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Be a Man:
Representations of Masculinity in the Civil War Literature of Ambrose Bierce
and John William De Forest

by
Corinna Barrett

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BE A MAN:
REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN THE CIVIL WAR LITERATURE OF
AMBROSE BIERCE AND JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST

Thesis Abstract – Idaho State University (2014)

This thesis investigates the role of manhood and masculinity as it is portrayed through the Civil War works of Ambrose Bierce and John William De Forest, both themselves veterans of the Civil War. Their male characters' ideas of what a man is and what he should do is influenced by the concepts of masculinity during the time. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of demonstrating one's manhood became a significant experience in a man's life. With the onslaught of the Civil War, additional definitions of manhood emerged that added to past attributes of self-restraint and cultivation; these additional definitions included the importance of robustness and virility in front of other men and the comparison of men to each other. This thesis will demonstrate how Bierce's and De Forest's male characters compare themselves with one another to achieve their desired masculinity, but also how they are unmanned by the atrocities of war.

Chapter 1

Understanding Manhood: A Historical Review of the Norms and Ideals of Civil War Masculinity

In 1861, two American writers joined Union forces to fight in the Civil War. John William De Forest, already an established author, was 35 years old and as a captain organized the 12th Connecticut Volunteers. Ambrose Bierce, then only 18 years of age, joined the 9th Indiana Volunteers making him the second man in his home county of Elkhart to enlist after Abraham Lincoln's call to arms. Both men served for four years until the end of the Civil War in 1865, and both men wrote about their service and wrote fiction about the Civil War. They have been praised for their realistic portrayals of battle scenes and for their visceral reactions to the experiences they went through as soldiers themselves.

The realism in their work reveals emerging ideas about masculinity, particularly with the representations of manhood that they create with their male characters. Because understanding masculinity through Civil War literature is largely influenced by the ideals and methods of manhood in the historical context of the time, this chapter will examine what those ideals were in nineteenth-century America leading up to and during the Civil War.

Michael Kimmel, a leading scholar in masculinity studies, explains that from the beginning of the nineteenth century “the idea of testing and proving one's manhood became one of the defining experiences in American men's lives” (1). Kimmel goes on to say that even before the nineteenth century and then leading into it, the dominating model of masculinity was the “Self-Made Man,” a man who could define himself through his activities in the public sphere and through his economic wealth and status, and that

“[b]eing a man meant being in charge of one’s own life, liberty, and property. . . . A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible” (14). Sylvia D. Hoffert, a gender historian, explains nineteenth-century American manhood in much the same way, stating that “America was the land of opportunity, and manliness was defined by the degree to which a man was able to exploit his opportunities to achieve social respectability” (83). In essence, a man demonstrated his manhood through his ability to be economically successful. Economic success in this period no longer hinged on class distinction, but on strength and intelligence. Leonard Kriegel notes:

Our evolving nation was composed of men who grew to believe that it was necessary to rid themselves of many of the restrictions of their European forefathers. The American wilderness demanded physical capacity and intellectual adaptation; it promised men that they might master the environment and be truly independent. A man’s talents had little to do with birth or background. He might endow his resourcefulness on something larger than his station in life. (63-64)

In America, a man could make of himself what he wished, if he possessed strength, fortitude, and an unswerving nature. America allowed for a self-made man.

Competition is as necessary as economic success for the “real” man. Comparison and competition were prevailing characteristics of manhood in nineteenth-century America, and Kimmel asserts that “it’s other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment” (5). Masculinity was defined by the opinions of other men; masculinity sought for and was described by the

levels of competition this homosocial environment engendered. It seems that anyone of the male gender could not think of himself as a real man if he did not measure up to his brothers, his neighbors, or his friends, and therefore he was constantly comparing himself to the other men in his life.

As the nineteenth century progressed, competition extended beyond the economic sphere, incorporating athletic ability and strength. With the onslaught of the Civil War, athletic ability, strength, and courage were highlighted even more as men felt compelled to enlist, fight for what they thought was right, and show little fear in doing so. Ken Burns states, “North and South, the average soldier was five feet eight inches tall and weighed 145 pounds. His chance of dying in combat was 1 in 65, of being wounded 1 in 10. One in 13 would die of disease. The average age of a soldier was 25, the minimum age for enlistment was 18, but recruiting officers were not particular” (*The Civil War*). Men signed up to fight in the face of such terrible odds, wishing to prove their courage and strength. Men of the era chose to show their masculinity by their outward appearance as well, sporting beards and mustaches and hard, somber expressions. The Civil War was the first large conflict that was recorded by photography, and many soldiers sat for portraits in their military uniforms, usually holding or standing next to a weapon. These photographs illustrate the physical dominance



Image 1: D.W.C. Arnold, private in the Union Army.

soldiers wanted to convey—a tough man, unafraid to hold and use a weapon, a man of brute force and conviction. Richard A. Nye explains that “the bodily ‘habitus’ of a man—his physical appearance, gestures, and speech—had become a marker in which many believed they could read the qualities of manliness he ostensibly possessed” and that “[m]uscular physiques and fitness were perfectly compatible with this style of heroism” (420, 424). Therefore, during the War Between the States a man needed to have a manly appearance and tough attitude for society to consider him a true man and for him to be successful in proving his masculinity.

Regarding literature of the Civil War, Alice Fahs explains that much of what was written from the 1860s to the 1890s explored “underpinnings of a robust new masculine identity, one that often abandoned earlier attributes of manhood such as self-restraint and ‘civilized cultivation’ in favor of ‘unrestrained nature’ and ‘athletic virility’” (317). Many felt that army life was the way to gain that virility and to help weak men become stronger. In a letter to his father in 1861, James Peter Elliot of the 1st Connecticut Artillery wrote, “I saw Edward about a week ago and he was well and looked tough and fat I think he is in better health now than [sic] he had been for a year yet he seemed to be rather uneasy. I advised him to remain until the close of the campaign thinking it the best thing he could do for his habits” (*soldierstudies.org*) Elliot’s letter dates early on in the war, and his statement that Edward looked healthier than he had in a year points to the idea that army life was the cause of his improved health; being a soldier made one tough and strong, and it helped gain athletic ability that was desirable. It can be guessed that Edward’s habits were effeminate, and serving in the army would change these to manly habits—habits that would be best for him.

These characteristics of “unrestrained nature, “athletic virility,” and physical strength inevitably fostered competition. Indeed, what better setting was there than war to demonstrate manhood and compare oneself to the men around him? Soldiers were thrown into a truly homosocial environment and could see how they measured up. Hoffert explains:

Serving in the military provided another context in which men could judge themselves by competing with others. Mastering the skills required of a good soldier more quickly than one’s comrades could earn a man high regard and enhance his self-esteem. Demonstrating leadership potential could result in promotion in rank, a bigger paycheck, and the right to exert more power and authority over others. The coarseness of life both in camp and in the field discouraged men from exhibiting such feminine sensibilities as love of comfort and cultural refinement. At the same time, however, the threat of death not only made soldiers dependent upon each other but also encouraged them, given the right circumstances, to express love for and tenderness toward their comrades. (91)

War provided the perfect opportunity for men to gauge their masculinity by competing with their fellow soldiers, those they fought with and those they fought against. But it also formed bonds of friendship in a distinctive way because it combined murderous male conflict with male camaraderie. They were in a sense rivals, striving to be the best man among many, but they also saved each other’s lives, creating a unique dichotomy on the battle-field between foe and friend. S.L.A Marshall states, “When a soldier is known to the men who are around him, he has reason to fear losing the one thing he is likely to

value more highly than life—his reputation as a man among other men” (qtd in Pecina, 46). Friendship and camaraderie in camp life was important, but so too was reputation. Without a masculine reputation, a man would be hard-pressed to find admiration and friendship among his fellow soldiers.

One particular example of soldierly competition is illustrated in the story of Charles Harvey Brewster. In his article “No Desperate Hero: Manhood and Freedom in a Union Soldier’s Experience,” David W. Blight highlights Brewster’s wartime experience and his thoughts of manhood. Blight explains that Brewster was sensitive, remarkably literate, and “no natural warrior,” but that “he aspired to leadership and craved recognition” (58). Brewster continually measured himself against his fellow soldiers, was anxious for respect, and “desperately relished compliments about his performance” (60). His relationships with his comrades were full of male bonding, as he realized that during war men often find love and respect for each other. But his relationships with his comrades were also full of competition. Brewster is just one example of many, as soldiers throughout the country learned to lean on each other and fight together, while at the same time contending for promotion, respect, and masculinity.

Military life and combat tested soldiers’ manliness in a way no other experience could. After all, soldiers needed to be independent but had to take orders, they had to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually strong, and they had to stoically withstand the atrocities of war as they witnessed rivers of blood, scenes of butchery, and screams of anguish. War demanded that men be heroic, forgetting themselves while trying to help others, all while ignoring their own terror. Soldiers were required to endure physical and psychological pain without complaint. Hoffert says, “[War] tested their ability to tolerate

the tedium and frustrations of military life without becoming cynical or losing their willingness to fight” (91). All of these ideals of manhood were thrust upon men during war, ingrained into their minds as the way they must behave, or be thought cowards. Kimmel explains, “Throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure” (4). This fear was particularly evident for soldiers during battle. Jozef Pecina points out:

For some, the dominant fear is of death or a disabling wound, but for most recruits, the greatest terror is of failure to live up to the standards of the group. Their fear focuses upon the conflict between an instinctive prompting to seek safety and a desire not to deviate from the standards expected of him by his leaders and comrades. The research of military historians indicates that fear of being a coward was the most strongly-felt sensation on the part of the troops going into action for the first time. (44)

A soldier’s inward feelings and thoughts may have been full of fear—fear of injury, fear of dying—but his outward actions did not show these feelings. Fear of losing face in front of other men trumped all other misgivings and pushed men forward in battle.

Indeed, the men of the Civil War felt the same, and those that were able-bodied but chose not to enlist were considered “yellow-bellied.” John E. Rastall, a soldier in the 1st Maryland Infantry, shares his feelings about manhood and battle in a letter to his parents. He writes:

I think every person who has a spark of manhood about him should jump with the ranks. What a terrible stake! We must destroy Lee's army.

Richmond is nothing. We number over 700 men, a veteran Regt., and still we are not where we might do good service for our country. We are worse than useless here while our presence with Grant might turn the tide of battle in our favor. It is a hard thing to be denied this privilege. You might not feel it but a soldier does. We feel our strength and would like to exert it again in a general engagement with the minions of Rebeldom [sic]. I view our men so truly sorrowful. (*soldierstudies.org*)

In Rastall's eyes, manhood meant desiring to fight for the cause, to be in the thick of battle, and to consider it a privilege to do so. Many other soldiers' letters voice the same opinion—they'd rather fight than be safe.

The notion of active manhood and courage was broadcast throughout the country. Men who did not enlist in the war were maligned, not only by those around them who knew them, but also publicly in newsprint. This can be seen in an article titled "Courage and Cowardice" in the *New York Times* printed on August 14, 1861. It reads:

The truth is that a few men are born fearless; but most men acquire the higher quality of courage, either by moral self-discipline, or by the experience of danger. But unfortunately, too, there are some men who are constitutionally so timid, or morally so weak, that they can never, either from a sense of duty or from self-respect, bring themselves to face mortal danger with equanimity. Such men we reproach as cowards. Men pity them; women despise them. Perhaps it may not be entirely charitable to

visit thus a weakness which may be entirely constitutional; but it is inevitable. For this courage, this high moral quality is the saving grace of manhood. Without it, the race would sink into sordidness and selfish vice; it would grovel in falsehood, the shield of the coward; and each man would live in a debasing fear that he might at any moment become the prey of some fellow-creature a little stronger or craftier than himself. Let the men who have taken up, or who are now about to take up arms for the first time in the service of their country, examine themselves closely by this standard. (qtd in Holzer and Craig)

Men who did not enlist were not only thought of as cowards, but they were pitied and despised. The writer points out that fear is not absent, but to be a true man is to recognize that there is something greater which requires courage. He even states that without courage, with only morally weak men, the nation would fall into “sordidness.” The concept of comparison is used as the true test of masculinity, both with the standards of courage and service to country, particularly with a man “a little stronger and craftier than himself” who would then defeat him. During the Civil War, a man could not get away from public judgment, as well as public and private comparisons.

