a wave in Whitman studies, almost certainly because it tapped in to one of the fundamental experiences of reading *Leaves of Grass*: the incantatory effect of parallelism instilled with subtle acoustic repetitions, which Allen suggests Whitman learned from the Hebrew parallelisms of the Old Testament, as translated in the King James Bible.

It did not spell the end for more classically-rooted approaches, though. Counting made a comeback in Sculley Bradley's ambitiously-titled 1939 article, 'The Fundamental Metrical

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[36] Allen, *American Prosody*, p.221.

[37] Allen, p.222.

[38] Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Principle in Whitman's Poetry'.[39] Bradley finds that even when the logical parallelism schematised by Allen is not present, we can still find in the lines a repeating pattern of stresses. This pattern though, relies on a notion of 'glides' – elided stresses – which seem to be something Bradley is very keen to hear in order that his theory might work. Roger Mitchell acknowledges but rebuts Bradley's scheme in 'A Prosody for Whitman?' (1969), an article whose title could be read as either inquisitive or incredulous.[40] Mitchell declares that it is only by 'the most liberal use of the hovering accent can Whitman be viewed as a stress prosodist'.[41] His own scansion finds that Whitman plays the number of stresses in 'stress groups' against the number of these groups in a line. He finds a recurring parabola shape where Bradley finds a pyramid, suggesting that both writers are as interested in shape as they are in sound. This reading relies on paying constant attention to possible points of caesura, which in the work of a flowing poet like Whitman seems to be quite a wilful experience, despite Mitchell claiming that the prosody he finds is 'the poet's tool rather than the critic's'.[42] Both Bradley and Mitchell demur when explaining what their prosodies do. Mitchell leans towards some careful mimetic readings, but both he and Bradley fall back on a general claim that Whitman's patterning 'lends rhythmical force to the statement' and helps create 'climax'.[43] It is a lot of acoustic engineering for little payoff.

A snappy summary of the field so far comes in a 1985 article by Rosemary Gates, in which she complains that 'an accurate history of Whitman's prosody has been delayed by the attempt to impose on his poetry methods that are not applicable to his form'.[44] '[I]mpose', here, looks to its modulation: 'superimpose'. Trying to scan Whitman's poems as a version, however radical, of metrical verse is doomed to failure: it's one thing laid askew on top of another. The true key to the mythology, she shows us, is generative metrics based on the natural stress prominence of human speech. Her analysis demonstrates that 'Whitman's verse is rhythmically – not metrically – regular, and that the rhythm depends on the relation through repetition of a few patterns of prominence, and on the isochronic character of the sound unit'.[45] But while Gates's article is valuable in revealing on just how fundamental a level Whitman's verse might be responding to human speech, it is, in the end, another act of minimising by fitting. The basic premise of stress

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[39] Bradley, 'The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry'.

[40] Roger Mitchell, 'A Prosody for Whitman?', *PMLA*, 84(6) (1969), 1606-1612.

[41] Mitchell, p.1606.

[42] Mitchell, p.1606.

[43] Mitchell, p.1609; Bradley, p.458.

[44] Rosemary Gates, 'The Identity of American Free Verse: The Prosodic Study of Whitman's "Lilacs."', *Language and Style*, 18 (1985), 248-276, p.248.

[45] Gates, p.253.

prominence, which Gates takes from Chomsky, relies on a normalised manner of delivery which in Whitman's emotionally-charged lines is not always simple to locate. Why, for example, should the stress prominence in Whitman's phrase 'and yet shall mourn' be falling – surely we could put more stress on 'mourn' than on 'shall'.[46] As Eric Griffiths has explained in detail, poetry cannot code real speech acts, and nor should we read it as attempting to.[47]

Annie Finch, writing soon after Gates, makes an argument in an opposite direction. In *The Ghost of Meter* (1993), Finch argues that when 'free verse' poems put forward a prominently metrical line, they are doing so to tell us about that meter, forming what she calls a 'metrical code'.[48] As one example among many, she finds that a compelling percentage of Whitman's pentameter lines have something to do with Europe, as if Whitman is gesturing to pentameter as an outdated historical institution.[49] Finch does not present this as a method of scansion in itself, and as such it works a lot harder than other responses: it is, in essence, a work of listening to how Whitman listened to rhythmical tradition. Her methods have not entirely shifted the debate, though. There has only been, to my knowledge, one full length monograph on Whitman's prosody since 1898: Doug Martin's *A Study of Walt Whitman's Mimetic Prosody* (2004).[50] Martin's project relies on chopping Whitman's verse up into feet, and then putting an imaginative ear to them, hearing meaningful sounds in the smallest syllabic movements. At best, these mimetic readings could be held as a fascinating example of subjective acoustics: of the ear's freedom to interpret where such a response to a visual stimulus might be challenged. Ultimately, though, Martin approaches Whitman's verse with a set of tools which, in Gates' bureaucratic language, are 'not applicable' to the project at hand.

One way out of this trap (and the circularity of Jannacone to Martin suggests a certain element of the discourse may have overstayed its welcome) is to take the cue from Finch and listen to how the poems listened. While I acknowledge the irony of critiquing a history of revisions only to propose a new theory, I do firmly believe that there is a basic problem with the vast swathe of previous attempts to theorise or schematise Whitman's rhythms: they hover too high above the poems, and skirt too low beneath history. One of the pitfalls of *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman's ongoing project of editing and arrangement is that the final product of 1891 gives us license to

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[46] Gates, p.253.
[47] Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry*, 2nd edition (1989; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[48] Finch, pp.3-12.
[49] Finch, p.49.
[50] Doug Martin, *A Study of Walt Whitman's Mimetic Prosody: Free-Bound and Full Circle* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

view it as just that: final. For most poets a collected edition will preserve chronological groupings and thus present us with a history of the poet's style. By collecting himself, Whitman effaced his own stylistic history. With the help of digital projects like the Walt Whitman Archive, we are able to do some work of unravelling, and explore how elements of Whitman's versification, like his rhythms, might have changed over his lifetime. It is telling that none of the articles or books briefly presented above bring any substantial body of new evidence to the table, preferring instead to conduct their enquiry within the walled garden of the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*. There is, of course, justification for sticking to the poems: Whitman never came forward with what we might call a prosodic theory, and what he writes about poetic rhythm more generally is vague, typically contradictory, and it is thus tempting to employ it only sparingly.[51] Perhaps what we should bring into the discussion, then, along with a conception of the poems as evolving, is not just the things Whitman declared about rhythm in the context of poetry, but the things he said about rhythm in a much wider sense: as a part of the soundscape and social world he inhabited.

We could argue for this approach from the other side: rhythm is a fundamental part of history, and so to study the history of Walt Whitman in the Civil War would thus require us to address his rhythms and those of the War in conjunction. Caroline Levine argues in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015) that rhythm is one of the 'pervasive' forms of which history is made up, and that to read history properly is to acknowledge the conflicting mesh of rhythms which exert power upon us:

> Reading the rhythms of the world in a formalist fashion, alert to the temporal organizing principles that govern social organisations and institutions, we find a social world where temporal structures often thwart or compete with one another. […] In order to understand the political and social power that temporal forms exert – their capacity to regulate and organize our lives – we need a kind of analysis capable of revealing how temporal patterns collide.[52]

My intention with the body of this chapter is to take Levine's prompting, and read Whitman's wartime experience as one of competing rhythmical patterns, including patterns of rhythmical sound, and to ask how we might use this formalist reading of history to approach the rhythms of *Drum-Taps*. Scanning the final edition of *Leaves of Grass* will never get us anywhere beyond our own habits of hearing; to do more, we must try scanning history.

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[51] Allen, *American Prosody*, p.217.

[52] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.51.

Before entering into the soundscape of Whitman's Civil War, though, we must explore what, after Levine, could be considered simply another form or soundscape exerting influence on Whitman: the rhythmical and metrical culture in which he was writing. As Meredith Martin has shown in *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, prosody can be read as a deeply embedded element of national culture: a politically charged set of sound patterns. It is the interaction, or collision, between these and other soundscapes which might lead us to a conception of *Drum-Taps* as acoustically intertwined with the environment of wartime Washington. Importantly, such an enquiry does not set out to prove that the poems of *Drum-Taps* 'sound like' their environment, rather that they are a sounded part *of* that environment.

II. Sounding Fit

It has become a truism of Civil War literary studies to point out that the boundary between song and poem in the period was fluid, and that the forms were inherently fungible in wartime print culture.[53] While this has led to some important work on how poems were adopted and disseminated, it travels via a specific historical route which bypasses some thorny issues of poetic taste and prosodic judgement. When it came to taking stock of the War's literary creations in anthologies, for example, post-bellum editors did not display the fluid attitude to genre with which critics now characterise the period. This is not to say these editors were snobbish. Indeed, the work which Fahs, Barrett and Richards have done in promoting newspaper and popular verse as an important part of Civil War literature, after Wilson skated past it in his study, is work which began in the immediate aftermath of the War. In the introduction to his 1866 anthology of Civil War poetry, Richard Grant White emphasises the democracy of the project:

> Nor have I been at all fastidious as to the quarter in which I looked for this poetry, or as to the subjects of the verses. In the formation of a volume which aims to be a poetical reflex of the mind of a whole people under the excitement of a war lasting four years, fastidiousness in these respects would be much out of place. I have looked through the street ballads as well as the monthly magazines, and have taken as readily what was printed upon a broadside, or written for negro minstrels, as what came from Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, or Boker.[54]

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[53] Barrett, *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, p.9.

[54] Richard Grant White, ed., *Poetry: Lyrical, Narrative and Satirical of the Civil War* (New York: The American News Company, 1866), p.vii.

'[F]astidious' in its nineteenth-century usage carried a sense of squeamish: in encountering street ballads, White implies, one generally has to hold one's nose.[55] But White eschews this nicety in the noble name of producing a more representative volume. While these poems were certainly not given equal status with the work of establishment figures like those listed, their inclusion does suggest that they were already valued in a conception of Civil War poetry as the productions of a widely literate and engaged nation, alert to its political present.

Although White claims he avoided 'fastidiousness', he goes on to describe popular verse as an affront to the ears. After lamenting the generally low quality of Confederate poetry ('[t]he secessionists fought much better than they wrote'), White turns to another kind of poem which he has included despite its faults: the song. His diatribe is worth quoting in full:

> Aside, moreover, from the sentiment which they express or their poetical merits, there is undoubtedly a quality in certain songs which insures popularity, and which seems to be a certain rhythm, or *lilt*, which seizes upon the memory and bewitches without always pleasing the ear; and I have not passed over compositions of which this is the only merit. It may be that some people complacently thought, as they listened to that nonsensical farrago, 'Old John Brown,' that here was proof that 'the great popular heart of this country beat in unison the impulses of humanity toward universal freedom.' But the truth was that the alternate jig and swing of the air caused it to stick in the uneducated ear as burrs stick to a blackberry girl.[56]

Where Fahs and Barrett find song to have been interchangeable with poetry, White finds it to be an acoustic affront compared to more measured verse. In the first instance, songs make prisoners of us: their rhythm 'seizes upon the memory and bewitches without always pleasing the ear'. We might note that White genders the songs by giving them a capacity to 'bewitch'. This could be dismissed as a mere turn of phrase, but after the entirely male list of sanctioned authors on the previous page, it contributes to a project of dismissing these songs as unmanly, untempered, female productions, which are nevertheless able to charm and seduce. In the second instance, when White comes to a specific complaint about 'Old John Brown', he chooses a more passive metaphor: 'the alternate jig and swing of the air caused it to stick in the uneducated ear as burrs stick to a blackberry girl'. Here, the ear is 'uneducated', and so seems unable to filter what enters it. In a moment of synaesthesia, the ear is shown to have no taste. The figure of the blackberry girl, again gendered, has gone out in search of sustenance — the fruit, perhaps, of poets like Longfellow and Bryant — only to come back instead covered in

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[55] Webster, I, p.657.
[56] White, p.viii.

unsightly, irritating burrs. A 'burr' is also a regional peculiarity of accent: everything about the metaphor makes of popular song something uncouth, unseemly and irregular.

Stress verse, then, is dismissed by this passage as sticky noise. We would be wrong, White insists, to interpret the strident rhythms or steady lilt of Civil War songs as 'the great popular heart' of the nation beating in unison; all these rhythms do is to help lodge meaningless words in our ears.[57] White's is perhaps the most specific complaint against song made in the anthologies, but it does not stand alone. In the 1867 *War Poems of the South* (published, it is worth noting, in New York), the editor declares he has not found much space for 'songs, camp catches, or marching ballads', because they are 'rarely such as may claim poetical rank'.[58] Instead, 'they depend upon lively music and certain spirit-stirring catchwords, and are rarely worked up with much regard to art or even propriety'. In a review of the 1864 *Lyrics of Loyalty*, songs are grudgingly admitted to have a found 'a wider circle of admirers than more finished and elegant strains'.[59] The pattern across these commentaries is an acknowledgement of the popularity of song accompanied by a dismissal of its rhythmical insistence as lacking in delicatesse. We find, counterintuitively, that texts which would have been sung to a specific beat, often made manifest by drums, are cast aside as convulsive and jumpy, in opposition to a vague conception of more tempered, and tempo-d, polite verse.

There is, then, a question about just how noisy poetry could get away with being. This was not a new question, although the mass voicing of certain popular texts during the Civil War made it newly-pressing. The issue of noise, quiet and the martial is addressed, for example, in a much-anthologised 1844 poem by Longfellow: 'The Day is Done'.[60] The poem originally formed Longfellow's introduction to *The Waif*, an anthology of short, contemplative lyrics. To inaugurate this selection, Longfellow presents us with a scene of darkening evening, and a speaker overcome with a melancholy which 'resembles sorrow only / As the mist resembles the rain' (11-12). He apostrophises:

> Come, read to me some poem,
> Some simple and heartfelt lay,
> That shall soothe this restless feeling,

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[57] I have been unable to find a source for this line which White presents as a quotation. It seems partly to gesture towards some lines in Shelley's *Queen Mab*: 'a life of resolute good, / Unalterable will, quenchless desire / Of universal happiness, the heart / That beats with it in unison [...]'.

[58] William Gilmore Simms, ed., *War Poetry of the South* (New York: Richardson & Company, 1867), p.vii.

[59] 'The Poetry of the War*', The Living Age*, 16 January 1864, 112-114, p.114.

[60] Originally titled 'Proem', in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Waif* (Boston: William Ticknor & Co., 1844), p.ix.

> And banish the thoughts of day.
>> (13-16)

The body of the poem involves the speaker attempting to control the soundscape of his glum repose. In the scene presented he seems to speak to a companion, whom he urges to read aloud from a 'treasured volume'. He rejects certain types of poem on the grounds of their acoustics:

> Not from the grand old masters,
>> Not from the bards sublime,
> Whose distant footsteps echo
>> Through the corridors of Time.
>
> For, like strains of martial music,
>> Their mighty thoughts suggest
> Life's endless toil and endeavor;
>> And to-night I long for rest.
>> (17-24)

In 'footsteps' we find the complaint of the next stanza echoing backwards: 'strains of martial music' suggest marching and the trudge of footsteps, where the speaker wants only rest. There also seems to be a sublimated complaint against long poems here, which might themselves be an 'endless toil and endeavor' liable in their magnitude to delay sleep. He requests, instead, that his companion read 'from some humbler poet / Whose songs gushed from his heart' (25-26):

> Such songs have power to quiet
>> The restless pulse of care,
> And come like the benediction
>> That follows after prayer.
>
> Then read from the treasured volume
>> The poem of thy choice,
> And lend to the rhyme of the poet
>> The beauty of thy voice.
>
> And the night shall be filled with music,
>> And the cares, that infest the day,
> Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
>> And as silently steal away.
>> (33-44)

Where the grand masters set their feet clattering, and write poems whose 'strains', next to Longfellow's 'rest', seem to be straining, the humbler poet 'gushed'. This gushing is a smooth, liquid sound, uninterrupted and unperiodised. Indeed, it acts against periods, with the 'power to quiet / The restless pulse of care'.

As a poem about reading out loud, 'The Day is Done' necessarily proposes that poems make noise. In the atmosphere of quiet which pervades it, though, this assumption falters. The speaker urges his companion to give 'thy voice' to a poem, or, rather, to 'lend' it. 'The Day is Done' thus presents poems as something which might occasionally emerge as sound, but have to be called up from a place of not-sound, or silence. Once the companion has finished lending the poem their voice, we must assume it becomes mute again. We should also pay attention to this poem's original position, as a proem to a print anthology. In this context, the speaker may well be Longfellow, addressing us, the anthology's owner and reader. The relationship thus inaugurated, between editor and reader, is necessarily mute: we cannot read out loud to Longfellow, but we can read nevertheless: silently, to ourselves.[61]

The meter of the poem is itself restrained, and encourages this quiet encounter. There is a tendency towards triple rhythms ('Gleam through the rain and the mist,' 'And lend to the rhyme of the poet'), but few lines are overwhelmed and lose their speech-like quality. The poem is in a shortened short meter, with each line housing three actual beats. Some of the third lines seem slightly too full ('As showers from the clouds of summer') but they always stick to their limit. Each line is filled out by a virtual beat, but the consistent blank spaces where we might expect a line to push on confer a breathless, diminutive quality to the stanzas. Longfellow does not seem to want his poem to break the silence.

What this reading of 'The Day is Done' shows, then, is that rhythm did not necessarily always imply noise: a well-formed poem, obeying the rules of propriety, was in many senses quiet, even silent. This was the acoustic background against which editors like White could read other types of poem as noisy and convulsive. Where Whitman fits, or fit himself, within this scale is hard to pin down. Certainly he avoided the charges of witchcraft: many reviewers seemed actively repulsed rather than enchanted by his verse. But neither did he set out to enter into the tempered acoustic space of Longfellow and his 'humbler poet'. Looking through Whitman's writing for evidence of where on this scale he placed himself is something of a fool's errand. For example, we could take the word '*lilt*' from White's introduction and see what Whitman does with it. Traubel recounts discussing lilt with Whitman in 1888:

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[61] Ironically, the first poem after Longfellow's begins: 'Clang, clang! the massive anvils ring; / Clang, clang! a hundred hammers swing'. It seems he didn't want us to get too sleepy before we'd made some progress with the book.

> Well – the lilt is all right: yes, right enough: but there's something anterior – more imperative. The first thing necessary is the thought – the rest may follow if it chooses – may play its part – but must not be too much sought after. The two things being equal I should prefer to have the lilt present with the idea, but if I got down my thought and the rhythm was not there I should not work to secure it.[62]

Here, rhythm and thought are set apart: thought is 'imperative', while rhythm seems a latecomer without whom the party could still go ahead. This declaration seems wilfully contrary: if the outline of prosodic responses to Whitman presented above shows anything, it is that there is a rhythmical experience to be found in his poetry, even if that experience is hard to quantify. Indeed, if we turn away from Traubel's volumes (which in their magnitude come to form something like Borges' Library of Babel: a compendium containing every possible opinion), we find a contradicting statement.[63] William Thayer recalls Whitman declaring: 'Nobody could write in my way unless he had a melody singing in his ears […] I always had a tune before I began to write'.[64] Here, Whitman seems to be acting under the very bewitchment of which White despairs. Thought, instead of arriving early and waiting for rhythm to catch up, emerges *from* rhythm, in a fashion theorised by Miller in her study of Dickinson.[65] Ask Whitman a question about rhythm, it seems, and he will obfuscate. In order to get some handle on Whitman's opinion on rhythmicality, propriety and noise, while avoiding becoming trapped with him in Camden as Traubel did, we must approach him while his back is turned.

In 2016, Zachary Turpin made the largest discovery of new Whitman writing in decades: a column written by Whitman for the *New York Atlas* under one of his favourite pen names, 'Mose Velsor'.[66] The column, which ran from September to December 1858, was entitled 'Manly Health and Training, With Off-Hand Hints Toward Their Conditions' and promised to show its male readers the path to 'a perfect body'.[67] Over the weeks Whitman, as Velsor, gave instruction on diet, exercise, and routine, all of which amounted to a total theory of soundness in all aspects

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[62] Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 9 vols (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), I, p.163.

[63] As a curio, here is a page of the online rendition of the Library of Babel which 21 lines down falsely declares 'whitman wrote perfect pentameters'. By phenomenal chance, three lines up sits the phrase 'noncontributory footnotes' <https://libraryofbabel.info/bookmark.cgi?whitman_babel:1> [accessed 2 April 2021].

[64] William Thayer, 'Personal Recollections of Walt Whitman', Scribner's Magazine, 65, June 1919, p.682 <https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/interviews/transcriptions/med.00574.html> [accessed 2 April 2021].

[65] Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp.49-81.

[66] Jennifer Schuessler, 'Found: Walt Whitman's Guide to Manly Health', *New York Times,* 29 April 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/30/books/walt-whitman-promoted-a-paleo-diet-who-knew.html> [accessed 2 April 2021].

[67] Mose Velsor (Walt Whitman), 'Manly Health and Training, With Off-Hand Hints Toward Their Conditions'. ed. Zachary Turpin, *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 33 (2016), 184-310, p.184. Referred to henceforth as 'Manly Health and Training', with page numbers noted in the text.

of life. From cold baths to callisthenics, Velsor would have his readers submitting entirely to his regime, and thus fulfilling the promise of American manhood. The column's literary mode and texture is that of repetition. Reading the pieces as they have been collected can be a trying experience, because Whitman covers the same ground again and again, and admitted as much: 'We place the greater reliance upon the forming of the habit [of training], and therefore repeat it many times in these articles' (p.206). Read with breakfast each Sunday morning (which should be a small portion of meat, a nearly raw egg, a slice of dry bread, and a cold cup of tea), the articles would themselves come to form a habit, within which Whitman repeats his instruction to be repetitious in all things.

'Manly Health and Training', then, is both a handbook and a metronome: it teaches us to live a rhythmical life. It also teaches us how to read poetry. In the 17 October column, after instruction on the value of baseball, hurling and swimming, Whitman turns to 'Training the Voice'. As with all the training he proposes, vocal exercise should be 'systematic and daily', and if done right will provoke 'the habit of electricity through the frame'. The particular exercise he recommends is that of declaiming texts. This is not the declamation of the elocution manuals, though, performed carefully in front of a tutor, but something raw and natural:

> We would recommend every young man to select a few favourite poetical or other passages, of an animated description, and get in the habit of declaiming them, on all convenient occasions – especially when out upon the water, or by the sea-shore, or rambling over the hills on the country.
>
> (p.241)

There is no tutor here to correct pronunciation and posture: only the hills to echo back the voice. Whitman's advice on declamation is unusually disordered. We should declaim whenever, wherever, with none of the temporal consistency which characterises the other regimes in the column. The declamations themselves, though, should be entirely rhythmical:

> Careful, however, not to overstrain his voice, or scream, for that is not the object that is aimed after. A loud, slow, firm tone, as long as it can be sustained without fatigue, and agreeably to the ear, is the test.
>
> (p.241)

This is an injunction towards a rhythmical performance. While certainly not a theory of versification, the specific qualities of the reading Whitman proposes do imply a stance on prosody. They might look back, for instance, to Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Poetic Principle'. Poe

argues, facetiously, that 'a long poem does not exist'.[68] A poem must excite, he claims, but can excite only for so long (half an hour to be precise), after which 'it flags – fails – a revulsion ensues'. Such a flagging and failing is what Whitman's instructions are designed to help us avoid: we must declaim only while we have the energy, and while the sound pleases us. While we declaim, though, we must be rhythmical: 'loud, slow, firm'. The instructions also look back to another part of Whitman's own text: his advice on walking. 'A pretty long walk' is good exercise, Whitman advises, but must be approached carefully (p.200). We should work up our step till 'it takes the power of locomotion pretty well', and then keep up that pace 'as it can be well endured – not to the extent of fatigue however, for it is a law of training that a man must not exercise so hard at any time as to overdo and tire himself'. Walking, like reading poetry, must have a tempo, but must never exhaust itself, as that tempo would then be lost. In 'rambling over the hills' and declaiming poetry, then, we reach the height of rhythmicality, all our body involved in maintaining a pace both sustainable and pleasing.

In 'Manly Health and Training' we find Whitman talking about rhythm without his own rhythmically problematic poetry forcing him to hedge his bets. Velsor's column shows a writer deeply enamoured with rhythmicality, even metricality, as a property of all parts of life, which must include poetry. We can, I suggest, carefully employ the theory of rhythmicality presented in 'Manly Health and Training' in our encounters with *Leaves of Grass*. Instead of reading the long lines of Whitman's early poems as exhausting themselves, perhaps we should read them as measured, tempered exertions. Whitman's lines always end with punctuation: they never stumble into enjambment. Many sections of 'Song of Myself' seem to set up their own regime: picking up a grammatical structure and repeating it steadily to a point not of fatigue, but of purposeful conclusion.

This rhythmical scheme, though, is fiercely independent, as, apparently, is the physical training regimen it matches. Is 'Manly Health and Training' purely interested in the individual, the solo body, or does it place that individual in a community of like-minded and like-bodied brethren? Or, to rephrase this in a way which applies also to Whitman's poetic rhythm, is it enough to be fit, or do we also have to fit in? Over its length, the column ends up promoting the latter. Whitman is enamoured with the male body not just individually, but en masse, where it has the potential to be America's great contribution to the world:

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[68] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Poetic Principle', *Home Journal*, 36, 31 August 1850, 1.

> We are not insensible to the triumphs of the demonstrative sciences and philosophy – to the explanation of the subtleties of mind – to the accomplishment of such wonders as the Atlantic Telegraph, the great feat of the age; but for all that, we are clear in the opinion of the still greater importance of all these researches and statements directly affecting individual happiness and health – the development of a superb race of men, large-bodied, clean-blooded, and with all the attributes of the best material humanity.
>
> <div align="right">(p.195)</div>

This sentence runs on to exhaustion, in contradiction of Whitman's own advice, but out of it rises the true American man. Past and future technologies are laid out: the development of 'a superb race of men' is to be the next step after innovations like 'the Atlantic Telegraph, the great feat of the age'. American manhood is a technology which will outdo even the telegraph in its capacity to span and bridge. A 'great feat' is to be replaced with great feet, which will move in powerful, cohesive locomotion over the country, for in human motion we find 'the whole expression of life, the passions, and the outshowing of active beauty' (p.282).

It is impossible to read 'Manly Health and Training' now without it seeming to predict, even eagerly to await, the Civil War and the teleology which Whitman built around it. In 1858, under a pseudonym, we find Whitman primed to welcome the Civil War as a consummation of the devout hopes he had for America as a rhythmical nation. Strong rhythm was not a bewitchment or a burr, but an intentional way of existing in the world, of instantiating the potential of the American man as a strong, aesthetic individual. Whitman only had to wait a few years before this conception was seemingly manifested entire, in the ranks of men marching out of New York to defend the Union. What he soon found, though, was that his teleology was to be tested, over and again, against the reality of war. The rhythmical utopia prophesied by his newspaper column was soon to encounter a real column of marching men, being drummed on their way towards slaughter.

III. Drumming

The rhythmical story of Whitman's Civil War is recorded in the title of *Drum-Taps*. Immediately available is the tapping or beating of a drum. This beating sounds a reveille for the nation: a motivation to war, and the setting of an army on the march. But the title also refers to a specific drum beat. Before the tattoo which sent soldiers in camp to bed, the drum corps would tap three

times.[69] This signalled a move from activity to rest, motion to prostration. One of the bugle calls played for this evening tattoo became known, after the drums which preceded it, as 'Taps'. During the War, this bugle tune became a traditional feature of military funerals. So in *Drum-Taps* we might hear three different rhythms: a patriotic stirring, a signal of stasis, and the 'solemn music of mourning'.[70] Before we even begin to read the poems, we find the body in motion, the body prostrate, and the body grieved for. The following sections will trace Whitman's encounters with these forms in turn, showing that while the rhythms of his poems are not necessarily mimetic of his wartime environment, they do betray an immersion in rhythmicality, one result of which was the more frequent appearance of recognisably metrical poetic lines.

Drums were used by two groups within the Union army: military bands and field musicians. The military band was in charge of one of the drum's functions: performance in 'parades and other special occasions'.[71] The field musicians, meanwhile, used drums 'as a medium of communication'. This included the calls which controlled camp life and set the tempo for marching, and the calls for directing troops in battle. It is worth noting that while this latter function is often depicted in painting and on film, it was quite rare in reality. The Civil War battlefield was simply too full of the percussive sounds of gunfire and artillery for drums to be distinctly audible. The bugle was preferred, as its higher frequencies cut through the din. Drummers were usually detailed to other duties during battle, and one of the most common reassignments was as a stretcher-bearer or surgeon's assistant. Drummers thus went from controlling the movements of upright soldiers to bearing prostrate bodies, in an echo of the narrative of Whitman's title. While drumming was a ubiquitous feature of army life, then, only one of its functions faced outwards to civilians: the drum as part of a parade band. Without coincidence, this is the sense in which it was most frequently employed in poetry, and is a good place to begin exploring Whitman's relationship with the sound of the drum.

Whitman's first War poem already had drumming in its ears:

> Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
> Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
> Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,

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[69] Eric Spall, 'The Tongue of the Camp: Drumming and Drummers of the America Civil War' (Honors Thesis, Ball State University, 2010), p.23. I'm grateful to Spall's work for its thorough synthesis of primary material relating to drumming.

[70] John M. Picker, 'The Union of Music and Text in Whitman's *Drum-Taps* and Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment*', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 12(4) (1995), 231-245, p.231.

[71] Spall, p.4.

Into the school where the scholar is studying,
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

(1-7)[72]

'Beat! beat! drums!' was published by both *Harper's Weekly* and the *New York Leader* on 28 September 1861, during the high-water months for patriotic verse.[73] While hardly Whitman's most complex War poem, it is at least more ambiguous in its stance than many of the similar calls to arms, printed in the newspapers, northern and southern. Whitman goads the drums and bugles of war to sound off and awaken a sleeping nation. This is already a modulation of the standard theme. More usually, the poet takes an observatory stance. They witness the parade, with its drums and music, and then repeat its message, urging people to heed the call of the drum.[74] Whitman places himself prior in the chain, making an apostrophe to the instruments themselves: he is the prime motivator.[75] The other oddness of the poem, beyond this initial modulation, is the extent to which Whitman makes the drums and bugles antagonists. By choosing not to include any paeans to freedom or godly purpose which might justify their clamour, all we really get is the story of drums bringing volcanic disruption to lives which seem otherwise rich in freedom and godly purpose. Everything which might be worth fighting for – the church, the wedding, the fields – is torn apart and thrust aside. The marital is trampled by the martial. By the end of the poem the drums have become a heathen force, disturbing even the quiet of death: 'Make even the trestles to shake the dead, where they lie awaiting the hearses'. Whitman pushes patriotic jingoism to such absurdity that the poem could be read as criticising the War as meaningless chaos, as opposed to championing it as the only way to defend what Northerners hold dear.

The poem's publication in *Harper's Weekly*, a firmly Unionist journal, implies that it was received in the latter sense, but the more literary among the journal's readership might have felt Whitman's ambivalence more strongly. The refrain of 'blow! bugles! blow!' is an echo of the

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[72] *Drum-Taps*, p.45.
[73] This makes it one of only four poems Whitman published in newspapers during the years of the War: 'Beat! beat! drums!', 'Little Bells Last Night' and 'Old Ireland' were printed in 1861, then there was a long gap until 'O Captain! my Captain!' in 1865. This means that Whitman had no poems published in newspapers while he was living in Washington; he was certainly writing them, but clearly did not feel compelled to make ongoing periodical publication part of his contribution to the war effort. For further detail, see: <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/bibliography/index.html> [accessed 2 April 2021].
[74] See, for example, James R. Randall's 'My Maryland' (April 1861) and its hearing of the 'bugle, fife, and drum'. Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller, ed., *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p.49.
[75] We might think of him as Irving Berlin's fabled other pup: the guy that gets the bugler up.

same call made in one of the lyric interludes which Alfred Tennyson added to *The Princess* in 1850:

> The splendour falls on castle walls
>   And snowy summits old in story:
> The long light shakes across the lakes,
>   And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
> Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
> Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.
>   (III, 348-353)[76]

Whitman composed his poem in the first months of what was to become a conflict of unprecedented slaughter. The bugles receive no answer in 'Beat! beat! drums!', leaving a gap where some readers might hear Tennyson's insistent refrain: 'dying, dying, dying'. How better to describe what would occur in the span of years between this and the poem's next publication in *Drum-Taps*? The one thing which a poem calling people to arms cannot admit is the possibility of mass slaughter. Whitman manages to include this possibility via a gap and a silence, the quieted answer to his call.

The echo of *The Princess* also motivates us to pay closer attention to Whitman's rhythms. The first line of each stanza is metrical, and could be scanned as follows:

$$\underline{/} \quad \underline{/} \quad \underline{/} \; [\underline{/}] \; \underline{/} \quad \underline{/} \; \text{x} \quad \underline{/} \quad [\underline{/}]^{77}$$
Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
                                        (1)

Essentially, this is two four-beat lines, each with a virtual beat, combined into one eight-beat line. It falls easily into this rhythm, perhaps pushed by its similarity to another Tennyson poem: that favourite of metrical manuals, 'Break, Break, Break'. Both poems begin with a three-stress imperative and a preponderance of Bs. 'Beat' and 'Break' are also an eye-rhyme, strengthening the link. While we would probably catch onto Whitman's rhythm without hearing it as an echo of Tennyson's elegy, I believe the coincidence helps ease us into rhythmical thinking, where we

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[76] *Tennyson's Poetry*, ed. Robert W. Hill Jr. (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), p.159.
[77] For my own scansions, I will be using the scheme laid out in Derek Attridge's *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*. Forward slashes indicate stress, an x indicates no stress, and underscores indicate the place where the beat falls. This has the advantage of being able to illustrate why certain lines might be experienced as metrical, while not forcing those lines into feet.

might usually leave this behind on beginning a Whitman poem. By the end of the first line, then, there is a rhythm to tap along to. The second line, though, stumbles:

> Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
>
> (2)

After two three-beat lines with virtual beats (or an eight-beat line, as here) we would expect a line of either three beats with a virtual beat or four beats. Whitman's second line does not give us this, but it is interesting to note how easily it could have, with a small alteration:

> /   x   ⟋   x   /   ⟋   x   x   ⟋   x   ⟋
> Through the windows—through doors—like a ruthless force,

I mark 'Through' and 'through' as demoted stresses, but they could just as easily go unstressed: the syntax lets us skip over them smoothly to build up to the much greater emphasis on the contrasting 'windows' and 'doors'. It's certainly busy for a four-beat line, but four beats it is, held together by the rhyme of 'doors' and 'force'. Whitman, though, gives us 'burst'. The verb summons the noise of the first line with its alliteration, and intrudes, or bursts in, on the rhythm which had almost got going. Rousing martial meter is played off against the disruption it brings.[78]

This rhythmical work carries on beyond these lines. In the manuscript fragment we have of this poem, we can see Whitman tussling with the last line of the first stanza:

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[78] I'm grateful to Edward Allen for his hearing of another possible rhythm-via-emendation in this line. An extra 'the' would fix the broken parallelism and give us a strong trochaic heptameter line: **Through** the **win**dows—**through** [the] **doors**—**burst** like a **ruth**less **force**'. This is more like the early manuscript version of the line: 'Through the windows—through every door' (see below). With several simple routes to a rhythmical line available, it seems very likely that Whitman deliberately veered away from rhythm as he turned to the drum as a 'ruthless force', interruptive and disruptive.
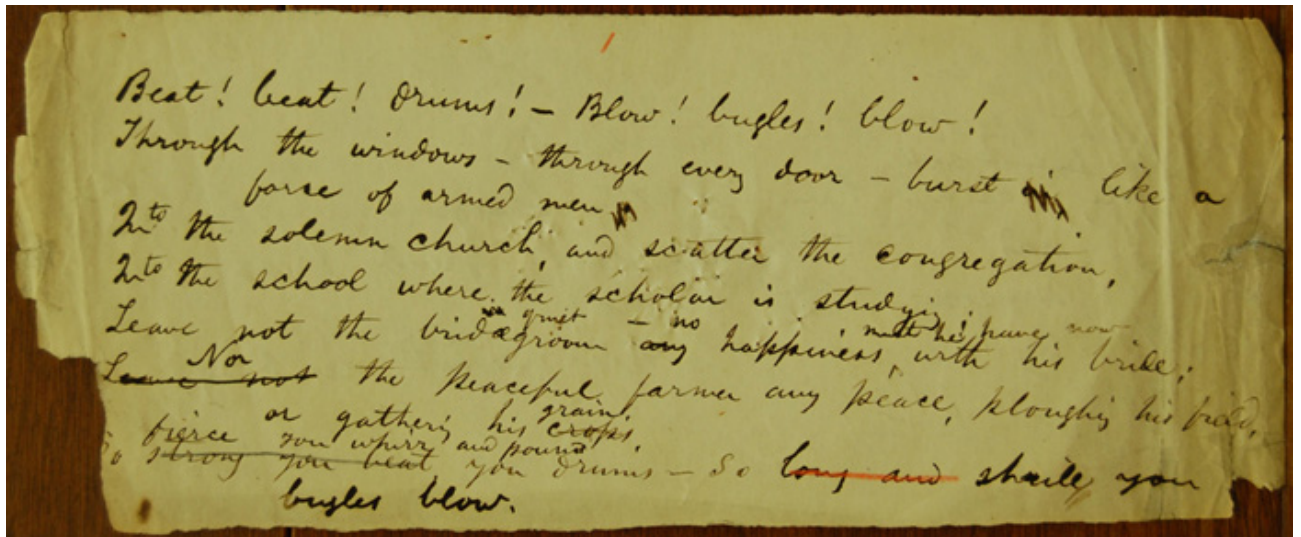
Figure 4: Manuscript fragment of 'Beat! beat! drums!'

So ~~strong you beat~~ ^{fierce you whirr and pound} you drums—So ~~long and~~ shrill you bugles blow.[79]

The line as it originally stood is metrical, but ends weakly:

    x   ∠   x   ∠   x   ∠ || x   ∠   x   ∠   x   ∠ x   ∠
So strong you beat you drums — so long and shrill you bugles blow.

A three-beat followed by a four-beat line at the end of a stanza is never as strong and conclusive as the opposite, as Whitman well knew, leading him to flip the line's rhythm:

    x   ∠   x   ∠   x   ∠   x   ∠ || x   ∠   x   ∠ x   ∠
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums — so shrill you bugles blow.

As the drums and bugles return to the stanza, so does the strong rhythm, such that the disruption they cause over the middle lines is bracketed by lines which could be laid out as a neat stanza in short meter:

Beat! beat! drums!—
Blow! bugles! blow!
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums —
So shrill you bugles blow.

This happens in each of the three stanzas, which become three instances of order bracketing chaos.

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[79] See <https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/transcriptions/loc.00051.html> [accessed 5 April 2021].

Here, then, at the start of the War, we find a Whitman wary of the beat of the drum, juxtaposing its regular rhythms against the disruption they bring. John Picker reads Whitman's early War poems as evidence that he was 'as carried away by the initial music of war as the recruits themselves'.[80] He is right, in that we should not read poems like 'Beat! beat! drums!' as the immediate laying-out of an anti-war stance. Indeed, Whitman was thrilled by the raising-to-arms of a nation of young men:

> We have seen the alacrity with which the American-born populace, the peaceblest and most good natured race in the world, and the most personally independent and intelligent, and the least fitted to submit to the irksomeness and exasperation of regimental discipline, sprang, at the first tap of drum, to arms – not for gain, not for glory, nor to repel invasion – but for an emblem, a mere abstraction – for the life, the safety of the flag. [81]

He even imagined himself joining the army if pressed:

> I would like to see the people embodied *en-masse* – I am very sure I shall see that my name is in its place on the lists, and my body in the ranks, if they do it that way – for *that* will be something like our nation getting itself up in shape.
>
> (6 March 1863)[82]

These passages show Whitman embracing military order, but they both remind his reader that the army is an army of individuals. In the first passage, Whitman paints the American populace as averse to controlling structures: they are 'least fitted to submit to the irksomeness and exasperation of regimental discipline'. In the letter, we get the doubled 'my': 'my name', 'my body'. Whitman is keen to index himself in this imagined scenario. The list of names will be long and total, but within it will shine the name of 'Walt Whitman'. We might, then, tune in to another movement in the rhythmical pattern of 'Beat! beat! drums!'. The drums and bugles enter the poem rhythmically, but once Whitman turns to describe the civilian life they disrupt, that rhythm departs and individual disobedience asserts itself. Even while Whitman was consciously making himself a part of the poetic reveilles that filled newspapers, he did not submit to their common metricality. Undoubtedly, he found in that metricality the same 'irksomeness and exasperation' that he saw in regimental discipline. That discipline had to be submitted to, though,

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[80] Picker, p.233.

[81] *Walt Whitman's Civil War*, ed. Walter Lowenfels (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p.284.

[82] *Correspondence*, I, p.76.

in order to defend the personal independence of the American population.[83] The War did not only, as David Reynolds has suggested, justify Whitman's 'free poetic form', but forced him to ask what rhythms that freedom depended upon.[84] The rest of Whitman's War would be a struggle between the individual and the rhythmical structures to which they were compelled to submit.

