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Living outside the Blast: Andrew Hudgins's *After the Lost War*

Andrew Hudgins published his narrative poem, *After the Lost War*, in 1988. It was well received by the critics and enjoyed good sales among the poetry-reading public, although it has as yet failed to make a significant impact on the broader (and obviously more lucrative) category of novel readers. My concern in this short essay is both to consider the work for its very strong individual merits and to see whether it belongs to a tradition of historical narrative-verse in America — to see, indeed, whether such a tradition can be said to exist. In particular, I am interested in seeing how the crucial experiences of American history (for example, frontier exploration and the Civil War) have impinged upon its poetry.

In the account of his frontier childhood, *Wolf Willow* (1963), the writer Wallace Stegner recalls prevailing attitudes to the study of history: "In general the assumption of all of us, child or adult, was that this was a new country and that a new country had no history. History was something that applied to other places" (28). The paradoxical fact, as Stegner points out, was that seldom had "historical changes occurred so fast. From grizzlies, buffaloes and Indians still only half-possessed of the horse and gun, the historical parabola to Dust Bowl and near depopulation covered only about sixty years" (29-30).

Stegner devoted his life to an attempt to recover a sense of the past for the West, acting on the notion that responsible use of the land (which means a concern with its possible future) depends on a knowledge of its past. However, it is not only environmentally

concerned writers (Wendell Berry is another significant name) who have been bothered by the American lack of concern with the past. Despite all the talk about America as the Land of the Future, a new Eden for a new Adam (or a new Jerusalem for a new Chosen People), it is since at least the nineteenth century that American writers have been seeking to provide some kind of historical ballast for their countrymen's more buoyant rhetoric of progress.

Poets perhaps felt the pressure more strongly than others to provide the new nation with a suitably dignified sense of its past as well as its radiant fllture. There were numerous attempts to turn its heroic story of discovery and frontier-expansion into epic, such as Joel Barlow's *Columbiad* (1807), Daniel Bryan's celebration of Daniel Boone, *The Mountain Muse* (1813), and James K. Paulding's *The Backwoodsman* (1819), but none of them proved satisfactory. As John McWilliams has put it: "As representative western settlers, Bryan's Daniel Boone and Paulding's Basil can have neither inner character nor variety of daily life, because their deeds and character must somehow be heroic and ordinary simultaneously" (40).[1] Indeed, the failure of such poems perhaps partly lay behind Poe's sweeping declaration that the long poem was by its very nature a contradiction in terms.

In his one attempt at an epic, Longfellow, as the acknowledged poetic spokesman for the nation, turned from frontier history to Indian legend, attempting to appropriate the country's little-known pre-colonial past. *Hiawatha* is less unsuccessful than popular opinion today (often enough based more on a reading of the poem's parodies than of the poem itself) would have it, but it undeniably falls into absurdity the moment he brings his heroic Indian figures into contact with the arriving colonisers; no amount of wishful thinking on the poet's part can efface our knowledge of the result of that contact.

Elsewhere Longfellow attempted to give dramatic life to some of the historical episodes that had inspired Hawthorne (and which were to inspire Arthur Miller), in his *New England Tragedies,* but the plays, while dignified enough, remain somewhat lacklustre. He proved more successful with his popular account of heroism from the War of Independence, "Paul Revere's Ride," told in galloping sprung rhythm. However, his most successful historical narrative is *Evangeline,* a tale of loss and displacement rather than of heroism, told in suitably sprawling and unenergetic hexameters.

Although poets gradually realised the difficulties of celebrating America's heroic history in verse, the American poetic epic (despite Poe's fulminations) was not to go away. Rather, as Roy Harvey Pearce put it, the poet's "strategy is to make a poem which will create rather than celebrate a hero and which will make rather than recall the history that surrounds him" (61). From Whitman on, the ambitious American poet was to set out to create huge sprawling works whose task was "one of ordering, not of order; of creation, not confirmation; of revealing, not memorializing" (Pearce 83).

