

MARTIN T. BUINICKI AND DAVID M. OWENS

The Last Campaign of *John Brown's Body* West Point and America's Forgotten Civil War Epic

In the spring of 1979, in a spare conference room, a fifty-year tradition at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, quietly came to an end. The English Department, revising its curriculum for the required freshman literature and composition course, removed Stephen Vincent Benet's book-length poem of the Civil War, *John Brown's Body*, from the syllabus. Almost from its publication in 1928, the poem had been a cornerstone of literary instruction at West Point, at one time spanning eleven consecutive class sessions. Generations of American military leaders read and wrote about Benet's work, and for a time it was nearly the sole representative text of poetry in the introductory curriculum. The story of how the poem rose to such prominence at West Point, and the pressures and decisions that led to its final removal, tells a great deal about Benet, the legacy of his most celebrated work, and the academic culture of the Military Academy. More importantly, this last campaign of *John Brown's Body* provides a compelling case study of how individuals, ideology, and institutional power—and its limits—intersect in the development of curricula and the formation of localized literary canons.

When Benet published *John Brown's Body* in 1928, the poem seemed all but destined to take its place alongside other perennial American favorites.¹ Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1929, it sold widely, and, although reviews were not universally positive, reception was generally enthusiastic, even euphoric. Henry Seidel Canby, prominent critic and Walt Whitman scholar, proclaimed “Benet is

writing as Shakespeare wrote in his Histories, and Racine in his tragedies, and Vergil in the Aeneid, on a great theme in which he has a vested interest. . . . [S]urely a year in which such a book as this is published is red-lettered for American literature. . . . If this is what comes of sending poets to Paris on a Guggenheim fellowship, let us send them all there” (qtd in “Stephen Vincent Benet” 71-72).² Harriet Monroe dubbed it “A big book. A book which reaches out over this broad America, and looks not only backward but forward” (qtd in “Stephen Vincent Benet” 73).³ Benet, who had already published eleven works of poetry and prose, was an established literary figure, and while he denied the term *epic* for its “portentiousness and... presumption” (qtd in Miller), with *John Brown’s Body* he was generally recognized even by his detractors for making a serious attempt to pen the epic of the American Civil War.

When the author died in 1943, critics, while still deferential, were far less kind. One noted flatly, “‘John Brown’s Body’ is no more profound in message or perceptive in the reading of history than ‘Gone with the Wind,’ and less interesting as a story” (qtd in SVB 75), while another, although still praising its “typical strength and weaknesses of American poetry,” commented, “The romance gets in the way of the history; the history intrudes on the romance; the two main narratives are wholly unrelated; and, finally, there are no really dominant symbols or ideas” (qtd in SVB 76). Years later, in 1976, William J. Harris remarked, “*John Brown’s Body*, the poem for which [Benet] is famous, is a cartoon of the Civil War. . . . In this poem Benet’s imagination sinks to the level of a best-selling novelist. . . . There is not one living three-dimensional character in the whole book. That part of his imagination that could write hack and conventional stories has won out over the more serious part” (qtd in SVB 84). More damning than the published critiques, however, was the unpublished verdict of Edmund Wilson, who omitted even the mention of Benet’s name from *Patriotic Gore* (1962), his highly influential survey of Civil War literature. In a letter, Wilson wrote, “[I]n my opinion Carl Sandburg is the worst thing that has happened to Lincoln since Booth shot him, and I can’t imagine either Grant or Lee getting through *John Brown’s Body*” (610). Wilson’s subsequent decision to omit Benet from a study that includes such nearly forgotten authors as Sidney Lanier ensured what one literary reference guide refers to as Benet’s “minor literary reputation for poetry” (SVB 68).⁴

John Brown’s Body has attracted fitful critical attention in the years since its publication,⁵ but, as part of the popular imagination or literary canon, it is mostly a historical footnote or curiosity, subject to “what ever happened to...” type stories like John J. Miller’s 2009 article in *The Wall Street Journal*, “‘John Brown’s Body’

Exhumed.” Commenting upon the poem’s disappearance, Miller suggests that politics are partly to blame:

Professors sometimes have the power to keep classics alive, but almost none put “John Brown’s Body” on their American literature syllabi. Perhaps this is due in part to the poem’s blatant patriotism, including its message that some things are worth fighting and dying for—ideas that aren’t exactly fashionable in politically correct English departments.

There is no denying that the work’s popular and scholarly reputation steadily declined during the years following its publication. However, the work was not without influential supporters, particularly at the U.S. Military Academy, champions with material resources at their disposal that outstripped those of most professors who may or may not manage to “keep classics alive.” Neither ideology nor aesthetic judgment can account for the work’s legacy or its end at West Point. While these play a role, a number of other factors, not the least of which is the Benet family’s own history at West Point, all combined to sustain the text’s pride of place there for fifty years, and the tale of the text’s eventual disappearance is similarly complex.

Benet had deep and abiding connections with the United States Military Academy. His paternal grandfather and namesake graduated from the Academy in 1849, spent the Civil War years as Instructor of Ordnance and Gunnery there, and rose to become a Brigadier General and the Army’s Chief of Ordnance from 1874 until his retirement in 1891.⁶ As tribute to his distinguished service to the Army, a portion of the old Ordnance and Artillery Compound, originally built in the late 1830s, was renamed Benet Hall in 1961 (Miller 119). General Benet’s son, James Walker Benet, graduated from West Point in 1880, while his father was serving as Chief of Ordnance. The younger Benet eventually became an ordnance officer like his father. According to Benet biographer Charles Fenton, the Colonel’s home “was not an easy household to define” (1), being a very eclectic mixture of literary salon and thoroughgoing military professionalism. It was into this odd milieu that Stephen Vincent Benet was born in 1898, grew up, and thrived, later writing that “It was an intensely interesting world for a child to grow up in. A world with a code and flavor all its own” (qtd in Fenton 8). From his very early years, Stephen’s interests turned to military service and literature. His eyesight was so damaged by scarlet fever at age three, however, that acceptance at West Point in continuation of the family legacy was out of the question.⁷

While military service may not have been in the cards for the poet, his Civil War poem proved his eventual entre to the Academy so important to his family. In early January, 1934, Lieutenant Colonel Clayton Wheat, the Head of West Point's English Department, wrote Stephen Vincent Benet explaining,

We have been using your 'John Brown's Body' as one of our text books in English since 1929 and I need not tell you that the cadets who have studied your poem have been captivated by the charming way in which you have presented the story of the Civil War. I am wondering if it would be possible to have you give a lecture to the cadets some afternoon in March on a subject of your choice dealing with poetry. . . . If you cared to give them a lecture on the poem it would serve as a splendid introduction to their study. (Wheat, letter to Benet, 4 January 1934)

