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RE-COLLECTING SOLDIERS: WALT WHITMAN AND THE APPRECIATION OF HUMAN VALUE

ADAM C. BRADFORD

FROM HIS INITIAL publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 until his death in 1892, Walt Whitman maintained an ambivalent position toward an economic system that thrived on the buying and selling of commodities for profit. From his 1855 promise, “I bring what you much need, yet always have, / I bring not money [. . .] but I bring as good”, to his 1882 lament that the “exceptional phases of wealth . . . in this country . . . [produce people] ill at ease, much too conscious, cased in too many cerements, and far from happy,” Whitman disdained that element of capitalism which elevated money over men, and promoted the accumulation of capital over an affection for “comrades.”¹ Consequently, the Civil War presented Whitman with a particular challenge. The desire for profit which drove the looms of the North and the lashes of the South seemed primed to enact a new kind of commodification in which average nineteenth-century Americans were “re-packaged” militarily—their previous identities overlaid with (if not stripped by) the trappings of rank and soldiery, and their value as individuals based largely upon how well they could kill off the “competition.” Identified as soldiers, the rank and file encountered the violent machines of war and were “expropriated and exchanged by the state for the maintenance of its ideology,” a process that valued political ideology more than human life, as the million or so corpses and the newly unified nation-state testified.²

Along with many nineteenth-century Americans, Whitman felt that maintaining the Union was worth the fight, but he was increasingly troubled by a war which produced so many unidentified corpses. He sought to counter these effects both physically and textually. Ministering in the Civil War hospitals of Washington, D.C., Whitman brought the soldiers comforts and company, while taking record of their names, their stories, their wounds, and, far too often, their deaths. As Whitman collected information about these soldiers in his notebooks, he began to recognize their potential to connect a highly interested public to the young men they had sent to battle, while redressing the deflation of human value innate to any war.

Throughout his Civil War journalism, Whitman would draw on his notebooks, selecting those soldier specimens he could use most productively to represent the war, while arguing the need for a broader social recognition and recovery of human value. However, as the mounting death toll in the Civil War began to reflect hundreds, then thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of casualties, Whitman's concerns about the deflation of human value in a sphere of industrial war became virtually universal throughout the populace, and the public became increasingly obsessed with finding means of recovering and affirming the value of the dead. This populace began to respond powerfully to representations of the battlefield, such as Matthew Brady's photographs, which presented them with a means of accessing the regional and human element of the war. Again drawing on his notebooks, Whitman went to work to generate a poetic project, *Drum-Taps*, which would not merely represent the war while arguing his broader social and political ideologies, but would create a textual means of reaching the dead—imaginatively recovering them and acknowledging their innate human value in contradistinction to the destructive processes of war. In doing so, Whitman was attempting a literary feat that differed in important ways from *Leaves of Grass*, for while *Leaves* had relied upon the vociferous and capacious “yawps” of “Walt Whitman, a kosmos” to attract a reading public, *Drum-Taps* would rely upon the cold and mute corpses of the “Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up” to invoke a powerfully recuperative investment.

Markets, War and Value

Long before his 1855 literary debut, Whitman wrote in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, “There is hardly anything on earth, of its sort, that arouses our sympathies more readily than the cause of a laborer, or band of laborers, struggling for a competence;”³ and late in his life, speaking to Horace Traubel, he stated, “I resolved at the start to diagnose, recognize, state, the case of the mechanics, laborers, artisans, of America . . . to welcome them to their legitimate superior place—to give them entrance and lodgment by all fair means.”⁴ For almost fifty years Whitman concerned himself with the cause of the common “middling-sort” American—the “[o]ffspring of those not rich—boys apprenticed to trades, / [. . .] fellows working on farms [. . .] / Mechanics, southerners, new arrivals, sailors, mano'warsmen, merchantmen, coasters” (*PP*, 91). Much of Whitman's concern for the common man, his “struggling for a competence,” grew out of the changes dictated by an increasingly industrialized economy. Transitioning away from skilled labor and artisans, industrialized production practices replaced

the skills of individual craftsmen with the increased productivity and standardization of machines; resulting in industrial products which represented the efficacy and indefatigability of the machines and not the skill, individuality, and intelligence of the worker. The worker's value in this industrialized process was represented only in the wages that he or she earned—which were often small. When “the purpose and value of work was no longer directly related to the exercise of the laborer's skills,” the “great richness of human significance that was discoverable in their everyday world of work” was negatively impacted.⁵ Whitman resisted this effect of industrialization by working to make his readership aware that their value was inherent in their unique individuality and couldn't be mediated by money, wages, or other “representative[s] of value” (*PP*, 91). In his estimation, “representative[s] of value” could be dangerous, and, by 1855, he felt that false representations of value, like wages, had been used to deny the common people their “superior place” in the social fabric of the nation—encouraging them to think of themselves as replaceable cogs in the machineries of an industrial economy rather than skillful, intelligent, and unique individuals.

In poetry that “celebrated” these individuals, Whitman asserted that “human worth is totally independent both of social background and financial achievement,” and he resisted tying an individual's worth to “the vagaries of his life as a social and economic being” preferring to see worth as something which “inheres in the person himself and is inalienable” (Thomas, 22). Therefore, whether one was a laborer, factory owner, or president, Whitman believed one's value was assured simply by being human—not on the basis of one's ability to garner profit through aggressive participation in a profiteering capitalist economic system.

One difficulty with Whitman's position is, of course, that his attempts to combat the devaluation of the common man that marked the time period had to be carried out through a medium, his text, which itself circulated within the very capitalist system he sought to critique and rectify. It was a difficulty that Whitman found means of overcoming—largely by recognizing that if capitalist markets held the potential to impact human value and identity negatively, they might also have the potential to do just the opposite as well. Whitman was experienced in making otherwise distasteful elements of capitalism work to serve his own ideological ends. As Martin Buinicki has pointed out, Whitman argued for the passage of international copyright laws in the nineteenth century not as a means of hoarding profits, but as a way to protect the genuine and democratic exchange between author and reader that piracy threatened:

Only copyright could guarantee Whitman's place in this exchange between the reader who purchases the book and the writer who produces it. . . . [W]hen we consider

Whitman, it becomes impossible to separate the process of monetary exchange and corporal offering: as Whitman himself repeatedly suggests, it is exactly his body that he is offering for sale to his readers. For Whitman, then, copyright played the additional role of metonymic guarantee: it assured the reader that he or she was getting a “true” manifestation of the writer, as well as guaranteeing that the money that passed from the reader’s hand would in some measure arrive in the hand of the writer, linking the two. . . . exactly what [he felt] copyright laws, as opposed to secretive monopolies, were meant to reinforce.⁶

Working from within the commercial capitalism that marked the nineteenth century, Whitman conceptualized ways of negating what he saw as the deleterious uses of that system. Whitman’s ingenuity in conceptualizing copyright laws as a means of protecting the integrity of the conduit through which author and reader could connect gives evidence of his ability to mold elements of capitalism to suit his own purposes. The idea that a textual commodity circulating in a capitalist market could be the means whereby the “self” represented there could “spring from the pages into [a reader’s] arms” becomes critical to understanding how Whitman “embodied” *Drum-Taps* and represented there the myriad soldiers he had recorded in his hospital notebooks during the Civil War (*PP*, 611). Just as he had done for his own “self” in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman constructed *Drum-Taps* to act as a repository for the bodies of the lost soldiers of the Civil War, a repository which, by virtue of its status as a textual commodity, could circulate throughout the populace and carry those bodies—previously lost and left on the battlefield—home to be reclaimed by a loving readership. However, the challenge of embodying the “Million Dead, Too, Summ’d Up” in text required a more radical literary construction than even *Leaves of Grass* had—one which, ironically, eventually resulted in Whitman stripping Civil War soldiers, wounded and dead, of the identities that marked them as unique, irreplaceable human beings.

