



# Henry Timrod's "Ethnogenesis" and the Untold Poetic Voices of the Confederacy's Reverse Epic

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Henry Timrod's "Ethnogenesis" and the Untold Poetic Voices of the Confederacy's Reverse Epic

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A Thesis in the Field of English  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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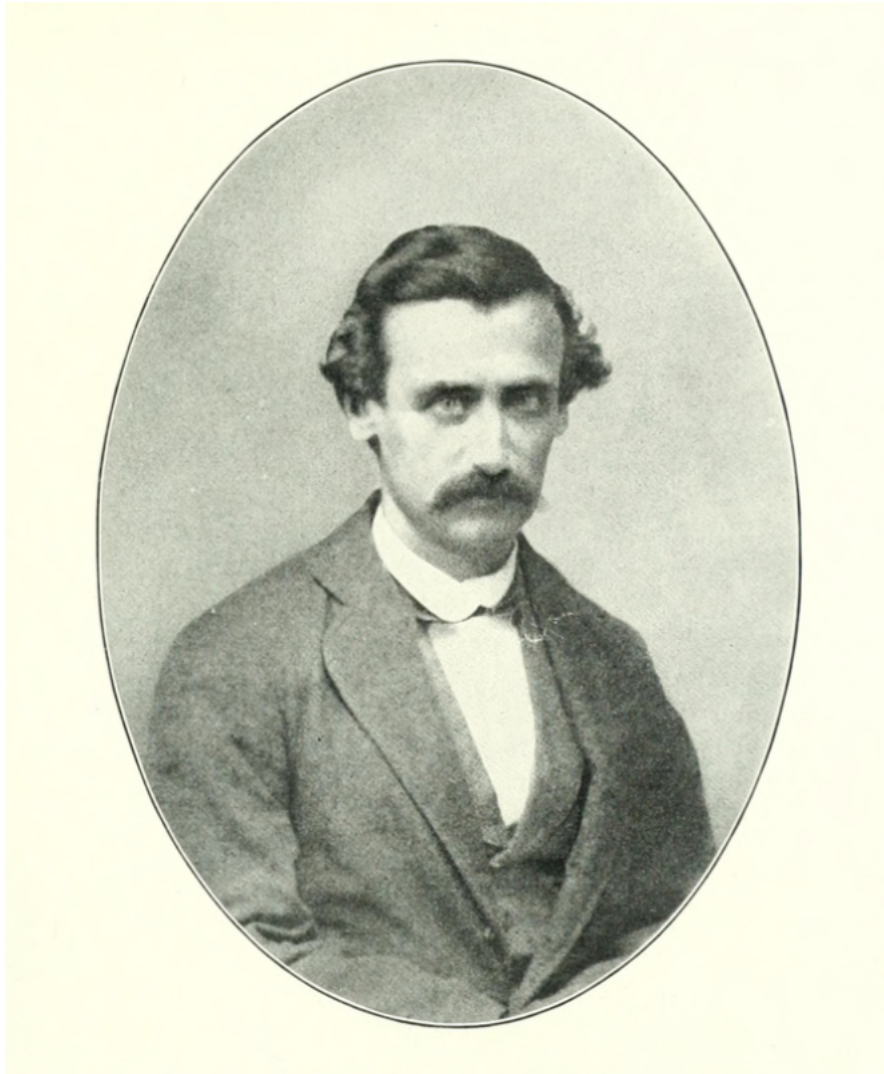
## Abstract

In a time when cotton was king, slavery was endemic, and secession represented Southern hope, the literati of the Confederate era hoped to assemble a foundation of words to support their new nation and declare their intentions for their future to the world. Beginning with the publication of Henry Timrod's "Ethnogenesis" in 1861 (and continuing throughout the Civil War in the form of innumerable lines of poetry published in newspapers throughout the South), Confederate poems offer an unfamiliar yet powerful perspective to evaluate Southern mindset during the Civil War. When viewed in their entirety, the numberless voices preserved in newspaper poetry of the time can be combined into a modern interpretation of the epic genre, with similarities drawn to Homer's *Iliad* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Henry Timrod's "Ethnogenesis," first published in 1861, acts as the Southern epic's omniscient narrator, drafting a roadmap available before the war began for poets to follow as they wrote this epic in reverse, with notable similarities drawn between God anointing Southerners as His chosen people, then through a bloody war, and finally to unavoidable independence and peace.

Problematic to the challenge of writing a Southern epic in reverse is the fact that the outcome Southerners desired never came to fruition, forcing their writers to reverse course one last time. Instead of composing a victory march, the final Confederate epic chronicles more an elegiac memorial, one where the South appears not as loser but as a chosen people who elect to interpret the loss as God's delayed victory. Their efforts simultaneously erase much of the cruelty of slavery from the narrative while elevating the

white men who fought for the South to mythological heroes similar to Achilles and George Washington. Bracketed by Henry Timrod's works (including 1861's "Ethnogenesis," 1863's "The Unknown Dead," and 1866's "Ode Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead at Magnolia Cemetery"), a detailed exploration of these newspaper poems adds depth to the Southern experience by including a valuable (yet often overlooked and minimized) collection of voices that canonizes and idealizes an epic poetic vision of the South's rise and fall.

Frontispiece



Henry Timrod

*Poetry and Eloquence of Blue and Gray*, vol. 9, from *The Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes*, edited by Francis Trevelyan Miller. New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1957, p. 27.

## Author's Note

When I began the thesis process in July of 2019, I had no idea what awaited me over the next eighteen months. Major events of the world that transpired while I was thinking, researching, compiling, sifting, and writing, include the following:

- *My final research trip to Cambridge, 21-25 February 2020:* Even as I was cramming in research at Widener Library, medical professionals were meeting at a convention center in Boston and unwittingly spreading COVID-19 in the first major outbreak in the US. I flew home full of new information and unaware that the world was only weeks away from shutting down.
- *Libraries shuttered, campuses closed, 14 March 2020:* Schools, libraries, and public places across the country closed in an attempt to flatten the curve as the virus spread. Not even online requests for scanned copies of texts could be honored. I drafted my thesis proposal while figuring out online learning with my three youngest kids. I was assigned my thesis director, Collier Brown, in May and much of our early discussions were peppered with the uncertainties of the pandemic: *How could I finish my research? Where would I get missing information? Would this even be possible?* Finding toilet paper and flour suddenly took precedence over the words of obscure Civil War poets.
- *Summer 2020:* Fomented by police brutality against black Americans, discontent spread across the country, closing federal buildings in its wake and once again limiting online access to information and fueling unanswerable questions.

Hurricane after hurricane flooded the South, while fire engulfed much of the West, including my home state of Arizona. Stress over the state of our country plagued my mind, and my research took a necessary back seat as I helped my family navigate rough waters once again.

- *Ruth Bader Ginsberg's death and the presidential election, fall 2020*: Despite the historic election of a woman of color to the vice presidency, Americans speculated if national politics would reignite emotions now simmering from the summer's protests. I buried my worries in documents and writing, still focused on my projected deadline.
- *Rioters storm the US Capitol, 6 January 2021*: At the exact moment protestors breached the Capitol building, Dr. Brown and I discussed the final draft of my thesis. When I hung up from that Zoom call, I received a flood of texts asking if I was watching the news, and after allowing myself two days of doom scrolling, I completed my final rough draft.

The thesis process is hard enough, and the unprecedented conflagration of events in 2020 threatened the completion of my work. I reimagined research possibilities and sources. I accessed information online through temporary emergency access granted by most universities and libraries. I reworked my approach to adapt to these limiting conditions. I rewrote and I restructured.

- *5 February 2021*: I finished.

Jenny Denton



## Dedication

To Brad for grounding my dreams and encouraging me to fly 2300 miles across the country over a dozen times while he learned how to navigate Costco in my absence

and

to Bob Tickner who survived polio and sixth-grade me.

One was much harder than the other.

Both knew I could do this before I ever did.

I still can't believe they were right.

## Acknowledgments

First, to my parents: Thanks, Dad for teaching me that our nation's history is riveting and worth fully immersing oneself in. And Mom, where would I be if you had never introduced me to Scarlett O'Hara in sixth grade and indulged my fantasy with a hoopskirt of my own for my twelfth birthday? Without Scarlett, I never would have sought for the truth behind the fiction. I love you both.

To the staff at the Library of Virginia: Thanks for hand-delivering microfilms and originals, and for learning my name (even if I was the only patron for hours on end!). Special thanks to Dave Graberek. I didn't know what I would do when libraries shuttered at the beginning of the pandemic. Though seemingly small, your help was indispensable at a very difficult crossroads. "Research is trench warfare—a muddy slog. Keep at it."

To Widener Library: Spending hours with rare volumes will be what I miss most about this experience. I will always remember how it felt to sweep my Harvard ID and walk up the staircase into Widener's welcoming halls. It's a joy I will treasure always. And HOLLIS, I'll miss you, too. You never let me down, especially when the pandemic made it impossible to access original documents.

Thanks to Harvard Extension School's English department: Elisa New taught me to love and parse poetry; and John Stauffer convinced me that my passions for American history and American literature could indeed be combined at this level of scholarship to create something of value. You'll never know your impact on this project, but I do.

Thanks to Stephen Shoemaker who awarded me the most prized grade of my life and confirmed for me that I *was* “Harvard Material.” Thanks for your quick responses to my inane questions.

To Michael Shinagel: I feel so privileged that I experienced the very last class of your storied career at Harvard. It was an honor. Your kind words and recommendation sit framed on my desk to remind me that I deserve a seat at the table. Thank you.

To Collier Brown: You let this project represent my ideas and acted as the guide for my journey, not the master. You provided endless resource ideas, asked thought-provoking contextual questions, and led me through two complete course corrections to a final product more literary than historical (as you knew it always should have been). Most important, you were an anchor of reassurance and kindness through the minefield of 2020. You didn’t have to do that.

Thanks to countless family and friends for acting as sounding boards for me, lending books, and for understanding missed lunch dates (sorry, Karen!). Thanks for tolerating my constant preoccupation with the ever-present ideas clouding my mind and diverting my attention for the last two years. Now that it’s all on paper and out of my head, I’m planning to reenter the world.

To my children, Heidi, Tucker, Ben, Lily, Micah, Hyrum, and Eve: You’ve always been my world. Thanks for supporting your mom’s crazy aspirations.

And Brad. How can I ever thank you for indulging my pipe dream? Thanks for loving me as me and swearing you wouldn’t want me any other way.

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## Chapter I.

