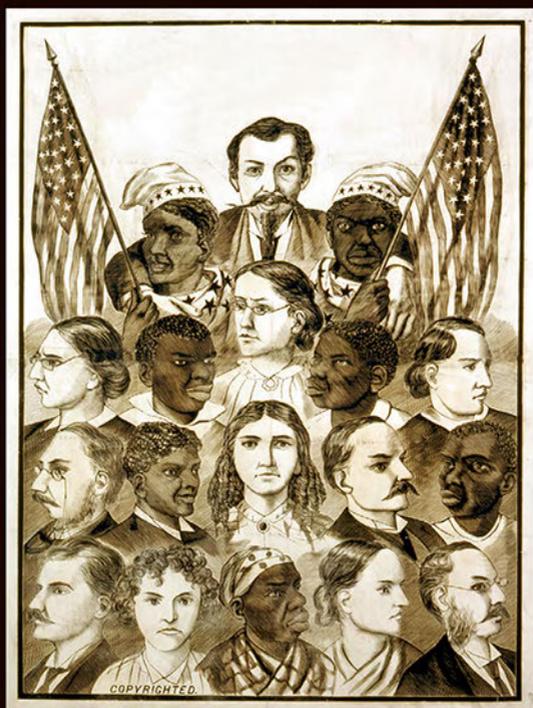


Kirsten Twelbeck

Beyond the Civil War Hospital

The Rhetoric of Healing and Democratization
in Northern Reconstruction Writing,
1861–1882



From:

Kirsten Twelbeck

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The Rhetoric of Healing and Democratization
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June 2018, 438 p., 49,99 €, ISBN 978-3-8376-3465-5

Beyond the Civil War Hospital understands Reconstruction as a period of emotional turmoil that precipitated a struggle for form in cultural production. By treating selected texts from that era as multifaceted contributions to Reconstruction's »mental adaptation process« (Leslie Butler), Kirsten Twelbeck diagnoses individual conflicts between the »heart and the brain« only partly compensated for by a shared concern for national healing. By tracing each text's unique adaptation of the healing trope, she identifies surprising disagreement over racial equality, women's rights, and citizenship. The book pairs female and male white authors from the antislavery North, and brings together a broad range of genres.

Kirsten Twelbeck (PhD) teaches American Studies at Augsburg University. She is interested in American literature and culture from the nineteenth through the twenty-first century.

For further information:

www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-3465-5

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Acknowledgements

In putting together this book about the equally progressive and prejudiced minds of Northern whites during Reconstruction, I have incurred many debts of gratitude to colleagues, organizations, friends, and family.

My work depended greatly on the support and astute criticism of my advisor Ruth Mayer, who not only chairs the American Studies Department in Hanover but has also become a true friend. It was important to have a mentor like her: not for a moment did she seem to doubt the academic importance of this project that by mushrooming and taking unexpected turns repeatedly threatened to overwhelm me. It was Ruth who reminded me of the common thread, the central argument that holds this book together. Yet while calling me back when I had wandered too far, she also stood by me when I ventured for good reason off the beaten path, and she happily accepted and often encouraged me to scrutinize the painful ambiguities and embarrassing contradictions that are inherent to all cultures, but that were particularly striking during this phase that has pointedly been called a “second founding.”

I also wish to express my collective thanks to my other colleagues in Hanover, and especially to our research colloquium, where we read and discussed each other’s work. I would like to acknowledge a special debt to Florian Groß, Shane Denson, Vanessa Künnemann, Christina Meyer, Anna-Lena Oldehus, Bettina Soller, and Jatin Wagle, whose unerring academic passion and perseverance contributed to and shaped this project. Thank you for the laughter and pasta we shared! And, Bettina, Anna, and Uta: thank you for providing the weary commuter with a home away from home, and lasting friendship.

Special thanks are due to Heike Paul who stepped in at the very last minute to serve as a second, external advisor to the project when for technical and organizational reasons a transatlantic committee proved impossible to realize. I am grateful to her and all the other members of the committee who in the end of the complex process of what we Germans call “habilitation” decided that I had accumulated all the requirements needed to become a full professor in this country.

Institutional financial backing was provided by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which freed me from other academic obligations for three years. Without the

ongoing support that was provided by Thomas Wiemer (Program Director) and Hans-Joachim Schöneck (DFG Finance Department), this book would not have come into being. Spending those three years at the John F. Kennedy Institute in Berlin was only possible with the help of Winfried Fluck and the Department of Cultural Studies who kindly shared their facilities and supported me academically. While I am grateful to all of the JFK staff, there are five colleagues whom I wish to thank in particular: Brian Crawford, Andrew Gross, MaryAnn Snyder-Koerber, Hannah Spahn, and Johannes Völz have generously shared their time and thoughts on my project. During my research trips (that were also generously financed by the DFG) I was able to meet with scholars whose work has inspired my own—Edward Blum, Joy and John Kasson, Anthony Lee, Eliza Richards, Jane Thraikill, Heather Williams—they all have been wonderfully supportive. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Young, author of *Disarming the Nation*, whom I had the chance of meeting several times during my research trip to Mount Holyoke College. Not only has her work been tremendously inspirational for my own; it was also a pleasure and an honor to have her as an advisor on the other side of the Atlantic.

A generous grant from the German Research Foundation enabled me to undertake research trips to the United States and to hire a research assistant in Chapel Hill who helped me access valuable sources and materials throughout the project. I wish to express my profound gratitude to Ashley Reed who not only dug up books, articles, and special editions that are complicated to obtain from Germany, but who also proved to be highly knowledgeable about nineteenth century culture, and generously shared her inspirational ideas about the Reconstruction era. In fact, aside from Ruth Mayer, she became my closest and most imperturbable reader, and her suggestions were gratefully taken into account when working on the final manuscript. As a research assistant, Ashley Reed was preceded by Elizabeth Stockton who also scoured library shelves at the University of Chapel Hill, and by Alison Bigelow who intermittently helped me out for a few weeks. Thanks also go to Stefanie John, Frederik Holme, Simon Rienäcker, and Angelika Schindler who assisted me in formatting and laying out the manuscript.

Many other people have been generous and indispensable in their assistance, yet not all of them can be mentioned here individually. The Women's Research Group at Hanover University has, over the course of its existence, offered generous support and interdisciplinary views. My students, who learned more about Reconstruction than the average student of American cultural studies, continuously forced me to explain why the rarely studied and often somewhat awkward literature of that period was both a symptom and a defining feature of the *Second Founding*. The librarians at Chapel Hill, Duke University, Penn Center, the Library of Congress, Mount Holyoke, Amherst, and UCLA saved me weeks of work by guiding me through their immense archives. And at the JFK, I was given special permission to borrow books for an extended period of several months.

My husband, Uwe Knape, supported me through these many years of research, travel, and writing. Without his patience, endurance, and optimism at every stage of the project, this book would not have come into existence. It is dedicated to him and to our daughters, Olga and Anuk, who throughout these years gave me much joy and affection. Without them, as well as my parents and in-laws who traveled many hours to help us out, Petra Schwarzer, my sister-in-law, and Bernie Knape, my brother-in-law, and my dear friends who lured me away from my desk, I would never have come to learn about that “mental adaptation process” commonly known as Reconstruction.