Whitman was not satisfied working through this problem from the outside, as a mere audience to the parade. Although the beat of the drum echoing through Brooklyn did not persuade him to join a regiment, he did call himself up to a different service: two years of intense humanitarian work in the Washington hospitals. He ended up on this campaign via a circuitous route on which he was exposed to another of the drum's functions: measuring out the life of the camp. Nervously following the progress of the War from New York (where he had already, in fact, begun to visit army hospitals), Whitman was pulled into its vortex by a slip of the eye. Whitman's brother, George Washington Whitman, had enlisted in the Fifty-first New York Volunteers in September of 1861. He saw constant action, and wrote home regularly. This instilled in the Whitman family a habit of scanning the casualty lists in New York newspapers, and on December 16, 1863, something caught their eye. Among the casualties from Fredericksburg the *New York Tribune* listed a 'G. W. Whitmore'.[85] Not even knowing for sure whether this referred to his brother, Whitman headed straight to Washington, and from there secured a pass to go down to George's camp and search for him. He found George in high spirits: a wound to his cheek was not serious and he was surprised but pleased to find his brother had travelled in search of him. Whitman stayed with George in the camp until early in the New Year, and then returned to Washington where he decided to stay, and so began his hospital work. These few weeks in the camp came to be the fulcrum of Whitman's writing on the War. He often exaggerated them in letters to friends in New York, claiming he went frequently to the front. There was a deep need in him to experience, or to pretend to have experienced, the 'real war'.[86]

His observations and listenings over the short time he spent in camp found their way into many poems in *Drum-Taps* (including 'By the bivouac's fitful flame', 'A sight in camp in the day-break

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[83] This declaration of a 'race […] personally independent' rings hollow, of course, in the light of slavery. While Whitman was a fanatic supporter of Lincoln from early on in the War, he never wrote anything to suggest he viewed the War as a fight to free slaves, and indeed his paeans to the 'American-born populace' are deeply racialist, even racist. It would be a mistake to paint Whitman as an enemy to slaves and African Americans, but we should be careful not to assume that his democratic utopia necessarily included them.
[84] David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), p.420.
[85] Reynolds, p.411.
[86] Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days and Collect* (Philadelphia: Reese Welsh & Co., 1882), p.80.

grey and dim' and 'Camps of green') and more are to be found in draft poems and notebooks, suggesting that Whitman used these observations as a store of poetic material. Glicksberg, in his collection of Whitman's Civil War writing, prints a manuscript titled 'Sights — the Army Corps encamped on the war field' which lives somewhere between a poem and a list of ideas for poems:

> The clusters of tents — the brigades and divisions
> The shelter tents — the peep through the open entrance flap — the debris around
> The balloon up for reconnoisances
> […]

(1-3)[87]

Like many of the poems in *Drum-Taps* it foregrounds sight as a way of trying to pin down the real war. This photographic quality has been dealt with at length before, and instead I want to focus on one line which stands out from the rest as the only one which hears instead of sees: 'The sound of drums — the different calls, the assembly, the early reveille, the tattoo at night, & the dinner call, &c' (8). This list of calls, compared to other Whitmanian lists, is unusually specific. Instead of moving panoramically and presenting, for example, 'The sound of the drums, the sound of the men, the sound of the horses', Whitman leans in to listen closer. The sound of the drums – what sounds specifically? The different calls. And those are? Assembly, reveille, tattoo, dinner. Camp drum calls were made up of a series of rudimentary strokes played in different combinations.[88] The act of distinguishing between them presented by this poem suggests that Whitman attuned himself swiftly to the soundscape of the Civil War encampment. That soundscape consisted of bursts of rhythm, both from the drums and from the soldiers, who kept to a timetable and were drilled daily – 'The squads out on the open ground going through their evolutions' (10). Between these bursts of rhythm came periods of slackness or stasis, with the soldiers free to cook, write letters, or mend equipment.

A more sustained rhythm which Whitman encountered, and which holds his attention throughout *Drum-Taps* and its *Sequel*, is that of marching. This is the rhythm that has been theorised as motivating Whitman's own turn towards metricality in his poems. *Watson's Weekly Art Journal* claimed that the poems of *Drum-Taps* are not 'the elaborate martial strains of the

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[87] *Walt Whitman and the Civil War: A Collection of Original Articles and Manuscripts*, ed. Charles Glicksberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), p.125.
[88] This video gives an excellent example of how drum calls might have sounded, and how to the untrained ear each call might sound incredibly similar: John Roberts, 'Civil War Drum Calls' <https://youtu.be/0fvkihdRV5g> [accessed 5 April 2021].

parade-ground, but the vigorous "drum taps" of the column in march'.[89] This seems to be a *sotto voce* distinction between syllable-stress verse and stress verse: the first is elaborate and ceremonial, the second merely sets a pace. Allen follows this response, claiming that it was natural that 'the poet's heartbeat would throb to the rhythms of marching feet'.[90] In both descriptions we find a pulse, or a beat, rather than a meter. Do these passages, though, describe the actual experience of reading *Drum-Taps*, or are their comments a way of fitting Whitman into a role as unifying American poet which he does not actually fill? The *Watson's* reviewer is keen from the start to make something monumental of Whitman: 'for the first time', they argue, 'the full strength of our American life receives expression – receives assertion'. Would it not be wonderful if we found in this newly-American poet a transcription of the column in march?

As an interlocutor to these questions, we can turn to a type of poetry which spoke out its rhythms in a clear, unambiguous voice: children's verse. A popular book appeared in 1862, written by one 'Cousin John', called *The Drummer Boy* and subtitled 'A story of the war in verse for the young folks at home'. [91] Edward Miller suggests that the book was written by Whitman's friend John Townsend Trowbridge and that it passed through Whitman's hands when Trowbridge sent him a package of books to distribute to the soldiers in hospitals, including two copies of this publication.[92] The story is one of the Civil War's favourite: a young boy, Bill, frustrated he cannot join up as a soldier, heads to war as a drummer and charms all he encounters with his innocence and patriotism. He has his adventures, sees the glories and horrors of war, and is converted entirely to the godly cause of the Union. The poem was published in 1862, with the thick of the War ahead of it, and Trowbridge ends with Bill marching on under the banner of freedom:

> Armed with this truth,
> Bill, noble youth,
> Is marching while you read ;
> You'll not be slow
> To bid, I know,
> Him 'Onward, and God-speed!'

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[89] '*Drum Taps* – Walt Whitman'.
[90] Allen, *The New Walt Whitman Handbook*, p.242.
[91] Cousin John, *The Drummer Boy* (Boston: Crosby & Nichols, 1862).
[92] See Miller's note in *Correspondence,* I, p.195. Miller is probably mistaken in this identification, since I have found no evidence that Trowbridge, though he often used pseudonyms, was in fact 'Cousin John.' Trowbridge did write a novel for juveniles called *The Drummer Boy* (Boston: J. E. Tilton & Co., 1863) and this is no doubt the book Trowbridge sent to Whitman. I am grateful to the editors of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* for their noticing of this probable error by Miller.

These simple rhymes,
Of these great times,
May give your heart a joy,
For now you know
To war doth go
Your friend, the Drummer Boy.
(p.48)

The sudden turn to the reader in the third line above makes manifest a rhythmical communication which was already in play. A child reading on the home front, perhaps even

Figure 5: The Drummer Boy, *p.29*.

reading out loud, is given access to Bill via the poem's 'simple rhymes' and simple rhythms. The poem is in ballad stanzas, made more digestible by splitting the four-beat lines into two rhyming lines of two beats. The patterning is tight: we never have to travel far between rhymes. We read about Bill setting the tempo for the soldiers marching with him, and do so in a poetic tempo which asserts itself from start to finish. Part of the reason the reader is able to 'know / To war doth go / Your friend, the Drummer Boy' is that reading the poem instantiates that going in its rhythm. He is 'marching while you read', but also marching *because* we read.

This children's poem, then, is the kind of reading experience in which poetic rhythm and the rhythm of marching might be said to coincide. It is not the reading experience we find in *Drum-Taps*. With the exception of 'O Captain! my Captain!' – and even then, shakily – Whitman's poems surely cannot be said to march. Allen, however, disagrees, calling 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'

a 'marching poem'.[93] This is an odd declaration. It is certainly a poem *about* marching, but it is very difficult to march to. Surfacing now and again across the stanzas is a promise of a falling rhythm echoing Poe's *The Raven*:

> 3
> O you youths, western youths,
> So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,
> Plain I see you, western youths, see you tramping with the foremost,
> Pioneers! O pioneers!

Here the poem begins to tramp, in strong trochees, but elsewhere it stumbles. For example, when we come to a stanza about the entire world beating in the same rhythm, that stanza loses its own beat:

> 15
> All the pulses of the world,
> Falling in, they beat for us, with the western movement beat;
> Holding single or together, steady moving, to the front, all for us,
> Pioneers! O Pioneers!

The caesura in the second line intrudes but can be navigated. The third line, though, goes awry. We are asked to pronounce 'to' of 'to the front' with a stress, which after its unstressed appearance in 'together' is uncomfortable, and then the line carries on past its eighth beat, with a double stress across 'front, all'. Certainly this is not 'steady moving', and suggests Whitman had a suspicion of total submission to a beat. Just as Whitman's support for enlistment relied on the American individual remaining intact within the throng, his love of rhythmical movement existed alongside a belief in the soldier as an independent locomotive force. In describing the 'actual soldier of 1862-'65' in *Specimen Days,* Whitman highlights a number of qualities, among which is his 'lawless gait'.[94] How can a soldier's gait, drilled into him and forced to fit to the tap of the drum, at the same time be 'lawless'?

The role of the drum in marching was, in fact, a constant negotiation between the human body and artificial rhythm. Columns of soldiers marched to a tempo set by the drum corps. What should be noted, though, is that the tempo the drum corps set was *itself* set by the natural tempos of human walking. The tempo was not measured in an arbitrary number of beats per minute, but in steps per minute. Spall finds that Silas Casey's *Infantry Tactics* specified 'three standard tempos:

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[93] Allen, *The New Walt Whitman Handbook*, p.242.
[94] Whitman, *Specimen Days,* p.779.

common time was to be played at 90 steps per minute, quickstep at 110 steps, and double quick at 140'.[95] This is a useful instantiation of Levine's theory of layered forms. The drum might seem tyrannical, an artificial check on a natural movement, but that check emerges from the pace into which a group of American infantry in the 1860s would naturally fall. Haun Sassy in *Critical Rhythm* argues that marching rhythms are distinctly national: a bodily technique which emerges from societal rules, not merely an idiosyncrasy.[96] I would push on, and suggest that the societal rules imposed on our bodies emerge from their natural operation. Somewhere underneath the cultural layers of marching is the palimpsest of walking. In fact, the drum did not even maintain its control over the column for very long. Once the column had been set going, it would often march in silence, in a rhythm maintained by common physical consent.

This may help us approach Whitman's apparently half-hearted submission to rhythm. The poems of *Drum Taps* are motivated by rhythmical devices, set going by them, but do not then give in to them completely. This movement emerges in several poems in *Drum-Taps*, and is typified by 'A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown'. The poem begins in motion:

> A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,
> A route through a heavy wood with muffled steps in the darkness,
> Our army foil'd with loss severe, and the sullen remnant retreating,
> Till after midnight glimmer upon us the lights of a dim-lighted building,
> We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted building,
> 'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an impromptu hospital
> Entering but for a minute I see a sight beyond all the pictures and poems ever made,
> (1-7)[97]

The first line has a readily available rhythm:

x ∕ x x ∕ \ ∕ x x ∕ x ∕
A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,

We get five beats in a rising pattern, alternating unobtrusively between duple and triple. The triple stress across 'ranks hard-prest' is as close as we can get to a rhythm which could be called mimetic. The stresses are crammed hard together, forced to move forwards under pressure. Line

[95] Spall, p.13.
[96] Haun Sassy, 'Contagious Rhythm: Verse as a Technique of the Body', *Critical Rhythm*, ed. Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), pp.106-127.
[97] Whitman, *Drum-Taps*, p.55.

2, though, drops this rhythm. We are led into the poem's world by a rhythmical line, made part of its story of heavy discipline, but then left to wander more freely. Rising rhythms, both duple and triple, sound out now and again as vestiges of the momentum which inaugurated the poem ('Our army foil'd with loss severe', 'We come to an open space in the woods'), but the steady going of the first line falls away.

The column comes to a halt at a church which has been made into an 'impromptu hospital'. The scene Whitman describes is one of infernal chaos:

> Shadows of deepest, deepest black, just lit by moving candles and lamps,
> And by one great pitchy torch, stationary, with wild red flames, and clouds of smoke;
> <div align="right">(8-9)</div>

Whitman is clearly most interested in how this scene reaches the eye, but a moment of soundscaping slips in between his visual noticings: 'An occasional scream or cry, the doctor's shouted orders or calls' (18). The sound is as disordered and unperiodised as the sights. In the doctor's 'calls' we can find a distorted parallel to the drum calls which controlled army life, as described in 'Camps of Green.' Where those calls are regulated and predictable, the doctor's calls are but one element of the chaotic action of the hospital. The speaker manages to draw himself out of this chaotic mass by ministering to a particular wounded soldier, whom he can single out 'more distinctly' at his feet. His act of staunching the young man's blood is entirely voluntary, and thus in opposition to the disciplined march which brought him to the hospital. Discipline is soon reasserted, though, and with it comes a return of precise rhythm:

> Then hear outside the orders given, *Fall in, my men, Fall in*;
> But first I bend to the dying lad—his eyes open—a half-smile gives he me;
> <div align="right">(21-22)</div>

There is a work of counterpoint going on here between the soldier's duty to continue marching and his desire to tend to the wounded youngster. The speaker takes up the rising rhythm begun by the first line above (Then **hear** out**side** the **or**ders **giv**en), but applies it to his own mission of ministration: 'But **first** I **bend** to the **dy**ing **lad**'. The rhythm then disappears as the poem turns to pay close, intimate attention to the solider: 'his eyes open—a half-smile gives he me.' There is a negotiation between the speaker as member of a grand column marching towards a fight for freedom, and his individual project of care and mercy. Importantly, both projects are presented as worthy subjects of rhythmical lines. Whitman seems to believe that the column is only worth

having if it is made up of soldiers who would leave its strictures in a moment to look into the eyes of a dying boy far from home.

Whitman's invocation of the Union soldier seems to have been fixed since before the War even began, but was doomed to fail when it encountered the realities of the War. We can find in 'Manly Health and Training' a precursor for the vibrant, healthful figure who arrived in *Drum-Taps* as a 'strong man, erect, clothed in blue clothes, / advancing' ('1861', 4). This soldier might stride, with 'springy gait', but he does so as an independent figure, not as a piece in a military machine. As the War went on, Whitman became uncomfortable with the prospect of an artificial drum motivating the natural step of this American solider. We learn in *Manly Health and Training* that no motion should be continued unto exhaustion, yet the soldiers in *Drum-Taps* are frequently tired, hard-pressed, and pushed to their limits. In 'Spirit whose work is done', published in the *Sequel*, the drum has lost all its patriotic timbre: we are left with 'the sound of the drum, hollow and harsh to the last' (7). Once Whitman has seen what the drum drives to, it lands differently on his ear. The drum in 'Dirge for Two Veterans', another later War poem, sounds 'convulsive' (15). At this late stage, rhythmicality has itself become spasmodic: an unwelcome intrusion on the more enduring, democratic rhythms to which Whitman wishes the nation could return. He reaches again for the word 'convulsive' at the close of his War chapters in *Specimen Days*:

> 'Convulsiveness'
> As I have look'd over the proof-sheets of the preceding pages, I have once or twice fear'd that my diary would prove, at best, but a batch of convulsively written reminiscences. Well, be it so. They are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke and excitement of those times. The war itself, with the temper of society preceding it, can indeed be best described by that very word *convulsiveness*.[98]

While used here to speak about writing and politics, 'convulsiveness' is a word which looks originally to the body, but the body in a state inverse to the erect, healthful figure which strides through *Drum-Taps*. It takes the body from fit to fits, and it is to this inverse I will now turn. While Whitman listened closely to the rhythms controlling soldiers, and thought hard about their paradoxes, his own time among active soldiers in the camp was sporadic and curtailed, and he was never truly inured to army discipline. We must look to his work in the army hospitals, among the convulsive wounded, to find the rhythms which structured Whitman's own war.

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[98] *Specimen Days*, p.78.

IV. Dying

From its bureaucracy to its soundscape, the Civil War hospital was experienced as an arhythmic institution. This is apparent in Whitman's sulphuric rendition of the 'impromptu hospital' in 'A march in the ranks hard-prest', but the more established hospitals were not significantly more periodised. Even the large Washington hospitals were still basically impromptu, established in requisitioned buildings with layouts which did not lend themselves to the work of tending to the wounded. Early in the War, Whitman visited a hospital set up in the Washington Patent Office, which impressed itself on him as a 'curious scene'.[99] He describes an ensemble of elements which interact but do not cohere:

> The glass cases, the beds, the forms lying there, the gallery above, and the marble pavement under foot – the suffering, and the fortitude to bear it in various degrees – occasionally, from some, the groan that could not be repress'd – sometimes a poor fellow dying, with emaciated face and glassy eye [...][100]

The 'glass cases' of the patent office, which are 'crowded with models in miniature', find their way into Whitman's description of the wounded man's 'glassy eye', turning the human body into a sterile display case of machinery. The different forms collide: the groan that cannot be repressed rings out in a space somewhere between museum, theatre and mausoleum, all of which should remain hushed. To sum up this chaos, Whitman coins the phrase 'Hospital Perplexity'.[101] It is virtually impossible, he claims, for a family member arriving in Washington to track down the location of a wounded relative among these hospitals, because the directories 'are nothing like complete; they are never up to date, and, as things are, with the daily stream of coming and going and changing, cannot be'. He relates an anecdote of a farmer arriving from New York in search of a wounded brother, giving up after a week, and then arriving back home to find a letter from his brother detailing his location. Everything is out of kilter.

Whitman's spontaneous, self-motivated work in the hospitals has generally been read as a productive counter to military hegemony. He lamented that the hospitals failed to extricate themselves from such control:

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[99] *Specimen Days*, p.31.
[100] *Specimen Days*, p.31.
[101] *Specimen Days*, p.48.

Of all places in the world, the hospitals of American young men and soldiers, wounded in the volunteer service of their country, ought to be exempt from mere conventional military airs and etiquette of shoulder-straps. But they are not exempt.[102]

By choosing not to follow the drum, Whitman exempted himself from this etiquette, which he elsewhere described as 'ill-fitting', and was thus able pursue his independent mission of nourishing the wounded and soothing the dying.[103] Whitman often emphasises the importance of ministering to each soldier's unique wants. Each case, he writes, 'requires some peculiar adaptation to itself', and must be responded to 'after its kind or call'.[104] That adaptation ranged from buying them particular candy, to searching out a glass of milk, to sitting by them and scribing long letters to family. This was the kind of work which nurses were often too busy to do, and which religious groups like the Christian Commission did not include in their visits, preferring a catch-all program of delivering religious tracts and praying over the soldiers 'without having smiled […] or dropped a word of comfort or cheer'.[105] Where the nurses and preachers were restricted by institutional forms, Whitman could wander where he wished, attending personally to each patient as an individual.[106] In Robert Leigh Davis's study of Whitman's hospital work, this coalesces into an 'erotic mobility unconfined by prescriptive boundaries'.[107] Whitman's ability to form deep, personal attachments to particular soldiers queered the hospital space, dissolving some of its etiquettes. Lying above and beneath this figure of the mobile, itinerant healer, though, is a history of deep, sustained rhythmicality which is not a mere giving-in to the etiquette Whitman despised, but a layered, productive reaction. This rhythmicality extends from the temporal to the linguistic, and can eventually be read back into the poems of *Drum-Taps*.

Firstly, we must recognise that while Whitman's work inside the hospitals was characterised by flexibility and adaptation, his wider project of hospital-visiting was sustained, periodised, and quasi-institutional. From early in 1863 until mid-1866 Whitman structured his life around his

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[102] Lowenfels, p.92.
[103] Lowenfels, p.92.
[104] Lowenfels, p.104, p.123.
[105] From a soldier quoted in Roy Morris, Jr., *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.108.
[106] Many nurses, of course, spent as much time as possible performing individual ministrations for patients, as shown in Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* (Boston: James Redpath, 1863). But what the *Sketches* also show is that each nurse was part of a larger machine, which pulled them to certain duties in a rhythm which could not often be broken to give special attention to particular cases.
[107] Davis, p.15.

hospital visits.[108] The paid employment Whitman took as a copyist was essentially a way of funding this project: he figured his wages in terms of how they could be spent in providing for patients. He had an unerring tendency to describe his hospital work in the language of military service and campaigning. It was not just a voluntary, charitable endeavour, but a fixed posting: 'I have been on self-imposed duty some five hours, pretty closely confined'; 'I am back again in Washington, on my regular daily and nightly rounds'; 'I work somewhere among them every day or in the evening'; '[y]esterday I spent nearly all day at Armory-Square Hospital. This forenoon I take an intermission and go again at dusk'.[109] In an 1863 letter to Lewis Brown, a soldier whom Whitman had met as a patient in Armory Square Hospital, Whitman refers to 'giving myself a furlough of three or four weeks and going home to Brooklyn'.[110] He is evidently attempting to make himself a comrade to Brown, to figure his hospital work as somehow equivalent to Brown's role as an infantryman. It is odd that despite his distaste for military etiquette, he ended up adopting a form of that etiquette by assigning himself a posting from which he could not go absent without leave, even if he could grant that leave himself. In a letter to his mother, we find Whitman addressing this bind:

> I have not missed a day at Hospital I think for more than three weeks – I get more & more wound round – poor young men – there are some cases that would literally sink & give up, if I did not pass a portion of the time with them.
>
> (22 June 1863)[111]

While Whitman's ministrations were fluid and adaptive, he came to believe the soldiers relied on them, would 'sink & give up' if the visits stopped, and so had to form a rhythmical project of visiting. He is 'wound round' his own charity. In this letter about hospitals it is almost impossible not also to hear 'wound' as in 'wounded'. And this is exactly what Whitman did: he went on wound rounds, effective exactly because they were round – recurring and predictable.

Whitman's activities on these rounds employed rhythm as cure. He had had a theory of health and healing ready since before the War began, as revealed in 'Manly Health and Training', and he adapted it swiftly to the army hospitals. The patients, prostrate, convulsive and often gravely

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[108] Whitman's letters from 1866 show the work gradually petering out around him. 7 May: 'My hospitals are dwindled to a small force – but there are plenty of cases to occupy me a couple of visits a week'. 14 May: 'I spent yesterday afternoon at the Quarter Master's hospital – it is the old dregs & leavings of the war'. 27 September: 'Washington is rather dull – no more soldiers around like there used to be – no more patrols marching around the streets – no more great racks of hospitals'. *Correspondence*, I, passim.

[109] Lowenfels, p.75, p.122, p.64

[110] *Correspondence,* I, p.120.

[111] *Correspondence*, I, p.110.

injured, could not engage in the daily exercise and habits Velsor recommends, so Whitman brought those habits in his own body, hoping to transfer them via a kind of magnetism.[112] This was a chance to test his theory, espoused five years before he entered the hospitals, that there is 'a wonderful medicinal effect in the mere personal presence of a man who was perfectly well'.[113] He thus prepared for his visits by ensuring he had 'previous rest, the bath, clean clothes, a good meal, and as cheerful appearance as possible'.[114] So equipped, he would set forth into the hospitals:

> I believe my profoundest help to these sick & dying men is probably the soothing invigoration I steadily bear in mind, to infuse in them through affect, cheering love, & the like, between them & me. It has saved more than one life.
> (14 May 1863)[115]

Across all his individual attentions, Whitman relied on the steadiness of his healthful form to do some of the work of healing. It is a theory deeply intertwined with rhythm. Whitman set a tempo which he hoped the wounded soldiers would begin to fall into or catch up with.

This tempo burst into sound through Whitman's emphasis on the voice as part of his healing process. Civil War hospitals had a distinct soundscape, as displayed in a recollection by *New York Herald* reporter George Townsend:

> There were some who had been shot in the bowels, and now and then they were frightfully convulsed, breaking into shrieks and shouts. Some of them iterated a single word, as, 'doctor,' or 'help,' or 'God,' or 'oh!' commencing with a loud spasmodic cry, and continuing the same word till it died away in cadence. The act of calling seemed to lull the pain.[116]

What begins as arhythmical and 'spasmodic' turns into rhythm as a way of soothing. Whitman took this potential for rhythmical sound to lull, and delivered it like a tonic. He would talk to the soldiers constantly, whether or not they were well enough to talk back. He also read to them from whatever they requested, even from the Bible, though he later admitted 'I see my friends smiling at this confession'.[117] In particular, though, the soldiers were fond of 'declamatory poetical pieces': so fond that 'the whole ward that can walk gathers around me and listens' to

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[112] Lawrence Kramer, note to p.51, *Drum-Taps: The Complete 1865 Edition*, p.141.
[113] Whitman, 'Manly Health and Training', p.185.
[114] *Specimen Days*, p.38.
[115] *Correspondence*, I, p.102.
[116] George Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant* (New York: Blelock and Company, 1866), p.109.
[117] Lowenfels, p.123.

such performances.[118] Here, then, we have 'Manly Health and Training' fulfilled. In speaking out hearty, rhythmical poems in the wards, Whitman worked to counter the spasm and convulsion, and instantiated his belief that declamation fortifies 'the bodily system'.[119] It is notable that he did not make his own poems part of this cure. While he was describing his project of reading to soldiers, Traubel asked him if he ever brought out his own books. The reply: 'No, I don't think so: I can't recall a single case in which I gave away *Leaves of Grass*'.[120] The poems he turned to were 'declamatory': the sort of thing to be found in the elocution manuals which eschewed Whitman in favour of established figures writing in established forms. In Whitman's hospital work we can find a belief that traditional metrics did have their purpose: they motivated, stirred, and got going.

Just as Whitman's poems did not play a part in his hospital work, so the hospital plays only a small part in his poems. Army hospitals appear now and again in *Drum-Taps*, but they are certainly not the focus as they are across Whitman's prose notes and especially his letters home, in which he has to apologise to his mother for talking about them at the expense of other news. Whitman claimed the wounded soldier in his perseverance was the ultimate manifestation of American manhood, but *Drum-Taps* prefers to give us soldiers either in the midst of motion or the still of death. The in-between form of the wounded soldier seems to pose a unique problem, and emerges in only a handful of poems: we find it in one line of 'Not youth pertains to me', in the central vision of 'A march in the ranks hard-prest', and across the entirety of 'The Dresser', Whitman's only long poem set in the hospital.[121] The framing device of this poem is often neglected, spoken over by the vivid, unflinching depiction of wounding and rotting which makes up its body.[122] It is a poem which, like many in *Drum-Taps*, makes sure to declare what kind of poem it isn't. Whitman inhabits a speaker addressing an enquiring crowd of children in some far-off future, where the War is a story told by old men. The crowd asks him to speak of 'armies so rapid so wondrous', and of 'hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous'. They ask, essentially, for a ballad.

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[118] Whitman, *Specimen Days*, p.52; *Correspondence*, I, p.163.
[119] Whitman, 'Manly Health and Training', p.241.
[120] Traubel, IV, p.63.
[121] *Drum-Taps*, p.36.
[122] For example, we could consider the inscription over the entrance to Dupont Circle metro station in Washington, D.C., which begins: 'Thus in silence, in dreams' projections, / Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals […]' This is attributed simply to 'Walt Whitman'; there is no way of knowing the lines are spoken by the character of the veteran.

The speaker begins to assemble the necessary materials for such a tale, but they slip through his fingers:

> Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and dust,
> In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the rush of successful
>   charge,
> Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a swift running river they fade,
> Pass and are gone they fade—
>
>   (12-15)

The scene disappears, and we enter on another:

> But in silence, in dreams' projections,
> While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,
> So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off the sand,
> With hinged knees returning I enter the doors, (while for you up there,
> Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart.)
>
> Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
> Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
>
>   (17-23)

There are two stories being told in this transition from battlefield to hospital, war to ward. First there is the story of the movement of a soldier's memories; the tales of 'furious passions' and 'chances / Of unsurpassed heroes', which the crowd want to hear, are not the path of least resistance for the teller, whose thoughts flow inevitably to the terrible sights of the hospital. Overlaid on this story, though, is that of Whitman's own war. The fading out of the scene of battle seems to be an admission that such battles were something Whitman never actually experienced. As an old man, Whitman would be unable to tell tales of heroic charges and the wild chaos of combat, because he spent his war on a different mission. Instead he would tell tales of the hospitals: in letters and articles, in *Specimen Days*, and then to Traubel in Camden.

As the speaker enters the ward, the site of Whitman's real, visceral experience, a neat dactylic rhythm also makes an entrance:

>   ∕ x x ∕ x x ∕ x x   ∕   [x x]
> Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
>   ∕   x ∕ x x   ∕ x x∕   [x x]
> Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
>
>   (22-23)

This is a rare instance of rhythm being marked visually: the lines are shorter than those that have come before, and are aligned with each other on the right, where previous lines have roamed. It seems to be a brief submission to meter. Why here, though? I read these lines as Whitman attempting to motivate his poem into action. In the first stanza the speaker describes how his 'fingers fail'd', presumably leaving him unable to pull a trigger, and explaining why he was reassigned as a hospital orderly. We soon find more fingers in the form of the neat dactyls shown above, which seem to be trying hard to achieve something: to help the poem steel itself as it advances into the hard work of presenting to the reader the fetid wards of convulsive patients. We have been asked to 'follow without noise', and Whitman gets straight to the work of poem-making, as signalled by the quick lapse into meter. The unusually precise dactylic rhythm gives way almost immediately to Whitman's usual style, but the poem continues to be textured with rhythmical phraseology. Twice Whitman gives us the peculiar image of 'hinged knees'. It is an emphasis on anatomy with the potential for steady, back-and-forth motion, where the rest of the anatomy in the poem has had this potential erased: 'crush'd head', 'amputated hand', 'perforated shoulder', 'fractur'd thigh'. The soldiers, who throughout *Drum-Taps* are shown in motion, are here laid low and broken down. The dresser must thus take on the responsibility of movement: 'I onward go, I stop', 'On, on I go', 'I am faithful, I do not give out'. The poem is a transcription of Whitman's rhythm-by-example approach to his hospital work, where the pendulum is set going by a brief moment of meter.

V. Mourning

While the wounded soldier in his in-between-ness poses a problem for Whitman, the body stilled in death seems endlessly productive. *Drum-Taps* without its sequel is a book which prefers the upright body as subject. With the sequel, it is a book dominated by elegy. To end this chapter, I will address Whitman's turn to metricality as a way of responding to the profound disruption of Abraham Lincoln's death. It was only after this martyring that Whitman embraced the prospect of fitting his rhythm to a norm, and thus began in turn to be fit into American literary history.

Throughout the years of the War, Whitman boasted of sharing a city with President Lincoln. In *Specimen Days*, he describes their parallel existence in Washington, the writer shadowing the leader:

> I see the President almost every day, as I happen to live where he passes to or from his lodgings out of town […] I see very plainly Abraham Lincoln's dark brown face, with

the deep-cut lines, the eyes, always to me with a deep latent sadness in the expression. We have got so that we exchange bows, and very cordial ones.[123]

The link between the two was of course slender, based entirely on spatial coincidence. Over the days spanning Lincoln's assassination, his death, and the great national shift from celebration to mourning, Whitman was in New York, far the from the epicentre of the action. He had taken leave from his work to visit his family and see *Drum-Taps* into print. His hopes for the book were high, and as usual he was on hand to oversee its creation. But just as the printing began, news of the tragedy at Ford's Theatre arrived in New York. With the first proofs in hand, it was immediately clear to Whitman that Lincoln's death had disproved his book. History had lurched forward, leaving *Drum-Taps* behind, making of it a relic of a war whose outline had been forever altered. Whitman made a bid to keep *Drum-Taps* viable, dashing off a short poem, 'Hush'd be the camps to-day', and having the printer insert it near the end of the sheets.[124] The poem is by no means a failure: it rounds off the project of empathy to the common soldier, the 'dweller in the camp', which is the great achievement of *Drum-Taps*. But as an attempt to dress the wound which Lincoln's assassination had made in his book, it was paltry, and Whitman soon realised that *Drum-Taps* in its current form was dead. He had only one hundred copies printed, and sent none to reviewers. In October, Whitman brought out a new edition of *Drum-Taps*, to which was appended a sequel of 18 more poems. One thousand copies were printed, notices placed in papers, and reviews solicited. Whitman did his best to ensure that this was the Civil War book which would stick to his name.

The six months between Lincoln's assassination and the publication of *Sequel to Drum-Taps* were also the space Whitman needed to write some of his finest and most-remembered poetry. These qualities are not, however, to be found in the same piece. At the start of the sequel, separated only by the six lines of 'Race of Veterans', are Whitman's two elegies: 'When Lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd' and 'O Captain! my Captain!'. As responses to the same event, they are startlingly different. 'Lilacs' runs for 206 lines and is a culmination of Whitman's experiments with form. Flurries of rhythm come and go, playing off against patterns of syntax and symbol in ways which constantly reinvent themselves across the 21 numbered parts. 'O Captain! my Captain!', meanwhile, is the most conventionally-formed of Whitman's mature poems: three octets with a ballad rhythm and simple rhyme scheme. These two poems can be employed to

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[123] *Specimen Days*, p.43.

[124] Daniel Mark Epstein, *Lincoln and Whitman: Parallel Lives in Civil War Washington* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), p.277.

sum up Whitman's nebulous acoustics. Asked to explain what a Whitman poem sounds like, we might say: it sounds like 'Lilacs', and not like 'O Captain! my Captain!'. This is rooted in a tendency to portray Whitman as radical, which has been operative in American literary history since Whitman's earliest self-written reviews of *Leaves of Grass*, and was institutionally confirmed in Matthiesen's *American Renaissance*.[125] If we wish to argue that Whitman broke the rules, we must define him by his rule-breaking poems. This means that there are some Whitman poems, like 'O Captain! my Captain!' and parts of his juvenilia, that end up being discarded as un-Whitmanian. His name on the cover is not enough to claim the work.

To focus this paradoxical idea, we could look at the bizarre incident of misattribution which Ed Folsom recounts in his article on the gradual addition of Whitman's work to textbooks, handbooks and anthologies.[126] In an 1885 literary handbook, Frank McAlpine printed a biography of Whitman, a critique of his style (both of which Folsom describes as 'wildly discordant'), and a supposedly representative poem: 'The Two Mysteries'. The piece begins:

> We know not what it is, dear, this sleep so deep and still,
> The folded hands, the awful calm, the cheek so pale and chill;
> The lids that will not lift again, though we may call and call;
> The strange, white solitude of peace that settles over all.
>
> (1-4)

This is not a Whitman poem; its author is Mary Mapes Dodge, writer of *Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates*. The misattribution stems from the headnote to the poem, which describes a death-vigil scene where 'in a great chair, sat Walt Whitman, surrounded by little ones, and holding a beautiful little girl on his lap'. Folsom explains that Dodge had read of this scene – the death of Whitman's nephew – in the *Philadelphia Ledger*, and been moved to expand on it in verse. The lines are thus in Whitman's voice, but certainly not written by Whitman. More than just a curious mishap, McAlpine's mistake offers a useful way of thinking about attribution and attributes. Folsom picks up on McAlpine's quotation of an injunction to 'read aloud' from Whitman's work, noting that 'readers who tried reading aloud the Whitman poem included in McAlpine's volumes would have had trouble ever hearing Whitman's poetic nature'.[127] However worthy a poem Dodge's 'The Two Mysteries' might be, it does not sound like Whitman.

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[125] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).

[126] Ed Folsom, "'Affording the Rising Generation an Adequate Notion": Walt Whitman in Nineteenth-Century Textbooks, Handbooks, and Anthologies', *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1991, 345-374.

[127] Folsom, p.356.

This charge, though, could be levelled just as easily against 'O Captain! my Captain!'. It would be an odd choice of poem to use as a sole example of Whitman's work, because it does not do the things we think of Whitman as doing. Indeed, Whitman later tried to dis-identify himself from the poem. Traubel recounts Whitman reading a comment in a newspaper suggesting he should have written 'a volume of My Captains instead of filling a scrapbasket with waste'. He reacted strongly:

> I'm honest when I say, damn My Captain and all the My Captains in my book! This is not the first time I have been irritated into saying I'm almost sorry I ever wrote the poem. It has reasons for being – it is a ballad – it sings, sings, in a certain strain with a certain motive – but as for being the best, the very best – God help me![128]

Whitman is goaded into rejecting the poem, not as meaningless in itself, but meaningless as a part of his own body of work. The poem 'has reasons for being': it maintains a validity, but is not a valid part of Whitman's corpus. We could add emphasis: 'I'm almost sorry *I* ever wrote the poem'. But if 'O Captain! my Captain!' is so unusually formulaic as to be rejected by its own author, why did he write it? Why does it sound like it sounds? What are its 'reasons for being'? These questions are generally glossed over in discussions of Whitman's Lincoln elegies, as they would take up space which could be given over to more readings of 'Lilacs'. In this section, I will take 'O Captain! my Captain!' at its word(s), and treat it as a meaningful contribution to the sonic environment of Lincoln's death and mourning. At the moment of terrible consummation to the years which Whitman later claimed as the fulcrum to his poetic thought, he wrote a short elegy in regular meter. Why?

By April of 1865 the American public had become elegy experts. The widespread antebellum culture of memorial verses for departed family members had paved the way for a steady output of elegies written for soldiers and officers killed in battle.[129] The death of Lincoln allowed this family mourning, which while outwardly performed was essentially still a personal project, to become public.[130] To mourn Lincoln was to mourn again every soldier lost on some bitter field.

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[128] Traubel, II, p.304.

[129] Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.17. See also Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[130] What had to remain private was the act of not-mourning: the ambivalent or downright jubilant response of Confederates and Confederate sympathisers for whom Lincoln's death was but small consolation for his actions. These not-mourners remained quiet, or risked violent reprisal. See Richard Wightman Fox, *Lincoln's Body: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), p.50 and Martha Hodes, *Mourning Lincoln* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p.74.

The outpouring of elegies was, consequently, vast. By 1 July 1865, only two and a half months after the assassination, Philadelphia publishing firm J. B. Lippincott & Co. were able to release a volume of 198 elegies for the President.[131] These 'spontaneous tributes of esteem' came from authors both established and anonymous, suggesting that to elegise Lincoln was a fundamental impulse, not just an obligation for the professional writer. The responses are unified. After the first few poems, few subsequent tributes add any significantly new idea. Instead, a series of images and sentiments circle around each other in different orders, making of the book a long, dispersed, sestina of grief.

Oddly, the poems do not seem to acknowledge their own unity of purpose. They resort with remarkable frequency to the vocative, commanding mood, usually in their opening lines: 'Shroud the Banner! rear the Cross! / Consecrate a Nation's loss'; 'O! Weep for freedom's martyr! Weep! ye nations!'; 'Toll, oh death-bells, sad and slow; / Muffled drums, your dirges play'.[132] Mourning rituals were precisely defined in this period: no one needed instructions on how to grieve, but the poets in this volume give them nonetheless, as if worried that without them Lincoln would go un-grieved. It is a direct example of 'coercive mourning'. In *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War*, Gregory Eiselein sketches the state of consolatory writing on Lincoln and remarks that: 'I call this kind of consolation "coercive" because it implicitly demands loyalty, patriotism, and obedience to national ideals as the pre-condition for any offer of comfort, sympathy, or understanding'.[133] This is borne out in the elegies quoted above, which immediately demand subscription to certain ideals before beginning the work of consolation.

Is 'O Captain! my Captain!' an example of coercive mourning? Eiselein, who sets out to find examples of 'eccentric consolation' which do not demand submission from the consoled, would probably suggest not. He praises 'Lilacs' as radical, and argues that the *Sequel to Drum-Taps* forms a 'flexible, open-ended mourning process that depends not upon expensive mourning attire or obedience to social standards, but upon personal memories and poetry'.[134] Here he slips in implying that 'poetry' is never obedient to social standards. The writing of elegies, as shown in *Poetical Tributes to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln*, was an almost programmatic exercise, with a limited array of forms and themes to choose from: a 'communal rhetorical strategy', as Matthew

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[131] J. B. Lippincott, ed., *Poetical Tributes to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865).
[132] Lippincott, p.24, p.59, p.83.
[133] Gregory Eiselein, *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p.122.
[134] Eiselein, p.125.

Brown describes it.[135] We might say, then, that 'O Captain! my Captain!' is not only coercive but coerced: in writing a poem with a regular rhythm and an established conceit (Lincoln as captain of the nation-ship) Whitman submitted to the standards which controlled the creation of mourning verse.

Does this, though, necessarily invite the pejorative response which Eiselein promotes? The second poem in *Poetical Tributes*, by hymn-writer Richard Storrs Willis, describes a coerced soundscape of mourning:

> Regretful bells are tolling,
> With mournful knell profound;
> Unwilling guns are booming,
> With dull and solemn sound!
>
>   (1-4)[136]

The sounds of mourning are neither pleasant nor desired. They arrive as a matter of form and social standard, and certainly not out of creative impulse. This is no reason, though, to reject them. Willis's poem goes on to intone over and again in its refrain a phrase already familiar:

> Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
> For all the worn and weary,
> There's no place like home!
>
>   (9-11)

Willis quotes from the 1823 song 'Home! Sweet Home!' by John Payne and Henry Bishop. The piece became so beloved among soldiers during the Civil War that it was banned by the Union army, for fear of it inspiring homesickness and desertion.[137] Gesturing to it in an elegy for Lincoln at the end of the War is practically an automatic response, as programmatic as the bells and guns, but there is no need to dismiss it as controlling. Coercive structures might be accepted and willingly engaged with even though they do not promise escape, release or novelty, because they come with the promise that other grievers are submitting to these structures as well. Mourners, it almost goes without saying, do not want to write elegies: they would rather there

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[135] Matthew Brown, '"BOSTON/SOB NOT": Elegiac Performance in Early New England and Materialist Studies of the Book', *American Quarterly*, 50(2) (1988), 306-339, p.322.