From *Song of Myself* onwards, these massive portmanteau works were to be the, results, as Sergio Perosa put it, of gradual "aggregation and appropriation" (27); history came into them more or less haphazardly as the writer learned it during the very process of composition — or as he (and such poems are almost exclusively masculine) experienced it. In Whitman's case, the Civil War conditioned his continual reworking of *Leaves of Grass,* to the point where he claimed that "without those three or four years and the experience they gave, *Leaves of Grass* would not now be existing" ("Backward Glance" 117); he took to comparing the Civil War with the siege of Troy, thus aligning himself with Homer— but a Homer who saw it as his poetic role to dress the nation's wounds,

Melville too attempted to give epic resonance to his poetry of

the Civil War, impressing upon it Miltonic overtones and comparing the Union leaders to Hercules and Adonis, and Lincoln to Christ. However, as Denis Donoghue has written, the overriding impression we get from his war poetry is that he "wrote those lines not because he felt in that way but because he desperately wanted to feel in that way" (80). A more convincing poetic treatment of the war is to be found in the later narrative poem *Clarel*, with its portrait of the caustic, scarred, ex-Confederate officer Ungar, haunted by memories of "the immense charred solitudes / Once farms[,] and chimney-stacks that reign / War-burnt upon the houseless plain /Of hearthstones without neighborhoods" (401). This compelling figure, a "wandering Ishmael from the West", provides searing evidence of the unhealed wounds of the war. At the same time, the relentlessly unwelcoming style of the poem in which he figures, the forbiddingly craggy rhyming tetrameter, together with the sheer length of the work ("eminently adapted for unpopularity;" as Melville himself put it in a letter of October 1884 [qtd, in *Clarel* 542]) testify to the difficulties of presenting such arguments in a poetry for broad public consumption.

Melville's problems anticipate the ones that were to be faced by the generation of Modernist poets. It is often said that Modernism, with its techniques of disjunction and fragmentation, was a response to the lacerations of an age in which all sense of public order and decorum had been lost. It can fairly be said that America, land of progress and advancement, was to the fore also in this troubled area of experience; fifty years before the Great War that tore Europe to pieces, America had experienced its own lacerating internal conflict, with slaughter on an industrial scale. Like the history of frontier-expansion, the war was to prove a rich source of material for art in both prose-fiction (from Crane to Faulkner and from Margaret Mitchell to Charles Fraser) and cinema (from Buster Keaton to Clint

Eastwood), but a problematic theme for serious poetry.

The one full-length narrative poem to tackle the war until the present day was the once extremely popular *John Braum's Body* (1928) by Stephen Vincent Benet. This work has almost completely fallen out of public favour and a fair assessment of the poem's weaknesses has been given by David Mason: "It's too devoted to history, too little grounded in character, conflict and scene" ("Forum on Narrative Poetry"). The historical background is given in sometimes compelling detail, and the historical characters are portrayed with some shrewdness, but the fictional figures in the narrative — Jack Ellyat, of Connecticut, who "thought the thoughts of youth, idle and proud" (16), Clay Wil1gate, of Georgia, who "sat in his room at night ... /Reading his Byron with knitted brows" (67), Cudjo the faithful Negro servant and Lucy, the Virginia belle — are too much like second-hand copies of characters from *Gone with the Wind.*

Benet's verse-novel is nonetheless a valiant attempt to overcome the Modernist all-but veto on historical narrative. The generation of Pound and Eliot had practically renounced any attempt to present history as *story.* Although Pound's *Cantos* are steeped in a profound if idiosyncratic awareness of historical matters, the poet makes no endeavour to present the events of history in narrative or even anecdotal form. The reader must either be already acquainted with the facts to which reference is made or attempt to recreate the story from the gobbets and nuggets that are dropped in enticing but frustratingly incomplete fashion onto the page. Both Eliot and Pound frequently use fragments of historical fact for purposes of ironic juxtaposition: in *The Waste Land* Queen Elizabeth I finds herself roped in as an honorary Thames daughter, her glittering river-pageant set alongside the drifting logs of the oily 20th-century Thames, images from her love-affair with Leicester preceding

broken snippets of lamentation from the rape-victim in the narrow canoe at Richmond. Lest the reader should be tempted into reading too much into these juxtapositions, the admonition is given: "I can connect nothing with nothing" (108). They are to remain as disjointedly meaningless and unpointed as "the broken fingernails of dirty hands" (109).