The habit of comparison between men and fear of being thought a coward has carried on from war to war. John Hersey, in observing a marine unit’s combat experience on Guadalcanal in 1942, said, “Except for the hard knot which is inside some men, courage is largely the desire to show other men that you have it” (57). Tim O’Brien also comments on this ideology in *The Things They Carried* when he states that “the soldier’s greatest fear [was] the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were

embarrassed not to” (20-21). During the Civil War, it was necessary to enlist if a man did not want to be looked down upon and thought of as effeminate. It seemed almost doubly important to show no fear when faced with actual battle, to be unflinching in the face of death, and not hesitate to kill. Of course soldiers were afraid, but they didn’t want to show it. Nye suggests that as “much as he might love and identify with his country, the citizen-soldier fought for and under the scrutiny of his comrades in arms, out of the need to defend his personal honor and that of the fatherland, or—which amounts to the same thing—to avoid shame” (421-22). Again, it is the opinions of other men and how men view each other, either as courageous or cowardly, that builds up the ideals of masculinity.

The atrocities of war were not far from soldiers’ thoughts. In their homosocial environment of camp life, surrounded by other men who also did not want to appear weak, men did not voice their fear, nor did they express any feelings of losing their humanity. Perhaps they whispered quietly to a friend here and there, but for a man stoic silence was best. However, some soldiers did write home about these thoughts and feelings. Eugene H. Freeman wrote his parents:

It makes me shudder to think of the terrible sights that I have seen this summer. I'm sure I see enough of the horrors of war without being obliged to participate. . . We were glad to leave the White House: the stench was awful; thousands of dead men, and horses, mules, etc., lay there rotting under a burning sun, some half buried, some entirely exposed. If the “stay-at-homes” could only see these sights, it would sicken them, I reckon; but one soon becomes hardened to it. The first lot of wounded men that I ever

saw, I was horror-struck; but now after seeing thousands upon thousands, I do not feel any horror, and, after my face is turned, forget that I have seen anything so dreadful. I have scrutinized every face of a wounded man that I have seen, but as yet have not seen the one I looked for; yes, and I have looked at many a dead face too—lifting the coarse blanket from their discolored faces, with a sickening dread lest my fears should be realized. All soldiers agree (those that have been in hospitals, I mean) that it is by far a more horrible sight to see a lot of wounded men than it is to see the battle itself; for some of these wounds are of the worst descriptions. I have often seen wounds full of crawling worms, the horrible creatures having taken possession before their appointed time. (*soldierstudies.org*)

Freeman's letter expresses an opposition of feeling. On one hand he details the "terrible sights" and horrors that he had to encounter; he experienced "sickening dread" and saw terrible wounds. But on the other hand he writes that he no longer feels any horror and easily forgets the dreadful scenes when his face is turned the other way. Freeman, like most soldiers in the Civil War, witnessed horrific scenes and experienced fear. He was able to convey his feelings of disgust due to the terrors of war to his parents, but at the same time felt the need to illustrate his manhood through his hardened emotions. He also expresses disdain for the men who did not sign up to fight, pointing out that the "stay-at-homes" would not be able to handle such horrible sights. If they are not man enough to join the war, they are definitely not man enough to harden themselves to wartime situations.

Another soldier, Amos W. Kibbee, articulates his feelings to his former school teacher. He writes, “Oh that the bloody war would cease. I am so tired of . . . blood and scenes of horror. I sometimes feel, when looking upon the victims of strife, that their fate is preferable to mine, for they are in peace and at rest. 'Tis a fearfull [sic] thing, Hattie, to have the blood of your fellow man upon your hands, no matter what the provocation” (*soldierstudies.org*). Kibbee was able to voice the fears and feelings he was unlikely to express, or to be able to express, to fellow soldiers. To utter his wish that the war would end to comrades would have labeled him as a coward. As much as all soldiers wanted the war to swiftly end, they would not speak it aloud to a group of men. Kibbee also voices another fear in his letter—the dread of killing his “fellow man.” Although many men undoubtedly felt the same, this too was a topic not discussed. The war was raging, and it was a soldier’s duty to kill.

But the ideals and expectations of masculinity varied significantly between men of the South and men of the North. Being a man during the Civil War also meant being true to the cause, whichever side you fought for. For the South, the reigning model of masculinity was a genteel patriarch with Confederate chivalry. A man of the South might have been a landowner and slave owner, but even if he was not, he held firm to those institutions the Confederacy thought of as vital. Support for abolition made one appear less than manly in the South. In the North, the industrious self-made man was the epitome of masculinity, as men forged their own ways relying on their own strength without the need of slave labor. Abolition was defended as manly. John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry seemed for many to prove this point, because men took up arms and killed for the cause of abolition, unafraid to fight and die. Wendell Phillips reaffirmed these

ideas in an article about the state of the country saying, “The cannons are pointed, and two hundred and eighty thousand muskets shorted by thirty years of Anti-Slavery agitation are aimed at Slavery. We shame England, awake France, call the world to witness that our cause is justice and manhood, and not a battle for a bit of parchment” (qtd in Holzer and Symonds).

The South was claiming to fight for states’ rights, which included the right to own slaves. Many in the South declared that showing kindness for blacks meant being soft and unmanly. However, many in the North held the opposite view, declaring that manhood required justice, and slavery was not just. As Wendell Phillips indicates, the North viewed slavery as shameful, and they were fighting, not for a simple signed document, but for the more important cause of abolition. The northern opinion of manhood designated that a man should be strong, hardworking, intelligent, and unafraid to fight, but also conscious of moral and political rights and wrongs. Slavery was a perturbed and uncharitable institution and therefore not something a man should participate in. These views can be seen in Northern recruitment posters that urged men to “Crush the Rebellion! Preserve our Glorious Union!” signifying that the Union possessed the power

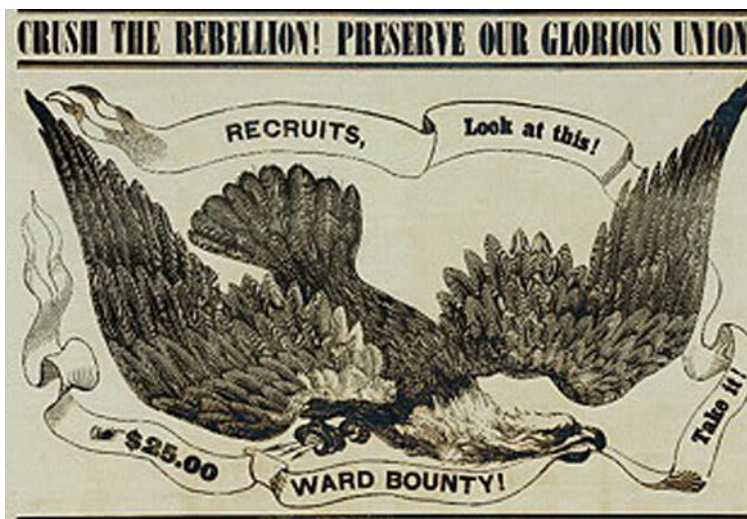


Image 2: Union recruitment poster.

and manhood to claim victory over the Confederacy’s silly rebellion. The North viewed the South’s stubbornness as childish, while the South viewed the North’s

kindness as effeminate. Because of these conflicts, the Civil War was not only a war about slavery, freedom, and states' rights, but it was also a "gendered war in which the meanings of manhood were bitterly contested" (Kimmel, 49). The Civil War was a battle for freedom, but it was also a battle to see which standard of manhood would hold fast and become the dominating presence in the landscape of the country.

Once a soldier chose to fight for his cause, he needed to stay consistent and true; for northern men, that meant taking Phillips' comment to heart and believing that their rifles were pointed at slavery in order to demolish the terrible institution. They needed to toughen up their stance on slavery and hold to the conviction of reclaiming the Union to be able to protect their masculinity. A soldier was required to prove his commitment or other soldiers were apt to call him out on it. For example, in a letter to his wife and "bairns," Calvin Shedd of the 7th New Hampshire Infantry maligns soldiers who complained about their food rations and who blamed the blacks:

The fact is these stories from this Department are from Homesick Traitorous Dough-Faces that have just political knowledge enough to D__n the Niggers & abolitionists & hurrah for sham Democracy. they [sic] have no manhood left or love of Country & hate to own they are homesick so vent their Billingsgate on the Government & the Nigger-War as they are pleased to call it. when [sic] they enlisted they were in favor of "crushing the rebellion" at any cost & all hazzards [sic]; but their present position shows how much stamina they have got, & their sincerity at the begining [sic]. (*soldierstudies.org*)

Shedd has no shame in insulting those soldiers that are not sincere to the cause, questioning their masculinity while he does so. Any man who complains and weakens his stance in the cause of war is “dough-faced.” A real man would do no such thing; he may be homesick, but he doesn’t voice it.

Another aspect of masculinity during the Civil War was the coming of age for a man. A boy enlisted, but through the trials of war, he became a man. Despite the fact that the minimum age for enlistment was 18, boys much younger joined up. In fact there were more than 100,000 soldiers in the Union army who were not yet 15 years old (*The Civil War*). Therefore, the idea of passing from boyhood to manhood while serving as a soldier became a popular notion. In his essay “Soldiering, Manhood, and Coming of Age: A Northern Volunteer,” Reid Mitchell examines what masculinity was for one soldier, Cyrus F. Boyd, and how Boyd’s experiences reflect those of other soldiers. Mitchell explains that the relationship between the war and coming of age was twofold. First, many young men that joined the war emerged from it at the age associated with adulthood. Second, the ideas of man, soldier, and citizen were linked: “Remaining a civilian was thought unmanly; going to war as proof of manhood. Since coming of age means not simply becoming an adult but assuming adult gender roles—becoming a man—popular thought sometimes conflated the two transformations. And so did many of the young men who served in the armies” (44). The expectations of becoming a man were thrust on young men throughout the country; others expected them to join the army, and they expected it of themselves as well. It was, in a sense, a way of becoming their own self-made men—self-made through the perils of combat. Mitchell further explains that “the image of the young soldier coming of age was so central to later understanding of

the war that it became, through a kind of cultural metonymy, a figure for both true manhood and for the nation itself” (49).

This idea of coming of age and comparison between men transferred to the divided country as well. Many Northerners felt that the rebellion of the South was like that of a child, and the North saw themselves as the level-headed parents who must teach that child a lesson. After the battle of Shiloh, one Northern soldier wrote, “We showed them on the 2d day that northern obstinacy and coolness was more than a match for the southern impetuosity,” and another Northern soldier, Henry C. Metzger, wrote, “I hate to hear the Rebels cheerre [sic] when they make a charge, they put me in mind of small schoolchildren about the time school is out” (qtd in Mitchell, 52). The North was cool under pressure, the picture of adulthood, of manhood, while the South was a petulant child. Manhood and masculinity were in the forethought of every soldier and to be considered childish was an extremely insulting remark. These comparisons of men to children further illustrate that many men could only assert their own manhood by attacking that of others. It connects back to the need for competition and comparison; a real manly soldier could beat a stubborn child any day. Perhaps it fortified the Northerners’ will to fight as they pictured an army vastly weaker than their own. The Confederate army was, in fact, significantly smaller than the Union army. However, this did not stop them from boosting their own egos by exclaiming that “one Confederate soldier was worth ten Union boys,” a disparaging retort to the idea of the Southern-child insult: Northern ‘boys’ were unequal to Confederate men (*The Civil War*). Everywhere soldiers turned, the question of manhood and its ideals were brought up, because the other side was continuously questioning their masculinity. They labeled each other boys

and children in an attempt to cement for themselves their own masculinity, and these labels further propelled the men of both sides to prove their manhood in battle.

Another facet of manhood during the Civil War was the idea of duty and honor. That duty required men to be soldiers and to die for their country if needed. Soldiers wrote home about doing their duty, making their families proud, and facing death for the honor of fighting for their country. For example, Henry R. Hoyt of the 2nd Connecticut Artillery wrote, “Dear parents I will try and do my duty and I know the good seed you have sown in my youth and watered with your prayers can never be lost. May it spring up and bear fruit a hundred fold and you will receive your reward.” Matthew S. Austin of the 5th New Jersey Infantry wrote his father, “I cannot believe that the prospect of an immediate engagement with the enemy, has any other effect upon the mind of the soldiers, than that of a desire to whip the enemy as soon as possible and a conviction that if he dies, he dies in the discharge of his duty and at his post—which they look upon as an atonement for many sins.” George B. Atkins of the Confederacy wrote his father, “WILLIAM A. R. D. WARD is also dead Give my kindest regards to his parents and family, and tell them he did his duty in battle and died the death of a soldier, lamented by all of his comrades and acquaintances” (*soldierstudies.org*). Every day these soldiers faced death, but they took comfort in the thought that if they would die on the battlefield they would die with their honor intact, in essence a hero’s death. And to be a hero was to be a man.