### Introduction

From South Carolina's declaration of secession in December of 1860, the Confederate battle for independence contained the elements needed to construct a Southern epic. These new Confederates aspired to forge a nation that could join other nations on a grand global scale. They predicted valor and victory from the courageous actions of soon-to-be battle heroes. They petitioned the Christian God Almighty for assistance from His Unseen World to fight their otherworldly Northern enemy, personified as Abraham Lincoln "Set up[on] his evil throne" ("Ethnogenesis" 151, see Appendix). However, they lacked a critical piece for their forthcoming Southern epic, a piece inherent to every epic written before this one: an inevitable and unavoidable outcome. Traditional epics lack suspense as a motivating element in the story simply because events occur in the past, and the audience knows the outcome from the outset. Nevertheless, this complicating factor for the Confederate epic acted as no stumbling block for Southern writers. They simply needed to construct their epic storyline from the conclusion and work *in reverse* as if their professions would guarantee their predicted outcome, delimiting the narrative (as the classic epicists did) to ideas, incidents, and facts that framed the war as they wanted the Southern people to see it—not necessarily as it actually was. Theirs was "a literature of aspiration . . . [in] a near perpetual process of deferral . . . [constantly] future oriented," observe Hutchison and Richardson (8). And writers from all over the Confederacy would add their perspectives to this reverse epic. Editor William Gilmore Simms declared in the *Southern Illustrated News*:

We are now living the first grand epic of our newly-born Confederacy. We are making the materials for the drama, and for future songs and fiction; and, engaged in the actual event, we are in no mood for delineating its details, or framing it to proper laws of art, in any province. (11 Oct. 1862)

The South could bother with literary rules and propriety after the war was over. For now, merely professing their existence as a nation would suffice. As Aristotle timelessly quipped, “A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility” (65). For now, Southern poets would write *their* epic with *their* end firmly and inarguably in sight, filling in the story’s timeline with appropriate events as they happened.

Certainly, Southern poetry from the Civil War cannot qualify as a traditional epic along the lines of the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*, where thousands of lines in one complete volume recount heroic adventures on the battlefields and harrowing encounters with demons, customarily ending with the victorious triumph of the hero. In the introduction to Stanley Lombardo’s translation of the *Iliad*, Sheila Murnaghan defines traditional epic as “a monumental form which recounts events with far-reaching historical consequences, sums up the values and achievements of an entire culture, and documents the fullness and variety of the world” (xxi). A modern epic, however, as Christopher Phillips emphasizes in *Epic in American Culture*, does not necessarily fit these strict parameters: “Epic did not die with Milton; . . . it developed new power and shape in the United States that continues to influence our literature and our culture today” (4). Further, he declares that as critics enable the definition of the epic form to evolve and expand, “the surprises in the archive of American literary engagements with epic form [can be] myriad” (6). When

combining this loosely classified definition of epic with Murnaghan's conventional definition of the term, the South's reverse epic comes more clearly into focus.

It appears that Henry Timrod, dubbed the "Poet Laureate of the South," hoped to craft just such an epic. Inspired by his fortuitous attendance at the first Confederate Congress in 1861, this formerly Romantic poet permanently altered the trajectory of his poetry when he wrote "Ethnogenesis," a four-stanza poem that idealizes Southern agrarian life; airs grievances against Lincoln and the North; links the Southern cause to both Revolutionary era and Christian heroes; and finally outlines the future course of the Confederate States of America as a benevolent contributor to the world. Described by John Budd as "the quintessential voice of the Confederacy" (439), Henry Timrod saw the future of the Confederacy, and in his "birth of a nation" vision lay the elements to construct the South's epic: heroes, villains, divine intervention, generals, warriors, memorable battles, mythical beauty—and eventual and unavoidable victory for and vindication of the Southern way of life.

In order to accurately understand Timrod's work as a product of his time, it is vital to address the increased influence of newspapers on the development of Southern Civil War literature and the countless lines of poetry published therein during the war. The world of poetry transformed during the Civil War, primarily due to the increasing influence of newspapers and the telegraph's ability to spread information over great expanses efficiently and almost immediately all over the country. These developments in technology created for the first time in history a collective national literary experience that contributed to the formation of national identity. During the war, most poets sought for their poetry to be published quickly, and "much of Timrod's poetry found readers via



broadsides and newspapers” (Hutchison and Richardson 13), a new route to exposure that varied from the more traditional routes he had taken before the war. As William G. Shepperson observed in his 1862 volume *War Songs of the South*, newspapers “sped [poems’] flight from and to the heart and mind of the people. [These poems] showed which way the wind was blowing when the war arose.” Even as inconsequential as these voices may seem today, Shepperson conceded that at the time, “surely these newspaper waifs have played no unimportant part in the actual drama which surrounds us” (Shepperson 4). Timrod’s work stands above this sea of voices, acting as a touchpoint before, during, and after the war, helping Southerners (including himself) process the horrific events surrounding them. Therefore, a background of newspaper poetry and its value to and impact on Southern Civil War society and culture is essential to understanding how these voices add depth to the Southern epic.

The poetry of the Civil War South is the product of a slave-holding society. Southern literature referring organically and unapologetically to slavery poses a crisis of conscience for modern readers who often pass moral judgment upon the author or the work—not the practice of slavery itself. Louis Rubin concedes that while this often presents “an inescapable limitation” to today’s scholars, it “is not the poet’s fault” (202), as they are creatures of their time, culture, and environment. Eliminating or discounting from study Confederate-era poems that positively identify with slavery weakens objective scholarship of the Civil War South with hindsight bias (see Tversky and Kahneman 1130; Fischhoff 304-307; Lewis 207-209). This ever-increasing practice of devaluing anything referencing Southern slave culture in general and Southern slave-culture poetry in particular contributes to an academic environment that, in the words of Elizabeth Elliott,

eliminates work holding “fascinating value” in its own right. She argues that works like Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis” and myriad Confederate newspaper poems “will continue to be side-stepped by academia because the subject matter cannot be reconciled with progressive modern views, and aversion will only increase with time” (24) if scholars refuse to consciously address (and attempt to minimize) the influence of their moral and hindsight biases.

Michael T. Bernath concedes that because researchers know the end of the Confederate experience, they “are predisposed to analyze the weaknesses” and forget that “Confederates at the time, of course, did not know that their nation was doomed. Their viewpoint was forward looking . . . [expecting] the Confederacy to survive and thrive” (3). As Walter Hines Page wrote more than a decade after the war, “Sufficient that at least the Southern people thought it right . . . Politically wrong or right, it was poetically true; as true as any classic chapter of life in any time” (qtd. in Budd 439), and every effort should be made to evaluate such works contextually and historically while withholding moral judgment, as this study attempts to do.

Combining Murnaghan’s classic definition, Phillips’s flexible interpretation, and Timrod’s poetic vision for a reverse Southern epic with the influence of the countless poetic voices published in Southern newspapers during the Civil War generates a uniquely powerful and fresh view of Southern poetry as an epic contribution to Southern literature, creating a change of perspective, perception, and definition that Stephen Greenblatt calls a swerve—“a key moment . . . muffled and almost invisible”(12) to those previously plotted or understood. Present from the first meeting of the Confederate Congress and quickly conveyed in verse in Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis,” a vision for

an independent Confederate nation merged with incalculable published poems to write a singular Southern epic foretelling a future victory that never came to fruition—a shocking tragedy the South struggled to resolve and rewrite for generations thereafter.

## Chapter II.

### Newspaper Poetry in the Confederacy

Southerners pinned their early dreams for the new Confederate nation's success on more than victories in the political and military arenas: Identity as a sovereign nation hinged on creating a uniquely Southern culture and literature, independent of Northern literary constraints. Confederate intellectuals were well acquainted with the war epics, from the warrior culture of Homer and Virgil to John Milton's war in heaven. Editors at Richmond's *Southern Illustrated News* moralized that in the poets "from the days of heroic Greece down to . . . every nation rude or civilized, there are evidences of effort to embalm in poetry the deeds of glory and pride of patriotism" (28 Feb. 1863). As Faith Barrett asserts, the Civil War was more than a literature-fueled war like World War I; it was "more specifically a *poetry-fueled war*" (*To Fight Aloud* 3). Understanding the importance of the poetry of the South, as exemplified by the works of Henry Timrod and those published in their newspapers, is vital to understanding how these works combine into a reverse epic describing Southern Civil War experience in their own voices to their contemporaries and fortuitously to scholars today.

### Role of Poetry in the Civil War South

Given the confident tones in their poetry and literary articles, it can be assumed that Southerners understood the power of poetry to guide people's religious and political beliefs. They believed that Southern literature could (after securing independence) tell the

grand tale of Southern liberation through their poetic historical record. They envisioned poetry playing a pivotal role in directing the population's perspectives on and dedication to the war efforts, "justifying blood sacrifice in the name of patriotism," as Eliza Richards declares ("Weathering the News" 113). Writers of the time viewed poetry as a weapon no less effective than those used by soldiers on the battlefields, largely fighting their battle for Southern nationalism with ink and paper in the public press.

### Defining Southern Civil War Poetry

As one who understood the possible impact powerful poetic voices could play in developing this new Southern idea, contemporary editor George William Bagby solicited "no namby-pamby" contributions to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, versifying his request for poems and prose that "smack of war," because "All thoughts, all passions, all delights / . . . are but ministers of War, / And feed his *horrid* flame" (XXXII:399).

Littérateurs agreed on the potential societal impact of poems in constructing their Southern cultural goal of "a literature of our own, . . . of which we may be justly proud, because it will be equal to any" (*SIN* 28 Mar. 1863), but they constantly argued over what classified as *poetry*. This argument played out in the Charleston press between William Grayson and Henry Timrod, both respected poets and published critics who moved in the same literary circles. A former South Carolina representative in the US Congress who died in 1863, Grayson never reached Timrod's stature poetically, but historians do credit Grayson for coining the term "master race" in his 1854 work *The Hireling and the Slave*, a piece in which he defends the practice of African slavery as humane (Grayson 173). Self-proclaimed as a literary traditionalist, Grayson's more conventional poetic philosophies were published in the July 1857 issue of *Russell's Magazine* in an essay

titled “What Is Poetry?”. His definition of poetry extends broadly, conceding that “[t]he great masters of song alone may occupy the summit, but every thicket and dell and bosky bourne [sic] from side to side, has its attendant melody” (147). He pigeonholes poetry to mere exercises in rhyme and meter, rejecting prose from the poetical classification of writing he deems “a divine art, and of this divine art the poets are the masters of the highest form” (153). Edd Parks comments that this theory lumps “a casual bit of doggerel” with the works of the masters like Shakespeare, but Grayson “thought of himself as an advocate of common sense,” a view in opposition to those who followed a more modern Romantic philosophy (Parks 14; Grayson 173).