Benet was not the only poet of the generation after Pound and Eliot to attempt to tackle historical themes, but he was perhaps unique in his blithe refusal to take into any account the Modernist legacy. Such poets as Robert Penn Warren, John Berryman and Robert Lowell all showed their awareness of Modernist methods in such works as *Brother to Dragons* (1953) and *Audubon: a Vision (1969), Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1953) and the sonnets of *History* (1973). This last work is perhaps the most ambitious, an attempt by Lowell to present the entire history of humanity in a sequence of 368 sonnets; from his Modernist forebears Lowell had certainly learned the technique of concentration. The dazzling detail — the "flash-in-the-pan" invoked in the very first sonnet — seems to have been what Lowell had in mind, and amid the confusing plethora of names, such images provide occasional moments of startling illumination, but all too often the compression is so intense as to provoke mere bewilderment; the reader is presented with a parade of significant names, many of them familiar to readers of Lowell's earlier poetry, but, as Philip Hobsbaum has put it, in these sonnets his heroes "are not so much re-created as invoked" (150). The overall impression is that we are being allowed a glimpse simply of the writer's random desk-jottings.

It was in the eighties that a new confidence in the possibilities of narrative-verse arose, thanks to a renewed interest in writers hitherto somewhat marginalised by the academic world such as Robinson Jeffers, E. Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost (although

this last poet had never really gone away). This affected even writers who had already attempted narrative, like Robert Penn Warren, whose *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (1983) is less based on unsettling techniques of collage and disjunction than his previous narratives had been. A number of compelling verse-narratives on historical themes have been written in the last twenty-five years or so, including Daniel Hoffman's *Brotherly Love* (1981), David Mason's *The Country I Remember* (1996), Mary Jo Salter's "The Hand of ThomasJefferson" (1994), William Jay Smith's *The Cherokee Lottery* (2000), Marilyn Nelson's *Carver: A Life in Poems* (2001), as well, of course, as the poem I wish to consider here, Andrew Hudgins's *After the Lost War* (1988).

While Hudgins has been associated with the New Formalist movement (he was included in the movement's key-anthology, *Rebel Angels,* 1996), he has never rejected the Modernist heritage or totally eschewed the possibilities offered by free verse. He has recounted how it was an encounter with the poetry of T. S. Eliot as a boy that first awoke him to the power of poetry and he has written admiring essays on the poetry of such contemporary non-formalists as Galway Kinnell and Jorie Graham. *After the Lost War,* while showing a clear commitment to narrative continuity, testifies also to the lessons of Modernism, in particular in its focus on the telling detail and its strategic use of ellipsis.

The formalist aspect lies in Hudgins's skilful handling of the iambic line, alternating throughout the work from pentameter to tetrameter. In an interview he has given all interesting account of his early decision to adopt blank verse as his dominant mode:

> Another thing that was going on was that up till then I'd written exclusively in free verse and I'd been resisting the growing realization that I had no reliable sense of what a free verse line was. I couldn't tell why

> free verse lines end where they do and what principles, other than intuition or appearance on the page or sheer arbitrariness, drive those decisions. My lines were all overintellectualized; there was nothing sensual in them, no rock and roll. They didn't have any boogie-woogie in their socks.
>
> So I began writing in blank verse... And when I started to write in meter, my content, without my realizing it at first, began to change. I began to work more in narrative. I began to use more dialogue, more humor, and I began to include sharp tonal shifts and leaps of logic. The pulse of the meter gave me confidence that it could carry those things without collapsing into prose - a pressure that exposition and the plain style place heavily on free verse, which to my ear always bears the burden of proving it is poetry; therefore its bias is toward song and it cannot bear much talking. *(Anvil* 121)

The talking voice, as in Frost's poetry, is at the basis of all Hudgins's poetry. His first volume, *Saints and Strangers* (1985), had contained a number of monologues in the voices of such figures as John James Audubon, Jonathan Edwards, Zelda Fitzgerald and Sidney tanier. The soliloquy of Lanier was to provide the basis for the book-length work of the same title, *After the Lost War,* published three years later.