(Re)collecting Soldiers

Whitman’s “embodiment” of *Drum-Taps* began with his Civil War hospital work. Here he entered into a sphere of sociability with the wounded and dying in which he sought to acknowledge their worth as individuals, recovering the value that the first modern industrial war, like the emergent modern industrial economy, sought to elide. Whitman spent much time among the wounded and sick soldiers and diligently recorded his experiences there. “From the first I kept little note-books for impromptu jottings in pencil to refresh my memory of names and circumstances, and what was specially wanted, &c. In these I brief’d cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bedside, and not

seldom by the corpses of the dead.”⁷ The notebooks are a catalogue of names, wounds, comforts desired, and Whitman’s general impressions or recollections. “John W. Gaskill, co. E 24th N.Y.V. bed 57 W.6. Camp weak and prostrated—pulmonary—sent for his description list bring him some *nice* cake sponge cake / Chester H. Lilly bed 6. ward 6. Camp 145th Penn. Erisepelus Jaundice & Wounded some preserve or *jelly*, or oranges.”⁸ While it is easy to see these “jottings” as a mere “form of practical memory,”⁹ to conceptualize them only as mnemonic aides would be to miss the important ideological work they do. Whitman stated that the notebooks with their long lists afforded him “the perusal of those subtlest, rarest, divinest volumes of Humanity . . . [and] arous’d . . . undream’d-of depths of emotion” (*MDW*, 56). Whitman’s rhetoric tropes on value (“rarest”), ideology (“divinest”), sentiment (“depths of emotion”) and textuality (“volumes”) and intimates that in the notebooks he was at work translating his immediate material reality into a textual collection of rare value—an act antithetical to the violence of war which had threatened to render these men as disposable commodities. The following is a good example of the way in which Whitman used textual representation to reveal and recover the “human” value of an otherwise impaired “functionary” of war:

Bed 41 Ward G. Armory May 12 William Williams co F 27th Indiana / wounded seriously in shoulder—he lay naked to the waist on acc’t of the heat—I never saw a more superb development of chest, & limbs, neck &c. a perfect model of manly strength—seemd awful to take such God’s masterpiece & / nearest friend—Mr. J.C. Williams Lafayette Tippecanoe co. Indiana (*NUPM*, 2:632)

Whitman uses the war-caused impairment, the shoulder wound, recuperatively. It is not a symbol of the man’s inability to “compete” in the circulating sphere of war. Rather, it, along with the heat, causes the man’s exposure and allows Whitman the chance to gaze past the wound to see the rest of the man’s body, the “superb development of chest, & limbs, neck &c.” This eroticized gazing at Williams’s physique leads to an “appreciation” of (i.e., an inflation, increase, raising, and re-assessment of) his value—seeing him as a “superb” specimen, a “perfect model”—opposed to his otherwise “depreciated” status as an impaired combatant of war. Whitman’s elevation of the wounded soldier into specimen-model culminates in his becoming a fetish—not only an object of physical attraction, but a sacrosanct specimen with divine value (“God’s masterpiece and truest friend”). Classified as a “perfect model” and sacrosanct specimen, the man’s value is asserted over and against those processes of war that had reduced that value to his ability to function as a soldier—a value jeopardized by the man’s wounding. In writing this description as he has, Whitman seeks to acknowledge

and elevate or “appreciate” William’s value in the face of the violent processes of war which have threatened it.

In the hospitals, Whitman would minister to thousands of these specimen-soldiers, like Williams, freely cataloguing them as specimens, and recognizing the potential that “specimenizing” had for acknowledging and recovering human value. Whitman’s works treating the Civil War acknowledge this tendency broadly. In the opening section of *Memoranda During the War* he states, “to me the main interest of the War, I found, (and still, on recollection, find,) in those *specimens* . . . stricken by wounds or disease at some time in the course of the contest” (*MDW*, 4-5, emphasis mine). Similarly, his publication of memoirs in 1882 is appropriately titled *Specimen Days and Collect*, a sizeable portion of which is a revised version of *Memoranda During the War*. In its introduction, Whitman straightforwardly conceptualizes his text as a means whereby specimens are collected and value is “appreciated.” He states, “I publish and leave the whole gathering, first, from that eternal tendency to perpetuate and preserve which is behind all Nature . . . [and] to symbolize two or three *specimen* interiors, personal and other, out of the myriads of my time, the middle range of the Nineteenth century in the New World; a strange, unloosen’d, wondrous time” (*PP*, 714). Besides his own poetic self, a vast number of “specimens” that this text examines are the same soldier-specimens displayed in *Memoranda During the War*. Both the original and later versions collect specimens into a textual space where their presence constitutes an “appreciation” of their value.

The concomitant action that accompanies Whitman’s “specimenizing”—as the title to his 1882 memoir *Specimen Days and Collect* makes apparent—is collecting. According to Whitman’s 1848 Webster’s dictionary the primary definition of “collect” is to “bring together, as separate persons or things, into one body or place,” an action generally taken, as subsequent definitions point out, in order to “secure [them] in proper repositories” as well as to “to gain command over [them].”¹⁰ In accordance with the first two of these definitions, Whitman’s “collection” serves to “bring together” and thus “secure” or preserve and protect specimens (be they “persons or things”) from otherwise ignorant destruction, something Whitman’s description in *Memoranda During the War* and his titling in *Specimen Days* implies he wanted and actively sought through his texts. However, as the final definition hints, collecting is tricky business because there is an element of control (i.e., “gain command over”) that reflects the collector’s desire for power over the objects collected. Collections, like Whitman’s notebooks of textual specimens, “represent something . . . profoundly related to subjectivity,” writes Jean Baudrillard, “for while the object is a resistant material

body, it is also, simultaneously, a mental realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone. It is all my own, the object of my passion."¹¹ In other words, Whitman's interactions with Williams, and many other Civil War soldiers, tend to operate in a dual sphere of meaning or signification. The soldiers are at once self-referential human beings whose material existence is only marginally impacted by their proximity to Whitman (in that they may draw comfort or companionship from him and his gifts), but as textual representations collected within the notebook they are ideological symbols whose meaning and importance is "commanded," controlled or "governed" by the collector alone (Baudrillard, 7). In other words, it is only when the wounded soldier becomes an objectified textual representation that Whitman can impress it with value. It is through the "impress-ability" of the notebooks' textual representations that Whitman can assert the soldiers' value, "appreciating" (inflating) what he sees as threatened by the violence of war—but this process by no means ensures that the soldiers themselves will recover. The key term in this sequence of events, *impress*, points to the psychical operation through which collection works and through which Whitman assigns value. Whitman does not perceive inherent value—as if value existed as a substance independent of an evaluator—rather he impresses value in the notebook based upon his own apparent sympathy for, attraction to, and emotional connection with the wounded man. The notebooks are not only mnemonic aids that help Whitman remember names, dates, and promises made, but are also the textual representation of a "mental realm" over which he holds sway, one where value and meaning are ensured because here they are governed by him alone (Baudrillard, 7).