[136] Lippincott, p.14.

[137] John Hanc, 'The Sentimental Ballad of the Civil War', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 30 November 2011 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-sentimental-ballad-of-the-civil-war-1205785/> [accessed 9 April 2021].

was no reason to mourn. But having rhetorical strategies available, from the firing of guns to the quoting of songs, at least provides a shared point of contact.

This might be one of the reasons 'O Captain! my Captain!' has for being. Between the manuscript drafts, its first appearance in *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, and its final form in *Leaves of Grass*, we can see Whitman working out the extent of the poem's submission to metrical predictability. The manuscript is made up of three stanzas written in pen, with copious pencil alterations. The penned poem does not rhyme:

> The mortal voyage over, the rocks and tempests pass'd
> The ship I love comes home again — the heavenly sun is beaming;
> The port is close, the bells we hear, the people all exulting,
> While steady sails and enters straight the wondrous veteran vessel;
>
> (1-4)[138]

The pencil alterations, which are what Traubel records in his transcription of the manuscript, introduce a rhyme scheme to the first two lines and smooth out the rhythm into neat fourteeners:

> The mortal voyage over, the gales and tempests done,
> The ship that bears me nears her home, the prize I sought is won,
>
> (1-2)

[138] Traubel, II, p.332. For the manuscript see < https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1863000691/> [accessed 18 April 2021].

Further pencil alterations continue to regularise the poem. In line five of the first stanza, 'you leave not the little spot' is amended to 'leave you not the little spot'. By doubling the rising rhythm between 'you not' and '-tle spot', the internal rhyme is emphasised. The poem in its
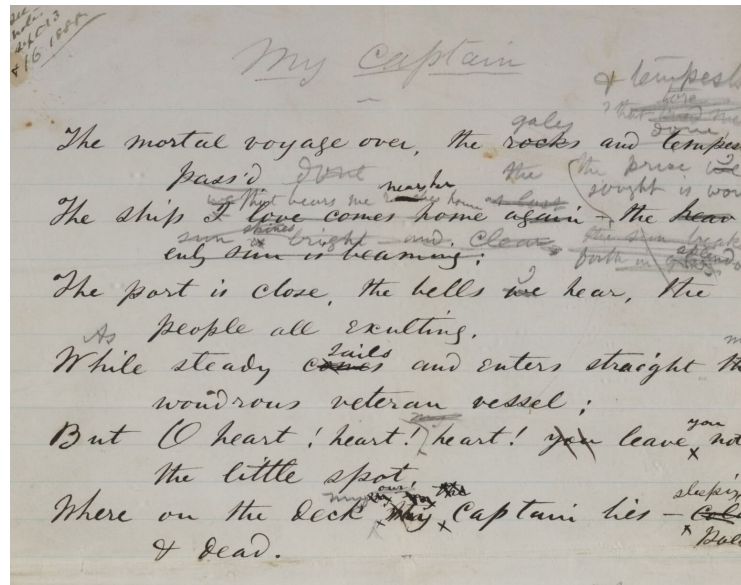
Figure 6: Manuscript of 'O Captain! my Captain', 1865.

published form makes even more concessions to regularity, with slant rhymes introduced into the third and fourth lines of each stanza. The alterations in the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass* add rhyme to all three refrains as well, where before only the 'tread/dead' rhyme of the third stanza was in place. What began as an unrhymed and irregularly rhythmical draft ends up as a metered poem with an aabbcded rhyme scheme. Whitman gradually coerced the poem into shape, making of it a memorable, portable piece which could thus become one of the mourning-objects so vital to nineteenth-century American death-practice.[139] It is, as Cavitch points out, 'one of the most frequently memorised poems in U.S. schools' and is certainly the most memorised Whitman poem.[140] All elegies are injunctions, or perhaps desperate pleas, to remember, and regular meter and rhyme are in this case a mnemonic strategy. With 'O Captain! my Captain!' Whitman provides a contribution to mourning which can not only be read but reached for, and carried out into the world.

The tussle with rhythm we find in the drafting process is not, however, totally disguised in the published poem. In the draft, both the pen and pencil versions of the first line announce their rhythm clearly:

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[139] Adam C. Bradford, *Communities of Death: Whitman, Poe and the American Culture of Mourning* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014), p.12.
[140] Cavitch, p.19.

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    x   � x  � x  � x [�] x   �    x   � x   �
The mortal voyage over,     the rocks and tempests pass'd          [Pen]