Henry Timrod was one of those Romantics. As one of the few Confederate intellectual poets whose work received critical acclaim both North and South (and as a poet who articulated his philosophies of poetry frequently), Timrod felt qualified to engage with Grayson in defining Southern poetry. *Russell’s Magazine* published his rebuttal to Grayson’s essay three months later in their October 1863 edition (Parks 158). Timrod’s familiarity with the works of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Coleridge (along with in-depth study of the classic poets) provided him ample ammunition for this philosophical engagement. His essay elaborates on Samuel Coleridge’s 1827 statement “prose—words in their best order; poetry—the best words in their best order” (qtd. in Timrod 161), thus increasing the scope of poetry from including only a strictly defined system of arranging words to include any words that are “the most beautiful, in sound and in association” (*Essays* 15). Thoughtfully constructed and purposefully chosen words, he argued, create poetry whether in rhyme or in prose. Using this definition, Timrod asserts that segments of Milton’s “Of Education” do “[contain] the genuine elements of poetry,”

while entire sections of Homer's *Iliad* merely recount names or places necessary to further the poet's narrative, therefore lacking true poetic value (*Essays* 78, 112). While he wrote countless verses in his life, Timrod's work reached beyond iambs or rhyme scheme to "thoughts which refuse to be embodied in language," suggesting "something ineffable and mysterious of which the mind can attain but partial glimpses" (114). He mourned the intrusions of industrial materialism on man's thoughts, and he concurred with Thoreau's conclusion that "there is scarcely a twig left for them left to perch on. . . . Our winged thoughts are turned to poultry. They no longer soar" ("Walking" 69). Although ceding a place and purpose for the ample poems written by common "versifiers" of the time, Timrod and other elites envisioned themselves as called by Calliope herself to eloquently and beautifully compose homages to the beauties of Nature and Love, and preserve in poetry the epic birth of the Confederacy.

Confederate poetry experienced a metamorphosis along with the South. Following in the traditions of his favorite poets (Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Milton), Henry Timrod understood that truly beautiful arrangements of words took time to create. In his "A Theory of Poetry" lecture given repeatedly during the winter of 1863-1864, he said,

Many poets have written of grief, but no poet with the first agony at his heart, ever sat down to strain that grief through iambics. Many poets have given expression to the first raptures of successful love, but no poet, in the delirium of the joy, has ever babbled it in anapests. (119)

Timrod believed that time and peaceful reflection lend necessary and elusive depth to poetic work, but the wartime symbiotic relationship linking poetry to the mass media and

the war's ever-changing events (and to the public's appetite for poetry relevant to the war's events) interrupted the work of many poets at the time. The speed with which poetry made it from pen to print during the war did not allow space for the contemplative, Romantic ideals that Timrod espoused. In 1863, William Gilmore Simms confessed that he had written little of literary quality for the first two years of the war, and that he would "need a year of peace to bring me back to that calm mood which Literature demands (*The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, qtd. in Moss 10). Reconstruction would not provide that peace.

In the North, Walt Whitman tried to explain the era's unusual experiences with poetry, attempting to marry war's graceless ugliness with poetry's elegant beauty without compromising quality. Whitman's work, as evaluated in *The Times Literary Supplement*, demonstrates convictions similar to Timrod's regarding poetic ideals. The article reasons that while "incontinently pour[ing] experience out in a Niagara-like cataract," Whitman's work classifies as "true poetry" which "focuses experience, not merely transmits it. [Poetry] must redeem [experience] for ever [sic] from transitoriness and evanescence" (1 Apr. 1915, qtd. in Whitman 14). The North produced other war-time poetic exceptions along with Whitman, including Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson, but the work of few contemporary Southern poets is remembered as meeting this "transitory" or evanescent" standard attributed to Whitman—and not because these poets simply did not exist. Instead, their work lies buried in an avalanche of poetic lines published in hundreds of newspapers and penned in a South trying to break free from decades of (real and perceived) Northern literary condescension.



In addition, the work of these exceptional Northern poets neither greatly impacted nor was reflected the writings of contemporary poets generally, especially in the South. As Drew Gilpin Faust explains in *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, her groundbreaking study of death's impact during this era, Herman Melville's *Battle Pieces* sold around five hundred copies during this time, and Emily Dickinson's work remained mostly private until thirty years after the war. Further, she argues that these Northern poets' revolutionary approach to "understanding . . . war's destruction does not lie in their influence upon popular thought. Nor can they be seen as representative of widely held views" of the time period, concluding that their viewpoints and levels of ability provide only samples "of possible reactions" to the war (208), and cannot, therefore, speak to or for the Southern experience.

Christopher Phillips advances Faust's observations. He claims that the "elevation of Whitman and Dickinson—both innovators of lyric forms and self-identified as marginal to American society—as the two great pre-1900 poets only serve[s] to consolidate [a] ghettoization of [the Civil War] genre," creating an unfair assumption that the predominantly "pre-modernist" writers in the South and in the North "had modernism unconsciously in mind" and somehow fell short in their comparison to the modernists (7). And Faith Barrett avers that by elevating modernist poetry as the only work of the period of any merit and summarily neglecting the rest as lacking "the aesthetic ambition that [today's] scholars value[ ] most highly" is a mistake. She concludes that the scholarly tendency "to analyze Civil War culture without attending to the [common] poetry of this period is to ignore the most influential and vital discursive conversation taking place in the divided nation at that time" (4).

Eliza Richards advances these claims even more, adding another argument in favor of the value of common poetry written during the Civil War. She writes that the poetry of this period was further complicated by the impact of the overwhelming death toll published daily in the papers. Combining horrific photographic images from battle sites heretofore only seen by those at the front (but now existed as part of the civilian experience) impacted writers in ways never before experienced on the home front. “What to make of this situation—how to feel when strangers die for you, how to imagine mass death at a distance, how to visualize invisible suffering—these are some of the pressing topics in much Civil War poetry.” She concludes that while this may seem commonplace to people today, “the mass scale of death in conjunction with a newly forged mass media network made this state of affairs . . . deeply perplexing” for Civil War-era Americans (*Battle Lines* 114). It was in these circumstances that the bulk of Southern Civil War poets recorded their experiences.

Had more of the South’s Civil War poets held to Timrod’s poetic philosophy, the Southern intellectual elite’s best efforts to produce a widely respected Southern Civil War literary culture might have been realized, despite the limiting circumstances of war. However, with the world in chaos and news of that chaos traveling faster than ever before, poets on both sides of the conflict rushed pieces to press. As Oliver Wendell Holmes observed, “We must have something to eat, and the papers to read. Everything else we can give up” (346). Because of this insatiable desire for quick information, most of the poetry produced during the Civil War followed more closely with William Grayson’s poetry definition of “words, of thought or emotion, in conformity with metrical and rythmical [sic] laws” (*Essays* 151) than with Timrod’s ephemeral encounters

with the Muse, “which when incarnated in language, are recognized as the utterances of Poetry, and affect us like the music of angels” (113).

Undeterred that their vision for the future of the Confederacy came with no guarantee, Southern poets still invested *en masse* in this vision of a Confederate future independent of the North, seldom doubting its veracity in print.<sup>1</sup> The societal isolation of Southern ports created from the North’s successful blockade (serendipitously halting the arrival of any new literature along with the stoppage of vital supplies) provided a singular opportunity for literary independence, and Southern writers stood poised to take advantage. Before the war, Southern writers had often tried to prove their value to the literary world at large, but Northern standards, criticisms, and arrogance continued to infantilize Southern efforts. In “Literature in the South,” Henry Timrod sardonically voiced the South’s concerns, penning,

It is the settled conviction of the North that genius is indigenous there, and flourishes only in a Northern atmosphere. It is the equally firm conviction of the South that genius—literary genius, at least—is an exotic that will not flower on a Southern soil. (*Essays* 84)

Southern literati publicly battled against these presumptions, working to produce a national literature supporting the fight for political and literary independence. From the pages of their periodicals and papers, editors condemned the “rotten and phosphorescent” works of Northern elitists, soliciting for Southern literary contributions that “would [not]

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<sup>1</sup> This does not apply to editorials and other articles where criticism of Davis, the government, and military operations abounded. Poetry, for no discernible reason, was the one voice in the press that could be depended upon to stay loyal to the administration and the Confederacy until the bitter end.

yield to morbid and trashy sentimentalism” but would create a respectable body of work “enriched by the gallant dead, and hallowed by inspiring associations” (*SLM* XXXIV: 313; *Southern Field and Fireside* III:255, qtd. in Aaron 233). From the moment shells fell on Fort Sumter in April of 1861, “it was widely assumed that poetry and song had an important patriotic role to play in the war,” as Alice Fahs posits. She continues, suggesting that these writers—both famous and unknown—saw their poetry as “imaginative acts that not only reflected a new nationhood but actively called it into being” (62). Written as battlefield or home-front events happened, Southern poets structured each work to tell their portion of the grand story in a way that used their poetic skills in rhetorical ways, touching on nearly all facets of their war-torn world. In the end, poets and publishers from all over the South blended their voices to generate the epic poetic legacy of the Confederacy.

Instead of producing poets (as the Romantics aspired to do) “of original genius draw[ing] his matter from the depths of his own being and the national character” (Timrod 161), or a corps of poets “whose words were so true and fresh and natural that they would appear to expand like the buds at the approach of spring” (Thoreau 48), Southern Civil War poets generally took a nationalistic, common-sense approach to their poems. This body of work overwhelmingly turned from Romantic ideals to interpreting current events, bolstering flagging morale at home and at the front, glorifying Confederate leaders, and comforting those mourning grievous losses. Thus, their poetry quickly veered away from Timrod’s hope that Southern letters could be established “[n]ot by exalting mediocrity, not by setting dullness on a throne, and putting a garland on the head of vanity,” an error so great that it would “only serve to depreciate excellence,

discourage effort, and disgust the man of real ability” (*Essays* 97). These poets inadvertently and unconsciously gravitated toward Grayson’s practical and more easily applied philosophy that “all [versifiers] deserve and may receive admiration and applause, and we may prefer one or the other without derogating from the claims of either to his own proper measure of honor and reward” (148). This choice influenced the direction of Southern poetry for the entire war; even decades later this Confederate philosophy reverberated in the epic reversal seen in poetry published after Appomattox.

### Using Poetry to Craft the Confederacy and Its Reverse Epic

The South had a problem: They had Southerners. Now they must create the Confederacy (see Massimo d’Azeglio in E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, qtd. in Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism* 15). This was a difficult task—carving out a believable and fully independent Southern ethnicity from their existing American identity. Southerners already viewed themselves as separate from Northerners, so of primary importance in their fight was establishing the identity, culture, laws, and beliefs of this independent nation. When asking, “How can ethnicity be produced? And how can it be produced in such a way that it does not appear as fiction, but as the most natural of origins?” (97), Balibar and Wallerstein recognize the inherent difficulty accompanying the creation of a new *fictive ethnicity* where the two easiest means of establishing cultural independence (language and race) cannot be employed, as was the case for Southerners. Even more problematic for Southern writers crafting this identity and story in reverse, however, was the fact that “the Epic,” as Aristotle observes, “affords more opening for the improbable, the chief factor in the marvelous” retelling of events (65)—not for recording history as it happens. Called “crisis of realism in epic form” by in

*Epic in American Culture*, this tension between tale and truth—this attempt to make a prominent figure or battle engagement fit into the predicted narrative—dogged the South as it had “haunted American engagements with the epic from its earliest stages” (Phillips 19), albeit their complications arose from attempting to fit actuality into their previously predicted timeline.