In generating a textual world where he is the sole arbiter of value, Whitman "reorders" a psycho-textual world where the social (dis)order of a nation at war with itself can be corrected and the accompanying depreciation of human value countered.¹² As Walter Benjamin points out, "for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects" (207). Analogously, Whitman's collected "objects" both create an order (a new structure of "appreciated" value) as well as "order" or "command" an idealized world into (ideological) existence. The valences of the term "order" (to create "U/union" out of chaos, as well as to "command") exposes the active, controlling presence of the collector that sits behind and proclaims the value of each specimen in a collection. Understanding how collection provides a collector with a mode for asserting value and establishing "order" gives an otherwise uncharged moment of prose from *Specimen Days* a new sense of urgency and importance:

I know not how it may have, or may be, to others—to me the main interest I have found (and still, on *recollection*, find), in the rank and file of the armies, both sides, and in those specimens amid the hospitals, and even the dead on the field. To me the points illustrating the latent personal character and eligibilities . . . embodied in [the] armies—[were] especially [found in] the one-third or one-fourth of their number, stricken by wounds or disease at some time in the course of the contest—[these] were of more significance even than the political interests involved. (*PP*, 802)

In this passage Whitman's lack of interest in what the war may mean to others is a result of a compulsive collection and "recollection" of the "rank and file" of wounded and dead soldiers. This compulsion is driven by the idea that only when he has collected them, re-ordered them, can he give them their true rank, "illustrating" their "personal character and eligibilities," thus asserting and "appreciating" their value, their "significance." Faced with a political and economic system that has materially reduced these men to little more than broken machines of war, Whitman finds his greatest opportunity for acknowledging, recovering, preserving, and perpetuating their value as human beings in specimenizing them and collecting them within his text. His note-taking becomes "a *system*, on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world," and recover human value from the violence of war (Baudrillard, 7). Through his textual representations Whitman works "to form a whole magic encyclopedia, a world order" (Benjamin, 207), countering the material reality of a war-time environment in which soldiers are expendable commodities "exchanged by the state for the maintenance of its ideology" (Sweet, 33).

Whatever the larger material conditions of the hospitals were, for Whitman they were physical structures whose function as an accumulation point for the wounded and dying allowed him the possibility of assembling a valuable collection from what would otherwise be the detritus of war. Whitman's notebooks, with their long lists of soldiers, move beyond being practical aids to memory and engender a psycho-textual space where he recovers value—finding specimens "rate[d] beyond all rate" (*PP*, 93). In this sense the notebook's representations should be read somewhat like *Leaves of Grass* itself in relation to the real-life Whitman. As a textual specimen protectively housed within the collective space of a text, "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" is ensured that the "celebration" of his self will continue long after the material body referenced has suffered sickness, decay and death; and by the same methods of specimenizing and collection, the dead, dying, and wounded Civil War soldiers are ensured that their value as human beings will be acknowledged, preserved, and perpetuated (*PP*, 50).

Journals and Journalism

As a psycho-textual space where he could ensure the appreciation of human value, the notebooks were of unquestionable personal value to Whitman—"full of associations never to be possibly said or sung" (*MDW*, 3). But the institution of a private textual space, accessed by him alone, was probably never in his plans. Whitman employed his collection as a means of proselytizing to the public the idea that a new ideological "world order" of recovered human value was needed. As early as February 1863, within a month or so of beginning his visits to the wounded, Whitman began to publish journalism that drew upon his notebooks. He would publish this journalism in various periodicals during the war and would use the articles he wrote for the *New York Times* from 1863 through 1865, as well as a series he wrote for the *New York Graphic* in 1874, to produce his major prose work on the period, the aforementioned *Memoranda During the War*.¹³ In seeking to bring the public to an awareness of the threat as he perceived it, Whitman, in the first piece of journalism he wrote for the *New York Times*, "debuts" his collection in the context of Washington's famous Patent Office Building—which had been converted at the time into a hospital for the wounded and dying. His choice to introduce his textual representations of soldiers within the Patent Office Building is significant because it was not merely the national bureaucratic office in charge of granting patents, it was also one of the nation's most important museums. During the nineteenth century it not only housed a museum quality collection of thousands of patent models, but at sundry times also contained items such as the original Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin's printing press, portraits of Native American Indians, Egyptian mummies, and even a mosaic of Pompeii.¹⁴ It was regularly visited as a museum by a curious public, and its stated purpose as described by its commissioner was to house "the most beautiful specimens of the genius and industry of the nation."¹⁵ For the public, the Patent Office was meant to symbolize the fruits of American political and economic ideology as seen in the form of nationalist symbols (like the Declaration) and patent models, but Whitman used it to present his readership with "beautiful specimens" of a different sort—specimen-soldiers whose bodies were now included with the museum's other collectibles, and whose presence in the midst of the nationalist symbols and models of industrial capitalism made apparent the threat that this war and this economic system posed to human value:

A few weeks ago the vast area of the second story of that noblest of Washington buildings, the Patent Office, was crowded close with rows of sick, badly wounded and dying soldiers. . . . It was a strange, solemn and, with all its features of suffering and death,

a sort of fascinating sight. . . . Two of the immense apartments are filled with high and ponderous glass cases, crowded with models in miniature of every kind of utensil, machine or invention, it ever entered into the mind of man to conceive; and with curiosities and foreign presents. Between these cases were lateral openings, perhaps eight feet wide, and quite deep, and in these were placed many of the sick; besides a great long double row of them up and down through the middle of the hall. Many of them were very bad cases, wounds and amputations. Then there was a gallery running above the hall, in which there were beds also. It was, indeed, a curious scene at night, when lit up. The glass cases, the beds, the sick, 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 repressed—sometimes a poor fellow dying, with emaciated face and glassy eye, the nurse by his side, the doctor also there, but no friend, no relative—such were the sights but lately in the Patent Office.¹⁶

What makes the sight in the Patent Office both “strange,” “solemn,” and “fascinating” is the incongruity of its “specimens.” The reader is forced to see the merging of man and machine, as the glass cases and patent models meld almost seamlessly into the “bad cases” and “emaciated face[s]” of the suffering soldiers. After confronting his readership with the stark image of an industrial and war-time “world order” which violates men and conflates them with machines, Whitman then presents his readership with an alternative in which human value is acknowledged, preserved and perpetuated.

He asks his readership to consider the “CASE OF J.A.H., OF COMPANY C., TWENTY-NINTH MASSACHUSETTS . . . a young man from Plymouth Country, Massachusetts.” Focusing on this specimen-soldier for most of the remainder of the piece, Whitman guides the reader through the soldier’s story—invoking the reader’s sentiment and working to induce them to “appreciate” (as Whitman does) the soldier’s value. He makes clear how the sphere of war treats the man as a “depreciated” commodity, one whose usefulness has been called into question, and whose treatment reflects his degraded status. Whitman relates that in the regimental hospitals towards the war’s front, J.A.H. receives “little or no attention.” During his transfer to the Washington hospitals, he is treated like a commodity when put “in an open platform car; (such as hogs are transported upon north,)”—and his treatment during this journey is such that it “caused him a great injury—nearly cost him his life.” Reaching the Washington hospitals, he is treated so callously that he collapses, his “half-frozen and lifeless body [falling] limpsy” in the hands of his attendants, “plainly insensible, perhaps dying.” Whitman finds him at this point and begins to associate with him. Describing for the reader how he ministered “to the affections first,” Whitman then relates that he wrote letters home for him, brought him “little gifts, and gave him some small sums of money,” before going on to say that “[h]e has told me since that this little visit, at that hour, just saved him—a day

more, and it would have been perhaps too late.” Whitman “appreciates” the man’s human value—raising it out of obscurity for the wounded man (and via the reading, for his readership) which restores him to health. His underlying argument, impressed upon the reader of his piece, is that an acknowledgement and “appreciation” of human value is the most needed element in this sphere of war. As Whitman himself urges, “A benevolent person with the right qualities and tact, cannot perhaps make a better investment of himself, at present, anywhere upon the varied surface of the whole of this big world, than in these same military hospitals, among such thousands of most interesting young men” (*GS*). In selections like this, common among the war-time journalism, we see Whitman making his collection of soldiers into a tool for countering the violent effects of war by inviting his readership into a psycho-textual space opened by the journalism—a space in which the reader receives a warning about a current social (dis)order that depreciates the value of men, equates them with machines and commodities, and then witnesses Whitman’s “re-ordering” and “appreciation” of human value.