It is no wonder that soldiers wrote home about duty and honor as they saw these concepts emblazoned on recruitment posters around the country. Posters cheered men on to “Rally Round the Flag!”, stating that the country needed patriots and good men. The

posters also encouraged men to “Keep out of the draft,” showcasing how real men did not wait for the government to conscript them, but instead did their duty and signed up willingly.



Images 3 and 4: Union recruitment posters.

Recruitment posters

also brought manhood into consideration as they declared that “No boys need apply,” using emotional pulls to gain recruits. They seemed to say that only good men, strong, tough, faithful, and dutiful signed up for the army, and thereby illustrated for society their amazing masculinity. Soldiers also heard about the virtues of duty and honor from women, state leaders, and their families. For example, in speaking to the 10th Massachusetts after presenting them with regimental colors, Mrs. James Barnes told the group of young soldiers that “the heart of many a wife and mother and child and sister, will beat anxiously for your *safety*, but remember, no less anxiously for your *honor*” (qtd in Blight, 57). Ex-Massachusetts Governor George N. Briggs told the same regiment to,

Show yourselves to be *men* and *New England men* When the army of an ancient republic were going forth to battle a mother of one of the soldiers said to him; “My son, return home *with* your shield or *on* your shield.” Adopting the sentiment of the noble mother let me say . . . bring back those beautiful and rich colors presented you by the ladies of

Springfield, the emblems of your country's power and glory, waving over your heads, unstained, or return wrapped in their gory folds. (qtd in Blight, 57)

The message was clear: fight bravely for your country and if necessary die in the process. There was no room for visible fear, as cowardice was a trait that could not be looked upon with the least degree of tolerance. Duty and honor required courage and self-sacrifice, and if a man wanted to be considered a real man he was required to have honor. If not, he was damned.

By the end of the war, when Union victory became apparent, the North feminized the South and its view of gentlemanly masculinity. Confederate president Jefferson Davis evacuated Richmond with his family at the end of the war by heading south, trying to avoid federal soldiers. On May 10, union troops caught up with him, and as he tried to escape he threw a long, waterproof coat around his shoulders, and his wife draped a shawl over his head. Rumors spread that Davis tried to escape Richmond by disguising himself in women's clothing. Immediately, Northern cartoonists and songwriters took the opportunity to ridicule him. Cartoons most often depicted Davis in a hoop skirt, while one song's lyrics read:

Jeff Davis was a warrior bold,
And vowed the Yanks should fall;
He jumped into his pantaloons
And swore he'd rule them all.
But when he saw the Yankees come
To hang him if they could

He jumped into a petticoat

And started for the wood. (qtd in Kimmel, 52)

Kimmel expounds that by “lampooning ‘Jeffie’ Davis, the ‘Bell of Richmond,’ as one cartoon had it, the victorious northerners could ridicule southern manhood, its feminized Genteel Patriarchal pretense, and the ‘Petticoat Confederacy’ at the same time” (52).

Hoffert also explains, “By portraying Davis as they did, these cartoons illustrate the degree to which northerners

understood that losing the war undermined the gendered identity of southern men” (186). Once again, comparison in defining masculinity came into play.

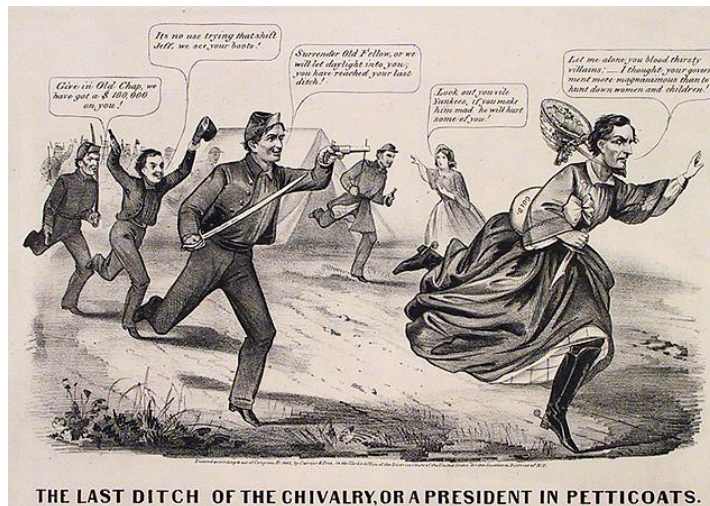


Image 5: “The Last Ditch of the Chivalry, or President in Petticoats.”
Lithograph by Currier and Ives.

Masculinity in nineteenth-century America incorporated many things. A man had to be economically successful and gentlemanly, and he had to be a “Self-Made Man.” A man should also be athletic, strong, and virile. With the outbreak of the Civil War, athleticism and strength became even more important, coupled with bravery and courage. During the Civil War, a real man enlisted without hesitation, faced hardship and death without complaint, and fought with duty and honor in mind. A man craved battle, competed with his comrades, sought promotion, and never turned his back on combat. If he was afraid he suppressed it, and if he was homesick he did not voice it. To be a man meant to desire true masculinity even if it meant dying for it. Comparisons to children

and women were insults; to have one's name synonymous with coward was worse than death. A man was strong, diligent, faithful, brave, and true, and during the Civil War a man was a soldier and a hero.

Chapter 2

Man versus Man: Competitiveness and Comparison among the Male Characters of

John William De Forest

By the time the Civil War had broken out, John William De Forest was already an established author, having published a work of historical nonfiction, travel sketches, and three novels. But perhaps his most well-known and best work is his Civil War novel, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*. This novel, along with his collection of letters and wartime accounts in *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War*, create memorable and realistic images of army life and battle scenes and portray men and soldiers in a variety of circumstances. De Forest stands apart from other war writers, because he was one of the first authors to write realistically about war and show the effects of it on the men that served. In fact, William Dean Howells, an American realist author, literary critic, and the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, stated that *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* exhibited “an advanced realism



Image 6: John William De Forest

before realism was known by that name” and was “one of the best American novels” ever written (223). As scholars of the genre well know, realist literature doesn’t necessarily portray real life, but instead constructs a version of reality as the author sees it. De Forest was able to construct a reality of war within his work that showcases his emerging ideas and criticism of masculinity. There is no doubt that his own experiences serving in the Civil War colored his

perceptions of a soldier's life and influenced his constructions of how a man achieves manhood. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the idea of manhood within the construction of realism and show how De Forest's realist text is significant in portraying the building up and tearing down of masculinity.

But first, an important concept for this chapter and the research on De Forest is the idea of "cultural amnesia" in connection to war and how De Forest stands apart from this conceit. Many American authors did not write about war until many years after the events, allowing time to reflect before putting thoughts to paper. In this way war literature becomes about patriotism and apologies instead of what war means to personal lives. For example, after WWI and WWII American writers underemphasized the sense of despair and failure for soldiers, and this cultural amnesia continued through the Vietnam War as few authors were able to respond immediately to the costs of war. Benjamin Cooper argues:

The conversations we have about Civil War memory and the urge to forget, or, if we are being generous, to at least remember selectively, can only really be complete if we understand how memory has laid . . . its "comforting automatism" onto the diverse experiences of our soldiers. Since there is no war without first the actual fighting, and no memory without first the actual experiences of that fight, the personal knowledge of the fight, which de facto can only be found in the men and women who fought it, arguably is the neglected starting point for the meaning we apply to war. (45)

Historians claim that decades after the Civil War, memory about it was characterized by a national “politics of forgetting” and that the “nation’s guilt made it quick to forgive [and] forget” (Cooper, 44). Forgetting created accounts of the war that were not about the personal lives of soldiers nor were they painted in a realist light.

However, De Forest is different in that he responded to war almost immediately. *A Volunteer’s Adventures* is comprised of letters that De Forest sent his wife during his service, as well as articles about battle that were published during the war in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*. He began working on *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* in the two-month interval between his military discharge and his re-enlistment from 1864 to 1865, and the novel was published in May 1867. Because of his immediate response to the war in writing, De Forest was able to investigate the issues of masculinity and the impact of the war on men directly, instead of as a delayed reflection. His immediate response goes hand in hand with the idea of a constructed reality. Because he responded immediately, his memories of war are fresh and raw, allowing for a more visceral reaction to and construction of the events that occurred; his thoughts on the impact of war on men and masculinity are uncluttered by time and this cultural amnesia. His writing is about personal impacts rather than delusions of grandeur.

De Forest was a product of his time, agreeing for the most part with the ideals of masculinity, specifically courage and duty. In *A Volunteer’s Adventures*, De Forest voices many of the same sentiments that other soldiers wrote home about. For instance, he expresses the boredoms of camp life and the desire to fight, saying, “It is a healthy, monotonous, stupid life, and makes one long to go somewhere, even at the risk of being shot” (7), and “One does not want to go into the army merely to return home without

seeing a battle” (31). He felt, like many other soldiers around him, that he was there as a soldier and it was his job to fight. Just as other men of the period pitied and despised cowardice, so too did De Forest, and he shares that sentiment throughout *A Volunteer’s Adventures*. As a captain, he states, “As for myself, my only fear was lest my men should disgrace me and the regiment by running away; and I loaded my revolver with the grim intention of shooting the first dastard who should start for the rear” (8). De Forest’s view of cowardice coincides with prevailing thought of the time—to be a coward was shameful and in De Forest’s mind, punishable by death. Indeed, many deserters were sentenced to death, approximately 330, which was more than in all other American wars combined. The Confederate *Articles of War* specified that “all officers and soldiers who have received pay, or have been duly enlisted in the services of the Confederate States, and shall be convicted of having deserted the same, shall suffer death, or such other punishment as, by sentence of a court-martial, shall be inflicted” (qtd in Cutrer). These Confederate *Articles of War* show how De Forest’s comments parallel the standards of manhood for Civil War soldiers.

De Forest was not shy about expressing his opinion in writing when it came to judging the men of the army, and that judgment comes in the form of a comparison. He writes, “Something like one fifth of the men who enlist are not tough enough nor brave enough to be soldiers. A regiment reaches its station a thousand strong; but in six months it can only muster six or seven hundred men for marching and fighting duty; the rest have vanished in various ways” (35). It is implied that De Forest himself was “tough enough” and “brave enough” because he stuck with his regiment and marched and fought alongside them. His contempt for those soldiers that do not measure up, that vanish in

various ways, is clear. And yet, he is not above comparing himself to these ideals and finding himself lacking, and feels guilty for his lack of experience. After arriving in Louisiana he explains that he and his regiment feel inadequate as they have yet to be in a battle. He writes, “We feel very poor in spirit when we remember that we have as yet done no fighting, while the sailors have done so much and done it so splendidly. We are very respectful to the naval officers, when we chance to meet them, because they have been under fire, and we not” (14). Once again, the historical ideas of masculinity are prevalent and influence De Forest’s opinions; the men that have fought are to be admired and respected, and the men that have yet to fight desire to do so. De Forest conveys his respect for those men who persevere and desire to fight, even after injury. He tells of Color Sergeant Edwards, who despite having a “bullet hole through his head” only complained that his mouth was sore and “dodged the surgeon” when he heard the regiment was to go to battle again. De Forest comments, “One of the most noticeable things in warfare is the heroism frequently shown by the wounded” (70). His high opinion of soldiers who did not shirk what they thought was their duty is evident, even proclaiming that heroism comes in the form of an aggressive man.

Alice Fahs discusses the evolution of Civil War literature in terms of how it replaces masculine restraint with an animalistic virility. This can be seen in De Forest’s biographical writings as well, and he demonstrates how army life changes men and hardens them. He says, “It is wonderful how profane an army is. Officers who are members of the church, officers who once would not even play a game of cards, have learned to rip out oaths when the drill goes badly, or when the disciple ‘gets out of kilter’” (43). Actually, De Forest was a devout Christian, a church-man himself, and his

sarcasm shows. The other men have adopted the harder version of manhood for themselves as they are surrounded by men who do the same thing. Cursing and card playing was just a way of life in the army. De Forest recognizes how war and camp life harden a man and change him. In his chapter about the battle of Port Hudson, he goes into greater detail about the changes that occurred among his men. He writes:

While we awaited the order to set forward I studied with interest the physiognomies of our men. They had by this time quite lost the innocent, pacific air which characterized them when they entered the service. Hardened by exposure and suffering, they had a stony, indifferent stare and an expression of surly patience, reminding me of bulldogs and bloodhounds held in leash. (108)

Army life brings about the change from innocence to animalism, and De Forest even compares his soldiers to aggressive dogs waiting to attack. On one hand, De Forest sees the need for such hardening, otherwise the soldiers would not be able to fulfill their duties like they are supposed to. But on the other hand, perhaps De Forest sees how the changes occurring in the men among his ranks cause them to lose their humanity.