With the extraordinary initial success of *John Brown's Body*, Benet was in high demand at top colleges and universities, and while he did not relish public speaking (Fenton 302-306), he was happy to agree to Wheat's invitation. In the years following that first letter, Benet's lectures on *John Brown's Body* became an annual early spring event at West Point through the rest of the 1930s. Benet's wife Rosemary typically accompanied him on these trips, and the couple became friends with Colonel and Mrs. Wheat. A handwritten letter from Wheat to Rosemary reflects both the friendship that developed between the two couples along with the deep Benet family roots at the Academy: "It will be great fun seeing the children enjoying their first visit to a place where their forebears were so closely associated—and now that they are going to be baptized here, they, too, will have a warm spot in their hearts for West Point" (Wheat, Letter to Rosemary Benet). The Benet family spent Saturday, September 18, 1937, taking in West Point and watching cadets on parade. That same day, Colonel Wheat, who was the Academy's chaplain before heading the English Department, performed a baptismal service at the Cadet Chapel for the three young Benet children (Thomas Carr Benet 32). After one of his last trips to West Point to lecture, Benet wrote his mother, "We went up to West Point on Friday [23 February 1940] a beautiful ride on the train . . . got there in time for an early supper with the Wheats. Then I gave my lecture . . . went back to the Wheats afterwards and some of the younger instructors and their wives came in. . . . The Wheats were most kind, as they always are, and we had a very pleasant time" (Benet, *Selected Letters* 343).⁸ Not only did Clayton Wheat baptize the Benet

children, he also performed Benet's graveside committal service when the author died at age forty-four of a heart attack in March, 1943.⁹

In 1944-1945, the final academic year of Colonel Wheat's tenure as Head of the English Department, a freshman cadet from Missouri named Jack Lee Capps read *John Brown's Body* and would eventually inherit Wheat's legacy as the Academy's caretaker of the epic. After serving as a field artilleryman, Capps returned to the Military Academy's Department of English as an Instructor in 1959 and became the Department Head in 1977 where he remained until his retirement in 1988 (*Register of Graduates*). A published Dickinson and Faulkner scholar, Capps was recognized as one of the Academy's most distinguished faculty members, and he devoted substantial energy to *John Brown's Body*. Working with his colleague C. Robert Kemble, he prepared an annotated edition of the poem with extensive historical, biographical, literary, and etymological glosses. Their motivation, in part, was to facilitate the teaching *John Brown's Body* within the department. The vast majority of the instructors were active duty Army officers, and, as one can easily imagine, in examining the historical context of the poem, there was much duplication of effort in fact-checking information about battles and leaders portrayed. An annotated edition certainly made this work easier. As Capps and Kemble explain in their Preface, "Our annotation, therefore, is intended only to enhance the reader's visualization of the broad milieu that Benet's poetry brings to incisive focus. We have avoided interpretive notes that might encumber the poem, but have identified the author's major sources and marked recurring motifs that contribute significantly to the poetic structure" (xi). Their text was of such quality that publisher Holt, Rinehart and Winston adopted it and began printing the annotated edition of *John Brown's Body* in 1968. When the book went out of print in 1972, the publishers gave West Point, gratis, permission to reproduce the edition in its own print shop, thus putting the considerable financial resources of the U.S. military into service keeping *John Brown's Body* alive and well in the curriculum. Between the years 1972 and 1979, the academy printed over 10,000 copies of the poem for students and faculty.¹⁰ One would be hard-pressed to find another example where so much was done to ensure a poem's continued survival.

The overall view of the Civil War that *John Brown's Body* reflects certainly helps explain the poem's initial popularity at West Point and elsewhere. As Jim Cullen points out, "*John Brown's Body* represented perhaps the final flowering of Nationalist school ideology . . . Benet's Civil War is tragic, but ends with an affirmation: From Brown's grave came a united nation and a powerful beacon of hope" (28). The nationalist school of historians Cullen cites came to the fore

in the 1890's and continued on into the early 1900's, and lingers in the popular imagination to this day." This school of thought was "characterized primarily by its spirit of nationalism and sectional reconciliation" (221) and, as Thomas J. Pressly explains, these analysts "interpreted the struggle in such a way that no individual or section was saddled with exclusive blame for what had happened. As historian Emerson D. Fite wrote in 1911, 'Both sides were right! Neither could have given in and have remained true to itself'" (quoted in Pressly 222). *John Brown's Body*, which depicts a war that begins with causes somehow inevitable, transcendent, even Providential—often symbolized in the text by celestial "Horses of anger trampling, horses of anger, / Trampling behind the sky in ominous cadence" (13)—and a war that ends with the observation that "Out of John Brown's strong sinews the tall skyscrapers grow" (384), does, indeed, give poetic embrace to the nationalist view.

West Point's affinity for such a view is certainly understandable. As T. Harry Williams explains, "The Civil War was pre-eminently a West Pointer's fight" (36). This was the school, after all, that educated both Grant and Lee, and Jefferson Davis as well. This was the school whose Superintendent in 1861, P.G.T. Beauregard, resigned to accept a Confederate commission and then four months later fired upon his former artillery instructor from West Point, Major Robert Anderson, who was in command of Fort Sumter. And, this was the school from which opposing commanders in fifty-five of the war's sixty most significant battles had graduated. Many Academy graduates found themselves on opposing sides during the war, and for generations it was a defining moment in West Point's history. Battle Monument, a tribute to the dead of the United States' Regular Army in the "War of the Rebellion," has remained the most prominent (and probably the most featured in postcards) monument at the United States Military Academy. Dedicated in 1897, it has the names of 2,230 Union dead inscribed in various places on the memorial. Although described officially as a "lasting memorial to brave men" (*Bugle Notes* 1973 81) at the time that *John Brown's Body* was removed from the curriculum in 1979, some cadets from the South sometimes still jokingly referred to it as a "tribute to Confederate marksmanship." The memorial powerfully illustrates the enduring stamp of the War on the Academy. Here was an institution that could use a nationalist account of the Civil War to help it make sense of its own past.

Given this institutional history and the varied backgrounds of the student body after the Civil War, the persistence of Benet's poem in West Point instruction would seem to be a straightforward example of the perpetuation of a particular ideology funded by and facilitated through a state institutional apparatus. In his discussion of ideology and American literary history, however, Sacvan Bercovitch

provides a useful discussion of ideology as it intersects with considerations of the canon. His definition complicates easy assessments of the use of Benet's work at West Point:

[I]deology is the system of interlinked ideas, symbols, and beliefs by which a culture—any culture—seeks to justify and perpetuate itself; the web of rhetoric, ritual, and assumption through which society coerces, persuades, and coheres. So considered, ideology is basically conservative; but it is not therefore static or simply repressive. (635)

Bercovitch makes a number of significant observations here. First, particularly when one is discussing the role and construction of ideology over an extended period of time—in this case, from 1929 to 1979—the concept of a fixed system is untenable, and, indeed, the history of *John Brown's Body* at West Point highlights the changing views of race, gender, and the role of American military power throughout much of the twentieth century. Second, even in the highly institutionalized environs of the Military Academy, tradition and interpersonal relationships played a significant role in the perpetuation of literary education there. It is a gross oversimplification to argue that an attempt to indoctrinate cadets accounts for the continued use of *John Brown's Body*, even as one must acknowledge the work's overt nationalism and gestures towards imagining a uniquely American literary aesthetic.