I. The Hopes and Fears of an Era

Introduction

I was learning that one of the best methods of fitting oneself to be a nurse in a hospital, is to be a patient there, for then only can one wholly realize what the men suffer and sigh for; how acts of kindness touch and win; how much or little we are to those about us; and for the first time really see that in coming there we have taken our lives in our hands, and may have to pay dearly for a brief experience.

ALCOTT, *HOSPITAL SKETCHES* 1863: 83¹

1. TRACING THE RHETORIC OF REHABILITATION

In Louisa May Alcott's novella *Hospital Sketches* (1863), the American Civil War is both a national and a personal identity crisis that forces the author's alter ego, one "Nurse Periwinkle," to define her place in the changed reality of the nation at war. As Elizabeth Young has argued, Periwinkle's struggle is part of Alcott's larger project to "reimagine the relation between women and nationhood—or, more specifically, between the disorderly body of the woman author and the diseased body politics of a country at war" (1999: 71). Moving beyond a gendered analysis, scholars agree that the "injured body politic" (ibid: 17) is one of the most powerful metaphors for the conflicts that shaped American culture during the Civil War and Reconstruction, when Abraham Lincoln's 1865 call to "bind up the nation's wounds" became the credo of the day.² In *Rehabilitating Bodies*, Lisa A. Long awards this metaphor

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- 1 Except where noted, quotations from *Hospital Sketches* are from the 1863 edition published by James Redpath, to be found online. Page numbers for *Hospital Sketches* (HS) as well as for other often-quoted primary sources are cited parenthetically in the text.
 - 2 Regarding the rhetoric of rehabilitation see, in particular, David W. Blight (2001); and Lisa A. Long (2004). Other texts that touch upon the use of healing as a metaphor during

an almost mythical status by suggesting that “[t]he Civil War embodies a pliable, quintessentially American idiom of cultural disease; concurrently, it offers an imaginative space where Americans attempt to form rehabilitative strategies specific to contemporary needs” (2004: 99). According to Long, the quasi-therapeutic promise of the Civil War wound inspired nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American authors to time and again return to this scene of individual and collective suffering where the diseased, unstable bodies of the injured, the helping bodies of female nurses, and the presumably “organic insufficiencies of African Americans” (ibid.: 116) inspired much-needed visions of wholeness and renewal.

On a metaphorical level the following chapters are about the status of the nation’s war-induced “wound” and the acknowledgement of, or ideological compensation for, that injured identity in the wake of the *Second Founding*. Instead of concentrating on the war itself this book focusses on Reconstruction. The key question is, simply put, how Americans from the former Union territory imagined the democratic future of the United States, and to what extent they linked their considerations to the discourse of national healing. Unlike much Reconstruction scholarship this study is thus not concerned with the former Confederacy and the rebuilding of the South but with a segment of the Northern population that opposed slavery when it was still in force. By analyzing the work of authors such as Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Emma Edmonds, Henry Ward Beecher, Walt Whitman and Mary Bradley Lane along with non-fictional texts by two early Reconstruction writers, Esther Hill Hawks and John Bennitt, it sheds light on how notions of racial and gender equality were negotiated in among whites in the North after emancipation. By emphasizing the emotional aspect of these negotiations the book hopes to contribute to an understanding of the cultural “climate,” the more general, societal “atmosphere” during the *Second Founding*. As will be shown, this climate led to and was shaped by a broad range of literary styles: in their effort to understand what it meant to be an American during a phase of ongoing sectional, racial, and gendered tensions, Reconstruction authors sought out new ways of expressing their views without necessarily suppressing their own ideological ambivalences, hesitations, and contradictions. This book, then, is about the representation of white postslavery hopes and fears, not about the actual political status quo.

By discussing the texts in the chronology of their appearance these chapters trace a multifaceted process: unfolding before the backdrop of the Civil War and its rhetoric of healing these works have adapted that rhetoric to the changing circumstances of the post-abolition era. Thus although this book owes much to the work of those many, mostly female scholars of the Civil War who have claimed that the admission of thousands of female nurses as helpmates in military hospitals was a watershed

the Civil War include Timothy Sweet (1990); Kathleen Diffley (1992); Elizabeth Young (1999); and Gregory Eiselein (1996).

moment in nineteenth-century gender relations,³ it takes this work as a mere starting point. To explore the discourse of nation-building and citizenship from a more inclusive perspective, this study connects the feminized code of healing to additional contexts. The chapters pair the works of female *and* male authors and link the struggle around race with an analysis of the much-lamented “crisis of gender” (Silber 2006: 13), tracing the evolution of these intersecting paradigms over time and within changing historical contexts. Yet before examining this development this introduction seeks to sketch out the discursive and theoretical framework that governs this book and explain the book’s choice of primary texts. This is what the introduction and the chapter “The Recovering Nation” hope to accomplish. They will elaborate the terms and conditions of this study and highlight the circumstances under which the texts themselves emerged and became culturally meaningful. Only then, by the end of the second chapter, will the outline of this book be introduced.

The “recovering nation” is part of a postwar terminology that also included the metaphor of healing as an important subtext to the *Second Founding*. To read Reconstruction as synonymous with individual and national recovery, however, would be misleading: the former was largely a political and legal issue, the latter refers to a combination of war-induced trauma with the multifaceted, postbellum debate regarding “the substance of an industrializing, urbanizing, and, most important, interracial democracy” (Quigley 2004: x-xi). As David Blight has pointed out, “the imperative of healing and the imperative of justice could not, ultimately, cohabit the same house. The one was the prisoner of memory, the other a creature of the law” (2001: 60).⁴ What he talks about here is not what the former slaves remembered; it is what white Americans from both sides of the conflict tried to preserve while negotiating the rules of the white nation’s unified future. As we all know, the struggle over “whose definition of regeneration would prevail in the emerging political culture” (Blight 2001: 32) was decided in favor of sectional reconciliation: even those who had fought against slavery felt that “healing from the war was simply not the same proposition as doing justice to the four million emancipated slaves and their descendants” (ibid.: 9). The emerging debate had deep philosophical dimensions since “Americans faced an overwhelming task after the Civil War and emancipation: how to understand the tangled relationship between two profound ideas—healing and justice” (ibid.: 3). Re-

3 Exemplary works will be listed later in this chapter.

4 Focusing on New York City after the Civil War, David Quigley’s *The Second Founding* (2004) provides an insightful analysis of the political and legal debates surrounding the two issues.

construction writing furthered this understanding; but in order to grasp its accomplishments we must consider the legal context of its production and appearance. During the first five years after the war

three constitutional amendments were adopted, securing the most far-reaching personal rights ever written into the nation's charter. Attached to each of these measures was powerful congressional enforcement legislation. The federal court system, which the victors in the Civil War had once regarded as a mere tool of the "Slave Power," came to be regarded as a coequal branch of government. (Vorenberg 2006: 141)

Not one of the Reconstruction laws and decisions came through easily—not the 13th Amendment (1865: prohibition of slavery in the United States), the 14th Amendment (1868: citizenship extended to all persons born or naturalized in the United States), or the 15th amendment (1870: against the denial of suffrage on the grounds of race, color, or previous condition of servitude). Fierce congressional debates gave prominence to the deep ideological rifts that ran through American postwar politics and society and poisoned the cultural climate of the day.⁵