Bringing the War Home—Problems Pro(po)sing Recovery

Whitman’s desire to confront the public with a clear view of the way in which the social, economic, and political forces combined to depreciate human value continued throughout the Civil War. But as the war dragged on and casualties reached into the hundreds of thousands, Whitman recognized that a recovery of human value (and humans themselves) needed to be enacted on an almost unimaginable scale. Other artists, like the group of photographers under the direction of Matthew Brady, had compiled compelling collections of their own—representations of the wounded, dying and dead—that exposed the public’s obsessive concern with their lost dead. People flocked to these collections, many of them in hopes of finding some method of connecting with and recovering, if only visually and imaginatively, their lost soldiers.¹⁷ A *New York Times* review of Brady’s photographs evinces this. Its significance as a cultural touchstone warrants lengthy quotation:

Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it. . . . Crowds of people are constantly going up the stairs [to his gallery], follow them, and you find them bending over photographic views of that fearful battle-field, taken immediately after the action. . . . You will see hushed, reverend groups standing around these weird copies of carnage . . . chained by the strange spell that dwells in dead men’s eyes. . . . There is one side of the picture that the sun did not catch, one phase that has escaped photographic skill—it is the background of widows and orphans, torn from the bosom of their natural

protectors by the red remorseless hand of Battle By the aid of the magnifying-glass, the very features of the slain may be distinguished. We would scarce choose to be in the gallery, when one of the women bending over them should recognize a husband, a son, or a brother in the still, lifeless lines of bodies, that lie ready for the gaping trenches. . . . How can a mother bear to know that the boy whose slumbers she has cradled, and whose head her bosom pillowed until the rolling drum called him forth—whose poor, pale face, could she reach it, should find the same pillow again . . . [lies in] a shadowed trench.¹⁸

As this review dramatically illustrates, Brady's photographs quite literally mediated a public anxiety about recovering what had been lost—so much so that individuals brought magnifying glasses with them to search for evidence of their loved ones. The transaction that occurs between the widow/mother with her magnifying glass and Brady's photographs points out that the power of the media to function in the act of recovery is dependent upon the viewer perceiving their hoped-for object in it.¹⁹ The real power of the image, as Alan Trachtenberg points out, is located in the viewers' imagination of it as a connection between themselves and the unique individual "self" represented by the image. "Not the representation reveals the self, but the questioning of the picture, the touching of it, the effort to imagine what lies behind it, antecedent it is what is important in this process."²⁰ In other words, the media acts as an invitation to viewers to imagine their connection with a material object that is represented by the media—and the strength of this connection grows in relation to the viewer's willingness to see beyond that representation to its outside material referent. When the media is a text instead of a photograph, the recovery of human value is tied to the reader's ability to perceive in that text something (or in this case someone) represented in it that is of importance to them.

Whitman's prose was capable of arguing the need for and illustratively "ordering" a new recovered social "appreciation" of human value, but the very journalistic conventions that he followed in "reporting" on the specimens he saw introduced a level of specificity that could itself be problematic. In journalistic prose, names, dates, company assignments, and other such personal markers are necessary for demonstrating authenticity, but they also serve for the vast majority of readers who encounter them to reinforce their inability to connect themselves personally to the soldier they are reading about. Surely when Whitman mentions "a young man, farmer's son; D. F. Russell, Company E, Sixtieth New York" or "Charles Miller, bed No. 19, Company D, Fifty-third Pennsylvania" these names signify more powerfully to those family, friends, and acquaintances who can perceive the individual behind the name than to an anonymous reader, however interested or sympathetic (*MDW*, 7, 8). Therefore only a very few could have the experience of

the widow/mother viewing Brady's photographs. Whitman seemed to want to remedy this. Whitman visited Brady's studios in 1863, and, after witnessing the public's desire to connect with their own Civil War dead, Whitman may have been led to consider producing a new textual commodity—one which not only engendered a psycho-textual space where he could assert and ensure the "appreciation" of human value, but where he might connect a searching public readership with their lost dead—a process that promised to allow his readership to reach those "poor, pale face[s]" one more time and to grant him a larger textual opportunity to connect with those readers and also with these "Million Dead" in the process.

The "Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up" and Recovered

The recovery of the Civil War dead with an accompanying "appreciation" (i.e., acknowledgement and increase) of their human value was carried out through poetry that relied upon anonymous representations of actual Civil War soldiers and the mediating presence of Whitman's poetic "self." It is a process in which Whitman selected particular soldier-specimens from his notebooks and transcribed them into his poetry, but when doing so carefully removed any markers of their individuality—stripping them of even the most basic war-time distinctions of identity, Union or Confederate—before placing them in proximity to his own narratorial "I." In leaving his poetic soldiers in anonymity, Whitman asked his readership, "himself or herself," to "construct indeed the poem . . . the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework."²¹ In the absence of markers of identity, the poetic soldiers became reflections of a reader's mind—constructions that were at the very least intimate mental projections from the reader's own consciousness, and likely corresponded to actual individuals in the material world with whom the reader could now imaginatively connect.²² For many readers, both in the North *and* in the South, it was a powerfully recuperative process and worked to connect them to their dead soldiers, and, given the mediating presence of his narratorial "I," to Whitman himself.²³ While Whitman's prose sought to facilitate "appreciative" connections between readers, soldiers and himself, the "appreciated" soldier was always the specific soldier he mentioned in his text—and the recovered human value always seemed to belong, in a sense, to that individual. The genius of his poetic project in *Drum-Taps* is his recognition that by stripping away the particulars of names, dates, and places associated with his specimen-soldier, virtually any reader—Northerner or Southerner—could impress the text with his or her own soldier image in need of "appreciation," and see that "appreciation" enacted through Whitman's speaker and the larger text.²⁴

The specimen-soldiers that Whitman employs in his poetry operate in a markedly different way from the specimens Whitman presents in his prose. When all significant vestiges of their individuality and identity are removed, they become specimens in the most abstract sense (albeit one that is quite common)—as representatives of an entire “species.” The sacrifice of their individual identity which allows this is the equivalent of the violence that occurs when any collector detaches the object/specimen “from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind” (Benjamin, 204). Whitman’s suppression of their individual identities erases their “original function” as self-referential individuals who lived, fought, and died as individuals, but lets them become any of the “things of the same kind” of which they are the representative example, in essence, any soldier. In a sense, these soldiers become the textual casualties of Whitman’s writing process. They are again “expropriated and exchanged” but this time by Whitman, rather than the state, for “the maintenance of [his] ideology—his belief in the inestimable value of humanity” (Sweet, 33). They become “object[s], pure and simple, divested of [their] function, abstracted from any practical context” other than their representative status in the text—where their “meaning is entirely up to [the collector]” (Baudrillard, 8). They have become abstract specimens standing in for any or all members of a population as the stuffed, mounted, and displayed animal in a museum of natural history might. Like the brief and generic placards that mark a specimen as representing an entire species—*Ursus Horribilis*; *Grizzly Bear*—so, too, do Whitman’s generic representations trade unique individuality for generic representation. These become Whitman’s most productive specimens, they are soldier images without identities—textual bodies without souls—waiting for a reader to enliven and see them in proximity to a loving narrator (an engaged “collector”) who can “appreciate” their value.