Still, as in all classrooms, institutional history, mission, and philosophy intersected with cultural forces and the very practical concerns of coursework and calendar to determine the poem's continued presence in the curriculum. Particularly when contrasted with a more Foucaultian view of canon formation—what David Fite refers to as “a power play and a campaign—a campaign to determine who's in and who's out, a campaign conducted with a rhetorical arsenal bristling with the weapons of closure, exclusion, unfairness, and misreading” (117)—Bercovitch's refusal to consider ideology simply in terms of coercion provides a means for more accurately considering the forces that affect the literary canon as it was manifested at the Academy. If one thing is made clear by the history of *John Brown's Body* at West Point, it is that we must be very specific in discussing the role of curriculum and institutions in canon formation. With varying degrees of detail, this is the argument made by critics including John Guillory, Paul Lauter, and many others. If, as Guillory argues, “Canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works—the syllabus in its institutional locus, the school” (55), then West Point certainly succeeded

in canonizing Benet—at West Point. The fact that fifty years of undergraduate instruction failed to broaden the work's appeal is both a function of the unique academic culture of the institution and an indication of the limits of the Academy's power to shape the discourse of literary study beyond the confines of the Academy's classroom.

Indeed, in the case of West Point, the local academic culture and the limits of its ability to shape the larger canon are intricately connected. The Academy's mission statement during these fifty years was largely unchanged, and read "The mission of the Military Academy is to instruct and train the corps of cadets so that each graduate will have the qualities and attributes essential to his progressive and continued development throughout a lifetime career as an officer in the Regular Army."¹² This focus on training and educating future officers necessarily circumscribed the degree to which it could—or even aimed to—influence either the canon or the field more broadly.¹³

At the same time, however, the work's longevity within and disappearance from the curricular confines of West Point may in part be the result of the changing critical and cultural trends beyond the walls of the Academy. Certainly the Civil Rights movement greatly affected views of Benet's poem. When *John Brown's Body* was first published, for example, several critics singled out the poet's representation of African Americans for praise. Canby wrote, "The negroes are the truest I know in American poetry" (qtd in SVB 72), while Wells couches his praise in the racist stereotypes of the time: "It is fitting that some of the most stirring lines of *John Brown's Body* should celebrate the African race in America, their fidelity, irresponsibility, and childishness and their striking religious and musical life" (qtd in SVB 77). In their critical analysis of West Point in the wake of the war in Vietnam, on the other hand, K. Bruce Galloway and Robert Bowie Johnson, Jr. provide one of the few discussions of the poem's place in the Military Academy's curriculum, and, in their discussion of the Spring 1969 syllabus for English 102, they highlight Benet's treatment of race. Unsurprisingly, their remarks differ greatly from Canby's forty-five years earlier:

In the 'poetry block,' Benet's epic poem on America during the Civil War, *John Brown's Body*, is studied for seven straight lessons. This work contains some of the most racist depictions of blacks found in popular poetry, constantly depicting them as buffoons and less-than-human creatures. The lesson plan contains nothing on how the cadets are to be helped in absorbing the contradiction posed by *Invisible Man* [which the

cadets read several weeks prior] and *John Brown's Body* in juxtaposition.
(88)

While the accuracy of their last claim is open to dispute,¹⁴ Galloway and Johnson's critique demonstrates not only how much cultural attitudes had shifted since the time of *John Brown's Body's* publication, but also how these attitudes did and did not influence curriculum at West Point. Not only was Ralph Ellison in the syllabus alongside Benet, but the author also came to speak at West Point, just as Benet had years before (Rampersad 459-62). Through it all, however, *John Brown's Body* remained.

Nevertheless, just how big a change Ellison's inclusion in 1969 might represent can be seen when one considers an essay Capps and a West Point colleague wrote describing the Advanced Freshman English course for *College Composition and Communication* in 1963. The authors discuss the course syllabus (See Fig. 1), and, while they do not claim to be naming every author in the syllabus, the list they provide includes only one woman (Anne Bradstreet), and no writers of color. Beyond the lack of diversity in the selections, not uncommon for the period, what is also significant in their essay is the way the authors explain *John Brown Body's* place in the curriculum. They write,

The second term is introduced by a presentation of significant American ideals that were fairly well established by 1860: a time when the ideal person was held to be devout, humanitarian, individualistic, optimistic, industrious, and tolerant; a time when it was 'right' to believe in the essential goodness of man, Manifest Destiny, the right of revolution, one God, devotion to duty, and the basic freedom of expression. Our students soon discover in their discussion that, while these tenets were almost universally accepted, the application and interpretation of such concepts were anything but universal in the provincial attitudes of the North, South, and West. To observe the resolution of these differences during the Civil War era, we read Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*. We discuss at length one major addition to our national ethos which came in the War. As Fletcher Pratt explains it, and as Benet illustrates it, that addition was the ability of free men to subordinate themselves to the discipline necessary for group action without abandoning individual liberty. Our study remains always one more concerned with understanding contemporary national attitudes than with recalling

historical detail. Benet's picture of Lincoln, for example, is a type of vitalized history that helps the student realize what moral courage is required of a reputable politician, one who must take his ideals into the market place, demonstrate their cogency to the people, and emerge with those ideals unsullied. (109-110)

FOURTH CLASS COURSES, 1962 - 1963 (Continued)

Lesson No.	Subject	Writing	Study Assignment
41	WRITTEN PARTIAL REVIEW III		Review Lessons 29-40
42	The Household Poets		APP, 772, 780-781 (Whittier, "L'aus Deol," "Abraham Davenport!"); 786, 788-790 (Longfellow, "The Arsenal at Springfield," "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport," "My Lost Youth"); 805 (Lowell, "Whittier"); 827 (Holmes, "The Chambered Nautilus")
43	The Rising Crisis		APP, 767-769 (Whittier, "Massachusetts to Virginia"); 929-930 (Timrod, "Ethnogenesis")
44	Synthesis		APP, 1322 (Frost, "The Gift Outright")