The book consists of a series of monologues, all in the voice of Lanier, taking us from his childhood to his death-bed, under canvas in the mountains of North Carolina. A number of the monologues describe his wartime experiences, together with his brother Clifford. Hudgins prefaces the book with a warning:

> This sequence of poems is based on the life of the Georgia-born poet and musician Sidney Lanier. Though the poems are all spoken by a character I call Sidney Lanier, the voice of these poems will be unfamiliar to anyone

> who knows the writings of this historical figure. Despite his having been dead for over a hundred years now, I'd like to thank Lanier for allowing me to use the facts of his life - more or less - to see how I might have lived it if it had been mine. And, in too many ways, I suppose it has. (ix)

Anyone who reads Hudgins's work in the expectation of finding reproduced the ornate lyrical style of Lanier's verse, as in such anthology pieces as "The Marshes of Glynn" or "The Waving of the Corn," or the flowery prose of his personal letters, will be disappointed. No prize is offered for guessing which of the quotations below belongs to the historical figure and which to the twentieth-century reincarnation:

> Dear, Sick Bettine, whose Goethe I will never be:
>
> You are to me a very Hebe without the roses in her cheeks: and the Golden Bowl, which you fill for me with Ambrosia, is a Letter: and, as we drink to a Bride and then break our wine-glass that no meaner Toast may ever dishonor it, so *you* change the rich Beaker at every divine drinking — Think you, O Sweet, pale Hebe, Cup-bearer to a *man:* who yet, in being *your* friend, is half a God. *(Letters* 92)

> I'm sick of our lost cause... we weren't
> fucked Ivanhoes of wickedness... (107)

Hudgins chooses areas of imagery that interested Lanier — for example, the marshes of Georgia — but makes no attempt to imitate his ornate, incantatory verse style. He occasionally draws directly on Lanier's letters to his family, transforming the lush prose into honed metrical verse (a clear example is the poet's account to his wife of an encounter with a group of Germans in San Antonio (a letter dated January 30'th 1873) and the corresponding poem "In San Antonio,"

section 5), but for the most part, while sticking fairly close to the essential facts of Lanier's biography, Hudgins creates his own voice and sensibility for the poet. He has declared quite frankly that "my character, who was based on the historical figure Sidney Lanier, was doing, saying, and thinking things that the historical Sidney Lanier would never ever do, say, or think" *(Anvil* 118).

Elsewhere Hudgins has described the poem as "a historical novel in verse that masquerades as a biography of the Civil War veteran and poet Sidney Lanier" *(Anvil* 23). The question naturally arises as to why he should have decided to adopt this persona at all, and Hudgins has answered this question frankly:

> I was more or less consciously using Lanier as a mask to work through concerns of my own. And not a little because I think the historical Sidney Lanier was not terribly interesting and a bit of a prig. His *life* was extremely interesting to me, emblematic of a lot of things: the war, the South, the poet in the South, the artist versus a world that doesn't value him, the poet in the nineteenth century, the poet who wants to live a normal and decent life, man in nature, man dying — to name some of them. But the man living that interesting life wasn't himself very interesting to me. So I changed him. *(Anvil* 118)

He admits to some embarrassment at the exploitative nature of this procedure and says that the apology at the beginning of the book is "a real apology, a real confession, a real statement of intent" (119). And, most interestingly, he states that since writing it he has not written another persona poem.

Nonetheless, the work seems to have been liberating for Hudgins; his most enthusiastically received volume since *After the Lost War* is *The Glass Hammer: A Southern Childhood* (1994), an autobiographical sequence of poems, whose witty frankness might

not have been possible without the earlier attempt at masked self-exploration. The voice is a very different one in the later volume — relaxed, colloquial and often very funny — but undoubtedly the earlier work gave Hudgins the confidence in the power of the speaking voice as medium,

Although the voice in *After the Lost War* may not be that of the historical Sidney Lanier, Hudgins does succeed in giving the reader the sensation of witnessing directly the events in which Lanier participated. Where the historical Lallier in a letter to his father makes parenthetical reference to a mass-burial of the Unionist troops — "(we yesterday shovelled six hundred dead Yankees into their own mine, the grave which they had dug for us!)" *(Letters* 162) — Hudgins's character gives us a detailed description of the event, pictured with disturbing imaginative intensity. The speaker's tone veers from one of scientific curiosity — "The lime has something to do with cholera / and helps, I think, the chemistry of decay / when slathered between the ranks of sour dead" (19) - to one of grim and deliberate unconcern: "I guess we owe our species something. / We stacked the flaccid meat all afternoon" (19). As the description continues, however, the sensation of the sheer strangeness of the activity begins to take over, leading to the speaker's swooning at his work. And yet he notes:

> It's funny — standing there, I didn't feel
> the mud-wet suck of death beneath my feet
> as I had felt it often enough before
> when we made forced marches through Virginia rain.
> That is to say, the dead man's spongy chest
> was firmer than the roads that led us —
> and him — into the Wilderness. (20)

