

CIVIL WAR NURSING NARRATIVES, WHITMAN'S *MEMORANDA DURING THE WAR*, AND EROTICISM

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"All flesh is grass."—Peter I, 1:24.

Bodies of soldiers "had gone down as Grass falls below the scythe."

— Civil War veteran

"[At Gettysburg] every grass-blade seemed to have been stained with blood."

—Sophronia Bucklin¹

WHITMAN'S *MEMORANDA DURING THE WAR* has recently begun to be considered within the historical framework of the many Civil War nursing narratives that proliferated during and after the war. While Whitman's *Memoranda* is not solely a nursing narrative—for it offers depictions of other aspects of the war—and while he served during the war as a nurse "in my own style"² as much as an official appointee of the Christian Commission, his memoir shares with the nursing narratives that preceded his work some important aspects of style and tone. A genre of prose that arose during and after the war, the nursing narrative was written most often by women who wished to offer the female version of service in the hospitals and on the field. Narratives written by Union nurses that appeared before Whitman's 1875-1876 *Memoranda During the War* include Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, Georgeanna Woolsey's *Three Weeks at Gettysburg*, the anonymous 1864 *Notes of Hospital Life*, Sarah Emma Edmond's *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*, Elvira Powers' *Hospital Pencillings*, Anna Morris Holstein's *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac*, Sophronia Bucklin's *In Hospital and Camp*, and Jane Stuart Woolsey's *Hospital Days*, all published before or in 1870. A full cultural assessment of Whitman's *Memoranda* depends at least partially upon discerning the ways in which he constructed his memoir within the context of those previous memoirs, utilizing themes of democracy, the typical American, motherhood, and, in the primary focus of this essay, the eroticism that forms between nurse and patient.³

Nursing narratives were well received by the general public. Alcott's 1863 *Hospital Sketches*, for example, proved so popular that it inaugu-

rated her literary career. Whitman's interest in Alcott's book, in fact, was responsible for his query to his friend and Alcott's publisher, James Redpath, whom he contacted concerning his own prospective narrative. Alcott's account of her Civil War nursing experiences first appeared serially in the Boston *Commonwealth* from May 22 through June 26, 1863, and then, later in 1863, in book form through the press of Redpath. Whitman wrote Redpath on October, 1863, about his narrative, as an idea "worthy the time,—something considerably beyond hospital sketches."⁴ The phrase "hospital sketches" probably refers at least obliquely to Alcott's narrative and, even if generic, reflects Alcott's achievement in that within a few months her title had become absorbed and restated into casual parlance for Whitman.

Given its wide following among the general populace, Whitman would have been likely also to have at least perused Sarah Emma Edmonds' 1865 *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*. *Nurse and Spy* was eagerly consumed for Edmonds' portrayals of herself as a nurse, if at times contested for her depictions of herself as a spy. Georgeanna Woolsey's 1863 *Three Weeks at Gettysburg*, written specifically "for the purpose of stimulating sewing circles to keep sending supplies,"⁵ saw the distribution of ten thousand copies. It is hard to tell exactly which nursing narratives Whitman might have read (though it is unlikely he encountered Jane Stuart Woolsey's narrative, only 100 copies of which were printed [Austin, 118]). The fact is incontestable, nonetheless, that the genre had developed significantly and primarily through the auspices of female nurses by the time Whitman published his *Memoranda During the War* in 1875-1876.

Though the memoirs of female nurses were to continue to grow more popular in the later decades of the nineteenth century, they had already lodged themselves into the consciousness of the nation in the decade after the war. Frank Moore's *Women of the War; Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* appeared in 1867, and its nearly 600 pages described the contributions of some thirty-eight nurses and a handful of women soldiers during the war; a year later, L. P. Brockett and Mary Vaughan's similarly encyclopedic volume described the contributions of at least as many women nurses, with a chapter on the four Woolsey sisters that included nearly the full text of Georgeanna Woolsey's narrative.⁶ In offerings like these, and especially in the proliferating narratives written by women themselves, Whitman had access to a plethora of material that might serve as a model for a nursing memoir with a general and large readership.

In *Memoranda*, Whitman extended the nursing narratives' style of nineteenth-century bricolage—that is, of notes composed on the spot and put together so as to retain the immediacy of the experience. Even a cursory glance at the narratives' titles indicates such immediacy:

Sketches, Three Weeks, In Hospital and Camp, Notes, Pencillings, Three Years, Hospital Days. In one such instance of the technique of note-taking, the narrator of the anonymous 1864 *Notes of Hospital Life* states at the outset: "These notes were jotted down as the incidents occurred; they are a simple statement of facts simply stated."⁷ The caveat—or boast—of on-the-pulse informality is one that Whitman, too, would claim ten years later. All the titles offer a necessary informality, giving notice that the author wrote in the rush of experience, offering a pastiche of observations running day-to-day or week-to-week. While Whitman was a self-trained journalist and had certainly honed the skills of *in medias res* reporting, still his *Memoranda*—composed from notes he wrote while at the site of the hospital or camp—were compiled, revised, and augmented in the years after the war, in the wake of the newly developing genre of nursing narratives.⁸

Whitman's newspaper reporting, however, in which he recounts some of his hospital experiences, precedes all the nursing narratives (except Alcott's serialized book). As early as August 16, 1863, Whitman published articles in various newspapers such as *The New York Times* that he later incorporated into *Memoranda*.⁹ In the *New York Times*, for example, he noted a sleeping soldier so handsome that "one must needs go nearer him," and he also wrote of a dying soldier, "He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving, he returned fourfold."¹⁰ Whitman reported his involvement with his patients as early as 1864, but the scenes of erotic attraction in *Memoranda* appeared in a more detailed manner in 1875; that is to say, Whitman's project of eroticism was well-established, if not particularly well-read, by the time of the Civil War, but the scenes in *Memoranda* carry Whitman's distinctive voice while also locating themselves within the burgeoning sweep of the popular new genre of nursing narratives.

In addition, a prepossessing concern of the nursing narratives pre-dating *Memoranda* was the need to show a kind of union of humanity that could transcend and outlast the division and cruelty of the war. Here, too, Whitman's writings of the 1850s and early 1860s including his war journalism—concerned as they are in a profound way with American unity—predate almost all of the early nursing narratives. The early nursing narratives, however, provide a means by which Whitman could subtly reframe his already prominent concerns. This he did by individualizing attraction to soldier patients, and by doing so in an accepted and popular way. The nursing narratives are characterized in part by a subterranean magnetism that acknowledges unity by revealing occasional scenes of eroticism, either explicit or coded. *Memoranda* shares in such a need to demonstrate union in this visceral and powerful way.