2. English 152

1	Introduction		APP, 918-923 (Whitman, "What is an American?")
2	The Slavery Issue		APP, 94 (Woolman, "Uneasiness as to Slavery"); 212-213 (Jefferson, "Negro Slavery"). Grayson, from "The Hiring and the Slave" (to be issued)
3	The House Divided		APP, 762-763 (Melville, "The Portent"); JBB, 3-54
4	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 54-98
5	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 98-135
6	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 135-185; APP, 763 (Melville, "Malvern Hill")
7	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 185-222
8	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 222-261
9	<i>John Brown's Body</i>	Submit Theme 1	JBB, 261-302
10	<i>John Brown's Body</i>		JBB, 302-336
11	The House Rejoined		APP, 927-928 (Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address"); 899-903 (Whitman, "When Lilacs Last . . ."); 933 (Timrod, "Ode"); 934-935 (Lanier, "The Symphony,"; 11. 1-63)
12	WRITTEN PARTIAL REVIEW I		Review Lessons 1-11
13	Opening of the West		APP, 1050-1056 (Harte, "The Luck of Roaring Camp")
14	Local Color Writing: Romanticism to Realism	Submit Theme 2 with Panel Topic	APP, 953-954; 1078-1085 (Freeman, "The Revolt of Mother")

Fig. 1. Excerpt from Advanced Freshman English syllabus. Special Collections and Archives Division, USMA Library, West Point, New York.

Capps and Kintz indicate that there is at least one clear message to take away from Benet's poem, and it is one well suited for a military institution whose mission is to teach and train officers to make independent command decisions, while simultaneously instilling within them the discipline to obey orders. Their interpretation of Benet's portrayal of Lincoln, one "concerned with understanding contemporary national attitudes" seems suggestive at a time when the nation was peering into the abyss of the Vietnam War, although the authors remain unspecific regarding the politicians and ideals at issue. Indeed, the effort to draw any parallels between Benet's text and the nation's military trials in the 1960s would have been all the more challenging given the text's placement in the syllabus. That is to say, in a course otherwise structured chronologically, *John Brown's Body* was presented ahistorically, more as a text of the Civil War era than of the post-World War I era in which it was written.

Despite the broadly historical emphasis of the course, the enduring military ethic of subordinating oneself "to the discipline necessary for group action without abandoning individual liberty" mentioned by Capps and Kintz is evident elsewhere in the syllabus. They write,

With reference to Thoreau's *Walden* we suggest to our students that their demanding and restrictive "Plebe [freshman] Year" is, in fact, a cadet's "time in the woods." Although they initially react with cynical smiles, they are quick to identify themselves with the following parody: I went to plebe year because I wished to live . . . to front only the essential facts of military life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. I went to measure myself against the immensity of the soldier's task. (109)

If *Walden* could be re-imagined as a lens into life at West Point, then it is no surprise that the overtly patriotic *John Brown's Body* could serve both as a seemingly historical gloss on the Civil War and as an exploration of the discipline and insight demanded from up-and-coming Army officers. The example of both of these texts seems to confirm Bercovitch's contention that any text, no matter how subversive it might appear, can easily serve particular ideological ends (641-42). As Capps and Kintz write near the conclusion of their essay, "A student guided through an inquisitive, comprehensive investigation of our literature, which so undeniably stems from our experience and character, can form value judgments that will strengthen his faith in the culture of which he is a part and for which he must assume his share of responsibility" (111). Although Capps's stated aim in

reading texts like Benet's was that "each cadet will evolve his own opinion of the values which coalesce American society" (107), clearly there was an institutional effort to guide that evolution. Exactly which values "coalesce American society" was largely unquestioned at West Point—at least in 1963. By the time *John Brown's Body* disappeared from the curriculum in 1979, the Academy and the Army itself found many of the values the text was said to uphold subject to intense scrutiny.

As Ralph Ellison's visit to West Point illustrates, the syllabus had already undergone considerable change by 1969, even though *John Brown's Body* persisted. The pressures the military was facing as a result of the continuing war in Vietnam were already having an impact on the Academy's view of itself and its curriculum, as evident in the Annual Report of the Superintendent for the 1968-1969 academic year. In it, Major General S.W. Koster, newly appointed Superintendent, writes:

As criticism by a vocal few against the professional soldier mounts, as the international role of the United States military establishment is increasingly questioned, and as military service is eschewed by a growing number of our nation's youth, we must continually assess the relevancy of what we are providing our students. I am convinced that our program of self-criticism and analysis, begun long before I arrived here, has enabled us to ensure that each cadet who completes this arduous program is well prepared to take his place both as an officer in the United States Army and as a responsible member of society. (1)

Koster's language echoes that of Capps and Kintz from six years before: instruction at West Point is not only meant to prepare officers for service in the field, but it is also designed to encourage reflection upon contemporary conditions. The concern with ensuring that the curriculum truly reflect the changes in society at large is evident throughout his report.

Given the emphasis on self-criticism and relevancy, it is striking that it was approximately this same time that Capps and a colleague were preparing an annotated version of *John Brown's Body* for classroom use, even though the text had taken up a large segment of the first-year composition course for approximately forty years.

Such longevity can only be accounted for by a combination of the personal investment of intellectual time and resources on the part of the faculty, the history of Benet's relationship with West Point, and the continuing use of the text in

forwarding the pedagogical aims and institutional mission of the academy. As Guillory puts it,

An individual's judgment that a work is great does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless that judgment is made in a certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to insure the *reproduction* of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers. The work of preservation has other, more complex social contexts than the immediate responses of readers, even communities of readers, to texts; as we shall see, these institutional contexts shape and constrain judgment according to *institutional* agendas. (28)

Beginning with Colonel Wheat's outreach to Benet and continuing with the work of Colonel Capps and others, *John Brown's Body* certainly had its champions working within the friendly confines of the Academy. The ways in which the text's place in the curriculum transformed over time speak to the efforts made to keep the text in the curriculum in some fashion: from the representative text of the poetry unit, to an illustrated depiction of the Civil War and the values of individual sacrifice, to its final short-lived presence in the syllabus as "the American Epic." The even more pressing mystery is why, then, *John Brown's Body* finally fell out of the West Point canon after a fifty-year run.

In early 1976, three major catalysts for change converged on the Academy. Individually, each was quite powerful, but collectively they provided the impetus for transformation with unprecedented scope and speed. The first of the three major catalysts was the on-going organizational self-examination and soul-searching that the Army experienced throughout its ranks both during and after the war in Vietnam. A dramatic example was Major General Koster, the Superintendent who had arrived at the Academy straight from Vietnam in the summer of 1968. With the Tet Offensive in January of 1968, both the fighting in Vietnam and public sentiment in the United States against the war had certainly hit a peak. But the "self-criticism and analysis" that Koster referred to in his first Superintendent's Report would be accelerated and deepened by Koster himself, and not in a way he would have preferred. Koster did not finish his second year as Superintendent. In March, 1970, he abruptly announced his intention to seek reassignment. He had been seriously implicated in the cover-up effort that followed the notorious My Lai massacre by an infantry platoon of the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal) in 1968. Subsequently, he was removed from the list of pending promotions, demoted one

star in rank, censured, and stripped of a Distinguished Service Medal. These were deeply troubling developments that heightened internal scrutiny at the Academy and in the American military generally. How had an officer risen to such a high level of responsibility and then acted in a way so antithetical to the Academy's mission?