Duty and honor are other aspects that De Forest discusses. Just as other soldiers wrote home about doing their duty and serving their country, so too did De Forest transcribe it in his war sketches. In the midst of the battle of Port Hudson, a fellow soldier Private Hunter groaned, “Oh, Captain, ain’t this awful!” to which De Forest replied, ““Not a bit of it, Hunter,’ I laughed, not because I liked the situation, but because a captain must do his duty. Still I was really glad to get out of our ridiculous no-thoroughfare, and I cheered my men along with a fairly honest light-heartedness, waving

my rubber blanket for lack of a better flag” (136). De Forest felt that because he was a Captain and a leader of other soldiers, he could not voice his true feelings of the situation. Instead, it was his duty to urge them on and cheerfully if he could. However, De Forest did not have delusions about military service and he at times shared honestly the effects of the war on men. He explains:

Such are some of my experiences and observation in the matter of duty in the trenches. The thoughtful among my readers, those who care less for objective incidents than for their effect upon the human soul, will ask me if I like the business. With a courage which entitles me to honorable mention at the headquarters of the veracities, I reply that I did not like it, except in some expansive moments when this or that stirring success filled me with excitement. Certain military authors who never heard a bullet whistle have written copiously for the marines, to the general effect that fighting is delightful. It is not; it is just tolerable; you can put up with it; but you can't honestly praise it. (123)

Yes, De Forest in large part agrees with the ideals of manhood at the time, but he also recognizes the effect war has on “the human soul.” He does not glorify war or paint it as chivalric endeavor. He cannot praise war; he can only tolerate it and recognize it as something he considered a duty to participate in.

At times De Forest was a voice against the ideals of manhood in his realistic renderings of combat and military life in his writing. Like some of the soldiers that wrote home about the tedium of camp life and horrors of battle, De Forest also expresses similar opinions. In the chapter titled “Forced Marches,” he states, “In the Teche country

I fought in two engagements, each time coming off conqueror, which is the next worst thing to being beaten, inasmuch as it is almost equally sure to involve you in the most terrible physical trial, a forced march. I have fought quite enough to know that human nature hates to be shot at; but I think I would rather take my chance in another battle than chase Texans again from Camp Bisland to Alexandria” (86). He explains that the distance between the two is about 108 miles, and then goes into great detail about the awfulness of marching—the horrid weather, the blisters that formed blisters, the hunger. This is not a picture of valiant victory or of soldiers cheering gleefully at the defeat of their enemy. Instead it is an honest portrayal of what actually occurred on the battlefield. One victory did not lead to joyous celebration; it led to forced marches, physical pain, and more fighting. De Forest was not afraid to portray battles and also what occurred between battles. In fact, the beginning of *A Volunteer's Adventures* is rife with his descriptions about the boredom of camp life on Ship Island outside of New Orleans. It should be noted that De Forest did not express this sense of tedium to his men, but kept his thoughts to himself and his writing. After illustrating the horrors of forced marches, he says:

It will be asked, perhaps, whether I, an officer and claiming, of course, to be a patriot, preserved my staunchness under these trials. I must confess, and I do it without great shame, conscious of being no more than human, that in my inmost soul I was as insubordinate as the worst men were in speech and behavior. In my unspeakable heart I groaned and raved. I wished the bridges would break down—I wished the regiment would refuse to take another step—it seemed to me that I should have been silent

in the face of mutiny. But nothing of all this passed my lips, and none could suspect it from my actions. (93)

As mentioned before, a real man embodied the attribute of stoic silence. He did not complain of his hardships or voice his wish to stop fighting. This is exactly what De Forest describes in this paragraph. He has mutinous thoughts, he wishes the bridges would collapse, and claims his human nature. And yet at the time he never said a word, and he kept it to himself. Like other soldiers, they voiced their complaints in letters home, but in their homosocial environment they did not let such complaints pass their lips.

De Forest was much like other soldiers, because he too did not want to be seen as a coward. He wanted to do his duty and show his outward bravery to his men. After reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, De Forest wrote a letter to William Dean Howells in 1887, expressing his admiration for Tolstoy's portrayal of battle. De Forest wrote:

Let me tell you that nobody but [Tolstoy] has written the whole truth about war and battle. I tried and told all that I dared, and perhaps all that I could, but there was one thing I did not dare tell, lest the world should infer that I was naturally a coward, and so could not know the feelings of a brave man. I actually did not dare state the extreme horror of battle and the anguish with which the bravest soldiers struggle through it. (qtd in Schaefer, 71)

With his own pen, De Forest details his fear of being thought a coward, indicating how he (and by extension other men) chose to leave out part of the truth concerning the awfulness of war and the terror associated with it. He felt this way as a soldier among his troops, but also as an author of war literature. He felt that to be a good writer of war

stories he needed to be a good soldier. Schaefer points out that “he is not merely afraid of being thought a coward but, by extension, of being regarded as one who cannot know—and thus cannot provide information about—how a brave man feels under fire” (71). De Forest’s desire to prove his masculinity, to show his bravery, mirrors the desire of society and other Civil War soldiers.

So how does De Forest’s biography and musings on military life and masculinity connect to his Civil War fiction? In simple terms, much of what occurred in his own life he used as the basis for his construction of *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*. As a soldier he was stationed in New Orleans, so too are the two main male characters of his novel. Just as De Forest went through the battle of Port Hudson, so do his fictional soldiers. He wrote about day-to-day life, the tedium of army camps, and what happened in between battles; he wasn’t interested in writing only about combat scenes, but in relaying truth. De Forest said himself that “for the first time in my life I came to know the value of personal knowledge of one’s subject and the art of drawing upon life From my *Miss Ravenel* on I have written from life and been a realist” (qtd in Schaefer, 36). De Forest not only observed and commented on camp life, soldiers, and manhood in his biographical sketches, but also in his Civil War fiction, discussing what war does to men on a personal level and how masculinity is affected.

Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, although situated in the years of the Civil War, is largely a romance, and the battle scenes depicted within scarcely take up any space at all. Benjamin Cooper notes that De Forest had “reluctantly ratcheted up the novel’s sentimental plot” at the insistence of his editor in order to attract more female readers (47). For this reason, De Forest’s portrayals of manhood toggle between the new idea of

masculinity in the homosocial environment of warfare and the previous idea of cultivated and restrained gentlemanliness when a man is away from that homosocial environment. Cooper states that “De Forest’s infrequent descriptions of battle stood out at the time as nothing less than revolutionary for Howells; they were for Henry James, Stephen Crane, and other writers of his generation a significant signpost of realist technique” (47). Some critics have noted that De Forest’s realism is inconsistent and gets lost in the jumble of narrative asides, emotional heroines, and sermons about religion, education, emancipation, and temperance. Thomas H. Fick argues that “the realistic elements of the novel are not momentary peaks of excellence that De Forest sadly could not maintain, but specific and therefore occasional weapons in a literary and cultural battle between North and South” (474). The short battle scenes depicted in *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* are also indicative of De Forest’s own military experience; he served in the army for four years but of those four years, only forty-six days were under fire: “six days of pitched battle, three days with storming parties, and thirty-seven days of siege” (Schaefer, 36).

As De Forest said himself, he wrote from personal experience, and his novel demonstrates the briefness of battle despite the long hours and years of service. Also through his writing, it seems that De Forest was a product of his time, choosing to illustrate masculinity in connection with the ideals of nineteenth-century manhood. However, *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* is also a novel about change: the change of a nation, the change of loyalties, and the change from one type of manhood to another. It is also concerned with the view of Northern and Southern masculinity: the restrained, ambitious man and the emotional, chivalric gentleman. These two views of masculinity, both within romantic and realist writing, can be seen in the two main male characters of

the novel, the Northern lawyer Edward Colburne and the Southerner-turned-Unionist John Carter.

Comparison among men to identify masculinity occurs early on in De Forest's novel. Dr. Ravenel and his daughter Lillie, natives of New Orleans, become residents of the fictional town of New Boston because of Dr. Ravenel's loyalty to the Union. They first become acquainted with the young lawyer Edward Colburne, and he is described as a town favorite—charming, agreeable, light-hearted, and frank. His physical description correlates with the ideal of athletic masculinity. De Forest writes, "In person he was strongly built, and he had increased his vigor by systematic exercise. He had been one of the best gymnasts and oarsmen in college, and still kept up his familiarity with swinging-bars and racing shells. His firm white arms were well set on broad shoulders and a full chest and a pair of long, vigorous legs completed an uncommonly fine figure" (19). Colburne is the picture of manhood, a favorite not only for his agreeable nature but for his manly appearance as well.

Colburne is especially masculine when compared with the other effeminate males of New Boston who study too much. One such studious man is described as "[t]hin, pale, and almost sallow, with pinched features surmounted by a high and roomy forehead, tall, slender, narrow-chested and fragile in form, shy, silent, and pure as the timidest of girls, he was an example of what can be done with youthful blood, muscle, mind and feeling by the studious severities of puritan university" (20). The young man's lack of physical strength and muscle and being dubbed as "youthful" depict him as a mere child. He is not a full-grown man despite his age, his weak appearance and timidity are not in sync with the ideal of a robust, confident man, and his severe studies paint a picture of him as a

small schoolchild hunched over a desk instead of playing outside. He does not measure up to Colburne who, although he attended college as well, spent much of his time in athletic pursuits building up his manly figure. De Forest continues, “Miss Ravenel, accustomed to far more masculine men, felt a contempt for him in the first glance, saying to herself, How dreadfully ladylike!” (20). Miss Ravenel does not merely disapprove this young man’s un-masculine physique and behavior, but is contemptuous of it. She forms her bad opinion of him with one look, without even speaking with him, and her reaction and opinion of such effeminate males mirrors the other ladies’ thoughts. It can, therefore, be interpreted that De Forest felt much the same way: a man must exude masculinity through appearance, character, and personality.

De Forest agrees with the ideals of the time, and voices that opinion through his heroine. The more virile and athletic a man was, the more masculine he was. And being more masculine meant a man was better than the other men around him. In fact, Lillie far prefers the likes of Colonel John Carter, a West Point graduate, soldier, and altogether manly man. Carter is described as having “a full chest, broad shoulders and muscular arms, brown curling hair, and a monstrous brown mustache, forehead not very high, nose straight, and chin dimpled, brown eyes at once audacious and mirthful, and a dark rich complexion which made one think of pipes of sherry wine as well as of years of sunburnt adventure” (20). Not only are Carter’s chest and arms large, but even his mustache is “monstrous,” a mustache with power. Everything in his appearance and description exudes power, including the fact that he is not afraid to look Lillie in the eye with boldness. Carter is the epitome of manhood in this setting, and his strong physical appearance and straightforward gestures allow others around him to read his manliness as

Nye suggests. Carter poses that brute force which society deemed desirable, and De Forest's physical descriptions of his male characters allow him to set them up as the embodiment of masculinity.

Despite Colburne being a town favorite and described as masculine, he cannot help but compare himself to the newcomer Carter. De Forests writes, "Colburne had not expected this alarming phenomenon. He was clever enough to recognize the stranger's gigantic social stature at a glance, and like the Israelitish spies in the presence of the Anakim, he felt himself shrink to a grasshopper mediocrity" (20). As Kimmel explained, men define their masculinity in relation to other men. Colburne was not threatened by the effeminate, studious university boys, but he is by the new army man and feels that his masculinity pales in comparison to Carter's. He shrinks and feels mediocre; he does not want to be seen as less than manly compared with Carter, not only in the eyes of other men but also in the eyes of Lillie Ravenel. John Stauffer explains that Colburne "is bookish, temperate, and sentimental—noble traits, but misunderstood in a culture of war" (125).

Colburne's traits correlate with the past ideals of sentimentality. Despite the fact that he is active and athletic, he is still seen as inferior to Carter's bold and swaggering masculinity. Stauffer argues, "With the onset of war, Sentiment had lost its power, and men needed to find their own source of energy. Sentiment was associated with femininity, and shaped morality. But war required force, not sentiment and morality. . . . The war demanded a new, masculine morality, one that placed less emphasis on Sentiment, and more on will and fate" (122-23). This argument correlates with the course that Colburne decides to take, volunteering for the war and serving as a captain in

Colonel Carter's regiment. He is placed under the leadership of a "true" man, eager to earn his own manhood. And because Colburne has decided to fight, to volunteer for the army, he is respected by other men. Dr. Ravenel tells him, "But even if you never receive a grade of promotion, nor have a chance to strike a blow in battle, you will still have performed one of the highest duties of manhood and be entitled to our lasting respect" (94). However, even though Colburne sets out to prove his manhood, it is still the superior masculine Carter that wins Lillie. After all, Lillie "believed in fighting, and respected a man the more for drawing the sword, no matter for which party" (78). Lillie respects Colburne, but Carter has made the military his profession, so it is Carter with his brash masculinity and boldness that Lillie falls in love with and marries.