In his 1864 *New York Times* article, Whitman described the great importance of "personal love, caresses and the magnetic flood of sym-

pathy and friendship” involved in nursing, and he also stated that the “American soldier is full of affection, and the yearning for affection.”¹¹ What he achieves in *Memoranda*, then, is to personalize the portrayal of that affection. Hardly representing a sea change in attitude, *Memoranda* is rather a subtle extension and more intimate recounting of Whitman’s already longstanding convictions. He could extend these convictions in part because of the successful examples of affection found in the nursing narratives of 1863–1870. The success and popular reception of those narratives afforded Whitman the confidence to cite in *Memoranda* the existence of particular men—men whose names and places in their communities and fighting units he for the first time recorded in full.¹² Whitman stated the unequivocal attraction he felt towards these individual men, directing his affection toward real and named human beings who were present and palpable to him.

My position here furthers Alice Fahs’s argument that popular Civil War literature insisted on a sympathetic humanity that recognized individual suffering, defined as sentimental literature: “Both a popular mode of thought and language of expression in mid-nineteenth-century America, sentimentalism emphasized the central importance of emotion in the individual’s life” (94). Fahs identifies this sentimentalism as that which allows “powerful feelings [to structure] individual identity,” and that which “fused patriotism and Christianity” (94, 95). Gregory Eiselein, too, states the importance of compassion, seeing the efforts of Alcott and Whitman to develop a kind of humanitarian praxis as providing “a critical examination of the patient/agent relation [which] illuminated the overlooked issue of power in this dynamic, and suggested the need for an eccentric humanitarian practice” (79). I would emphasize yet another pattern delineating the interactions between nurses and patients. This interaction also falls into the realm of powerful feelings, but not specifically in the realm of patriotism and Christianity, and gathers as a more subliminal aspect of the nursing narratives preceding *Memoranda*. That is to say, an undeniable magnetism in some scenes of hospital life exists so as to privilege sensual connection and eschew division, and this magnetism exists outside of the available rhetorical structures of morality and thus subversively insists on its own validity.

When eroticism exists as an underlying force in significant moments of a memoir, it enables, whether by conscious design of the narrator or not, both the narrator’s own prodigious individualism and an undeniable and overarching union of humanity. The outlook of soldiers and nurses, necessarily strained nearly beyond endurance in the daily tension between duty to country and horror at the atrocity of war, proved one of unutterable complexity. In some cases nurses needed to develop an emotive dynamic that would allow them to continue to function and

exist as integrated selves. If compassion forms the sentimental Christian and patriotic side of nursing narratives, then passion forms an intensive erotic facet of some nurse-patient dynamics.

My focus in this essay is on the central scene of an erotic attraction to a patient. While women's early nursing narratives remain true to their titles, indicating sketchiness and flickers of scenes that comprise a compendium of scattershot stories and observations, the erotic scene often forms a relatively small proportion, but a significant weight, in each account. Sometimes it exercises more narrative integrity than other reportings in the memoirs; the scene lengthens as the narrator lingers on the import of physical attraction. To the extent that the narrating is conscious, the narrator may develop the scene of erotic attraction to underscore, as in the case of Alcott, a brace of humanity, and in other cases, to illustrate a devotion to the democratic principles of multiplicity and diversity in America.¹³ To the extent that it is not altogether conscious, the erotic scene may show a highly individualized self distinguished by the inarguable sweep and force of desire. The theme of unity—or, in more Whitmanian terms, merging—was hardly new to Whitman, but it was newly available as popular literature in these memoirs, and as such provided a form he could refashion for his own project. In 1875 Whitman presented the dynamic of erotic unity in his memoir, with the added confidence of having written within a newly acclaimed genre.

Two questions attend the inception of this inquiry: why would Whitman have chosen to enter such a primarily female vocation as nursing, and why would he choose to draw partially upon the genre of the nursing narrative? In regard to the first question—why he entered the primarily female vocation of nursing—the answer is, he didn't. Nursing as an occupation in prewar United States was primarily a male pursuit; trained nurses in prewar United States were a rarity, and most nurses were patients who had stayed on in the institution of the hospital because they could not afford to leave. Only in the home did nursing prove almost altogether female—where it wasn't seen as a vocation or even an avocation at all. Nursing or domestic care at home was provided almost exclusively by women, because a sick person “usually obtained nursing care from female relatives,”¹⁴ and the majority of the population never left home to visit a hospital.

In wartime situations previous to the American Civil War, nurses were male and usually drawn from convalescing patients, but in the Civil War, organized nursing opportunities for women opened up, and nursing and the conception of the nurse changed drastically. After the high volume of casualties in the battle of First Bull Run, the shortage of nurses became acute and apparent, and “just about anybody who could apply a lint bandage” was allowed to tend to soldiers, including “undesirable soldiers, . . . convalescents, invalids, prisoners, those too young

or old for military service, relatives, and recruited females.”¹⁵ To put the need for nurses dramatically, the situation following the outbreak of the war was as follows: “The Army Medical Department, which consisted of fewer than one-hundred doctors at the outbreak of the war, had no general hospitals; its largest facility was a post hospital in Leavenworth, Kansas, with only forty beds,” and as a result the medical bureau converted hotels, colleges, and even a jail into makeshift medical facilities.¹⁶ There were very few professionally trained nurses of either gender in relation to the prodigious number of wounded and sick.

While statistics concerning nurses have been historically elastic—for instance, a convalescent soldier might perform nursing duties for a week and then be sent back to the front; a mother might arrive to help her sick son, then stay on as a nurse for years; another nurse might come through the bureaucracy of the Sanitary Commission or Christian Commission and stay but a month or two—Jane Schultz’s recent study sets the number of female nurses in service much higher than previously acknowledged. Whereas John Brumgardt stated that there were approximately 2,000 women nurses, North and South, in the Civil War, and Stewart Brooks stated that between 3,000 and 4,000 women served in Union hospitals alone, Schultz puts the figure at upwards of 20,000, and that is just for Northern nurses who were paid: “The Carded Service Records of Union hospital attendants, compiled in 1890 by the U.S. Record and Pension Division as Congress debated granting pensions to women, list the names of 21,208 women.”¹⁷ Of course this number does not include Southern nurses nor does it include nurses who donated their services.