While in Congress, notions of racial justice and national reconciliation clashed and resulted in political horse-trading, romantic visions of personal and national union seem to have trumped in the field of literature—De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) comes to mind almost immediately here (cf. Blight 2001: 9). Yet if one moves beyond the few canonized texts of that era, the two tropes seem to be far more closely intertwined than Blight suggests, leading to unresolved tensions within the works themselves. As I hope to show in these chapters, those writers who once shared the same abolitionist mindset were especially likely to struggle with the discrepancy between the democratic ideal and their personal prejudice. While social and ideological divisions along political, ideological, racial, ethnic, classed, and gendered lines applied to them just as much as to anyone else, much of their writing seeks to imaginatively integrate blacks and whites, the poor and the better-off, and men and women, into a future-oriented, presumably democratic order. Justice, in other words, *was* a major concern of Reconstruction writing—along with the rhetoric of sectional reconciliation. As was hinted at earlier, however, none of these texts envision a radical democratic state and society; on the contrary, they often display an awkward discrepancy between democratic ideals and a desire to legitimize marginalization, exclusion, or the delay of basic citizenship

5 Cf., for example, Stephen C. Neff, *Justice in Blue and Gray* (2010); and Christian G. Samito, ed. *Changes in Law and Society during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (2009). Regarding the reconciliatory mood of the era cf. Blight, and Wolfgang Hochbruck, *Die Geschöpfe des Epimetheus* (2011).

rights. The strategies used to justify such limitations were often tentative and surprisingly diverse, and tell us much about the anxieties, ideological differences and tensions even among Northern writers with an anti-slavery legacy. This internal diversity is at the center of the book's analysis, and sets this study apart from existing scholarship. By interpreting the changes and increasing complexity of the entire discourse as a reaction to the larger transformation processes taking place on the social, political, and ideological planes, this book traces the genesis of the wartime rhetoric of rehabilitation from the 1860s to the 1880s, when Reconstruction had officially come to an end.

This study maintains a concept of the text as an expression of lived life, although the impact of personal experience on the text may vary. That the authors of these works were all between twenty and forty years old at the beginning of the war sets them off from the young generation during the 1880s that encountered history through the stories of others. While the generations of the 1860s had struggled to find a voice of their own in which to express their profound sense of crisis, the newcomers from 1880 onward posited the war at the center of an increasingly self-assured culture of public commemoration that assuaged the political and cultural needs of audiences in both the former Union and the so-called *rebel* states. During this time "poetry, fiction, and autobiographical reminiscences" in particular (James 2007: 58) were increasingly used to rewrite the war as a "shared sacrifice for reunion" (Kaplan 1991: 242). Most famously represented by De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, the novel of reunion relied on sectional difference to find new ways of expressing the relationship between language and the real. Interestingly, however, American realism as such is rarely thought of in connection with the Civil War; after all, its best-known representatives had no or very little soldiering experience: William Dean Howells had fled to Europe at the outbreak of the war, Mark Twain quit military service after two weeks, and Henry James was unfit for military service due to an earlier injury. This book will contribute to place their work in a continuum with those (often neglected) texts that emerged from a more immediate experience of the national crisis: by exploring potential strategies of making this experience meaningful, by grappling both with the recent past *and* with the social transformation processes in their surroundings, the private, sensationalist, or otherwise presumably minor texts of the Reconstruction era inspire a rethinking of those late-nineteenth-century developments in American culture that are usually explained by processes of modernization—processes which are themselves often discussed without reference to the war.⁶

6 As John Kasson and others have shown, the war was of course an important engine for these developments as well. Cf. *Civilizing the Machine* (1999).

To emphasize continuities between the war, political Reconstruction, and the last decades of the *long nineteenth century*, this book has started with a quote from Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*. The best-known Civil War nursing narrative and the women's novel of the Civil War period was published during the sectional conflict but remained highly popular throughout the nineteenth century. As a story about female independence and a forerunner to that other story about daughters during wartime, *Little Women* (1868), *Hospital Sketches* was an important literary step in the transformation of gender during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. At the same time, the novella helped establish the metaphor of the hospital as a site of national healing from which a viable American identity emerges: as inspiration for many nursing narratives to come, *Hospital Sketches* was largely responsible for the fabrication of the hospital as a postwar cultural cipher. As a discursive frame and intertextual point of reference, this cipher (which includes the discourses of rehabilitation and humanitarianism) opened doors to those other, more provocative and risky topics and debates about nation-building, citizenship, and the limits of democratic participation that this book is centrally concerned with.

This study seeks to untangle how the wartime hospital functioned as a privileged point of reference in Northern Reconstruction narrative, and how the changing discourse of national healing was connected to other important discourses that helped imagine a meaningful post-emancipation future. The coming pages highlight what may best be described as this flickering Reconstruction moment, this threshold situation where the violent clashes between North and South were, for the first time, put at the service of the future. Held together by the wartime hospital as privileged point of reference, and tracing the discourse of national healing, this study emphasizes that often-overlooked, common concern for the immediate future: it in other words nuances rather than contradicts the prevailing idea of Reconstruction as a phase of mourning and nostalgia.⁷ What comes into view is not an era of recovery and rebuilding, but of fierce negotiations that unfolded against the defining backdrop of America's fundamental democratic promise. According to John W. Draper's 1867 *History of the American Civil War*, it was now incumbent upon "thoughtful men" to seriously consider "whether it be in truth a democracy in which we are living, or whether we are only deluding ourselves with a name." (1867: 3-669, qtd. in Duquette 2010: 61-62). As the historian David Quigley reminded us in 2004, postwar Americans were very much aware that what they engaged in was a "second founding" in a very narrow sense:

7 Cf. Blight, Hochbruck, and (to some degree) Christine Gerhardt, *Rituale des Scheiterns: Die Reconstruction-Periode im amerikanischen Roman* (2002).

Back in 1787, America's first founding had produced a constitution profoundly skeptical of democracy. James Madison and his coauthors in Philadelphia left undecided fundamental questions of slavery and freedom. All that would change in the 1860s and 1870s. Decided at this second founding were the rules of the democratic game. Though lasting only a few short years, Reconstruction involved countless Americans fighting over who would be able to play in that game, and on whose terms. A century and a quarter later, the democracy that emerged at Reconstruction's end remains our inheritance. (ibid.: ix)

This book builds on Quigley's description of Reconstruction as an "unprecedented expansive conversation" along regional, racial, and gendered lines that set the course for further developments in American society and politics (ibid.: x). While a great deal of this conversation emerged in various forms of life-writing, we witness an increasing liberation from these somewhat limiting conventions. Letters and diaries had dominated the wartime era but early Reconstruction saw the publication of novels such as Edmonds's aggressively sensationalist spy story *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1864) and Beecher's middlebrow domestic novel *Norwood* (1867). These clearly departed from the claim of truth that defined the more factual genres of the battlefield years, embraced a selective view of historical representation, and openly sought to imaginatively solve the contradictions of the present by taking refuge in fiction and poetry. Walt Whitman's varied postwar writings and Mary Bradley Lane's utopian novel *Mizora* (1881-82) suggest even more outspoken alternatives by promoting textual experimentation as a means to adequately express the changing needs of a new era. By analyzing these texts together with a wartime diary (by Esther Hill Hawks, a female doctor) and the Civil War letters of John Bennitt (a Union surgeon), the following chapters show how a concern for the future inspired what was, for the most part, a struggle for form. By reading this as a symptom of a more general crisis of orientation, this study goes beyond the political and legal reordering processes commonly associated with the *Second Founding* and instead traces what Leslie Butler describes as a key aspect of those difficult years:

The Civil War and its aftermath elicited reconstructions in intellectual terms no less than in social, political, or economic ones. No matter how one defines "Reconstruction"—as the reentry of the former Confederate states into the Union, as the adjustment to the emancipation of some four million slaves, or as the integration of the national economy under a newly powerful centralized state—the process of moving from Civil War to a civil peace required mental adaptation. (2006: 173)⁸

8 Butler here relies on the work of Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), reprint (2000); Robert B. Westbrook, "Fighting for the American Family: Private

In keeping with what Blight has called the Reconstruction “struggle over ideas, interests, and memory” (2001: 51), this “mental adaptation” was experienced differently by individual people, some of who shared their thoughts and feelings in the literature of the day. Struggling to define both a nation in the making and one’s place within this imaginary construct, the writings of this period form a multi-vocal, often self-contradictory conversation about what it meant to be an American. It is this debate, this multifaceted “mental adaptation,” that will be unfolded in these chapters. By spotlighting six vastly different views of American society at different moments during this process, this book narrates one story of Reconstruction among others (hopefully) to come. The emerging narrative is neither straightforward nor simple: meandering, headed in many directions simultaneously, and interrupted by numerous setbacks, it traces a surprisingly complex and multi-centered development.

2. CONSTRUCTING THE RECONSTRUCTION NARRATIVE

In writing about Reconstruction, the literary scholar is still very much a pioneer. Those politically decisive years are the least analyzed phase of nineteenth-century literary production, and yet they were as productive as they were chaotic. Criteria for choosing from such a large body of works are difficult to determine. Why select this author and not the other? What can be gained by moving from life-writing to fiction? Why discuss a broad spectrum of genres instead of concentrating on, say, autobiographies?

The answer has much to do with the dynamics of that multifaceted conversation among whites from the Reconstruction North that was sketched out earlier. By covering a variety of genres reaching from personal letters to little known and more famous novels to canonized poetry, this publication wishes to emphasize that Reconstruction implied an aesthetic struggle as well as a political one: since genre is always also functional, the *Second Founding* fought to find an adequate way of expressing the adaptation processes of the American mind.⁹ The marked shift from private forms of life writing (diaries, journals, letters) to more imaginative, fictional, poetic modes, however, also suggests a development: American Reconstruction writers, it may be argued, quickly reached the generic limits of truth-bound, confessional writing and took to increasingly fictional modes to create individual visions of the nation to come.

Interests and Political Obligations in World War II,” (1993: 195); and Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (1994).

9 As Eliza Richards reminds us, this struggle for adequacy began during the Civil War, when questions arose as to “[w]hat genres are best suited for the cultural tasks of making meaning and memory from chaotic events?” (2005: 349).

Significantly, however, much of this writing authorizes its ideas by maintaining loose ties to that earlier claim of authenticity and to a past experience of the war. It is, then, this very specific, semi-fictional (or quasi-autobiographical) textual quality of Reconstruction writing that this book focuses on in order to analyze the postbellum adaptation process.

This involves talking about different target audiences as well: Esther Hill Hawks's journal was *intended* for publication (though it remained unpublished during her lifetime) but more private in scope than Louisa May Alcott's fictionalized autobiography; John Bennett's wartime letters had one main addressee, his wife. Sarah Emma Edmonds's sensationalist novella and Henry Ward Beecher's religiously inflected domestic novel, by contrast, sought a large readership to which their social agendas might appeal. Walt Whitman's Reconstruction oeuvre (which includes poems and published journal excerpts) was not only *intended* for a broad readership but actually reached a certain level of popularity. And there is little doubt that Mary Bradley Lane's anti-male utopia reached a predominantly female audience. Thus while this study pairs texts to highlight the similarities of intention and the ideological disparities that existed during a given historical moment, it abstains from suggesting intertextual conversations in an immediate sense.

Despite such qualifications my choice of authors is relatively homogeneous. This may disappoint readers who, like Eliza Richards, have criticized scholarship on the Civil War as one-sided:¹⁰ all the writers hail from the white Northern middle class. This segment of society expanded after the Civil War as its members engaged in new industrial enterprises, thereby securing its hegemonic position in a changing United States. Idealizing individual agency and deeply suspicious of government intervention, this newly expanding middle class clearly contributed to the demise of Reconstruction (cf. Richardson 2007). A shared economic and educational background, however, does not imply similar views of democracy, nor does it preclude multiple strategies for voicing one's concerns and opinions. One of the challenges I faced while working on this study was to show just how ideologically diverse these textual voices actually were, and how the negotiations within the group ultimately contributed to the failure of the *Second Founding*.

To create a more rounded analysis it would have been helpful to also include black voices. Unfortunately, during my initial research I found them to be scarce, if

10 In her review of Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War* (2001) and Kathleen Diffley, *To Live and Die* (2002), Richards asks: "who has the authority to speak, both in terms of the capacity to transmit experience and in terms of moral sanction?" See "Print Culture and Popular Imagination (2005: 349)." Richards celebrates Fahs' effort to identify a "set of shared rhetorics" in American popular culture, regardless of regional origin and ideology or of gender, class, or race. *Ibid.*

not (especially during the early phase of Reconstruction) glaringly absent.¹¹ This is partly due to the book's focus on the hospital as an interracial *contact zone*: the few black doctors who served in so-called *contraband*¹² hospitals and the many black nurses who volunteered for service left very little written material.¹³ Even Charlotte Forten's diary, which mentions her brief service as a nurse among the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry, could not be matched with a black male account of that era.¹⁴

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- 11 The best-known African-American authors who have experienced the Civil War and who also wrote about Reconstruction are listed in Richard A. Long's *Black Writers and the American Civil War* (1988). The list does not contain Elizabeth Keckley, whose autobiography is an important contribution to black Reconstruction literature, from a decisively female viewpoint. Cf. Keckley, *Behind the Scenes Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1989). See Young's *Disarming the Nation* (1999) for an in-depth analysis of Keckley's work. Young's chapter on Frances Harper mentions additional African-American works about the Civil War, most of them, however, published during the last decade of the nineteenth century and later. (Ibid.: 194-95).
 - 12 The term was first used by general Benjamin F. Butler, who declared that slaves could find refuge in Union camps as "contrabands of war." The term was highly problematic since it did not settle the legal situation of these people: being a *contraband* did not imply freedom from bondage. When the practice was formalized in connection with the Second Confiscation Act of July 17, 1862, these *contrabands* were requested to offer their work in exchange for protection in such camps. For a discussion of the term see Barbara J. Fields, "Who Freed the Slaves?," *The Civil War*, ed. Geoffrey Ward (1990).
 - 13 Regarding the role of African-American hospital workers see Robert Slawson, *Prologue to Change: African Americans in Medicine in the Civil War Era* (2006). When I began this study I considered working on freedmen's schools as another site of interracial contact. I still believe that this could be very fruitful, as it would include African Americans from both the South *and* the North and white teachers and school officials from both parts of the country. It would, however, be an entirely new and in large parts archival endeavor that would focus not so much on fiction but on letters, diaries, and shorter articles. For an introduction to the topic I recommend Heather A. Williams' *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (2005). I thank Heather for taking her time discussing this option with me, back in 2006.
 - 14 I briefly considered writing a joint chapter on Hawks and Forten, but that wouldn't have solved the dilemma of assigning a somewhat marginal position to African-American voices in this project, as I have not been able to find an African-American text that fit my criteria, and that was authored during the years between 1865 and 1877. A "male source" that I considered at an early stage of this project were the letters that George E. Stephens published in the *Weekly Anglo-American*. Yet while the most famous black war correspondent of the era offers a unique African-American perspective of race relations and