As the narration moves away from domestic households and places the men in the homosocial environment of camp life, the change from gentleman to animalistic man can be seen. No longer are they fettered by needed social manners, but are instead freed to act as they will. De Forest writes that Carter "gave himself up to lazy pleasure, and even allowed his officers to run to the same" (110). The men drank, and gambled, and partook of all types of debauchery, with the exception of Colburne who resisted such pleasures. Their standards and expectations for themselves change when they are no longer surrounded by women and required to live by a social code. A man could be a man, so to speak, in the camp setting. But with this change in scenery, one can start to see cracks in the character of Carter and De Forest's opinion of him. Carter is no doubt a brave and loyal army man, but intemperance and gambling are seen as shortcomings despite the fact that all the other men are partaking in it as well. The narrator praises Colburne for his ability to resist such pleasures, while at the same time illustrating how he continues to

grow and improve as a man because of the army. The narrator also shows other shortcomings in Carter, even though his outward appearance and mannerisms are praised by those around him. De Forest writes, “As Miss Ravenel drifted towards Colonel Carter she beheld him in the guise of a pure and noble creature, while in truth he was a more than commonly demoralized man, with potent capacities for injuring others” (154). Again, De Forest’s judgment is that a man can be strong and hard, as well as someone capable of malicious action or behavior. This judgment can be seen through the eyes of the soldiers under the command of Carter, but they also illustrate a dichotomy of feeling:

Carter was a hard-hearted, intelligent, conscientious, beneficent tyrant. . . . I can only say that the soldiers hated their colonel because they feared him; that, like true Americans they profoundly respected him, because, as they said, “he knew his biz;” that they were excessively proud of the superior drill and neatness to which he had brought them against their wills; and that, on the whole, they could not have exchanged him for any other regimental commander in the brigade. They firmly believed that under “Old Carter” they could whip the best regiment in the rebel service. (172)

The soldiers don’t particularly like Carter; he is not kind or easy. But they respect him because he helped them achieve a new level of manhood, one that they can outwardly show and demonstrate for others to see. As Kimmel suggests, these soldiers are “proving” their manhood, and they feel pride in their ability to do so. A page later the narrator comments, “I believe that all women admire men who can make other men afraid,” illustrating that it is not only men who respect a hard, aggressive man, but

women as well (174). In fact, De Forest suggests that women are instinctually drawn to this kind of man, as Lille is to Carter.

With camp life came the continual need to compete and prove one's manhood. De Forest illustrates this in a brief conversation: "'Don't you find it hot?' said a citizen to Captain Colburne. 'You'll find it too much for you yet.' 'Pshaw!' answered the defiant youth. 'I've seen it hotter than this in Baratania with two feet of snow on the ground'" (111). Colburne was now a soldier and as such needed to prove his manhood, even regarding such a trivial matter as the weather. He was man enough to withstand the heat. Yet still Colburne continues to feel inferior to Carter. When Carter comments that he thought Colburne spoke French, and Colburne must admit that he doesn't, he is vastly embarrassed. "He blushed at the Colonel's apology, which mortified him more than the offence for which it was intended" (160). Not only does Colburne feel inferior in military prowess and masculine attributes, but also in social graces, and because of that he blushes. A blush is the stereotypical response a woman might display, and a further insult to his manhood. In an effort to feel inferior no longer, Colburne throws himself into his duties.

It is only through drill and the exertions of military life that Captain Colburne begins to feel his masculinity flourish. When he and his regiment must partake in that horrid thing, a forced march, the narrator comments:

His feet have been as sore as any man's; they have been blistered from toe to heel, and swollen beyond their natural size, but he has never yet laid down by the roadside nor crawled into an army wagon, saying that he could march no further. He is loyal and manly in his endurance, and is

justly proud of it. In one of his letters he says, “I was fully repaid for yesterday’s stretch of thirty-five miles by overhearing one of my Irishmen say, while washing his bloody feet, ‘Be----! But he’s a hardy man, the Captin!’” (246).

De Forest conveys that through Colburne’s trials, he comes into his manhood. He was always athletic and well built, but now because of the army he goes about his duties without complaint. He does not give into weakness, and the praise of other men is enough for him. It is a picture of a man with his chest full of pride. In fact, the title of the chapter in which this scene appears is “Captain Colburne marches and fights with Credit,” which indicates how De Forest wished to portray him. Once the battle of Port Hudson commences in this chapter, it is evident how the narrator admires Colburne. The battle is described as harried and confused—men running and charging, bullets and cannon shot whizzing by and destroying trees, soldiers not knowing if they are stumbling over friends or enemies, limbs being blown off, rivers of blood flowing. And yet the men advance on, and Colburne is the courageous man who leads them.

De Forest does not shy away from the fact that battle is frightening. He points out that men were afraid, and that some even turned in an effort to flee, “unmanned by the horror of death” (251). Colburne himself even recounts his fear in a letter after the battle, but he does not succumb to those fears, but steadily leads his men on. The narrator notes, “A man who keeps the ranks hates a skulker, and wishes that he may be killed, the same as any other enemy” (251). Once again, De Forest exemplifies how he is a creature of his time, because to be a man was to carry on and fight in the face of fear. Michael Schaefer, in discussing De Forest’s war writings, suggests, “A military unit under fire is not an

imperturbable monolith under its officers' absolute control, but rather a collection of individuals constantly beset by fear and thus constantly on the verge of responding as undisciplined individuals to their separate impulses to either fire or flee, at best held together provisionally by their officers and their own loyalty to one another" (25). It was not that men were not afraid and didn't want to bolt to escape the horrors of combat. In fact, as Schaefer comments, they were constantly beset with fear. But in the era of the Civil War, a man felt the need to suppress that fear, to clamp it down into a cold knot that he could overcome or ignore as he charged into battle. If a soldier were to flee, he was branded a coward. De Forest's protagonist is anything but. Colburne continues to lead his men even after he is shot in the arm. He only takes a moment to regain some strength, and sees it as his duty to continue on and does so until he falls unconscious to the ground. De Forest uses his personal experience seeing injured men eager to fight and conveys his respect for those men who persevere, even after injury. De Forest suggests that Colburne fought with credit, and deserves admiration for his manly valor.

Colburne also fits the mold of a man who sees it as his duty to fight and to serve his country. His ideas of duty can be seen from the beginning of the war when he volunteers without hesitation, through his service as a captain in his regiment. After Colburne recovers from his injury, he returns to his post as is expected of him, not only by others but of himself as well. As a soldier, Colburne sees it his duty to fight even if it seems impossible to win. While serving at a small fort, the soldiers see the enemy coming upon them. They are vastly outnumbered, but still Colburne says, "Gentlemen, we are dishonored cowards if we surrender this fort without fighting. . . . If we surrender, we make the whole campaign a failure. We must not do it. We never shall be able to face our

comrades after it; we never shall be able to look loyal man or rebel in the eye. We *can* defend ourselves” (294-95). His speech covers many of the areas for the ideals of masculinity of the time: one, that to not fight is an act of cowardice; two, that it is their job to fulfill their duties as soldiers and help the cause even if it means death for themselves; and three, that other men will compare themselves to their actions and they must not be found wanting. It is also in this same chapter that De Forest bolsters Colburne’s masculinity by comparing it with that of another man’s, Major Gazaway. Despite his higher rank, Major Gazaway is portrayed as completely unmanly; he gives no orders, hides when the ambush begins, and totally succumbs to his fears. De Forest writes:

His trepidation was so apparent that the common soldiers discovered it, and amused themselves by slyly jerking bullets at him, in order to see him jump, fall down and clap his hand to the part hit by the harmless missile. He must have suspected the trick but he did not threaten vengeance nor even try to discover the jokers: every feeble source of manliness in him had been dried by his terrors. He gave no orders, exacted no obedience, and would have received none had he demanded it. . . . He had just manliness enough to feel a little ashamed of himself and mutter to Mrs. Carter that he was “too sick to stan’ up.” . . . With what an admiring contrast of feeling she looked at the brave Colburne and thought of her brave husband! (296)

De Forest’s point is clear that a man does not earn respect merely because of his rank, but rather because of his actions. The soldiers in Major Gazaway’s command do not respect

him and resort to teasing him, because he shows not an ounce of courage, fortitude, or proper manliness. Colburne, on the other hand, shows all of these characteristics and leads the men bravely on, even though his rank is lower than Gazaway's. He does what a man is supposed to do, and in the process earns the admiration of his fellow soldiers and of Lillie.

De Forest suggests that Colburne becomes a true man because he is tested by battle, but also because he stays firm to his other admirable characteristics: temperance, honesty, and gentlemanliness. For Colburne, the war changes him in that he faces his fear and does his duty in combat, but war does not corrupt him or change many of his key traits. The opposite is true of Carter. Although at the beginning of the novel, Carter is portrayed as the alpha male, the one with brute masculinity and strength, he is also the one that becomes unmanned by war. This does not happen on the battlefield, for he is as brave as ever when he must fight. Instead it happens because of his tendency to indulge in vices: he drinks too much, gambles too much, is unfaithful, and dishonest not only to his wife but also to his government. Because Carter indulges profligately he is often without money, which means he continually seeks promotion. Carter travels to Washington for "his own work and for his own interests. He felt the necessity of adding to his income, and desired the honor and claimed the justice of promotion" (332). Carter's ambitions and goals are not for the good of the Union, as a true loyalist's, but instead to acquire more money and more praise. Colburne also liked the praise of other men, but it is different in that he liked hearing the praise of the soldiers under his command, knowing that he was a worthy leader and doing what he must for the cause.

Carter, on the other hand, wishes to receive praise from those in higher authority and for monetary gain.

In his portrayal of Carter, De Forest illustrates how one vice leads to another. First, Carter succumbs to the charms of Mrs. Larue and begins an affair with her. De Forest writes, “He would have been glad to break the evil charm, but he was too far gone to be capable of virtuous effort” (359). Second, Carter’s excessive drinking and gambling make it necessary for him to find a way to acquire money. As a result, he cheats the government. In order to cover his debts from his life of excess he offers \$100,000 of government money to an agent who expects to buy and then resell Confederate cotton at a large profit. However, when the agent disappears, Carter replaces the \$100,000 by auctioning off and then rebuying Union steamboats. Carter claims this as “the only ungentlemanly act of my life!” De Forest seems to be writing this sarcastically, as he has already written about Carter’s other unfavorable characteristics—not only his drinking and gambling, but also his unkindness and his unfaithfulness. Fick explains that “sensual indulgence and financial ruin go hand in hand, and the ‘gentlemanly’ lack of interest in financial management is inseparable from the worldly sin of fornication” (484). Carter is not a man who receives honest pay for honest work; he must resort to dishonesty and fraud in an effort to cover his less-than-gentlemanly pursuits. He is not the ideal of a self-made man any longer, despite his masculine appearance. His actions negate what manhood he had at the beginning of the novel. De Forest writes, “But he grew thin, looked anxious, or ostentatiously gay, and resumed to some extent his habits of drinking” (382-83). Carter himself recognizes that his deeds have cast him into a desperate and dishonorable situation and that in losing his respect he is losing his manhood. Eric

Solomon notes, “De Forest employs war for the metaphorical framework of Carter’s life, for the dangerous waters—the destructive element—in which he can swim, in contrast to the peaceful land that must destroy him” (86). Carter is successful in the world of war for he has courage and discipline, but outside of war he lacks the attributes to make him a successful man. Nye states that “the citizen must carry within himself the qualities of a warrior, but as a warrior must also remain the citizen he will become again at conflict’s end” (417). Carter is not able to “remain the citizen,” instead only possessing warrior like characteristics. De Forest suggests that to be a real man, one must be successful in both spheres—to fight bravely in war and to be honorable in peacetime.