Whitman’s love and “appreciation” of all Civil War soldiers leads him to sacrifice the specific identities of a few in hopes of gaining a recuperative method of connecting himself and a grieving public readership to the “Million Dead” of the Civil War—a text through which he and his readership can “appreciate” the value of the soldiers they locate there. It is a process easily traced. In two notebooks used primarily in the spring of 1863,²⁵ Whitman found specimens he could use to create his famous poem, “The Dresser” (1865), later titled “The Wound Dresser.” One potential source is the case of “Hiram Johnson Co K. 157th N.Y. vols wound in left hip / this is the bed of death / he is failing fast the muffled groan, the laboring panting chest & throat, the convulsion? without intermission, the attitude of the hands, the restlessness—the contraction & dilation of the nostrils—fortunately he is out of his head,

poor fellow” (*NUPM*, 2:630). A remarkably similar image is found in “The Wound Dresser” where Whitman seemingly represents Johnson’s experiences anonymously while inserting himself into the scene as more than a mere observer: “The crush’d head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,) / [. . .] Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard, / (Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death! / In mercy come quickly)” (*PP*, 444).

Other images in this poem appear to come from this notebook as well, and function similarly. In the poem, the narrator claims, “I dress the perforated soldier, the foot with the bullet-wound,” and in the notebook is recorded both “Lieut Wm Hubbard, co B 27th Indiana regt. Bed 34—ward H. . . . wound bad in foot, instep, rec’d at Chancellorsville, Va. Sunday forenoon—bones out, pretty badly smashed” as well as the previously mentioned case of “Wm Williams . . . badly wounded in arm has suffered much.” (*PP*, 445; *NUPM*, 2:630-631).

Two other images from the poem appear in another of Whitman’s notebooks from the time period.²⁶ The most salient is “bed 47. Ward H. Thos. H.B. Geiger co. B. 53d Penn wounded at Fredericksburg—lost his right forearm—young bright handsome Penn. boy—tells me that for some time after his hand was off—he could yet feel it—could feel the fingers open and shut—lies to-day (Feb. 14th) on his bed silent and rather weak—a farmer’s son” (*NUPM*, 2:606). This notebook entry resonates with the poetic image of a soldier with only “the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,” who lies “[b]ack on his pillow . . . with curv’d neck and side-falling head, / His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump” (*PP*, 444). In these moments Whitman works to comfort and soothe the soldiers, mercifully asking for death to relieve pain when it is too great—his sympathetic engagement and personal contact showing an “appreciation” of the man’s value as a unique human being.

Whitman continues this pattern of representation and mediation throughout *Drum-Taps*. In an entry seen as the inspiration for “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,” Whitman records the following in the notebook scholars have called “Return My Book”: “William Giggee, Sept 18th ‘62. I heard of poor Bill’s death—he was shot on Pope’s retreat—Arthur took him in his arms, and he died in about an hour and a half—Arthur buried him himself—he dug his grave” (*NUPM*, 2:493). The end of “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night” reads, “Vigil for boy of responding kisses [. . .] / Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten’d, / I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket, / And buried him where he fell” (*PP*, 439). Whitman’s notebook entry and the poem share a concern over the fall of a comrade who is spoken of in intimate terms. While the

poem makes the relationship between the two explicitly that of father and son, the notebook entry is vague—the only hint of the relationship being an intimate one is the fact that Whitman uses their first names only. Historical research, however, indicates that “Arthur” was unquestionably not William’s father.²⁷ Whitman’s desire to reconfigure this series of events with his own poetic speaker in Arthur’s historical role, transmuting this into a paternal role as well, is an intriguing instance of Whitman preferring his narratorial “I” to other possible poetic figures, and is a testimony to his personal desire to connect with and “appreciate” the value of the soldiers that he represents. As a soldier avatar, William becomes a site of democratic access for Whitman’s readership—a readership that can impress upon him whatever identity they wish. And by replacing Arthur with his own poetic sense of self, Whitman steps into the process, seeking to ensure both his readership and himself that he is a sure arbiter of value, capable of guiding impressions and “appreciating” the soldiers represented there.

Whitman’s process of stripping identity and impressing the text with his own ideological recovery or “appreciation” of human value is again seen in “A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown.” In the notebook known as “Scene in the Woods,” Whitman records the story of the retreat from the battle of White Oaks Swamp as “told me by Milton Roberts.” Whitman records Roberts’s “silent stealthy march through the woods, at times stumbling over the bodies of dead men in the road” until he reached a church converted into a hospital, “dimly lit with candles, lamps torches” which was now filled with “all varieties [of wounded] horrible beyond description . . . crowds of wounded, bloody & pale . . . the yards outside also filled—they lay on the ground, some on blankets, some on stray planks” (*NUPM*, 2:651). Many of the images that Whitman records in his notebook as told to him by Roberts appear in the poem—with one very notable exception:

[. . . A] soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death, (he is shot in the abdomen,) I staunch the blood temporarily, (the youngster’s face is white as a lily,) [. . .]
 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,
 Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness. (*PP*, 440)

Whitman’s record of Roberts’s experiences does not include any mention of ministering to soldiers upon arriving at the hospital. This particular portion of the poem appears to be largely invented on the part of Whitman in order to allow his narrator the opportunity of entering into the scene (a poetic rendering of one man’s actual experiences) and of approaching the image of a Civil War soldier. The fact that the soldier Whitman represents is so completely generic (a lad dying from a gun-

shot wound to the abdomen references thousands of actual Civil War soldiers) can be seen as an effort to ensure the widest possible readership the ability to impress this image with the identity of their own dead soldier. Brought to experience the image of the death of someone they have mentally impressed onto the poem's scene, readers are simultaneously shown an acknowledgement of this image's value by a "comrade" who staunches the wound, tries to preserve life, and at least comforts him enough that he leaves mortality with a "half-smile."

In this poem, Whitman reconstructs an actual Civil War scene which is part of Roberts's life experience, but shapes and reshapes those experiences by making both his own poetic "self," as well as an anonymous soldier image part of its poetic representation. This allows both Whitman's speaker and the reader to reach the reader's impressed Civil War soldier, and use this psycho-textual space to counteract the deflation of human value created by the war—with Whitman guiding the reader in a shared "appreciation" of the dying soldier. The shared "appreciation" of value that develops out of the interaction of reader and speaker provides the reader with a strong rhetorical argument that here—in this text, with this speaker—humanity is and can be re-valued, and what was lost can in some measure be recovered. In a sense, the text takes on the qualities of scripture as it seeks to participate with its readership in understanding the moral imperative and proper ways of valuing humanity. Readers are invited into the intimacy of the scene—their ability to look on as the action unfolds lets them see their own mental conception of a soldier being nurtured—and while Whitman's speaker ministers to the soldier with his look and his touch, readers discover that they are now connected to their previously lost Civil War soldiers through a textual presence who clearly "appreciates" the value of what they have lost.