Poets throughout the South viewed their words on paper as just as valuable in the fight for Confederate independence as soldiers on the fields of battle. James Dawes, in *Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War Through World War II*, suggests that “wars are born and sustained in rivers of language about what it means to serve the cause, to kill the enemy, and to die with dignity.” Southern poets took this responsibility seriously, viewing their poetry as specifically “part of war’s arsenal as surely as uniforms and training camps” (qtd. in Richards, *Battle Lines* 131). Since leaders had already outlined the intended trajectory of this epic quest for Southern independence, it now passed to the poets to make it a reality.

#### Importance of Mass Media in the Dispersion of Confederate Poetry

Warfare played by faster, more brutal, more deadly rules during the Civil War than ever before, with advances in technology unexpectedly and irreversibly affecting the literary world in ways that traditional poets like Henry Timrod could never have predicted. According to Eliza Richards in *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the US Civil War*, this transformation in literature was “fueled by a symbiotic relationship between the development of mass media networks and modern warfare” (1). The proliferation of printing presses linked by thousands of miles of telegraph and railroad

lines consolidated into America's first mass media system, and this new network "drew its energy from the war" (Richards, "Weathering the News" 113), thus increasing the value of short, quickly penned poems which could travel the wires and fill column inches to presses all over the South.

This newly constructed network was flawed: Early news from the battlefield often contained purposefully or accidentally inaccurate news. Because the Confederate government exercised little control over the press (unlike Lincoln in the North), Southern newspapers published the facts (and required subsequent retractions) as they received them, occasionally crossing the line between printing the truth and compromising the military's battle plans. On 15 October 1862, for example, the Richmond *Daily Whig* printed a statement from General Lee: "I thought it was understood that our papers were to be silent on all matters appertaining to the movements of the army." Even though it was published in the North's *Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes's 1861 article, "Bread and the Newspaper," accurately conveys how both sides felt about these advances in the media when he wrote that "perpetual intercommunications . . . keeps us always alive with excitement. . . . but almost hourly paragraphs, laden with truth or falsehood as the case may be, [make] us restless always for the last fact rumor" (348). For the first time in history, civilians constantly stewed in the horrors of war along with their soldiers in a way never before experienced behind the lines, and their thirst for updated information only grew as the war intensified.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Richmond's newspapers declared Robert E. Lee Gettysburg's winner, inaccurately reporting his victory and the capture of forty thousand prisoners as late as July 9, 1863, five days after the battle (Coulter 504). Whether attributable to intentionally delaying bad news or simply the consequence of bad reporting and faulty early technology, mistakes of this magnitude were not uncommon in the Confederate press.

Despite the number of mistaken reports, newspapers played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, and poems published alongside battle news influenced public morale, patriotism, and interpretations of events. Poems with lines such as “Three to one! our foes outnumber, / Frenzied hordes our ruin plan; / Now for us nor ease, nor slumber, / Now each one be *thrice* a man!” or with lines like “Leave, then, your peaceful labors; / Unfurl your banners high; / Bring your rifles and your sabres, / And go prepared to die!” spurred enlistments, just as poems titled “Southern Chant of Defiance” and “Battle Song of the Invaded” amplified nationalistic fervor (*MW*, 7 Mar. 1863; *RDE*, 21 Apr. 1861; *RNHL*, 23 Jul. 1863; *RDE*, 28 Feb. 1862). Because they held establishing Confederate nationhood as their shared goal, both readers and writers valued newspaper poetry for its public influence, especially since the conduit to Northern literature and its ideals quickly closed once the blockade of Southern ports was in place. In his biography of *Southern Literary Messenger* editor Dr. George William Bagby, Joseph L. King quotes Bagby’s description of the early efforts in Southern belles-lettres as a time when Southern “dolphins [could] show their most brilliant hues, and swans give forth their most precious odors when crushed” (105), venerating the role of Confederate poetry published under the duress of the war. Since newspapers now held the public’s attention daily, poems published in newspapers became even more influential and widely read, and Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller reflect that “poetry was seen as an integral part of American political culture, [as] the war only heightened Americans’ commitment to the discursive strategies of poetry” (2). In fact, writers redirected focus on developing an independent Southern literature from a more formal literature published in books to spreading the Confederate message through easily transportable short works (newspapers, broadsides,



pamphlets, and periodicals) until after the war when serious writers would have time to reflect and process the war's events in volume form.<sup>3</sup>

### Reception of Poetry in the Civil War South

Despite composing and publishing "Ethnogenesis" in seventeen days, Henry Timrod considered both the passage of time and reflection vital in the poetic process. Four years before the declaration of war, he referenced Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility" in his essay, "Character and Scope of the Sonnet," published in *Russell's Magazine* (*Essays* 65). Even in the midst of overwhelming national loss, grief, and few peacefully reflective occasions, he still preached this definition, stating in his 1863-64 "A Theory of Poetry" lecture that in moments of contemplation are "the [poetic] feelings awakened." Only then can the poet "stand in the presence of Truth, Power, and Beauty," to access "the prime minister of Poetry,—Imagination" (*Essays* 118). This contemplative philosophy, while applicable to much of the South's antebellum poetry, quickly fell victim to the tumultuous conditions forced upon poets during the war.

Even though they still held value, no longer were sophistication and transcendence the poetic ideals overwhelmingly prized in the South. Rarely finding the retrospective moments necessary to write their "poems for the ages," as William Moss states (5), and with limited opportunities for recompense for their efforts, professional poets stepped back. In their places arose largely amateur writers who waxed poetic in sentimental verse or jingoistic doggerel related to current military and political events,

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<sup>3</sup> Poems published in any of these sources will be correctly cited from their original sources, but for brevity, the term "newspaper poetry" will be used in this work as a general term of classification.

thus satiating the public's constant thirst for both up-to-date news and personal understanding of their battle-torn world. Viewing their poetry as "a crucial means of engagement with political discourses" (Barrett, *To Fight Aloud* 3), poems simply titled "Sumter," "Shiloh," or "Gettysburg" often appeared before the battle dust had settled. These poems did not explain the battles as much as they interpreted them, "trying desperately to connect their texts to a political immediacy" (Hutchison and Richardson 7), acting as a quickly accessible political tool to elevate morale as well as diminish the pains of loss. Often, these battles inspired new poems months or years later, hoping to remind readers of past victories. Printed in the *Southern Illustrated News* almost three years to the day since the first shots fired over the fort, the final stanza of "Sumter" by JED begins with these lines: "We love thee, 'Sumter,' and we trust thee still' / We know thy glory is thy country's will" (8 Apr. 1864). Even three years later, writers still used Sumter's victory to rally Southrons to the Confederacy's defense, as supplies dwindled and families and soldiers struggled to survive.

Joseph L. King contends that the South's most popular periodical, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, was "in very truth less *Literary* than *Southern*" (43), thus describing the writing atmosphere of the time as turning from creating literary art to using poetry to address more pressing sectional concerns. An unidentified editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* (assumed to be George William Bagby, head editor at the time) bemoaned the quality and the quantity of submissions in the shorter-than-usual edition published in July 1863. Not only was the periodical "receiving too much trash in rhyme" but "[w]hat is called 'poetry,' by its authors is not wanted. Fires are not accessible at this time of year, and it is too much trouble to tear up poetry. If it is thrown out of the window, the

vexatious wind always blows it back” (XXXVII:447). With quantity of lines prioritized over quality, from fiery pens across the region flew more poems than could ever be published, despite the estimated 800-900 papers in the South at the start of the war, with about eighty of those newspapers publishing issues daily (see Harris 9).<sup>4</sup>

These circumstances do not necessarily reflect Southern lack of poetic ability, but rather they reflect a complicated interrelationship between relevance and expedience. The poets quickly redirected the themes of their work to act as cogs in the war machine, accepting the fact that “they needed to make poetry more than an indulgent form of entertainment and self-expression” as their pre-war efforts now appeared to them (Richards, *Battle Lines* 113). They wrote of victory and loss, of hope and death, of Yankee hatred and Rebel pride. Their work, as Louis Rubin confirms, “goes beyond patriotic declaration into a meaning that is at once personal and public” (*Edge of the Swamp* 215). Through incalculable lines in incalculable poems, these largely unrecognized and unremembered Southerners poeticized their experiences as part of the history of the short-lived Confederate States of America.

### Value of Civil War Poetry Today

Very little of this poetry is remembered today. This poetry tsunami of the Civil War South, “with a handful of notable exceptions . . . is simply not on the [nineteenth-century literary] map” (Hutchison and Richardson 2). This omission can be tracked primarily to the evaluation of one man—Edmund Wilson, a well-respected twentieth-

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<sup>4</sup> Brayton Harris states that the estimated eighty daily newspapers published in the South at the outset of the war decreased to thirty-five by February of 1864 (115), and that number continued to dwindle as supplies and staff became increasingly difficult to find as battle lines and Northern occupation ever encroached into their lived.

century literary critic of the Civil War. Even though he classified poetry from both North and South during the Civil War period as “patriotic journalism” in his 1962 book *Patriotic Gore* (470), Wilson deemed the Civil War as “not at all a favorable one for poetry. An immense amount of verse was written in connection with the war itself, but today it makes barren reading” (466). Two sentences by one author stifled scholarship of this genre for decades thereafter, with subsequent researchers hesitating to assign it much literary or even historical value because of Wilson’s long-accepted and rarely challenged assessment.

As early as 1918, Esther Parker Ellingson recognized the value in this unassembled poetic anthology, arguing that “the poetry written in the Confederate states during the days of the Civil War was a force in potency second only to the army in the field, a fact that has been too long unnoticed by commentators on the literature of the country” (8). Thankfully, twenty-first-century scholars have begun looking past Wilson’s criticisms on a simply literary level to the historical and ethnographical value this record leaves behind, as noted by Ellinger a century earlier. Edward W. Said agrees with Ellinger’s estimation, arguing that evaluating literature in its historical context uncovers the “organic and integral” relationship between literary art and history, revealing “the specific dynamics of society at a very precise moment in its development” (xiii). Examination of the literature of a nineteenth-century slaveholding nation fighting for its independence does not justify the atrocities perpetrated by that nation but instead works “to recapture the world view they sprang from and which they helped to shape” (Tompkins xi). This historical viewpoint is impossible to reach without referencing the

works they left behind, works where they unintentionally preserve the historical moments along with their perspectives and poetic interpretations of those moments.