Susie King Taylor's *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp* was the only extensive African-American nursing narrative that has found its way to the shelves, but it was not published until the early twentieth century. And while Francis Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* features black and white hospital workers and patients and is set in a middle-class context, this novel was published long after the time period covered by this study: it could only have been included as an appendix, a positioning that would have subordinated Harper to the other authors that are treated here rather than making her an integral part of this book's analysis.¹⁵

That Harper's novel was one of the first by an African-American woman, and that Taylor published her diary very late and at her own expense, hints at a further reason for the dearth of African-American texts from the postbellum period: at a time when white veterans from both armies engaged in rituals of "purposeful forgetting" (like marching together to commemorate their dead), "[b]lack memories" were "fundamentally at odds" with "national reunion" (Blight 2001: 10)¹⁶ and there was simply no mainstream demand for an African-American nurse's viewpoint. Particularly with regard to African Americans from the former Confederacy there were also economic and educational reasons for this void: slaves in the plantation South (many of whom came to serve in Civil War hospitals¹⁷) had been denied the chance to learn how to

politics during the Civil War the journalistic nature of his writing makes it ineligible in the context of my project, that seeks to examine the not so obvious fears and hopes of Reconstruction. Donald Yacovone, ed. *A Voice of Thunder: The Civil War Letters of George E. Stephens* (1997). An interesting southern black view of the era comes from William B. Gould, a *contraband* who escaped from slavery and served in the American navy during the Civil War. He wrote what is "(p)erhaps the best summary of what blacks fought for" during the wartime period. Cf. James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in The Civil War* (1998: 128). Apart from the regional category I decided against using Gould's diary because as a sailor he was far removed from the actual events in the United States; and there is no connection to the Civil War hospital or the discourse of healing. William B. Gould IV, ed. *Diary of a Contraband: The Civil War Passage of a Black Soldier* (2002).

- 15 Regarding the relationship between Harper's novel and Civil War / Reconstruction literature at large cf. James, *Freedom Bought With Blood* (2007: 63-102).
- 16 Regarding the politics of national memory after the Civil War see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997).
- 17 As the two examples mentioned show, African Americans' experiences of the Civil War and Reconstruction differed immensely, (not only) depending on where they came from,

read and write for generations: large-scale participation in the postwar public debate was therefore sadly limited. In 1870, that is five years after the installment of freedmen's schools in the postbellum South, almost 80 percent of blacks were still reported to be illiterate compared to 11.5 percent of whites.¹⁸ (The perspectives of those uneducated whites, and of non-English-speaking immigrants, are equally missing from my retracing of the Reconstruction debate).

Eliza Richards has pointed to another core problem in Civil War scholarship much of which focuses on narrative setting rather than publication date: “[q]uestions of chronology and temporality” (2005: 355). Extending this important remark to the Reconstruction years, the book follows the chronology of textual *production*, beginning with a diary that was started during the first year of the war and ending with a utopian novel that appeared during the early 1880s. Mary Bradley Lane, author of *Mizora*, was in her mid-forties when her novel was published, and while she was not immune to the new questions and challenges of the post-1877 era, her book insists on their connection to the Civil War experience. Middle-aged writers like Lane and older ones like Walt Whitman had personal memories of emancipation, the president's assassination, the Reconstruction Acts, the three amendments to the Constitution, and the political muddle of the Johnson and Grant presidencies. These authors shared a first-hand experience of the ambivalence, shock, anger, and frustration that went along with these transformative processes, so it is no wonder that they tended to struggle more with constructing an ideologically coherent narrative than did authors of the next generation.¹⁹ That these struggles often show on the level of narrative construction, while perhaps lamentable aesthetically, is an asset for the purposes of this book, as these narrative fractures say much about the mental adaptation process with which the texts—and their authors—are centrally concerned.

As an important phase in American political history, Reconstruction has been a major topic of historical research, much of which focuses on the rebuilding of Southern society²⁰ and on the political, economic, legal, and social aspects of Southern

what their educational background was, etc. For an insight into African-American middle-class lives in 19th century New York City see Carla Peterson, *Black Gotham: African American Family and Community in Nineteenth-Century New York* (2012).

- 18 Cf. “National Assessment of Adult Literacy,” *National Center of Education Statistics / U.S. Department of Education*. See also Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (1978); and, for a short summary, Richard J. Altenbaugh, *The American People and Their Education* (2003: 88-95).
- 19 Regarding the “standard form” of the post-1880 war novel cf. Richard Schuster, *American Civil War Novels to 1880* (1961: 2).
- 20 Eric Foner's work must be mentioned here, especially his *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988); and (together with Olivia Mahoney)

Reconstruction.²¹ Race relations are, of course, a major subject of this scholarship,²² but there has also been an increasing interest in how gender has shaped the postbellum South²³ and on religion as a prominent factor in Southern social history.²⁴ For this study, however, the focus remains on the North, and particularly on a segment of Northern society that may be categorized as “radical” by the era’s standards. By highlighting the ideological rifts that existed within this particular group, and by dwelling at length on the individual struggles of each author to define his or her concept of Reconstruction, this book wishes to emphasize what Hugh Davis (in a recent study regarding African-American organizing after emancipation) has stressed as well: it

America’s Reconstruction: People and Politics After the Civil War (1995). Another recent, and very useful, anthology is Thomas J. Brown, ed. *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (2006). It offers a valid overview of the previous scholarship on the subject and suggests additional directions for future research. See in particular Brown’s “Introduction,” which traces the development from the early 20th century “Dunning School” to the revisionist “school” of W.E.B. DuBois, and Eric Foner’s groundbreaking work. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds. *The Great Task Remaining Before Us: Reconstruction as America’s Continuing Civil War* (2010) focuses on a broad range of individual case studies of postbellum Southern society and indicates the latest developments in Reconstruction studies. Another book-length study that I have found particularly useful with regard to my own work is Carol Faulkner’s *Women’s Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen’s Aid Movement* (2004). It offers important insights into the lives of black and white women during Reconstruction.