    x   �  x  � x  � x [�] x   �    x   � x   �
The mortal voyage over,    the gales and tempests done,          [Pencil]
```

A simple rising rhythm in seven beats, made only slightly more complex by the caesura, is immediately established. The opening line of the published version, meanwhile, sets rhythm in a violent clash with meter:

> O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,

It is almost impossible to find four rising duple beats in the first half of the line. Instead, it introduces a falling triple rhythm (more usual for Whitman) which then crashes to a halt against the rising rhythm. A full line in the triple rhythm might be 'O Captain! my Captain! we come to the shore'. Expecting something like this, the line as it happens is choppy. I mark the place where the triple rhythm turns to double with an asterisk:

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[x]  /   x    x   /  x    x * /   x  /  x   /
O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
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There is no way for us to know that the phrase 'O Captain! my Captain!' should be pronounced with the feel of four beats, in order to match its sibling-phrase 'The port is near, the bells I hear'. This rhythmical tussle is not a vestige of an unmetrical poem which Whitman sculpted into meter: it is a deliberate disruption which acts as a reminder that elegy's structures are always inaugurated by events which irrevocably alter the structures to which we have become accustomed. 'O Captain! my Captain!' shows Whitman submitting to the demands of mourning verse, while revealing how reluctant this submission can, must, be. Regretfully mournful, unwillingly dull: the poem presents elegy as paradox.

I further suggest that this poem should be read as being *about* rhythm: the rhythm of the dying body. In her study of Whitman and death-sciences, Lindsay Tuggle asks scholars to consider what place the physical body, as medical specimen, holds in Whitman's poems of mourning.[141] 'O Captain! my Captain' presents a version of Lincoln's body which at first seems needlessly

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[141] Lindsay Tuggle, *The Afterlives of Specimens: Science, Mourning, and Whitman's Civil War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017), p.14.

abstracted and far from the physical. We do not get an account of the moments leading up to his death, or indeed any kind of chronology, only the dream-like portrait of a figure already dead. He 'lies' on the deck, with 'no pulse or will' (18). It is not clear whether he *ever* had a pulse: its cessation precedes the poem and we are confronted with a dead, but somehow continuing, body.

I propose that this is a distorted account of Lincoln on his deathbed, which stood in a room of the Peterson Boarding House across the road from Ford's Theatre. If Lincoln had been killed instantly by Booth's bullet, the status of his body would have changed like a switch: living president to dead martyr in an un-observably minute moment. But he lived almost nine hours from the pulling of the trigger, and in this space of time his existence became a matter of rhythm. As soon as it became clear to the attending doctors that Lincoln's head wound was fatal, all they could do was monitor his breathing and pulse and wait for them to stop. The Civil War years had seen a boom in interventionist medicine, as typified by the amputation: a decisive single action performed in the hope of saving a life. No such action was possible in the small bedroom where Lincoln lay. Instead there was a measuring and gauging of bodily rhythm. Richard Fox draws attention to the multitude of deathbed prints published in the wake of the assassination, and shows that mourners could choose between images centred on either familial or public grief. Both the prints he includes, though, show a figure holding Lincoln's arm, presumably monitoring his pulse.[142] This figure is present in practically every graphic representation of Lincoln's death:

DEATH BED OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.
DIED APRIL 15TH 1865.

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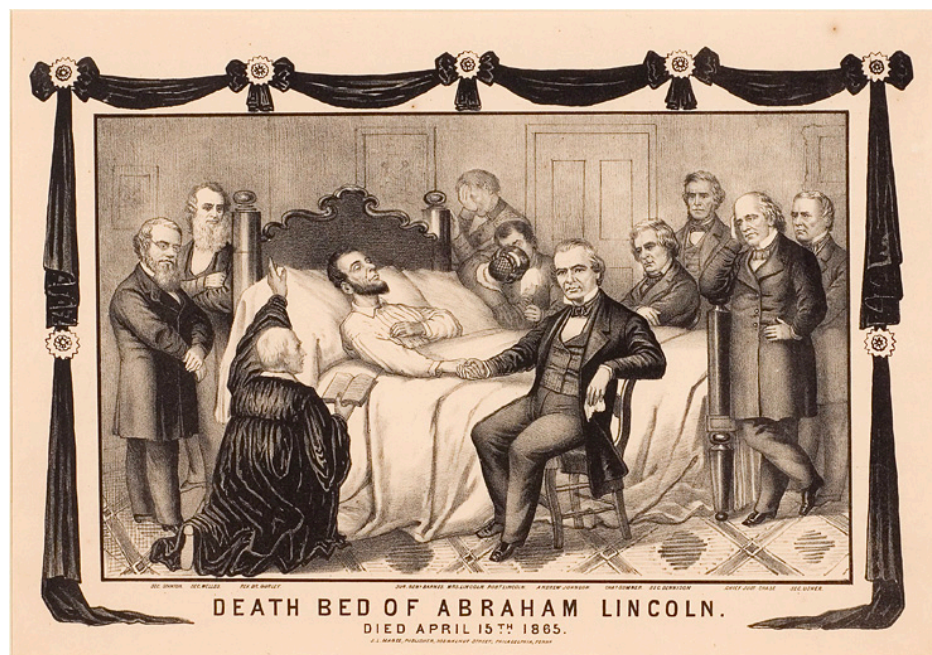
[142] Fox, p.40.

It is a visual marker of the moment of Lincoln's passing, but also one that gestures towards the period of waiting and measuring which preceded it. Two days later, readers of the *New York Times* would learn that Lincoln died in steadiness:

> There was no apparent suffering, no convulsive action, no rattling of the throat, none of the ordinary premonitory symptoms of death. Death in this case was a mere cessation of breathing.[143]

At the close of the convulsive years of war came a few hours of the night, where a small group listened to Lincoln's breath, 'rising and falling in steady rhythm', until it stopped.[144]

Elements of this deathbed scene find their way into Whitman's elegy. There is a crowd waiting on the shore, as there was outside the Peterson House. Within the house/ship, the speaker reaches out to Lincoln's hand: 'My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will'. The
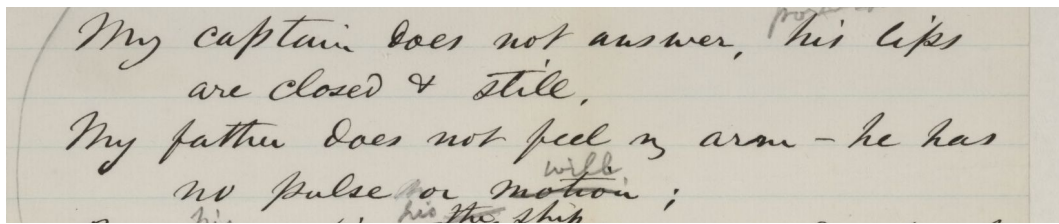
Figure 8: Manuscript of 'O Captain! my Cpatin!', 1865.

speaker takes the place of the seated attendant in the lithographs, searching for a rhythm which would persuade them of any remaining vitality. Before Whitman went searching for rhymes, 'will' was 'motion': another surfacing of 'Manly Health and Training'. Once the body of his captain has been stilled, the speaker begins to pace back and forth on the deck, in a vain attempt to perpetuate the motion which was, as Whitman had long espoused, the ultimate proof of health:

> Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
>   But I, with silent tread,
>   Walk the spot my Captain lies,
>   Fallen cold and dead.
>
>   (21-24)

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[143] *New York Times*, 17 April 1865, p.1
[144] Fox, p.44.

The 'tread' went through several variations. In the draft it is 'gentle', in *Drum-Taps*, 'silent', and from the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* onward, 'mournful'. To 'tread' seems a compulsion, and all three adjectives suggest an attempt to minimise the disruption such movement would cause to the traditionally still deathbed vigil. Rhythm does not need to break into sound to be present. The rhyme of 'tread' with 'dead', meanwhile, is clear and un-obfuscating: one man is in motion while the other lies still.[145] The poem thus ends with Whitman thinking about a rhythm which occurs time and again in *Drum-Taps* – the march. Lincoln is given back to the soldiers, in a return to Whitman's first instinct in 'Hush'd be the camps today'. The commander-in-chief might have fallen, but the loyal troops he left behind are still marching on.

It is impossible to argue that 'O Captain! my Captain!' sounds like a Whitman poem in any meaningful way. This should not, though, be an excuse to ignore its rhythmical properties and their interaction with the environment of mourning which engulfed America in the spring of 1865. It is clear that Whitman listened to this mourning, and heard in it a hope that rhythm might do some small work of healing.

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[145] This matches another instance of Whitman in mourning. Sherry Ceniza quotes an account of Whitman sat by the coffin at his mother's funeral: 'bent over his cane, both hands clasped upon it, and from time to time he would lift it and bring it down with a heavy thud on the floor'. Ceniza puts this in conversation with the various drums struck throughout *Drum-Taps*, arguing for rhythm and regular motion as a language of mourning. Sherry Ceniza, *Whitman and 19th-Century Women Reformers* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), p.43.

<u>Making Sense of Civil War Rhyme: Herman Melville and Laura Redden</u>

I. Rhyme's Great Task

In 1869, a ceremony was held at the Gettysburg National Cemetery to dedicate the newly-completed Soldiers' Monument. After a prayer, an address, and an oration, the poet Bayard Taylor stepped forward to read his 'Gettysburg Ode': an extended, impassioned attempt to make meaning out of the violence responsible for the graves crowding in the 'immense concourse of people' who had come to witness the new pillar's hallowing.[1] While the monument was named specifically to commemorate the soldiers of the War as a plurality, Taylor begins his poem with a turn to a singular figure, already columnar:

> After the eyes that looked, the lips that spake
> Here, from the shadows of impending death,
> > Those words of solemn breath,
> > What voice may fitly break
> The silence, doubly hallowed, left by him?
> > > (1-5)[2]

A good question. Every bit of speaking that took place on that sultry July day was fated to be a speaking-over – both a drowning-out and futile reiteration – of Lincoln's speech made six years earlier on the same ground.[3] The *New York Times* covered the ceremony over a full page, and ended its report by printing, in full, the Gettysburg Address, or 'President Lincoln's Gettysburg Oration, Nov. 19, 1863'. The text goes without introduction or comment: it can, as history has confirmed, speak for itself. Lincoln's speech was also present at the dedication. The last sentence of the Gettysburg Address – from 'It is rather for us to be here dedicated' – had been carved onto the monument. 'Those words of solemn breath' which Taylor's poem is so nervous about following were very much breathing over his shoulder. The fear seems to be that to 'break / The silence' left by Lincoln's death would be somehow to undo or take apart the words of the Gettysburg Address. The convoluted syntax of Taylor's lines allows this worry to surface: 'what voice may fitly break those words?'

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[1] 'Gettysburg', *The New York Times*, 2 July 1869, p.1.

[2] Richard Marius, ed., *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.322.

[3] Taylor's 'Here' is the first instance of the misconception that the Soldiers' National Monument was erected on the site of the Gettysburg Address. The Address was actually delivered a few hundred meters to the south.

Taylor's solution to this problem is similar to that of the *Times*. If Lincoln's words cannot be outdone, then why not just say them again?

> We can but bow the head, with eyes grown dim,
>   And as a Nation's litany, repeat
> The phrase his martyrdom hath made complete,
> Noble as then, but now more sadly-sweet:
> "Let us, the Living, rather dedicate
>   Ourselves to the unfinished work, which they
>   Thus far advanced so nobly on its way,
>   And save the periled State!
> Let us, upon this field where they, the brave,
> Their last full measure of devotion gave,
> Highly resolve they have not died in vain!
> <div align="right">(6-16)</div>

In a poem which begins with talk of hallowing, it is hard to view what Taylor does here as anything short of a literary sullying. His rhyme of 'repeat/complete' is singularly self-unaware. While the *Times* printed the speech verbatim, Taylor hacks it open in order to stitch in some rhymes, leaving little hope that anything would be left of the original. He does not repeat it complete. Taylor's potentially deliberate pun on 'break' at a line break turns round on its author: chopped up into metered lines, the power of Lincoln's evolving sentences is broken. There is no need to be overly analytical of just why this adaptation might set us on edge; one example will suffice. Lincoln's facility with deictics is well on display in the Gettysburg Address: 'that nation', 'that war', 'that field', 'those who here gave their lives'.[4] We listen as even the head of state, the centre of war's web, demurs to the unknowability of battlefield death as something outside of us, which we can only look in on like we look at a grave and know that some unsurpassable gulf has opened between us and its occupant. Compare this to Taylor's 'Let us, upon this field where they, the brave, / Their last full measure of devotion gave'. The clarification, 'the brave', is the doubling-down of a speaker afraid they will be misunderstood, and it interrupts a sentence which in Lincoln's speech is wilfully ongoing.

Perhaps the most bizarre element of Taylor's decision to chop the Gettysburg Address into rhyme, though, is that the Address rhymed already. Richard Marius, who includes Taylor's piece in *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry*, suggests as much with some scorn: 'Taylor sets Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" to rhyme, an act approximate to setting Beethoven's Ninth to music'.[5]

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[4] Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2011), p.161.
[5] Marius, p.402.

The Gettysburg Address is an intricately-formed text, which, while not a poem, certainly operates via something which might be called a poetics. Stephen Booth goes as far as to take it as an example of what literature, at its best, can do with language: 'the speech is so meticulously repetitious', he writes, 'that within its own brief course it becomes its own authoritative base'.[6] While Booth does not include rhyme in his own meticulous reading, it is certainly one of the kinds of repetition in play. It is little noted but surely universally felt that the Address starts with a rhyme: 'Four score'. Critics have shown that 'Four score and seven years ago' takes its impetus from Psalm 90's 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten', suggesting that Lincoln chose this archaism in order to encode the Civil War as the death and new life of the United States.[7] But just as good a reason is that it allows him to open with a double-stressed rhyme, of the same inaugural, leaning-in quality as '*Jack Sprat* sat on his mat' or its twentieth-century successor '*Each peach* pear plum' (my emphases). The other rhymes in the Address are less forthright, but a few make themselves known by coming at the end of parallel or successive phrases: 'war/endure' and 'live/this' are two good examples. We could also lift out 'dedicate/consecrate' and ask why Taylor chose to swerve away from this rhyme in favour of 'dedicate/State'.

Even though Taylor's poem lives on only as a literary-historical curio while the Gettysburg Address has undergone a canonical apotheosis, text and ur-text are united in their promotion of rhyme. Lincoln scattered his prose speech for the solemnest of occasions with small chimes, and Taylor, on an occasion intended to renew and preserve that solemnity, close-rhymed his way through 225 lines of verse. Both texts seem to have a fundamental belief that rhyme can be relied on to do something. If we ask what that something is, we end up on the edge of rhyme's eternally renewing history of defence. Since John Milton paper-clipped a tirade against the barbarous feature onto the great English epic, the chiming of like endings has often been treated as if it had some explaining to do.[8] The irony of *Paradise Lost* is that while the resonance of the poem is incalculably pervasive, its argument against rhyme failed to strike a chord: like endings are the forbidden fruit tasted over and again. What Milton's preface did achieve, though, was a lingering sense of embarrassment with rhyme, even as English poetry returned to an embarrassment *of* rhyme in the eighteenth century.[9] Milton's distaste echoes quietly on: in almost

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[6] Stephen Booth, *Precious Nonsense* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.34.
[7] Booth, p.26.
[8] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667; London: Penguin, 2000), p.1.
[9] For more on this shift, see Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, 'Rhyme's Crimes', *ELH*, 82(3) (2015), 987-1012, p.991.

every critical piece which claims to explain rhyme's good work, there is also a sense that the author is trying to explain rhyme away.[10]

Taylor, however, was writing during one of rhyme's heydays, or at least a period in which it caused minimal embarrassment, and his audience would certainly not have questioned his choice of verse style. This suggests a consensus, at this point in time, that rhyming was the right thing to be doing. Why? Before exploring any of the more freighted accounts of rhyme as sense-making/unmaking, it is worth considering its role as mnemonic. Rhyme as an aid to memory is easy to accept, in part because rhyme is itself a kind of remembering. Consider a stanza of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850): the enclosed couplet stores its sound in short-term memory, while the fourth line performs a wilful recalling of the first, remembering what has just begun to slip away. This remembering is an effect of rhyme which stands prior to others, but remains intricately involved in them. For Taylor's 'Gettysburg Ode', though, rhyme as mnemonic does not get us very far. Firstly, the poem is long. Remembering it would have to be an active, deliberate enterprise akin to learning lines, not the chance recalling of a catchy snippet. The *New York Times* only mentions Taylor's poem in a single sentence: 'Then followed a poem written for the occasion, by BAYARD TAYLOR, but evidently not intended for general circulation, as the author refused to supply the Associated Press with a correct copy'. This makes it clear that no one from the *Times* was able to remember Taylor's poem well enough to risk printing any part of it. By contrast, the Gettysburg Address, which disguises its rhymes in the overlapping, tidal movement of its prose, is widely remembered, in no small part because of its brevity. This is not a fair comparison, of course, and it is not meant to be. Rhyme does not guarantee memorability, and only carries that effect under specific circumstances.

Another way rhyme is working in Taylor's poem is as a marker of its poemhood. Simon Jarvis notes that rhyme has become 'metacommunicative': a mere 'badge' which we can't see past to its 'prosodic colourations'.[11] This is certainly some of the truth, but it is not just the modern 'practicing poet' for whom rhyme is a badge. Rhyme has been a metonym for poetry almost as long as we have had poetry in English, and for much of the amateur poetic community in 1869, as today, setting out to write a poem meant writing something with a rhyme scheme. While Taylor was no amateur, he had been asked to provide a poem for a public occasion, and needed

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[10] Cf. Clive Scott's remark that writers of English verse 'have tended to be shamefaced about [rhyme] and accordingly have implied that rhyme should be shamefaced about itself'. Clive Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme: Studies in French Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.11.
[11] Simon Jarvis, 'Why Rhyme Pleases', *Thinking Verse*, I (2011), 17-43, p.19.

to signal to his audience of amateurs that this was what he had done. At a level almost too fundamental to be worth laying out (and thus all the more worth it), by writing a rhyming poem Taylor ensured it stood distinct from the other forms of address which had preceded it in the programme: a prayer by Henry Ward Beecher, a speech by General Meade, and an oration by Senator Oliver Morton. This badging might be discounted as the lower limit of what rhyme can be tasked with, but it was entirely common during the Civil War and in its aftermath. The War created in many of the population a drive to express themselves poetically, and that meant, almost by definition, in rhyme. This is also the basis for many of the other things we trust rhyme to get done. Once we are in the realm of the poem, as heralded by rhyme, we start to give in to the play of logic and illogic which since the mid-twentieth century has been held as one of rhyme's chief operations. This is the Wimsattian scheme in which a likeness of sound disguises or leaps over an unlikeness in sense.[12] Taylor's rhyme of 'repeat/complete' has something of this effect. As the lines neatly present it, repeating something complete seems to make sense, but on closer inspection the lines depart from logic: if Lincoln's martyrdom completed the hopes and plans of the Gettysburg Address, why do those words still need to be intoned? By 1869, it was becoming clear that Lincoln's death had not put a seal on the nation's crisis, but wedged it open. Antebellum divisions were doomed to be repeated, giving the lie to any claim that the War had completed America's coming-of-age.

Compelling as it is, the problem with this way of reading rhyme is that it promotes trick and wit above all else. Wimsatt chose Pope as his testing ground, and his theory has a correspondingly Pope-ish preference for the joke and comic reversal. More recently, critics have sought to remind us that Wimsatt's article is entitled '*One* Relation of Rhyme to Reason' (my emphasis), and that there are indeed others. Jarvis's article is one of these push-backs: he also takes Pope as his sample, proving we can get different results from the same evidence. In Jarvis's scheme, rhyme is less clever wit and more accidental music which creates currents of sense running in parallel to the poem's other movements. John Creaser takes a similar 'after-Wimsatt' stance in 'Rhymes, Rhyme and Rhyming'.[13] He draws a distinction between 'manifest' rhymes, which are an 'exhibition of virtuosity' in the Wimsattian sense, and 'latent' rhymes, which he also describes as 'standard' or 'stock', and claims have been under-studied.[14] Among his examples of latent rhymes is 'death/breath', which makes up the first couplet of Taylor's poem: stock indeed. Such rhymes

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[12] W. K. Wimsatt Jr., 'One Relation of Rhyme to Reason: Alexander Pope', *Modern Language Quarterly,* 5(3) (1944), 323-338.

[13] John Creaser, 'Rhymes, Rhyme, and Rhyming', *Essays in Criticism*, 62(4) (2012), 438-460.

[14] Creaser, p.443.

lead to a reading experience wherein the 'presence of rhyme colours all, yet individual rhymes do not seize the attention'.[15] This is rhyme as a way of proceeding through a poem. Oddly, the readings Creaser performs in order to prove why latent rhyme is effective pay such hyper-detailed attention to the rhymes that they can no longer be said to be latent. This having and eating of cake is an unfortunate distraction from Creaser's otherwise important reemphasis on rhyme as structure and texture, and his reminder that 'stock' rhymes do not necessarily equate to bad ones.

While all these thoughts on rhyme exist happily in conversation, they can, I believe, be summarised. I propose that we can think of rhymes on a spectrum of effect between the two extremes that could be extrapolated from Wimsatt's and Creaser's work: chaos and cliché. I take these terms from Barbara Smith's *Poetic Closure* (1968).[16] Smith's book is not specifically a study of rhyme, but of 'how poems end'.[17] In fact, and perhaps counter to our instincts, Smith makes the case that rhyme has no special power to conclude or close, because it opens the possibility of infinite repetition. I contend, though, that each rhyme, containing as it does a start and an end, can be thought of as a miniature playing-out of her insight on poems in general:

> If the surprises and disappointments are not finally justified, so to speak, by the total design, then to that extent the poem is a poor one. If, on the other hand, there have been no surprises or disappointments, if all our expectations have been gratified, then the poem has been as predictable – and as interesting – as someone's reciting the alphabet. Art inhabits the country between chaos and cliché.[18]

The word 'poem', here, could happily be replaced by 'rhyme'. At one end of the scale we have chaotic rhymes, which throw off sense in favour of total babble without design: the 'meaningless words' which Wimsatt claims 'afford no pleasure'.[19] At the other end we have cliché, the rhymes we saw coming a mile off and which are thus unable to bring any new sense to their context. These two ends can form a circle: a work which included entire pages from a rhyming dictionary would be just as likely to be deemed chaotic as clichéd. It is also worth noting that both ends of the spectrum tend towards non- or lack of sense. Chaotic rhymes test and mock our instinct to find a semantic link between rhyme words, while clichéd rhymes have had the sense beaten out of them by repetition.

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[15] Creaser, p,443.
[16] Barbara Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p.14.
[17] Smith, p.vii.
[18] Smith, p.14.
[19] Wimsatt, p.337.

Smith's pair of terms (which, admittedly, are themselves motivated partly by aural and visual coincidence) are not equally weighted. Chaos – elemental, violent – seems the more dangerous side of the spectrum, versus harmless, predictable cliché. It is worth pausing to test that assumption. While clichés are generally benignly banal, with their worst threat being to bore us, that banality is easily exploited. If something sounds right, it is easy to persuade people that it *is* right.[20] To take an example with its roots buried deep in the Civil War, we could look briefly at the white-supremacist and neo-Nazi rally that descended on Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, ostensibly in response to a decision to relocate a statue of Robert E. Lee from a town-centre park. Organisers named the rally 'Unite the Right'. The rhyme feels clichéd due to the unfortunate but inextricable pun between right as right-wing and right as correct, justified, moral. The right-as-in-moral should of course unite, in order to resist or overthrow the hegemonic wrong. It is a rhyme of revolution so obvious as to be entirely un-revolutionary. The rhyme manages to hold on to its goes-without-saying quality, though, even as 'Right' pivots to its meaning of (ultra-)conservative. It also manages to hide another rhyme word: white. The word is at once there in the slogan and nowhere to be seen: deeply implicated with a perfect alibi.[21] Clichés can move through the world with enormous ease, and they thus impose a responsibility to read them closely, however counterintuitive that might seem.[22]

Smith's juxtaposition of chaos and cliché overlays productively onto another pertinent form-as-object: battle. It is a cliché that battle is chaotic, hence the 'chaos of battle'. But it is also a cliché that battle is predictable. Consider, for example, the phrase 'War. War never changes'. This is a modern cliché, or meme, which gained its ubiquity online, as the tagline for the video-game series *Fallout*.[23] But an un-analytical Google search will tell you it was first said by Ulysses S. Grant. This is a classic case of a sourceless claim being perpetuated online. There is, though, no reason Grant couldn't have said it, because it's such an inconsequential thing to say. Myriad different attributions would be within the realm of belief. It is a cliché of a cliché about clichés,

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[20] Cf. Christopher Ricks, 'Clichés', in *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.356-368. See also George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *Collected Essays* 4 vols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), IV, pp.121-46. Orwell writes that '[o]rthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style', and a lifeless, imitative style will thus, in the essay's mirror-logic, persuade a reader of orthodoxy.

[21] Cohen-Vriggnaud describes this as 'rhyme's involuntary phonic impressment'. Cohen-Vrignaud, p.1003.

[22] As ever, Geoffrey Hill on difficulty is apposite: 'tyranny requires simplification'. Carl Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill, The Art of Poetry No. 80', *The Paris Review*, 154 (2000) <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/730/the-art-of-poetry-no-80-geoffrey-hill> [accessed 9 April 2021].

[23] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM3Y6uw6FtU> [accessed 9 April 2021]. The phrase has spread as a meme in part because of its absurd pomposity. The introductory cinematic for *Fallout 4* both opens and closes with the tagline, adding another level of vacuous, clanging repetition. It is possible to give the writers the benefit of the doubt, because the game series thinks hard about the desire to cling on to certain ways of life in a crisis – mirroring is part of its logic and language.

the vague upshot of which is that there is something historically consistent about interstate violence.

What is consistent is, in part, the fundamentally chaotic nature of that violence for the low-ranked participant. This is the basic operation of the two most enduring Civil War prose works: Ambrose Bierce's *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Both authors show the War from the perspective of single, bemused participants, for whom any larger shape or meaning is utterly inaccessible; they commit to the trope of battle as a predictable chaos. How does something as apparently trivial and surely-returning as rhyme face up to this ongoing senselessness? This chapter will analyse two poets whose Civil War verse takes rhyme to either side of the wide country between chaos and cliché, and will explore how much sense those rhymes try to make. Firstly, I will investigate Herman Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866). Criticism of Melville's rhymes has not got very far beyond the opinion espoused in the early newspaper and periodical reviews: that the rhymes are unusual and irregular, and that this bespeaks Melville's inexperience as a poet. I propose that we should instead think of Melville's rhyming as a deliberate move towards nonsense. *Battle-Pieces* is filled with rhymes on names and places which verge on the comic or absurd. They hint that Melville was attempting to question the safe knowledge suggested by more traditional rhyme schemes. The second part of the chapter will investigate a poet and a publication heavily invested in such schemes: Laura Redden and her 1864 book, *Idyls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion*.[24] Redden developed hearing loss after a childhood illness, and rhyme was a way of proving her poetic ability to a sceptical public. At the same time, she throws her own scepticism on poetry as a phonotext, something which works by making a noise. Her verse re-emphasises that no poem can truly house or transcribe sound, just as battlefield sound could never truly be recorded in a pre-phonographic period.

II. There Once Was a Man Called Brown

Melville's poetry has always been on the back foot. After releasing *The Confidence-Man* in 1857 to a lukewarm reception, Melville retreated, publishing nothing until almost a decade later when *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* snuck onto the shelves in a limited run which left critics roundly bemused. Multiple reviews referred to the volume as Melville breaking a 'silence', in terms which

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[24] Laura Redden ('Howard Glyndon'), *Idyls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1864).

distinctly implied the silence had been welcome, and *Battle-Pieces* was a raucous noise.[25] Only 468 copies had been sold by 1868, and although Melville continued to publish poetry until his death, it never brought him much praise.[26] *Battle-Pieces* was hauled from the depths with the rest of Melville's oeuvre in the revival following his centennial in 1919, but unlike some of his other work it has never shaken the need to be defended. Consider, for example, two books on Melville's poetry, published forty years apart. William H. Shurr's *The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891* (1972) was one of the first monographs on Melville's poetry, and its qualificatory subtitle, '*Melville as Poet*', is warranted.[27] In 1972, to write an entire book about Melville's poetry was in part to be responsible for persuading the reader that Melville *was* a poet. The degree of separation latent in 'as' is a sugaring of the pill. Jump forward to 2013, though, and we might fear our time-machine has malfunctioned, on encountering the essay collection *Melville as Poet: The Art of 'Pulsed Life'*.[28] That '*as*' has gone nowhere. '*Poet*' is still a role Melville is presented as playing, not just something he was, even though (if certain accounts are to be believed) he spent more of his working life writing poems than he did writing novels.[29]

Aboard the ship of Melville studies, the poems will probably never shake the ignominy of not being the novels. Elsewhere, they do slightly better. One of the places Melville's poetry can go entirely without defence is in works like *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry*. The democratic levelling of the genre anthology lets his poems breathe for a moment, albeit in some quite stuffy company. In a similar fashion, *Battle-Pieces* has been widely adopted by critics practising various kinds of literary history.[30] In the search for the kind of poem written during the Civil War, even the most turgid, occasional parts of *Battle-Pieces* are fair game, and as valid as any other poem by any other poet of the period. Meanwhile, attempts to give some of the poems a place in the lyric canon are also able to sidestep the problem of defence, because any poem worthy of the label 'lyric' can be shown to be defending itself. Virginia Jackson and Michael Warner thus take 'The Portent' and 'Shiloh', respectively, in isolation, and let them work on their own, without needing

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[25] *Albion*, 44, 15 September 1866, p.441; *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* 34, January 1867, p.265.

[26] G. Thomas Tanselle, 'Note on Printing and Publishing History', *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Hershel Parker, 11 vols (Evanstan: Northwestern University Press, 2009) XI, 529-578, p.543.

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

[28] Sanford E. Marovitz, ed., *Melville as Poet: The Art of 'Pulsed Life'*, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2013).

[29] See Hershel Parker's mostly-accepted theory that Melville had a volume of poems ready for publication in 1860, which never made it to the press. Hershel Parker, *Melville: The Making of the Poet* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), p.3-10.

[30] See, for example, Thomas Dikant, '"Shedding a Little Ink": Melville's Victorian War Poetry', *Leviathan*, 21(3) (2019), 115-132; Faith Barrett, '"They Answered Him Aloud": Popular Voice and Nationalist Discourse in Melville's *Battle-Pieces*', *Leviathan*, 9(3) (2007) , 35-49; Stanton Garner, *The Civil War World of Herman Melville* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

to contextualise them within Melville's literary career.[31] These two poems are exceptional, though, in every sense, and the tactics Jackson and Warner bring to them cannot be applied across *Battle-Pieces*. There seems to be a missing middle ground between wrapping up the entire volume as a piece of literary-historical evidence, and isolating its lyric fragments: neither tactic gets us very far towards an understanding of how Melville's weird poetry works.

One solution is to focus on Melville's versification. This might seem to be a wilfully obtuse return to the same pedantic ground covered by his early reviewers, but part of the reason Melville still suffers under the need for defence is that some of the claims made by those reviewers linger on almost verbatim. Rosanna Warren, for example, labels Melville's verse as 'inwrought, crabbed, ponderous, grimed'.[32] These terms work hard in her essay about darkness and obfuscation, but they still carry some of the same derogatory tone as the reviews, which were filled with words like 'jarring', 'involved' and 'obscure'. Riddling and obfuscation are prized qualities in lyric, but in writing about Melville such qualities look back to a history of derision and rejection, and thus need to be brought out with more care, lest they perpetuate the narrative that Melville's poems are simply bad. They also promote an image of the poems as gloomy, pessimistic and universally serious, which, as I will show, herds them into a corner. A renewed focus on Melville's versification, in this case his rhymes, has the potential to repackage the reviewers' language and provide a technique for reading *Battle-Pieces* as a volume intensely involved in testing the limits of poetic resources. It is not so much that Melville's poetry is 'bad', as it is poetry which does too much poeming for its own good.

This chapter will not attempt to make a full survey of Melville's rhyme schemes in *Battle-Pieces*, partly due to limitations of space, but also because such a study is practically impossible. One of the things that lets us build an appreciation of the way rhyme works for a particular poet is repetition of repetition, i.e., the same rhyme scheme or pattern used multiple times. This is how we can have discussions about the kind of thing a Spenserian stanza does, or become attuned to modulations across *In Memoriam*. The promise of an article like 'Why Rhyme Pleases' is that we can go elsewhere in Pope's corpus of couplets and, using our new training, track down more examples of the effect Jarvis notices. Rhyme in Pope is, in this way, 'necessary and predictable'.[33] In *Battle-Pieces*, it is no such thing. Early on in the criticism of Melville's poetry, Shurr noted the

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[31] Virginia Jackson, 'Who Reads Poetry?'; Michael Warner, 'What Like a Bullet Can Undeceive?', *Public Culture*, 15(1) (2003), 41-54.

[32] Rosanna Warren, 'Dark Knowledge: Melville's Poems of the Civil War', *Raritan*, 19(1) (1999), 100-121.

[33] Jarvis, 'Why Rhyme Pleases', p.27.

lack of repetition across the rhyme schemes of *Battle-Pieces*: 'The stanza form [of 'The Portent'] is Melville's own as indeed are most of his. (I have been unable to find that he has used a single poetic form twice in this collection)'.[34] This is a slight misconception: 'Dupont's Round Fight' and 'In the Prison Pen' both use common meter. But Shurr's point still stands. Melville's stanzas are 'almost invariably nonce forms', in which the rhyme scheme is never predictable.[35] Indeed, rhyme in *Battle-Pieces* doesn't seem to scheme at all; it invents itself as it goes along.

Instead of schemes, then, I will focus on a particular type of rhyme: the rhymes Melville's reviewers deemed inexcusable. There was an awful lot at stake for rhyme in 1866, and fully a third of the identified reviews of *Battle-Pieces* take time to point out Melville's deficiency in the area. Some only take a swipe in passing, but others lay in at length:

> Rhyme he confesses a respect for, but discourteously entreats, offering 'magnolia' as the rhyme of 'far'. He attacks every word, however unmanageable, quite confident that he shall find a rhyme for it. Thus 'Shenandoah,' which, speaking after the manner of the profane, would *stump* an ordinary poet, has no terrors for him. In one stanza he links it with 'law' and 'more'; in another, with 'draw' and 'war.' 'Arm' and 'calm,' 'harm' and 'balm,' 'saw' and 'war,' 'force' and 'loss,' are paired regardless of incompatibility; and 'Shenandoah' makes another Mormon marriage with half-a-dozen unfit terminations, of which 'star' is the least unlike.[36]

There seem to be two metaphors vying for position in this paragraph. First there is one of courtship. In the first sentence Melville is painted as a bad wooer of rhyme, offending it with uncouth pairings. This is picked up later with his rhyming of words 'regardless of incompatibility', and reaches its zenith in the comparison to a 'Mormon marriage'. Melville's gaucheness even seems to rub off on the reviewer, who is forced to resort to the profane '*stump*' in their hunt for the right critical vocabulary. At the same time, there is a metaphor of battle: 'He attacks every word, however unmanageable', 'Thus "Shenandoah," […] has no terrors for him'. Melville did not fight in the War, but the *Independent* describes him marching into Shenandoah, site of many battles, on a futile campaign. This metaphor turns up in other reviews. The New York *World*, for example, complains that *Battle-Pieces* contains 'multitudes of strong and beautiful images', which unfortunately 'refuse to obey the rigid regimental order of the stanza, but outlie its lines, deployed as irregular, though brilliant skirmishers'.[37] Bad rhyme, it seems, is like bad tactics: it risks defeat.

[34] Shurr, p.16.
[35] William C. Spengemann, 'Melville the Poet', *American Literary History*, 11(4) (1999), 569–609. p.585.
[36] 'Book Table', *Independent*, 10 January 1867, p.2.
[37] 'Three Poets', *The World*, New York, 19 October 1866, p.2.

There are several ways to reread these blundering rhymes. Shurr suggests that 'the problem with his peculiar rhymes (*law-o'er*, for example) will disappear […] when one grants it to be an experiment by a died-in-the-wool New Yorker to establish his regional pronunciation as normative'.[38] I am unwilling to grant that, as Shurr does not provide the necessary evidence, and we can of course never know what Melville sounded like; despite living until 1891, there is no evidence of Melville having been recorded on a phonograph. More convincing is the notion that Melville was a proto-modernist who embraced the 'flexible potential' of half-rhyme.[39] As Anna Ferry remarks, the nineteenth century saw some poets '[l]oosening the likeness in sound between rhymed words'. Ferry paints this as 'the most widespread form of revolt, a practice that rhymed poetry in English has not turned away from since'.[40] Among her examples, though, are Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emerson and Longfellow: popular poets who did not suffer the kind of scorn lavished on Melville. This implies Melville's impropriety was altogether more potent. The 'loosening' argument also misses out on some effects of Melville's rhymes that result from what would be better termed a tightening: a self-conscious over-adherence to rhyme's rules. A coy advance towards half-rhyme might explain modulations like 'saw/war' and 'force/loss', but it is not a capacious enough figure to contain other, more bravura rhymes, like those on 'Shenandoah'.

The *Independent* review helpfully provides us with a lever into a reading of Melville's bad rhymes which allows them to be productive without minimising their over-deliberate absurdity:

> The odorous South winds which blew through Mr. Herman Melville's earlier books might have filled the sails of his graceful bark, and wafted him to Cathay, for all the world has known of him of late. It seems, however, that he has been coquetting with the Muse – and we say advisedly, coquetting – for the majestic presence has not possessed and enthralled him. It is rather as if he were the humble 'meejum' alternately influenced by the overmastering personalities of Walt Whitman, Dante, Emerson, Brownell, and Mother Goose.[41]

The list of spirits which possess Melville-as-medium is predictable enough until its last occupant: Mother Goose. We know Whitman worked in the hospitals, and Brownell was aboard the *Hartford* at Mobile Bay, but what was Mother Goose's role in the Civil War? And how did she master Melville? One way to decode this odd pairing is to note that it disguises a much more

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38 Shurr, p.9.
39 *The Writings of Herman Melville,* XI, p.511.
40 Anne Ferry, 'Love rhymes with of', *Modernism/modernity*, 7(3) (2000), 423-445, p.431.
41 'Book Table', p.2.

familiar comparison. The early editions of *Mother Goose's Melody* and its subsequent reprints had as their second part the 'Lullabies of Shakespeare'.[42] This selection of songs from the plays followed straight on from what we now consider to be the original collection of nursery rhymes. The two canons collide, making nonsense of Shakespeare and sense of the 'Three wise men of Gotham'. Whitman, Dante, Emerson, Brownell and Shakespeare make a much more predictable grouping, in which Brownell becomes the new odd one out, as the only writer to have slipped from most modern reading lists. However, while Shakespeare's influence on Melville has been the subject of much study since, it is highly unlikely that the *Independent* reviewer had this quirk of anthologising in mind when reaching for Mother Goose as a point of comparison. It is silliness that is the issue, as the review makes clear:

> 'Sheridan at Cedar Creek' seems founded on the two familiar poems of an earlier writer: one beginning 'Ride a black horse to Banbury Cross, to see an old woman,' etc., etc.; the other 'Shoe the old horse, and shoe the old mare, but let the little colt go bare.'

The reviewer seems to be accusing Melville of a glib prosody relying on bouncing rhythms and banal rhymes: a 'one two, buckle my shoe' approach to versifying. We thus come up against a paradox: the *Independent* follows other reviews in haranguing Melville for his bizarre rhymes, but then compares him to Mother Goose, whose rhymes are, if anything, *too neat*. Melville is accused of resorting to both chaos and cliché. And herein lies a rich, novel way of reading Melville's rhymes: as nonsense.[43]

The language of nonsense hovers around responses to Melville's rhymes, but has never been allowed to land. Cody Marrs describes the poems of *Battle-Pieces* as 'unruly', a word which Ferry in turn yokes to 'comic rhymes', and which modulates easily to the naughtiness ascribed to the poems of Edward Lear.[44] This follows the early reviewers who resorted to words like 'uncouth', 'obscurely-profound', and 'epileptic'. While this last arrives shrouded in ableism, in the nineteenth century it also held a vaguer meaning of 'loss of sense'. As a cloud, this language suggests a breaking of the rules, a thumbing of the nose towards propriety. It is a truism of thought on nonsense verse, though, that its apparent unruliness is actually a comic hyper-

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[42] See, for example, the 1889 facsimile of the now lost eighteenth-century text: *The Original Mother Goose's Melody* (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1889).
[43] This chapter finds many of the same effects in nursery rhyme and nonsense verse, but does not intend to erase the unique literary history of the former. For an excellent summary of this history, see Melissa Gregory, 'Women Writers, Nineteenth Century Nursery Rhyme and Lyric Innovation', *Literature Compass*, 12(13) (2015), 106-118.
[44] Cody Marrs, 'A Wayward Art: *Battle-Pieces* and Melville's Poetic Turn', *American Literature*, 82(1) (2010), 91-119, p.95.

obedience, a setting of conventions into 'absurd overdrive'.[45] Lear's limericks do not kick rhyme to the curb; they cheer its arrival, dress it up and parade it around the streets. Caught in the act of making fun of rhyme, they turn to the accuser and are able to show exactly how well they treated it, following its rules to the letter. Nonsense verse and nursery rhyme only seem to break the rules because they show up how absurd and rooted in senselessness those rules are: they bend chaos and cliché into a circle.

There is evidence that Melville was thinking hard about the comic and nonsensical during the apparently mirthless years of the Civil War. In 1862, he purchased a combined volume of William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819) and *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818).[46] The latter he dated '1866', implying the volume was at hand through the War years and his writing of *Battle-Pieces*. Both are marked heavily in pencil throughout.[47] Of particular note are his markings in the introductory essay to the first volume, 'On Wit and Humour'. He immediately took interest, underlining the end of the first sentence: 'Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what <u>things are, and what they ought to be</u>'.[48] Later, he marks a page deep in conversation with nonsense verse:

> […] wit principally aims at finding out something that seems the same, or amounts to a momentary deception where you least expected it, viz. in things totally opposite. The reason why more slight and partial, or merely accidental and nominal resemblances, serve the purposes of wit, and indeed characterise its essence as a distinct operation and faculty of the mind, is, that the object of ludicrous poetry is naturally to let down and lessen […][49]

A close resemblance in sounds between rhyme words can deceive us into finding a resemblance in sense where there is none: 'Ding dong bell / The cat is in the well' sounds right, but sound its depths and it becomes hard to imagine an alarm bell ringing for such a local mishap.[50] Hazlitt is not very positive about the value of such 'ludicrous poetry'. Melville puts a mark beside his pronouncement that 'Wit and humour […] appeal to our indolence', while 'serious and impassioned poetry appeals to our strength'. This would imply Melville's pencil marks mean

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[45] James Williams and Matthew Bevis, ed., *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.3.
[46] *The Writings of Herman Melville*, XI, p.917.
[47] Cf. *Melville's Marginalia Online*, <http://melvillesmarginalia.org/> [accessed 9 April 2021].
[48] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers & Lectures on the English Poets* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), p.2.
[49] Hazlitt, p.23.
[50] *The Original Mother Goose's Melody*, rhyme no. 25.

agreement, as indolence is hardly something to be aimed for, but this is not absolutely the case. In his copy of *Paradise Lost*, Melville underlined Milton's declaration that rhyme is 'no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, <u>in longer Works especially</u>'. We need only turn to *Clarel*, Melville's 18,000-line rhymed epic, to see that underlining does not translate to blanket endorsement, and might also suggest scepticism, if not outright disagreement. So in marking Hazlitt's thoughts on the bathos of nominal resemblance, Melville might have been noting it as a potential resource. This hypothesis is supported by another of his 1862 book purchases: Byron's *Poetical Works*.[51] Alongside comic theory, Melville was reading a poet who pushes rhyme towards the absurd while obeying its rules, often to bathetic effect. Byron's more overwrought rhymes feel like deceptions, like the words shouldn't rhyme at all. It seems that during the early 1860s Melville was priming himself to experiment with rhyme as surprising, ludicrous deflation. He had taken Mother Goose as muse.[52]

With this in mind, we can turn to 'Lyon', Melville's ode to the Union General killed defending Springfield, Missouri in 1861:

> Some hearts there are of deeper sort,
>   Prophetic, sad,
> Which yet for cause are trebly clad;
>   Known death they fly on:
> This wizard-heart and heart-of-oak had Lyon.
>
> 'They are more than twenty thousand strong,
>   We less than five,
> Too few with such a host to strive'
>   'Such counsel, fie on!
> 'Tis battle, or 'tis shame;' and firm stood Lyon.
>
> 'For help at need in vain we wait—
>   Retreat or fight:
> Retreat the foe would take for flight,
>   And each proud scion
> Feel more elate; the end must come,' said Lyon.
>
> […]
>   (1-15)[53]

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[51] *The Writings of Herman Melville*, XI, p.871.
[52] Melville's later prose work also tended towards comedy. Both *The Confidence-Man* and 'Bartleby, the Scrivener' make a joke of repetition. The passengers of the steamer are conned over and again by a figure at once different and the same. Bartleby's statement 'I would prefer not to' begins as sense, is repeated unto nonsense, and then comes out the other side as the only thing worth saying in the face of nonsensical institutions.
[53] *Battle-Pieces*, p.24.

The poem was picked out for praise in several reviews, suggesting that Melville was perfectly able to hit the patriotic tenor of popular War verse when he wanted to. The *Boston Commercial Bulletin,* though, had a small complaint: 'The verses on the death of Gen. Lyon are very fine, despite the somewhat jarring artifice of ending each stanza with the chieftain's name, which is not specially easy to find a rhyme for'.[54] Choosing words 'not specially easy to find a rhyme for' is a fine description of Melville's technique throughout *Battle-Pieces.* Stanton Garner describes 'Shiloh', for example, as 'a soft, elegiac, conciliatory poem that survives the technical difficulty of rhyming the name 'Shiloh'.[55] Rhyme, these writers concur, is something that Melville was up against. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the feeling that the hunt for rhymes overwhelms 'Lyon'. As soon as we reach the second rhyme on the general's name, the reader realises they are witnessing a trivial word-game, albeit one which gets a few interesting results. The pairing of 'A field to die on' with 'Lyon', for example, is surprisingly resonant. A field to die on is also one which bodies will lie on, or Ly-on: Melville makes this pun present in the poem without having to print it and thus open himself to the charge of explicitly toying with an officer's name. There is no way, though, that these rhymes can feel natural or incidental. As Christopher Ricks has remarked, it is always strange to encounter a rhyme on names or places, 'because they don't really seem to be *words*'.[56] In a similar vein, John Hollander describes 'a spectrum […] along which a possible rhyming string would be arranged according to the total or composite distance between them'.[57] In his example string, which begins with 'meet', the proper noun 'Lafite' is placed second-to-furthest away, trumped only by 'zieht'.[58] As Creaser neatly puts it: 'the greater the obstacle, the greater the mastery'.[59] Mastery, though, as the history of responses to virtuosic rhymers like Byron and Melville has shown, can easily be taken for something less desirable: a stunt or a trick. Byron, certainly, was happy to consider himself a trickster, but Melville's topic is so serious that to embrace this role would be to flirt with a charge of impropriety.

How far, though, can impropriety take us? Is Melville tricking us in his ode to a fallen hero? Before exploring the possibility that 'Lyon' is an intentional embrace of nonsense, it is worth considering more ostensibly sombre options. The name of the deceased in America has a long history of being made into poetic material. In Puritan elegies, the subject's name was taken apart and reassembled into anagrams, acrostics and puns, in a kind of exegetic autopsy. Anne

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[54] 'New Publications', *Boston Commercial Bulletin*, 8 September 1866, p.1.
[55] Garner, p.141.
[56] Christopher Ricks, 'Bob Dylan', *The Threepenny Review*, 40 (1990), 33-35, p.33.
[57] Hollander, p.127.
[58] Hollander, p.128.
[59] Creaser, p.453.

Bradstreet's name, for example, was made part of several games in the elegiac material attached to volumes of her poems. John Norton punned on it, claiming her 'breast was a brave palace, a Broad-street.'[60] Earlier in the volume it was anagrammed into submission by J. Rogers: '*Anne Bradstreate:* Artes bred neat *An*'. Rogers opts for a different spelling in another anagram: 'Anna Bradestreate: Deer Neat *An Bartas*'. This is an extreme example of the capacity of the anagram, acrostic and pun to thin out a name even as they attempt to monumentalise it. The games were an attempt to recover 'purpose from affliction by discovering the sacred messages' embedded in the names.[61] While this might seem to imply a faith in language as inherently meaningful, this is not quite the case. Anagrams rely on language as basically provisional, as Rogers's respelling of Bradstreet's name shows in miniature. Puritan elegists took the earthly falling short of words and used it to shore up meaning against loss. Witty play with names was a way of making temporary, provisional sense out of language as nonsensical stuff. I have only located one explicit example of Puritan word games in the Civil War period: Robert Blackwell's *Original acrostics, on some of the southern states, Confederate generals and various other persons and things* (1869).[62] Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Stonewall Jackson are all splayed down the left margin, the letters of their names inaugurating lines of Southern loyalty. This text was a self-published novelty, though, and not part of a wider culture of name games. Newspaper reportage of battles and campaigns ensured that the names of men like Lee and Davis were hyper-saturated with meaning, and thus did not require the recuperative tactics and creative stitch-work of Puritan elegy. When a name is made monumental, meaning does not have to be discovered – it can be pointed to.

Battle-Pieces is richly invested in the monumental name, and what could be done with it, or to it. In 'The Cumberland', Melville engages, apparently sincerely, with the Civil War habit of having a poem circle round a name:

> Some names there are of telling sound,
> Whose vowelled syllables free
> Are pledge that they shall ever live renowned;
> Such seems to be
> A Frigate's name (by present glory spanned) —
> The Cumberland.
