

Literary Representations of Veterans in the 19th Century

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

Prof. Liam Corley

Cal Poly Pomona

PRIMARY SOURCES

Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Spy* and *The Pioneers*. 1821 and 1823.

The centrality of wartime experience to the characterization of Natty Bumppo becomes evident over the long period that Cooper composed the Leatherstocking Tales. However, Bumppo's initial appearance in *The Pioneers* displays him as a veteran relic with unique authority and dignified, but anachronistic values and virtues. Cooper's earlier novel, *The Spy*, frequently comments on how the heroes and villains who served in the Continental Army and militias respectively will be incorrectly remembered in the post-Revolutionary era. Harvey Birch, the title character, is an exemplar of self-sacrificing patriotism misunderstood as a venal traitor to his country. Cooper's soldiers and veterans demonstrate the rapidly changing valuation of Revolutionary War service in the 1820s.

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage*. 1895.

This novel is the classic rendition of a veteran experience by a non-veteran author. Crane's novel reimagines veteran identity as a result of happenstance and existential choices rather than an expression of values and honorable actions. See Casey Ch. 4 for a contextualization of Crane's novel within an intergenerational struggle over masculinity and the memory of the war in the 1890s.

Howells, William Dean. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. 1885 and 1890.

Although veterans appear in other works by Howells, his treatment of Colonel Silas Lapham and Brevet Corporal Berthold Lindau encapsulates several representative dynamics in the way non-veteran writers grappled with the figure of the veteran in order to establish themselves as authorized to critique American society by ventriloquizing the voice of the veteran. In both novels, Howells uses the sentimental characterization of a veteran to make a substantive critique of American values and practices, but he does so in a way that allows him to deprecate veterans as a class.

Melville, Herman. *Israel Potter* and *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. 1855 and 1866.

Melville's fiction is full of veteran characters, but Revolutionary War veteran Israel Potter is undoubtedly his most fully developed. In this novel, Melville experiments with the practice more famously perfected in *Benito Cereno* of adapting historical memoirs into scathing novelizations. Melville's post-Civil War collection of poems, *Battle-Pieces*, is ideologically organized to argue for an elegiac consideration of Union and Confederate veterans in order to temper the punitive aspects of Reconstruction. Melville's political purposes in collapsing distinctions between Northern and Southern soldiers worked to depoliticize veterans as a body in order to focus on individual trauma and bravery, an approach similar to Whitman's in *Drum Taps*.

Tourgee, Albion. *Figs and Thistles: The Story of an Earnest Man*. 1879.

Albion Tourgee, a Union veteran from Ohio, created two semi-autobiographical veteran characters in this early novel that highlight the transition of ideological authority from veterans as deliberative leaders to ones whose combat experiences qualify them for public respect but don't inherently qualify them for office. Tourgee displaces his political career as a carpetbagger in North Carolina to an Ohio setting so as to make his critique of the political utility of veteran status less constrained by the unique political dynamics of Reconstruction.

Tyler, Royall. *The Contrast*. 1787.

Though this play is a derivative revision of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, Tyler transposes the hero into the guise of a Revolutionary War veteran, Colonel Henry Manly. Manly's characterization as a virtuous American exemplar includes scenes where he remarks on his work to obtain pensions for soldiers who served under his command. Tyler had two periods of service in the Massachusetts militia that helped inform his characterization of Colonel Manly. The play is ambiguous as to whether Manly's veteran virtues are purely admirable or priggish.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Barrett, Faith. *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.

Barrett shows how the practices of both civil war and poetry strain toward politically unifying ends even as they fracture along isolating and individualized responses to grief and violence. The Civil War inspired partisan and heartfelt poetry from a broad spectrum of society North and South, and Barrett provides sophisticated insight into poems and songs previously discounted for their conventional forms and sentiments in order to elucidate the ambivalence and emotional complexity of poets grappling with the difficult task of reconciling their personal experiences and beliefs about war with the more polarized and uniform positions available to them as they strove to speak for and to a national audience. In addition to the inclusion of many soldier-veteran poets, Barrett's analysis greatly expands the usefulness of poetic texts as testimonies to the transformative effects of military service on veterans.

Casey, John A. *New Men: Reconstructing the Image of the Veteran in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

Casey focuses on veterans of the Civil War and shows how the nature of veteran identity shifted as a result of the nation's widespread grappling with wounded, suffering, and articulate survivors of military service. *New Men* chronicles how a history of military service shifted from being a temporary indicator of employment and activity to a permanent marker of an internal change in character and knowledge.

Marten, James. *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

[not annotated since it is part of Institute syllabus]

McVeigh, Stephen and Nicola Cooper, eds. *Men after War*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

This collection of essays covers topics spread across centuries and the Atlantic Ocean to provide range of perspectives on how masculinities have been affected by military experience. Several chapters demonstrate how the remembrance of particular wars inform the perception of their veterans, making them welcome or unwelcome reminders. Daniel Blackie's chapter on disabled American Revolutionary Veterans is of particular relevance.

Resch, John. *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999.

Resch's history documents the transition in perceptions of the Revolutionary War veterans from the early Republic to the immediate aftermath of the War of 1812. While distinctions between service in the militias versus the Continental Army were important in early conceptions of the Revolutionary War as a people's army, the image of the Continental Army was gradually rehabilitated from a dangerous group of mercenary vagrants to exemplars of republican virtue, reversing early fears of a standing army as an aristocratic institution inimical to democratic liberty and equality. Resch shows how revisionist histories of the American Revolution in the 1810s emphasized soldier suffering in Valley Forge in order to build

consensus both for veteran pensions and a standing army capable of resisting foreign aggression more effectively than the militias bowled over in the War of 1812.