Whitman's attempts to democratize and universalize access to the lost Civil War soldiers while engendering a shared appreciation of human value is most explicitly portrayed in "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim." Here the speaker examines the bodies of three men—the first one "elderly", the second a "sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming," and finally "the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory; / Young man I think I know you—I think this face is the face of the Christ himself, / Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies" (*PP*, 441). Various portions of the poem are verbatim renderings from Whitman's notebooks where he records, "Sight at daybreak (in camp in front of the hospital tent) on a stretcher, three dead men lying, each with a blanket spread over him—I lift up one and look at the young man's face, calm and yellow. 'tis strange! (Young man: I think this face, of yours the face of my dead

Christ!)” (*NUPM*, 2:513). Whitman’s notebooks indicate that he only looked at one of the individuals, but in the poem he represents three—each of these drawing from a different age demographic while remaining vague as to other markers of individuality. In this one image Whitman seeks to present a trio of soldiers capable of representing almost any common soldier who fought in the Civil War²⁸—attempting to pen a visual synecdoche of the “rank and file” itself. Having constructed the scene in such a way that most readers could access one of these soldier images, Whitman then makes them into or places them in association with the “dead Christ.” In conflating dead soldiers with the image of Christ—overlaying Christian ideologies of recovery from death and divine acknowledgement of human value onto the common Civil War soldier—Whitman seems to suggest that in every soldier one potentially finds a Christ-figure, crucified in battle as opposed to on the Cross. In doing so, he not only gives his readership a powerful poetic image that locates their lost soldier, but tacitly encourages them to “appreciate” the dead soldiers of the Civil War with the “divine” value they seemingly all merit.²⁹

It is hard to read this poem and not hear in it Whitman’s attempts to give the aforementioned widow/mother an opportunity to recover her lost soldier “whose head her bosom pillowed until the rolling drum called him forth—*whose poor, pale face, could she reach it*, should find the same pillow again” (*BP*, italics mine). These poems, each of which figures anonymous soldiers, invite readers to do just that—reach the “poor pale face,” the “beautiful yellow-white ivory” face one more time; carrying with them the voice and image of Whitman’s poetic speaker who is able to reach their dead soldier as well, and impress both the corpse and the reader with an “appreciation” of human value. Through this interaction, loss is acknowledged, and the desire to touch, to kiss, to hold, to recover their dead is realized through the mediation of the speaker in concert with the readers’ impressions of identity.³⁰

As one might expect from “the poet of the body . . . the poet of the soul,” most of this “appreciation” centers on the body of the represented soldier (*PP*, 46). As we have seen, their “appreciation” is generally carried out by Whitman through personal, physical touch—as if by laying hands on them he can impress them with the value that they have lost. In “The Wound Dresser” he passes from one soldier to another, the “hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,” claiming a value for them so high that even though “I never knew you, / Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you” (*PP*, 444). In “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,” Whitman as father-speaker holds his dead child throughout the night, obsessively and repeatedly imagining and lamenting the loss of their shared kisses,

before wrapping him in his blanket and tucking him away in the dark earth. He claims the boy's value to be inestimable with his statement that the boy is a comrade he "shall never forget," one with whom his vigil constitutes "sweet hours, immortal and mystic" (*PP*, 438-439). And in "March in the Ranks Hard Pressed" he moves to the dying boy, "stanch[es] the blood temporarily" and then bends "to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me" (*PP*, 440). In each instance, Whitman's text gives evidence of his belief that his text was a conduit through which "bodies" could be reached, both by himself and by his readership, and in that shared reaching could have value acknowledged and "appreciated."

These specimen-soldiers haunt the poetic landscape of *Drum-Taps*—always drawing close or being drawn close to, but never given a voice with which to tell their story and assert their personal identity. They are the "phantom" images Whitman speaks of in another *Drum-Taps* poem "Hymn of Dead Soldiers," ultimately titled "Ashes of Soldiers," where he writes, "I chant this chant of my silent soul in the name of all dead soldiers. // Faces so pale with wondrous eyes, very dear, gather closer yet, / Draw close, but speak not. // Phantoms of countless lost" (*PP*, 599). The choice to have these dead and dying soldiers remain mute and unable to tell their story is a crucial part of Whitman's aesthetic (and ethic) in *Drum-Taps*—and represents an important divergence from his previous mode of representation in *Song of Myself* where its subject "Walt Whitman" is given free reign to sound his "barbaric yawp." But just as *Song of Myself* was an attempt to cast "Walt Whitman" as a "presence forever accessible to readers of the future . . . able still to confront him, interact with him, even though death and time and space separated them,"³¹ *Drum-Taps* was a similar attempt to make the Civil War's "Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up" accessible to a grieving national readership through a reader's writerly constructions of the text's most vital images—images created from "the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work" that the text provided (*PW*, 2:425). Whitman's poetic self was not absent in this process; it was as present as it was in *Leaves of Grass*—working to invite readers into the text with their own Civil War soldiers in mind, and mediating the encounter through his narrator in hopes of forging recuperative connections, and healing a painful divide.

In his nineteenth-century America, Whitman witnessed a physical and social landscape increasingly marked by callous indifference to the value of humanity. Industrial modes of production and rampant capitalism increasingly transformed Whitman's beloved "mechanics, laborers, artisans, of America" into unskilled, exchangeable, machine-like cogs whose unique ingenuity, identity and value was no longer richly

perceived in the products they produced, but was flatly represented to them in the meager dollars they were given. Arguably, this deflation of human value reached its culmination in the Civil War, where social, political and economic forces combined to make men into soldiers and reduce their value to their ability to kill other men. Whitman resisted this trend throughout his career, but perhaps nowhere are his attempts to do so as visible as when he sought to recover this lost value for a public readership during the Civil War. Beginning with his ministrations in the hospital and his textual collections of soldiers in his notebooks, Whitman wrote prose and poetry that sought to counter the deflation of human value by giving his public readership not merely a sampling of what *he* saw, but access through their own imaginative vision to the bodies of their loved ones, whose value as unique human beings had been “expropriated and exchanged by the state for the maintenance of its ideology” (Sweet, 33).

Granting public readership access to the “Million Dead”—the “young men once so handsome and so joyous, taken from us—the son from the mother, the husband from the wife, the dear friend from the dear friend”—required that Whitman find a way to have them “Summ’d Up” in a few representative specimen-soldiers whose personal identities he sacrificed in order to foster such democratic access—for “*They* make indeed the true Memoranda of the War—mute, subtle, immortal” (*MDW*, 800). The double valence of Whitman’s term “Summ’d Up” nicely indexes the work of his poetry which accounts for the mass of dead Civil War soldiers with representative soldier-specimens which “give us the Civil War dead *summed up*” while simultaneously providing the grieving with a means for having the “dead *summoned up*.”³² These soldier-specimens, while largely nebulous and unidentifiable, are also the most productive. In them, Whitman found a means of making a powerful ideological argument against the deflation of human value, as well as the means for fostering connections between himself, his readership and the lost soldiers of the Civil War.

Whitman worked from his hospital notebooks, a vast textual collection of soldiers, to create textual products capable of countering or correcting a social and economic system that combined to deflate human value. Transcribing images from this collection into print, Whitman also made them into commodities capable of circulating inoculation-like throughout the larger print market to reach a public readership whose sensitivity to questions of human value was increasingly heightened by the growing published lists of dead and wounded soldiers brought to them by that very market. But unlike the industrial commodities of a market economy whose production deflated human value through the divisions of labor and representative wages needed for their produc-

tion, these textual commodities worked to inspire or recover a sense of human value by relying, ironically, upon a poetic stripping of unique markers of self. With their actual identities parsed from their poetic representations, Whitman's collection of specimen-soldiers was circulated as a textual commodity capable of representing many "selves." As such, Whitman countered the deflation of human value begun in the industrial economy's divisions of labor by using capitalist markets to circulate a recuperative textual commodity throughout a commercial society. In doing so, he trumped an American industrial and economic system that "re-packaged" nineteenth-century men and boys as soldiers and subjected them to the violence of war, by re-packaging and re-commoditizing the bodily "detritus" churned out by this system in such a way that its "human" value could be restored.

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NOTES

1 Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 91, 870. Hereafter, *PP*.

2 Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 33.