- 21 See Stephen A. West’s contribution to Thomas J. Brown’s *Reconstructions* for a very good overview of this scholarship (“A General Remodeling of Every Thing,” 10-39). The intellectual history of the South, however, remains understudied. See Butler (2006: 184). While a couple of scholars have started investigating the persistence of Southern conservatism “no work of equal ambition to *The Inner Civil War* has emerged from southern thinkers, though such a study would not only be valuable in its own right but also might allow for an intellectual history that could compare the impact of the war on northern and southern intellectuals, as Edmund Wilson and Daniel Aaron have done for literary figures” (ibid.).
- 22 Steven Hahn’s groundbreaking *A Nation under Our Feet* (2003) is still the standard textbook here. I also recommend John Hope Franklin’s *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1994) as a valid introduction to the issue of race relations in the former Confederacy.
- 23 See, e.g. Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (2004).
- 24 See Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (1998).

was not only the South that needed reconstructing (2011). Following the call of scholars like Davis and Heather Cox Richardson (cf. 2004)²⁵ to devote more attention to Reconstruction in the North, the next chapters argue that tensions and insecurities regarding the meaning of democracy *within the North* contributed to the demise of the *Second Founding*.

These internal fissures of course go back to the antebellum period: Louis Menand refers to the relationship between prewar unionists and abolitionists as a “war within the North” (2001: 6). After the war not every abolitionist shared the radical Republican concept of racial integration: a brief glimpse at the primary texts that have been selected for this study here reveals strong disagreements among this group of former antislavery proponents. Their views of race, gender, and religion (to name but a few), and their strategies for substantiating their respective claims or legitimizing their viewpoints, diverged considerably depending on the author’s age, religious outlook, and, most of all, whether it was a man or a woman writing. By the end of the war (which led, among other things, to an anti-feminist backlash) this group that seemed, at first sight, to be least responsible for the lack of support for racial integration revealed itself to be ambivalent about its own racial convictions, insecure in its understanding of democracy, self-absorbed, and fractured.

When the Civil War was over, former abolitionists could not easily return to antebellum ideals of community and racial harmony. In *Loyal Subjects* (2010), Elizabeth Duquette explains that Reconstruction-era Americans faced an emotional dilemma and a symbolic void: the “image of a happy (monogamous, consent-based) nuclear family” that had added emotional depth to the political concept of the American nation before the war was no longer easily accessible. This is why, on the plane of culture and political rhetoric, the idea of loyalty had, at least partially and temporarily, replaced sentiment (only to help re-establish “sympathy’s reconstruction later in the century”) (Duquette 2010: 4).²⁶ John W. De Forest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* is the earliest instance of this replacement: merging emotional closeness, authoritative guidance, and “contract” relations, “romances of reunion” (cf. Silber 1997)²⁷ helped envision sectional reconciliation as a matter of the head *and* the heart (cf.

25 Richardson points to Northern controversies over class (and class-related theories) as a crucial factor in the much-lamented failure of Reconstruction.

26 Jennifer C. James makes a similar point. She emphasizes, however, that sentimentality never ceased to influence Civil War literature. Written “for popular audiences who had not yet lost their taste for sensation and sentimentality,” she argues, “the hundreds of Civil War novels of the nineteenth and twentieth century were decidedly unconcerned with realistic presentations of modern war.” J. C. James (2007: 54). I do not find the two views to be mutually exclusive.

27 Regarding the increasing number of such narratives from the 1880s onward see *ibid.* (58).

Duquette 2010: 61-99). While this study is not about sectional reconciliation as such but about Northern views of race and gender, I too will discuss the appropriation of antebellum sentimental formulas and their limits.

One should not expect this to be a study of Northern intellectual life. By stressing the tensions *within* and *between* certain fictional and non-fictional texts, and by emphasizing the individual struggle for post-emancipation narrative closure, this book views Reconstruction as an unfinished and highly dynamic process of cultural negotiation regarding the meaning of America and Americanness. This, then, sets it at a critical distance to George Fredrickson's generalizing claim of a conservative turn among the American educated elite after the Civil War (1993).²⁸

As a literary scholar I of course limit my examination to the material I am best prepared to analyze. And yet this book owes much to historians such as David Blight (who shows that remembering and forgetting were vital to national reconciliation, which took place at the expense of African-American equality) and Edward Blum (who analyzes the role of Northern Protestantism in white reconciliatory culture).²⁹ It is, significantly, *historians* like these two who must be credited for having turned to the *literature* of the day to make their point while scholars of American literature and culture, with their expertise in analyzing textual material and the cultural dynamics that evolve from it, have remained surprisingly silent. Apart from references to William deForest, Albion Tourg e, and (occasionally) Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, most histories of American postwar literature concentrate on the realism of the Gilded Age or (with the advent of gender studies) on texts formerly considered to be "minor," including those written in the regionalist mode. Overviews of nineteenth-century American literature commonly frame the Civil War as a rupture in creative output, as the younger generation either served in the army (and had no time to write when they returned) or spent the war in Europe. According to John Stauffer the decade between 1860 and 1870 was marked by a "dwindling of literary output" among "New England men who had been prominent and prolific writers before the war." Stauffer focuses

28 James M. McPherson's *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (1975) is one of the best-known challenges to Fredrickson's view. For an overview of the debate among historians that was provoked by Fredrickson see Butler (2006: 175-81).

29 Blight, *Race and Reunion*; and Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic* (2005). Regarding cultural transformation processes in the former Confederacy I wish to mention Peter W. Bardaglio's *Reconstructing the Household* (1995). This book provides a unique insight into the interconnections between gender and the law before and after the Civil War. Michael T. Bernath's ambitious book about the cultural foundations of Confederate nationalism is titled *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (2010).

on Nathaniel Hawthorne—he died in 1864—and Ralph Waldo Emerson—whose mental faculties declined after the war. These authors were relatively old when the war started, and did not participate as combatants; their romantic approach to literature was no longer deemed “an appropriate mode for representing life,” leading to what Stauffer calls “a crisis of manhood among Northern white men” that lasted for years after the war. Stauffer significantly does not mention Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, both of whom *did* write about the Civil War and Reconstruction but are still not commonly recognized for their work in that context. By and large, however, Stauffer has a point, and he must be credited for pointing out that women’s writing “burgeoned” between 1860 and 1870, with Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott its most visible contributors (2006: 121). Stowe, however, never managed to replicate her antebellum success, and while Alcott began her career as America’s most popular author of girls’ novels with a book she published during Reconstruction (*Little Women*, 1868 and 1869), she too is not usually recognized as a “Reconstruction writer.” Accordingly, one of the effects of the following chapters is to reposition Whitman and Alcott as writers of the *Second Founding*. In an effort to join the high and low, canonized and forgotten works, they are discussed alongside colleagues who published only one book (and sometimes the one they wrote was published posthumously, as in Hawks’s case) and therefore never received much scholarly attention.³⁰

My work owes a considerable debt to studies of gender and the Civil War and Reconstruction. Most of these studies come from scholars of women’s history who—from the mid-nineteen-sixties onward—have shown the transformative effect of the Civil War on American gender relations: Elizabeth Massey, Catherine Clinton, Drew Gilpin Faust, Nina Silber—to name but a very few.³¹ Kathleen Diffley, Jane E.