This image connects with a number of other related images throughout the poem, evocative of a morbid attraction to the sucking earth. The very first poem in the book describes the child Lanier being lost in the marsh, where "the mud sucked at my feet with gasps / and sobs that came so close to speech / I sang in harmony with them" (4), and ends with his mother's punishing him amid sobs and laughter:

> And even as a child, I heard,
> inside her sobs and chuckling,
> the lovely sucking sound of earth
> that followed me, gasped, called my name
> as I stomped through the mud, wrenched free,
> and heard the earth's voice under me. (5)

Towards the end of the poem, in a section entitled "A Christian on the Marsh," he writes:

> I know the earth desires me back,
> desires the part of me that's earth —
> and I'm not sure how much that is,
> despite the mud-suck at my ankles
> that's luscious, sexual. (103)

The protagonist of the novel, as fighting soldier and tuberculosis victim, is plagued by thoughts of death. He takes a kind of grim comfort in the thought of the natural process of decomposition, which will return his body to the life of the earth. As he remembers standing on top of the pile of enemy-corpses, he muses:

> I take great comfort in knowing I will rot
> and that the chest I once stood on

is indistinguishable from other soil
and I will be indistinguishable from it. (21)

The imagery of natural processes of decomposition and transformation pervades the poem. Even as the protagonist makes love with his wife, he observes "a swollen wasp pounce on a caterpillar / and pump her eggs into its yellow skin" (48), and clearly takes a grim satisfaction in the thought that "[w]ithin a week they'll hatch into larvae / and eat the caterpillar from the inside out" (48).

Elsewhere he describes a "possum corpse" that "shimmers with orange butterflies" (68). The body of a cow, which he sees on a walk with his wife, "buzzed, / the whole corpse vibrant with a hum, / the whine of deep machinery" (81). He is fascinated by the insects that live off his own body and describes his wife's attention to them in his final months:

she combed through my head,
picking through each dark, separate strand,
finding the lice and crushing them,
one by one, beneath her fingernail.
Such life that clings to me! Such death
it takes to keep my body clean! (128)

He takes to imagining his own disease as a budding flower, thriving on the soil of his wrecked body:

In this bright, coiled bulb of pain
beneath my collarbone, another flower
is opening. I feel it bloom. As yet,
I'm not sure what it is, but I would bet
a daffodil — the yellow bloom I love most. (115-6)

It is clear that the success of this verse-novel depends entirely on the extent to which we are convinced by this voice. Hudgins has chosen not to opt for the wide range of characters that Benét attempted in his *John Brown's Body*, and not to give a detailed chronicle of the war and its aftermath. He involves us almost claustrophobically in the experiences of this single character, with frequent flashbacks to his childhood and with a series of epiphanic episodes of great suggestive power. We are free, if we so wish, to read political allegory into such sequences as the anecdote of the hornets' nest, where the protagonist, not yet ten, and his friends strike the nest "to show we had some power in the world" (17) and then run for the safety of the water. However, what really convinces here is the sheer visual clarity of the description:

> Two splashes. Joab made it. So did I.
> Jack tripped. They settled on him like a ghost.
> He blurred beneath the frenzy of their wings. (17)

And the conclusion of this episode has a convincingly cynical realism.

> I did the proper things. I visited.
> I wrote. But what I thought was this: *I'm glad*
> *it's him. I'm glad it's not me.* Eight years old. (18)

One of the most striking episodes in the whole book is the section entitled "A Soldier on the Marsh," in which the protagonist describes a day spent on leave in the marsh. It is a remarkable piece of writing, which purely through natural description manages to suggest all the violence and the intensity of emotions evoked by the distant war. It begins with Lanier recalling how he used to play with

the bees, touching them "To feel the hard hum of their wings" and trapping them in flowers, "loving the angry buzz, / the danger I had trapped" (22).

This memory of past cruelty and daring leads into the description of the storm, with the thunder sounding "like a giant's feet / approaching, blundering from the west" (22), a comparison we have already heard in the poem, but with reference to the Yankees' cannon-fire: "Don't they ... / sound like a giant limping through / the woods in search of us?" (16). The storm culminates in a moment of sudden peril, with a thick branch that "skittered through the limbs / and hit six inches from my head" (22).