3 Walt Whitman, *The Journalism*, Volume I: 1834-1846, ed. Herbert Bergman (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 303.

4 Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1961), 2:142-143.

5 M. Wynn Thomas, *The Lunar Light of Whitman's Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16-17.

6 Martin T. Buinicki, "Walt Whitman and the Question of Copyright," *American Literary History* 15.2, (Summer 2003), 248-275 (258-259). Whitman's desire to "embody" and "circulate" himself in and through the text of *Leaves* led him not only to embrace copyright laws, but to pen such well-known and remarkable poetic lines as "[T]his is no book / Who touches this, touches a man" (*PP*, 611). It also led Whitman to include paratextual elements such as his signature which, in Buinicki's estimation "guarantee[s] . . . the embodiment that he proclaims" in *Leaves* by "'imprinting' his essence on the text" (265). As the remainder of this essay will show, Whitman was similarly preoccupied with "imprinting" individual identity and "essence" in *Drum-Taps*—although here his main focus would be to "present" the "body" of the dead Civil War soldier for a loving reader who otherwise would have no access to it. Several scholars have explored the various ways in which Whitman attempts to "embody" *Leaves*. Some prominent examples might include Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), M. Jimmie Killingworth's *Whitman's Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), and C. Carroll Hollis's *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

7 Walt Whitman, *Memoranda During the War*, The Classroom Electric, <http://www.classroomelectric.org/volume2/price/memoranda/memoranda.htm>, 3. Hereafter *MDW*.

8 Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 2:520-521.

9 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 205.

10 See “Collect” in Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Harper, 1848), 191. While it seems most likely that Whitman is here performing one of his many familiar verb-to-noun coinages, it should be mentioned that the 1848 edition of Webster’s also defines the word as a noun: “A short comprehensive prayer . . . adapted to a particular day or occasion” of the type typically found in liturgical services like Holy Communion. Thus the possibility exists that in using this term Whitman was also indicating his desire for the war entries in *Specimen Days and Collect* to be read as a kind of secular literary “prayer” whose goal was to establish a sense of communion between the living and their deceased soldiers. If so, it would not be the first time that Whitman sought a literary means of engendering such a communion between the living and the war’s dead, for as the remainder of this paper will show, this was in many ways the goal of the verses he penned in 1865.

11 Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 7.

12 This is the power and promise of collecting, and it explains Whitman’s attraction to specimens, catalogues, collections, and lists in more than just his notebook writings. Besides the previous examples from *Specimen Days and Collect*, *Memoranda During the War*, and Whitman’s hospitable notebooks, the lengthy lists or catalogues in *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman’s obsessive desire to be photographed might also be seen as examples of his commitment to the power of specimen gathering and collection in acknowledging and ensuring value.

13 Whitman described his book to friend and publisher James Redpath as early as 1863: “[a] book of the time, worthy the time . . . [a] skeleton memoranda of incidents, persons, places, sights, the past year. . . . a combination in handling of the Old French Memoires, & my own personality (things seen through my eyes, & what my vision brings)—a book full enough of mosaic, but all fused to one comprehensive thing . . . [I] do not hesitate to diffuse myself [into] the book.” (*The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller [New York: New York University Press, 1961], 1:171-172). Whitman’s characterization of the book is striking because it proposes a collection of “incidents, persons, places, sights,” rather than a more traditionally fluid narrative. Like his notebooks, Whitman modeled his Civil War prose on and conceptualized it as a “collection”—maintaining a style that presents his readership with images of soldiers characterized as valued specimens worth protecting.

14 The Smithsonian currently has an excellent website dedicated to the history of the Patent Office Building entitled *Temple of Invention*. For more information on what was housed there see “Museum of Curiosities,” *Temple of Invention*, Smithsonian American Art Museum (<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/pob/index.html>).

15 Henry Ellsworth, “Letter from Patent Commissioner Henry Ellsworth to Senator John Ruggles, Dec 18, 1840,” National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/pob/index.html>).

16 Walt Whitman, "Great Army of the Sick," *New York Times* (February 23, 1863). Hereafter, *GS*.

17 The drive for survivors to connect with their lost Civil War dead has been most recently investigated by Drew Gilpin Faust in her 2008 work *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007), where she states: "Managing Civil War death was made all the more difficult by the mystery that so often surrounded it. Nearly half the dead remained unknown, the fact of their deaths supposed but undocumented, the circumstances of their passage from life entirely unrecorded. Such losses remained in some sense unreal and thus "unrealized," as the bereaved described them, recognizing the inhibition of mourning that such uncertainty imposed. The living searched in anxiety and even "phrensy" to provide endings for life narratives that stood incomplete . . ." (267).

18 "Brady's Photographs," *New York Times* (October 20, 1862). Hereafter, *BP*.

19 Making the connection between Brady's photography, Whitman's prose writings, and the function of collection even stronger is an intriguing series of articles, which I have no room to expound on here—Whitman's 1862 series written for the *New York Leader*, provocatively entitled "City Photographs."

20 Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (Toronto: Collins, 1989), 68.

21 Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 2:425. Hereafter, *PW*.

22 Thus Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, as an object whose rather "anonymous" representation of a soldier encourages any and all individuals who come into contact with it to "impress" that soldier with an identity of their choosing, appears as a kind of early textual version of the famous tombs to unknown soldiers that now exist in over forty countries throughout the world. Arguably, both Whitman's text and any such tomb gain an ability to recuperate loss and function therapeutically through a reader/viewer's willingness to "see" their lost loved one within the volume/vault before them. Clearly Whitman understood the needs of a war-ravaged public, for formal tombs to the unknown first began appearing in the United States only shortly after the Civil War. The most prominent of these is Arlington National Cemetery's massive "Civil War Tomb of the Unknown Dead" which was dedicated in September of 1866, roughly a year after Whitman had offered the public his text. For more information see Monro McCloskey, *Hallowed Ground: Our National Cemeteries* (New York, Richards Rosen Press, 1968), and John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

23 For many of Whitman's readers, the sacrifice of identity did engender ability on their part to connect imaginatively with their own dead soldier and see human value "appreciated" in the touch of Whitman's speaker. William Dean Howells's review appears in *The Round Table* on November 11, 1865: "Woman's tears creep unconsciously to the eyes as the pity of his heart communicates itself to his reader's. . . . One is touched reading them by the same inarticulate feeling as that which dwells in music, and is sensible that the poet conveys to the heart certain emotions which the brain cannot analyze, and only remotely perceives" (William Dean Howells, "Drum-Taps," *The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society* [November 11, 1865]). Similarly, a review in *The Radical* in April 1866 states that in the poetry one catches "the soft and sweet strains of sublime tenderness . . . [as they] walk with him through some of the hospitals" ("Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps." *The Radi-*

cal [April 1, 1866], 311); and John Burroughs's lengthy and heartfelt review in *The Galaxy* on December 1, 1866, states that *Drum-Taps* is "so unusual—so unlike the direct and prosy style to which our ears have been educated. . . . [i]t eludes one; it hovers and hovers and will not be seized by the mind, though the soul feels it. But it presently appears that this is precisely the end contemplated by the poet. He would give as far as possible the analogy of music, knowing that in that exalted condition of the sentiments at the presence of death in a manner so overwhelming, the mere facts or statistics of the matter are lost sight of . . ." ("Walt Whitman and His Drum-Taps," *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading* [December 1, 1866]). Besides these published reviews, individual readers wrote to Whitman about his Civil War writings, expressing the way in which the medium of text served to connect them to him and enliven, recover, and "appreciate" their dead soldiers. One, written by "Theresa Brown" of "Waco, Texas," is particularly worth quoting in that she apparently sent Whitman a piece of her own verse as an acknowledgement that his poetry held the power to do for her what her own could not, "I have written sometimes what seemed poetry to me but when I tried to put it in regular harmonious order hoop it round like a barrel, as it were, the poetry was all chocked out and it fell flat and insipid from my hands. [My poem] is only a harmless conceit of a working woman My husband was a southern soldier and is dead; it seems as if it would be a sort of satisfaction to me if I could think in my mind, 'Walt Whitman has read my attempt at poetry.' I do not believe you will misunderstand my sentiment" (quoted in Sherry Ceniza, *Walt Whitman and 19th-Century Women Reformers* [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998], 238). Significantly, Brown's husband was a Southern soldier fighting for the Confederacy and her letter testifies not only to the ability of Whitman's soldier images to stand in for both Union or Confederate soldiers, but also its ability to ameliorate partisan divisions and enact a recuperative process of healing and connection that united (i.e., enacted a process of re-Union for) individuals otherwise separated by civil war.