As for the second question—why would Whitman align himself with a primarily female genre to write *Memoranda*?—the answer is that the alignment is not so surprising, given that Whitman had from the beginning of his writing career been intensely interested in and aligned with women as thinkers and writers. Roy P. Basler, in his introduction to *Memoranda*, notices Whitman’s “sensitive, almost feminine spirit” (2), as have others. Sherry Ceniza, Vivian Pollak, and David Reynolds, among others, have shown the influences of women and the feminine upon Whitman’s production.¹⁸ Notably, Whitman used Fanny Fern’s *Fern Leaves*, the title and cover of which influenced *Leaves of Grass*. Highly aware of genre and women’s literature in the early decades of his career, Whitman in *Memoranda* also relies on women’s literature.

Whitman, however, did differentiate between male and female nurses, as when he specifically mentions Mrs. G of Ward F as a “lady nurse,” a designation that suggests the relative novelty of females in the hospitals. He also devotes a short section to the description of a “lady named Miss or Mrs. Billings, who has long been a practical friend of soldiers and nurse in the army” and who asked to be buried among the

soldiers she served.¹⁹ The request was granted, and Whitman, by dint of including the account—detailing her fine service as well as the salute fired over her grave—seemed to admire her. He usually finds the accounts of female nurses' duties moving, especially as those duties intersect with his ideas of unity, motherhood, and erotic magnetism as a healing force.

Such unity, maternalism, and magnetism converge in erotic moments in nursing narratives. A hospital forms the site wherein the primacy of the body remains indisputable, where certainly the worst is seen of the body but also the best, as when a patient almost miraculously recovers through the care of good nursing. Often, moments of sensual intensity form the center of early nursing narratives, a kind of indelible, inexplicable hub of desire from which the rest of the text radiates and borrows energy. The scene of erotic attraction in nursing narratives draws in part from the significance of democracy as it functioned with unstated immediacy in the lives of the hospital workers. A hospital scene of erotic attraction emphasizes the desire of human beings, the pull of individual magnetism, regardless of class or political alignment, and depends upon the uprooted and chaotic circumstances of wartime activities. It marks a state of affairs nearly impossible to apprehend or organize in other more routine ways. The presence of erotic attraction is one that may surprise and discomfit readers of nursing narratives, yet it seems to be nearly universal, sometimes pressing implicitly if unconsciously for tolerance or unity and always existing in raw power.

Consider, for example, a Whitman letter describing an intimate and romantic attraction, relating to friends the situation of a "poor boy" whose leg had been amputated: "our affection is quite an affair, quite romantic—sometimes when I lean over to say I am going, he puts his arm round my neck, draws my face down, &c."²⁰ Such sensual intensity almost equals the intensity of the ineluctably physical nature of war, as when Alcott's sympathy toward her charges extends to the sympathy she feels physically. She experiences pain not only as a meeting of minds but as a meeting of bodies, admitting, "I often longed to groan for them."²¹ Whitman detailed his erotic attractions more directly and personally in *Memoranda* than he had before in his public writings. Hardly devoid of erotic scenes, Whitman's poems glory in lavish, passionate descriptions, such as those from the famous fifth section of *Song of Myself*, the "Calamus" poems, and to some extent the *Drum-Taps* poems. In *Memoranda*, however, Whitman develops even more personal scenes, naming specific individuals and sketching the particular beloved in a more personal manner than ever before. The men he is attracted to have names, regiments, companies, families, communities, and exist as nonhypothetical and highly individual human beings.

In one intimate, erotic encounter in *Memoranda*, Whitman attends to a badly hurt, beautiful soldier whose name is "Thomas Haley, Co. M, Fourth New York Cavalry—a regular Irish boy, a fine specimen of youthful physical manliness." Whitman then refers to Thomas as Tom, a patient whom Whitman thought could not survive twelve hours yet after three days "looks well enough in the face to a casual observer." The soldier Tom, Whitman reports, "lies there with his frame exposed above the waist, all naked, for coolness, a fine built man, the tan not yet bleach'd from his cheeks and neck." The soldier acknowledges for a moment the presence of Whitman, then falls asleep again, remaining unaware of Whitman's almost ghostly yet reassuring presence:

Poor youth, so handsome, athletic, with profuse beautiful shining hair. One time as I sat looking at him while he lay asleep, he suddenly, without the least start, awaken'd, open'd his eyes, gave me a long, long steady look, turning his face very slightly to gaze easier—one long, clear silent look—a slight sigh—then turn'd back and went into his doze again. Little he knew, poor death-stricken boy, the heart of the stranger that hover'd near.²²

The "long, long steady look" from an individual, Thomas Haley, registers as no look in Whitman's work has registered before. The Whitmanian perspective here occurs in an almost otherworldly way, the hovering "heart of the stranger" that emphasizes the romantic inevitability and attraction that overlaps with the horror attendant upon life in the hospitals. Such a scene contributes to the complex character of the erotic moment during war experience.

The *Ur*-story of erotic Civil War experience, however, undoubtedly belongs to Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, as she tells at length of the attachment she feels to the exemplary soldier, John. Alcott's John, a working class blacksmith whom she differentiates in terms of class by dint of his speech patterns and especially grammar, represents the very type of the American working man, possessing character, dignity, and serenity. Alcott describes him by using the following words: courageous, sober, self-denying, stately, uncomplaining, tranquil, earnest, faithful, true, excellent, natural, frank, brave, and upright. He is the perfectly attractive man, for a "most attractive face he had, framed in brown hair and beard, comely featured and full of vigor, as yet unsubdued by pain; thoughtful and beautifully mild. . . ." He is "a large, fair man, with a fine face, and the serenest eyes I ever met," has "bonny brown hair" and is unquestionably the "manliest man" among her patients. Not only admired by Nurse Periwinkle, John is nearly worshiped by virtually all of the men, and before he dies his comrade and he "kissed each other, tenderly as women" (Alcott, 38-44).

