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Music and Poetry during the Civil War

The causes of the Civil War were the conflicting differences between northern and southern states on issues of slavery, trade, tariffs, and states rights. The American Civil war was fought between 1861 and 1865 and lasted 4 years, beginning on April 12, 1861. The Civil War ended April 9, 1865 in Northern Virginia, when Confederate leader Robert E. Lee and his forces surrendered to Ulysses Grant, leader of the Union forces. The total number of people killed was between 640,000 and 700,000. During these years, soldiers and civilians found that music and poetry helped them deal with the violence and bloodshed that surrounded them. According to Ramona Garcia, “The Civil War has left a heritage of music that reflects those times in the most vivid way. Indeed, this music was so intimately involved with the events of the time that it became part of them” (Popular Songs of the Civil War). In other words, the music and poetry of the time reflects the events and feelings of the era, which people nowadays can use to understand the war itself. The grim reality of death and loss became an important topic that was expressed through songs and lyrics. Although, the Civil War was despairing, it also had its memorable moments when music brought people together especially to rally up more pride and confidence in the soldiers. In addition, it reflected how soldiers gained strength from their Christian faith. Civil War music and poetry were both a reflection of the country’s patriotism, religious fervor, and an expression of the tragic loss that resulted from the war and sense of national unity. One

can explore and discover the tragedy and bloodshed as well as pride and patriotism of the American Civil War through the songs and poetry written during that time period.

First of all, Civil War poetry and music reflected a sense of patriotism for one's country. As many people were recruited to the army to fight for freedom, a song called, "Battle Cry of Freedom," was written in 1862 by George Frederick Root. In the song, the lyrics resonate with the hearts of brave soldiers who stand up to fight to preserve the nation. They sing,

We will welcome to our numbers.

The loyal, true and brave,

Shouting the battle cry of Freedom...

These powerful words declare how the Civil War was fought by the bold soldiers who risked their lives to because of loyalty to their country and loyalty to the cause of national unity. For Root, "freedom" included the right to defend one's country and stand for one's principles.

Secondly, Civil War poetry and music reflected the religious fervor and faith of Americans during the war. A poem that reflects a religious act is the poem *The Blue and The Gray* in the war and there wife, "Whence the fleets of iron have fled, where the blades of the grave-grass quiver, asleep are the ranks of the dead Under the sod and the dew, Waiting the judgment-day Under the one, the Blue, Under the other, the Gray".

Next, Civil War poetry and music reflected death and loss due to the war. The poetry and music was often dedicated to those who had lost their lives in battle. Francis Miles Finch penned the following words in the poem entitled *American Memory*,

By the flow of the inland river,

Whence the fleets of iron have fled,

Where the blades of the

grave-grass quiver asleep

are the ranks of the dead

When Finch writes about “the ranks of the dead,” she is referring the soldiers who lost their lives in battles such as Gettysburg, Antietam, and others. Her tone is peaceful and honors those who gave their lives for the cause. It is almost like the battlefields are their final resting place. However, this poem also shows the sadness of war because people lost their lives. Another poem that also reflects death and loss is one written by Elizabeth Ward,

Dying in the dark at Malvern Hill.

With his rough face turned a little,

On, a heap of scarlet sand,

They found him, just within the thicket,

With a picture in his hand

This poem tells us about a soldier dying after battle. This poem projects the man lying on his own blood where they found him with a picture in his hand. The blood shows the brutality of war and the pictures shows the loved one that he leaves behind. This image is heartbreaking and shows that war is made up of humans who all have loved ones.

Lastly, Civil War poetry conveyed a sense of national unity. According to John S. Bowman, songs from the Civil War era brought the country together, “Songs and music of the Civil War covered every aspect of the conflict and every feeling about it. Music passed the time; it entertained and comforted; it brought back memories of home and family., it helped create the sense of national identity and unity so necessary to a fledgling nation” (civilwar.org). To Bowman, national unity was necessary because war is destructive and tears people apart. In the poem by John Hopkins, we see the heart and dedication the south had for their people, “Hurrah

for the South, 'tis joy to see, far in the mighty dawn, the genius of old Liberty With all her armor on. The glory of her sword has cast the tyrant's might away sound loud your trumpets to the blast-Hurrah for the Confederate States, Hurrah!'' This song is a song that gave the South a sense of identity and made them feel as if they were one, fighting for the worthy cause of liberty. Music often allowed people to identify with each other.

In conclusion, Civil war music and poetry were both a reflection of the country's patriotism, religious fervor, and an expression of the tragic loss that resulted from the war. The music and poetry allowed people and soldiers to express their feelings about hardships. War throughout history has also shown patriotism from brave soldiers as well.

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