24 While the manner in which Whitman's text accomplishes the erasure of specific identity and the way in which readers (both real and ideal) responded to such a text is the focus of the remainder of this essay, I would like to interject the importance of keeping in mind that the stripping of markers of identity allowed this text to signify across partisan lines—as the preceding footnote demonstrates. In the poetry, where Whitman denies the reader names, ranks, and affiliations, the soldiers he represents could as easily be Confederate as Union. A reader from South Carolina and a reader from New York would arguably be able to impress the images with equal facility. As such, Whitman's *Drum-Taps* is a text "national" in scope though seeking to operate in a non-partisan way during a period of deadly partisan strife.

25 The "From Hooker's Command" notebook (*NUPM*, 2:630-633), and the "Walt Whitman's Soldiers" notebook (*NUPM*, 2:602-610). Scholars have given Whitman's notebooks their titles by using the first few words of written text that appear in each one.

26 The first of these indicates that Whitman was working directly from this notebook in constructing the poem, but because the entry begins after a torn page, its reference to any particular soldier (if any such reference existed) is gone. It reads, "[a]mong other things in the hospital / the gnawing, the putrid gangrene through this war and after the armies in the rear stalk fever, diarrhea, eating gangrene breaks out in some hospitals and takes an endemic character" (*NUPM*, 2:610), and is represented verbatim in Whitman's poem when the narrator claims to "Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive." (*PP*, 445). The above referenced image of Geiger follows shortly after this section.

27 For information on the previous identification of this entry as a possible source for “Vigil” see “William Giggee” in Charles Glicksberg’s *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 47. William Saley Giggee, born March 10th 1844 in Luzerne, Pennsylvania, died August 29th, 1862 at Manassas—the site of Pope’s Retreat from the Second Battle of Bull Run (also called the Second Manassas). As Whitman indicates in his notebook, William Giggie (Whitman spells “Giggee”) was a member of the 1st Regiment, Co E, New York Volunteers, but until recently Arthur’s identity has remained somewhat of a mystery. However, in his essay “Responding Kisses: New Evidence about the Origins of ‘Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night’” (*Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 25 [Spring 2008], 192-197), Martin Murray identifies Arthur as a soldier in the 1st Regiment NY Volunteers, and suggests, based upon a letter whose tone seems somewhat formal and perhaps less than familial, that Arthur and William may have been a homosexual couple serving together, and not father and son as the poem seemingly hints. However, the Civil War Rosters for the 1st Regiment, New York Volunteers lists three men with the last name of Giggie—Arthur and William, both privates, and Ira, a wagoner. The 1850 census shows Ira as the father of a family with two sons, William and Andrew—but no mention of an “Arthur.” There is no question that “Arthur” was not William’s father and that the poem’s representation of a son being buried by his father does not correspond with actual events. Ira was, in fact, discharged from service due to disability on May, 10 1862—a full three months before William’s death. However, the possibility exists that “Arthur” was in fact Andrew—and that the census taker merely mis-recorded the name. If “Andrew” was Arthur, he would have been born in 1849 and would only have been 13 years old at the time—young to be a private in the Volunteers, but not unheard of, and in such a case the poem would represent an almost complete reversal of the actual historical record—a 13 year old boy burying his 18 year old brother as opposed to an older father burying his son. Regardless, the “father/son” relationship that Whitman portrays in the poem was certainly not the one enjoyed by “Arthur” and “William” regardless of whether they were brothers or lovers, and so this poem offers further compelling evidence of Whitman’s re-writing and erasure of historical facts as he translated events from the notebooks to the poetry to provide himself with the opportunity to mediate the reader’s experience of approaching and “appreciating” their lost soldier.

28 Whitman’s overt reference to the color of the soldier’s faces in the two poems just brought forward—the “yellow-white ivory” of the soldiers face in “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim” and the face “white as a lily” in “A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown”—beg mention of another compelling element of Whitman’s soldier avatars. More often than not, the soldiers in the other *Drum-Taps* poems where these avatars are present (such as “Drum-Taps,” “Calvary Crossing a Ford,” “O Tan Faced Prairie Boy,” “As Toilsome I Wandered Virginia’s Woods,” “Hymn of Dead Soldiers,” “I Saw Old General At Bay,” “Look Down Fair Moon,” “How Solemn as One by One,” “Dirge For Two Veterans” and “Reconciliation”) are presented in racially ambiguous terms, and most images could represent black or white soldiers. Like Whitman’s refusal to denote whether a soldier was Union or Confederate, this ambiguity is a productive means of opening up as opposed to limiting recuperative connections.

29 Wynn Thomas has characterized this poem as “Whitman’s attempt to humanize an inhuman situation and to enact his own little private ‘ceremony’ to demonstrate a continuing, human solidarity between the living and the dead” (217). While Thomas investigates how this poem functions as a site of personal mourning for Whitman, his description is suggestive of the larger potential that the poem has for readers as well.

Certainly Whitman's text holds the potential to create a sense of "private ceremony" for a reader, who having "impressed" or "humanized" the otherwise anonymous soldier image with the fuller contours of individual identity can find himself or herself co-present with the speaker and deceased in the moment before burial—thereby gaining a means of recovering and "appreciating" the value of the lost dead. But also, by including other potential "unknowns," Whitman seems to suggest to his reader that the inestimable value they would anxiously afford to their soldier is a value they should just as eagerly place upon any and all of the rank and file lost during the war. Thus it might be more appropriate to claim that the "solidarity" that Whitman seeks to foster between the living and the dead includes not only Whitman and the particular dead encountered here, but between all readers and the entirety of the war's dead as well.

30 This was, sadly, as real a moment of access to their dead as many would ever have. "Hundreds of thousands of wives, parents, children, and siblings of unidentified and missing men would never have the . . . "melancholy satisfaction" of irrefutable evidence to serve as a foundation for emotional acceptance of loss. The intensity with which Civil War Americans sought to retrieve the bodies of their slain kin arose in no small part from this need to make loss real by rendering it visible and tangible" (Faust, 146). Under conditions that made tangibility and visibility impossible, Whitman strove to make them "virtually possible" in the psycho-textual realm of his text. Therefore, poems such as this not only effectively "'embalm[ed]' [soldiers] in [Whitman's] memory, and so . . . preserve[d] them from the devouring worm of oblivion," as Wynn Thomas has pointed out, but surely "preserved" them for a reader also, guaranteeing that reader a connection to their lost loved one as well (Thomas, 216).

31 Ed Folsom, "Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture," *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Donald D. Kummings (New York: Blackwell, 2006), 283.

32 Ed Folsom, "Poets of Compassion: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and War," *Multitudes* (Summer 2003), 5.