The second event that greatly accelerated programmatic and curricular change at the Military Academy was a cheating incident that erupted in the early spring of 1976 involving the junior class. EE304, Electronics, the second of two required introductory electrical engineering courses, featured an extensive take-home problem, and collaboration was explicitly forbidden. After an instructor noticed papers with elaborate identical errors, the department compared papers across sections and found many instances of these similarities. This would lead to the most widespread and publicized honor code scandal in Academy history. During months of investigation and the often wrenching testimony that followed, almost three hundred cadets were implicated. The picture that emerged was of a large, loosely connected network of "rings" of cadets who had been collaborating unethically, in some cases over extended periods of time.¹⁵ When the investigations and hearings ended, one hundred fifty-two members of the class of 1977 had been dismissed or had resigned from the Academy.

In December, a report from an external commission appointed by the Secretary of the Army and chaired by retired astronaut and President of Eastern Airlines, Frank Borman, himself an Academy graduate, recommended West Point establish ethics instruction as part of its core curriculum. Specifically, the commission recommended that "all cadets should be required, early in their careers at West Point, to begin formal ethics study" (20, emphasis in original). The gravity of the scandal and the public attention that it brought to the Academy all but ensured a significant review of all aspects of the cadets' education and training.

As if the effects of the largest ethical breach in West Point's history were not enough for the Academy to absorb in 1976, women arrived for the first time as part of the incoming freshman class. Unlike the cheating scandal, however, this event affected all three of the major national service academies and was a relatively long foreseen contingency. The inclusion of women at the services academies had drawn predictable resistance from many alumni and some among the faculties and staffs. This continued to keep West Point in the spotlight during a difficult period; however, the Academy was quite scrupulous in its efforts to fully integrate women into the Corps of Cadets. From their arrival, for example, women were not segregated into separate dormitories or floors but placed in barracks rooms

alongside their male counterparts. The result of these efforts in terms of pedagogy was not so much to include what might be simplistically characterized as female-friendly material in classes, but rather a willingness to review the curriculum with an eye to identifying material or pedagogical practices that actually ran counter to or somehow subtly undermined the Academy's determination to fully integrate women into the institution.

The confluence of post-Vietnam reflection, the cheating scandal, and the integration of women had the combined effect of breaking down most all existing barriers to considering reform of all types at the Academy. In response to the Borman Commission's recommendations, the Army formed the West Point Study Group, and the Academy itself formed the West Point Special Actions Group—both in 1976. The Study Group wrote that “all aspects of the Academy” needed examining (Dickinson iii). The Academy was poised as never before to overcome institutional inertia.

The conditions were ripe for change at the departmental level as well. While the English Department was far removed from the flashpoint for the cheating scandal, it was at the center of some of the most significant ensuing curricular reforms. Based on the Borman Commission and others' strong recommendation for formal professional ethics instruction early in a cadet's four years of study, a required senior philosophy survey taught by English Department faculty was moved to the sophomore year and redesigned as an introduction to ethics with a heavy emphasis on military issues. Additional philosophers joined the faculty, and the Department became the Department of English and Philosophy. This move, coupled with an increased focus on writing skills, caused a mandatory sophomore comparative literature class to disappear, replaced by a junior-level intermediate composition course. Thus, two of the English Department's four mandatory courses were completely overhauled, even to the point of changing the year in which they were required in a cadet's course of study.

There were other concerns regarding Benet's text, as well. Then, as now, most instructors at the Academy were officers who were stationed there for three years and then reassigned as part of a regular career progression. Preparing to teach a lengthy work like *John Brown's Body* as part of the normal four-course teaching load created a significant time demand. Many sensibly chose to draw on the years of lesson plans left in the English Department's files by those who had taught the book before them. Over time, this meant that very little fresh thought was going into instructors' preparations for teaching Benet's poem. Predictably, a sense of

staleness eventually began to develop among much of the faculty regarding the poem (McIntosh).

Not only did *John Brown's Body* put a great deal of pressure on instructors' time in terms of course preparation, but most cadets also did not have the time to read the poem adequately. Competing demands on cadets' schedules are a perennial source of tension within the Academy, and freshman year is a particularly demanding one. Hence, very few cadets could devote the hours necessary for a close, careful reading of the 385-page poem. Particularly given the reduction in the number of required literature courses following the curricular reforms, Benet's poem may no longer have been an effective text for achieving the Department's objectives. Class time was simply too precious a commodity for a poem that was getting at best a cursory read by most students.

Among some cadets, there also existed what may seem an odd sort of suspicion at reading what appeared to be "an in-house product" (McIntosh). Although even a quick look inside the Academy's paperback edition reveals that it was simply a reprint of the 1968 Holt, Rinehart and Winston edition, the cover itself was done in the standard layout for documents produced at the Academy's printing plant—Academy crest at the top left, simple block lettering, and the originator (in this case "Department of English") in the bottom right (See Fig. 2). In other words, on its face this book looked just like the course packs, military training manuals, and regulations of the Corps of Cadets published by academic departments, the Department of Military Instruction, and the bane of many a cadet's existence, the Tactical Department.¹⁶ Moreover, when a cadet did open the book, the title page informed him that this edition came "with an introduction and notes by" the Head of the English Department and another prominent professor from it. Hence, the conclusion in some jaded cadet minds would be that this was not a "real" work of literature.