30 When in 2006 I visited the most important archive of Civil War literature, the Reverend Richard H. Wilmer Jr. Collection of Civil War Novels at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it had not been used for over fifty years. Significantly, however, this seems to be changing: I very recently learned that Amanda Claybaugh of Harvard University grapples with questions similar to mine and is currently working on a literary history of Reconstruction. Cf. Alvin Powell, “Unraveling Reconstruction,” *Harvard Gazette*, 16 Dec. 2010.

31 Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades: American Women and the Civil War* (1966). For a first glimpse into this scholarship I recommend Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (2006); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (1996). Another important author is Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (1994); and *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (1999). For a view of the Civil War and Reconstruction in the South

Schultz, and Elizabeth Young are among the few notable scholars who, with a background in literary studies, have contributed important books and articles to the study of Reconstruction.³² These works have helped uncover the function of literary and visual forms of expression in negotiating the interconnections between gender, class, and race, thereby opening new venues into understanding the war and its aftermath. All of these works, however, focus on women alone, confirming Fahs's complaint that the tradition of Civil War scholarship is highly selective and rarely aims at a more inclusive picture of American society.³³ By analyzing both men's and women's texts, the following chapters aim to draw that more inclusive picture.

This book of course also considers important single studies such as Gregory Eiselein's *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era*, which contains a chapter on the progressivist humanitarianism in Walt Whitman's war-related oeuvre; Alice Fahs's *The Imagined Civil War*, which investigates how the war became meaningful via various forms of popular expression; or Kirk Savage's *Standing Soldiers Kneeling Slaves*, which analyzes how Americans remembered slavery in the public

see LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (2005); and Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Trials and Triumphs: Women of the American Civil War* (1991).

- 32 Kathleen Diffley's edited anthology *Witness to Reconstruction. Constance Fenimore Woolson and the Postbellum South, 1873-1894* (2011) focuses on a Northern observer figure and author. Works on women's writing in the context of the Civil War itself include Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (2004); LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (1995); and Judith Scheffler, "'Uncommon, bad, and dangerous': Personal Narratives of Imprisoned Confederate Women, 1861-1865," *Women's Life-Writing: Finding Voice/Building Community*, ed. Linda S. Coleman (1997). The contributors to Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber's eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (1992) focus on both female and male experiences of the war. Lyde Cullen Sizer examines *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* (2000). Jeanie Attie does the same in *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (1998). Drew Gilpin Faust's contribution to James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr.'s *Writing the Civil War* provides an overview of the scholarship on gender and the Civil War that had come out until then: "'Ours as Well as that of the Men': Women and Gender in the Civil War" (1998). Contrary to Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War* (1987). Edmund Wilson includes both male and female writers (white and black) in *Patriotic Gore* (1994). Both authors focus on the North and South.
- 33 In *The Imagined Civil War* Fahs argues that the turn of the nineteenth century was dominated by regionalist and masculinist reinventions, while more recently a focus on feminist and African-American readings dominates Civil War scholarship. (2001: 6).

realm. Wolfgang Hochbruck's *Die Geschöpfe des Epimetheus* (2011, published in German) is the most inclusive analysis of Civil War veteran culture to date, and has alerted me to how deeply entrenched the *Second Founding* was in wartime nostalgia. While I rarely dwell on these works at much length they have sharpened my view of the era and inspired how I have approached the book's topic.

The single most significant point of reference that was shared by the men and women who imaginatively reconstructed the nation was the Civil War hospital and the discourse of health attached to it. As Joan Burbick has shown in her analysis of nineteenth-century culture as an effort to overcome national disease, this was hardly new: "The need to constitute a universal body for the American nation," she argues, emerged through a discourse in which "questions of political differences became submerged within a discussion of somatic rules as this 'constitution' created hierarchies of the flesh, demarcating gender, race, and class" (1994: 304). Yet while Burbick focuses on the antebellum period, my own analysis highlights the changing function of the Civil War hospital as the real and symbolic site of American suffering during an era fraught with moral concerns. It seems that living among maimed veterans, job-seeking ex-slaves, and increasingly impatient feminists made Reconstruction writers take to the seemingly uncontroversial, sentimental discourse of healing to construe and legitimize their vision of the *Second Founding*. Inspired by Burbick's view of the diseased Republic as well as Lisa Long's attempt to decipher the cultural meaning of disease in close connection with the Civil War (2004: 19-21), this study unfolds in the larger framework of changing historical circumstances. It traces across time a loosely knit intertextual dialogue that considers not only the war with its death toll of more than two percent of the nation's inhabitants and many more who returned with visible and invisible wounds, but also the manifold transformations in American society during the postwar decade: "the rise of Darwinian evolution and the authority of science, corporate capitalism, and the modern university" and "the challenges of socialism, feminism, and countless other 'isms'" (Butler 2006: 174) that catapulted Americans into a new era. While all of these changes have long attracted scholars of American culture, they are almost never seen in connection to the Civil War and Reconstruction. This study takes up Amy Kaplan's critique of a literary history that focuses on aesthetic epochs (1992: esp. 104-60) and challenges established boundaries of classification. By doing so it hopes to spur further scholarship on the potential overlap between Gilded Age and Progressive Era literature and its distant, Reconstruction relative(s).

3. MAZEWAYS AND HUMAN FIGURATIONS

If earlier Reconstruction scholarship has been majorly concerned with the era's political and legal transformation processes there is now a trend to investigate the *feel* of that period. Duquette attunes us to a deep emotional instability caused by the breakdown of the antebellum family, and Faust attests to a "presence of death." Post-bellum Americans, she writes, were survivors who had to "assume new identities established by their persistence in face of others' annihilation." The common denominator is war-induced trauma; the horrors Americans on both sides had faced "forced them to question their ability to cope, their commitment to the war, even their faith in a righteous God" (Faust 2008: xi and xviii) Hardly anyone will doubt that in order to adequately grasp the emotional climate during Reconstruction we must take seriously that "death created the modern American union" (ibid.: xiv). At the same time, however, such considerations strongly suggest that individuals were in dire need of visions to inspire a future that recognizes the past and yet inspired a fresh and hopeful view of United States society. For the contemporary scholar, one of the best ways to understand and systematically grasp such visions lies in the concept of the *human figuration* that in the following will be adapted to specific situations during the *Second Founding*. Introduced by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (2000; orig. publ. in 1939) the *human figuration* describes societies as constellations of human interdependencies and power relations that develop over time. Importantly, such constellations are not stable but dynamic and procedural, leading, in a second step, to what Elias famously called the *civilizing process*. Describing the long-term evolution of human behavior in Western societies, the latter refers to the regulation of the self as the consequence of a growing awareness of one's relationship to others. The scope of this all-embracing insight into the "psychogenesis" of Western culture (ibid.: 402) makes the *civilizing process* unusable to describe such a short time span as Reconstruction. The concept of the *human figuration*, however, seems promising indeed. With its help this book will single out and examine particular moments during the dynamic *human figuration* process of Reconstruction. By suggesting that each of the texts in question is a direct outcome and interpretation of a point in time during the larger historical development, the following chapters describe what Elias calls *stills* (a translation of the German term *Standbild*) (ibid.).³⁴ By analyzing a total of seven *stills* that were created during the early-, mid-, and late-Reconstruction periods, this study suggests a loose cultural development over time. By tracing this (imaginary) *human figuration* process, these chapters shed light on a crucial phase of cultural consolidation, and on the strategies used by an elite of Northern whites to voice its

34 On the term *figuration* itself see particularly the "Introduction" to *Civilizing Process*.

ideological concerns. This, then, helps me identify these Americans' fears and hopes regarding the setup of the future society.