> (1-4)[63]

[60] Anne Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (London: 1650).

[61] Jeffrey A. Hammond, *The American Puritan Elegy: A Literary and Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.175.

[62] Robert Blackwell, *Original acrostics, on some of the southern states, Confederate generals and various other persons and things* (St Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1869).

[63] *Battle-Pieces*, p.53.

The first stanza teases its own solemnity. When hearing of a name that shall 'ever live renowned', we might assume that it refers to a human figure, especially after 'Lyon' has shown Melville's familiarity with this trope.[64] The clarification that this is 'A Frigate's name' seems an almost Pope-ish inversion towards the trivial. Melville goes on to lift up the ship's name with fetishist zeal: 'Goodly name as ere was sung, / Roundly rolling on the tongue — / Cumberland! Cumberland!'. The *Independent* balked at this refrain, which was 'unpleasantly suggestive of quids', i.e., chewing tobacco. In assuming that Melville was trying to be sombre throughout his collection, the *Independent* lets the joke fly over its head. Tongued over again and again, 'Cumberland' becomes cumbersome, turning from a telling sound to a sound which tells nothing. Melville's other joke is the same one he makes in 'Lyon': the apparently iconic name of 'Cumberland' is chewed up and spat out by rhyme. The premise of rhyme is that the sound of a word is only a phoneme away from being another word entirely. So by successively rhyming 'Cumberland' with 'spanned', 'grand', 'manned', 'stand', Melville gradually draws attention to the name as susceptible to change. So, too, in 'Lyon', but with extra levels of convolution added by the double rhymes – 'scion/Lyon' – and the rhyming of two words with one – 'fly on/Lyon'. With each rhyme the names lose something of themselves: their meaning is diluted by the flood of rhyme words.

Is this bad poetry, or just poetry which does too much with itself? The two are remarkably similar. Anyone lucky enough to have been exposed to the kind of poems submitted to local newspapers will know that these pieces tend to perform their versification unflinchingly. The authors are aware that poetry rhymes, and so rhyme their poems for all they're worth, thus ensuring no one will mistake them for anything else. An undisciplined misuse of poetry's resources results in bad poetry. A deliberate and skilled intensification of those resources results in something we might call lyric. A deliberate and skilled *overuse* of those resources gives us something it is tempting to call nonsense. 'Lyon' and 'Cumberland' overuse two poetic notions which were close at hand for Melville: the notion that an elegy for a War hero should repeat their name, and the notion that such a poem should rhyme. Combined, the two cancel each other out. Hershel Parker notes an upended response to Melville's poeticism, whereby the prose of his early novels was frequently described as 'poetic', only for his poems to be decried as mostly unpoetic.[65] I believe his poems were in fact hyper-poetic: where these novels did not put their

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[64] Faith Barrett points out that 'Lyon' is already made ironic by Melville's decision to use the name-as-refrain 'in an elegiac poem instead of the more conventional rallying cry'. Barrett, 'They Answered Him Aloud', p.37.
[65] Parker, p.22.

heads above the parapet, *Battle-Pieces*, with its weird rhymes, invented stanza shapes, and overt textuality, sallied deep into the territory of verse and thus came to critics as altogether too much. Melville takes the clichés of the form, and runs with them unto chaos.

Armed with these thoughts, we can proceed to a reading of Melville's most nonsensical poem: 'The Portent':

> *Hanging from the beam,*
> > *Slowly swaying (such the law),*
> *Gaunt the shadow on your green,*
> > *Shenandoah!*
> *The cut is on the crown*
> > *(Lo, John Brown),*
> *And the stabs shall heal no more.*
>
> *Hidden in the cap*
> > *Is the anguish none can draw;*
> *So your future veils its face,*
> > *Shenandoah!*
> *But the streaming beard is shown*
> > *(Weird John Brown),*
> *The meteor of the war.*[66]

Close-readers have done some phenomenal sense-making with these two short stanzas. Edgar Dryden reads them as a tapestry of textual allusions, finding portents for Melville's Portent.[67] Virginia Jackson, meanwhile, looks to river song and sonnet to explain the poem's hovering around lyric subjectivity.[68] These readings, though, end up as attempts to paint the poem as deeply serious, and thus explain away its apparent absurdity. I propose that absurdly is exactly

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[66] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, p.11.
[67] Edgar A. Dryden, *Monumental Melville: The Formation of a Literary Career* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.68. I would add one more possible source to Dryden's collection: Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott.' In the third stanza of Part III, we get:

As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
   Moves over green Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
[…]

The occurrence of 'bearded meteor, trailing', 'green Shalott' and 'clear brow' within three consecutive lines neatly resembles Melville's 'streaming beard […] meteor of the war', 'green, / Shenandoah', and the 'crown'/'cap' of John Brown (brow-n). Perhaps Melville would like us to see the makings of an Arthurian hero in Brown.
[68] Jackson, 'Who Reads Poetry?'.

how the 'The Portent' wants to be read, and that the poem is a kind, or rather degree, of limerick.

The limerick was a popular form even (or perhaps especially) during wartime.[69] In June 1864, Philadelphia publishers Ashmead & Evans issued a *New Book of Nonsense* in aid of the Sanitary Commission's Great Central Fair.[70] Most of the limericks in the slim book have plots aspiring to Lear's consummate obscurity, but a few are firmly rooted in their historical circumstances:

Figure 9: 'There was a young lass of Kentucky', The New Book of Nonsense.

In many ways, this is a poor candidate with which to illustrate the formal potential of limerick. For a poem in a *New Book of Nonsense*, it is asked to carry an awful lot of sense. The last thing Edward Lear's limericks ask of their readers is action, beyond laughter. The characters of the limericks do things, indeed are made characters by so doing, but their actions are so unusual as to run out of significance as the poem ends. Contained within the last line's repetition of the first, the actions occur forever within that one weird space. 'There was a young lass of Kentucky', meanwhile, is unabashed Union propaganda. While the action depicted is absurd – a young lady in full skirts strapping on a drum after apparently subduing and binding the hands of a secessionist – it is based on a real desire for loyalty in a fraught border state. A limerick as a call to action is practically an oxymoron, and this might explain why only three poems in the volume

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[69] The popularity of nonsense during World War I, for example, has been noted. See Emily Anderson, "'There was a young girl of the Somme, / Who sat on a number five bomb': The Representation of Violence in First World War Trench Newspaper Nonsense Rhymes', *Literature & History,* 27(2) (2018), 129-147.

[70] *The New Book of Nonsense: A Contribution to the Great Central Fair* (Philadelphia: Ashmead & Evans, 1864).

have anything specific to say about the Civil War. The fact that a reader could learn something about Kentucky from this poem – i.e., that it has a problem with secessionists – is also counter to the normal workings of limerick. As Daniel Brown notes in his excellent essay on Lear's limericks, the place names which inaugurate these poems are '[d]enuded of content, of local colour and richness', and arrive as 'inchoate words, mere word-sounds'.[71] The settings of limericks are arbitrary, given meaning only in their rhyme with the bizarre characters introduced in the second lines. Kentucky is in no way inchoate, and would carry a cargo of political associations for the Great Central Fair attendee who might pick up the book.

It can be argued, then, that 'The Portent' does more limericking than 'There was a young lass of Kentucky'. Melville's poem uses names almost exactly as Brown describes. Isolated on its own line in both stanzas, 'Shenandoah' means far less than it feels like it should. Stephen Booth takes a stand in *Precious Nonsense* by pointing out that two key elements of the Gettysburg Address are inherently nonsensical or absurd, and I would like to do something similar for the 'The Portent'.[72] The first four lines of the poem have only ever been read with Brown as their implied referent: Brown is the one 'hanging', because this is a poem about the hanging of Brown.[73] The participles which apparently tell us this, though, are themselves hanging. The poem begins in grammatical suspension; eventually the subject of the sentence is revealed via apostrophe to be, in fact, 'Shenandoah'. The first lines could be rearranged into something like this: 'The shadow is gaunt on your green, Shenandoah, hanging as you are from the beam, and slowly swaying thereon'. But a mountain range cannot hang or sway; indeed, it does just the opposite. And so even as 'The Portent' addresses Shenandoah, it makes nonsense of it, and leaves it to sit as mere word-stuff. This is compounded by the rhyme. 'Shenandoah' forms the middle of a three-part rhyme in both stanzas: 'law/Shenandoah/more', 'draw/Shenandoah/war'. The word becomes a waypoint between two others which do more sense-making. Just as a limerick is inaugurated by a location it then tells us nothing about, 'The Portent' uses Shenandoah as rhyming scaffold but refuses to imbue it with significance. It is as much placeholder as place. In the form I have quoted them, the rhymes offended reviewers as fundamentally improper. The *Round Table* labelled them 'positively barbarous', and the *American Literary Gazette* called them Melville's 'best

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[71] Daniel Brown, 'Being and Naughtiness', *Edward Lear and the Play of Poetry*, ed. James Williams and Matthew Beavis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.162-182, p.181.
[72] Booth, p.52. He shows firstly that the opening sentence is absurd in suggesting that 'Fathers – males – give birth', and secondly that the last sentence is 'syntactically incomprehensible', even if we don't have much trouble understanding what it means.
[73] Jackson, 'Who Reads Poetry', p.184.

worst'.[74] But if we arrive at the poem willing to read it as absurd, the rhymes can be fleshed out. In the first instance, 'such the law' visually announces 'Shenandoah' in the 's—h' of 'such'. The aural gap between '-ch' and 'Sh-' is similarly small. In the second stanza, the rhyme is not just on 'draw' but on 'none can draw'. '[N]one can' chimes with 'Shenan', and contracted becomes 'n—an', the 'nan' of 'Shenandoah. These multisyllabic rhymes are not announcedly virtuosic in the style of Byron's mosaic mode (e.g. 'intellectual/hen-peck'd you all'), but they still do some of the leaping of limerick. Melville works harder with the sound and shape of 'Shenandoah' than he does with its meaning.

Of course, the poem is about John Brown, not the Shenandoah valley, but Brown is only sketched with the absurd proportions of nonsense verse. We learn very little about him. He might wear a broken crown, or perhaps he has a bare head on which a cut is showing. Or maybe he wears a cap, which hides something beneath it. All that is certain is that he has a 'streaming beard': this is made Brown's caricaturish defining feature, a companion to Lear's 'Lady whose chin / Resembled the point of a pin', or his 'Old Man of the South / Who had an immoderate mouth'.[75] In Brown, Melville creates just such 'a peculiar species […] of only one member', defined only by features unique to him.[76] The other thing a nineteenth-century reader would have expected from a limerick is a fantastical illustration which took the limerick at its word (what else is in a limerick at which to take it?) and attempted to sketch its bizarre character in
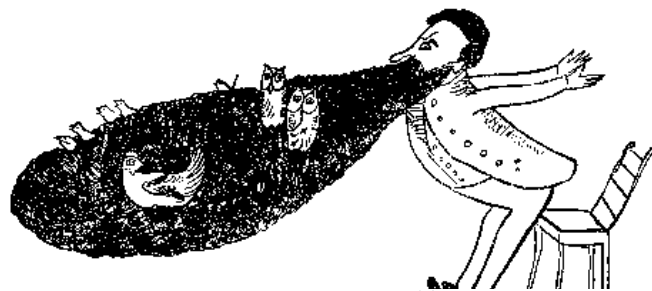
Figure 10: 'There was an Old Man with a beard', The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse, *p.157.*

action. *Battle-Pieces* of course contained no such thing, but 'The Portent' nevertheless has a ghost of a picture behind it. The poem is printed in italics at the start of the volume, and goes unlisted in the contents. This lends it a pictorial quality – it is not simply one of the poems in the volume – and the typography invites us to consider it as a visual object. This moves it towards the realm of limerick as practised by Lear and his imitators: short poems which can be taken in at a glance

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[74] 'Literariana', *Round Table*, 4(54) (1866), p.108; 'Book Notices', *American Literary Gazette and Publisher's Circular*, 7(9) (1866), p.190.
[75] Edward Lear, *The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.162, p.90.
[76] Brown, p.168.

with their accompanying illustration. The character of Brown which 'The Portent' barely describes reaches out towards a non-existent clarifying illustration. In 1963 Hennig Cohen edited an edition of *Battle-Pieces* with interspersed sketches by Civil War artists Alfred and William Waud, almost as if in response to this holding-back of pictorial information.[77] But the sketches Cohen selects are only ever tangentially related to the poems, consonant only in mood and not in detail. Melville writes of 'an anguish none can draw', and 'The Portent' is just that: a poem with the logic of limerick, but with depictions too stretched to be illustrated.

In an attempt to get a handle on how limericks work, Daniel Brown puns on the 'naught' in 'naughtiness'. A limerick is a 'bubble of not-being': it promises to provide some new knowledge but ends up leaving us none the wiser, or even slightly less wise, if more susceptible to play.[78] It is the epitome of what Booth calls the triviality of literature:

> The justifications [of literature] have all, I think, been driven by a need to find a dignified function for an activity that by all standards at all comparable to the ones we apply to the other things we value, is frivolous – a need to find a function for literature that has the practical weight of the other things that matter to us, things like food, shelter, love, gods, children, and law.[79]

Following 'The Portent', we might find a useful rhyme for Booth's 'law': 'war'. 'The Portent' certainly seems serious, and seems to promise to provide some clarification of the dire, weighty events its title suggests it will predict, but the poem ends up as a vacuity, held together only by its form. What is ultimately most non-sensical about 'The Portent' is its paradoxical position as an after-the-fact omen poem which fails to predict anything specific. Melville writes prolepsis via analepsis and ends up with nothing in between.[80] His rhymes imply edifice and education but end up talking to themselves more than to the reader. 'The Portent' is a bubble made up of babbling baubles.

After Booth, I believe that a defence of Melville's poems as nonsense is indeed a defence, and not just an obedient return to William Dean Howells's complaint that *Battle-Pieces* is made up of 'words alone'.[81] The volume is indeed made up only of words, but Melville is sure not to rely on those words to do more than their fair share. If read as tending towards nonsense, poems like

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[77] Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1963).
[78] Brown, p.182.
[79] Booth, p.18.
[80] For more on 'The Portent' as both 'reminiscence and premonition', see Dryden, p.69.
[81] William Dean Howells, '*Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*', *Atlantic Monthly*, 19, February 1867, 252-3, p.252.

'The Portent', 'Lyon' and 'The Cumberland' can be brought as evidence against Edmund Wilson's oft-cited charge sheet:

> Melville […] is writing versified journalism: a chronicle of the patriotic feelings of an anxious middle-aged non-combatant as, day by day, he reads the bulletins from the front. The celebration of current battles by poets who have not taken part in them has produced some of the emptiest verse that exists.[82]

With Wilson's last point, I concur. But I would add that the empty verse to which he refers is often trying its hardest to be full. The raft of clankingly loyal poems that the Civil War produced were hampered by an attempt to achieve a large, national meaning, to swell themselves with patriotic import. Melville's verse, on the other hand, deliberately goes about emptying itself. His stretched rhymes embrace triviality, and make no pretensions to 'illusory knowledge'.[83] As William Spengemann says of poetry in general in his article on Melville, *Battle-Pieces* tries to 'make some sense of a nonsensically fragmented world without pretending that the world itself makes sense'.[84]

Melville's rhymes don't claim to know much beyond their shared sound. And at times, they don't even try to know this. I have already suggested that 'The Cumberland' ironises its own premise by elegising a ship instead of a person, and by diluting its monumentality with rhyme. One further irony stems from its position in the collection. 'The Cumberland' attempts to commemorate the sound of a word, but follows immediately on from 'Donelson', a poem which throws suspicion on poetry's ability to make words sound and raises a key question about lyric's resources.[85] The poem is set at a noticeboard in a northern town, at the time of the siege of Fort Donelson, Tennessee. Reports from the battle arrive in the town, are posted on the board, and then read out to the expectant crowd. This might seem to imply a figuring of poetry as a transcription of voice: just as the 'tall man' reads out the bulletins, so might 'Donelson' itself be read out, sent forth into an oral/aural public. But 'Donelson' shows this up time and again by fixing its words to the page. On the most apparent level, the typography disavows vocalisation. The reports are printed in italics, and prefaced by headlines in capitals: an unpronounceable modulation. This re-textualising emphasises the complex chain of code-changes which have occurred between event and reader. In the world of the poem, battlefield report has been turned

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[82] Wilson, p.479.
[83] Warren, p.272.
[84] Spengemann, p.599.
[85] *Battle-Pieces*, p.33.

to telegraphic code, and then to written account, then to spoken words. The poem turns this speech into rhymed lines which are typographically distinct, and thus draw us back to the printed bulletin. We know that Melville took many of the accounts of the action at Donelson from *Rebellion Record*, a compendium of war reports published from 1861 to 1868. 'Donelson' is thus a record of the movement of text to text to text: the spoken voice it depicts is, as Faith Barrett remarks, only 'an illusion of presence'.[86] We are not part of the crowd listening to the bulletins being read aloud; if anything, we are part of the smaller group who arrive only in the penultimate stanza:

> But others were who wakeful laid
>   In midnight beds, and early rose,
>   And, feverish in the foggy snows,
> Snatched the damp paper—wife and maid.
>   The death-list like a river flows
>   Down the pale sheet,
> And there the whelming waters meet.

In the newspaper death-lists vital information is reformatted into a strange shape which demands a specific kind of silent reading encounter. The list, which 'like a river flows / Down the pale sheet', forms a cousin to the poem itself, which also flows from top to bottom, and searches out novel ways to relate disaster and death.

'Donelson' proposes its own silent reading encounter. The illusion that the poem relies on sound is revealed by rhyme. From the outset, rhyme is put forward not as a pattern of sound, but as an evolving possibility of likeness by degree. The first stanza rhymes itself in knots, proceeding abacbdbddcee (and this is being generous in assuming 'street' rhymes with 'met/set'). Some of the ingredients of a more restrained rhyme scheme are here – alternations, couplets – but they are only moments of calm in the chaos. The c rhyme is introduced in line three, but goes unrhymed until line ten, by which time the reader might have lost faith that it is a rhyme word at all. Having set out with no recognisable analogue, the poem then presents its first transition from framing narrative to battlefield report:

> 'No seeing here,' cries one—'don't crowd—'
> 'You tall man, pray you, read aloud.'
>
> IMPORTANT.
> *We learn that General Grant,*

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[86] Barrett, 'They Answered Him Aloud', p.45.

> *Marching from Henry overland,*
> *And joined by a force up the Cumberland sent*
> *(Some thirty thousand the command),*
> *On Wednesday a good position won—*
> *Began the siege of Donelson.*

Does 'IMPORTANT' rhyme with 'Grant'? Aurally, not quite, but visually, very much so. And in both cases it rhymes better than '*sent*', which is the partner ordained by the standard practice of alternating rhymes. Just so, '*overland*' and '*command*' look like they rhyme, and stand in the right places, but both rhyme almost as well with '*Grant*'. Altogether, three of the first four rhyme words share the 'an' of 'IMPORTANT', and all four go vowel, n, hard consonant. It would be easy to miss these moments of visual rhyme, but even if they are only glimpsed, they begin to train the reader to expect likeness in strange places. The second move from frame to bulletin performs a similar trick:

> Washed by the storm till the paper grew
> Every shade of a streaky blue,
> That bulletin stood. The next day brought
> A second.
>
>   LATER FROM THE FORT.
> *Grant's investment is complete—*

Here, 'brought' definitely rhymes with 'FORT'. Melville yokes the frame and the transcription together with rhyme, and thus shows that they are one and the same thing: they are both poem, and any illusion of a shift in register is just that – an illusion. Running alongside this are a host of rhymes-on-names: 'IMPORTANT/Grant', 'big gun/Morrison', and, of course, the regular rhyming of 'Donselson'. Melville seems determined to avoid settling on a rhyme sound for the key word of his poem. It is variably rhymed with 'won', 'upon', 'stone', and perhaps even 'morn'. Eye-rhyme seems to take precedence, as if the possibility of recitation is only at the very back of Melville's mind.

This unpicking of rhyme from sound reaches its giddy height a short way into the poem:

> *Our ranks once out of range, a blast*
> * Of shrapnel and quick shell*
> *Burst on the rebel horde, still massed,*
> * Scattering them pell-mell.*
> *(This fighting—judging what we read—*

> *Both charge and countercharge,*
> *Would seem but Thursday's told at large,*
> *Before in brief reported.—Ed.)*

With its unassuming monosyllables, Melville's rhyme of '*read/—Ed.*' is funnier than almost all of Byron's reaching rhymes. And at the same time, it isn't a rhyme at all. No one would ever *say* '*—Ed.*' while reading aloud from a newspaper. They would say 'editor' or 'by the editor'. '*—Ed.*' is a word, or a bit of a word, which lives its entire life on the page. Rhyme is a likeness in word sound, so surely a word that is never sounded cannot be a rhyme. This is something of the same conundrum Anne Ferry identifies in Marianne Moore's habit of putting small words alone on a line, and then rhyming them. As Ferry notes, when we are faced with lines containing only 'those,' 'and,' 'a,' or 'to', 'we see only letters making a word', and thus 'may hardly be aware of its sound because the echo that calls attention to it takes so long to be heard'.[87] So, too, with '*—Ed.*' The chime of sense between '*read/—Ed.*' is strong (what is an editor if not someone who reads things), but it is very hard to hold it in the head as a rhyme of sound. It is quite easy, meanwhile, to see '*—Ed.*' as a near-perfect visual rhyme of the characters that immediately precede it: the '*ed.*' of '*reported.*'

By turning rhyme into a visual phenomenon, Melville emphasises that we are not overhearing but over-reading – both reading over-the-shoulder and reading too hard. And by pulling our attention towards the page and its weird coincidences, Melville ensures he is not pretending overt knowledge of anything beyond that page. 'Donelson', with its rich texture of report and account, shows a poet immersed in his political moment but determined not to act outside the bounds of his poem. As Williams and Bevis write of Lear, *Battle-Pieces* is 'both somehow its own world, and inseparably embedded in the world of everything that is the case'.[88] One final example from 'Donelson' distils this facility with historical nonsense. In the midst of the poem, a 'cross patriot' complains from the throng that the siege will 'drag along—drag along'. The only description we get of this cantankerous figure comes in two dense lines:

> His battered umbrella like an ambulance-cover
> Riddled with bullet-holes, spattered all over.

Here we get more of Melville's hanging participles, which let the lines read in two directions. First: his battered umbrella, like an ambulance-cover riddled with bullet-holes, was spattered all

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[87] Ferry, p.440.
[88] Williams and Bevis, p.7.

over. But at the same time: his battered umbrella (like an ambulance-cover) was riddled with bullet-holes, and spattered all over. There is not quite enough punctuation to fix the former sense, and so the latter lives on, giving us a Lear-ish picture of a man holding an umbrella torn to shreds by small-arms fire. It is easy for the senses to shift, because there is so much else going on in the lines to catch our attention. They are spattered with small likenesses. The end-rhyme of 'cover/over' is possibly the least forthright parallel in play; it is a rhyme which pulls away from rhyme by simply dropping a letter from the first word. The words match, but don't chime. Spotting the other moments of matching quickly turns to a game. There's the (better) rhyme of 'battered' and 'spattered'. There are the matching hyphenated compounds: 'ambulance-cover' and 'bullet-holes'. There's the extra partner to the end rhymes in 'umbrella […] cover/over'. And then there's the glut of doubled letters: tt ll dd ll tt ll. In her reading of Dickinson's 'A narrow Fellow in the Grass', Susan Stewart refers to doubled letters as 'rhymes'.[89] And why not? In a poem like 'Donelson' which has us looking hard at words, there is not all that much distance between the doubled letters and the more permitted rhyme of 'cover/over'. Both do the same thing twice.

The lines describing the Lear-ish 'cross patriot' are a playing-up of poetic resources, and do just a bit too much of everything. They take the clichés of verse, and overuse them until they break, leaving us with nonsense on our hands. The early reviews of *Battle-Pieces* noticed this, and deemed it a lack of skill by a writer who should have stuck to drip-feeding clichés to his readership via nautical prose romances. Howells cut to the bone in his review, and accused Melville of 'shedding, not words and blood, but words alone'.[90] I propose one way to rephrase this: Melville as poet wrote poems as poems.

III. Playing It Safe

Some poets could not risk riskiness. As rhyme became increasingly demarcated and schematised in the mid to late nineteenth century, a poet's ability to rhyme interestingly yet unobtrusively became an easy way to measure their work.[91] By the time Melville came to publish *Battle-Pieces* he had already lost the favour of his public, and so there was not much at stake in the games he

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[89] Susan Stewart, 'Rhyme and Freedom', *The Sound of Poetry and the Poetry of Sound*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.29-48, p.47.

[90] Howells, '*Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*', p.252.

[91] For more on this, see Adam Mazel, 'The Work and Play of Rhyme in Victorian Verse Cultures, 1850-1900' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 2014).

played with rhyme. *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *The Confidence-Man* (1857) were much weirder novels than *Battle-Pieces* was poetry; Melville had made the charge into strange literary territory before the Civil War, and *Battle-Pieces* just reinforced his position. For other poets, though, bad rhyme risked everything. I want now to investigate Laura Redden and her 1864 volume, *Idyls of Battle and Poems of the Rebellion*.[92] Redden was born in 1839 and grew up in Missouri. At the age of 11, she lost all her hearing during a bout of meningitis. She was educated at the Missouri Institute for the Deaf, and went on to write for a number of Missouri periodicals. At the outbreak of the Civil War, she was sent to Washington, D.C. to report for the *St. Louis Republican*.[93] In 1864 she published *Idyls of Battle*, a collection of lyrical war poems with a subscriber list headed by Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant. The poems do not step out of line. They are almost universally restrained, and move carefully through the familiar registers of Civil War verse: rallying cry, ode to Generals, battle ballad, and elegy for fallen loves. They are also restrained in form. Staid rhyme schemes are established and adhered to, and very few individual rhymes draw attention to themselves. While the volume was one of the first to be published with the Civil War as its only subject, it is not different in kind to the swathes of newspaper verse which had preceded it. *Idyls of Battle* is, at heart, a clichéd volume of poetry.

Christopher Ricks, with his lightest of heavy hands, has put forth what seems like the last word on cliché: '[t]o use a cliché is to take a risk. But then nothing is more dangerous than to play it safe'.[94] This decree emerges from some fine readings of twentieth-century poets, but starts to fray at the edges when carried back into the nineteenth century. Consider, for example, that the first OED entry for 'cliché' as 'trite expression' is from 1881; the first adjectival use is entered as 1895. Certainly there were other words available to describe predictable forms, but the pejorative payload of 'cliché' was not yet to hand. Ricks deems clichés risky via a critical orthodoxy in which surprise is a sacred quality. My own prior arguments are hardly heretical in this regard, and in proposing that Melville's chaotic rhymes allow him to avoid pretending to an impossible knowledge of war, I risk implying that verse like Redden's *does* pretend to this knowledge, and is thus a kind of propaganda. This is not always the case. For Redden cliché was the only course of action: her poems had to be safe in order to save face. Inevitably, as a deaf writer in the public

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[92] Redden published under various names. Born Laura Catherine Redden, she wrote much of her work with the penname 'Howard Glyndon', and married to become Laura Redden Searing. She later divorced Searing, though, so 'Laura Redden' remains the common link, and the name I will use. Redden normally printed her real name under penname on title pages; Glyndon appears to be more of a character than a disguise.

[93] For further biographical detail, see Judy Yaeger Jones and Jane E. Vallier, ed., *Sweet Bells Jangled: Laura Redden Searing, A Deaf Poet Restored* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2003).

[94] Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*, p.362.

eye, and the public ear, Redden's verse would be viewed as a test case for whether deaf people could write poetry 'correctly', and thus whether they inhabited the same artistic and moral plane as the hearing population.[95] Whereas Melville risked only his own reputation as poet by pushing rhyme towards nonsense, Redden would have risked something much larger if she had conducted similar experiments with rhyme: the artistic reputation of the deaf population. Her poetry had to adhere to conventional rules in order to persuade readers that it was poetry at all. She thus followed in the footsteps of other deaf poets like John Carlin and John Burnet, contributing to a corpus of work that would, at the end of the century, be employed as literal evidence in support of deaf culture.[96]

In this section I will read *Idyls of Battle* and its rhymes with two different modes of attention. To begin with, I will take Redden's rhymes as they come, without her disability as lens. While this reading is productive, and is justified in the sense that Redden never considered herself as writing a 'deaf poetry', there is ultimately more to be gained, I believe, from keeping Redden's disability at stake. I will thus go on to read Redden's rhyming as a form of resistance to a culture in which deafness was, without any doubt, a 'category of oppression'.[97] This is not to say I will go looking in *Idyls of Battle* for personal *accounts* of her disability. Alice Hall in *Literature and Disability* (2016) holds up Georgina Kleege's objection to treating authors with disabilities as 'native informants', and prompts us instead to forefront the 'aesthetic qualities and ethical complexities' of the texts in question.[98] I agree, and follow Hall's advice to take up deafness as 'an active critical position', rather than a mere object of study. I believe that staying alert to Redden's rhymes will inevitably lead us to question some of the traditional critical tactics we bring to the reading of lyric poetry in general. To put it starkly: how can we adhere to a lyric theory founded on the lyric poem as an acoustic object if that theory excludes or fails to account for a significant subset of lyric poets? The readings in this section lead us to another option, which is a version of Lennard Davis's 'deafened moment': a critical position which remains aware of reading as 'a process that does not require hearing or speaking'.[99] Davis himself does not grapple with poetry in his study, and the absence is telling. It is as if he worried that a medium so closely associated with sound, at least

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[95] I will refer to Redden as 'deaf' as opposed to 'Deaf'. While Redden was a part of communities centred on deafness, such as the Missouri Institute for the Deaf, the concept of 'deaf culture' was not cemented until 1965, and capitalising 'Deaf' would be an anachronism. In this regard, I follow Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.12. See also Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), p.234.

[96] Jennifer Esmail, 'The Power of Deaf Poetry: The Exhibition of Literacy and the Nineteenth-Century Sign Language Debates', *Sign Language Studies*, 8(4) (2008), 348-368.

[97] Lennard J. Davis, p.xix.

[98] Alice Hall, *Literature and Disability* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.14.

[99] Lennard J. Davis, p.4.

compared to the novel, would invalidate his argument. Below I argue: why should it? After laying out Redden's tactics for rhyming without sound, I propose that her work casts suspicion on any fundamental understanding of lyric poetry as a sound technology. The noises of a Civil War battle cannot be stored in a poem. As Davis remarks: '[w]riters write in silence; readers read in silence'.[100] We should be cautious in making verse an exception to this fact.

Putting aside for a moment, then, Redden's inescapable role as deaf spokesperson, we can consider what can happen within a poem that rhymes predictably, or, as Creaser might put it, latently. The Civil War made its own contribution to the corpus of stock English rhymes. A particularly tacky example – in both senses – is the rhyme of 'sod/God', or vice versa. It is a bad Civil War rhyme par excellence. Both Union and Confederate poets tried to write God onto their side, but were hampered by the lack of resonant rhymes. Like 'love', 'God' is one of those little-big English words that somehow avoid most of the embarrassing business of rhyming. The bulk of the rhymes for God are trivial, and go unused: 'nod', 'plod', 'pod'. There's also 'rod', which has been made to bear some weight, and 'odd', which feels like a tiny blasphemy. 'Sod', though, promised to do extra work for Civil War poets. The War was a war over land: over which land had which laws, and who got to make them. If God is on your sod, it means he isn't over there on the other side's. The rhyme, though, is an awful clang. As a synonym for land, it does badly, carrying too much horticultural and not enough patriotic sense. And more to the point, it is so obviously a rhyme. There's no way 'sod' could end up in a poem *except* as a rhyme for God. Far from being latent, the rhyme draws attention to itself by chiming so obviously. This is cliché in its weakest workings: we can see it coming, and when it arrives it brings nothing with it but still takes up more than its fair share of space.

Redden is not afraid of clichéd rhymes, but instead of presenting them as if her reader won't notice, she uses them to think about repetition. 'The Snow in October' investigates the properties of already and again.[101] It is made up of fourteen short-meter stanzas, divided into three groups. The first eleven stanzas are an elegy for a lover who fell in battle and is buried 'away to the West'. The stanzas imagine the snow falling on the grave, and break into lament: 'Moan, moan aloud, / O desolate heart of mine! / But spoken words can never give vent / To an agony like to thine'. This first part concludes with a stanza wrapped up in itself:

> The snow is falling abroad,

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[100] Davis, p.117.
[101] *Idyls of Battle*, p.63.

> Silently, soft and slow,
> But the tears that rain from despairing eyes
> Fall faster than the snow!
> (41-44)

There is nothing about the rhyme of 'slow/snow' which immediately comes across as inventive. Redden is quite possibly thinking about Longfellow's 'Snow-flakes', which ends its first stanza: 'Silent, and soft, and slow / Descends the snow'. 'Snow-flakes' had been published in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863) the year before *Idyls of Battle* and was given war-weight by its position next to 'The Cumberland'.[102] An inverted version of the rhyme, 'snow/slow', is also the first rhyme in Tennyson's 'The Death of the Old Year'. I will show later that mimicking Tennyson's rhymes was one of Redden's poetic survival tactics, but for the moment I point out the similarity only to suggest that the average reader wouldn't have been in any way surprised by the rhyme. Indeed, even if the reader had never come across Tennyson or Longfellow, the rhyme is predictable, because Redden tells us it is going to happen. By beginning the stanza with 'The snow', Redden has presented by the end of line two all the material for the rhyme we don't expect to be concluded until line four: the pairing is old hat before the stanza has had time to put it on. Enveloped by snow, the stanza's apparently binary comparison between the snow and the 'tears that rain' gets muddled and muffled. The tears might fall faster, but there's more snow than tears. It is foreground and background.

The three stanzas forming the next group show Redden finding reconciliation in thoughts of God and heaven: the white of the snow becomes the white of the 'Great White Throne / And the shining robes they wear'. The final part of the poem is made up of only one stanza, and repeats the rhyme of 'slow/snow':

> The snow is falling abroad,
> Tenderly, soft and slow;
> And the quiet throbs of my heart keep time
> To the musical fall of the snow!
> (57-60)

Here, the out-of-joint comparison has been replaced by a measured keeping-time. Redden discovers that the snow, in its steadiness, has been a potential source of solace all along, and is now able to settle in with it. Her heart rises as the snow falls. Redden has an easy facility with meter, and the stanza keeps its own steady time, with the rhyme of 'slow/snow' positioned like

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[102] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), p.218.

the clicks of a metronome. The words have something of the quality of 'tick/tock' – a variation in sound unreal but universally felt. Her discovery that her heart can keep time with the snow is really a discovery of her own rhyme, which was already ticking along.

The rhyme certainly seems to form something of a mantra for Redden. Shortly after 'The Snow in October' comes another wintering poem, 'The Snow at Fredericksburg', which has the same words in its head:

> Drift over the slopes of the sunrise land,
>   O wonderful, wonderful snow!
> Oh, pure as the breast of a virgin saint!
>   Drift tenderly, soft, and slow […]
>   (1-4)[103]

By the time we reach this second poem, the rhyme has already become a cliché within the confines of the collection. The apostrophe which opens 'The Snow at Fredericksburg' is addressed to a known source of redemption, and when Redden repeats 'tenderly, soft, and slow' verbatim from her earlier piece, the words come across like the set form of an invocation. These are the terms by which snow's cleansing powers are got at. Here, again, Redden pre-empts the rhyme: 'slopes' chimes with 'slow' and ensures that this word shape comes to pattern the stanza. The snow does slightly different things in Fredericksburg than it did in October. It puts Redden in mind of 'the shriven souls, / And their mantles of righteousness', but also of 'the bridal veil / That will never be worn by the drooping girl' (39-40, 26-27). The dress of the bride doomed to wait forever for her groom feels like a somewhat threadbare image, but while it is a cliché, the snow it emerges from is not. The snow is, rather, in its blankness, the stuff clichés are printed on, as in the original meaning of cliché as a plate prepared for stereotyping. Redden thus plays it safe within these two poems, cycling a poetic figure, or fragment of a figure, for the value of the predictable in the face of sudden loss. She makes no attempt to hide the fact that certain poetic tactics are fated to return over and again in wartime, as typified in the returning rhyme of her two snow poems. Rather than useless cliché, though, on which we fall back only for it fly out from beneath us, the rhyme of slow/snow and snow/slow becomes something that can be invoked, called up as a route into a new crisis. Within *Idyls of Battle*, the rhyme dares little but achieves much.

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[103] *Idyls of Battle*, p.85.

Not every predictable Civil War rhyme, then, was predictably thin. This encounter with *Idyls of Battle* deliberately avoids taking account of Redden's hearing loss, in order to show that her rhymes respond perfectly well to traditional critical tactics. Although such a reading could be sustained, and it would indeed be wrong to pigeon-hole Redden as a 'deaf poet', it would be a greater disservice to ignore the hostility she faced from a society in which deafness and incomprehension were interchangeable terms. Any attempt by a deaf poet to comprehend the Civil War through verse was doomed to be waylaid by a widespread equation of deafness, unknowing and the unknowable. Christopher Krentz finds that this equation was buried deep in the literary language of nineteenth-century America, proposing that a 'hearing line' was in play throughout the period.[104] Taking the shape of his argument from W. E. Du Bois's colour line, and Toni Morrison's concept of literary whiteness, Krentz argues that hearing authors used deafness to 'negotiate their own identities as hearing people'.[105] The binary that emerges from this negotiation is one of rationality against the unfathomable. He finds that the deaf characters in Melville's novels 'stand at the limits of knowing, serving as meditative figures on the threshold of difference'.[106] Deafness, for Melville, becomes a figure for the oracular, the unknown country beyond earthly knowledge. While this is inherently fetishistic and othering, it is still one of the more positive manifestations of the hearing line in the nineteenth century. Outside of the complexities of works like *Moby-Dick* and *The Confidence-Man*, deafness was viewed not as a transcending of knowledge, but as a falling short.

This stemmed from a long-lived biblical interpretation, or, rather, misinterpretation. Paul, in Romans 10:17, declares that 'faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. In a Christian nation with a historical emphasis on the sermon as the epicentre of religious education, deaf people were thus judged as 'unredeemable', unable to hear the Gospel and thus be saved. From this scriptural crux, nineteenth-century America became dominated by an 'oralist ideology', which, Esmail writes, 'claimed that, without speech, deaf people would be unsuccessful with language and thus unsuccessful in their lives'.[107] Douglas Baynton proposes an alternative version of events, in which the ascendance of oralism was tied to the drive towards national unity after the Civil War. For a nation to cohere, it had to speak one language, and the manual education of the deaf was thus ripe for suppression. In Baynton's reckoning, this nationalism replaced an emphasis on a culture united in Christianity, within which sign language had provided a valid

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[104] Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[105] Krentz, p.66.
[106] Krentz, p.100.
[107] Esmail, 'The Power of Deaf Poetry', p.350.

means of arriving at spiritual maturity.[108] What is peculiar about both these interpretations, though, is the apparent side-lining of written language. For Christian manualists, it was sign, not writing, that would permit religious comprehension. And for the oralist hegemony, the ability to *write* English seemingly did not make up for the inability to speak it. Davis suggests that writing is now aligned closely with speech. The act of writing, he argues, is all too often 'given the qualities of sonic duration'.[109] This was not so much the case in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which Davis argues saw the deaf person become the 'totemic representation' of a newly and widely literate public.[110] As discourse moved to print, so the 'hearing person became deaf'. But this notion beaches itself upon the pervasive scepticism towards deaf poetry. If deaf people were judged and judged themselves unable or unlikely to become poets, it was because poetry was held, although written, to be a sound art. There was thus a seemingly unsolved conundrum as to how writing got onto and off the page: in sound or without it?

Within the deaf community and the field of deaf education at the time of Redden's writing, these problems were the subject of ongoing, intense debate. A snapshot of this debate can be taken from a back-and-forth series of articles published in the *American Annals of the Deaf* during 1858. Redden, recently graduated from the Missouri Institute for the Deaf, had her first publications in the *Annals* the same year. The valedictory poem she had written for her graduating class was printed in the July issue, along with her short address, 'A Few Words about the Deaf and Dumb'. The address opens on a pessimistic note, reiterating the prevailing dismissal of deaf people as 'surrounded by a blank silence, with no means of communicating or receiving abstract ideas, with a language barely sufficient for the common wants of nature, and with no idea of God'.[111] This prejudice, for Redden at this time, was entirely internalised. It is, she declares, 'no fancy picture of my own painting, it is *stern reality*'. Literature, in particular, she marks as off-limits:

> There are but few instances of the deaf and deaf-dumb having attained literary eminence. It must be partly because the mind, in most cases, does not rise above the common level; and partly because the language of signs, from its peculiar structure, disqualifies them for expressing their thoughts in written language. How could we expect an English poet to excel in writing *French* rhymes?[112]

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108 Baynton, p.15.
109 Davis, p.100.
110 Davis, p.62.
111 Laura Redden, 'A Few Words about the Deaf and Dumb', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 10(3) (1858), 177-181, p.177.
112 Redden, 'A Few Words about the Deaf and Dumb', p.179.

Redden tempers this claim by drawing a distinction between 'semi-mutes' and 'those who are born deaf': the former have 'an immense advantage', as they are able to retain a memory of the sound of English. But the wider outlook for the deaf poet, as painted by this address, is bleak. Written language is put forward as a sound medium, and is thus inaccessible to those for whom 'all is dead silence'. *Idyls of Battle* is, of course, counter-evidence to Redden's own youthful lament, and suggests that the six years she spent as reporter and poet leading up to its publication were time enough to find tactics with which to overcome any perceived disqualification from written expression.

I will analyse these tactics below, but would first like to propose that they were predicted in articles published in the *Annals* alongside Redden's. Moving in impassioned eddies around her sombre address was a debate as to whether the deaf were in fact doomed to the inferior relationship with writing she describes. The 1858 articles were a flare up of an ongoing exchange, the key members of whom were J. A. Jacobs, principal of the Kentucky Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, the writer and poet J. R. Burnet, and Harvey Peet, president of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. In the April 1858 issue, Jacobs attempts to correct some 'misrepresentations' of his stance on deaf education.[113] He quotes at length from a speech Harvey Peet gave at a 'recent convention in Staunton', in which Peet suggested Jacobs is mistaken in his promotion of fingerspelling, or 'methodical signs' as key to the teaching of written English to deaf pupils, and is equally mistaken in his shunning of 'colloquial signs' in his explanations of written sentences. Jacobs rebuts that his stance is not at all so cut and dried, and that Peet has wilfully stripped it of nuance. He doubles down, though, on his belief that '*Written* words are the written representation of spoken *words* to speaking persons, and of signs […] to the mute'.[114]

In the next issue, published in July, Harvey Peet came back with a note titled 'Signs unnecessary as "the representation of words"'. Peet argues that Jacob's position is absurd, and that written words act on non-hearing readers not as a representation of signs, but as 'the direct signs of ideas'.[115] He suggests that the deaf have a unique ability to retain a memory of a word's sense which is linked to its visual form, and not to its correspondence with an oral or manual sign, however counterintuitive that might seem:

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[113] J. A. Jacobs, 'Misrepresentations Corrected', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 10(2) (1858), 65-70.
[114] J. A. Jacobs, 'Misrepresentations Corrected', p.67.
[115] Harvey Peet, 'Signs unnecessary as the 'representation of ideas', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 10(3) (1858), 129-136, p.132.

> If they [people with hearing loss] can grasp, repeat and combine the visible forms of words independently of any necessary association with another order of signs, and we can not do so, evidently *our* experience can not be cited in limitation of their mental faculties, so far as written words are concerned.[116]

Jacobs rebuts this directly in the subsequent October issue, where he protests that while words as visual objects might indeed deliver ideas directly in the absence of sound, once that sound is made known, the reader 'will use that as his instrument of thought […] and lay aside the "cumbrous" mode of thinking in the objects themselves, and their written names'.[117] So, too, for sign language in place of sound. John Burnet also enters the argument in this issue and sets up his own stance in an article titled 'Under what Forms do Deaf-Mutes apprehend Words?'. Burnet proposes that no reader, hearing or non-hearing, takes in words as units. Hearing readers take them in as syllables, while non-hearing readers take them in as 'the written representation of a certain combination of [manually-signed] letters'.[118] He thus concurs with Jacobs. The editor of the *Annals*, Samuel Porter, could not even wait until the next issue to weigh in on this, and appended a note to Burnet's article, several times its length, arguing that just the opposite is true:

> In the case of persons of ordinary education and reading habits, we believe that in the process of reading, though the written word suggests the sound or the organic movement of the spoken word, yet the same written word does itself suggest the thought directly, and that, as soon as, and we think, even before, the mental repetition of the spoken word.[119]

If this is the case, hearing and non-hearing readers *share* this instant movement from 'written word' to 'thought'.

The intense back-and-forth of this argument across only three issues of the *Annals* shows how fundamental it was to the practice of deaf education, and how far from agreement deaf educators found themselves. While its implications for poetry did not take up much print-space in 1858, some resonances can be recovered and used to interrogate our own assumptions about lyric. The driving force behind Peet and Porter's side of the argument is that a deaf reader does not comprehend less of a text because they cannot replay the sounds of the words in their heads. Both writers minimise what we might now call subvocalization in order to avoid reinforcing a

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[116] Peet, 'Signs unnecessary', p.132.
[117] J. A. Jacobs, 'A Sufficient Admission', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 10(4) (1858), 219-227.
[118] J. R. Burnet, 'Under what Forms do Deaf-Mutes apprehend Words?', *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 10(4) (1858), 228-241.
[119] Samuel Porter, note to J. R. Burnet, 'Under what Forms', p.235.

distinction between literate, moral hearing people, and their illiterate, amoral deaf counterparts. Does a lyric theory in which 'sound is the elixir of poetry' reopen this gulf?[120] Is there any way to detach lyric from sound, and instead encounter it via Davis's deafened moment? If so, what does this suggest about not just the sound of words, but the words of sound? Studying Redden's *Idyls of Battle* as the work of a poet conscious of the arguments over how deaf people encounter written language opens up potential routes into these questions. Redden's project as a deaf poet in the midst of this debate was twofold, and bespeaks a doubleness similar to the double consciousness W. E. Du Bois proposed in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).[121] In order to prove herself on an equal literate and moral standing with the hearing population, Redden was compelled to write poems which adhered to the accepted standards of verse; she had to ensure her poems sounded right. But she simultaneously managed to begin the work of unpicking her poetry from the oral hegemony, and started to enquire whether lyric could be experienced as a textual, deafened phenomenon.

The first of these projects – making her poems sound right – was by far the easier. Both rhyme and meter rely on patterns, and patterns can be replicated. Consider 'The Story of Sumter', Redden's poem on the War's origins written from its bloody midst:

> Over sea and over city slowly crept the sullen morn,
> All the splendor of its dawning by a growing shadow curst;
> And the sunless sky that sphered us nursed a tempest yet unborn,
> But we waited on the Battery for another storm to burst.
>
> <div align="right">(1-4)[122]</div>

The poem is in trochaic octameter, a scheme which declares its own difficulty. Each line contains eight beats, enough for a couplet under different circumstances, and thus feels like its own contained performance. And because so few poems use the meter, each new entry to the trochaic octameter canon is always partly in conversation with its precedents. The closest American cousin to Redden's poem would be Poe's 'The Raven', but in this case I believe Tennyson looms larger. 'The Story of Sumter' comes after two poems in abba tetrameter stanzas: 'De Profundis', and 'For the Stricken', the latter subtitled 'In Memoriam'. Tennyson has already made himself known, then, when Redden picks up the meter of 'Locksley Hall':

> Comrades, leave me here a little, while as yet 't is early morn:
> Leave me here, and when you want me, sound upon the bugle-horn.

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[120] Clark, p.7.

[121] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.8.

[122] *Idyls of Battle*, p.19.