The second half of this section begins with a moment of apparent harmony with nature, as he strips off his wet clothes and plays his flute, being rewarded by the sound of a wood thrush responding "to my music, / not note for note, not harmony, / but just enough to let me know / I'd swayed, a little bit, her song" (23). However, the moment is short-lived and is followed by one of the most intense visual images in the whole poem, as the sunset turns scarlet and a cardinal-bird explodes from a redbud tree:

> One wingtip brushed my chest
> an inch below the nipple, and,
> in that red light off blood-red things
> — blooms, bird — my whole white body turned
> to flame, an *ignis fatuus,*
> will-o'-the-wisp, a brief, bright light
> that flickers on the marsh and means
> *delusion,* which is my greatest gift. (23)

The symbolic weight of this moment might even seem excessive, but

it is somehow made convincing by the closely-focused realism and tactile sensuousness of the detail of the wingtip brushing the "chest / an inch below the nipple."

After this epiphanic moment — although the revelation appears to be one of the insignificance of his life and the illusoriness of his artistic gifts — the section concludes with a description of the fields ablaze, as a farmer burns off his land. The allegorical possibilities of this scene are never forced upon the reader, but it seems to say more about the destructive forces of the war being waged than the four hours in glorious Technicolor of the film of *Gone with the Wind.* The scene moves towards darkness, with the "true stars" corning out, "and in redbuds beyond burnt ground / a bobwhite sang its stupid, cheerful name" (24).

In a later section, one that arouses echoes of Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Armadillo," the protagonist muses on his enjoyment of the cruel spectacle of the "firebirds" — buzzards captured by sailors, doused with kerosene, set on fire and then launched "into the evening sky."

> For them it must be hideous,
> but from the ground it's beautiful —
> in some odd wayan easement of
> the savage tedium of days.
> But more than that: perhaps you know,
> with the younger generation of the South
> after the lost war, pretty much
> the whole of life has been not dying.
> And that is why, I think, for me
> It is a comfort just to see
> The deathbird fly so prettily. (46)

This is perhaps the only moment in the whole poem in which the protagonist draws an overt parallel between one of his visual images and the historical situation of the South. Almost as if to point to the perils of over-simplification, this section ends, uniquely in the whole poem, with a tinnily chiming triple rhyme.

Such a moment makes us understand why, in a later section, after describing a field of corn and recalling that he had "heard that Grant's men looked like corn / advancing toward the reaper's blade" (60), he goes on to declare:

> Sometimes, like now, I have great need
> to live outside of metaphor,
> to know a dawn that's only dawn
> and corn that's corn and nothing else. (61)

The intensity of the metaphorical life of the poem is such that we perfectly comprehend this desire for a kind of bare simplicity of experience, shorn of all ulterior signification. In a late section, after the speaker has slaughtered a loggerhead turtle together with his sons, and wonders *"What have I done to my boys?"* (97), he describes an early-morning walk on the winter marsh, where he unexpectedly finds himself in "all island in /the shifting wind, an opening."

> I laughed out loud and almost prayed
> to live like that — outside the blast. (97)

The novel, of course, is one that shows the impossibility of living "outside the blast"; nonetheless, the reader fully understands how natural such a longing would be for a man of sensitivity who has endured what Lanier has endured.

Hudgins's approach to the matters of history is all original one;

he successfully resolves the problem of presenting historical events and their consequences through purely poetical means. His solution is based on the adoption of an intensely focused and acutely sensitive point of view. He does not shirk from presenting us with key scenes from the war itself but for the most part we are made to understand the violence of the situation and the cruel lacerations of the war through the density of the poem's figurative language and the vividness of its imagery. Hudgins has clearly learned one of the essential lessons of Modernism, with its emphasis on concentration of effect, but he successfully weds this with his own gift for memorable presentation of significant scenes, which is essentially a narrative skill. Perhaps more than anything else, Hudgins succeeds through his superb handling of the individual voice; while his Lanier may bear little relation to the historical Lanier, we never have any doubt that it is the voice of a real person — and thus that the experiences that he reports are equally real. History comes across to us — through poetry — as something vital and immediate.

NOTES

1. A more memorable poetic tribute to Boone is to be found in the eighth canto of Byron's *Don Juan.* Byron specifically draws attention to the fact that he somehow managed to leave a name for himself without having had to "decimate the throng" (332), after the manner of the usual epic hero.

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