Elizabeth Elliott also defends the study of Southern Civil War poetry as historical record, claiming that suppression or disregard of Confederate poems “blinds us not only to . . . structural and lyrical merit, but [the poems also provide] illumination of the complex Southern attitudes” they held about their society (16). They loved and lived in a singular moment, and their poetry can effectively be interpreted beyond its literary value as a viable and valuable record of US history as well. William Gilmore Simms (friend of Henry Timrod, a newspaper editor, a poet of the era, and the compiler of the 1866 *War Poetry of the South*) wrote of his hopes for Southern poetry in the introduction of that volume, hoping that the South’s poems could be viewed as “highly creditable to the Southern mind,” as they prove to be “truly illustrative . . . [of] sentiment and opinion [that] have sustained their people through a war unexampled in its horrors, . . . [composed] under all reverses, and amidst every form of privation” (viii). When approached from a more ethnographical and anthropological perspective, scholars can appreciate the poetry as an “artifact which shape[s] the historical reading experience” (Houston 236) today—and for what it meant to 1860s Southerners. Faith Barrett’s *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave*, Alice Fahs’s *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*, and Coleman Hutchison and Riché Richardson’s *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America* all bring critical and long-awaited attention back to these long-buried works. To quote Hutchison and Richardson, “With all due respect to Edmund Wilson, such poetry makes for very fertile reading indeed” (142).

The poetry of the war “achieved a popularity in the South, among writers and among readers, probably unprecedented and almost certainly never to be equaled thereafter” (Moss 5), despite a lack of familiarity with *littérateurs* today or recognition from critics both then and now. As William Moss points out, scholars today increasingly see the importance of studying this minor literature when studying the Confederate South, “investigating not just the exceptional, which transcends its time and place, but the popular, the commonplace, the (stereo)typical, and the supposedly trivial, which is shaped by and in turn shapes its culture” (vii-viii). Henry Timrod’s literary foe, William Grayson, would have agreed with Moss placing value on the stereotypical and trivial so common in Southern Civil War poetry when he argued, “No writer writes to all minds. No preacher is able to reach all hearts” (144). For the poets at the time, this held true. Although “the Confederacy was not blessed with [the] ‘one for all and all for one’ patriotism with which future generations of sentimental romancers were to endow it,” as E. Merton Coulter argues in his *The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865* (a book long regarded by historians as the definitive work on the Confederacy), the printed poetry of the time without notable exception provided a nationalistic voice, uniting readers in support for the South despite any personally held reservations. The capacity to mold both Southern culture and a positive Southern perception of the war despite how battles were going at any given time held highest value for these poets, and when holding that at the forefront of its evaluation, their poetry can be seen as successful from the perspective of the poets who wrote it.

Like a traditional epic, these thousands of Confederate voices combined to write their reverse epic, poeticizing battle, war, patriotism, love, religion, loss, victory, death,

and life from their perspective during wartime. Through its 15,000+ lines focused on “the fates of warrior after warrior,” as Sheila Murnaghan proffers, “the *Iliad* becomes a monumental work of commemoration . . . [and] the principal means by which these heroes’ glory is preserved” (xlvii). One of the *Iliad*’s goals, Murnaghan continues, is to depict contemporary Greek society and “to record the sheer number of people, each with his or her own history and circumstances, whose lives are decisively shaped by the war” (xxi). Though indeterminable, the lines written to commemorate the fates of Southerners perform the same function. They left behind what “would in effect be a national literature” today, if only “the Confederacy had succeeded and become a separate nation” (Inge 589).

### The Epic Voice of the Civil War South

In the *Iliad*, Homer uses omniscient narration to supply alternate perspectives, moving from Achilles to Hector to Zeus in order to provide a complete view of events, evolving through decades and centuries of retelling and refining. Additionally, even after taking about seven years to compose *Paradise Lost*, John Milton still revised his most famous epic in subsequent printings, according to Harvard University professor Gordon Tesky in his introduction to Milton’s work (xxii-xxvi). Confederate Civil War poets did not have this luxury of time. Out of necessity, they succumbed to expediency, writing in the powder keg of the war-torn South. These poets and publishers scurried poems quickly to print “like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow” (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd. in Hutchison and Richardson 8), flinging their poetic lines just as hurriedly. In individual poems, the jingoistic style of the Confederate period “worked against a depth equal to the events described” (McClatchy xvii), but when reclassified as thousands of voices relating

firsthand experience of historical events, the diverse topics addressed throughout Southern poetry echo the ability of an ancient epic's narrative form "to describe a number of simultaneous incidents . . . [which] give it grandeur, and also variety of interest and room for episodes of diverse kinds" (Aristotle 65). When viewed this way, these uncountable voices illustrate the South's attempt to write their reverse epic in the voices they chose to highlight, composing the narrative from the inside before presenting it to the rest of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Examples of these disparate voices are abundant, preserving countless experiences and pro-Confederate viewpoints in the process. Poems such as "The Flag of Virginia" (*RDD* 3 Mar. 1862) advocate for states' rights, documenting the devotion these poets had for their individual states as well as for the Confederacy. Not only did their works champion the South, they also disparaged and satirized the North, as Lincoln and his generals provided frequent targets for humor or attack. Isaac G. Reed, Jr., skewered Lincoln in a parody of Tennyson, writing, "The rightful heirs of the ancient free, / But all of us slaves in our worship of thee, / Our Republican King," (*RNHL* 24 Sept. 1863). In writing this poem, Reed preserves the paradoxical Southern mindset of their slavery to the North while exempting and accepting their own status as a slaveholding society. Even publishers and printers occasionally added their poetic perspectives in the Poet's Corners. In "The Printers of Virginia to 'Old Abe,'" Harry C. Treacle justifies the exempt status yet afforded to newspapermen as an invaluable asset to the Confederacy. While admitting that their risks were not with "leaden balls," he predicts that their work would stand the

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<sup>5</sup> Since it is only possible to evaluate the Confederate poetic voice from extant examples, this viewpoint lacks substantive examples from the poor, the uneducated, and the enslaved. Therefore, the information synthesized in this essay skews unintentionally and unavoidably to emphasize the voices of the literate and the elite and should be evaluated as such.



test of time, and “. . . in after years to come, / Our history’s read by youth and sage, / They’ll make a *side note* of ‘well done.’ / On this our *volume*’s brightest *page*!” (RDE 3 Apr. 1862).

Some of the poetry even addresses slavery, but in a subdued, decidedly positive and nostalgic way. “A Southern Scene,” published in the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* on 16 January 1862 provides an example of the slave voice in newspaper poetry, but since it is written from the perspective of a slaveowner, it descends into pidgin English and racial stereotypes. The voice of the “young mistress” as she discusses Lincoln with her mammy is easily discernible from the slave by the use of correct grammar, whereas Mammy iterates lines such as “My little missus stop and res,” and “And den, and not till den, my chile / Your mammy will be free.” Mammy repeatedly talks of how happy she is and that only death and Jesus can set her free, concluding with this stanza: “‘Come, little missus, say your prayers, / Let old mas Linkum ‘lone, / The debil knows who b’longs to him, / And he’d take care of his own.’” The value of this poem lies in how white Southerners viewed the interaction between the slave and white child as joyful and pleasurable for both. Mammy states that she can’t read but “You reads de dear Lord’s blessed book, / And you kin tell me true.” As Joseph L. King expresses, no matter how “crude much of the writing of this period in the South may be, it is a rich storehouse of information on the social history of a bygone time” (49). This mammy loves her mistress and her labor-filled life, and the poet either perceives (or wants to believe) this slave feels negatively about Abraham Lincoln and the possibility of her freedom while adoring her white family and her sentence of lifetime servitude.

From his position as an actor onstage as the action played out, Henry Timrod could not have understood that the average poet's work published and republished across the South during this chaotic time would collectively preserve the South's epic in an inestimable quantity of lines, far surpassing the amount written by any single epicist of the past. The Civil War may not have generated a distinct solo poetic work equal to Homer or Virgil or Milton, but when viewed as a whole, these intentionally "public poems" as Louis Rubin deems them (*History of Southern Literature* 198), track the South's epic battle to attain (but ultimately lose) independence, creating a literature simultaneously predictive and projective of the outcome. This reverse epic predicted ultimate victory from the outset and projected their faith in that victory into the believing Southern people as the poetic line count mounted along with the body count. Edward Keyes asserts that works like these myriad poems create "layers of sediment . . . complexly striated and historically textured, offering a picture of the period and its scholarship" (189) that cannot be justly interpreted as individual poems, but "it is," as Vanessa Steinroetter claims, "precisely through their lack of individuality that the speakers function as representative voices of collective experiences" (52). When considered as a multifaceted whole, these poems bear remarkable similarities to the thousands of lines in a traditional epic poem, some recalling their glories in battle and others their losses, some the public events and others the intimate moments, despite the lack of memorable works of stunning transcendence like those written by Whitman and Dickinson in the North.

Drawing qualification lines between "good" and "bad" poetry limits serious scholarly interpretation, especially when relating an individual poem to its deeper cultural

context. Regarded as one of the United States' most influential contributors to the field of cultural anthropology, Clifford Geertz broadened the characterization of what holds scholarly and historical value in his landmark 1973 essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Expanding past a thin, surface-level description of events to a thicker description that includes deeper contextual issues and multiple perspectives, Geertz argues that evaluation of a specific culture must be "actor-oriented" (14), centered on what the people themselves say about their lives and what their symbols mean to them at the time, not what they represent to a more distant analyst. Instead of evaluating poetry on merit alone, by posing questions such as "What does it *all* mean?" or "How does this fit into the bigger picture?" or "Why do they what they do?" researchers can flesh out the skeletal perspective constructed when considering only carefully selected authors or perspectives. This approach "ferret[s] out the unapparent import of things" (26) previously glossed over or dismissed, adding what Gallagher and Greenblatt call "the touch of the real" (see Ch. 2).

Geertz does concede that this "thick description" approach "is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (29), an observation that justifies meaningful excursion into and evaluation of Southern Civil War newspaper poetry. Completeness, however, is not the goal. The goal is to "access . . . the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them" (24). Historical and literary assessment that qualifies a select few Civil War poems or poets as valuable and then demotes the rest as holding no value limits not only the scope of study but minimizes the depth and color and ultimate understanding these poets provided simply by writing and publishing their poetry.

Civil War literary culture runs much deeper, much wider, and is steeped with much more nuance than can be seen simply through the lens of what is deemed “the best.” The work of Southern poets, sometimes read by thousands of their countrymen, holds value on the nineteenth-century literary map today simply because at the time they wrote it, these poems were “part of a shared oral culture of rhetoric and oratory,” and Southerners of the time “accepted [it] as an appropriate, expected, and often deeply felt part of [their war] experience,” as Alice Fahs declares (4). Thus, the value of Civil War newspaper poetry lies in its ability to reveal the voices of the ordinary people as they intended their voices of their lived experiences to be heard, not by how critics, scholars, or historians presume they thought—or dictate how they should have thought from a place far removed from their original time and place.