> 'T is the place, and all around it, as of old, the curlews call,
> Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall;
>
> (1-4) [123]

Redden takes her first rhyme-word, 'morn', from Tennyson, and part of its partner, if we collapse 'bugle-horn' down to '-born'. Is there any coincidence in play beyond this borrowed rhyme and meter? While the earlier poems, 'De Profundis' and 'For the Stricken', are in a clear conversation about elegy with Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, it is harder to tune in to any sustained thematic discussion between 'The Story of Sumter' and 'Locksley Hall'. Certainly, Redden's splitting of her poem into sections titled 'Then' and 'Now' squares up with Tennyson's interest in returning, but the equation of military fort and childhood home is quite lopsided. The overwhelming similarity is formal, and can be read as a version of the badging Jarvis finds so frustrating in contemporary poetry. For Jarvis, poems which use clear rhyme schemes to declare something about themselves contribute to a 'falling-silent' of rhyme. [124] Redden's borrowing from Tennyson prises this notion apart. By using a rhyme scheme, and indeed a specific pair of rhyme words, which her readers might recognise from the British poet laureate, Redden proves that she is listening, and is able to hear and then replicate the sound of verse. It is hard to play it any safer than copying a rhyme word, but it was a fine tactic for mitigating the risk of publishing which hovered over a writer made proxy-representative for deaf personhood.

The success of the tactic is evidenced by the small collection of reviews of *Idyls of Battle* I have been able to locate. The *New York Evening Post* declared that Redden's poems were 'happily conceived and wrought up with considerable artistic skill'. [125] The *United States Service Magazine* praised Redden's 'technical merits' and 'gift of language', writing that 'her English is excellent; pure, nervous, often passionate, almost always musical'. [126] One reviewer, though, accused her of cliché: 'In versification, too, Miss Redden is a copyist of current forms. There is no originality in either the substance or manner of her writings'. [127] I would note here that we need only look back to the reviews of *Battle-Pieces* to see what kind of response was waiting for poems which made a show of their 'originality'. By taking up canonical rhyme schemes, and by recirculating particular rhymes, Redden ensured *Idyls of Battle* was palatable to the kind of reviewer and reader on the

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[123] *Tennyson's Poetry,* p.115.
[124] Jarvis, 'Why Rhyme Pleases', p.19.
[125] 'Advertisement', *New York Evening Post*, 10 November 1864, p.2.
[126] 'Literary Intelligence', *United States Service Magazine,* 2(6) (1864), 571-576, p.576.
[127] 'New Publications', *Albion*, 43(20), 20 May 1865, p.237.

lookout for technical skill and potentially ready to pounce on a lack thereof as confirmation that deaf people did not have ready access to the acoustic faculties needed to write verse.

Taking up 'Locksley Hall' as an intertext is a bravura move in this attempt at silencing. Tennyson, the possessor of that 'finest ear', is always inventing and playing aural games in his poems, and 'Locksley Hall' is no exception.[128] He leans, for example, on the sound of his opening rhyme word, 'morn', in a later line:

> Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the copses ring,
> (35)

In the elegiac atmosphere of the poem, the 'or' sound of 'morning' and 'moorland' cascades into 'copses', turning it into 'corpses'. This then makes 'mourning' of 'morning'. The question of how we might hear a corpse 'ring' is only as odd as how we might hear a copse ring. While the graveyard origin of the phrase 'dead ringer' is contested, Tennyson wrote his poem during the ongoing panic over premature burial, as typified by Poe's 1844 story of that name, and as mitigated by the installing of bells into coffins.[129] This one line, then, uses aural play to overlay a fear of death on a scene of young love, thickening the poem's proleptic texture. It would not be absurd, though, to point out that this play is present even in a silent, non-subvocalised reading. The double presence of 'or' in 'morning' and 'moorland' might lead to a visual hallucination of an 'r' in 'copses'. The rogue letter also presses in on 'copses' via 'hear' and 'ring'. Seeing is as important as hearing, or hear-ring.

Redden's borrowing in 'The Story of Sumter' also speaks to a much wider project of deafened versifying. The corpus of English poetry is a repository of rhymes, 'an arsenal of specific lexical pairings', and this arsenal is available to deaf poets because rhyme announces when it's happening.[130] As Clive Scott remarks, rhyme 'derives its metrical/rhythmic significance from its line-terminal position', and, conversely, 'a line-ending identifies any perceived consonance of sounds as rhyme'.[131] Rhyme is almost entirely about location, and drags sound along for the ride. Each poem in any kind of predictable rhyme scheme immediately sets about telling its reader which words are supposed to rhyme. Through a combination of positioning and like-spellings, a deaf reader would thus be perfectly able to identify even looser rhymes. Consider, for example,

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[128] T. S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', *Selected Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964) pp.286-295, p.286.
[129] Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Premature Burial', *Dollar Newspaper*, 2(28), 31 July 1844, p.1.
[130] Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme*, p.2.
[131] Clive Scott, 'French and English Rhymes Compared', *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 10(2) (1992), 121-156, p.123.

the rhymes in 'The Story of Sumter'. Coming at the end of alternating eight-beat lines, the rhymes are far apart in time, and in the poem as performed they might slip the ear. But the line indentation in *Idyls of Battle* as it was printed ensures the rhymes fall in a regular visual pattern and thus arrive easily to the eye. Scott writes of the 'significant interval which creates the space in which words may rhyme or may positively resist rhyming'.[132] Space, not time. As long as we know where to look, rhyme can do most of its work.

The use of the canon of poetry in English as a kind of rhyming dictionary might even help rejuvenate rhyming dictionaries as such. Typically, rhyming dictionaries are the butt of the joke for poetics; they are used to invoke a predictable, formulaic kind of verse, and thus seem to fly in the face of the Wimsattian stance on rhyme. A rhyming dictionary, though, orders its rhymes without any regard to sense, and so can easily lead to the play of likeness against unlikeness which Wimsatt views as rhyme's richest function. While there is no evidence that Redden used a rhyming dictionary, other deaf poets certainly did. John Carlin recounts his attempts to learn versification without sound:

> […] when I made a professional sojourn at Springfield, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1842, I had the good fortune to become acquainted with the Rev. Dr. W. B. O. Peabody […] He soon saw my deficiency in the knowledge of regular rhythm, and, after careful reflection, he definitely opened my eyes to the right way to my goal, by directing me to study Walker's *Pronouncing Dictionary,* and also his *Rhyming Dictionary*, which contains all the fundamental principles of poetry.[133]

As Carlin's winking metaphor of 'opened my eyes to the right way' hints, he felt it possible to write rhymed verse with only a visual, and thus silent, knowledge of rhyme. If, as Scott suggests, a reader can recognise rhyme by its position, and a poet can find rhymes in a dictionary, or in other poems, suddenly an entire poetic transaction becomes possible in which sound plays no significant role.

Is this silencing of verse a quirk of poetic history, rooted in a specific culture which saw stringent rules for versification clashing against the fight for deaf personhood? Or does it carry sustained implications for lyric? A pair of critics, Jessica Luck and Jennifer Esmail, have addressed this question in recent years. Luck describes the quieting of verse by deaf poets as 'lyric

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[132] Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme*, p.3.
[133] Quoted in Edward Gallaudet, 'The Poetry of the Deaf', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 29(3) (1884), 200-222, p.202.

underheard'.[134] In her article on Redden, she takes the most worn-smooth of lyric theory's metaphors – John Stuart Mill's notion of lyric as a private utterance overheard – and gives it a new edge:

> [Redden's] poems reconstitute the lyric itself as something written and read, not spoken and heard. The silent space of the page becomes the neutral territory on which oralist and manualist thinkers, hearing and deaf readers can meet as equals.[135]

Luck takes on the figure of apostrophe, and argues that Redden's poems show it up as a *printed* phenomenon, acting on its own terms divorced from oral recitation. This is entirely convincing, and confirms that only a few years after her pessimistic valedictory address Redden was publishing poetry which acted as a contribution to the other side of the debate: poetic language does not need to function by conjuring up the spoken voice, but can work silently on the page. It is odd, then, that after this thesis statement Luck does not leave the metaphor of voice behind, and instead runs into trouble by attempting to carry it out of its oral context. She finds that Redden's poems put forth traditional modes of poetic address, but that 'these poems continually undercut the notion that we are "overhearing" these acts of address or that the texts require a spoken voice or hearing listener at all'.[136] The 'act of silent reading', she writes 'requires only the eyes to pass over the words and an inner voice that attempts to conjure what Eric Griffiths calls the "ideal body" or "plausible voice" behind those words'. 'Inner voice' is not quite pliable enough, as a concept, though, and can never entirely escape its roots in oralism: it is a metaphor reliant on its outward counterpart. Luck later refers to Redden's poems functioning via 'the interplay of eye and inner ear that constitutes the underheard printed voice of the lyric'.[137] I believe we need to be suspicious about even an appeal to the 'inner ear', as it risks characterising the deaf experience as a shift from sound outside the head to sound within it, instead of acknowledging that sound might not happen at all.[138]

Jennifer Esmail begins her work on deaf poetry in the same place as Luck, but moves past the pitfall of 'voice' to new territory which acknowledges the inadequacy of aural language. In her chapter '"Perchance my *Hand* May Touch the Lyre": Deaf Poetry and the Politics of Language', she leaves behind voice, and the sound of words, to consider the words of sound. Esmail

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[134] Jessica Luck, 'Lyric Underheard: The Printed Voice of Laura Catherine Redden Searing', *Legacy*, 30(1) (2013), 62-81.
[135] Luck, p.64.
[136] Luck, 70.
[137] Luck, p.73.
[138] For more on the problem of imposing aural metaphors on deaf experience, see Baynton, p.23.

analyses the widespread subgenre of the 'sounds unheard' poem, and shows that deaf authors emphasised the textual origins of sound words: a variety of sounds, which the poets had never heard, appear in their poems 'according to the conventions of poetic language rather than according to their experiences with hearing'.[139] Just as I have proposed deaf poets were able to find a stock of acceptable rhymes in English poetry, so Esmail proposes a bank of acoustic clichés: roaring oceans, murmuring brooks, sighing wind. These phrases don't contain much of actual sound within them: they rely on eyeing poetic tradition rather than listening to specific soundscapes.

Surely this is where a deaf Civil War verse might reach its limit: how could such a verse go about including any of the new sounds the War brought with it, if they were not a part of the existing acoustic toolbox? In practice, a good deal of the noises of Civil War poetry were stock sounds like those Esmail notes: bugles, drums and cannon were already a part of the acoustic palette of English poetry, and were thus available to Redden as safe clichés. Hence, there is no reason to be surprised when she casually summons them up in 'The Legend of our Victories':

> We all remember SUMTER,
> And the battle's growing hum,—
> How the noise of tinkling cymbals
> Was deadened by the drum.
> (1-4)[140]

Redden's claim that 'We all remember' is a multiple fiction. First, it hides the fact that Redden, as a deaf poet, would not have heard 'the battle's growing hum', the 'tinkling cymbals', or 'the drum'. These sounds, as Esmail suggests, arrive as 'conventions of poetic language' rather than as references to actual acoustic experience. The 'tinkling cymbals', for example, have been lifted from 1 Corinthians 13:8: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal'. Indeed, Redden fixes these sounds even more tightly to the page by rhyming 'hum' and 'drum' with the 'SUM' of 'SUMTER'. If these military noises sound out from the poem, it is only with the sound of words. But the first syllable of Sumter, when spoken out loud, is not 'sum' but 'sump'. The rhyme with 'hum' and 'drum' is in the eye, and on the page.

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[139] Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness*, p.40.
[140] *Idyls of Battle*, p.27.

The second part of the fiction is in the suggestion that *any* of her readers, let alone 'all', heard the hum of battle at Charleston. Of course, only a vanishing minority of Redden's potential readership would have actually been present as earwitnesses to Fort Sumter's fall. The majority would not have *heard* the noises Redden describes, but have heard *of* them. Redden's poem thus shows up the lie of Civil War poetry as a recording technology: poems could only report that certain sounds happened, and could not contain the sounds themselves. This comes into sharper focus when we look at poems which attempted to tune in to the newer, novel sounds of battle. Consider these lines from Melville's 'Lyon':

> There came a sound like the slitting of air
> > By a swift sharp sword —
> A rush of the sound; and the sleek chest broad
> > Of black Orion
> Heaved, and was fixed; the dead mane waved toward Lyon.
> > > > > (31-35)

This stanza appears to show Melville working hard to describe a new sound: the sudden arrival of a rifled musket ball. But the only way he is able to describe it is through its similarity with a more clichéd sound: the 'slitting of air / By a swift sharp sword'. The formulation is novel, but its components are not: 'swift sharp sword' seems an echo of the 'terrible swift sword' which had been rattling around in Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' since 1862. Melville was not by Lyon's side as the bullet struck him, and was only able to conjure the sound of that bullet as a textual event. Or consider even the finest moment of soundscaping that Civil War poetry has to offer: Dickinson's advice to 'Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball'.[141] Minie balls don't go 'whizz'. 'Whizzing' was a word Dickinson took from the newspaper in which the subject of the poem, Frazar Stearns, had his death recorded.[142] It also, perhaps, borrows the 'z' from his name. Words, to repeat John Hollander's oft-neglected dictum, can only sound like other words.[143] And Redden's verse reminds us that often they only look like them. This is the somewhat bathetic upshot of any sustained search for Civil War sounds in poems: there aren't any. Civil War poetry, thus, in its apparent noisiness, draws sharp attention to what Esmail aptly calls 'the limitations of this sound-based theory of poetry'.[144] Just as *Idyls of Battle* puts forward rhyme as a potentially silent affair, so it reminds us that no poem can ever record the sound of war. Any poetic battle-sound can only be resonant as part of the textscape of Civil War poetry.

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[141] *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, ed. Cristanne Miller (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2016), p.303.
[142] See chapter 3, section II.
[143] Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, p.120.
[144] Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness*, p.33.

Esmail proposes 'absurd' as a rich and viable term for deaf poetry. Tracking the word back to its Latin origins, 'from the deaf', she writes that deaf poets wrote absurd verse which 'does not "hear" and does not "speak", that is, it was not derived from orality, nor should it necessarily be forced into aurality'.[145] I would like to suggest that *Idyls of Battle* shows up all Civil War poetry as similarly absurd, whether it is aware of that absurdity or not. Writers like Melville make absurdity, and a broader stance of not-knowing, the base element of their verse-work, while for other poets it is latent, and thus gives the poems an aspect of the oblivious, as they try to hear things they cannot, and try to make sounds in a silent medium. In the closing stanzas of 'The Armies of the Wilderness', which Stanton Garner has accurately labelled the 'crossroad' of *Battle-Pieces*, Melville despairs of rhyme.[146] But he does so in richly rhyming lines:

> None can narrate that strife in the pines,
>   A seal is on it—Sabæan lore!
> Obscure as the wood, the entangled rhyme
>   But hints at the maze of war—
> Vivid glimpses or livid through peopled gloom,
>   And fires which creep and char—
> A riddle of death, of which the slain
>   Sole solvers are.
>
> *Long they withhold the roll*
>   *Of the shroudless dead. It is right;*
> *Not yet can we bear the flare*
>   *Of the funeral light.*
>   (217-228)[147]

Melville's rhyme 'hints at the maze of war' with its own maziness. The route between 'lore/war/char/are' is winding, reliant on the eye as well as the ear. We are led to a dead end by the half-rhyme of 'pines/rhyme', which is not replicated in 'gloom/slain'. But this maze is not in contact with the violence of the poem's subject, which lurks beyond the stanzas. Both are riddles, and both are bewildering, but they do not amount to each other. Where rhyme for Redden was an arbitrary but necessary pattern, for Melville it seems ultimately to have been a delaying tactic: something to do, to play with, to puzzle over, until the funeral light could be borne. In its absurdity, its barely-thereness, it pushes away conclusion.

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[145] Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness*, p.31.
[146] Garner, p.328.
[147] *Battle-Pieces*, p.93.

Losing Voice: The Civil War Poems of Emily Dickinson and Paul Laurence Dunbar

What did Emily Dickinson sound like? The question is, on its surface, glib, and any answer would be conjecture. While contemporaneous for the last eight years of her life with the early version of Edison's phonograph, there is no real possibility that Dickinson would have encountered the device in any form more tangible than a newspaper piece. Such an encounter is likely, at least, to have captured her attention. The *Springfield Republican* reported that the phonograph:

> […] repeats the voice perfectly, not merely as to distinct articulation, but as to every inflection and tone, so that the individual speaker may be recognized. We see not why a phonograph may not make our friends who are dead to speak, and so become a more startling memento than any photograph.[1]

To make the dead speak was one of the projects of Dickinson's poetry, but Dickinson herself was not, as the *Republican* put it, 'bottled up' by the tin-foil phonograph.[2] This is unsurprising. While Amherst was by no means the fastest adopter of technologies (the first telephone did not come to town until 1895), the promises of eternal voice-preservation in the early press coverage of the phonograph were hardly fulfilled anywhere in America.[3] Tin-foil cylinders degraded beyond function in well under a hundred plays, and the device was not marketed widely enough to create anything like a mass culture of recording.[4] It would take until Edison's 'perfected phonograph' in 1888, and Emile Berliner's rival device, the gramophone, for any of the apparently miraculous properties of sound recording to disseminate into culture at large.

It is then that we first see poets committing their voices to cylinder and disk. The recordings of Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson made in 1889 and 1890 were the first, noisy stirrings of a new technological ubiquity. That Edison's agents crossed the Atlantic to seek out the two poets as recording subjects so early in the phonograph's new commercial life strongly implies that they

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[1] 'The Edison Phonograph', *Springfield Republican*, 6 April 1878, p.4.
[2] Dickinson's dead and dying speakers will be discussed below. See also Diana Fuss, *Dying Modern: A Meditation on Elegy* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), and Sabine Kim, *Acoustic Entanglements: Sound and Aesthetic Practice* (Heidelberg: Universitätverlag Winter, 2017).
[3] Edward Wilton Carpenter, *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst: Carpenter and Morehouse, 1896), p.469.
[4] For an excellent examination of the capabilities and promises of the 1878 phonograph, see Rubery, 'Thomas Edison's Poetry Machine'.

were held as a kind of proof of the machine's capabilities.[5] Even so, the rarity of such recordings and the myriad chances for them subsequently to be lost or damaged has ensured that very few instances of nineteenth-century poetic voice survive. The only American recording of equivalent stature to Browning's and Tennyson's is potentially apocryphal. Since 1951, what has been claimed as a recording of Walt Whitman reading lines from 'America' has dipped in and out of circulation, and has settled for the moment in a YouTube upload with over 65,000 views at the time of writing.[6] Arguments for and against its authenticity remain in contention. Ed Folsom notes that Edison wrote a letter to a colleague expressing an interest in recording Whitman, but there is no documentary evidence of him following this through.[7] The frequency range of the recording is remarkably rich in contrast to other preserved cylinders, and its provenance is murky to say the least. But whether or not this is a genuine recording of Whitman (I err towards doubt), and whether or not there are a host of other cylinders inscribed with poets' voices that have been lost, the simple fact remains that we do not know what most late nineteenth-century poets sounded like, despite their being coterminous with the phonograph. There was always bound to be a generation of poets who lived alongside sound recording technology before it was ubiquitous enough that the chances of any one poet being recorded were more than vanishing.

This chapter aims to analyse the concept of poetic voice before and after sound recording, and to ask thereby whether our notions of voice are inherently post-phonographic. Of the several sounds that lyric poems have been held to make – and with which this dissertation has reckoned – voice is simultaneously the most fundamental and the most reliant on a metaphorical jump. While rhythm and rhyme are specifically poetic sounds, and so go about announcing their happening, voice is imported from elsewhere and made not only to fit into lyric but to be one of its chief operations. Voice can mean, and has been made to mean, an unhelpful variety of things, but surely at its heart is what the *Springfield Republican* claimed the tin-foil phonograph would be able to record: 'distinct articulation', 'inflection and tone', the acoustic data necessary for a 'person to be recognised'. This was what startled early witnesses to the phonograph as a voice-recording technology: not merely that it could record and reproduce what people said, but that it could record and reproduce that *way in which they said it*. The claim that lyric poems have a voice is always at least in part a claim that they performed this primary function of the phonograph

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[5] John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.122. Browning inadvertently revealed a different truth with his recording: intoning his way through 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix', he tails off, pauses, then declares: 'I'm terribly sorry, but I seem to have forgotten my own verses'. An accurate machine records faults and failures of voice as well as anything else.

[6] < https://youtu.be/cnMoUm87QII > [accessed 13 April 2021].

[7] Ed Folsom, 'The Whitman Recording', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 9(4) (1992), 214-216.

before the phonograph was dreamed of. But this is always doomed to ring false. A written poem cannot record timbres or tones and then play them back to a reader. Much of the great body of work on poetic voice, though, puts poetry on an asymptotic approach to this point. Griffiths, for example, describes printed poetry as 'a text of hints at voicing, whose centre in utterance lies outside itself, and also an achieved pattern on the page, salvaged from the evanescence of voice in the air'.[8] Almost exactly voice, but never quite so. Voice as an acoustic phenomenon, an assembly of phonic data by which we might recognise a person, is an axis never touched by poetry, and the term is thus only ever a metaphor. But is it a good one?

My contention is that there are actually very few circumstances in which 'voice' is the best word to bring to a reading of a poem, as opposed to 'style', or on occasion 'diction', or 'dialect'. The Civil War might be one of these circumstances. In an era when the promise of sound recording was latent, soon to be fulfilled, poets faced with the new ubiquity of death had to decide whether recovering and preserving the voices of the dying was something their writing could achieve. After the phonograph's invention, poetry inevitably found itself working in relation to the new technology, and began to test the limits of what it could do with voice. To make this case, I will analyse the work of Emily Dickinson and Paul Dunbar: two poets on either side of the phonograph's cultural adoption who both engaged with the task of salvaging voices lost to the Civil War. The key critical debates around Dickinson, I argue, are wound up in problems of voice, and can be at least partly unspooled by reading the Civil War and its cultures of dying as an essential drive in her rise to poetic maturity. My reading of Paul Dunbar, meanwhile, whose work has received scant critical attention in general, places him in two underexplored contexts: in the fraught world of post-Reconstruction Civil War memory-making, and in the 1890s as the beginning of the phonographic industry proper. In reading Dickinson alongside Dunbar, I am following Faith Barrett's recent challenge to critics to do something other than go looking for Dickinson's few and fleeting engagements with race, and to pursue instead comparative readings that place her more fully in the current of an American literary history which must itself be viewed through the lens of race.[9] Dunbar, as an African American poet of some fame, faced a unique crisis of over-determined identity, which Dickinson's poems do not go quite as far as to imagine. Even so, many of the anxieties Dickinson expressed over anonymity and the distinction between poet and poem were shared by Dunbar, and to read the two poets in partnership is thus a provocative and rewarding scheme.

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[8] Griffiths, p.57.

[9] Faith Barrett, 'Dickinson and George Moses Horton', *The New Emily Dickinson Studies*, ed. Michelle Kohler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.204-219, p.204.

I. Familiar With Her Voice

Dickinson was one of the unrecorded generation. Our critical relationship with her visual image is rich, triangulated between photographs, descriptions by friends, and Dickinson's own self-portraits in letter and poem, which tell of a woman 'small, like the Wren', with eyes 'like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves'.[10] Her voice and its timbres, by contrast, are hard to find.[11] Higginson relates that when Dickinson spoke, 'she seemed to speak absolutely for her own relief, and wholly without watching its effect on her hearer'.[12] This is a remarkable anecdote, but does not tell us much about the sound of her voice. A more promising recollection comes from Mabel Loomis Todd: Dickinson's friend, her brother Austin's lover, and co-editor with Higginson of her poems. Todd recalls her growing intimacy with Dickinson:

> Emily's notes to me became personal and affectionate, and although our interviews were chiefly confined to conversations between the brilliantly lighted drawing-room where I sat and the dusky hall just outside where she always remained, I grew very familiar with her voice, its vaguely surprised note dominant.[13]

On display in this sentence is the image of the ghostly, reclusive Dickinson which Todd perpetuated in the wake of the 1890 *Poems* and the sudden wave of interest it brought in this strange Amherst woman. The sentence is bracketed by the assurance of intimacy and friendly discourse, but at its centre, casually dismissed by an 'although', is what Todd would certainly have known to be the tantalisingly gothic image of Dickinson hiding vampire-like in the shadows of the hall. In a subtle play, 'confined' comes unmoored from its neutral sense and floats across the sentence to describe Dickinson herself. She is made a prisoner, although to what it is left uncertain. Mystery, Todd knew, sold.

The caricature of Dickinson the spooky recluse is, thankfully, long outmoded, and I believe there is more to be gained from focussing on Todd's language of familiarity. Stranger than the prison-like barrier between drawing-room and hall is that which crosses it: 'her voice', which Todd

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[10] L268, *Letters*, II, p.411 (July 1862).
[11] Cynthia Nixon mentions reading Richard Sewall's biography while researching for her role as Dickinson in *A Quiet Passion* (2016). Her vocal performance, though, must have been largely conjecture – the only sources she refers to are readings by actor Julie Harris. Rachel Syme, 'Cynthia Nixon's "Emily Thing"', *New Yorker*, 15 April 2017 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/cynthia-nixons-emily-thing> [accessed 26 May 2021].
[12] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'Emily Dickinson's Letters', *Atlantic Monthly,* 68, October 1891, 444-456, p.452.
[13] Millicent Todd Bingham, *Ancestors' Brocades: The Literary Début of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), p.12.

claims she 'grew very familiar with'. While a voice can be 'familiar' as in recognisable, via something like a characteristic 'surprised note', this is generally a metonym for the person themselves as the true thing-which-is-familiar. Hence the playful greeting 'I know that voice' is easily understood to mean 'I know you'. Todd goes further though, and recalls that she grew familiar *with* Dickinson's voice, in the sense of 'intimate; close; as a *familiar* friend or companion'.[14] There is Dickinson, and then Dickinson's voice. The voice and the person are separated, or, rather, the voice *becomes* a person, going out to be sociable where Dickinson dares not. This recollection was recorded shortly before Todd's death in 1932 by her daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, who was preparing a book with the aim of debunking the mystery and gossip surrounding her mother's editing of Dickinson's poems. In this context, Todd's description of her interviews with Dickinson becomes a shadowed version of that editing process. Only vanishingly acquainted with Dickinson in life, Todd had to persuade herself and the reading public that she was nevertheless deeply familiar with Dickinson's voice, and thus fitted for the task of editing a body of poetry which required various kinds of reconstruction. Being 'familiar with her voice' was a justification for Todd's role as editor, because of the near total elision of voice and poetic-style, personality and diction, which came with the 1890 publication.

Of note in this regard are Todd's 'notes'. The sentence begins with 'Emily's notes', a nod to Dickinson's cryptic letters which often took on the same style as her poems. It ends with the 'surprised note' of her voice: a characteristic marker of her personality. The slip between them is a route into the problem of editing and reading Dickinson which still refuses to be solved. Is Dickinson's 'voice' tied to the written objects she left behind, or is it somewhere else, above or between these paper notes? This is the bedrock of the continued critical rift in Dickinson studies, and a summary of this rift, I propose, will recast my opening question – what does Dickinson sound like – as a possible point of intervention.

Script or sound, notes or notes. Answers to the question of what and where a Dickinson poem is do not boil down to such distinctions, but do end up putting more weight on one side than the other. Promoting script is the school of Dickinson criticism which argues that the manuscript page is where Dickinson did her work, and where we should aim to encounter her poems. Critics including Susan Howe, Sharon Cameron and Jerome McGann have made the case that Dickinson did not imagine her manuscripts as a precursor to a printed collection, but as the site

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[14] Webster, I, p.651.

of poetic action. As McGann writes: 'Dickinson's scripts cannot be read as if they were "printer's copy" manuscripts, or as if they were composed with an eye toward some state beyond their handcrafted textual condition'.[15] The main resistance to this wave of manuscript evangelism has come from Cristanne Miller, who has proposed that Dickinson's poems are not visual objects, but rhythmical objects variously inscribed. Behind or above all the many instantiations of any particular poem, Miller argues, is the rhythmically coherent poem itself: 'an essentially aural structure, which could be performed or mapped in distinct and various ways in writing'.[16] Manuscript alternatives thus become 'multiple performance options for a single production', an idea corroborated by Melanie Hubbard's work on the ubiquity of alternatives in school compositions and sermons.[17] While the manuscripts are still the best source for an editor, they should not be fetishized:

> As with any poet's manuscripts, a print transcription cannot retain the aura of a handwritten artifact, the idiosyncrasies of the poet's handwriting, or the perhaps playful use of the page. It does give us, however, everything essential to what I believe Dickinson conceived as the poem – even if not everything remarkable about particular presentations of a poem.[18]

The poems are 'separable from their handwritten artifacts', because they are, to Miller at least, sound objects. That 'perhaps' does a lot of work: while the page *might* be a site of play, it is, above all, a momentary resting place for something which lives more properly in sound.

The essential conundrum of Dickinson studies thus rests on the unspoken question of what a Dickinson poem sounds like. To Miller, a Dickinson poem sounds a lot like other nineteenth-century poems, and it is only our unskilled modern ear which has let it go quiet. To manuscript critics, any sound the poem makes is an effect of the primarily visual action of the page. What is remarkable, though, and what brings me back to the problem of voice, is that this manuscript criticism relies on the language of aurality to talk about artifacts it considers bound to the pencilled page. I offer two examples: Paul Crumbley's 1997 *Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson*, and Ellen Louise Hart's 2014 essay 'Manuscript Study, Fascicle Study:

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[15] Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.38.
[16] Miller, *Reading in Time*, p.12.
[17] Cristanne Miller, 'Introduction', *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), p.6; Melanie Hubbard, 'The Word Made Flesh: Dickinson's Variants and the Life of Language', *Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities*, ed. Paul Crumbley and Eleanor Elson Heginbotham (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), pp.33-62.
[18] Miller, 'Introduction', *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, p.7.

Appreciating Dickinson's Prosody'.[19] Crumbley pays microscopic attention to the 'multiple angles' of Dickinson's manuscript dashes, proposing that they are 'highly nuanced visual signals intimately linked to Dickinson's experiments with poetic voice'.[20] The dashes are, in essence, visual markers for an auditory phenomenon. But this, surely, can only end in paradox. In a reading of 'Doom is the House without the door', Crumbley contends that attention to the dashes allows us to 'hear voices' expressing deviating opinions about being contained within the 'House'.[21] Do they? If the dashes work as a kind of diacritic marking a change in tone, then this implies that the written poem is simply a script or notation of something else: a spoken, acoustic rendition. And once this rendition comes into play, the manuscript page pales in significance. It is not the thing itself, but a faulty jotting down of that thing.

Hart's essay is a more recent manifestation of this paradox. Fascicle and manuscript study, she writes, will allow readers 'to take deep delight in the rich array of visual strategies contributing to Dickinson's complex aural art'.[22] My problem is simple: while I understand where I can go to look at Dickinson's visual strategies, I do not understand where her complex aural art *is*. Hart points out that in her manuscripts Dickinson often puts a break halfway through a metrical line, such as: 'The Definition of / Beauty is / That Definition is none –'.[23] Dickinson's motivations for breaking the first line in this case, Hart writes, 'seem to be to slow the pace'. What pace, and set by whom? Either Hart imagines the poem being read aloud, in which case there would be no way of knowing where the line breaks fall, or she is referring to a silent reading, in which any appeal to pace becomes fuzzy: I could skip past the line in an instant, or stare at it for minutes on end. The metaphor both Crumbley and Hart's readings seem to rely on is a version of Todd's Dickinson-in-the-hallway. Their language of sound and voice implies that in reading a Dickinson poem what we are actually doing is trying to hear Dickinson read it aloud to us from a dark space beyond, and that her 'spatial prosody' is a way of accessing this spectral voice. But in listening to Dickinson, the written page disappears. Any gesture toward a sounded or voiced rendition of a poem relies on an admission of diachronic time which is incompatible with the manuscript as spatial object.

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[19] Paul Crumbley, *Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); Ellen Louise Hart, 'Manuscript Study, Fascicle Study: Appreciating Dickinson's Prosody', *Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities*, pp.169-190.
[20] Crumbley, prefatory note; p.1.
[21] Crumbley, p.22.
[22] Hart, p.171.
[23] *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, p.500 (FR797, J988). All quotations from Dickinson's poems are taken from *Emily Dickinson's Poems*. Miller does not number the poems, but I will provide Franklin and Johnson numbers for convenience.

I believe that any decision to refer to 'voice' as opposed to 'style' needs to justify itself by acknowledging all the functions of voice that a poem will have a hard time housing. David Nowell Smith's 2015 monograph, *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation*, sets out several useful markers in this regard. He warns against employing voice as a solely metaphorical concept, but also against the counter-claim that there is no literal voice in poetry at all, because both stances 'take for granted that there is something, at least, that voice literally *is*'.[24] The rest of Smith's book is a working out of what, if anything, that thing might be. He offers a rich version of voice as an inherently vibratory phenomenon, always in action somewhere between the poles of *logos* – word as reason – and *phone* – pure sound. Voice is the process of the inside becoming outside, but that outside, as Smith keenly notes, has a way of overwriting its origin:

> If voice does indicate, and even set up, our sense of interiority, it nevertheless remains strangely external to us, something we register each time we perceive our own voices: at once through the vibrations of jawbone against the 'inner ear', and as they return to us through soundwaves against the eardrum. It is the internal aspect which is denied to us in recordings of the voice, whence our unease at a voice is both recognisable and yet transfigured.[25]

Smith goes on to argue that voice should not be aligned wholly with 'speech', but this seems to be a contradiction of his excellent point about sound recording. If sound technology can record voice, then voice is made up of sound. It is not reducible to sound, but is sounded at least.[26] The contention that written poetry cannot record or contain this aural data is not the glib contrarianism which Smith paints it as, but a key check on an often inappropriate metaphor. If we are to talk about voice in poetry, it needs to be in terms of a reaching towards, not a done deal.

With this in mind, Dickinson's fraught position as a Civil War poet comes into sharper focus. As my chapters on rhythm and rhyme have shown, features of lyric which occur trans-historically nevertheless can, and should, be read as interacting with the specific historical contexts of their instantiations. Dickinson reached the peak of her poetic output during the years of a war which brought with it a national crisis of voice recovery. In the next section, I will explore Dickinson's

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[24] David Nowell Smith, *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.4.
[25] Smith, p.50.
[26] I acknowledge that I am referring here to the speaking and hearing population. Sign language has no reliance on sound for voice. As a natural language with large geographical spread, ASL has an array of accents, dictions and voicings. But just as written poetry cannot truly record idiosyncrasies of manual sign, so it cannot record idiosyncrasies of speech.

place within this crisis, and ask how it shaped her own relationship with poetry as a potential, but ultimately flawed, technology of voice recording.

II. Emily Dickinson's Last Words

'All quiet along the Potomac,' they say,
    'Except, now and then, a stray picket
Is shot as he walks on his beat to and fro,
    By a rifleman hid in the thicket.
'Tis nothing – a private or two, now and then,
    Will not count in the news of the battle;
Not an officer lost – only one of the men
    Moaning out, all alone, his death rattle.'
        […]
(Ethelinda Beers, 'The Picket-Guard', 1-8)[27]

'The Picket-Guard', elsewhere titled 'All quiet along the Potomac', was first published in November 1861, and originally attributed to northern poet Ethelinda Beers. It was absurdly popular, and went on to be reprinted countless times, in various contexts.[28] Barrett and Miller note that in February 1863 the *Southern Literary Messenger* printed the poem and declared that it had been written by a Confederate private 'while on picket on the bank of the Potomac'. In fact, the *Messenger* had already published it the year before, suggesting then that it had been found 'in the pocket of a volunteer who died in camp on the Potomac'.[29] Either way, the poem was put forward as a kind of ear-witnessing: a direct, first-hand account of a specific soundscape. But this misses the mark. Key to the poem's working is the aside that the private's death '[w]ill not count in the news of the battle'. A gap is opened up between home and the battle-line that certain things, like sounds, cannot cross. But the poem is able to close that gap by supposing across it. At the moment when we should get the sound of the rifle, we get an imagined call to the home-front lover:

Hark! was it the night-wind that rustled the leaves?
    Was it moonlight so suddenly flashing?
It looked like a rifle—'Ha! Mary, good-by!'
    And the life-blood is ebbing and plashing.
            (37-40)

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[27] *Words for the Hour*, p.65.
[28] Footnote to *Words for the Hour*, p.65. The poem's authorship was still being debated twenty years later. See 'Was "All Quiet Along the Potomac" Northern or Southern', *Springfield Republican*, 29 January 1885, p.4.
[29] 'All Quiet Along the Potomac To-night', *Southern Literary Messenger*, 36(33), 1 September 1862.

The soldier's last words are saved from being lost words. Suggesting that the poem was written by a guard on duty is a misstep: it is not a poem about ear-witnessing – what any particular soldier might hear on an overnight picket – but about the sounds a poem is able to recover through imagination.

'The Picket-Guard' and its popularity stand as a record of the importance placed on last words, and the fear stirred up by the new likelihood of their going unheard. As Drew Gilpin Faust describes in her study of Civil War dying, a culture of Good Death in the antebellum United States put huge spiritual and emotional weight on final utterances.[30] The chief burden of last words was to persuade those present that the speaker was willing to die, their faith in spiritual reward firm to the last.[31] We can see this in play in an 1854 letter Dickinson wrote to the Reverend Everett Hale of Worcester:

> Rev Mr Hale –
>   Pardon the liberty Sir, which a stranger takes in addressing you, but I think you may be familiar with the last hours of a Friend, and I therefore transgress a courtesy, which in another circumstance, I should seek to observe. I think, Sir, you were the Pastor of Mr B. F. Newton, who died sometime since in Worcester, and I often have hoped to know if his last hours were cheerful, and if he was willing to die.[32]

There is in this letter – as so often – a push and pull between Dickinson's desire to communicate and the apparent embarrassment communication brought with it. The prospect of addressing a stranger clearly caused Dickinson some angst, which was overcome by her desire to learn of her childhood friend's dying state. Even this has some strangeness to it. After Dickinson has asked her slanted question – 'I often have hoped to know if his last hours were cheerful, and if he was willing to die' – she puts this line of inquiry on hold, and talks for two paragraphs about her own memories of Newton, before circling back to ask again 'if he was willing to die, and if you think him at Home'. It seems that the desire to learn of a friend's last words was a formulaic enough request that Dickinson felt able to write to a total stranger with her real aim of working through her memories of Newton and negotiating his sudden departure.

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[30] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), p.18.
[31] For more on the congregationalist origins of this deathbed culture, see Linda Freedman, *Emily Dickinson and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Bradford, *Communities of Death*.
[32] L153, *Letters*, I, p.282 (13 January 1854).

Predicted in Dickinson's letter is the crisis that would overwhelm the United States in the next decade. Death, long an affair of the home, was transferred in an instant to the muddy fields and hospital tents of far flung states; its witnessing, once practically assured, became a matter of chance, of the myriad chaoses of battle aligning to let a comrade be near enough the dying to witness their passage, and then themselves to survive long enough to record any final utterance and send it back home. At every moment this could go awry, and a soldier's family could be left without any knowledge of his last words. From this new reality came poems like 'The Picket-Guard' and 'Was My Brother in the Battle?': works predicated on the possibility of verse re-witnessing the unwitnessed.

Dickinson, I propose, was wired-in to this literary mode. We could read 'To know just how he suffered' (1863) as a response to the trend of dying soldier poetry:

> To know just how He suffered – would be dear
> To know if any Human eyes were near
> To whom He could entrust His wavering gaze
> Until it settle broad – on Paradise
>
> To know if He was patient – part content
> Was Dying as He thought – or different
> Was it a pleasant Day to die
> And did the Sunshine face his way
>
> What was His furthest mind – Of Home – or God
> Or what the Distant say
> At news that He ceased Human Nature
> Such a Day
>
> And Wishes – Had He Any
> Just His Sigh – Accented
> Had been legible – to Me
> And was He Confident until
> Ill fluttered out – in Everlasting Well
>
> And if He spoke – What name was Best
> What last
> What One broke off with
> At the Drowsiest
>
> Was He afraid – or tranquil
> Might He know
> How Conscious Consciousness – could grow
> Till Love that was – and Love too best to be

> Meet – and the Junction be Eternity[33]

It is by no means Dickinson's most inventive poem, but, as Barrett, Miller and Benjamin Friedlander have shown, moments at which Dickinson seems unusually in synchrony with her contemporary poetic norm are worth lingering over.[34] The poem has the same motive as her letter to Reverend Hale: the desire to know whether a loved one died willingly.[35] But where the letter presumed, albeit bashfully, that it would receive a reply, 'To know just how he suffered' has no such assurance. Like 'The Picket-Guard', it sets up the problem of last words gone missing and then sets out to solve it itself.[36] In working through the different possibilities Dickinson very much leads the question. The final stanza, which begins to recover the poise of the pentameter couplets that inaugurated the poem, stands not merely as Dickinson's final question, but as her final imagining of what she hoped the dying man would have known to say. 'Might he know' looks both ways. There is not enough grammar to conclude whether it means: 'I wish I could have told him' or 'there's a chance he knew'. The final three lines are Dickinson at her sentimental height: the familiar, almost formulaic language of divine recompense made startling by the unearthly 'too best', language straining in the harness. They are Dickinson's words, of course – an almost schoolbook example of her style – but in allowing that the soldier might have thought or said them too, she approaches the ultimate goal of dying soldier poetry: consolation.

Does this poem, though, maintain that there is any real possibility of recording not just words, but voice? It is at least wary. When asking 'if He spoke', Dickinson assumes that the soldier would say a 'name'. She asks only for a report of some indexical attempt to communicate, some vestige of language's work. This is what would close the gap between battlefield and home-front – the experience not of hearing but of hearing from. But at the same time, the poem proposes that voice offers something more than this basic naming function. She imagines herself by the dying soldier's side:

> Just His Sigh – Accented
> Had been legible – to Me

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[33] *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, p.333 (FR688, J622).

[34] Benjamin Friedlander, 'Emily Dickinson and the Battle of Ball's Bluff', *PMLA*, 124(5) (2009), 1582-1599.

[35] Miller makes this point in her footnote to the poem, but does not suggest the Civil War as particular subject, which she does for poems including 'My Portion is Defeat Today' and 'The name – of it – is "Autumn"'. I believe the 1863 dating, the question of whether there was 'any' witness to the death, and the 'news' sent to the 'Distant' are evidence enough that Dickinson has a battlefield in mind.

[36] 'The Picket-Guard' was published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1861. Susan Dickinson subscribed to the magazine, and the practice of sharing reading material between the houses gives reasonable odds on Dickinson having read the poem.

Language is absent here, but meaning through voice persists. Accent, the thing early witnesses to the phonograph were stunned it could record, becomes readable. Is this an operation Dickinson's poems can themselves perform? Paula Bennet, in a reading of Dickinson's Civil War poems, has asked a version of this question:

> If scholars are now largely agreed as to the polyvocality of Dickinson's verse, that is, her use of multiple voices in her poems, they have said much less about her invention of multiple speakers, speakers, that is, who are *separate* and *distinct* from herself.[37]

Dickinson did not have a lover who died on the battlefield, but writes from that perspective. In other poems, she writes as soldiers, both living and dead. Do her poems present these characters in different accents and make them legible, or is her accent, her style, the thing doing the reading of her characters?

Renewed attention to the letters Dickinson wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson can show her working through this problem with the War as backdrop and interlocutor. In a letter of July 1862, Dickinson came her closest to a direct statement on what might now be called a theory of poetic voice:

> When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person.[38]

The basic thrust of this statement is vital in keeping speculative biographical readings at bay, a practically evergreen project. Be sure to know, Dickinson tells Higginson, that these poems are not things I might say or think, but things someone might say or think, albeit definitely me who wrote them down. Beyond this most available sense, though, the statement begins to thicken. What is a *supposed* person? Immediately the sense seems to be 'imagined' or 'potential'. This fits Webster's definition of 'supposed': 'imagined, believed, received as true'.[39] Dickinson, though, as arch-lexographer, would certainly have had in mind the wider meanings of the verb beyond its passive participle. 'Supposed' has only one sense in Webster's dictionary; 'to suppose' has five, all of which are in play in Dickinson's sentence. Particularly compelling are senses four and five: 'To require or exist to be true', and 'To put one thing by fraud in the place of another'. Between

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[37] Paula Bennett, '"Looking at Death, is Dying": Fascicle 16 in a Civil War Context', *Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities*, pp.106-129, p.111.
[38] L268, *Letters*, II, p.176 (July 1862).
[39] Webster, II, p.725.

these two senses is an almost mythic pull between truth and falsity. To suppose something is both to put it forth as an essential consequence of its circumstances, and to make it up entirely. Is Dickinson's representative a natural creation, or a fraud? An inevitable phenomenon of lyric, or a Twainian confidence-man?

Dickinson's dictionary can only reveal these quicksand contradictions, and never solve them, but other instances of 'supposed' might offer a branch to cling to. When she writes of a 'supposed person', this is the second time she has used the word in the space of two sentences. Above the line already quoted is this:

> Because you have much business, beside the growth of me – you will appoint, yourself, how often I shall come – without your inconvenience. And if at any time you – regret you received me, or I prove a different fabric to that you supposed – you must banish me –

Immediately before claiming that her verse is about not herself but a supposed person, Dickinson figures herself as a supposed person. In this case, Higginson is doing the supposing, as in believing, and he runs the risk of finding out that Dickinson is some kind of trickster figure, who has played on his confidence and must be shunned. In an earlier letter, also to Higginson, Dickinson uses the word in another context entirely: 'Your second letter surprised me, and for a moment, swung – I had not supposed it'.[40] Here, it means something more like 'predicted', or even 'prepared myself for'. This is the same sense as in her second letter to Higginson, where she writes: 'Thank you for the surgery – it was not so painful as I supposed' (interesting, then, that a letter can be as traumatic as a surgery).[41] It is hard to fix this predictive sense into 'supposed person', but the multiple instances suggest it is present somewhere in the phrase.

To get even closer towards a workable theory of what a 'supposed' person might be, we can use another word to triangulate. In February 1863, Higginson received this letter:

> Dear Friend,