Because of his misdeeds, and when he finds out that Lillie knows of his affair with Mrs. Larue, Carter feels the need to throw himself more deeply into military service. Carter’s duplicitous nature can be seen in the views of Dr. Ravenel and Lillie and of Carter’s fellow soldiers. Dr. Ravenel and Lillie see him as a dishonorable man, while his fellow soldiers see him as a fearless leader. In his final battle, Carter’s robust masculinity comes into play as he is once again surrounded by men, and is propelled to act in a way that casts him a favorable light. He also believes that his actions, i.e. his heroic acts in combat, will bring him forgiveness. De Forest writes, “The whizzing of the Texan bullets, the sight of the butternut uniforms, and ugly broadbrims which faced him, had cleared his deep breast of oppression, and called the fighting fire into his eyes. He swore loudly and gaily; he would flog those dirty rascallions; he would knock them high and dry into the other world; he would teach them not to get in his way” (408). Combat brings him to life, and in the eyes of the soldiers under his command he is seen as a hero and wholly masculine. Fick posits, “De Forest’s strategy is to play off Carter’s social

confidence, prepossessing physique, courage, and military skill against a triumvirate of moral shortcomings: intemperance, sexual misconduct, and fiscal irresponsibility” (482). De Forest’s judgment of Carter is twofold. On the one hand, Carter is struck by a fatal bullet, evidence that his honorable deeds in battle cannot make up for his dishonorable deeds with his wife and government. But on the other hand, De Forest writes:

In a letter to Ravenel, Colburne related the particulars of Carter’s death, and closed with a fervent eulogium on his character as a man and his services as a soldier, forgetting that he had sometimes drunk too deeply, and that there were suspicions against him of other vices. It is thus that young and generous spirits are apt to remember the dead, and it is thus always that a soldier laments for a worthy commander who has fallen on the field of honor. (412)

Carter is a man on the battlefield, a strong leader, and a mighty defender. He did his duty as a soldier and fought with action and courage. However, he does not do his duty to his government or his wife, lying to and cheating on both. For this reason, he is not allowed to live. He cannot repent and make up his sins against his family and his country. His tough masculinity and virile manhood are stained by shame.

Colburne is contrasted with Carter. Seen as the lesser man at the beginning of the novel, even in his own eyes, he comes into his manhood because of the war. Fick suggests, “In Captain Edward Colburne, De Forest finds a synthesis of manly vigor and morality adequate to the demands of postbellum industrial society” (486). Colburne is tested as a soldier and a leader and found that he measures up to the mark. His fellow soldiers see him as someone to look up to, a man who did his duty and without

complaint. And he becomes more of a man than Carter because he never falls into vices; he is honorable and trustworthy throughout the entire novel. Due to Colburne's honorable personality, he wins Lillie's affections after the war is over. Cooper points out, "He is a proper native of New England, and though he loves Lillie dearly, he must be tested by battle and the full term of their prolonged separation before events finally will bring the two together in the end" (55). De Forest illustrates the reversal of Carter's and Colburne's lives. Carter is the dominant male at the beginning of the novel—robust, militant, courageous, and wholly masculine—and for these reasons Lillie loves him. However, his overindulgences, irresponsibility, and dishonesty cause him to stray from the fine line of man and gentleman, which in turn results in him losing his wife and his life. Colburne, on the other hand, is able to achieve true manhood through his trials in the war, proving his bravery, leadership skills, and faithfulness. He is able to walk the fine line that Carter fell away from, and for this reason he wins the girl in the end.

In truth, De Forest's comparison of Colburne and Carter is actually a comparison of the larger ideas of Northern and Southern manhood. Colburne represents Northern manhood in which the ideals of self-restraint, containment, chastity, respectability, and capitalism are evident. He embodies this ideal northern man. He is educated as a lawyer, and he is ambitious and wishes to forge his way in the world. In a sense he is a self-made man. He is also athletic, forthright, and chaste. E. Anthony Rotundo explains that a good Northern male had to be "a person of physical strength and primitive energy" and "the master of his own impulses" (27). Indeed, Colburne is a copy of this man, the model that all Northern men were required to try to attain. Carter exemplifies the ideas of Southern manhood: outward social graces and gentlemanliness, robust virility, and free indulgence.

Southern men felt there was something “unnatural or unmanly about sexual restraint” (Fick, 479). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes, “Southern conventions of masculinity never abandoned the element of force or even brutality that northern conventions were submerging in the rational self-discipline appropriate to commercial society” (qtd in Fick, 478). Force, brutality, and a lack of self-discipline can be seen in Carter through his treatment of his soldiers, his sexual philandering, his fiscal irresponsibility, and his unlawful dealing with the government. In the end, Carter falls just as the South and the ideals of Southern manhood fall.

By having Colburne represent the victorious North and Carter represent the beaten South, De Forest showcases the superiority of Northern society and manhood. The Southern ideals of gentility and plantation society could not stand up to the stronger Northern ideals of hard work and commercialism. Jonathan Daigle argues:

The old romance of passion and conflict, represented by Carter, the barbaric planters and the war, yields to a new national romance of progress. By dramatizing Colburne’s affinity for his postwar surroundings, De Forest creates a new genre that derives its compelling force not from vibrant love affairs, violent conflicts or even singular characters but by connecting ordinary readers to the ‘stupendous thing’ it celebrates. This thing is not the war but the war’s contribution to history. (198-99)

The war’s contribution to history is victory of North over South, the victory of freedom over slavery, and the victory of Northern over Southern manhood.

De Forest determines that the Union needed to develop and grow, just as Colburne does through his trials in war. In the final chapter, De Forest writes that serving

in the war “will finally give strength to his character and secure to him perfect manliness and success” (467), or in other words the whole of the Union will achieve manliness and success because of their trials and triumph in war. De Forest continues:

[Colburne’s] responsibilities will take all dreaminess out of him, and make him practical, industrious, able to arrive at results. His courage will prolong his health, and his health will be used in effective labor. He has the patience of a soldier, and a soldier’s fortitude under discouragement. He is a better and stronger man for having fought three years, out-facing death and suffering. Like the nation, he has developed, and learned his powers. Possessing more physical and intellectual vigor than is merely necessary to exist, he will succeed in the duties of life, and control other men’s lives, labors, opinions, successes. (468)

De Forest’s parting thoughts in his novel convey his beliefs about manhood. A man is hardworking, honest, and smart; he learns from his hardships and takes the lessons to heart to improve his life. War and battle teach men about patience and suffering, courage and bravery. Colburne is the ideal of northern, superior masculinity. In his profession he will have authority over others and shape other men’s lives, just as the North will control and shape the South. Daigle notes that northern masculinity “denotes progressive qualities, including dependability, effort, and selflessness” (204). Carter, and by extension the South, was selfish and irresponsible. He lacked patience and self-control and thought more of himself than others. By having him die in battle, De Forest suggests that he could not survive in the new era of northern manhood, just as the Confederacy could not survive.

Chapter 3

Man versus War: The Unmanning of Ambrose Bierce's Characters Due to the Horrors of Battle

Ambrose Bierce was just 18 years old when he joined the Union forces during the Civil War. Much like De Forest, Bierce wrote both autobiographical and fictional stories about the War, but unlike De Forest, Bierce's works were short stories published in newspapers. While De Forest published his Civil War novel just a few years after the end of the war, allowing him an immediate reaction to the events, and labeling him as one of the first realist authors, Bierce published most of his Civil War short stories between 1880 and 1905, some fifteen to forty years after the conflict ended, allowing him years to reflect and respond to the war in his writing. Despite the years between the war and publication, Bierce's stories "harmonize in every significant particular with the known facts" (Joshi and Schultz). Whereas De Forest paints a picture of comparison between two men in his 500 page novel, one measuring up to the model of manhood and the other succumbing to his shortcomings, Bierce creates small sketches in his short stories where



Image 7: Ambrose Bierce in uniform

the effects of war on men are looked at through the lens of personal impact. Bierce's characters are men of action, just as much as De Forest's are, but Bierce's characters are also unmanned by the battles they take part in. Yet despite the horrors of war, S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz explain, "Although Bierce left the army for good in 1866, for the whole of his life he considered himself more soldier than civilian" (*stjoshi.org*).

Bierce is not a sympathetic human being. He showed no love or affection for his parents or siblings, but acquired an affinity for small animals such as snakes and lizards. He was impatient, antagonistic, and cynical. Roy Morris, Jr., explains, “Many things wearied Ambrose Bierce; preachers, politicians, doctors, lawyers, capitalists, socialists, jingoists, anarchists, immigrants, women, bohemians, and dogs. Indiana rhymester James Whitcomb Riley—a particular Biercian *bête noire*—was close to the point when he archly observed that ‘Bierce edits God’” (7). It seems that Bierce was unpleasant, and aptly earned the nickname “Bitter Bierce.” Notwithstanding his feeling that “all governments were suspect, since all were comprised unavoidably of men” (Morris, 4), he served in the Union army until the end of the War. In writing of Bierce’s military service, Napier Wilt points out, “In the entire Rolls of his regiment there is no mark against him. Both in the Rolls and in the official reports he is always spoken of with respect. The tribute, ‘he rendered me efficient service,’ twice used in reference to Bierce, probably suggests what manner of soldier he was. There are recorded of him no showy deeds, nor any outstanding action. He was merely an efficient soldier” (267). In spite of Bierce’s feelings about government and his harsh personality, he still fell in with the standards of the era. He was man who fulfilled his duty and obligation to his country, followed orders, and served honorably in the army.

In the aspect of military service, Bierce and De Forest are similar in that they both served out the war honorably. Schaefer notes, “Bierce sounds like De Forest, asserting as De Forest did in ‘Our Military Past and Future’ that thorough training produces successful soldiers and that a combination of such training with firsthand observation can produce competent writers on military matters. Following De Forest’s logic, we might

assume that Bierce would therefore also find that successful soldiers are the best authors of useful military history” (81). His personal experiences with war, coupled with his success as a soldier allowed Bierce to craft stories not only about the realities of combat but also about men who either achieve desired masculinity or are unmanned by warfare.

Bierce’s ideas of manhood can be seen his description of his commanding officer:

General W.B. Hazen, a born fighter, an educated soldier . . . was one of the best hated men that I ever knew, and his memory is a terror to every unworthy soul in the service. He was aggressive, arrogant, tyrannical, honorable, truthful, courageous . . . a skillful soldier, a faithful friend, and one of the most exasperating men alive. Duty was his religion . . . his missionary efforts were directed against the spiritual darkness of his superiors in rank . . . [He was] my commander and my friend, my master in the art of war. (“The Crime at Pickett’s Mill”)

Bierce looked up to Hazen, and Hazen fits the model of manhood during the period of the Civil War. Hazen embodies the athletic, virile, dutiful, courageous male, and, in Bierce’s eyes, soldiers that did not praise him and were afraid of him were “unworthy.” In other words, they were not real men. For Bierce, men should follow orders and go into battle. But years of reflection allowed him to look back at the Civil War and write about what truly happens to men in the midst of combat. Daniel Aaron points out that Howells, Adams, James, and Clemens, “the four malingerers,” were “the men probably best endowed, if not the most temperamentally suited, to record the War in history or fiction. The only trouble was, they never got close enough to the fighting to write about it” (qtd in Morris, 23). Enter Bierce, a young soldier who fits into the idea that the War propelled

his coming of age, and a writer who was in the midst of some of the bloodiest battles of the War. Bierce's Civil War works encompass realist ideologies, while portraying masculinity within realism in a variety of ways.

In his short autobiographical writings of his time in the Civil War, Bierce expresses a dual attitude about the men in the army. In "What I Saw of Shiloh," his description of one of the bloodiest battles in the early years of the War, Bierce reports, "These men were defeated, beaten, cowed. They were deaf to duty and dead to shame. . . . An army's bravest men are its cowards. The death which they would not meet at the hands of the enemy they will meet at the hands of their officers, with never a flinching" (6). Here he illustrates how combat can wear men down, can make them unmindful of duty, and can cause them to be cowards. In a sense, battle was unmanning the soldiers. But just a few short pages later he relates how the men of his regiment were anxious to fight, only to be commanded to lie and wait. He writes:

What would we not have given to join them in their brave, hopeless task! But to lie inglorious beneath showers of shrapnel darting divergent from the unassailable sky—meekly to be blown out of life by level gusts of grape—to clench our teeth and shrink helpless before big shot pushing noisily through the consenting air—this was horrible! "Lie down, there!" a captain would shout, and then get up himself to see that his order was obeyed. "Captain, take cover, sir!" the lieutenant-colonel would shriek, pacing up and down in the most exposed position that he could find. O those cursed guns!—not the enemy's, but our own. Had it not been for them, we might have died like men. (12-13)

This scene portrays the thoughts of the era; true men were desirous to do their duty and wanted to fight. They wanted to be in the thick of the battle even if it meant dying, because it meant they would die like men. In Bierce's account, the soldiers resisted protecting themselves even in the face of immediate danger. They are athletic, brave men.