#### Research Limitations

William Moss laments, “Today much of the popular poetry of the wartime South remains to be discovered. . . . A great deal of such material [is] probably gone. Much of it, undoubtedly, will never be recovered” (43), and several factors make poetry of the Civil War South difficult to research, factors that may compromise not the value but the reliability of the data now available. First, few of the preserved newspaper collections are complete, and researchers find it difficult to assess if issues missing today never were printed or if these issues just simply are missing since publishers kept inconsistent records (or their records no longer exist). Therefore, it would be inaccurate in the case of most Southern newspapers to claim that available data accounts for all the poems published in one newspaper or periodical. Also, even though newspapermen received exemption from military service, many of the men felt the call and enlisted anyway,

while others fell ill or simply could not support themselves on their meager salaries, thus compromising on multiple occasions the regularity of publication. Without qualified staff, publishers often found it difficult to get issues to press, resulting in incomplete or missing issues.

Second, lack of provenance trails adds to the research difficulties of this period's poetry. True, publishers used an "exchange" system where publishers shared editions of their paper with others, "with the understanding that reprints were allowable as long as they were credited" (Fahs 30), and they usually extended proper credit when reprinting poems. But for publishers in the nineteenth century struggling simply to print their newspapers, attributing credit to a poet unknown to most people lagged in importance to getting issues to press, which was hard enough considering the duress imposed on publishing in a war zone. Poets' names, dates, and original details often contradict from paper to paper as popular poems passed through the Southern newspaper network with no reliable way to track original publisher in many cases.

The poem "Reading the List" illustrates the difficulty of tracing the provenance of popular poems circulated in newspapers throughout the war. Likely first published in the South in Richmond's 9 August 1862 edition of the *Daily Enquirer*, the poem describes a scene played out countless times over the course of the war: women holding their breath as they scanned the lists for the names of their men. These lists, though incomplete and often inaccurate, recorded the soldier's name, rank, and status (injured, captured, or dead). When Widow Gray hears her son's name read aloud to the crowd, she exclaims, "Well, well, read on: is he wounded? quick!", but her hopes are dashed when she hears "Killed outright on that fateful day!" Widow Gray faints at the news, but in the end, she

concedes, “But the battle is fought and the victory won; / The will of the Lord, let it be done!” The poem concludes with words of Christian comfort for Widow Gray and the lost loved ones of countless mothers, wives, sweethearts, and sisters: “God pity the cheerless Widow Gray, / And send from the halls of Eternal Day, / The light of His peace to illumine her way!” While the poem first appeared in the *Dispatch* in 1862, its original provenance is impossible to trace, as existing copies provide neither original publication information nor authorship, and the poem itself provides no contextual clues about the referenced battle in which Widow Gray’s son lost his life.<sup>6</sup> Publishers both North and South printed and reprinted “Reading the List,” and its frequent appearance in the papers emphasizes the vital role newspapers began to play in people’s lives in this era and the impact this unfortunately frequent communal experience had on civilians waiting at home for the news.

Finally, the Confederacy suffered frequent paper shortages during the war due to lack of manufacturing sites in the South, and editors and publishers often took drastic action to maximize their impact as their resources dwindled: reducing font size and increasing columns per page; eliminating images in advertising; shortening issues from eight to four to sometimes simply one two-sided sheet, and sometimes publishing no issue at all, with apologies extended in the next issue. As the war wore on, newspapers all

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<sup>6</sup> In the research for her article titled “Reading the List”: Casualty Lists and Civil War Poetry,” Vanessa Steinroetter traces the poem’s earliest known publication to 5 August 1862 in the *Oswego Commercial Times* (just five days before its appearance in Richmond), where original publication credit is given to the *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch*, but the *Times* still lacks an original publication date or authorship (76). “Reading the List” has been attributed to William Gilmore Simms, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James B. Randall, and Henry Timrod, among others, but all authorship claims remain unproven.

over the South published droll verses like this one from the *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel*, begging to purchase cotton rags so the paper could continue printing:

Anything that will paper make,  
This newspaper now does take,  
And will pay you for your rags,  
And your good-for-nothing bags—  
Bring them in, and bring them soon,  
Morning, Evening, and at Noon. (30 Aug. 1863, qtd. in Van Tuyl 207)<sup>7</sup>

Their editions stand a testament to these publishers' dedication to the news and to the South as they continued to print the news (until it was physically impossible to do so) for a public straining for information, confirmation, direction, and guidance at a time when life held so many uncertainties.<sup>8</sup>

### Objectivity in Newspaper Poetry

Whether “shot through with sentiment, moonshine, and special pleading” or “down-to-earth, sharp, humorous, [and] observant” (Aaron 228), newspaper poetry held a valuable place in the newspaper reading experience of Civil War Southerners, and readers could find poetry appearing on the front page, included in a “Poet’s Corner” or

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<sup>7</sup> When inspecting original copies, fluctuations in milling and paper quality can easily be observed, from the various textures of the paper and ink color variations to the irregular and inconsistent paper sizing. The ever-decreasing typeface can also be traced, as microfilm copies of some papers become harder and harder to read in the issues published during the latter part of the war when typeface for the body of the paper’s text could be as small as six-point font.

<sup>8</sup> For example, news of Lee’s retreat reached Richmond during Sunday church services on April 2, 1865. The Richmond *Daily Examiner* rushed a two-page issue to print the next morning. By April 4, Abraham Lincoln walked the streets of the Confederate capital. Despite the city’s occupation by Federal forces, the Richmond *Whig* published a pro-Confederacy issue on April 10, 1865, the day Lee surrendered to Grant just ninety miles away.

tucked away as an added bonus on the final page in issues of many papers. However, just as assembling a complete collection of this period's newspaper poetry is not possible, so too is establishing any level of objectivity in evaluating why editors or publishers chose certain topics, a poem's length, or how frequently to include poems in their editions. Too many variables commingle to justify making more than the most general of conclusions.

Poetry's value in a publication would necessarily be appraised by someone before publication, and that value could have just as easily been the poem's relevance to current events, personal preferences of the staff, or how many column inches needed to be filled in that edition. Most importantly, impartiality in printing and fact-based journalism was not a standard held during this era, and it changed at the whim of the editors and publishers who aligned their content with their personal philosophies. Men like Dr. George William Bagby of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and John Moncure Daniel, the notoriously anti-Jefferson Davis editor of the Richmond *Examiner*, were known for their politically-bent editorials and articles, alternately advising the Confederate government to change, praising some current decision, or offering reproach of their leaders just as vociferously as they would Abraham Lincoln.

How much sway these men had over the poetry they published is inconclusive and the level to which their tastes and moods affected what they published is difficult to determine. However, John R. Thompson, editor of Augusta, Georgia's *The Southern Field and Fireside* early in the war, did echo complaints of other editors that submissions "lack[ed] the genius of the poet" (Manuscript dated Confederate States of America, Apr. 1863, John Reuben Thompson Papers, qtd. in Moss 12) and an editor of Richmond's *Southern Illustrated News* (likely Bagby) thought the poetry submissions he had received



“for the most part have proven most stale, flat and unprofitable” (29 Novv 1862). Some editors blamed poor poetry for ensuing battlefront losses, even “lashing out at so-called ‘bad’ submissions because they seemed to prove the South could not intellectually sustain itself” (Elliott 20), let alone fight the resource-laden North. Produced collectively, each issue “yields a complex interplay among authorship, intention, ideology, and reception,” and though produced in extreme circumstances, Hutchison and Richardson maintain that newspaper submissions “might be considered the most sociable form of Confederate poetry” (126). Civilians fought Lincoln’s “Damn Yankees” with their words, wielding their pens to engage in the “fierce words of war” as Southern poet Sarah Piatt wrote in 1861 (“Hearing the Battle.—July 21, 1861,” qtd. in Barrett 15).

What can be determined—through careful comparisons of what topics were consistently printed across the board in different publications and the frequency with which newspapers across the South reprinted certain types of poems—is that Southern poetry during this period acted as a unifying voice between the battlefront and the homefront in most turbulent times. Unconcerned with critical acclaim and frequently classified as jingoistic doggerel by both more accomplished contemporary poets and by today’s modern critics, these poets could invoke God’s protection in one line, mourn the loss of a beloved son or vilify Lincoln and the Yankee hosts in the next, then praise the virtues of the Bonnie Blue flag in the next, not parsing their language to fit a poetic standard beyond anything other than what they imposed on themselves. Their voices turn increasingly mournful as death tolls surge, and while editorials may curse Jefferson Davis, verses published in the same issue could just as easily sing his praises. Their poetry overwhelmingly supports the Confederacy’s war efforts, echoing “the ring of

steel; its color is not rose-pink, but blood-red, and its perfume is that of sulphur and nitre,” as the editor of Richmond’s *Semi-Weekly Enquirer* professed on 18 February 1863 (qtd. in Coulter 507). Theirs were the verses of a people at war, by a people at war, and for a people at war—exercises in developing democratic expression that prove revelatory when collectively regarded not as a failure to reach some arbitrary modern literary standard but as an epic record of an epic battle for self-government that never came to pass, despite all the poems visualizing and voicing the contrary.

Data is limited and inconsistent, unquestionably. Historians can reliably conclude, however, that Southern readers valued newspaper poetry, since “[t]he ephemera of newspaper clippings and broadsides were most often destined not for the library but for the scrapbook for the chest and the attic. There many of these items were preserved” (Moss 42). So much Civil War newspaper poetry still exists that, where a scientific evaluation would fall short, much can still be found of historical and literary value from what remains behind. And what remains behind is legion.

The length and breadth and depth of the Confederate is difficult to determine and impossible to limit to only a few select Southern poets. When asked about the works of Milton and Homer, Henry Timrod confessed that their works often read more as “a succession of poems having no real connection with each other,” and required complete reading to understand the poets’ intentions. Even he could not fix a limit on the appropriate length of an epic, merely claiming that length “must be left to the taste and judgment of the Poet,” (*Essays* 112), or in the case of the Southern epic, a cadre of Poets, whose “succession of poems” connect thematically (if not stylistically) as the traditional epic work of a single poet. Oblivious of critical acclaim or future historical value and

“[u]naware that war was not time to produce the poetry of a people,” William Moss confirms that Southern Civil War poets “wrote the people’s poems” (16) not the poetry of the *littérateurs*. When evaluated collectively, “the people’s poems” allow exploration of the Confederacy through the eyes of those who witnessed it, “in its own terms—as the South’s commentary upon itself,” as Drew Gilpin Faust proposes (*Creation of Confederate Nationalism* 6).