>   I did not deem that Planetary forces annulled – but suffered an Exchange of Territory, or World –
>   I should have liked to see you, before you became improbable. War feels to me an oblique place – Should there be other Summers, would you perhaps come?
>   […]

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[40] L265, p.408 (7 June 1862).
[41] L261, p.404 (25 April 1862).

> Should you, before this reaches you, experience immortality, who will inform me of the Exchange? [42]

Higginson had been commissioned in November 1862 as the colonel of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, the first Union regiment to be composed of formerly enslaved men. In July of 1863, he would be wounded in Florida by the concussion of a passing shell and subsequently leave the army, but in February he was as involved in the War as anyone of Dickinson's direct acquaintance. And away in this oblique place, he became 'improbable'. I believe we should read 'improbable' as a partner-word to 'supposed': a word which addresses and converses with the various senses of its relative. Firstly, it picks up on the troublesome sense of 'supposed' as in 'predicted'. Someone away at war has a future that is hard to predict or prepare for. When every day could bring news of new death – 'Bulletins […] / From immortality', as Dickinson put it to Higginson – every soldier became improbable to those left at home.[43] War is an 'oblique' place: hard to see and jealous of its import. Secondly, 'improbable' picks up on the senses of imagining and believing on offer in 'supposed'. Once a person has been made improbable by war's chaos, it becomes the burden of their friends to suppose them: to imagine, and then believe in, their continued existence. All of this is instantiated in written correspondence. Every letter was an act of supposing that someone was out there to receive it. Once Higginson had gone to war, he became an improbable, and thus supposed, person.

What was particularly improbable, as the end of Dickinson's letter makes clear, was getting a reply. A great deal of Dickinson's correspondence is highly meta-communicative. Letters demand a response, or ask why one has not yet come, or scald the recipient for writing too briefly. One typical note to Austin bristles: '[y]our last letter to us, Austin, was very short and very unsatisfying – we do not feel this week that we have heard anything from you for a very great while'.[44] A letter presumes a reply. With the coming of the War, this transaction was exploded. As Shira Wolosky has remarked, the trauma of war 'put extraordinary pressure on the norms, and fundamental faiths, that had promised to structure Dickinson's world and render it meaningful'.[45] Wolosky's 'faiths' are quite large, but I believe this smaller faith – that conversation would go on – brought the sharpest pang. Beginning in the early 1860s, Dickinson's letters started to become ever more cryptic and elided, as if she wanted to pre-empt

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[42] L280, p.423 (February 1863).
[43] L290, p.431 (early June 1864).
[44] L95, *Letters*, I, p.213 (20 June 1852).
[45] Shira Wolosky, 'Public and Private in Emily Dickinson's War Poetry', *Emily Dickinson: A Historical Guide*, ed. Vivian R. Pollak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.103-132, p.109.

the correspondence failing.[46] To compare the fluid, conversational tone of Dickinson's letters in her youth to the curtailed metaphorical style of her later years is to see a writer for whom communication is a risk, and so always guarded in irony and complexity.

The Civil War shook Dickinson's faith in the possibility of communication across distance. And at the same time it fractured her confidence in the lyric poem as a social medium. If a poem does have a 'speaker', that speaker is beyond conversation: a 'supposed person' who becomes improbable as soon as they are created. In her work on Dickinson and elegy, Diana Fuss makes the striking observation that 'none of Dickinson's many deathwatch poems include last words'.[47] Strange indeed, for Dickinson was certainly *interested* in last words. To Lavinia in 1860 she wrote: 'I can't believe it, when your letters come, saying what Aunt Lavinia said "just before she died" […] I sob and cry […] and then sit still and wonder if she sees us now, if she sees *me*, who said that she "loved Emily"'.[48] To William Jackson, Dickinson wrote in 1885 of Helen Hunt Jackson's passing: 'Dear friend, can you walk, were the last words that I wrote her. Dear friend, I can fly – her immortal (soaring) reply'.[49] So why, despite this cherishing, do last words never make it into her poems? It is, I believe, because her poems *are* last words. Dickinson performed a work of supposing every time she put pencil to paper. Every poem creates a person who will say this, only this, and then disappear. What they say is meaningful, certainly, but has no hope of a reply. In Dickinson's first letter to Higginson she asks if her verse 'is alive', if he thought 'it breathed'.[50] If it did, it was but for a moment: the moment of its reading. Fuss describes last words as part of the 'challenge of dying a linguistically meaningful death'.[51] Each Dickinson poem takes this as its own challenge.

To draw this section to a close, I will pursue a reading of two poems which I don't believe have been read in conjunction before, despite their complex interrelation. I believe that they show a sustained attempt by Dickinson to work through the crisis of communication in which she found herself, and might begin to settle the question of whether her imaginings-from-elsewhere can usefully be thought of as writing in a 'voice': an accent that is not her own.

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[46] Sabine Kim makes a perceptive point about Dickinson's style predicting the failures and glitches of audio technology. While a letter either arrived or didn't, a telephone message could arrive partially broken. Kim, p.29.
[47] Fuss, p.18.
[48] L217, *Letters*, II, p.361 (late April 1860).
[49] L1015, *Letters*, III, p.889 (late summer 1885).
[50] L260, *Letters*, II, p403 (15 April 1862).
[51] Fuss, p.9.

> If any sink, assure that this, now standing –
> Failed like Themselves – and conscious that it rose –
> Grew by the Fact, and not the Understanding
> How Weakness passed – or Force – arose –
>
> Tell that the Worst, is easy in a Moment –
> Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball –
> When the Ball enters, enters Silence –
> Dying – annuls the power to kill –[52]

In August 1861, Frazar Stearns, the son of the President of Amherst College, left home to join the 21[st] Massachusetts regiment. He was twenty years old. In February 1862 he was lightly wounded in the cheek during the invasion of Roanoke Island, and promoted to the rank of Adjutant Lieutenant. From Roanoke, the regiment was sent on a march to New Bern, North Carolina, as part of the Burnside Expedition. On 14 March, while fighting to dislodge a Confederate battery from a brickyard, Frazar was shot through the lung. He lived only a few minutes. After Frazar's funeral in Amherst, Dickinson composed a bulletin to send to her young cousins, Fanny and Louisa Norcross:

> Dear Children,
> You have done more for me – 'tis least that I can do, to tell you of brave Frazer – "killed at Newbern," darlings. His big heart shot away by a "minie ball."
> I had read of those – I didn't think that Frazer would carry one to Eden with him. […]
> He fell by the side of Professor Clark, his superior officer – lived ten minutes in a soldier's arms, asked twice for water – murmured just, "My God!" and passed![53]

Her account of Frazar's last words seems to be based on the one given by the *Amherst Express*: '[Stearns] was near Col. Clark, and received a bullet in his right breast. Edward Welch, a corporal, immediately went to his assistance, and raised his head. He called for water twice […] and with the words "My God!" upon his lips, breathed forth his spirit.'[54] Frazar, then, had one of the better deaths that could be hoped for: his final words, turned towards the everlasting, were witnessed and recorded.

But a Good Death, such as it could be, was only ever the first move in the hesitant work of mourning. Frazar's passing had caught the entire town off-guard, and the population was forced

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[52] *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, p.303 (FR616, J358).
[53] L255, *Letters*, II, p.397 (late March 1862).
[54] Quoted in William Stearns, *Adjutant Stearns* (Boston: Massachusetts School Sabbath Society, 1862), p.107.

to develop strategies of grief suited to the new kind of tragedy imposed upon them. In April 1862, a cannon captured from the Confederate forces at the brickyard was sent to Amherst as a memorial to Frazar and the other Union casualties of the battle.[55] Engraved with the names of Frazar and his comrades, and placed upright within Amherst college, it works as a strange mnemonic device. It is at once exhaustive – listing each casualty – and indexical, the cannon standing in, in some uncanny way, for Frazar himself.[56] Frazar's body was brought home from the battlefield, but his family were advised against viewing it, so violent had been the death. The cannon, meanwhile, is columnar, self-sufficient, perfect.
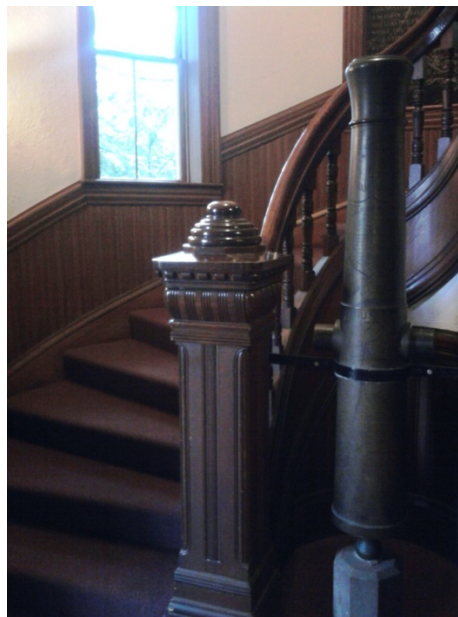

Figure 11: Cannon in Amherst College.

Later in the year, Frazar's father published a slim memorial volume titled *Adjutant Stearns*: a collection of letters and reminiscences of his son's character.[57] At the heart of the book is a long sentence trying to reckon with the unknowability of Frazar's last moments. There is, Stearns claims, 'an inward history of last hours which can never be written'.[58] He lists the sequence of events which made up these last hours: 'the excitement of the conflict, – the sudden bullet-shock, – the fall, – rushing memories […]'. '[A]ll this', he concludes, 'with the first openings of eternity, may be imagined; but nothing of it can be known'. Imagined, but not known. The work of mourning a son lost in battle requires a reaching out of the mind into obscurity.

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[55] William Sweet, 'A Cannon for the Confederacy: The Legacy of Frazar Stearns', *Amherst College News*, 15 March 2012 <https://www.amherst.edu/news/news_releases/2012/03/node/384752> [accessed 21 May 2021]

[56] Kristen Treen, '"Histories of the real things": literature, memory, material culture and the American Civil War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2017), p.153.

[57] William Stearns, *Adjutant Stearns* (Boston: Massachusetts School Sabbath Society, 1862).

[58] Stearns, p.104.

The place of 'If any sink, assure that this, now standing' within the mourning of Frazar is highly fraught. While the poem certainly imagines the 'inward history' of his death, can it be said to transgress a boundary and *know* it, or to claim to know it? I believe not, because, in the end, it is not pretending to speak in Frazar's voice. It does not try to sound like him, and thus to persuade the reader that it is a transcription of something he might, somehow, relate from beyond death. Indeed, it resists being uttered at all. The first stanza is highly elliptical:

> If any sink, assure that this, now standing –
> Failed like Themselves – and conscious that it rose –
> Grew by the Fact, and not the Understanding
> How Weakness passed – or Force – arose –

Read aloud, the perfect rhymes of 'standing/-standing' and 'rose/-rose' serve only to obscure. On the page we can at least keep an eye on them, and arrive through rereading at some understanding of what the stanza is proposing. We also have to navigate Dickinson's obfuscatory habit of using the third in place of the first person. The first line's 'this' stands in for 'I': the poem points outside of itself even as it offers a personal testimony. There is something, here, of Dickinson's decision to give her name to Higginson by writing it on a card contained with a second, enclosed envelope: in order to exist, Dickinson has to be framed, held in place by a surrounding structure. But then again, 'this' is really the only option available, as the poem describes an experience which an 'I' would be unable to relate: dying. If there is a speaker which in some far-removed sense is saying the words of this first stanza, it is saying them as a kind of lecturer or historical guide. It might even be pointing as it lectures to the cannon in the stairwell of Amherst College, as a version of Frazar laid low, but now standing. As a lecture, though, it fails, unable to escape the terms of its own thought long enough to offer any real information, let alone consolation.

From the mists of the first stanza, we open our eyes in the second and find we are on a battlefield:

> Tell that the Worst, is easy in a Moment –
> Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball –
> When the Ball enters, enters Silence –
> Dying – annuls the power to kill –

Where Dickinson's two-stanza poems often begin with a particular metaphor or image which the second stanza teases apart and complicates, this poem does the reverse. There is something at stake too serious for the potential mis-meaning of the opening lines, and the second stanza bears an urgency towards clarity, vialed in the micro-parable of 'Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball'. After the elliptical, overlapping vocabulary of the first stanza, 'Whizzing' stands out in its stark specificity. It is, according to Rosenbaum's concordance, the only instance of the word across Dickinson's entire corpus, suggesting that its arrival into her vocabulary was simultaneous with the occasion of this poem.[59] I propose that Dickinson took it from the issue of the *Springfield Weekly Republican* which announced Frazar's death. In the same column bearing the list of casualties from the 21st Massachusetts, Dickinson would have found a description of the Union artillery at New Bern struggling 'to load and fire as fast as possible, for one hour and five minutes, with grape and canister shot and rifle balls whizzing around and over them'.[60] Inches from the name 'F. A. Stearns' is a potential source for a word which becomes an artefact, even a relic, of battle.

But Dickinson does more than just preserve it as curio. Her line, 'Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball', seems to know that most Civil War rifles fired their projectiles at subsonic speeds. The sound of the ball, its whizzing, would reach you before the ball did, creating an infinitesimal moment between the possibility of encroaching death and the fact of it. When the ball arrived, it would do so in silence, the worst already over. In her letter to the Norcross cousins, Dickinson describes Frazar being shot with a 'minie ball' and declares she has 'read of those'.[61] This comes across as a casual, passing awareness, but 'If any sink' suggests a much more involved knowledge of the new projectile, and the kind of attentive curiosity we know she maintained for subjects like botany and geology. This new information, though, does not sit strangely in the poem, like a foreign object: it is made part of her style. Structurally, visually and rhythmically this is a Dickinson line before anything else. Dickinson's use of ballistic physics as a route into the 'inward history of last hours' thus shows the Civil War finding a way into her style, without that style becoming something other than hers. While this is a poem for Frazar, to Frazar, and, possibly, from Frazar, it does not attempt to ventriloquise him. Dickinson takes up war's equipment and learns to use it for her own poetic-humanitarian ends.

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[59] S. P. Rosenbaum, ed., *A Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p.833.
[60] 'The War', *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 22 March 1862, p.5.
[61] My best suggestion for where Dickinson would have read of them is in the short piece, 'What Is The Minie Rifle', a *New York Tribune* article reprinted in the *Springfield Weekly Republican*, 7 September 1861, p.6.

'If any sink' forms a juncture in Dickinson's lyric thought. How far towards another person can a poem go? We can find her working through this question, and the circumstances behind 'If any sink', in another poem, which Miller marks as late 1862:

> I rose – because He sank –
> I thought it would be opposite –
> But when his power dropped –
> My Soul grew straight.
>
> I cheered my fainting Prince –
> I sang firm – even – Chants –
> I helped his Film – with Hymn
>
> And when the Dews drew off
> That held his Forehead stiff –
> I met him –
> Balm to Balm –
>
> I told him Best – must pass
> Through this low Arch of Flesh
> No Casque so brave
> It spurn the Grave –
>
> I told him Worlds I knew
> Where Emperors grew –
> Who recollected us
> If we were true –
>
> And so with Thews of Hymn –
> And Sinew from within –
> And ways I knew not that I knew – till then –
> I lifted Him –[62]

The gap in this poem between Dickinson and her 'supposed person' is thin unto vanishing. A letter she wrote to Samuel Bowles, editor of the *Springfield Republican,* stands as a hypotext:

> Austin is chilled – by Frazer's murder – He says – his Brain keeps saying over 'Frazer is killed' – 'Frazer is killed,' just as Father told it – to Him. Two or three words of lead – that dropped so deep, they keep weighing – [63]

There is an almost inescapable misreading lurking in these lines. 'Austin is chilled', in its rhyme with the doubled 'Frazer is killed', takes on a deadly shadow: the phrase becomes 'Austin is killed

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[62] *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, p.227 (FR454, J616).
[63] L256, *Letters*, II, p.398 (late March 1862).

– by Frazer's murder'.[64] This argues with the glancingly optimistic close to 'If any sink'. Even the assurance that 'Dying – annuls the power to kill' is unsettled, as Austin is laid low by the bulletin of Frazar's death – a bulletin which Dickinson puts a bullet in, figuring it as '[t]wo or three words of lead'. The possibility of news arriving home as a literal wounding grew in potency during the War, and had become a trope by its end. Even Longfellow, whose Civil War output was slight, tuned in to the trauma of news. In 'Killed at the Ford' (1866), he describes a bullet which slew a soldier on picket flying on from its target, 'Till it reached a house in a sunny street, / Till it reached a heart that ceased to beat'.[65] News, as Dickinson knew, can 'riddle like a shot'.[66] That Austin might be killed by Frazar's murder was, if not a literal possibility, at least an inevitable resting point for the imagination.

Faced with her brother's sudden affliction of grief, Dickinson was forced to search out tactics of care and healing, and this is what 'I rose - because He sank' recounts. In the space remaining, I would like to zoom in on one point of vibration within the poem: the quibble between 'hymn' and 'him'. Entwined in the pun is a struggle over the social powers of lyric, the question, at heart, of whether lyric can ever make contact. The words circle each other, at the ends of lines 7, 10, 21 and 24, but they never square off in clear rhyme positions. Indeed, there are no clear rhyme positions at all in the poem, which is oddly laid out even for Dickinson, without a clear metrical shape lying in wait behind the line divisions. Only in the final stanza do we encounter the 3343 meter of Dickinson's hymnals, albeit with 'till then' moved back a line, to make 3352. The punning words thus stand askance to one another, never in a direct partnership, as if Dickinson is feeling out the unlikely possibility of their relation. The poem thus gestures outside itself: if hymn, and its rhythmical 'Thews' and 'Sinew', can do some work of healing, they do that work elsewhere from here. These lines are not 'firm – even – Chants', but only the fractured remnants of such. The fourth stanza seems to be explicitly curtailed. We get two lines of three beats, then the components of an internally rhymed four-beat line: 'No Casque so brave / It spurn the grave –'. In other circumstances, this momentum would give on to a final three-beat line rhyming with the second line's 'flesh', but here we get only white space, and then a new thought. It is as if having managed once to soothe a him with a hymn, Dickinson has forgotten how she did it. The overwhelming tone is of surprise: surprise that verse made fleeting contact, that it didn't come into being only to die.

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[64] There is also something of 'freezing' in Frazar (spelled 'Frazer' by Dickinson), which might have precipitated 'chilled'.

[65] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'Killed at the Ford', *Atlantic Monthly*, 17, April 1866, p.479.

[66] Alternative for line 4 of 'How News must feel when travelling', *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, p.521 (FR1379, J1319).

The secret of how she did it hides in plain sight. Dickinson tells us she met Austin 'Balm to Balm'. The image, which takes up a whole line, is one of Dickinson's mysteries. Her own balm is, we can assume, her words: her 'even – Chants'. But what is it that it meets? The 'Dews' seem the opposite of a balm – they are what were freezing Austin's mind. I propose that the line is concealing another, in the manner of the lyric cryptographies which John Shoptaw reads as Dickinson's chief mode.[67] In 'Balm to Balm', we are meant to see 'Palm to Palm', and to be put in mind of the sonnet Romeo and Juliet share between them:

> JULIET
> Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this,
> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
>   (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1 Scene 5, 96-99)[68]

The sonnet that Romeo and Juliet negotiate into being is a work of poetry as intimacy. Through its holy conceit, it asks how close is close enough, and what kinds of touch – physical, spiritual, linguistic – might be allowed into play. The erotics of the scene, its intimacy, come from the sonnet's mixture of habit and intention. It is another kind of 'thew' – a word Dickinson may well have taken from Shakespeare, to whom it meant something like muscular vigour and the apparatus thereof. Its first sense in Webster's, though, is 'Manner; custom; habit; form of behaviour'.[69] The sonnet is both: Romeo and Juliet know from custom how a sonnet is laid out, but its creation is willed, a push and pull. The lovers are not singing mechanically from the same hymn sheet; they are negotiating a pliable form between them, exercising it rather than letting it lazily unfurl. From here it is not far to Dickinson's 'Thews of Hymn'. Her 'Hymn' is a version of poetry which can meet someone else via its formal features without abandoning its vigour. 'If any sink' might be such a hymn. 'I rose – because he Sank –' is a fractured memory of how it was done.

Lyric, if it draws its waters from the formal wells of hymn and prayer, can aspire to sociality despite its history of solitude. Our profoundest hopes for voice would thus be better given to style. This is somewhere close to where Adorno arrives at the end of 'Lyric Poetry and Society', his meditation on what lyric might reach out and touch. Lyric is at its best not when it sounds

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[67] John Shoptaw, 'Lyric Cryptography', *Poetics Today*, 21(1) (2000), 221-262.
[68] *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.343.
[69] Webster, II, p.776.

like something a person reasonably might say, but when it 'communicates nothing', when 'the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language'.[70] Adorno's hope for poetry thus relies on style overcoming actual language-in-use, and looks to the moment when 'language itself acquires a voice'. This is the place where we might be able to meet one another, equally alienated to the strangeness, the formality, of what is before us. Dickinson's poems do not represent a connection between her and him, or her and anyone: they are not conversations in which we might find recordings of her voice or anyone else's. The connection is between hymn and him, hymn and her, hymn and the reader.

III. After-Dinner Dickinson

By 1893, Dickinson had lost much of what voice she'd had. While Todd and Higginson had done their level best with Dickinson's scattered manuscripts, they had also done their best levelling; in order to publish a collection they thought would sell, they had smoothed over complexities of spelling, grammar, lineation and lexicon. But sell it did. The success of Todd and Higginson's first 'series' of Dickinson's poems in 1890 persuaded them to assemble a second in 1891. In what reads as a moment of tone-deafness on the part of the editors, the first poem in this second series seems to lament the volume's very existence:

> I'm nobody! Who are you?
> Are you nobody, too?
> Then there's a pair of us – don't tell!
> They'd banish us, you know.
>
> How dreary to be somebody!
> How public, like a frog
> To tell your name the livelong day
> To an admiring bog![71]

Small unto trivial, this poem works as one of Dickinson's watermarks: if it ends up being published, it seems to declare, that publishing was against its wishes, and, presumably, the wishes of the poet. In 'public' we can see 'publish', and the book certainly did tell her name: these were

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[70] Theodor Adorno, 'Lyric and Society', *Notes to Literature*, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), I, pp.37-54, p.43.
[71] *Poems by Emily Dickinson: Second Series*, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), p.21 (FR260, J288).

Poems, by Emily Dickinson, not by anyone else. Part of Todd's levelling work included the silent rejection of a manuscript alternative, which offered 'advertise' instead of 'banish'. This is an instance of Dickinson's poems acting as their own lexicography. '[B]anish' and 'advertise' have no immediate shared sense. Indeed, they stand as opposites: where a banishment sends someone away, an advertisement welcomes them, to the in-group wise enough to plump for a particular product. Offered as alternatives, though, we are asked to find a new relation, the gist of which is that to be advertised, literally to be 'turned to', is also to be banished from a state of blissful anonymity. Dickinson does this again in the second stanza. '[D]reary' and 'public' are not inherently synonymous, but the parallel line structure takes public's latent sense of common, and makes it *overly* common, unto monotony. Via this self-defining the poem doubles down on its tone of us-not-them. Ostensibly addressed to the reader, the reader finds themself unequipped with the right vocabulary, and is thus made eavesdropper as opposed to confidant. The poem proposes, only to undermine, one of the most pervasive misplaced hopes for lyric: that it can achieve some intimacy with its reader. By reading it in any published form, no matter how faithful to the manuscript, we become the public it despises.

What extra irony at the expense of this public is added, then, when the poem is read out loud? In the spring of 1893, with the publication of his grimy debut novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, newly under his belt, Stephen Crane made his way to dinner at the home of William Dean Howells. After they had eaten, including a full course of glowing compliments for the young writer, Howells pulled down a volume of Dickinson's poems, and read aloud from it to his guests.[72] We can't know whether this was the first or second series, but Howells was nothing if not up-to-date, so it is probable that he chose the second. And if he began his reading at the beginning, we can imagine a scene in which Stephen Crane listened to the literary taste-maker in chief declare 'I'm nobody!' to his assembled guests, and then reel off a short diatribe against the idea of literary celebrity. The irony of this possible recital is almost too rich to swallow, and we must assume, instead, that Crane heard *through* Howells's voice to the style of the poems in his hands.

This is almost, but not quite, how the chief disseminator of this anecdote has figured it. Fred Pattee, early twentieth-century critic of American Literature, recounted this story of Dickinson-for-dessert twice, once in an article about Dickinson's critical receptions, and once in a summary of the 'transition poets' of the 1890s. In both pieces, he reaches with apparently automatic hand

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[72] Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (London: W. Heinemann, 1924), p.102.

for the same metaphor. Dickinson, he writes in his article, came to Crane 'like a phonograph record out of the Victorian past', and in *The New American Literature* (1937) we learn that she was 'brought like a phonograph record into the period that needed a poet'.[73] Pattee's edition-as-phonograph-record is, I feel safe to say, an inappropriate metaphor, or at least one which no longer functions. By 1937 (indeed, even by 1893) the phonograph had come a vast distance from Edison's initial plans for it as a dictation device. In that first formulation, its purpose was to record nothing but what, exactly, was said. *How* it was said – 'the quality of the utterance' – was strictly by the by in the proposed office environment.[74] Edison and his competitors soon realised, though, that music, not the office memo, was what people wanted recorded, and that tone was what sold one musical playback device over another. Dickinson's poems, then, in 1893, were fundamentally un-phonographic. Even if we were to give Pattee the benefit of the doubt, and assume he meant that Dickinson's *style* was what had been carried across to Crane, as opposed to anything like her actual voice, we know now that that style was transmitted by Todd with very low fidelity. Perhaps, by turning a scene of oral recitation into something overtly technological, Pattee meant instead to figure Dickinson's verse as itself a novel technology, albeit thirty years old by the time Crane heard it. While the concept of either Dickinson's verse or the phonograph as distinct junctures or break-points in history is passé, it would be petulant to deny that the poems even in their edited form were far from usual. They offered new relations of language to the world, and to the young Crane they may indeed have been a device whose workings demanded investigation.

What Crane did after this recital is the source of some contention. Pattee paints a picture of influence so direct and immediate as to beggar belief. Crane, he writes, 'heard Howells read […] and then rushed back to his room to pen "The Black Riders"'.[75] This offers a cartoonish image of Crane's smoking silhouette hovering on a dining room chair, as the man himself zooms through the streets to his desk, where the pages of his debut poetry collection fly from his hand. Elsewhere, Pattee writes more soberly that Crane 'had gone home with new ideas whirling in his brain'.[76] Even here, Crane is a machine set in motion, 'whirling' like tightly-wound clockwork, a clear case of cause and effect. Thomas Beer's biography (Pattee's source material), meanwhile,

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[73] Fred Pattee, 'Gentian, Not Rose: The Real Emily Dickinson', *Sewanee Review*, 45(2) (1937), 180-197, p.194; *The New American Literature, 1890-1930* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1937), p.199.

[74] Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', p.529. There is a hint in this foundational text of what would become the importance of tone. Describing its use as a letter-writing device, Edison remarked that the record 'gives the tone of voice of his correspondent' and is thus '*identified*' (p.532). Here, tone is a mere signature, the tag on the product. Later, tone would become *the product itself*, when records begun to be marketed via individual celebrity-singers.

[75] Pattee, 'Gentian Not Rose', p.184.

[76] Pattee, *The New American Literature*, p.67.

sketches another scene entirely. Beer writes that after dinner Crane 'walked over to the Bowery and spent the rest of the night watching drunken negroes play poker in the rear room of a saloon'.[77] Crane did not, according to Beer, 'stop to let his mind bask' in what he had heard Howells read. So which is it? Did he run to his desk, or slink off to the pub? The truth is, in all likelihood, somewhere between these two equally reductive accounts. Crane was certainly influenced by Dickinson's style: a glance at *The Black Riders* (1895) and its unusually condensed, aphoristic verses shows that much. But he did not run home to try to record the sound of her poems before it faded, in a precocious mirroring of Mozart's fabled transcription of Allegri's *Miserere*.[78] Any search for a close acoustic similarity between Crane's poems and Dickinson's will come up short. Indeed, his poems are remarkable in how little they sound at all. They are just rhythmical enough to prove how little they care about rhythm, and their anti-temporal perspective distances them from any kind of familiar speech act. Howells had certainly backed a fine horse with Crane, who had a hit with his next novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), but if he'd hoped that his recitation would inspire a new poetic genius, he must have been disappointed: *The Black Riders* never made it far from the gates.[79]

We reach, here, a possible understanding of the 1890s as a silent decade for poetry: both metaphorically, in the dearth of writers who would become, for better or worse, 'canonical', and formally, in the apparent lack of acoustic experimentation. This is how Pattee figured it within his literary history: the 1890s were a decade of 'silence', 'the moment of hush', 'the period of hesitation', before Modernism came along not with a whimper but a bang.[80] This is, of course, a very particular critical stance. Adjust our parameters even slightly, and the period can resolve itself as one in which verse becomes newly sounded – even, perhaps, phonographic. This was the heyday of dialect poetry. Dialect, in verse and prose, on page and stage, had dominated the market since the end of the Civil War: it was, explains Gavin Jones with no demurring, 'the most significant literary event of its generation'.[81] And yet, we (critics of lyric poetry) don't really talk about it. I suggest that this is because it embarrasses some of our favourite thoughts about how lyric poems work. In many formulations, lyric lies in an oblique but insistent relation to speech.

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[77] Beer, p.102
[78] Ben Byram-Wigfield, 'Gregoria Allegri's *Miserere Mei*', < https://ancientgroove.co.uk/essays/allegri.html> [accessed 15 April 2021].
[79] A different tale of influence can be plotted if we imagine Howells reading from the *first* series of Dickinson's poems, which opens with 'Success', a lyric philosophy of battlefield failure.
[80] Pattee, *The New American Literature*, p.194, p.203.
[81] Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.1.

For Mill and his lingering definition, lyric is speech overheard.[82] For Culler, it is speech addressed to the reader via or through the object of its apostrophe.[83] In other schemes, lyric is a faulty echo of speech rhythm, or does its work by making cryptographs of verbal idioms. The commonality between these formulations is their quality of almost-but-not-quite: voice just outside the room, or otherwise muffled or echoing. Is it that voice in dialect rings too clear to fit into these familiar shapes?

For another way of explaining this embarrassment we could turn to Northrop Frye, who proposes (in his own slightly unseemly terms) that a lyric is mappable on a scale between babble and doodle, the extremes of aural and visual play.[84] Dialect might be read as collapsing this scale by doing too much of both at once. It is simultaneously pure sound – recreating a specific type of speech – and pure text – making full use of the resources of typography.[85] It is both voice and its opposite. While it might seem odd that such a radically ambiguous style of verse has gone uncelebrated by a mode of reading for which ambiguity is at least the be-all if never the end-all, I read its short shrift as an inevitable consequence of what it says about performance. Much analysis of sound in lyric, as I outlined with regard to Dickinson, relies on imagining an ideal performance of the poem, which becomes the text we then work on. For dialect poetry, this performance brings with it a host of problems. Are we to imagine ourselves doing the accent the poem proposes, with all the risks of parody and stereotype involved therein? Or to imagine a performance of the poem by someone from the region implied by the dialect, in which case it is no performance at all but some kind of problematic anthropology or ethnography? These questions will texture my argument as it progresses.

Howells, though, had no such qualms about dialect's viability, and made sure to invest at least some of his reputation in this most modish of modes. Just as Crane's poetic stock was sinking, Howells found a much more likely prospect in the work of Paul Laurence Dunbar, a young black poet from Dayton, Ohio, who had just secured a contract for his first substantial collection, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896). Howells provided a lengthy introduction to the book, in which he lauded Dunbar, in the best palindromic terms, as having 'made the strongest claim for the Negro

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[82] Mill, 'What is Poetry'.
[83] Culler, pp.211-243.
[84] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.275.
[85] For a theory of dialect verse as a textual, page-bound phenomenon, see Nadia Nurhussein, *Rhetorics of Literacy: The Cultivation of American Dialect Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

in English Literature that the Negro has yet made'.[86] Zoom out, though, and Howells'
introduction takes on a conflicted, even contradictory character. It begins with a compliment
that is at least under- if not backhanded:

> I think I should scarcely trouble the reader with a special appeal in behalf of this book, if
> it had not specially appealed to me for reasons apart from the author's race, origin, and
> condition. The world is too old now, and I find myself too much of its mood, to care for
> the work of a poet because he is black, because his father and mother were slaves,
> because he was, before and after he began to write poems, an elevator-boy.[87]

We must assume that Howells thought this sentiment entirely reasonable. He is endorsing *Lyrics
of Lowly Life* as an artistic achievement in its own right, for what it is 'in itself'. This detached,
stubbornly objectivist critical stance has not aged well, but we don't even need to rely on our
contemporary sensibilities to problematise it: Howells contradicts himself within his own text.
He sticks to his guns for a while, labelling Dunbar's merits 'positive and not comparative', and
holding them as 'evidence of the essential unity of the human race, which does not think or feel
black in one or white in another, but humanly in all'.[88] But then he pivots:

> Yet it appeared to me then, and it appears to me now, that there is a precious difference
> of temperament between the races which it would be a great pity ever to lose, and that
> this is best preserved and most charmingly suggested by Mr. Dunbar in those pieces of
> his where he studies the moods and traits of his race in its own accent of our English.

His race, our English. So much for an 'essential unity'. Howells's praise of (or perhaps banking-
on) Dunbar relies on a fundamental contradiction of his initial objectivist stance. Even as he
claims to remain colour-blind, it seems he cannot remain colour-deaf. Dunbar's best work, in
Howells's mind, is his dialect poetry, which is only successful because Dunbar is black, and thus
specially attuned to this 'accent of our English'. Howells is not even keen on the term 'dialect',
claiming that Dunbar's poems are 'not dialect so much as delightful personal attempts and
failures for the written and spoken language'.[89] 'Dialect' implies a writer involved in a specific art.
Dunbar comes across more like a recording device: sometimes faulty, but usually able to capture
and preserve the tone and mood of 'negro' speech with more fidelity, more 'truthfulness', than a
white author.

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[86] William Dean Howells, 'Introduction', in Paul Dunbar, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company,
1896), pp.xiii-xx, p.xix.
[87] Howells, p.xiii.
[88] Howells, p.xvii.
[89] Howells, p.xviii.

In the following sections, I will investigate a field of Dunbar's writing where the stakes for his 'attempts and failures' were particularly high: his Civil War verse. Throughout his career Dunbar felt a compulsion, often unwelcome, to speak on behalf of the African American population. His critics have done little to rescue him, and instead have all but repainted Howells's portrait of Dunbar as faithful recording device and committed cultural historian, as opposed to a poet. This encompasses the response to his Civil War writing, which posed a unique problem for Dunbar. How could he speak for, or as, the black soldiers of the Civil War, whose contribution to the conflict had gone practically unrecorded? Could dialect poetry not only put on voices, but meaningfully recover them? I will begin by analysing a portion of Dunbar's Civil War poems, asking what kinds of memory they count on being able to perform or house. The key question, which critics seem to take as always answered in advance, is whether dialect verse was necessarily *better* than any other kind of verse at recovering the black experience of the Civil War. This will lead on to a reading of Dunbar's 'Whistling Sam' in the contexts of minstrelsy and the early phonograph industry. I propose that Dunbar's poetic career was characterised by a fear that dialect voice was a phenomenon inextricable from the body, and that he harboured a desire to use the written page as a way to avoid his black face being read as blackface.

IV. Dunbar's Halting Lines

The reception of Dunbar's poems has undergone several shifts since Howells's early laden praise, and it is worth sketching these shifts in brief, wound up as they are with the problem of voice. Where the debate over Dickinson's poems has got stuck on whether we should look or listen, Dunbar's critics have rarely suggested we use anything but our ears. What is heard in him, though, has never been settled. Howells heard the authentic voice of a black American, unmediated and pure – never mind that most of the poems he praised were in a southern dialect Dunbar never actually spoke. This characterisation stood for a while, but with the Harlem Renaissance came a wilful desire to rid black art of the stereotypes propagated by white authors in the nineteenth century. Dunbar took pride of place in James Weldon Johnson's 1922 *Book of American Negro Poetry*, and glowing anecdotes of the editor's meetings with Dunbar take up a good portion of the preface.[90] Turn the page, though, and we encounter what is, in essence, an extended refutation of Dunbar's form:

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[90] James Weldon Johnson, *Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).

> The Negro in the United States has achieved or been placed in a certain artistic niche. When he is thought of artistically, it is as a happy-go-lucky, singing, shuffling, banjo-picking being or as a more or less pathetic figure […] Negro dialect is naturally and by long association the exact instrument for voicing this phase of Negro life […][91]

Johnson concludes that dialect 'is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America'.[92] This judgement, and its implications for Dunbar as a poet most renowned for his dialect work, held sway for most of the twentieth century. There was no sense that Dunbar was unskilled, or his poems not worth reading – and he would continue to be anthologised – but Johnson had stapled a certain amount of embarrassment, or at least regret, to dialect of Dunbar's style.[93] What we hear in it, Johnson hints, is not blackness but whiteness.

Dunbar criticism of the late-twentieth and twenty-first century has been concerned with extricating Dunbar's dialect verse from this knotty fate. In place of an unwitting repetition of racialist and racist tropes and accents, critics have argued for a degree of irony in Dunbar's work. Even Dunbar's most plantation-mired dialect verse, it seems, can be read askance, as a double-voiced hiding-in-plain-sight. What seems to be nostalgia for the plantation conditions is really just nostalgia for the bonds of black community sundered during Reconstruction.[94] This revitalisation was heralded in Joanne Braxton's 1993 *Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, the first complete, or nearly complete, edition since the 1913 Dodd, Mead and Company text. The introduction declares that 'Dunbar exceeds his inheritance of racialized language, recharging it and refocussing it, turning it to his own purpose'.[95] Twenty years later, the matter could be put even more starkly. In a chapter for the *Cambridge Companion to American Poets* (2015), Braxton and Ramey describe Dunbar's dialect poetry as his 'most controversial', but reassure us that 'some critics misread it because white authors had so often used dialect to caricature and demean the

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[91] Johnson, p.xl.
[92] Johnson, p.xli.
[93] Sterling Brown gave a more pointed critique of Dunbar, who he claimed 'could not completely escape the influences' of white plantation writers like Thomas Nelson Page, whose shadow fell 'darkly upon him'. Sterling Brown, *Negro Poetry and Drama and The Negro in American Fiction* (1937; New York: Atheneum, 1972), p.32
[94] See John Keeling, 'Paul Dunbar and the Mask of Dialect', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 25(2) (1993), 24-38, and Shira Wolosky, *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.153-162.
[95] Joanne M. Braxton, 'Introduction', *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp.vii-xxxvi, p.xxiv. Aside from a few added poems, this edition merely reprints the text of *The Complete Poems* (1913). With the further additions presented by *In His Own Voice: The Dramatic and Other Uncollected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), it seems to me that the time is ripe for a comprehensive new collection.

black experience and persons of African descent'.[96] Even for an introductory form like the *Cambridge Companion*, this is quite cut-and-dried. To find Dunbar's dialect poems problematic is apparently, as of 2015, a misreading.

I do not entirely concur, and for an alternative view will rewind briefly to the height of Dunbar's renewed critical moment: the 2006 Paul Laurence Dunbar Centennial Conference at Stanford University. At the close of the conference, which hosted various speakers in favour of the 'double-voiced' reading of dialect, David Bradley presented a paper titled 'Factoring out Race: The Cultural Context of Paul Laurence Dunbar'.[97] Bradley argues that Dunbar has been yoked too readily to one particular set of circumstances, at the expense of richer, more varied readings:

> Rather than allow Dunbar to be a writer who, like every writer, desires, again in Du Bois's words – 'to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation' and [whose] most pressing problems were issues of craft and commerce, they read him as a Race Man and crucified him on a Cross of Black.[98]

'[T]hey', here, are the twentieth-century critics who found Dunbar's dialect so distasteful. Bradley is thus equally as keen to move on from this criticism as Braxton, but where Braxton and others pursue a reading of Dunbar's dialect as an ironic critique of racial stereotyping, Bradley would have us move on from race, and embrace other contexts entirely. I concur with Bradley in part. He is right, I believe, to put an emphasis on Dunbar as writer, and as poet, as opposed to what we would now refer to as activist or journalist. He ties himself in a knot, though, by pairing this opinion with a desire to downplay the complexities of dialect verse. Dialect verse is, without any doubt, an 'issue of craft'. To give Dunbar the respect he deserves as a writer, we must reckon with how Dunbar crafted his dialect poems, and why. My contention is that this kind of close attention does not inevitably lead us away from the poems' problematic elements, and might, in fact, end up highlighting them.

Bradley's hope for the future of Dunbar studies was not borne out. 2010's *We Wear the Mask* – the only major Dunbar publication since the 2007 special issue of *African American Review* based on the Stanford conference proceedings – did not factor out race, and instead made it the

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[96] Joanne Braxton and Lauri Ramey, 'Paul Laurence Dunbar', *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.136-143, p.136.
[97] Barbara Palmer, 'Centennial conference re-evaluates legacy of writer, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar', *Stanford Report,* 15 March 2006 <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2006/march15/dunbar-031506.html> [accessed 27 May 2021]; David Bradley, 'Factoring out Race: The Cultural Context of Paul Laurence Dunbar', *African American Review*, 41(2) (2007), 357-366.
[98] Bradley, p.364.

common denominator of its contributions. Dunbar is still, in Bradley's term, a 'Race Man', as confirmed by Willie J. Harrel Jr.'s introduction. 'To effectively represent the black voice in his works,' Harrel writes, 'Dunbar illustrated his awareness of the black struggle to triumph over the legacy of slavery and prejudice while affirming the civil liberties, responsibilities, and advantages of freedom'.[99] I don't by any means wish to claim that this isn't the case, but it is, nevertheless, a useful example of 'voice' as a term with too many metaphorical responsibilities to perform any of them all that well. Dunbar could certainly be read as trying to 'represent the black voice' through phonetic dialect writing, and that acoustic sense is lodged in Harrel's sentence, which wants, instead, to use voice to mean 'political desires'. Certainly, the two overlap, but never neatly, and this is the problem. Just because Dunbar is thinking hard about voice as in *dialect* does not necessarily mean he is thinking hard about voice as in the 'will of a body of people', and vice versa.[100] Sharon Raynor, in a chapter in *We Wear the Mask* dealing with Dunbar's 'mythic and poetic tribute to black soldiers', argues that we should read his poems as the filling of silence with voice:

> Dunbar pays homage to both real and mythical soldiers […] who never got the opportunity to tell their own stories because of the devastating silence of America's distorted history […] Dunbar puts a voice to their experience, thereby memorializing their presence on America's battlefields.[101]

After paying homage and telling stories, we get 'puts a voice to'. This is a phrase with its eye on ventriloquism. It suggests that 'experience', or at least this kind of experience, did not have a voice, and so Dunbar provides one out of the side of his mouth. Shortly after, we learn that Dunbar 'makes audible those voices that have yet to be heard'.[102] In this formulation, he is more like a playback device, amplifying the sounds of erstwhile fugitives. So within a few pages, Dunbar is figured as both *recreating* and *amplifying* the 'voices' of black Civil War soldiers: two distinct ideas given to the reader as equivalents. What should be clear already is that voice is, at the very least, a problematic but persistent critical term within Dunbar studies.

I am not alone in wishing to quibble with this metaphor-of-least-resistance. At the start of *The Sonic Color Line*, a monograph on racialised listening in the nineteenth century, Jennifer Stoever

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[99] Willie J. Harrell Jr., ed., *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010), p.x.
[100] 'Voice' clocks in with a polyphonous 14 senses in the OED. The above quotation is taken from sense 9, which itself advises us to 'Cf. sense 3': 'an expression of choice or preference given by a person'. More than many other words, 'voice' speaks over itself.
[101] Sharon D. Raynor, '"Sing a Song Heroic": Paul Laurence Dunbar's Mythic and Poetic Tribute to Black Soldiers', *We Wear the Mask,* pp.32-48, p.35.
[102] Raynor, p.35.

provides a frank disclaimer: 'I do not intend my readings to further the neoliberal project of "giving voice to the voiceless" or recovering "lost" sounds'.[103] This is a polemic stance for a work of sound studies to take, focussed as much as the field has been on a kind of quasi-archaeological acoustic retrieval. Stoever might even be taking aim at a particular book: Tim Brooks's *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919*.[104] This would be a troubling target, as most of the work Brooks does is the archival trawling and reporting necessary for commentaries such as Stoever's to exist. Her intervention itself, however, is essential. Certainly, the record of nineteenth-century black experience was suppressed, but that does not mean black people were 'voiceless' and are thus in need of ventriloquising. It means we need to go looking for other kinds of record, and to do more of the valuable work that Stoever performs in her book: reading experience via the traces it leaves on its suppression. This forms an implicit rebuttal to the recent attempts to revitalise Dunbar's dialect poetry by mining it for hints of irony or resistance. Dunbar's verse bears marks of suppression; it is better, I think, that we square up to these, instead of performing critical gymnastics in order to positivise, or factor out, Dunbar's reluctant relationship with stereotyping.

Dunbar, in turn, did not inherently believe himself best-placed to recover the 'lost' voices of black Civil War soldiers, and we must make sure to ask what kinds of remembering or recreating his poems thought themselves able to perform. This is one of the questions posed by 'The Veteran', a 1905 poem in 'standard English'.[105] The scene is a parade:

> Underneath the autumn sky,
> Haltingly, the lines go by.
> Ah, would steps were blithe and gay,
> As when first they marched away,
> Smile on lip and curl on brow,—
> Only white-faced gray-beards now,
> Standing on life's outer verge,
> E'en the marches sound a dirge.
>
> Blow, you bugles, play, you fife,
> Rattle, drums, for dearest life.
> Let the flags wave freely so,

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[103] Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p.6.

[104] Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

[105] I use inverted commas for want of a better phrase. By what measure could Dunbar's lyric language be considered 'standard' English? Lyric is made from an entirely non-standard kind of English, where words like 'E'en' still have currency. Bradley refers to this as 'Romantic English', which while perhaps a little restrictive, is useful in emphasising its otherness (Bradley, p.360).

As the marching legions go,
　　　　Shout, hurrah and laugh and jest,
　　　　This is memory at its best.
　　　　(Did you notice at your quip,
　　　　That old comrade's quivering lip?)
　　　　[…]

　　　　　　　　　　　　(1-16) [106]

In years, we are far indeed from the bugles Walt Whitman apostrophised in 1861, but Dunbar's nevertheless seem in close kinship. Here again are the fifes and the drums, and they play 'for dearest life', as if these soldiers are once more called to arms against a deadly aggressor. To remember war, this poem knows, is to repeat all of it but the killing. Hence, perhaps, the quip: '[t]his is memory at its best'. While Dunbar could not entirely avoid the current of reconciliation and reunion which dominated Civil War memory after Reconstruction (see, for instance, his highly reconciliatory poem 'After the Struggle', or his letter recounting a performance to an audience including 'Mrs. Jefferson Davis'), there are flashes in his writing of frustration with what has come to be remembered and what has been erased.[107] This parade, the speaker's companion seems to be suggesting, is meaningless pageantry, replaying the War's ornamentation at the expense of engaging with its causes or effects.

The further narrative of the poem is hard to fix. It is not clear why the 'old comrade' is unable to participate in the parade. We learn that he uses a 'cane', but we are also told that the column is 'stumbling', possibly full of cane-users, so he surely isn't held back by a lack of mobility. There is a possible racial divide in play. The marching veterans are white, or at least 'white-faced'. The old comrade is sketched in outline:

　　　　[…] He stood and stands
　　　　In my memory—trembling hands,
　　　　Whitened beard and cane and all
　　　　As if waiting for the call
　　　　[…]

　　　　　　　　　　　　(33-36)

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[106] *Collected Poetry*, p.256. All further quotations from Dunbar's poems will be taken from this edition, unless noted otherwise.