This desire for athleticism can be seen in "Four Days in Dixie," when a soldier escapes capture. Bierce writes, "I sprang through the door and struck out for the nearest point of woods, in a direction previously selected, vaulting fences like an accomplished gymnast and followed by a multitude of dogs" (25). These soldiers are not weak boys, but men of muscle and virility. The idea of crudeness that Alice Fahs discusses can also be seen in this story. As the soldiers are sitting around the campfire, they "were in a pleasant humor: someone had just finished a funny story about a man cut in two by a cannon-shot. Suddenly something staggered in among them from the outer darkness and fell into the fire. Somebody dragged it out by what seemed to be a leg. They turned the animal on its back and examined it—they were no cowards" (26). Their crudeness is evident in what they find funny, their bravery seen in their lack of fear in witnessing a disfigured creature. Just as Eugene H. Freeman wrote home about how he was hardened to the terrible sights around him, Bierce conveys this same idea. The men around the campfire are not cowards because they show no emotion in the face of an awful spectacle, and Bierce's characters are also placed in a homosocial environment where they do not express fear even if they feel it.

Bierce's portrayals of men coincide with the prototypical aggressive and athletic male of war during this period. His characters are men of action, and it is action—fighting, duty, bravery—that is valued over thought. Adrian Hunter notes, "In his

writing, the successful soldier is only reckoned with in terms of his outward conduct: indeed, his very identity as a combatant depends on not investigating his mind. Conversely, the soldier who fails to perform adequately in battle has his failure explained in terms of his excessive 'inwardness.' In both cases, competent masculinity is presented as a triumph of deed over thought" (284). This valuing of action is seen in Bierce's "Killed at Resaca." The short story recounts the history of Lieutenant Herman Brayle, who is described as the best man in an Ohio regiment, and who had "a gentleman's manners, a scholar's head, and a lion's heart" (63). Brayle is admired and looked up to because of his bravery and heroism. Even when his "heroic" deeds seem foolish and senseless, putting himself and his regiment in danger, he is still admired by his comrades for his courage. In every sense, Brayle is a doer, not a talker. Hunter points out, "It is not simply that he is brave, but that his courage comes unblemished by expressiveness, by any effeminate loquacity" (285). Bierce clearly repeats the stereotypical image of a soldier's manly virtues, contrasted to the way a woman might be viewed in this context.

Just as real men in the Civil War did not voice their fears or complaints to their fellow soldiers but rather opted for silence or self-effacing humor, so too does Brayle. De Forest noted this tendency when he recorded that he dared not complain about forced marches in front of his men. This lack of speaking and communication about feelings among soldiers portrays a type of quiet manhood, the strong, silent type. And to have a quiet manhood a man must shut up and remain quiet, at least about personal emotions. Hunter explains, "The function of self-effacing humor among these fighting men is to encode fear, to firm up the boundaries of their masculinity by not giving way to a potentially damaging 'excess' of feeling. The man who says too much, the leaky vessel,

is viewed with suspicion in this environment. . . . In Bierce's stories in particular, introspection is displaced by humor or, more commonly, by action; male character is defined and endorsed in terms of its 'outwardness'" (285). Therefore, Brayle is wholly a man of action, proving that he feels no effeminate emotions and showing his outward aggression.

Only later is the true impetus of his bravery revealed. After his death, a letter written by a woman is found in Brayle's belongings. The narrator reads the letter, which says, "Mr. Winters, whom I shall always hate for it, has been telling that at some battle in Virginia, where he got his hurt, you were seen crouching behind a tree. I think he wants to injure you in my regard, which he knows the story would do if I believed it. I could bear to hear of my soldier lover's death, but not of his cowardice." Bierce continues, "These were the words which on that sunny afternoon, in a distant region, had slain a hundred men" (67). It is Brayle's fear of being thought of as a coward by his lover and also by his fellow soldiers that spurs him on in his imprudent deeds of heroism. Perhaps at the beginning of his military service he could not stomach battle, but to hear his name linked to that word 'coward' is unbearable. Brayle finds it imperative that he live up to his masculinity. Hunter suggests that the narrator misreads Brayle's heroism because even after reading the letter he "considers Brayle 'the truest and bravest heart that ever beat,' when in fact he was a man spurred to a frightful self-destructiveness because of the intolerable demands of the role he must act up to" (286). Brayle's bravery was not an internal reaction in him, but rather a need to prove his manhood in his homosocial environment and save face for his lover. She compares him with other men, and therefore he does the same. The guilt of Brayle's death is laid at her feet due to her vapid nature

and her betrayal. This conveniently allows Brayle to maintain his masculinity—his heroic conduct on the battlefield is seen as the ultimate showcase of courage despite his earlier timidity.

Bierce makes a commentary on manhood in “Killed at Resaca.” He suggests that proving one’s manhood is possible among other men, and that outward displays of courage and masculinity that are witnessed by fellow soldiers only strengthen the evidence of one’s manhood. Brayle’s comrades witnessed his heroic deeds, and so to them he is a true man. Even if the reader views Brayle’s actions as self-destructive and manic, those in his homosocial environment view them as bravery and aggression. Even when Bierce writes, “he was vain of his courage” (63), Brayle’s social self, his outward mask, allows him the title of the best soldier in the regiment. He was to be looked up to and admired. As stated earlier, Michael Kimmel suggests that proving one’s manhood is a defining experience in a man’s life, and Brayle rushes into this experience in an attempt to outrun the title of coward, and is successful in doing so.

In “A Son of the Gods” Bierce creates another character whose outward showing of bravery earns him respect from his fellow soldiers. The soldier narrator tells the story of a young officer who puts himself in peril by riding out onto the front line in full dress uniform. He does this in an effort to expose the enemy, so they will fire and reveal their position. Throughout his madcap ride, he receives praise from his fellow soldiers and the narrator. Bierce writes, “O if he would but turn—if he could but see the love, the adoration, the atonement! . . . all are watching with suspended breath and beating hearts the outcome of an act involving the life of one man. Such is the magnetism of courage and devotion. . . . At what a dear rate an army must sometimes purchase knowledge! ‘Let

me pay all,' says this gallant man—this military Christ!" (49-50). The admiration his fellow soldiers pour on him is in no way subtle, because they witness physical proof of his bravery.

Yet despite this young officer's courage, he is never given a name nor is the reader given any hint into what he himself is thinking. Hunter argues that in fact the young officer is psychologically traumatized and suicidal, stating:

[I]n order for the ironic structure of Bierce's story to function, and for the young officer to be construed as heroic rather than damaged, the narration must draw a blank on the content of his mind. We are therefore left with this fleeting image of horrified madness while Bierce diverts to his wider story about the futility of warfare. Once again, interiority is refused, and a ratio enacted upon the issue of male psychological trauma. (288)

Indeed, Bierce's construction of this young officer makes him a specimen of his time. Soldiers were men of action, not emotion. Inaction resulted in too much inward thinking and worrying about oneself in a time when men needed to be concerned with their fellow comrades and the cause. Bierce criticizes war, but not the man's bravery. John Talbott explains that during the Civil War there was "no label like shell shock, battle fatigue or post-traumatic stress disorder to help explain and legitimize a mysterious condition, no category short of lunacy to account for peculiar behavior" (41). From a historical view, Bierce demonstrates this avoidance of psychological worries, instead labeling the young officer's foolhardiness as courage. Mental frailty did not equal manhood. However, the young officer cannot outrun the perils of war and is riddled with bullets during his reckless endeavor.

Bierce's writing also coincides with the idea of duty during the Civil War. Thousands of men left home and family to join the ranks, because they saw it as their duty to do so, and if they did not they would lose their honor. Bierce's characters are no different. In "A Horseman in the Sky," Bierce tells the story of a sentinel who fulfills his duty to an unsettling end. Bierce writes:

The sleeping sentinel in the clump of laurel was a young Virginian named Carter Druse. He was the son of wealthy parents, an only child, and had known such ease and cultivation and high living as wealth and taste were able to command in the mountain country of western Virginia. His home was but a few miles from where he now lay. One morning he had risen from the breakfast-table and said, quietly but gravely: "Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton, I am going to join it." The father lifted his leonine head, looked at the son a moment in silence, and replied: "Well, go, sir, and whatever may occur do what you conceive to be your duty.

Virginia, to which you are a traitor, must get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter." (28)

Druse's father encourages him to do what he feels is his duty, despite not agreeing with him about joining the Union forces. Duty was an external force coming from family, friends, and the nation, and duty was also an internal force driving men to fulfill it in order to feel comfortable with their own conscience. Bierce continues, "By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the country that he owed his selection for the present perilous duty at the extreme outpost" (28-29). It is

this sense of duty that drives Druse to outwardly exhibit his manhood through courage and action. Again, comparison comes into play here, because in comparison to his fellow soldiers, Druse's masculinity is superior and for this reason he receives promotion.

Following what he thinks is his duty is also what pushes Druse to make a difficult decision. As he hides at his post, he sees a Confederate soldier on horseback, but when the horseman turns to face him, Druse is overcome with emotion. He hesitates in shooting, thinking that perhaps the horseman hadn't seen anything, didn't know where the Union regiment was stationed, or was just taking in the scenery. But then Druse thinks again of duty, of saving his comrades, of doing his job, and he decides that it is his duty to shoot the horseman. Bierce writes, "Duty had conquered; the spirit had said to the body: 'Peace, be still.' He fired" (30). After firing, Druse reloads and resumes his watch. In the last lines of the story an officer comes to Druse, and Bierce writes this exchange: "'Was there anybody on the horse?' 'Yes.' 'Well?' 'My father.' The sergeant rose to his feet and walked away. 'Good God!' he said" (32). The reader is perhaps shocked to find out that Druse has killed his own father. However, the Civil War involved countryman against countryman, brother against brother, and father against son. From the beginning of the story, Druse followed what he felt was his duty—first in joining the Union forces even though his home state was part of the Confederacy, second in fighting bravely and being a man of action, and third in fulfilling his job even when it meant shooting his father. In war, it was important for him to protect his comrades and do what he must do all for the betterment of the cause. His confession that it was his father on the horse is disconcerting for the sergeant and the reader, but Bierce illustrates that once Druse

recognized his duty he had no regrets. And it is this same thought of duty that propelled many soldiers into joining the army and staying even when situations were horrific.

While Bierce represents the ideals of masculinity of the time, portraying men of athleticism, action, courage, and duty, he also portrays men that are unmanned by war. He does not do this by comparing soldier to soldier, but instead by comparing man to the horrors of warfare. In one of his most well-known stories, "Chickamauga," he conveys this through the eyes of a small boy, who wanders off into the woods with his toy wooden sword to play soldier and fight imaginary enemies. The boy becomes lost and falls asleep; when he wakes he is surrounded by hundreds of real wounded and dying soldiers. Bierce writes, "They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction" (43). Here Bierce illustrates a dumb despair as severely injured soldiers drag themselves, unmanned and vulnerable, toward a creek, the springs of life, only to die along the way or drown in it.

Bierce does not feminize the soldiers; he merely demonstrates what occurs due to the atrocities of war. His realistic portrayal of wounded and dying men serves as a criticism of the futility of warfare, but not the futility of duty and courage. Nowhere in "Chickamauga" does Bierce write that the soldiers were cowards or unadmired for their service. They are only men forced to crawl, unmanned because of the experience they have been through. They are unmanned, but not unmanly. When the small boy fails to understand the seriousness of the situation, and with his toy sword in hand tries to lead

the group of dying men on, it is only another comment on how war affects people. The young boy is a product of the time, the son of a military man, and because of past stories of glorious wars he perceives the need to continue in battle. In reality, the boy should be frightened, but instead he continues to play soldier. He is literally deaf, but also figuratively blind to the horror that surrounds him. It is only when he attempts to play with one of the wounded soldiers and comes face to face with the grotesqueness of war, literally a man lacking a lower jaw, that the boy is “terrified at last” (44). Then the boy is further affected personally, when he recognizes that his home is on fire and he finds his dead mother with “the greater part of the forehead torn away, and from the jagged hole the brain protruded” (46). The small boy comes to understand the awfulness of his surroundings and is impacted emotionally. Tim Edwards suggests that the ending scene of “Chickamauga” is “a terrifying vision of what we now call the ‘collateral damage’ of war, [and] is emblematic of how these stories expose war for what it is; a child standing over the sprawled and broken body of a woman, her skull shattered by ‘the work of a shell.’ Bierce’s aim in the story is to explode romantic and naïve notions about war by showing us its brutal realities; he does so with grim success in this scene” (71).