John represents the fine democratic American male in every way for just about everyone who sees him, combining as he does the types of

a mythological Paul Bunyan, a tragic character from Shakespeare, and an American Jesus. He functions, too, as a kind of mate for Nurse Periwinkle who almost creates him by way of sympathetic forces; indeed, he is overdetermined as a character, being made to hold the efflux of sensory and sensual repression, the nonverbal locus for pain, the hope for an as yet idealized democratic nation, and the complex vortices of family relationships under the dire stresses put upon them by the conflagration of the war. Nurse Periwinkle understands many of these complications, admitting that she knew she “was the poor substitute for mother, wife, or sister” (41), a set of substitutions including what to a twenty-first-century audience might seem the uncomfortable polar opposites of mother and wife.²³

Further, Nurse Periwinkle is perhaps at her most revealing when she admits, upon writing a letter for John, that she cannot subdue “an irrepressible glimmer of feminine curiosity” about whether the recipient of the letter is his mother or his wife. This reveals much about the nurse but also much about the patient, for John’s home life back in Virginia incorporates these very polar opposites—mother and wife—in his relationship with his widowed mother. In his own words, he acts as “father to the children and husband to the dear old woman, if I can.” John wears a ring he deems of great importance, one given him by his mother, as he says, “to keep me steady,” a plain ring he touched “and often turned thoughtfully on his finger when he lay alone” (Alcott, 42).

It is important to emphasize that such complications in relationships were in part viewed differently in nineteenth-century American culture than in our time; Alcott’s nurse sees John as admirable in acting as both son and husband to his mother. As John is husband to his mother and father to his siblings, Nurse Periwinkle is in turn mother, wife, and sister to him. This situation is far from unusual and in fact somewhat typical of nursing narratives, whereby the nurse sees herself in a complex of relationships to some patients, in both maternal and erotic connection with a wounded and dying soldier. Such an overloaded relationship does not admit of easy emotional filing, and because of this difficulty the connection resists categorization and remains a quintessential characteristic of nurses’ memoirs. This relationship evokes compassion in a narrative otherwise characterized by sass and wit, and the story of John provides the most extended moment of tragedy in Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches*.

It also provides ample passion, as Schultz observes: “Though few women openly admitted romantic attachments, a number obliquely acknowledged the sexual energy that infused their work. Louisa May Alcott’s description of Virginia blacksmith John Suhre’s death (her ‘manliest’ patient) invoked maternal imagery, but was full of grasping, clutching, and other sexual cues” (94–95). The intimacy established between

John and Nurse Periwinkle continues until his death, when “to the end [he] held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away” (Alcott, 45). Death and life are conjoined in a handclasping from which she finds it difficult to extricate her fingers. “I could not but be glad,” she says, “that through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, perhaps, had lightened that hard hour” (45). Alcott allows Nurse Periwinkle to overcome sorrow through sympathy and to feel the electrical wave of physical contact, both maternal and sensuous. Indeed, the maternal may function as a sometime cover-up for the sensual, as Schultz notes, in that nurses “could, in fact, admit the affection they felt for soldiers through the mask of the maternal without jeopardizing reputation” (95). At the end of the scene, Alcott makes herself “happy with the thought, that . . . he would not be without some token of love which makes life beautiful and outlives death” (33). The need to mention a token of love suggests a reason for the eroticization of a patient—the need to signify into memory the belief that touch and contact can reconcile loss.

Alcott wrote the most extended moment of erotic attraction and sympathy among the narratives preceding Whitman’s *Memoranda*, but she is certainly not the only nurse to report such passion. Alcott’s wanting to groan for her patients shows an extraordinary movement of compassion and a kind of physical counter-transference as regards her attendance upon her patients. Sophronia Bucklin in her narrative, too, reports the groans of her men in a remarkable way, noting that the “groans of suffering men echoing on all sides, aroused me to the highest pitch of excitement” (48), an excitement, of course, of sympathy, yet also, as she says, of arousal. Such pairing of arousal and death—a conjoining that perhaps sits uncomfortably with the reader when a sensual connection is involved—nonetheless exists notably in such Civil War nursing accounts, showcasing unpretending erotic moments.

The parallels between Alcott’s and Whitman’s scenes are manifold: both see the soldier as physically beautiful; both see him as infantilized;²⁴ both note that the dying man looks well on the surface of things even though they know differently; both portray the wounded man as possessing a magnetism; and both seem to be the sole sympathizers provided for the soldier. While Alcott includes one extended scene, Whitman includes numerous brief instances of erotic attraction in *Memoranda*—numerous undoubtedly because they underscore the nature of a conflict that afflicts such multitudes. Like Alcott, he offers the detail of the patient’s first name, but offers further detail in providing the last name as well. For instance, Whitman relates the last days of Corporal Frank Irwin, whose left knee was wounded and subsequently amputated. In *Memoranda* Whitman records a letter he wrote to Irwin’s family about Frank, who was fond of Whitman and was “sweet and

affectionate." Whitman elaborates that Frank was "good and well-behaved, and affectionate, I myself liked him very much. I was in the habit of coming in afternoons and sitting by him, and soothing him, and he liked to have me—liked to put his arm out and lay his hand on my knee—would keep it so a long while." Near the close of the letter Whitman states that "I loved the young man, though I but saw him immediately to lose him" (51).

Like Alcott and Bucklin, Whitman cues the exchange of sympathy through a kind of underlying passion, conflating the presence of the suffering body and the erotic body so as to show mortification and attraction in conjunction. It may have been the most profound challenge of his writing career. He marks physical anguish and beauty at the same time, for instance, in the person of Thomas Lindly, of the First Pennsylvania Cavalry who, suffering "horribly" and dosed with morphine, is given "a large handsome apple" by Whitman. Whitman shows, too, the conjoining of suffering and beauty in a description not technically from the hospital: he offers the "fine sight" of a passing cavalry force made up of "the gallant bearing, fine seat, and bright faced appearance of a thousand and more handsome young American men, [who] where so good to see—quite set me up for hours." But almost directly afterward—he briefly describes two more passing forces—Whitman notes the ambulances moving the other way "up Fourteenth street north, slowly wending along, bearing a large lot of wounded to the hospitals," so that each procession is in marked contrast to the other, moving in different directions, but occurring on the same street (*Memoranda*, 18-19).

About the long-suffering cases, Whitman remarked that they needed "special sympathetic nourishment. These I sit down and either talk to, or silently cheer them up. They always like it hugely, (and so do I). . . . Some of the poor young chaps, away from home for the first time in their lives, hunger and thirst for affection. This is sometimes the only thing that will reach their condition" (*Memoranda*, 30-31). It is important for Whitman to report that both sides enjoy the attention, which he perceives as mutual. The phrase, "hunger and thirst for affection," demarcates a need as strong as the need for nourishment. Affection and attraction provide staples of hospital life for Whitman, Alcott, Bucklin, Powers, and other nurse narrators. For these hospital workers, perhaps eroticization of the body in pain is one of the few things that a nurse can do in the face of death. The erotic may provide a means by which a patient or nurse can attempt to override pain, replacing one physical phenomenon, one bodily experience, with another.