[107] 'After the Struggle' is printed in *In His Voice*, p.282; for the letter, see *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, ed. Jay Martin and Gossie H. Hudson (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975), p.436; for a comprehensive account of the triumph of reconciliatory politics, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

The '[w]hitened' beard could belong to a black veteran, excluded from a segregated parade. The ostensibly common experience of Civil War veterancy did not, in practice, overcome racial divides. Dunbar's own father, a veteran of the 55th Massachusetts Infantry, spent his last years in Dayton's National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Residency at the home was available for both black and white veterans, but the institution was internally segregated, with separate barracks and dining rooms.[108] The call that Dunbar imagines echoing in the veteran's ears – 'To arms, my sons' – is consistent with a common poetic shorthand for African Americans: the 'sons of Ham' (often a handy rhyme for 'Uncle Sam').[109] So this might be a poem with its eye on the irony of racial segregation within the memorialisation of a war which was ostensibly fought for racial liberation. If this is the best the poem can do, though, it is scarce little. My reading of the old comrade as black is at least stretching if not stretched; the poem certainly does not insist on this version of events. The quip, then – '[t]his is memory at its best' – might also be at Dunbar's own expense. This kind of poem, the paean to aging veterans, is itself tottering, and unable to perform much in the way of radical re-remembering if it is to keep its shape. Such an intention to self-slight would also explain the odd premise of it being a 'you' who makes the remark – Dunbar lends the reader the words to quibble with his poem. 'Haltingly', we learn, 'the lines go by': Dunbar is caught up in the drive for lines of pageant verse, but is painfully aware of their failures.

What, then, *is* memory at its best, if the phrase is used here with only a bitter sarcasm? The kind of memory Dunbar's critics task him with performing is the memory of things all but forgotten. By arguing for his ability to give voice to the black experience of the Civil War, they figure him not as the speaker who *observes* the old veteran, but as the veteran himself, who we might turn to in hopes of filling the gaps in the record of black military experience. It is hard to work out what these gaps actually look like – blank spaces are notoriously light on features. Within verse studies, though, we have the advantage of trope: when there are enough poems of a particular type, any absence becomes telling. In 2013, Elizabeth Lorang and Rebecca Weir published a profoundly valuable online edition of poems from two Civil War newspapers, the *Anglo-African* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.[110] In the richness of its findings, and its gestures towards what remains to be recovered, the edition argues with the very notion of a dearth of African

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[108] 'History of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers', <https://www.nps.gov/articles/history-of-disabled-volunteer-soldiers.htm> [accessed 16 April 2021].
[109] See, for instance, 'The Colored Soldiers', *Collected Poetry*, p.50.
[110] Elizabeth Lorang and R. J. Weir, ed., '"Will not these days be by thy poets sung": Poems of the *Anglo-African* and *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1863–1864', <https://scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/aa.18640806.2.html> [accessed 16 April 2021].

American Civil War poetry – we've just been looking in the wrong places. What Lorang and Weir do note, though, is a gap in the black authorship of a specific *type* of Civil War poetry: the dying soldier poem. In a note to 'The Dying Soldier' by Brown-Eyed Ruth, the editors remark that the poem is 'unusual, in that relatively few verses published in the *Anglo-African* during the latter half of the war represented individual soldiers' deaths within the "framework of sentimental norms" that privileged family ties and tender thoughts of home'.[111] The editors quote here from Alice Fahs's *The Imagined Civil War*, which identifies the dying soldier poem as a popular Civil War trope; as I have shown, it made it even as far as Dickinson's Amherst isolation. It was not, though, taken up by a large volume of black poets.

Lorang and Weir don't have space in their note to explain *why* dying soldier poems were unusual in the *Anglo-African*, so I will offer some theories here. African Americans were only permitted to join the Union Army in 1863, after two years of fighting had already been and gone. As such, as Ira Berlin et al. remark, '[w]hereas many white soldiers wearied as the war dragged on, the enthusiasm of black soldiers grew with the Union's commitment to freedom and to the effort – however feeble and reluctant – to eliminate the most glaring racial inequities from life'.[112] For white soldiers and their families (and here I of course generalise) what began as a war to defend the Union dragged on into a conflict over abolition, a cause to which many were at best ambivalent and at worst hostile. Thus we find a detachment between the War's political background and the daily experience of the white northern population. Within this ambivalence, the dying soldier poem, and the sentimental elegy more generally, found its place. An apparently senseless dying was made meaningful in verse. For black soldiers, meanwhile, the War was *always* bound to be meaningful: it was a tangible fight for their own liberation. The Dying Soldier dies politically adrift; the black soldier never could. On a more material level, we can note that the majority of sentimental Civil War verse was written by women, and specifically women of some leisure. The black men who signed up to fight often left behind families with few means, and thus scarce time for the writing of verses. This was true enough for those in free states; soldiers signing up from border states might even have left families in slavery. The editors of *Freedom's Soldiers* include a letter from a Missouri woman to her enlisted husband: 'You ought not to left me in the fix I am in & all these little helpless children to take care of.   I was invited to a party to night but I could not go   I am in too much trouble to want to go to parties'.[113] The dying

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[111] Note to Brown-Eyed Ruth, 'The Dying Soldier'
<https://scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/aa.18640806.2.html#note1> [accessed 16 April 2021].
[112] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland, ed., *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.33.
[113] *Freedom's Soldiers*, p.117.

soldier poem relies on the author having time to imagine and versify that dying, and on the death being at least partly detached from the political origins of the violence which caused it. For many black poets and soldiers, both of these criteria were hard to come by.

Dunbar was perhaps just as aware as Lorang and Weir are of the lack of sentimental Civil War lyrics by African Americans; there is no shortage of sentiment across his corpus, suggesting an implicit project of making up the deficit. But even Dunbar can hardly bring himself to write an entirely apolitical War lyric. Within his published works, he comes closest with 'Dirge for a Soldier' (1903):

> In the east the morning comes,
> Hear the rollin' of the drums
> On the hill.
> But the heart that beat as they beat
> In the battle's raging day heat
> Lieth still.
> Unto him to the night has come,
> Though they roll the morning drum.
> (1-8)[114]

This poem is conflicted from the start. In line 2 it slips into dialect with 'rollin'', only to double down on a more highfalutin tenor with '[l]ieth' and '[u]nto'. It is an odd, inexplicable slip, but it at least serves to remind us that lyric language is as non-standard as any of the myriad things we could label 'dialect'. The poem lays on the sentimental features: 'There's a woman left to mourn / For the child that she has borne / In travail'. She is consoled by her son's heroism – her heart beating 'high and higher / With a patriot mother's fire' – and thus becomes a model of good mourning, her passion directed unto lofty hopes instead of earthly woes. Of the soldier and his identity we learn little. We are too late to hear his dying words, and can only watch his burial:

> What is in the bugle's blast?
> It is: "Victory at last!
> Now for rest."
> But, my comrades, come behold him
> Where our colors now enfold him
> And his breast
> Bares no more to meet the blade,
> But lies covered in the shade.
> (9-16)

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[114] *The Collected Poetry*, p.199.

Dunbar's interest in the 'Colored Soldiers' of the Civil War is manifest – they feature in the titles of two poems and are the subjects of several more.[115] Here we get not a colored soldier, though, but a soldier enfolded in colours. His body is covered in the flag of his country (presumably the Union, but even this isn't explicit), and this becomes his only identifier. The speaker asks his comrades to 'come behold him', but there's really nothing to see – just a flag, in shadow. The problem here is that within the history of Civil War poetics as it stood during Dunbar's career, such sentimental verse came across implicitly coded as white. There was, for all intents and purposes, no such thing as an elegy for a black soldier. 'Dirge for a Soldier' would thus have carried little ambivalence to its contemporary readership. A hero-soldier's body, unless specifically described as black, would simply be assumed to be white.

This is where dialect came into play. If Civil War verse in lyric diction could not escape a history of whiteness, dialect could at least wear its investment in blackness on its sleeve. I believe this is something underestimated by critics who project an embarrassment with Dunbar's dialect verse. Certainly its investment in 'darky' tropes and plantation characters is troubling, but it remained for Dunbar a tactic with which to forefront blackness unambiguously. This is not to say that Dunbar's dialect verse is therefore a successful tactic of resistance to stereotyping, although there is some consensus that this is the case. Wolosky proposes that Dunbar 'is not presenting, but stylizing one kind of black personae: masks that the slaves displayed to their masters as a certain type within African-American history and lore'.[116] Dunbar thus 'has his black speakers act the way whites think they do, an imitation of an image, his enactment of an act to which blacks themselves might resort'. Certainly this might be so, but what difference would this complex engagement with theories of masking make to a white readership? My worry is that the answer is none. Throughout his career, Dunbar was supported and patronised (in both senses) by white editors, authors and readers. However complex his employment of stereotypes is (and I concur with Wolosky that it is, at times, complex indeed), his audience could easily choose not to heed that complexity. Unlike, for instance, Charles Chesnutt's dialect stories, which Stoever reads as scorning the white 'listening ear', Dunbar's poems all too easily *play* to that ear.[117] While poems like 'The Deserted Plantation' might, with careful reading, come to work as a repudiation of the system wherein plantations became a 'deah 'ol place' to the people enslaved there, the path of least resistance is towards a genuine nostalgia for the antebellum South. But Dunbar was in a

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[115] 'The Colored Soldiers' and 'When Dey 'Listed Colored Soldiers'; other poems about black soldiers include 'Ode for Memorial Day', 'The Unsung Heroes', 'Whistling Sam' and 'Robert Gould Shaw'.
[116] Wolosky, *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America*, p.157.
[117] Stoever, p.179.

bind. In an 1898 interview with the *New York Commercial* he responds to the reporter's suggestion that black poets should preserve their 'genuine' linguistic temperament:

> 'We must write like the white men. I do not mean imitate them; but our life is now the same.' Then the speaker [Dunbar] added: 'I hope you are not one of those who would hold the negro down to a certain kind of poetry – dialect and concerning only scenes on plantations in the south?'[118]

It is a valiant defence, but not one Dunbar was able to bear out entirely. He did not escape an implicit charge of imitation from Howells in the introduction to *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, and as his career continued his output leaned more and more towards 'dialect' and 'scenes on plantations in the south'. He was compelled, ultimately, to talk a very particular talk.

V. Minstrel Voices

Within this fraught back and forth, Dunbar's Civil War dialect poems sit uniquely askance. We encounter poems about the fight to liberate African Americans in language which perpetuates the stereotypes weaponised by their oppressors. In these poems, is Dunbar recovering voice (in either its acoustic or political sense) or is he reluctantly engaging in a commercial practice in conflict with his poetic project? Do the poems present a black experience of the Civil War, or are they products of a culture within which black experience could be consumed as entertainment for white audiences? In the remainder of this chapter I will take up two of Dunbar's Civil War dialect poems, and ask what they recorded and how.

'When Dey Listed Colored Soldiers', first published in the 1901 *Candle-Lightin' Time*, is an example of Dunbar's dialect verse at its most resourceful and complex:

> Dey was talkin' in de cabin, dey was talkin' in de hall;
> But I listened kin' o' keerless, not a-t'inkin' 'bout it all;
> An' on Sunday, too, I noticed, dey was whisp'rin' mighty much,
> Stan'in' all erroun' de roadside w'en dey let us out o' chu'ch.
> But I did n't t'ink erbout it 'twell de middle of de week,
> An' my 'Lias come to see me, an' somehow he could n't speak.
> Den I seed all in a minute whut he 'd come to see me for;—
> Dey had 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias gwine to wah.
>
> (1-8)[119]

[118] *In His Own Voice*, p.206.
[119] *Collected Poetry*, p.182. For the title as rendered here see Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Candle-Lightin' Time* (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1901).

The poem begins as a dramatic monologue in which the speaker has nothing to say: after all the chatter and hubbub of the first four lines, the communication between 'Lias and the speaker is silent, made up of visual signs and clues. What she hears is less important than what she sees. As such, the refrain – 'Dey had 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias gwine to wah' – comes across not as a transcription of something said, but as the record of a thought or realisation. Because dialect verse is accented (to an extent I will try to pinpoint below), it generally appears to have an ambition towards speech. '[M]ore than any other poetic form', Nadia Nurhussein writes, dialect 'defies John Stuart Mill's definition of poetry as something "overhead"'.[120] Instead, it seems to want to be *heard*. But this stanza, in being all about what isn't said, goes some way to reminding us that its relationship to speech might be just as oblique as that of a more 'standard' lyric. After all, people don't talk in rhyme. The woman's realisation relies on a small bit of verse technology: the chime of 'for' and 'wah', which pulls the stanza to its conclusion. As the refrain comes to be repeated, led into each time by a rhyme on 'wah', we get further and further away from a speech act, and closer to the ritual, incantatory realm of lyric.

Later in the poem Dunbar thinks again about speech and its limits. 'Lias goes off to fight for the Union, and his masters go to join the Confederate forces, leaving their wives, mothers and sisters behind:

> Ol' Mis' cried w'en mastah lef huh, young Miss mou'ned huh brothah Ned,
> An' I did n't know dey feelin's is de ve'y wo'ds dey said
> W'en I tol' 'em I was so'y. Dey had done gin up dey all;
> […]
>
> (25-27)

The second line here is one of only two in the 38-line poem to end without punctuation. In the earlier instance, the thought is clearly divided across the line break, and is confined to a couplet: 'An' he could n't baih to lingah w'en he had a chanst to fight / For de freedom dey had gin him an' de glory of de right' (11-12). Here, though, the thought is continuous as it spills over the line break and bursts through the settled 'Ned / said' rhyme, before ending abruptly in the poem's only full caesura. In this mostly narrative poem, the lines also sit strangely in not really telling us anything. Their frame of reference is beyond the poem's own material, and we are made to lean into their ambiguity. It seems as if the woman is querying a prior assumption that her mistresses would in some way dissemble their feelings about their family's enlistment. She herself has

[120] Nurhussein, p.5.

dissembled throughout the poem, from the first silent exchange with 'Lias to her eventual farewell: 'An' he looked so strong an' mighty in his coat o' sojer blue, / Dat I hollahed, "Step up, manny," dough my th'oat was so' an' raw'. She is startled, perhaps, by the fact that her white owners do not need to express their feelings circuitously; they do not need, in essence, to signify, and can instead use the most direct language available to them.[121]

Shelley Fisher Fishkin argues that Mark Twain found black dialect to be a powerful means of 'decentering and exposing the hollow conventions that pass themselves off as meaningful and authoritative in the dominant discourse of culture'.[122] This is certainly afoot here, with Dunbar's character cutting through her mistresses' formal expressions of grief, showing clearly that such expression is a privilege denied to her, and to the families of black soldiers in general. It becomes a poem about the gap noted by Lorang and Weir, a reflection on the elegiac discourse denied to a group for whom death came ready-laden with political meaning. But are Fisher's words not a fine description, too, of the aims of lyric poems? Nurhussein has referred to dialect as 'an extreme subgenre of lyric poetry', based on its earworm-ish memorability.[123] I propose that this definition can be thickened if we hold dialect verse as involved in an intensified version of lyric's negotiation between spoken and written language. The risks and rewards of dialect poetry are the same as those of lyric in general: the language of speech, with its many 'hollow conventions', is put under pressure, made to follow strange new rules, and if the gamble pays off ends up meaning more, or meaning better. 'When Dey Listed Colored Soldiers' is undoubtedly a talkative poem, but remains invested in the difference between everyday 'talkin'' and versifying, the creation of a kind of talk to which we cannot listen 'keerless'.

Even here, though, in one of Dunbar's most successful dialect pieces, we fast find problems. Because is this poem, really, rooted in the language of speech? The bargain proposed by dialect writing – that the investment in phonetic spelling and punctuation pays off by replicating a real-world speech act – is broken before we even begin. The title of the poem, as originally printed in *Candle-lightin' Time* and replicated ever since, is 'When Dey Listed Colored Soldiers':

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[121] For a breakdown of definitions of signifyin(g), see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1988; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.70-96.
[122] Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.104.
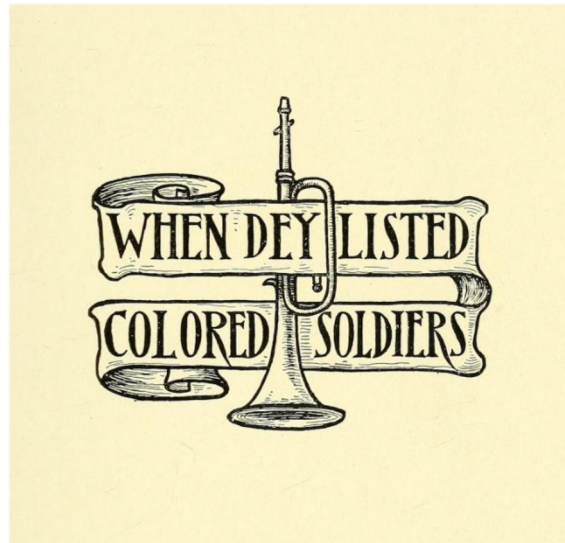[123] Nurhussein, p.26.

Figure 12: from Candle-Lightin' Time, *1901.*

Within the poem, though, the refrain is rendered as 'W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers'. If the title had used 'they' instead of 'dey', there would at least have been a clear distinction between 'standard' English and dialect. Dunbar probably left 'dey' in his otherwise conventional title in order to signal to his reader browsing the contents page that this was a dialect piece. But this signal puts the lie to dialect as an apparently accurate, objective transcription: it can come in degrees. Further complaints can be levelled against the poem's rhymes. If 'wah' is meant to rhyme with 'for/draw/raw/saw' then why not simply render it 'war'? The '-aw/-ar' sound is clearly a part of the character's accent. Here I follow Henry Louis Gates's complaint in *Figures in Black* (1987). He takes up a poem by Ray Garfield Dandridge only to take it down a peg, writing that the dialect 'sounds forced, of the sort written but never spoken or sung'.[124] He inspects Dandridge's word 'doin'', then discards it as a 'poor literate translation, meant for the eye of the uninitiate, not meant to suggest a sound'. Dunbar might come under the same fire. He opts for 'wah' instead of 'war' because it *looks* like dialect. The formerly enslaved person reminiscing of times 'befo' de wah' was a trope of dialect writing, and Dunbar seems deliberately to summon it here. Gates passes unflinching judgement on this kind of verse: 'out of aesthetic decision, a technical failing, or the very limitation of literary form, the poetry echoed the minstrel or plantation traditions of dialect usage rather than its vital origins'.[125] So where lyric can profit from placing 'vital', living speech in negotiation with formal constraints, what he have here is one constraint clashing with another: form grating against form.

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[124] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Word, Signs, and the 'Racial' Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.188.
[125] Gates, p.187.

But is there any way to extricate dialect from its problematic conventions? Can an objective dialect writing exist? In 1883, physician, academic and spelling reformer Cornelius Wilson Larison published an account of an interview he had conducted with the formerly enslaved Silvia Dubois. [126] The book, titled *Silvia Dubois: A Biografy of the Slave Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, is written entirely in Larison's own revised English orthography:
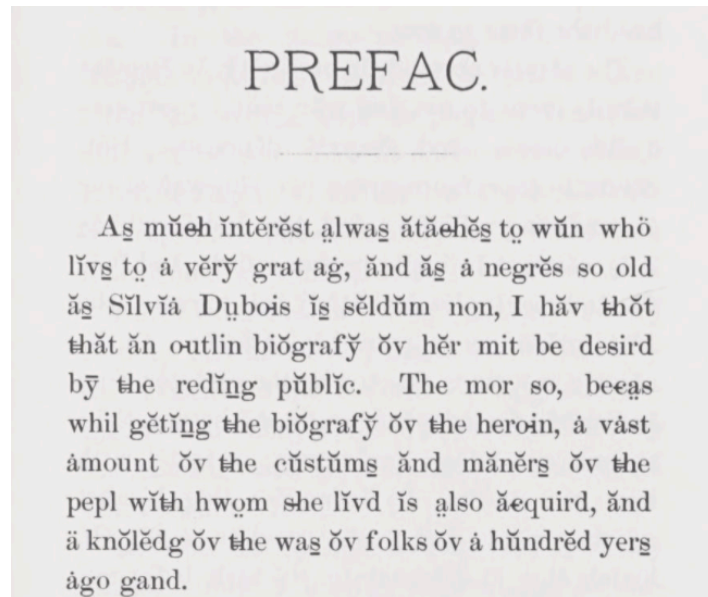

Figure 13: Silvia Dubois: A Biografy of the Slave Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom, p.4.

The system is based, as far as possible, on a system whereby 'wūn cārāctēr wīl rēprezēnt būt wūn fon; ānd wūn fon īs rēpreṣēntēd by wūn cārāctēr'.[127] Both Larison and Dubois's words are rendered in this form, raising the possibility that her accent comes to us with something of its vital origins. But while this may be the case, it was not one of Larison's express aims. He makes a claim to accuracy, declaring that 'as by giving her own words in the order and style in which she spoke them portrays more of the heroine than can possibly be given in any other way, I have written the most essential parts of it, exactly as she related the facts to me'.[128] This is not directly related to his radical orthography, and is in more immediate conversation with the trope of the authenticating disclaimer appended to slave narratives. Indeed, most of the preface is concerned with the issue of spelling reform per se, and gives a diatribe against the 'meaningless, jumbling of characters as occur in the printing or writing of words as found in most books and

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[126] C. W. Larison, *Silvia Dubois: A Biografy of the Slave Who Whipt Her Mistres and Gand Her Fredom*, ed. Jared C. Lobdell (1883; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[127] Larison, facsimile p.5. Further quotations will be rendered in standard spelling.

[128] Larison, facsimile p.3.

newspapers'.[129] Larison's interest in Dubois's life and his passion for spelling reform are parallel but not intersecting. Indeed, spelling reform was, taken as a whole, a force in opposition to regional and ethnic dialects. Ostensibly a means of promoting literacy among 'previously subaltern groups', reformed spelling 'did not tolerate difference: it aimed instead for the destruction of nonstandard speech'.[130] Larison's transcript of Dubois's dialect is wound up with a linguistic scheme which looks towards the eventual erasure of such dialects.

The '*Biografy*', while curious, is thus not a radical ethnography, and does not provide a solution for dialect.[131] Any attempt to get voice and its acoustic complexities into poems is bound to be frustrated by the conventions upon which the attempt ends up relying. Dialect verse thus becomes a partner to stenography in the list of nineteenth-century technologies doomed to what Gates might call 'technical failings' or limitations of form. Lisa Gitelman, in *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (1999), breaks down the debate as to whether stenographers should aim to record sound or sense: what was said, or what was *meant* to be said.[132] The idea that stenography was a phonographic technology, a writing purely of sound, cannot be maintained, as all the methods Gitelman describes employed shorthands for particular words and particles as well as for phonemes. In the same way, dialect verse can be thought of aspiring to phonography while relying on its own coded set of non-acoustic shorthands, of which Dunbar's 'wah' is a perfect example. The word presents itself as a 'gesture toward a spoken reality', but ends up working as a complex visual marker, much more likely to have been previously encountered on the page, than as part of some 'heard experience'.[133] The question becomes, then, how much influence the code's origin bears on the final poem. To approach this question, I will take up a poem with unavoidable links to minstrelsy, and track Dunbar's repudiation of verse as a sonic, vocalised art.

'Whistling Sam' was first published in the 1899 *Lyrics of the Hearthside.*[134] The poem is a tall tale in the same meter as 'When Dey Listed Colored Soldiers':

> I has hyeahd o' people dancin' an' I's hyeahd o' people singin'.
> An' I's been 'roun' lots of othahs dat could keep de banjo ringin';
> But of all de whistlin' da'kies dat have lived an' died since Ham,
> De whistlin'est I evah seed was ol' Ike Bates's Sam.

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[129] Larison, facsimile p.5.
[130] Jones, p.24.
[131] Such an ethnography was tied up with the further development of the phonograph. See Brian Hochman, *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[132] Gitelman, p.45.
[133] Jones, p.184.
[134] Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1899).

In de kitchen er de stable, in de fiel' er mowin' hay,
You could hyeah dat boy a-whistlin' pu'ty nigh a mile erway,--
Puck'rin' up his ugly features 'twell you could n't see his eyes,
Den you'd hyeah a soun' lak dis un f'om dat awful puckah rise:

(1-8) [135]

The poem recounts Sam joining up at 'de call fu' colo'ed soldiers' and buoying his comrades with his bravura whistling. In *Lyrics of the Hearthside*, we reach the end of the right-hand page after line 8. When we turn over, we are met with another kind of text entirely:

Figure 14: from 'Whistling Sam'.

This sudden occurrence of multimedia puts a new focus on dialect as a sound device. With a musical score, we know where we are. A score is an accurate record and transcription of a particular melody. Certainly, this notation doesn't tell us everything – Dunbar doesn't give us a tempo, dynamics or any other performance markers – but it still gives us enough information to replicate the tune Sam whistled. Where, then, does dialect stand in relation to musical notation?

Dunbar's interpolated scoring might call to mind the multimedia epigraphs that Du Bois added to the essays in *The Souls of Black Folk*. At the head of each chapter Du Bois included 'a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men'.[136] He also included a small quotation from a poem. While this might tempt a kind of one-song-to-the-tune-of-another approach, the juxtaposition of the two forms ultimately serves to keep them distinct. The melody that Du Bois points to with the score is not just something to put words to, but is the thing in itself – meaningful on its own proper terms. He does not intend us merely to *look* at the notation, but to use it to hear an 'echo' of the tune. The verse snippets, meanwhile, are already the very thing, in the medium by which their authors intended them to reach their audience. Daniel Hack has pointed out the 'historical identification of lyric poems with or as

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[135] *Collected Poetry*, p.156.
[136] Du Bois, p.167.

"songs"', and argues that this suggests a strong 'formal kinship between the verse and musical epigraphs'.[137] To my mind, though, this does not explain why Du Bois gave the text of the poems, but the *tune* of the songs, without their lyrics. While I concur with Hack that poem and song can meet in the middle as potent, living cultural works, I don't believe they can ever meet formally. Just so, I don't believe Dunbar wanted his readers to think of dialect as a kind of sheet music, to be read through to a projected vocal performance. On the page, it was already in its element.[138]

While Dunbar's poem sits in conversation with Du Bois's epigraphs, its source material is quite distinct. Sam's immediate predecessor is not to be found in the white-authored, largely Romantic verse chosen by Du Bois; his predecessor is, in all likelihood, the 'Whistling Coon'. In *The Lost Sounds*, Tim Brooks recounts the career of George W. Johnson, a black street entertainer who scored a hit in 1891 when he recorded 'The Whistling Coon' for the New Jersey Phonograph Company.[139] The song begins much like Dunbar's poem:

> Oh, I've seen in my time some very funny folks,
> But the funniest of all I know,
> Is a colored individual as sure as you're alive,
> He's black as any black crow. . .[140]

Both Johnson and Dunbar open their texts with an anecdote of a larger-than-life figure painted in grotesque, exceptional terms. To Sam's 'awful puckah', there is the Coon's 'pair of lips like a pound of liver, split' and his 'nose like an india-rubber shoe'. But while we only get a snatch of score for Sam's performances, Johnson follows each verse with several bars of his virtuoso whistling. The piercing timbre of this whistle played to the strength, or rather the weakness, of the early machines, cutting a deep line in the wax, and the record enjoyed phenomenal success.[141] By 1894, Johnson had made 25,000 records of 'The Whistling Coon', at a maximum of four cylinders from each rendition. As well as being sold directly to customers, the records were used in phonograph exhibitions and placed in public coin-operated machines. Based on this

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[137] Daniel Hack, *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p.193.
[138] Of similar interest in this regard are the photographs with which many of Dunbar's later books were illustrated. See Ray Sapirstein, 'Picturing Dunbar's Lyrics', *African American Review*, 41(2) (2007), 327-339.
[139] Brooks, pp.13-72.
[140] Brooks, p.28.
[141] For an example of a recording, see George W. Johnson, 'The whistling coon', c.1898 <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder9963> [accessed 16 April 2021]. The piano and vocals are indistinct, but the whistling comes through with remarkable clarity.

'incredible total' of records, there is a very good chance that Dunbar heard 'The Whistling Coon', or one of its imitations, and wrote his own version.[142]

It is harder to say why. Johnson's song finds all its jokes in the hideous appearance of its subject: a staple of the caricatured minstrel performance. The song could be read, perhaps, as part of the afterlife of the 'forced slave performance' as described by Jennifer James.[143] The enslaved person's various performances were 'integral', James writes, for 'the master to remain master', and she reads southern nationalist writing after the War as a way of perpetuating this master-position. While Johnson is the author and performer of 'The Whistling Coon', the nature of the phonograph industry in 1891 meant he had no control over its distribution, sale, or accreditation. Brooks describes Johnson singing for hours on end into a bank of phonograph horns for a wage orders of magnitude below the record company's profit. It was another kind of forced performance. Perhaps, then, by signing Johnson's Whistling Coon up for Civil War service, Dunbar is attempting a kind of trojan horse manoeuvre. Tempted into a poem about a minstrel stereotype, a white reader might be surprised to find this stereotype in the traditionally white realm of Civil War ballad, with 'saber' and 'bullet' whizzing around him. Sam, though, in being both the stereotype and the argument against it, is caught between two places, and is ultimately left voiceless, whistling into the white space at the end of the poem. The promise made by recent Dunbar criticism – that he provides a rich subjecthood for black Civil War soldiers deprived of it in wider literature – thus ultimately remains unfulfilled by this strain of dialect verse. Dunbar cannot escape the fundamental paradox of the form: that while it looks like a novel sound technology, it is in reality deeply reliant on convention and tradition. Sam is not a recovered Civil War voice but a product of Dunbar's contemporary cultural market: the market which made Johnson's song so absurdly popular, and which continued to keep dialect, however inventive, in its place as a mode of minstrelsy.

Although it may seem a step in the wrong direction to designate Dunbar a purveyor of a kind of minstrel verse, it is a reading supported by Dunbar's own reflections on his career. Essential to keep in mind as we review this evidence is the quirk of 'false consciousness' described by Eric Lott.[144] His key proposition is this: 'that when, in the decades before the Civil War, northern white men "blacked up" and imitated what they supposed was black dialect, music, and dance,

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[142] Brooks, p.35.

[143] Jennifer C. James, *A Freedom Bought With Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p.93.

[144] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.20.

some people, without derision, heard Negroes singing'.[145] This is different to noting the existence of African American minstrel troupes, as it raises the possibility that *all* minstrel performances were read by their (white) audiences as authentic. Lott goes on to temper his proposition, reminding the reader that 'belief in the authenticity of blackface hardly ruled out racial ridicule; the oscillation between currency and counterfeit in the minstrel show was related to but often discrete from the oscillation between sympathy and ridicule toward its representations'.[146] So, in minstrelsy's heyday we find a situation wherein any performance could be consumed as authentically black, with the potential for derision still entirely in play. I am interested in whether the inverse holds true: that any black performer could thus be read by their audience as part of this same minstrel paradigm; that audiences watching Dunbar might see a black man performing as a white man performing as a black man. I hold that this was Dunbar's worry – that by performing works in a dialect bearing even some relation to the voices and accents of minstrelsy, he would be read by his audience as a blackface performer.

This fear was absent at the start of his career. It seems that Dunbar considered himself not a black poet foremost, but a fledgling member of a *regional* trend in poetics. To the young Dunbar, dialect was thus a rich opportunity. In an 1892 letter to one of his earliest supporters, James Newton Matthews, Dunbar expresses his hopes for the form:

> There could scarcely be a better thing than the development of a distinctly western school of poets, such as Riley represents. This may come to pass in that literary millennium when Chicago becomes a great publishing center, as foreseen by Dr. Ridpath. Until that time the nightingales and thrushes will sing so loud that the modest piping of a homely every day meadow-lark cannot be heard.
> I want to write more, but my bells keep ringing, so I must close […][147]

There is a strange play of noises in this letter. It seems, eight years in advance, to be a repudiation of Thomas Hardy's darkling thrush, whose ecstatic sound would promise to Hardy some hope for the new century. Dunbar looks forward to a different millennium, where such traditional literary voices will have given up the ghost, and made acoustic space for the regional meadow-lark. It is an odd inversion whereby dialect, which declares itself as sounded, becomes the quiet to lyric's racket. It seems Dunbar wrote this letter while on shift at his job as an elevator operator, for his 'bells keep ringing'. Another intrusive noise, making demands on

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[145] Lott, p.16.
[146] Lott, p.20.
[147] *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, p.410 (26 July 1892).

Dunbar's attention. The bells keep ringing and the thrushes keep singing – for the moment. Dunbar hoped, at least at this early stage, that dialect would have its day.

This optimism would be short lived. Only a few months after his ornithological treatise, Dunbar wrote again to Matthews, this time complaining about performance:

> Last night the Fisk Jubilee singers were here and I read for them at the Y.M.C.A hall. There was an audience of between six and seven hundred people who received my poems with an unexpected heartiness. But, Doctor, with it all I cannot help being overwhelmed by self doubts. I hope there is something worthy in my writings and not merely the novelty of a black face associated with the power to rhyme that has attracted attention. [148]

Although pleased with the 'unexpected heartiness' of the audience members, the young Dunbar already feels the sting of spectacle. The anonymity of the 'homely every-day meadow lark' is replaced with anonymity of a different kind: the depersonalising, erasive consumption of 'a black face associated with the power to rhyme'. Latent in this phrase is a fear of minstrelsy. '[A] black face' easily contracts to 'blackface': Dunbar was at risk of being read by his audience as a spectacle founded, ultimately, on the white appropriation of black cultural material for profit. In *The Sonic Color Line*, Stoever recounts the first tour of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1871. At the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, Henry Ward Beecher had the singers begin their concert from behind a curtain; he worried, Stoever writes, that if they began their performance in plain sight 'his flock would take the troupe for white minstrels and automatically deem their sound unsavoury'.[149] This is an incredibly complex moment in the history of race and voice, and I defer to Stoever's careful reading of it, but it is worth bringing up here to emphasise that the viewing of a black body on stage as a *minstrel* body was a path of least resistance. Dunbar's audience were set up to respond to the *idea* of entertainment, the meta-spectacle of blackness-on-stage, as opposed to the actual art of Dunbar's 'writings'.

These fears would reach their consummation during Dunbar's reading tour of England in 1897. Expecting a series of literate, intellectual audiences, he was shocked to find himself repeatedly put on the bill as a Barnum-esque novelty, as he relates to Howells:

> I was put in upon programs between dancing girls from the vaudeville and clowns from the varieties. At one place I went on at midnight when half or three fourths of the men were *drunk*. Miss Pond coolly informed me that in such cases as this I was to *tell vulgar*

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[148] *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, p.412 (18 October 1892).
[149] Stoever, p.132.

> *stories!* […] If I once get really started in the literary line, no more readings for me – forever. […] If I can make my living by my pen I will not use my voice. [150]

This closing sentence, after the horrors he has just described, feels very do-or-die. It could even take on a conclusive 4/3 rhythm: 'If I can **make** my **liv**ing **by** my **pen** / I **will** not **use** my **voice**'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I have not found this sentence quoted in any other writing on Dunbar, even though the letter has been accessible to scholars since 1975. While he is of course speaking literally about an aversion to vocal performance, the leakiness of voice as metaphor makes this statement something of a foe to readings determined to cast Dunbar as racial spokesperson. While the sentence is not an eschewing of dialect per se, it does show a deep wariness towards any understanding of his poems as scripts for performance. The English music hall was a close cousin to the American minstrel stage; Sarah Meer has shown that minstrelsy was a 'transatlantic phenomenon', and Lott describes the ready consumption of touring American minstrels by the same audiences which flocked to vaudeville.[151] So again we find Dunbar, poet of the page, rejecting a performance context liable to make blackface of his blackness. The stage performance of poetry brought the body unavoidably into view, where it could be consumed, via the embedded play between 'currency and counterfeit', as a minstrel body.[152] Far from wanting to sing out over the din of the thrush, the Dunbar of 1897 does not want to be heard at all.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In writing about the long life of the coon song on phonograph records, Lisa Gitelman asks a pressing question: '[w]hat happens to the "love and theft" of blackface when there is no face'?[153] I will approach this question in my conclusion, but to close this chapter I will ask another: what happens to dialect verse when there is no print? The long history of minstrelsy replacing African American cultures and identities with stereotypes meant that if Dunbar took to the stage and read out, for example, 'Whistling Sam', white audiences were likely to understand him not as the *writer* of the poem but as the character it presents. Or, perhaps, the character it *supposes*. Dickinson and Dunbar never, of course, corresponded, and there is unfortunately no record of Dunbar having read any Dickinson poems (although as a mover in literary circles it is perfectly likely that he encountered one of the Todd and Higginson publications). To imagine a

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[150] *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, p.444 (26 April 1897).
[151] Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p.15; Lott, p.71.
[152] Lott, p.20.
[153] Gitelman, p.124.

conversation, though, is useful. Dickinson wanted Higginson, and by extension any reader, to accept her as a poet of imagination, not a mere diarist of experience. It is no coincidence, I have argued, that she made this declaration during the Civil War, while she was writing poems on a subject seemingly far beyond her ken. Dunbar, meanwhile, wanted to secure for his readership a version of himself un-refracted through the lens of blackface. So we end up with something of an inverse: where Dickinson sought out the freeing power of anonymity, Dunbar struggled to escape anonymity and establish himself as the final representative of his poems, as their author. Where Dickinson wanted to be 'nobody', and thus everybody, Dunbar was tempted by the proposition of being 'no body', and having his work exist primarily on the written page, under his name. There is a bridge across this gulf. Both poets seemed to have feared the erasure of 'voicing': a term Jonathan Culler offers to dilute some of the problems he finds in 'voice'.[154] Voicing is another term for what I earlier described as the putting of spoken language under pressure. Dickinson seems to have worried that if she was held to be the representative of her own verse, her poems would be understood simply as *things Emily Dickinson has said.* Just so, Dunbar has run frequently afoul of an assumption that he is transcribing or recording some genuine utterance, instead of what he has actually been doing all along: writing and publishing poems.

The Civil War saw death at large and the spread of death's silencing. Its lyric poetry should not be looked to as a technology of voice recovery, or a way of filling that silence with an equivalent acoustic material. What we can find, though, is a technique of gradual coming-to-terms with a nation newly quieted. In our encounters with Dunbar, it is worth remaining alert to where those terms came from, and the forms of performance and reception that he was unable to escape.

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[154] Culler, p.35.

Conclusion: Dunbar on Record

Dunbar's fear of voicing came to pass in his afterlife on the phonograph. While he never, so far as we know, recorded anything on the device himself, an array of his poems were committed to cylinder before and after his death in 1906, by performers both white and black.[1] Tim Brooks has begun a survey of these recordings, and while a more sustained investigation would be valuable, I will focus in this conclusion on Dunbar's presence within a single artefact of the early recording age: the December 1913 issue of the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*.[2] Attention to this text can help mark the place this dissertation has reached, and can also show us where the study of Civil War sounds could usefully go next.

The *Edison Phonograph Monthly* was a trade journal published between 1903 and 1916 for agents and jobbers of the National Phonograph Company. It featured guides for window displays, sample testimonies, and talking points on new features: everything a regional dealer would need to stay on top of their game. A phonograph was nothing without its records, of course, so each issue also included a list of coming titles along with profiles of the artists (who were, by this point, the real commodity).[3] In December 1913, dealers were encouraged to make it the 'biggest Edison Christmas ever experienced' by shifting large volumes of the improved Blue Amberol cylinders, alongside a new product: the 'Disc'.[4] But sellers wanting to plan ahead could also make note of the titles due to be released in February 1914, after their Christmas window displays had been taken down. Among these titles were Blue Amberol 2152 and 2153, on which 'Edward Wright, new to Edison audiences gives four readings. (a) "A Little Christmas Basket," (b) "Howdy, Honey, Howdy," (c) "When de C'on Pones' Hot" and (d) "'Possum'". They would have to scan further down the page to discover that Wright was not the author of these poems, and that they were the work of 'Paul Lawrence Dunbar [sic]'. In April 1914 these recordings were complimented by Blue Amberol 2235, with Wright's readings of 'In De Mornin'' and 'Jes' Gib' Him One Ob Mine'.[5] Of the six Dunbar poems on Blue Amberol, then, all were dialect pieces.

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[1] The *Discography of American Historical Recordings* has 44 entries for Dunbar as author between 1899 and 1939, largely musical settings of his work.
<https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/mastertalent/detail/102275/Dunbar_Paul_Laurence> [accessed 21 April 2021].

[2] Brooks, pp.260-265.

[3] Andre Millard, *America On Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.62.

[4] 'Make this the merriest Christmas of all', *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, 11(12), December 1913, p.3.

[5] 'Blue Amberols for April', *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, 12(2), February 1914, p.15.

What kind of object are these recordings? Are they 'readings', of a text which the listener could track down, or something else? Over the page from the cylinder listing in the December 1913 issue, Edward Wright was featured among the 'Splendid, New Edison Talent' for that month. Six photographs are displayed over the top of a double page spread: five white musicians and the black Wright, who is named as an 'Impersonator'. To start, we can see that the Edison catalogue was clearly music-dominated. In both listings featuring Wright's readings, they are the only
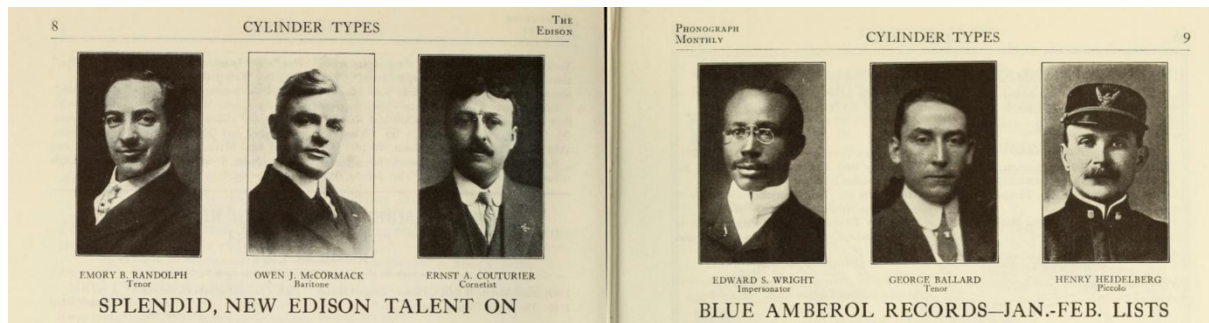

Figure 15: Edison Phonograph Monthly, *December 1913, pp.8-9.*

literary entries for that month; indeed, across all the 1913 lists, Blue Amberol 2152 and 2153 are the *only* ones to be described as 'readings'.[6] And even then, their literary status is unstable. If Wright is an 'impersonator', what is he impersonating? Dunbar, or his characters? Brooks inadvertently describes the problem: 'Wright's readings are especially realistic, delivered by someone who was an actor as well as a reader. One can almost see him gesturing in front of the recording horn as he recreated the simple scenes that Dunbar had envisioned'.[7] For Brooks, Wright is 'recreating' a scene, not reading a poem. Sounding acousmatically from a phonograph horn, he is taken as impersonating not the poet but the poet's subjects. The transaction which Dunbar balked from on stage is replicated again on record: dialect voice comes across as character work or even ethnography, with authorship fading away in the middle.[8]

I believe we rely in large part upon the idea of the phonographic voice in our encounters with lyric poems. In his work on the maligned form of the talking book, Matthew Rubery points out that the 'spoken delivery of the audiobook is a departure from the familiar conception of the narrator as an imagined voice in the reader's mind', and that it can thus come across as less

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[6] For the early history and cultural logics of literature on the phonograph, see Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017) and Edward Allen, 'What We Talk about When We Talk about Talking Books', *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.211-233.

[7] Brooks, p.263.

[8] On the nature of voice in audiobooks more widely, see Sara Knox, 'Hearing Hardy, Talking Tolstoy: The Audiobook Narrator's Voice and Reader Experience', *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies*, ed. Matthew Rubery (London: Routledge, 2014), pp.127-142.

complex or multifaceted.[9] But I wonder if Rubery has it backwards, and if our notion of metaphorical voice in poetry in fact stems from our encounters with phonographic voice. What else could this 'figurative sense' of voice be a figure of?[10] In describing a poem's sound effects, we are essentially banking on those effects being there every time we return to the poem, and on the next reader hearing the same thing we do. The audiotext is practically the default starting point of reading. I remain wary. Once the poem is sounded, its methods for drawing attention to or away from sound become inaccessible, and these methods, as I have attempted to show, perform key historical work. The poems I have discussed in this thesis do not automatically deem themselves sound objects, but exist in negotiation with the possibility of their becoming sounded. And this possibility was textured by their wartime situation. For a poem to announce itself as rhythmical as the drums began to beat in 1861 meant something specific; for a poem about nonsensical violence to rhyme was uniquely risky. Whitman, Melville, Redden, Dickinson and Dunbar all pulled back from sound as much as they embraced it. A sustainable encounter with the lyric poetry of the Civil War must account for the particular kinds of knowing and unknowing achieved by poems which did not take their acoustic properties for granted.

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So where might a study of Civil War sound go next? One path is offered by the *Edison Phonograph Monthly*. On the page before the Blue Amberol cylinder listing in the December 1913 issue is a short article (or perhaps an extended caption):

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[9] Matthew Rubery, 'Introduction', *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies*, pp.1-21, p.13.
[10] Rubery, p.13.

OLD SOLDIERS LISTENING TO AN EDISON

THE Old Soldiers' Home, located on a very historical spot between old Fort Snelling and Minnehaha Falls, Minn., where the above scene is of frequent occurrence, is a firm believer in the comfort and enjoyment of an Edison Phonograph. These old soldiers have over 1000 records including 300 of the new Blue Amberols. They have become so familiar with the selections that they can tell the titles of the records and the artists' names as soon as the first few notes are heard. Some of the younger chaps between the ages of eighty-five and ninety years, can even be seen occasionally doing the Tango dance to the strains of an Edison Concert Band. The selections which have found most favor are: 1626 Patriotic Songs of America, 1888 Marching Through Georgia, 1711 Manhattan Beach and El Capitan March, 1766 Old Comrades March, 1612 Spirit of Independence March, 1951 Entered Apprentice Degree Hymn. The photograph is sent us by courtesy of Laurence H. Lucker.
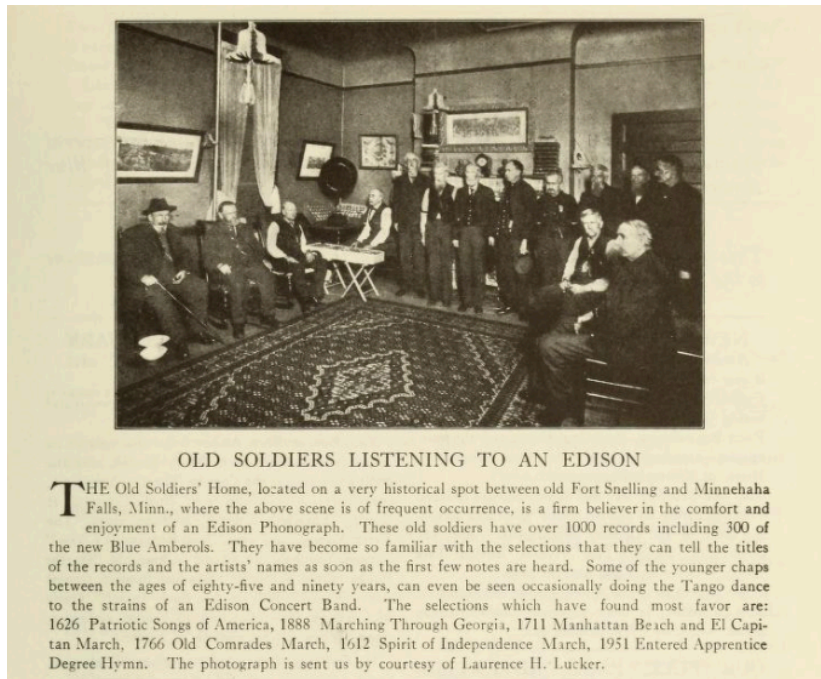
Figure 16: Edison Phonograph Monthly*, December 1913, p.5.*

This is a direct encounter with a strand of Civil War sound history. As the article jokes, even the 'younger chaps' at the Old Soldiers' Home are long in years from their Civil War service, but are still choosing to listen to recordings of Civil War songs. Blue Amberol 1626, 'Patriotic Songs of America', features 'Dixie' as part of its medley.[11] Assuming most of the veterans at the Minnesota Home would have fought for the Union, we are offered a strange account of Unionists repeatedly spinning the de facto anthem of the Confederacy to pass the time. In the history of reconciliation after Reconstruction, articles like this – and the recordings to which they refer – provide a source of evidence practically untapped by scholars so far. We could note, for example, a 1916 disc (Victor 35545) which had as its A side a poem titled 'Me and Jim', and as its B side a rendition of Dunbar's 'When Malindy Sings' by Homer Rodeheaver.[12] 'Me and Jim' is a ballad in western dialect about two friends who leave a country town to fight for the Union.[13] Only one returns and he marries the girl they had both courted unsuccessfully in their youth. The poem's chief relation to 'When Malindy Sings' is as a dialect piece, but it also prompts us to read the Civil War into Dunbar's work. When Dunbar's speaker declares that Malindy's singing

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[11] New York Military Band, 'Patriotic songs of America', 1913
<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder0694> [accessed 21 April 2021].
[12] Victor 35545, 1916 <https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/objects/detail/30110/Victor_35545> [accessed 21 April 2021].
[13] I've been unable to find an attribution for the poem. It was printed in August 1891 in the *Chicago Times* after a piece by James Whitcombe Riley, but is given as simply 'from the Chicago Times' (*Chicago Times*, 7(4), August 1891, p.605). I have also found the title in the contents of an 1888 issue of the Boston journal *Lend a Hand*, but have been unable to access a copy.

is 'sweetah dan de music / Of an edicated band' and 'dearah dan de battle's / Song o' triumph in de lan'', has a Union victory march been struck up outside this southern house?[14] How does this change the relationship between the speaker and Miss Lucy? These are questions permitted and encouraged by the impression of the two poems, recorded three years apart, on either side of the same disc.

I would offer this as a pressing direction for Civil War sound studies. The role of early recorded sound in Civil War memory-making and remaking has gone unexamined, and offers not only a fresh avenue onto the cultural life of the Civil War after Reconstruction, but also a key foundation for the study of the Civil War's afterlives in modern digital media. What parts of the Civil War get replayed, and what fades away, remains a vital question, and I believe that the sounded study of the period needs to take into account the coincidence of the War's remembrance with the first boom in recorded sound as commercial product. Literary study, meanwhile, must keep an eye on lyric poetry as historiographical technique. The poets I have discussed refrain from assuming that any one form would necessarily sound right, or sound at all. They do not count on form to bear political or emotional weight without argument, and instead set about rederiving that potential through experiment and excess. Their work thereby remains a constantly renewing point of access to the Civil War's histories and humanities.

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[14] *Collected Poetry*, p.82.

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