It is war, not the comparison of man to man, that Bierce rails against. Bierce is viewing manhood on two scales, one in which courage, athleticism, and duty are admired and where a man can prove his masculinity, and the other in which it is man versus war, which causes virtual castration. Robert A. Wiggins argues that Bierce, “upon close examination seem[s] to be [a] bitter critic of man’s failures to achieve some romantically idealistic notion of man’s potentials that have not been achieved” (5). However, in Bierce’s stories he depicts men that are viewed as achieving manhood among their peers.

To the reader they may be damaged, foolhardy, or even a bit crazy, but in their homosocial environments they are seen as exemplary soldiers, brave and true. It is not that his characters are effeminate and unmanly, but are instead degraded because of combat and the standards of society. Tracy L. Strauss suggests that in "Chickamauga," "the child symbolizes the smallness of the human being who faced the sublime enormity of consuming trauma" (213). I would add that the child also symbolizes the enormity of being unmanned, where the grown men are again forced to crawl like children, brought down by the destructive forces of warfare.

Bierce further examines man versus war and the psychological trauma that occurs in "One of the Missing." The story is about Jerome Searing, a scout in the Union army. Early in the story, Searing is distinguished by his masculinity, being described as "a brave man," "an incomparable marksman, young, hardy, intelligent and insensible to fear," and a man with "extraordinary daring" (53). Again, in his homosocial environment, Searing is admired for this outward, physical proof of his manhood. He gains recognition because of it, and because of his job as a scout others rely on him. He goes out alone on his scouting expedition, going beyond his duty to find more information. Searing chooses not "to return to his command with all possible speed and report his discovery," because he finds the retreating Confederates an easy target for his sniper rifle. After all, "it is the business of a soldier to kill. It is also his habit if he is a good soldier" (55). Bierce sets Searing up as an ideal soldier, a man's man within his homosocial camp, one full of action and bravery. Yet, as a scout he is taken away from that environment and forced to face danger on his own.

Searing enters a dilapidated shack, and when a sudden cannon shot causes the building to collapse he finds himself trapped by fallen timbers. Scott D. Emmert states, “The story becomes, at this point, a study of the psychological reactions of a man facing his death” (par. 8). Because Searing is alone and stuck, he is left only with his own thoughts, and the story focuses on his state of mind. Bierce writes, “A sound was in his ears like the low, rhythmic thunder of a distant sea breaking in successive waves upon the beach, and out of this noise, seeming a part of it, or possibly coming from beyond it, and intermingled with its ceaseless undertone, came the articulate words: ‘Jerome Searing, you are caught like a rat in a trap—in a trap, trap, trap’” (56). Left alone to his own devices, unable to move and to do the job he is trained for, Searing embodies a man consumed with paranoia and panic.

During the cannon shot, his rifle with its hair-trigger was jolted from his hands, and he now finds its muzzle pointed directly at his forehead seemingly ready to fire. Emmert notes, “Although Searing has been a brave soldier in the past, his bravery manifested itself in physical activity. He had once charged a cannon, only to step aside before a fatal blast. His present circumstances, however, allow severely limited movement. Because his eyes are still free to move, he tries to look away from the bore of his rifle, but he cannot completely ignore it” (par. 9). Searing’s earlier displays of courage and manhood all hinged on his aggressiveness and action. He was able to rush at danger head on when other soldiers could witness his bravery. As a scout he had to go out alone, but he would return with his information, which was further proof of his intelligence and virility. But when he is trapped under the building, there is no one to help him, and away from the homosocial environment there is no one to view his manhood.

Yet, in spite of his fear and lack of audience, Searing's thoughts turn briefly to manhood, indicating the hold the standards of the time had on men. Bierce writes, "He resolved that he would meet his fate more manly. He was a plain, common soldier, had no religion and not much philosophy; he could not die like a hero, with great and wise last words, even if there had been someone to hear them, but he could die 'game,' and he would" (60). Even trapped and alone, Searing feels the need to live up to his masculinity; even in the face of death he wished to die "manly."

However, his resolve dissipates the longer he is pinned immovable and the longer he has to contemplate what is about to happen to him. He changes from a man of outward action to a man of inward thoughts, plagued with panic. Bierce writes, "Jerome Searing, the man of courage, the formidable enemy, the strong, resolute warrior, was as pale as a ghost. His jaw was fallen; his eyes protruded; he trembled in every fibre; a cold sweat bathed his entire body; he screamed with fear. He was not insane—he was terrified" (60). This lack of action, Searing's inability to change his circumstances, causes him to break down. Regaining some of his calm Searing decides to fire the rifle himself to end his life, and as he does so, "There was no explosion; the rifle had been discharged as it dropped from his hand when the building fell. But it did its work" (61). The rifle does its work, because it kills Searing despite not firing a bullet into his head. Instead, the rifle kills him by its power to instill fear and what he views as his fate. Away from other men, unable to charge bravely forward, and physically restrained, Searing is crippled by his paranoia. Emmert points out that "Searing becomes the victim of his own unbearable fear" (par 9). As with "Chickamauga," "One of the Missing" depicts the futility of war and the unmaning of soldiers in dire circumstances. Compared to other men, Searing is an

admirable soldier confident in his masculinity. But when the option of action is taken away, fear overtakes him. As Hunter noted, the successful soldier in Bierce's writing is measured by his outward conduct and not in investigating his mind; therefore, Searing's downfall comes because of internal conflict. Schaefer states, "In Bierce's view, the individual's apprehension of war is inevitably a discovery of irrationality and unknowability that drives that man into isolation and subjectivity" (100). Searing is driven into isolation, which causes his irrationality because of the unknown. He is not aware that his rifle has already fired and no one is there to tell him. And it is the terror of the unknown—not knowing when the rifle will go off and kill him—that causes his death.

"One of the Missing" ends with Lieutenant Adrian Searing passing by his brother's body, but Jerome Searing is unrecognizable. His uniform covered in dust appears to be Confederate gray and his body appears to be "[d]ead a week" (62). However, when the officer looks at his watch and notes the time, the reader learns that only twenty-two minutes have elapsed from the time of the cannon shot and the discovery of Searing's body. His brother passes by without recognizing him. Emmert states, "As an individual, Jerome Searing has been erased; as was foretold in the first sentence, he has disappeared" (par 10). Again, Bierce portrays how a soldier has been unmanned by war due to inaction, inward thoughts, paranoia, and fear, to the point where he is not even recognized. Schaefer explains, "That Bierce would focus in the majority of his war stories on men in such isolated situation—standing lonely lookout duty, performing solitary scouting missions, roaming battlefields apparently occupied only by the dead and dying, swinging through empty space—makes sense, given his propensity in all his

fiction for centering his attention on the isolated, alienated individual consciousness” (105). Within his homosocial group, Searing lived up to the standards of manhood, but alone and afraid he breaks down and dies, hardly acknowledged by the passing soldiers. It is war and the meaninglessness of it that takes men away from society and each other, making them alone and unmanned.

Bierce divides masculinity into two spheres in his short stories. In one sphere, Bierce suggests that action is the epitome of a good soldier, which in essence makes one a good man. That action included bravery, intelligence, and promotion, and the need to fight and race headlong at the enemy. Men admired soldiers who embodied those qualities. But in the other sphere, men are brought down by the standards of society and the futility of warfare. Compared to fellow soldiers, a man could live up to and achieve desired masculinity, but compared to war itself, a soldier’s masculinity is vain.

Chapter IV

Conclusion: Examining the Trauma of War and the Concept of Manliness

I have set out to show how De Forest and Bierce view manhood and masculinity in the time of the Civil War. Through examination of their war literature, it becomes apparent that they share similar ideas about masculinity, which coincide with thoughts on masculinity during the era. Masculinity during this period focused on outward actions and appearance. Men sought to avoid being labelled as effeminate or childlike and therefore concentrated on being tough, athletic, and strong—men with brute force. To distance themselves from criticism and the brand of coward, men volunteered for the War as a way to prove their honor and preserve their manhood. In De Forest's novel, the effeminate and childlike studious young men are scoffed at and looked down on. Lillie cannot even fathom associating with such boys. Carter and Colburne provide the appealing counter to these effeminate young men, as they are men with physical strength and dutiful hearts. Bierce's characters that garner praise from fellow soldiers are also men of physical strength and courage. They are unafraid to fight and to die for the cause, even when their bravery seems foolhardy.

De Forest's and Bierce's personal experiences with war indicate their understanding of achieving manhood for themselves, because they are products of their time. They served with honor in their regiments, choosing to remain silent about hardships when among their comrades, and voicing their desire to be in battle. They received praise from other soldiers for doing their duty. Their understanding of achieving manhood is then passed on to their characters. Their characters that are seen as true men by their fellow soldiers are men of action, athleticism, and bravery. Schaefer notes that

“what De Forest and Bierce themselves and the worthiest of their characters discover is that they are professional soldiers—that is, men who retain their composure under fire through a concentration on the immediate practical demands they face in that situation” (132). De Forest’s and Bierce’s characters prove their masculinity in their homosocial environment, fulfilling their duties, remaining quiet about their trials and fears, and illustrating how they are true soldiers. They have distanced themselves from womanish and childish emotions, and their action and bravery allow them to be branded as real men, proving their masculinity.

However, even though De Forest and Bierce coincide with the ideas of courageous, athletic, dutiful men of the War, they also do not shy away from the trauma associated with combat. Their stories include detailed descriptions of the horrors of battle. Previously, war literature had been painted in a chivalric and idealized manner, as soldiers died in a blaze of glory forever to be remembered for their heroic deeds. In contrast, the publication of these veterans’ fiction of the Civil War portrays war for what it was—a bloody and horrendous experience. Yes, their characters were able to achieve manhood, because they were entrenched in a homosocial environment where competition and comparison was a daily experience and where men judged one another accordingly. But their characters also faced the atrocities of war: hospitals filled to the brim with soldiers suffering from awful, putrefying wounds, battlefields moving with crawling, injured men, forced marches, and inglorious deaths. De Forest and Bierce are able to illustrate such realistic scenes of war because of their personal experiences. Their ideas of manhood are no longer the romanticized versions of battle, but are instead defined by their actual experiences with the realities of war. One reason their characters portray

masculinity is because they fight and are brave within a realistic depiction of battle, and their actions ring true to what actually occurs in war.

De Forest portrays war as a coming of age process for Colburne. Through combat he learned patience, fortitude, selflessness, and manliness. In De Forest's story, war is the making of Colburne as he becomes more secure in his masculinity and intellect. But De Forest also shows how war can affect men in negative ways. For Carter, war brings out his good traits—bravery, strength, and leadership, but it also brings out his bad traits—selfishness, unkindness, unfaithfulness, and greed. Promotion and money were more important to him than duty and honesty. Carter flourishes in battle, but cannot survive as a mere citizen and therefore dies. De Forest portrays another negative aspect of war through Colburne. At the end of the novel, Colburne is beaten down, weak and sick with fever. Battle has trod all over him and left him almost lifeless. Here, De Forest does not paint a glorious, indestructible soldier but a man affected by the trials of war. Colburne must struggle to become healthy, but because of his good characteristics, because he is a man that can flourish as a soldier and a citizen, he regains his health. De Forest focuses on characters that represent the nation as a whole: Colburne is the North, victorious, and Carter is the South, beaten.

In Bierce's short stories, his characters are most often isolated and unmanned because of war, despite their action and bravery. A man alone, trapped in a shed succumbs to his fear, a lone scout on a hill must kill his own father, a child alone wades through a sea of wounded men struggling to save themselves. When Bierce's characters act bravely, witnessed by fellow soldiers, such as Brayle in "Killed in Resaca" and the unnamed young officer in "A Son of the Gods," they prove their manhood in their

homosocial environments. Bierce points out that opinions of other men matter, but he also points out that war causes psychological trauma. Courage and bravery are most often propelled by the need to avoid shame. Man against man can prove his masculinity, but in combat men die. Bierce illustrates the personal impacts of war on individual men.

In short, the concept of manliness in De Forest's and Bierce's works is twofold. On one side, their men are able to achieve manhood and prove their masculinity because of the homosocial environment they belong to. Their outward appearance, mannerisms, action, and bravery allow them to be seen as men among men. Those characters that are effeminate or cowardly in the face of battle do not measure up to the standard. On the other side, combat weakens men, both physically and psychologically. War causes trauma, which is seen in the behavior and health of their characters. However, it is a trauma that men did not discuss with each other, as too much talk and showing of emotion would label a man less than manly, as womanly. Because of De Forest's and Bierce's personal experiences within the Civil War, and because they were equal to the task of a soldier, their comments about manliness and insights into male camaraderie and competitiveness within war are illuminating and revelatory. They illustrate how to achieve manhood and how to be a man in nineteenth-century America.

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