The exacerbated condition of pain deserves scrutiny here. Pain, as investigated by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain*, is immediate in nature and necessarily attended by inarticulation. By the time health and comfort return and pain might be articulated, the immediacy is of ne-

cessity gone and thereby inexpressible in a direct form. Scarry suggests that the difficult relationship of pain to language is part of the reason that pain-inducing experiences such as war and torture can be manipulated by power and governmental structures and thus be allowed to continue. She suggests, too, that the fact of pain is essentially isolating and invisible because of such a relationship: "Invisible in part because of its resistance to language, it [the fact of pain] is also invisible because its own powerfulness ensures its isolation, ensures that it will not be seen in the context of other events, that it will fall back from its arrival in language and remain devastating."²⁵ Probably the isolation of the sufferer is a situation witnessed if not usually acknowledged by medical staff members, for if suffering on a day-to-day basis were felt on the pulse of the worker as acutely as upon the pulse of the patient, then no aid or relief would be possible, due to the crippling empathy experienced by the workers.

However, the pain experienced by patients is at least partially felt by the nurses, if momentarily or subconsciously.²⁶ Patients' suffering, absorbed by ministering nurses, may register as physical response—body to body—in a manner that allows pain almost to be translated, the isolation of the patient to be alleviated, and the nurse to enter into a sympathy that has extended its own logic. As such it assures the nurse of her vital existence within the entropy and enormity surrounding her. Erotic attraction provides a way for a narrator to spotlight, emotionally, an interaction of meaning in the middle of chaos, in the middle of violence that cannot be predicted or controlled. "When one hears about another person's physical pain," states Scarry, "the events happening within the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the surface of the earth" (3). An erotic connection does not register that invisible geography fully but it does, in a seismic way, attend to it, body to body. Eroticization of a patient in pain may be one means by which to register exacerbated experience, given the circumstance that the body resists language. Through Scarry's recognition of such resistance the body is made visible, in an entelechy of human sympathy, or a kind of democratic *miser cordia* felt in the body.

The unrepresentability of pain stands in necessary conjunction with an inimical political utilization of that condition whereby such political force may assert its own rhetoric. As Sweet interprets Scarry, "the displacement of the body by ideology is possible because wounds are referentially unstable and thus can be appropriated rhetorically as signs of the legitimacy of an ideological position." I agree that *Memoranda* attempts, as Sweet says, "to find aesthetic and ideological solutions" after posing the "representational problems" that war brings forth.²⁷ To the

extent that repressive political organizations make use of and depend upon the unrepresentability of pain in order to polarize power, the nurse who in her or his narrative attempts to foreground the body may be engaging, almost certainly unconsciously, in an act of political resistance.

It is an aesthetic act, too. Time and again nurses speak lovingly of one or two or several particular soldiers, usually those men noble or handsome or in some way enhanced through a lover's eye. Beauty is often mentioned, and to the extent that beauty is usually equated with health it must have alleviated stress for hospital workers to feel attraction to patients. Bucklin, for example, emphasizes the beauty of some of the soldiers she attends, calling a soldier a "beautiful boy," and in another case confessing that she "could hardly turn my fascinated eyes from this feast of beauty" that was a wounded soldier. Another soldier calls Bucklin by a woman's name not her own and asks if she will stay through the night with him, possibly mistaking her for his wife (Bucklin, 106, 265, 203-204). The Quaker nurse Cornelia Hancock (who did not write a memoir but recorded incidents in her letters) somewhat disturbingly reports the fact that doctors she worked with would, after the deaths of certain handsome soldiers, embalm the soldiers' bodies, after which she and the doctors would periodically visit the mausoleum to admire their beauty.²⁸ Georgeanna Woolsey describes the death of an attractive man, a "fair-haired, blue-eyed young lieutenant, a face innocent enough for one of our own New England boys."²⁹ The lieutenant is actually a rebel soldier, a significant fact in the ability for a nurse to represent the eroticisation of pain in terms of restating the goals of reunion of the nation.

The goal of union of the nation is powerful if understated in the narratives written by women; the narrators tend rather toward demonstrating union than asserting it rhetorically. For example, many rings are given in the accounts of nurses. Jane Stuart Woolsey, for one, exclaims, "What hospital nurse has not a bone ring or trinket carved by her men in the wards or in prison?" and lists the many types of rings and the icons carved on them, including a wooden ring carved by a thankful rebel soldier. Woolsey tells the story of Hunter, not a rebel but "a loyal Tennessean" (135), who gave her a little ring. Though Hunter fights on the union side he hails from the south, and he recounts the conflict of joining the Union army while watching his southern home jeopardized by that same army, his capture and imprisonment, and his carving of the ring while in a Macon jail. The ring bears "two clasped hands to mean *True till Death*, or something like that," he explains, as he asks her to take the ring. Woolsey says to her reader, "Let those who have one of these rings with two clasped hands to mean 'True till Death,' keep it as a sacred relic."³⁰ Woolsey uses the image of the ring, often a sign of

erotic and romantic attraction, to show the strength of the Union cause, which includes Southerners, in a symbol that does double duty in representing union: the symbol of the ring itself of course shows union, and the clasped hands emphasize union, too. Bucklin describes bone rings and also a ring given to her that was made of a shell fuse found from the rebels' firing attack on her hospital (300). While these rings are not always romantic, as can be seen by the fact that they are also sent to mothers and daughters,³¹ they are at the very least intimate. Elvira Powers receives a ring from a man referred to as "Kentucky," with her name engraved on it, and it fits perfectly because he had contrived in advance, through painstaking and ingenious measures, to discover her ring size.³² Charlotte McKay, whose 1876 narrative is contemporaneous with Whitman's, recounts a rebel giving her a ring carved of bone, "in token of his gratitude."³³

A particularly powerful scene of ring-giving is offered in Sarah Emma Edmonds' *Nurse and Spy*. This scene rivals Alcott's portrayal of John and Nurse Periwinkle, because in both books the erotic scene unfolds in a more extended and heightened narrative space than the rest of the episodes. Edmonds finds herself receiving a ring from a wounded soldier to whom she is attracted; she presents this soldier as owning some of the same admirable qualities possessed by Alcott's John. An important distinction inheres, however: this soldier is a Confederate. Edmonds's attraction proves additionally titillating because the interaction occurs not in a supervised hospital but in the literal no-man's land of space between the North and South lines. In this uninhabited space Edmonds comes upon a deserted house where she wishes to regroup before her next surveillance mission, and discovers that the house is the shelter for a mortally wounded rebel soldier. She cooks food and feeds him before she tends to her own needs, describing the soldier as "a very pleasant and intelligent looking man" and noting that "it is strange how sickness and disease disarm our antipathy and remove our prejudices."³⁴