Most significantly, however, the portrait of war provided within the text itself seems far removed from the kind of institutional self-examination that consumed the military in the years following the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. In spite of the work's title and its opening description of a slave ship, for example, Benet presents the Civil War as a preordained event beyond human control. His working title for the poem was *Horses of Anger*, and their first appearance comes in the Prelude as the first mate discusses the biblical rationale for slavery with the captain: "Horses of anger trampling, horses of anger, / Trampling behind the sky in ominous cadence, / Beat of the heavy hooves like metal on metal, / Trampling something down" (13). Again and again when the causes of the war are considered, Benet

refuses to put great credence into the social or political realities of the time. This is perhaps most clear—and most disturbing—when a young Southern aristocrat ponders the coming conflict:

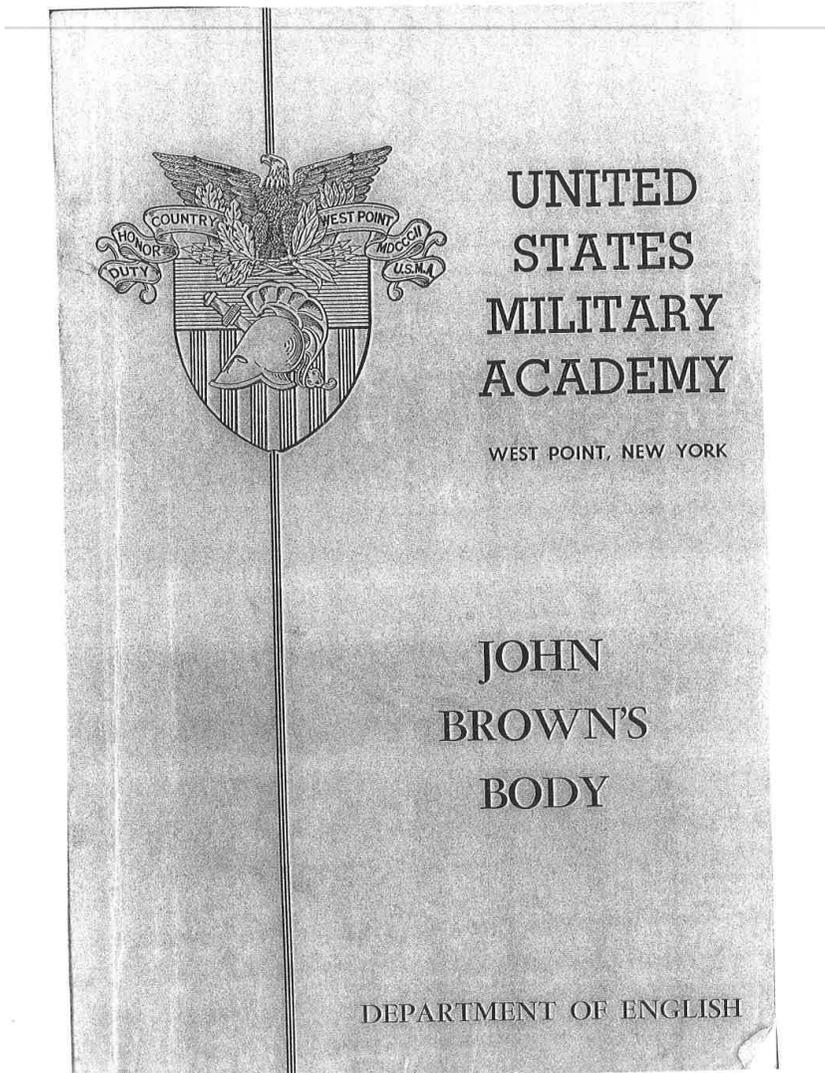


Fig. 2. Cover of the USMA reprint of *John Brown's Body*, circa 1972.

Why were they all going out to war?

He brooded a moment. It wasn't slavery,
That stale red-herring of Yankee knavery
Nor even states-rights, at least not solely,
But something so dim that it must be holy.
A voice, a fragrance, a taste of wine,
A face half-seen in old candleshine,
A yellow river, a blowing dust,
Something beyond you that you must trust,
Something so shrouded it must be great,
The dead men building the living State. . . . (74)

The influence of the Southern Historical Society and Lost Cause rhetoric is evident here, particularly in the speaker's willingness to dismiss slavery outright as a cause while still preserving at least the suggestion of "states-rights." Still, what is most striking here is the suggestion that the cause cannot be fathomed, perhaps should not be, its uncertainty lending it gravity and divinity. Here are soldiers as Capps described them in 1963 in his lesson plan on *John Brown's Body*, ready "to subordinate themselves to the discipline necessary for group action" (110). The answer to the question "Why were they all going out to war" is not clear, and the question itself is described as perhaps even impious.

In a system designed to encourage discipline and prepare officers for command authority, such an unquestioning approach toward going to war is not surprising; however, the Vietnam War and events that took place at West Point during the 1970s forced the wider military and the faculty to interrogate the ways in which complex problems were traditionally approached.¹⁷ These events, the self-scrutiny that they engendered, and the assortment of more pedestrian practical concerns finally cost *John Brown's Body* its place in the Academy's canon, even after the poem had remained required reading throughout the social turbulence of the 1960s. It was not, as some might suspect, the result of a desire to radically overhaul the kinds of works studied in the English curriculum. As William Macintosh recalls the faculty meeting in which the change was made, Colonel Capps, the man with the most invested in the text, remarked that removing Benet from the syllabus would "make more room for teaching Shakespeare." This perhaps marks a moment when West Point bowed to the canon as conceived beyond the institution's walls, a recognition that Benet was no longer a relevant cultural object. In this view, the

turn towards Shakespeare confirms the influence of an extra-institutional canon on the curriculum. In the context of the sweeping changes at West Point and in the larger military culture, however, it seems more likely that *John Brown's Body* was no longer an efficient vehicle for transmitting the kinds of values and skills that were prioritized in the late 1970s. Indeed, the fact that one of the poem's last appearances in the syllabus is as a unique artifact—"The American Epic"—and one whose very existence had long been questioned and contested, even by Benet himself, suggests that the work's surprising pedagogical elasticity was at last coming to an end (See Fig. 3).

FOURTH CLASS STANDARD COURSES, AY 1974-1975 (Continued)

Lesson No.	Subject	Assignment	Reference
26	INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE: DRAMA	Shakespeare, <i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	Study GLT, 25-28; Study S, 21-30, 668-678 (Act I).
27		Shakespeare, <i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	Study S, 678-693 (Acts II, III).
28		Shakespeare, <i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	Study S, 693-702 (Acts IV, V).
29	OPEN PERIOD	None	None
30		Classroom Theme II (Submit Theme I)	TBA
31	INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE: POETRY	Selected Poetry	Study ILP, 1-13.
32		Selected Poetry	Study ILP, 13-30.
33		Selected Poetry	Study ILP, 30-44.
34	OPEN PERIOD	None	None
35	THE AMERICAN EPIC	Benét, <i>John Brown's Body: The House Divided</i> (Submit Theme II)	Study JBB, xi-61, 389-390.
36		Benét, <i>John Brown's Body: The War Begins; Ellyat's Tune</i>	Study JBB, 63-154.
37		Benét, <i>John Brown's Body: Wingate's Tune; The Turn of the Tide</i>	Study JBB, 155-246.
38		Benét, <i>John Brown's Body: The Road to Appomattox</i>	Study JBB, 247-323.
39		Benét, <i>John Brown's Body: The New Order</i>	Study JBB, 325-385.
40			Course Review
41		TEE	Review Lessons 1-39.

Fig. 3. Excerpt from Advanced Freshman English syllabus. Special Collections and Archives Division, USMA Library, West Point, New York.