Reclassifying the quickly penned, nationalistic poetry of the period as contemporary and sweeping social, cultural, and often political commentary brings depth, perspective, and nuance to the Confederate experience, “reframing literary history as both phenomenon and environment” (Phillips 5). Each voice tells a variation of the Confederacy’s story. Their poetry speaks of a Christian society that put “Trust in the Lord! Trust in the widow’s God; / He can reanimate the lifeless sod.” (“Trust in the Lord!” *CP* 21 Jan. 1864). While fighting a war almost exclusively within their borders for four straight years, some voices pressed for military service and still others wrote prayers for peace (see “The Southern Mother’s Charge,” *RCA* 4 Dec. 1862 and “A Prayer for Peace,” *RNHL* 29 Oct. 1863). These poems also preserve less common perspectives of the war experience that might have been lost otherwise. For example, in “The Refugees,” an anonymous author brings to light a forgotten segment of the Southern people—those who lost everything, “exil’d from home, by a rude foe,” but who did not begrudge their circumstances. Instead, they declared, “Yes, drive forth from our borders this insolent foe; / Grant us liberty, peace, and relief from our woe;” (*RCA* 6 Nov. 1862). In a poem titled “The Crutches,” Rev. W. T. Helms brings attention to those crippled by war: “Using sticks instead of feet / Sad, alack, / Is the music of their click-a-clack.” However

“sad” the poet was at the sight of this disabled soldier, he manages to bring this suffering back to the Confederate cause, concluding with “Victory! / Then shall chime from every steeple, / And a free and grateful people / Will provide for every cripple / Ye shall see / Maimed in battle for their liberty.” (*RDD* 18 Mar. 1865).<sup>9</sup>

Lines like these provide insight into the Confederate phenomenon and provide depth to scholars’ views of the environment in which Southern poets lived and composed. While evaluating the Southern poetic experience in poems such as these which justify chattel slavery or idealize their slave society and its leaders may pose difficult for scholars today,<sup>10</sup> minimizing the effects of hindsight bias against a slaveholding nation and the creeping determinism of the eventual defeat opens often-closed windows of understanding into Confederate mindset, allowing these Southern voices to speak for themselves to readers today.

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<sup>9</sup> Published on the eighteenth of March, 1865, the recorded completion date of the poem just eight days previously is notable for how late into the war this poet maintained the belief that victory was still possible.

<sup>10</sup> Even Coleman Hutchison and Riché Richardson in the introduction to their authoritative book *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America*, feel the need to include the following disclaimer: “This book is by no means an apology for the Confederacy or Confederate nationalism. I find almost nothing that is admirable in the politics and culture of the Civil War South. . . . Emerging from a fiercely nationalistic milieu, it resounds with both racist and racialist rhetoric . . . Thus, the story told in the following pages is that of both the losers and the ‘bad guys.’ No matter how unsavory the story proves, I think it is important that it be told” (3).

### Chapter III.

#### Henry Timrod and the Birth of the Confederate Reverse Epic

Like the description of Hephaestus forging Achilles' shield provides a quiet moment of reflection before the final battle between the Spartans and the Achaeans in the *Iliad*, "Ethnogenesis" acts "as the calm before the storm at a turning point" (Taplin 1) for the South in the Civil War, mooring readers to the moment when the epic vision of the South's future became clear to Henry Timrod. To be sure, Henry Timrod's most powerful and enduring contribution to the legacy of the South during its four-year attempt at independent nationhood was the poem he wrote in the wake of that first congressional meeting. The initial 23 February 1861 publication of "Ethnogenesis" in the *Charleston Daily Courier* under the title "Ode on Occasion of the Meeting of the Southern Congress"<sup>11</sup> resounded deeply with people throughout the Confederacy. Edd Winfield Parks points out that while Timrod retained his earlier Romantic pastoral concepts of nature and mind and soul, "against these he set the blood and hatred of war" (3), and when he finally chose "war" as his chief theme, his work "found common ground with his people, . . . giving expression to what they dimly felt" (26). Widespread connection to his message of independent nationhood led to the poem's republication in innumerable newspapers and broadsides all over the South throughout the war. Turning from his first love of Romantic poetry to becoming a vocal supporter secession, war, and the

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<sup>11</sup> Title of the poem changed upon revision in January of 1862.

Confederacy in his war-era work, Henry Timrod grew into their unintentional but beautiful original voice and acting as omniscient (if later proved incorrect) narrator of the Southern reverse epic.

### Henry Timrod, the Poet Laureate of the South

Called an “unworldly soul . . . not very adept at the more practical aspects of daily life,” Henry Timrod was the grandson of German immigrant Heinrich Dimroth (anglicized to Henry Timrod), an American Revolutionary War soldier. His father, William Henry Timrod, worked as one of Charleston’s bookbinders and published poetry on occasion. His mother, Thyrza E. Prince, was the daughter of English and Swiss immigrants. Born on 8 December 1828, young Henry lost his father in 1838, leaving the Timrod family struggling for financial support (Cisco 20, 23, 24, 31). Henry was shy, with gray eyes and “slow of speech but quick to learn” as one of his teachers labeled him. Close friend Paul Hamilton Hayne added that Timrod was “passionate . . . with a thirst for knowledge hard to satiate” and when Henry spoke with his deep bass voice, “his eyes flashing and his swarthy face one glow of intense emotion, it was impossible to listen to him without catching some spark of his enthusiasm” (Cisco 32, 38-39).

Although his formal education at the University of Georgia ended unexpectedly and prematurely due to his chronic ill health and shortage of funds (and a constant struggle with alcohol which would haunt him on and off for the rest of his life), Timrod continued his education independent of school, immersing himself in the inspirational works of the great British poets and the classics (Cisco 68). His poems and treatises on the art of poetry express particular praise for the well-crafted verse of Milton and

Tennyson, and “Wordsworth seemed not only his personal mentor, but the guiding spirit of poetry” in his life (Parks 32). While scholars cannot accurately assess the depth of Timrod’s exposure to classical poetry, references to Homer and other ancient poets pepper his treatises, including one reference to the “absurd inaccuracies” in Pope’s *Iliad* translation (Timrod 124). In addition, despite his limited time in college, he could also read French, German, Latin, and Greek (see Parks 52).

Most likely, Timrod began teaching on large rural cotton plantations in the fall of 1850 after a brief attempt to study law, but he “found [the law a] jealous mistress unsuited to his life work” (Bryan xvii). Although teaching was a better fit for a man devoted to his books, his heart was never completely with his students, as he was poor, lonely, and missed the intellectual life in Charleston. His tutoring jobs on the plantations did provide him time to work on his poetry, however, and his first published poem, “Lines,” appeared in Richmond’s *Southern Literary Messenger* February 1856 issue (see Appendix), followed by “The Arctic Voyage” published in the debut issue of Charleston’s *Russell’s Magazine* (*SLM* XXVII:89; Cisco 48). By 1859 when a Columbia magazine titled him “our young Carolina Petrarch” (Cisco 55), Timrod had compiled enough work to publish a small book simply titled *Poems*, the only volume of his work published during his lifetime. Acclaim for *Poems* spread throughout the South, and surprisingly even a few readers north of the Mason/Dixon line read and valued his antebellum work. On 22 February 1860, the *New York Times* pronounced *Poems* “full of delicacy without weakness, and power without coarseness, . . . rejoic[ing] in the future

before him” (qtd. in Hanlon 164).<sup>12</sup> Southern critics viewed him even more positively, bestowing on him the informal title of “Poet Laureate of the South.” Their “literary world rarely mentions Timrod without referencing Tennyson” (Henderson 19), the contemporaneous English Poet Laureate, and one critic of the period deemed him “the ablest poet the South had yet produced” (Richard Henry Stoddard, qtd. in Hayne 7).

While late nineteenth-century Southerners proclaimed Henry Timrod “the finest interpreter of the feelings and traditions of the splendid heroism of a brave people” (Bryan viii), their declarations must be carefully weighted to account for the bias inherent in Southern publications of the time. These biases originated in slights Southern literati perceived coming from the famous poets and critics of New England, and it elucidates the motivation behind creating their own Southern literature. Nevertheless, more recent scholars confirm these early critics’ positive appraisals, applauding Timrod’s “nuanced analogies between poetic lines” (Plasa 5) and calling him “a versatile talent like few other poets of his time” (“Henry Timrod” 445). In *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South*, Louis Rubin proclaims Henry Timrod “assuredly the most gifted of the Southern war poets,” asserting that Timrod’s work during this period “deserve[s] a place, however modest, in the permanent American literary record [of the American Civil War era], alongside those of Whitman and Melville” (190, 216). Timrod’s poetry reached its best during the war, and it stands virtually alone in the Confederate literary catalog for its beauty, poetic mastery, and ability to avoid jingoism while still employing a sympathetically Confederate tone.

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<sup>12</sup> William Gilmore Simms, bitter that Timrod’s work received little recognition in the North outside of New York, decried, “New England criticism is always silent in respect to the swans of other regions. Its own geese are its sufficient swans” (Cisco 55-56).



## Timrod the Romantic

Henry Timrod's gentler, more pastoral poetry from before the Civil War reflects both "the inherited vocabulary of the poetry of English Romanticism" (L. Rubin, *Edge of the Swamp* 192) and the scrutiny of an artist constantly critiquing and improving his craft. He strongly believed that while poetry should be beautiful, the best poems were "ethical" and could find inspiration not only in beauty, but that "power and truth" were "equally valid sources" of inspiration as well (Parks 18). In "A Vision of Poesy" (the thoroughly Romantic and most acclaimed work from *Poems*), Timrod even resorts to reversing Keats's famous "Beauty is truth" (52) contending that "All for the Truth, assured that Truth alone / Is Beauty" (see Appendix, "Poesy" 90). As Edd Winfield Parks points out, with "Poesy" Timrod attempts to create a "complete poem [that] is an ethical poem; [one that] not only functions within itself, [but] acts upon the world to make for positive good" (6). Timrod saw his work as valuable beyond art; he wanted it to make a difference "to the whole wide world" ("Poesy" 89).

Timrod divides the 558 lines of "A Vision of Poesy" into two parts consisting of fifty-seven and twenty-eight stanzas of sestains, with an interlude of fifty rhyming lines demarcating the young poet's early experiences from the end of his life where he finds that "the Poet's hope within my heart / . . . withered" (90-91). In this work, Timrod poeticizes a vision of a young man receiving the gift of the poetic muse from Poesy, "the angel of the earth" who "sow[s] the germ which buds in human art, / And with my sister, Science, I explore / With light the dark recesses of the heart, / And nerve the will and teach the wish to soar;" (85). Edd Winfield Parks recognizes glimpses of Timrod in the poem, proposing that the poet uses it "in thought, although not in fact . . .

autobiographical[ly], . . . presenting the subjective sources of poetry,” and also as a vehicle for his poetic theories (4).