Edmonds enjoys attending to him and easing his pain and more than once refers to his beauty with phrases such as, "those beautiful eyes," "those beautiful windows of the soul," and "lovely in death." His dying action is to give her a ring and ask her to keep it in memory: "taking a ring from his finger he tried to put it on mine, but his strength failed." The moment has hallmarks of the erotic but also of the maternal, with Edmonds perceiving the soldier "as a little child" folding his hands in prayer as "he would do at his mother's knee" (89-91). Edmonds's encounter with the rebel soldier proves charged, erotic, unchaperoned, between lines. The intimacy is intense and undeniable.

While Whitman experiences many intensified intimate encounters in his nursing narrative, probably the most healing of such encounters comes in the final pages of *Memoranda* where, like Sarah Emma

Edmonds, he presents a rebel soldier he loves. Needless to say, Whitman's project of eroticized democracy is his own and had been at least since the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman, always impassioned about human unity as commensurate with national unity, may nonetheless have discerned in the early nursing narratives a way to further his project. The nursing narratives' maternal and erotic structuring of desire bespoke unification and found legitimization for union. Whitman placed his longstanding project within this new context of a popularly received and admired genre that detailed intimate relationships with real human beings, at least in part as a way to make his primary project more accessible to a general readership.

For instance, he describes "a young Baltimorean, aged about 19 years, W. S. P., (2nd Md. Southern)," whose right leg had been amputated. The young man was dying, sleepless, and under the influence of morphine:

Evidently very intelligent and well bred—very affectionate—held on to my hand, and put it by his face, not willing to let me leave. As I was lingering, soothing him in his pain, he says to me suddenly, "I hardly think you know who I am—I don't wish to impose upon you—I am a rebel soldier." I said I did not know that, but it made no difference. . . . I loved him much, always kiss'd him, and he did me. (53)

This depiction of devotion, handclaspings, and kissing is marked by tenderness and affection. The account is set apart, as is that of Edmonds, by the fact that the man is a Secessionist. Furthermore, in the next ward Whitman found the man's brother, a Union soldier, hit in the same battle and also mortally wounded; this second soldier is identified as a brave Union soldier, "Col. Clifford K. Prentiss, Sixth Md. Infantry." The two brothers were "brought together" in their dying, and "each died for his cause" (*Memoranda*, 53). Here Whitman accentuates his espousal of a post-war democracy, attributing equal valor and dignity to each side in the war.

He admires Union and Secession soldier alike in a remarkable reverence that crescendos in the last sections of *Memoranda*. His respect for the soldiers of both sides proves notable in the reunion of the two brothers from the North and South, one of whom was the rebel Whitman kissed and loved. He states, after the anecdote about the Northern and Southern brothers, "I can say that in my ministerings I comprehended all, whoever came in my way, Northern or Southern, and slighted none" (56). Whitman uses the word "comprehended" to form the same movement characteristic of his earlier works: he not only understands the wounded in a deep and intimate way but he is part of them all, and assumes them all into himself comprehensively.³⁵ It is in response to the fractured condition of the country during and after the war that Whitman

reintroduces in narrative form his aesthetic of maternal, erotic, and homosexual merging. This aesthetic operates in response to the bifurcated sense of the American self, pulled between North and South, and allows Whitman to achieve a perspective that engenders tenderness.

For all the erotic traces underscoring unity in the accounts of Civil War nursing memoirs, however, the potential for female and male nurses to become romantic figures was hardly identical. Whereas the position of the female nurse in tending to male patients was controversial in the nineteenth century, and female nurses were sometimes seen as potential seekers of romance and marriage, the motivation of the male nurse would have been scrutinized far less rigorously.³⁶ Homosexuality in nineteenth-century United States was for the most part unnoticed or perceived ambiguously (British writers such as John Addington Symonds notwithstanding). The reception of Whitman's "Calamus" poems of mutual male attraction or adhesiveness was largely unruffled, for instance; such reception stands in marked contrast to the scandalized reaction to Whitman's poems of heterosexual attraction, "Children of Adam." Because of relatively vague conceptions of homosexuality in the mid-nineteenth century, Whitman's attractions to male patients might have intensified without the need to register any "staggered" reaction, as did Alcott's nurse upon first needing to bathe a naked male soldier.³⁷

Thus Whitman could use the tenderness of the early nursing narratives and the maternal imperative that went unquestioned in the popular conception of the female nurse, and, further, he could skirt the perceived difficulties concerning heterosexual eroticism. "Whitman presents the in-betweenness of the homosexual healer as a therapeutic habit of mind, a habit of mind capable of sustaining the uncertainties of medicine, capable of 'being in uncertainties,' as Keats said of the poet," states Robert Leigh Davis, and Lawrence Buell, too, posits the existence during the Civil War of Whitman's "maternal/erotic tenderness for beautiful young men."³⁸ Subtly undercutting assumptions about preference in terms of passion, Whitman in his adhesive eroticism continues in this "therapeutic habit of mind" in order to be able to discover a way to heal the nation.

From the context of female nursing narratives of 1863-1870, Whitman displays the maternal strain evidenced almost universally therein, effecting an intimate relationship both "motherly" and romantic. Importantly, it is a relationship the nation was willing to accept and valorize. Nowhere is that tenderness more prominent than in his role as nurse in *Memoranda*. It may be that in portraying himself as both maternal and erotic he can find an ambient formula that approximates the expression of homosexuality in a culture that distrusts or resists or is blind to it. Whitman defines his aesthetic by positioning himself in his

role as nurse and attending to attraction more directly and specifically than ever before in his career.