Even the text's depiction of the Civil War, long hailed by proponents as its signal strength, was falling out of fashion by the late 1970s. At the time of *John Brown's Body's* publication, Benet was lauded both North and South for his treatment of the conflict. Perhaps the strangest evidence of this is Benet's invitation to serve as judge for a poetry contest sponsored by the Alabama Daughters of the Confederacy, whose intent was to find a new "Battle Hymn of the Republic" to replace Julia Ward Howe's "vindictive" hymn (Ray, undated letter). Benet agreed, apparently writing that he was all in favor of an effort to engender more patriotic songs, although he demanded the right to choose no poem at all should he feel that no work rose to the level of Howe's work (Ray, letter to Benet, 1 December 1938).¹⁸ By the late 1970s, the sway of the Nationalist version of the war, while continuing to be popular, had been steadily eroded by the work of historians, along with the idea that a literary representation could serve as a lens for viewing the past.¹⁹

Clearly, there are no simple explanations for a text's disappearance, even when dealing with a single institution, although the last campaign of *John Brown's Body* in many ways confirms Guillory's assertion regarding the role that individual judgment plays within a particular academic context in ultimately determining a text's longevity. Colonels Wheat and Capps had both the institutional standing and the resources necessary to ensure the reintroduction of Benet's work year after year, and it is hard to imagine a more hospitable milieu. Perhaps most importantly, for five decades Benet's Civil War epic served as a fitting vehicle to help instill professional values in aspiring Army officers, even as its critical and popular reputation declined. The text's eventual demise also demonstrates the limits of Guillory's account of canon formation, however, for finally, no institution is an island, and even West Point's massive granite walls and storied 210-year-old tradition were not enough to preserve Benet's text and its legacy for future generations of readers.

Authors' Note

The idea for this article originated when David M. ("Mike") Owens, a graduate of West Point and later an instructor in its English Department, asked Martin Buinicki if he had heard of Benet's poem and then showed Buinicki the blue-bound Academy reprint he was issued as a cadet in 1973, along with the Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston edition his father had carried, also as a cadet, in 1948. After Owens briefly described the poem's disappearance from the curriculum, Buinicki suggested they develop and present the story as a sort of case study. In addition to Buinicki's examination of Benet's papers at Yale's Beinecke Library and decades of syllabi at the United States Military Academy, Owens conducted multiple interviews with Brigadier General (Retired) Jack Capps and Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) William McIntosh. For their cooperation, and that of Susan Lintelmann, West Point's Manuscripts Curator, the authors are extremely grateful.

Notes

1 Indeed, in 1958, President Eisenhower wrote to Benet's widow, Rosemary, during the tumultuous integration of Little Rock Central High School, remarking, "The tragedy of 'John Brown's Body' has been much in my mind these last few troubled weeks" (Letter to Rosemary Carr Benet, 9 October 1957). In 1960, Jacqueline Kennedy noted in a newspaper article, "The first year I was married I learned John Brown's Body by Stephen Vincent Benet for my husband, as it was one of his favorite poems and he loved to hear parts of it recited" ("Your Child's World").

2 Benet, only 30 years old when the poem was published, was awarded a Guggenheim in 1926 to compose an extended work in verse on "some American subject" (qtd in Fenton 167). The Civil War was only one of several topics that the author considered.

3 "Stephen Vincent Benet" in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 7. Hereafter SVB.

4 Although the author appears fairly often in anthologies published during the first half of the century, when the first edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* was published in 1979, Benet was nowhere to be found.

5 The paucity of recent criticism on the poem is striking. A survey of the MLAB reveals that most scholarship done on the poem was written prior to 1970, and the vast majority of the work done examines the poem either in terms of its historical accuracy or its identity as an "epic." See, for example, John McWilliams' essay "The Epic in the Nineteenth Century" in *The Columbia History of American Poetry*. Jay Parini, (ed. & introd.) and Brett C. Millier (ed.). New York: Columbia UP; 1993: 33-63.

6 Information in this paragraph regarding Benet's father and grandfather, including their time at West Point and their military service can be found in *The Register of Graduates and Former Cadets* published by the Association of Graduates, USMA. The on-line version is available to "Graduates, Widows, and Cadets."

7 Even as a prominent undergraduate at Yale during World War I, Benet made repeated attempts to enter service, only to be rejected for weak eyesight. In the early summer of 1918, in desperation, Benet memorized the standard eye chart and managed to enlist in the Army. On the second day of his enlistment, a sergeant observed him peeling potatoes so close to his face that, according to a 1940 *New York Times* article, "the way he was carving the things, he was likely to nick his nose" (quoted in Fenton 73).

8 In a sign of their friendship, Colonel Wheat wrote in a 1941 letter to Benet, "I think we have known each other a sufficient length of time to drop the Mister and Colonel. We are counting on you to come and give your annual lecture to the cadets on Friday, February 14th. We would like so much to have Mrs. Benet come and spend the night. Mrs. Wheat and I always enjoy your visits" (Letter to Benet, 6 February 1941).

9 In his biography, Fenton writes that the service was performed by a "former chaplain of the United States Military Academy" (8), and BG (Ret.) Capps recalled in an interview that the chaplain was indeed Col. Wheat.

10 The publication history of the "West Point" edition of *John Brown's Body* is based upon interviews with BG (Ret.) Capps, LTC (Ret.) McIntosh, and author LTC (Ret.) David Owens' own experience.

11 This is most evident in Ken Burns's documentary series *The Civil War*. C. Vann Woodward recalls, "At the beginning of the project Ken Burns asked me to name a book or two that he 'should begin to read to understand the Civil War.' He later expressed special gratitude for my suggesting *John Brown's Body* by the poet Stephen Vincent Benet as a good 'place to start.' Recalling this episode later, Burns described the series as being 'like a poem—selective, impressionistic, to be sure, but a legitimate form of historic expression'" (7). Woodward's recollection appears in an anthology that collects historians' frequently critical responses to the documentary's presentation of the war.

12 *Bugle Notes*. Ed. Jim Fuehrmeyer. West Point: USMA, 1973: 4.

13 In this regard, West Point is distinct from even those institutions which define their mission primarily in terms of the undergraduate classroom. Its focus was solely on preparing students for a career in the military. By way of contrast, Harvard College still maintains the mission set forth in its 1650 charter, beginning with "The advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences" ("The Mission of Harvard College). While Harvard also emphasizes teaching, of course, this broader mission reflects its different aims.

14 As anyone who teaches will recognize, syllabi do not often reflect the day-to-day discussions in a course. David Owens does remember his class (English 152) putting Benet's and Ellison's work into juxtaposition. That being said, it is difficult to reconstruct with certainty how material was treated in each section of English 102 and 152 in the sixties and seventies.