The development just mentioned relied on a number of established narratives, norms, and cultural images that were used repeatedly to enable communication across gendered and ideological lines and authorize varying visions of the American self and society. Among these cultural codes were fantasies of cross-sectional romance, the quest for the kingdom of God on earth, the idea of "going native," visions of a pastoral order, of spiritual bonding with a metaphysical whole, and of healing the nation. Importantly, however, the incitements for using this shared repertoire differ considerably for each author: Louisa May Alcott, the young feminist writer who grew up in one of America's most radical families of reformers, exploited the image of the nurse to entirely different ideological ends than, say, the popular New England "Spokesman for a Middle-Class America,"³⁵ Henry Ward Beecher, who adapted it to the needs and values of an earlier, more conservative generation. Writing at about the same time, both authors invoked the idea of woman as motherly helpmate to support their respective cultural interventions, thereby turning the figure of the nurse into a symbolic battlefield.

It is only in retrospect that we can get a fuller view of this battlefield and analyze what Jane Tompkins has called the *cultural work* of individual texts. To identify the methods used for "expressing and shaping the social context that produced [these texts]" (Tompkins 1986: 200) this study relies on a limited number of works. We must not forget, however, that these belong in a larger cultural field of expression with roots in both the antebellum and postbellum eras. Reconstruction was thus not only a phase of acute political, legal, and social consolidation, but also an in-depth negotiation of the country's cultural heritage. In its effort to build a new nation on the ideals of the founders, Reconstruction was future-oriented *against all odds*—even if some desired that the future look like the past (cf. Duquette 221): the sheer number of texts produced, many of them with a very personal ring, highlights the dawning of a new phase in American culture, marked by a readiness for individual participation and a widespread desire to be recognized as politically mature citizens.

To better understand the relationship between individual texts and the larger culture, this study is based on the principles formulated by Anthony F. C. Wallace in *Culture and Personality* (1961). Dating back to the early nineteen-sixties, this standard work in modern anthropology criticizes the scholarly tendency to "overestimate not only the psychological but also the cultural homogeneity of even small societies with simple cultures" (Wallace May 27, 1985). Picking up this warning, these chapters assign a central role to the enormous internal differences among Northerners who

35 Cf. the title of Clifford E. Clark, *Henry Ward Beecher: Spokesman for a Middle-Class America* (1978).

before and during the war had shared an anti-slavery attitude. Wallace, in other words, provides me with a concept to substantiate my initial impression that there exists, within the postbellum North, an astonishing fragmentation along ideological, political, and emotional lines that has been overlooked due to the dominant narrative of sectional division. Such pulling apart, however, makes it all the more crucial to understand what held this group together and enabled its impact on the larger culture. Again, *Culture and Personality* offers a valid theoretical starting point, as it explains how a society can develop in a certain collective way precisely because its individual members are the products of experiences they do not necessarily share with others (cf. Wallace 1961: 21). According to Wallace, misunderstandings are not only an unavoidable dimension of the human experience but the very basis of successful social interaction, and fundamental to the dynamics of a given culture. What, then, is the “glue” that binds a group together? Wallace agrees with earlier anthropologists that cultures rely on the replication of uniformity (in certain behaviors and beliefs handed down from one generation to the next), but he finds this insufficient to explain what is unique about a given culture and how that uniqueness persists under changing historical, legal, and social circumstances. The differences between cultures, he concludes, depend not so much on the symbols and codes shared by each member of a society, but on how “various individuals organize themselves culturally into orderly, expanding, changing societies” (ibid.: 23) even as they misunderstand each other fundamentally. By applying this definition of culture to Northern Reconstruction America, this book hopes to show that what made this culture recognizable was the way individual authors represented their ideas of society and social change. What held them together was not only a fixed set of cultural symbols and codes that they all relied on, but a shared sense of competition and democratic self-empowerment. Building on the assumption that white Northerners shared a culturally specific understanding of how to effectively participate in Reconstruction’s highly contested, asynchronous cultural sphere, this study suggests an underlying style that was a prerequisite to being recognized as a legitimate participant in the competition between various religious, philosophical, psychological, scientific and aesthetic approaches that vied for recognition in the reordering of American society.

Culture and Personality was developed in the context of anthropology, yet the concept is applicable to textual representations (and interactions) as well: as a practice and a means of communication, literary and non-literary texts are a defining part of the cultural dynamics described by Wallace.³⁶ By participating in a nationwide

36 This is not to deny the profound differences between printed texts and face-to-face conversations that involve the physical aspects of language (voice, mimicry, gestures, etc.), the effects of which have much to do with the relationship between the individuals involved.

controversy regarding the place of the former slaves—but also of other minorities, including white women—the individual Northern Reconstruction text constitutes both an individual, multi-vocal world apart (that negotiates the contexts that surround it) and a group-specific contribution to the (flawed) conversation that makes Reconstruction culture unique. By analyzing this simultaneity, the following chapters enable a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics of postemancipation America.

Culture and Personality helped me choose from an overwhelmingly large archive of possible texts and to define the focus of this project. To construct a plausible and insightful narrative of Reconstruction, I limited my analysis to this Northern subgroup not to show how it “replicates uniformity” but to identify what enabled its in-group negotiations in the first place: being influenced by similar experiences and debates, (former) abolitionists from the North shared what Wallace calls “capacities for mutual prediction” (24) based on an understanding of what was important and meaningful in their culture (self-reliance, democracy, freedom of speech, the Bible, science, gender norms, etc.) and what were adequate means to bring these ideas across (the confessional mode, a sincere interest in the matter, a laugh-at-life sense of humor, etc.). Only after identifying this common ground on the level of content and of form can the vast ideological differences between these texts be related to the larger context of the national culture in which they were set.

What, then, is the status of the single text that stands at the center of each chapter? We may once more rely on Wallace, who speaks about an individual’s “mental image,” or *mazeway*, to describe that person’s interpretation of the real: defined as the product of individual meaning-construction, the *mazeway* “consists of an extremely large number of assemblages or cognitive residues of perception, and is used by its holder as a true and more or less complete representation of the operating characteristics of a ‘real’ world” (15). From a more material-oriented, social theory standpoint, such a conception of the real as perception may seem problematic; for this study, however, this is not an obstacle: after all, its focus is on representations. Yet the *mazeway* is not entirely removed from the context of its emergence: *how* Northern Reconstruction writers appropriate the values, images, and techniques available in their culture relies on both their individual *mazeways* and how they positioned themselves in the conversation described earlier (cf. Wallace 1961: 16-18). This self-positioning, however, can only be touched upon in the conclusion: none of the texts is written as a direct response to another, and even in the one case where such a reference plays a role, various other philosophical and religious contexts are equally important. Before highlighting these contexts, however, the following chapter wishes to unfold the historical basis that motivated the selection of primary texts: a concept of the Civil War hospital as a test case for both the democratic status quo and its (real and desired) limits, a new understanding of woman’s role in society that goes back to the Civil War, and a placement of Reconstruction as continuum rather than fixed historical phase.