If my emphasis upon the erotic in this essay seems overloaded, consider the views of authorities at the time who registered fear of the attraction that might occur by admitting women to the occupation of nursing. There existed a general sexual anxiety about women's roles in tending to the body, including not only a fear that American women might faint if exposed to wounded men, but also "a usually unstated fear [that] involved exposure of young women to the naked male body" (Freeman, 52). In addition, fears about sexuality caused authorities to conceive of nursing as an occupation befitting older women, for "the exposure of an older motherly woman to naked bodies, especially those of men, was deemed neither shocking nor arousing."³⁹

Superintendent of nurses, Dorothea Dix, famous for barring young and pretty women from duty as hospital nurses, turned away thousands of women because they were "too attractive." Female nurses were required to be over thirty years of age and to be unremarkable in appearance.⁴⁰ Dix announced that "no woman under thirty years need apply to serve in the government hospitals. All nurses are required to be very plain-looking women. Their dresses must be brown or black, with no bows, no curls, or jewelry, and no hoop-skirts" (Brown, 54, 303). Clearly, such governmental stipulations spoke to a fear of heterosexual attraction and eroticism. Florence Nightingale, too, in her work in the Crimean War, stressed that nurses' training "had to eliminate any hint of eroticism."⁴¹

For example, the anonymous narrator of the 1864 *Notes of Hospital Life* describes an erotic interchange with a patient who tells her that she can help him assuage his loneliness. He says to her, "Sure, and it's lonely I am, so very lonely; and it's some one to love that I'm wanting." He observes that the lady nurses are there exactly to supply such want, to which the narrator, somewhat amused, retorts, "I do not find wives among the list of luxuries on our diet-table" (25). In *Pencilings*, Powers too notes these preconceptions at the outset of her narrative and presents them in order to poke fun. When she and her two companions arrive at the wards to visit patients, they joke that they will "notice only the good looking ones" (2). Later, Powers reports that once she had "the audacity to pay special attention to a young corporal from Massachusetts, fifteen years her junior, by accompanying him to church one Sabbath evening, and came very near being discharged for the same" (157-158).

An awareness of the body—the body that is magnetic because it arouses maternal sympathy and because it arouses erotic urgings—is crucial to a full understanding of nursing. One of Whitman's aesthetic tasks in *Memoranda* was to embrace the body as fully and vigorously, yet

even more specifically, than he had in "Song of Myself" and the 1860 "Calamus" poems. The body in *Memoranda* is the body of the male soldier, of course, which is now diseased, disfigured, amputated, putrefying, weakened, or dying. Never was Whitman's need to celebrate the body so dire as it was at this crux. By and large the strategy he used remained the same as the strategy he used at the outset of his career—the assertion of merging. In the 1875 *Memoranda During the War*, however, unlike in "Song of Myself" twenty years earlier, the test for merging was severe and the strain palpable. Timothy Sweet points out that "in Whitman's experience of army hospitals, the adhesive love that had made his poetic self 'completely satisfied' in the 'Calamus' poems had to find its object in the violated bodies of soldiers" (64). The erotic attraction was disjunctive, as was the experience of visiting tent to tent, as was the experience of the wounded, fragmented body. Whitman's project of adhesiveness and erotic merging had never been more thoroughly tested as in the hospital tents of the Civil War. The sense of purpose that the war afforded to Whitman caused him to reclaim the primacy of his commitment to the cause of union and democracy in America, and this redoubled commitment infused his prose writing. Indeed, important to all early nursing narratives is the concept that healing the soldiers might also "heal the country," as Dorothea Dix, Superintendent of nurses, believed (Brown, 274). Whitman attempted to heal the fragmentation of a national and political conflagration in his role as a lover of patients and as a writer of the nation's hospitals.

It is the achievement of *Memoranda During the War* that Whitman was able to put forward a kind of antiwar tract that included the atrocity of war at the same time that he offered a hopeful statement about the tenderness of humankind, and to affirm the United States as a nation, as well. Ed Folsom points out that Whitman's remarkable prose "could turn the war inside out, . . . bring America to the hospital that its war had created . . . [and] recenter the war on what had previously been its marginal and ignored aspects," such as infection, amputation, and other incidents deemed unmentionable before.⁴² Whitman refused to flinch from the horror of war at the same time that he refused to exclude the presence of erotic attraction in the midst of such horror. In the final three words of the narrative, Whitman honors the memory of the dead, from both the North and the South, to whom he chooses to "dedicate my book" (*Memoranda*, 58).

He believes the kisses that he and the soldiers exchange—and the love these kisses represent—can bring reconciliation (and so it is fitting that in his poem "Reconciliation," he concludes by kissing his "enemy [who] is dead . . . the white face in the coffin").⁴³ Whitman sees, together, devastation and healing. He worked hard for his *Leaves of Grass* to signal, once again, democratic impulses so as to save a nation. Like

Sophronia Bucklin, who said of the aftermath of Gettysburg, that “every grass-blade seemed to have been stained with blood” (189), Whitman did not turn away from the enormity of the Civil War. He realized in a visceral way in 1875 that each blade of grass had been blood-stained and labored under the onus of dedicating the leaves of grass (and his *Leaves of Grass*) to the fallen war dead. At the same time, however, he submitted once again that tenderness might heal the nation’s division. Placing his memoir, in part, within the context of popular nursing narratives published in the decade before his, he attempted to validate his vision in the democratic mind. To further his own already well-established aesthetic of passion and commitment to unity, he rediscovered in his prose an erotic positioning as a means to heal a rift so wide an embrace could hurt.

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NOTES

1 The three epigraphs are from Peter I, 1:24; Hard Holzer and Mark E. Neely, Jr., *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art* (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 197; and Sophronia E. Bucklin, *In Hospital and Camp: A Woman’s Record of Thrilling Incidents among the Wounded in the Late War* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Company, 1869), 189. This essay is an expanded version of a paper delivered at a symposium, “The (R)Evolution of Walt Whitman,” at Texas A&M University in April 2004. I wish to thank M. Jimmie Killingsworth especially for inviting me to write and deliver the paper.

2 *New York Times*, December 11, 1864. See Kenneth M. Price, “Whitman’s Journalism,” in Price, Martin G. Murray, and Robert K. Nelson, *Whitman’s Memory* (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/fdw/volume2/price/memoranda/journalism/>).

3 See, for works on Civil War nursing: Robert Leigh Davis, *Whitman and the Romance of Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Gregory Eiselein, *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); Lisa Long, *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Ann Douglas Wood, “The War within the War: Women Nurses in the Union Army,” *Civil War History* 18 (1972), 197-212; and Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also Libra Rose Hilde, “Worth a Dozen Men: Women, Nursing, and Medical Care During the American Civil War” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2003). In general, most of these critics acknowledge Whitman’s memoir in the light of Alcott and sometimes Edmonds, but less often or not at all with Jane Stuart Woolsey, Georgeanna Woolsey, Powers, Holstein, and Bucklin, and not as an exploration of how the nuances of narrative style are used and

developed. My project distinguishes itself from the above works by concentrating intensively on the narratives preceding Whitman's, and investigating the tone and style of those early narratives through 1876.