15 The Borman Report describes these events in detail.

16 The Tactical Department oversees the day-to-day professional development of cadets, including such aspects as the disciplinary system and standards of individual appearance and room arrangement. Woe be it to the cadet whose socks are not stowed in the proper bureau drawer with their folds facing the inspecting officer, frequently a member of the Department.

17 In their analysis of West Point, Joseph Ellis and Robert Moore note how instruction at West Point through the early 1970s concentrated on systematic problem solving, "A way of thinking that will be reinforced in engineering, physics, chemistry, economics, and even history and literature classes throughout the next four years. Cadets call it the 'engineering approach'" (115). The authors observe that such habits of thought produced a great deal of efficiency in decision making even if it came at the cost of complete understanding of the context of a particular problem (118).

18 The irony is rich: Howe's work is obviously a vital source text for Benet's poem, and, when most people are asked today if they know of "John Brown's Body," they will nod in recognition, only to realize a moment later that they are actually referring to the song, not a book-length poem. Had the Daughters of the Confederacy contest succeeded in its aims, then, even Benet's title may have been by now forgotten.

19 Although it is possible that, should the text have lingered in the curriculum into the 1980s, New Historicism might have offered yet another way to maintain the text in the curriculum, this time as a post-World War I text reflecting the nation between wars. In other words, theoretical trends can as readily support a text's inclusion as they can mobilize its removal. As Guillory suggests, what is required is individual and institutional will.

Works Cited

Abbe, George, ed. *Stephen Vincent Benet on Writing: A Great Writer's Letters of Advice to a Young Beginner*. Brattleboro: Stephen Greene Press, 1964.

Association of Graduates, USMA. *Register of Graduates and Former Cadets*. On-line.

Barkalow, Carol. *In the Men's House*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1990.

Benet, Stephen Vincent. *John Brown's Body*. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1941.

---. *John Brown's Body*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968.

---. *John Brown's Body*. 1968. West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, [1972?].

---. *Selected Letters of Stephen Vincent Benet*. Ed. Charles A. Fenton. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1960.

- Benet, Thomas Carr. "A Son Remembers" in *Stephen Vincent Benet: Essays on His Life and Work*, David G. Izzo and Lincoln Konkle, eds. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2003. 19-36.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. "The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History" *Critical Inquiry* 12.4 (1986): 631-53. On-line.
- Borman, Frank, et. al. *Report to The Secretary of the Army by The Special Commission on The United States Military Academy*. Department of the Army, 15 December 1976. On-line.
- Bugle Notes*. Ed. Jim Fuehrmeyer. West Point: USMA, 1973.
- Capps, Jack C. Personal interviews, 18 May 2011 and 22 November 2011.
- Capps, Jack C., and J.R. Kintz. "Advanced Freshman English at West Point," *College Composition and Communication* 14.2 (1963): 106-11. Print.
- Cullen, Jim. *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.
- Dickinson, Hillman, et.al. *Final Report of the West Point Study Group*. Department of the Army, 23 September 1977. On-line.
- Ellis, Joseph and Robert Moore. *School for Soldiers: West Point and the Profession of Arms*. London: Oxford UP, 1974.
- Fenton, Charles A. *Stephen Vincent Benet: The Life of an American Man of Letters 1893-1943*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1958.
- Fite, David. "Kenner/Bloom: Canonmaking and the Resources of Rhetoric." *Boundary 2* 15.3 (1988): 117-45. On-line.
- Kennedy, Jacqueline. "Your Child's World." *The American Weekly* 11 December 1960. n.p.
- Koster, Samuel W. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*. West Point, NY: USMA, 1969. Online.
- Galloway, K. Bruce and Robert Bowie Johnson, Jr. *West Point: America's Power Fraternity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- Gottesman, Ronald, et al., ed. *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Vol. 2. New York: Norton and Company, 1979.
- Lauter, Paul. "Context for Canons." *Pedagogy* 10.1 (2009): 107-16. Print.
- McIntosh, William. Personal interview, 15 April 2011 and 19 May 2011.
- Miller, John J, "John Brown's Body Exhumed." *The Wall Street Journal* 15 October 2009. On-line.
- Miller, Rod. *The Campus Guide: West Point U.S. Military Academy*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002. On-line.
- Pressly, Thomas. *Americans Interpret Their Civil War*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Rampersad, Arnold. *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- Ray, Louise Crenshaw. Letter to Stephen Vincent Benet. Undated. MS. Benet Family Papers. Yale, Beinecke Library, New Haven, CT.

- . Letter to Stephen Vincent Benet. 1 December 1938. MS. Benet Family Papers. Yale, Beinecke Library, New Haven, CT.
- Samet, Elizabeth. *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.
- Shaara, Michael. *The Killer Angels*. New York: Random House, 1974.
- "Stephen Vincent Benet." *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 7. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co, 1982.
- United States Corps of Cadets. *Bugle Notes 1973*. West Point: USMA, 1973.
- Wheat, Clayton E. *The Democratic Tradition in America*. Boston: Ginn, 1943.
- . Letter to Rosemary Benet. Undated. MS. Benet Family Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- . Letter to Stephen Vincent Benet. 4 January 1934. MS. Benet Family Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- . Letter to Stephen Vincent Benet. 6 February 1941. MS. Benet Family Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
- Williams, T. Harry, "The Military Leadership of North and South" in *Why the North Won the Civil War*. Edited by David Donald. New York: Collier Books, 1962.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912-1972*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Woodward, C. Vann. "Help from Historians" in *Ken Burns's The Civil War: Historians Respond*. Ed. Robert Brent Toplin. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. 5-15.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Excerpt from Advanced Freshman English syllabus, 1962-63. (Special Collections and Archives Division, USMA Library, West Point, New York)

Figure 2. Cover of the USMA reprint of *John Brown's Body*, circa 1972.

Figure 3. Excerpt from Freshman English syllabus, 1974-75. (Special Collections and Archives Division, USMA Library, West Point, New York)

MARTIN T. BUINICKI is the Walter G. Friedrich Professor of American Literature at Valparaiso University and author of *Negotiating Copyright: Authorship and the Discourse of Literary Property Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Routledge) and *Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing between Memory and History* (Iowa Whitman Series). He has published essays in a number of books and journals, including *American Literary History*, *American Literary Realism*, the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, and *War, Literature and the Arts*.

DAVID M. OWENS is an Associate Professor of English at Valparaiso University in Indiana. He is the author of *The Devil's Topographer: Ambrose Bierce and the American War Story* published in 2006 by the University of Tennessee Press. He has also published articles in *American Literary Realism and Modern Fiction Studies*. In addition to a previous article for *War, Literature, and the Arts*, he and Martin Buinicki have also recently edited an extensive collection of nineteenth century Civil War writings from San Francisco's *Overland Monthly* for which they are seeking a publisher.