4 Cited in Roy P. Basler, "Introduction," in *Walt Whitman's Memoranda During the War [&] Death of Abraham Lincoln* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 11.

5 Anne L. Austin, *The Woolsey Sisters of New York: A Family's Involvement in the Civil War and a New Profession (1860-1900)* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1971), 94.

6 See L. P. Brockett and Mrs. Mary C. Vaughan, *Woman's Work in the Civil War: a Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience* (Philadelphia: Zeigler, McCurdy & Co., 1868); and Frank Moore, *Women of the War; Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice* (Hartford, Connecticut: S. S. Scranton & Co., 1867).

7 Anonymous, *Notes of Hospital Life* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1864), xiii.

8 Such note-taking styles, however, are also anticipated, for example, in the works of Irving, Dickens, and Thackeray.

9 For Whitman's journalism preceding *Memoranda*, I've relied on Price, "Whitman's Journalism," *Whitman's Memory* website.

10 *New York Times*, December 11, 1864.

11 *New York Times*, December 11, 1864.

12 He names individuals in one article from December 11, 1864: D.F. Russell, Company E; Charles Miller, Company D; and Oscar F. Wilder, Company G, who returned Whitman's kiss fourfold, as mentioned earlier—also William Cohn, the handsome sleeping soldier also mentioned earlier, whose name Whitman makes a point to discern, along with a couple others. This one article (though another article on February 23, 1863, has initials of one soldier, JAH) is closest to what *Memoranda* will become, though still without the protraction of detail and depth of affection registered in 1875.

13 Alcott, however, is an exception to the theme of using hospital experience to unify democratically. She refused to restrain herself in the first version of her narrative from unleashing vitriol on the rebel soldier. On Alcott's subsequent revisions, see Young, 89-90.

14 Freemon, Frank R. *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care during the American Civil War* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 51.

15 Stewart Brooks, *Civil War Medicine* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1966), 51.

16 Thomas J. Brown, *Dorothea Dix: New England Reformer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 287.

17 John R. Brumgardt, ed., *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 3. Also Brooks, 54; and Schultz, 20.

18 See Sherry Ceniza, *Walt Whitman and Nineteenth-Century Women Reformers* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); Vivian R. Pollak, *The Erotic Whitman*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995); and Daneen Wardrop, *Word, Birth, and Culture in the Poetry of Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), for Whitman's alignments with women.

19 Whitman, *Memoranda During the War* (Camden, NJ: 1875-1876), 39.

20 Edwin Haviland Miller, ed., *The Correspondence* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 1:81.

21 Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*, in *Alternative Alcott*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 29. Concerning the physical, Alcott also notes her preoccupation with the activities of a seasoned doctor: "There was an uncanny sort of fascination in watching him, as he peered and probed into the mechanism of those wonderful bodies, whose mysteries he understood so well."

22 Walt Whitman, *Memoranda During the War* (Camden, NJ: 1875-1876), 16-17.

23 Alcott, though, often seems to familialize her characters' objects of desire.

24 Eiselein and other critics have noted Civil War nurses' tendency to infantilize patients.

25 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 61.

26 Nearly all of these Civil War nurses became seriously ill at some point in their service, often suddenly or, as in Whitman's case, experiencing life-threatening illnesses afterwards. These reactions must have been at least partly due to a reception of suffering on an unconscious level.

27 Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2, 46.

28 Cornelia Hancock, *South after Gettysburg: Letters of a Civil War Nurse*, ed. Henrietta Stratton Jaquette (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

29 Georgeanna Woolsey, *Three Weeks at Gettysburg* (New York: Anson D. R. Randolph, 1863), 16.

30 Jane Stuart Woolsey, *Hospital Days* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1870), 135, 137.

31 Bucklin, 240; Anna Morris Holstein, *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1867), 23.

32 Elvira J. Powers, *Hospital Pencilings; Being A Diary while in Jefferson General Hospital, Jeffersonville, Ind., and Others at Nashville, Tennessee, as Matron and Visitor* (Boston: Edward L. Mitchell, 1866), 201-202.

33 Charlotte E. McKay, *Stories of Hospital and Camp* (Philadelphia, 1876), 120.

34 Sarah Emma Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier, Nurse and Spy: A Woman's Adventures in the Union Army*, ed. Elizabeth D. Leonard (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 87.

35 From the very beginning of *Memoranda*—indeed in the first paragraph—Whitman defines soldiers as "Not Northern soldiers only . . . [but] many a Southern face and form, pale, emaciated, with that strange tie of confidence and love between us, welded by sickness, pain of wounds" (3). Early on, too, he proposes a kind of universal hero

in a fallen “altogether unnamed” Southern boy (13). At the end of the narrative, this theme gains in force.

36 There were those, however, who disliked Whitman’s treatment of patients, so that “the poet’s attachment to soldiers raised concerns in some quarters. Two women nurses [Amanda Akin and Harriet Foote Hawley] reacted to Whitman in very negative ways, disliking his presence and disapproving of his charged relationships with men” (Price, Introduction, on *Whitman’s Memory* website).

37 For her first task, Alcott’s nurse is directed by Miss Blank to wash and scrub the bodies of the patients, and responds with shock: “If she had requested me to shave them all, or dance a horn-pipe on the stove funnel, I should have been less staggered; but to scrub some dozen lords of creation at a moment’s notice, was really—really—” (23).

38 Davis, 14. Lawrence Buell, “American Civil War Poetry and the Meaning of Literary Commodification: Whitman, Melville, and Others,” in *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America*, ed. Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 132.

39 Susan M. Reverby, *Ordred to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20.

40 Bucklin flouted this stipulation, and found herself in the personal presence of Dix, who said she was “altogether too young for a nurse” (Brooks, 60), but Dix let her stay on anyway. Other nurses, too, delighted in trying to resist Dix’s stipulations, and many did so successfully.

41 For Nightingale, however, the concern “was not the fixation of a sexually repressed Victorian, but rather an attempt to limit any male claim on a woman through the sexual exchange” (Reverby, 43). See also Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What It Is, and What It Is Not*, ed. Virginia M. Dunbar (New York: Dover, 1969).

42 Ed Folsom, *Walt Whitman’s Native Representations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126.

43 Whitman, *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (Washington, DC: 1865-1866), 23.