Poesy sees the sacred in everyday life—“children, Girlhood’s kiss, and Friendship’s clasp, / The boy that sporteth with the old man’s staff, / The baby, and the breast it fingers grasp”—and gives the power to see this Truth and Beauty to the poet, exhorting him that “what thou may’st discover by my aid / Thou shalt translate unto thy brother man;” for “Into [the poet’s] soul my soul have I infused” with “lofty powers be wisely used.” (86, 87, 88). Here, Timrod reveals that the narrator (who from his youth possessed the ability “upon a simple leaf [to] pore / As if its very texture unto him / Had some deep meaning;”) had been endowed by Poesy with the ability to “understand that mystic tongue” (75, 78) and see the Truth. This examination of the theory behind poetry often perforates Timrod’s later poems, his lectures and essays, and his work during the war as associate editor at the *Daily South Carolinian*.

#### Timrod the Secessionist

To show his loyalty to South Carolina and the South, Timrod served briefly in the Confederate army and then again as a war correspondent for the *Charleston Mercury* following the Battle of Shiloh before poor health due to “consumption” shortened his service (Timrod, *Poems* xix; Henderson 21). The war was hard for Timrod, who (after failing as both a soldier and as a war correspondent because of the limitations his health placed on his activities) ended up working as an associate editor for the *Daily South Carolinian* before Sherman’s invasion closed most of the papers in Charleston (Cisco 92). By 1865, he admitted in a letter North that he would take “the oath of loyalty” in

exchange for a job, since he had slowly sold off personal belongings (“We have eaten two silver pitchers, one or two dozen forks, several sofas innumerable chairs, and a bedstead” (Letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne, 13 Apr. 1867, qtd. Cisco 110)) in exchange for food for his family. He concedes at this point that he had been “a secessionist by opinion” but “the most abject poverty” put no job beneath him and “nothing would come amiss to me that would put bread into the mouths and a roof over the heads of those whom I love best in the whole world” (Letter to Richard H. Stoddard, 10 Jul. 1865, qtd. in Cisco 97). These letters echo back the second section of “A Vision of Poesy,” where the narrator describes the aged poet who now

Wanders bewildered, striving still to clutch,  
Yet never clutching once, a shadowy goal,  
Which always flies, and while it flies seems near,  
Thy songs were riddles hard to mortal ear. (97)

Members of the Southern literati particularly struggled during the war to find ways to support themselves, and this inability to provide for his wife and newborn son weighed heavily on Timrod even more so after the war ended, forcing him (like the poet in “Poesy”) to question the value of the gift of poetry in his war-racked world. By this point, “beggary, starvation, death, bitter grief, utter want of hope” forced Timrod to betray the muse of poetry, bemoaning that he “would consign ever[y] line I ever wrote to eternal oblivion for one-hundred dollars in hand” (Letter to Paul Hamilton Hayne, 13 Apr. 1867; Timrod quoted in letter from Paul Hamilton Hayne to Edward Spencer, 20 Mar. 1872, qtd. Cisco 110). Unlike other poets in the South, Timrod moved quickly “from being a poet of war to a poet of peace, and from a champion of the Confederacy to

a willing citizen in the reunited nation” (Richards, *Battle Lines* 157-58). Whether solely motivated by his desire to escape his extreme poverty or by more altruistic reasons, historians will never know, as Henry Timrod died from tuberculosis two months before his thirty-ninth birthday in October of 1867 (Cisco 123).

### “Ethnogenesis” and Characteristics of the Reverse Epic

So influential was his attendance at the first Confederate Congress in Montgomery, Alabama, on 8 February 1861, that he redirected his work onto a decidedly Confederate nationalist path, using “a poetic model to express his political argument . . . [supporting] Southern secession” (Henderson 20), a redirection Louis Rubin declares nothing short of “astounding” (198) when compared to his earlier, more Romantic works like “A Vision of Poesy.” Timrod’s pre-war poetry abruptly transforms from “compos[ing] nothing whatever of a practical, utilitarian nature” (L. Rubin 198), to boldly denouncing the North as “Our foes” and lobbying for Southerners not to “shun the battleground” if necessary in “Ethnogenesis” (151, 152), the poem that arguably became the most famous and influential work of his lifetime.

Timrod’s work in “Ethnogenesis” starts the poetic documentation of the life of the South as it occurred in real time. In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Erich Auerbach identifies the primary problem in attempting to write not of historical legend as epicists of the past had always done but of events as they happen. He points out that witnessed history “runs much more variously, contradictorily, and confusedly” while historical “legend arranges its material in a simple and straightforward way” and can be edited, simplified and separated “from its contemporary historical

context” to fit the narrative vision of the author (19). Because he writes this poetic visionary outline of the Southern epic in reverse as if it has already happened, Timrod “derive[s] from poetic invention not from history” (Oliver 3) the images he uses in “Ethnogenesis.” Not having the luxury of retelling events of the distant past like Homer or Milton, Timrod uses “Ethnogenesis” as a fictional microcosm to portray the South at its utopian best, prophesying and projecting the epic Southerners *intended* to write. Timrod’s work is understandably much more one-dimensional than a classic epic and primarily focuses on the recent declaration of Southern independence and its future influence on the world.

Hurrying ideas to press was not common for Timrod. This observation is particularly relevant to the events that inspired “Ethnogenesis,” where attending the convention, writing, and publishing the poem all took place within the span of fifteen days. However, as a Southern poet published and critically acclaimed outside the South, it can be assumed that he understood the role a vibrant national literature could play in establishing respect abroad, and it appears that he hoped to establish that voice as quickly as possible. Hutchison and Richardson point out that the “Confederates needed to invent a literary tradition, and in a hurry” (7), and it is precisely Timrod’s ability to look past the surface value of the moment to “a deeper evocation of the historical occasion” and rapidly pen a poem “superior in kind to the now-forgotten verses of all his Southern contemporaries” (L. Rubin, *Edge of the Swamp* 210) that sets his work apart in general and drew the accolades of the South to “Ethnogenesis” upon its initial publication and for years after.

Similar to the utopian images of village life hammered by Hephaestus onto Achilles' shield, the beautiful, peaceful images of Timrod serve as representations of "the life that humans aspire to," (Taplin 4). The images on Achilles' shield include balance between peace and war (allowing for atrocities like lion attacks even in peacetime), but Timrod refuses to acknowledge that these moments of strife currently exist or will exist in his unsoiled conjured Southern society. Because he wrote this poem before military engagements began, Timrod also lacks the experience of living through war and does not voice that perspective in the poem.<sup>13</sup> It did not take long for this element to be added to the reverse epic's narrative. Timrod's later works, notably 1863's "The Unknown Dead" and the ode he wrote to dedicate Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston in 1866, touch deeply the themes of loss, death, and the burdens placed on a population at war. Here, in his pre-war naiveté, he glosses over the prospect of future violence, dwelling instead on Southern vindication for Northern wrongdoing and the beauties of agrarian life, describing the beauties of the red-soil fields with language that echoes Homer's "deep fallow field / and the earth churned black" (Fagles 18.636-637), a joy reserved for those who live an agrarian life.

While it may appear problematic to write a nation's history before it ever happens, "Ethnogenesis" reads as a roadmap confidently outlining the South's epic journey and envisioning the fight for and attainment of their independence. In the lines of his poem, Timrod succeeds in outlining the characteristics endemic to the grand Southern epic as he foresees them playing out: (1) secede because their nationhood was ordained

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<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the next four years, the more graphic parts of war often described in detail by Homer in his works are left largely unaddressed by Southern poets (but not by photographers).

and blessed by God; (2) fight if they must to defend their homeland from the evil North and in the process create heroes equivalent to those of the American Revolution; (3) minimize overt references to slavery; but (4) share its “blessings” with the rest of the world once the war validates their God-sanctioned practice. Timrod accepts that “The hour perchance is not yet wholly ripe / When all shall own” this future vision (154), but by memorializing the Confederate Constitutional Convention in verse, he legitimizes Southern potential to act as “a salvic force . . . establishing stability and prosperity throughout the world” (Henderson 27) and laying claim to a future the South already could see on the horizon.

The fundamental job of an epic’s narrator, as clarified by Mark W. Edwards in the introduction to Allen Rogers Benner’s *Selections from Homer’s Iliad*, is to act as omniscient explainer, “seeing into the minds of his characters . . . and knowing the future fate . . . [of] the heroes fighting around it.” The narrator directs the audience by “giving us his opinion of an action or telling us of its outcome” (xviii). For example, Homer uses the opening of Homer’s *Iliad* to invoke an unnamed goddess (usually assumed to be Calliope, the Greek goddess of poetry) to tell tale of

Rage:

Sing, Goddess, Achilles’ rage,  
Black and murderous, that cost the Greeks  
Incalculable pain, pitched countless souls  
Of heroes into Hades’ dark,  
And left their bodies to rot as feasts  
For dogs and birds, as Zeus’ will was done. (Lombardo 1:1-6)

Rage. With a single word, Homer establishes the theme of heroic motivation and sets precedent for war in epic poetry, immediately engaging “the hearts and minds of men” (Grayson 153) with a single word. In these first lines of thousands, the narrator quickly outlines the themes and trajectory of the entire *Iliad*: war, death, the consequences of unchecked rage—all at the hands of the gods and fate—with man acting merely as a pawn to be moved and manipulated at will. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton reverses Homer’s approach, choosing to declare his themes in the first few lines (Adam and Eve’s disobedience and death, all restored by Jesus Christ) before he invokes his muse to sing. While Milton often refers back to mythology throughout the poem, he quickly identifies his “Heav’nly Muse” as the Holy Spirit by referencing its presence with Moses “on the secret top / Of Oreb or of Sinai” (1:6-7).

In “Ethnogenesis,” Henry Timrod uses the title itself to mirror the invocation of the muse’s blessing found in the first few lines of traditional epic poetry. Defined as “birth of a nation . . . emphasiz[ing] the ethnic boundaries of this nascent nation” (Henderson 27) and written before any shots were fired to seal their secession with aggression, the term ethnogenesis is evoked as more than a nineteenth-century Southern update of Thomas Jefferson’s 1776 Declaration of Independence from oppression. It poeticizes the past, present, and future of this new nation, laying out Timrod’s joint themes of birth and nationhood in one word. The South desperately wanted their own ethnicity—spiritually, politically, and culturally—and Timrod’s seminal poem pinpoints the moment in time when the South is born, both figuratively and physically. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein define this process of establishing a unique collective identity as fashioning a *fictive ethnicity*—connoting not “fictitious” and “made



up” but “*personal ficta* . . . in the sense of an institutional effect, a ‘fabrication’ (96).”

Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis” fabricated the South and its epic future in vision before war was ever declared between the states.

## Stanza I

Timrod’s decision to structure “Ethnogenesis” as a variation on a Pindaric ode “makes a quiet claim about the intellectual capacity and refined tastes of the Confederate people” (Hutchison and Richardson 13) and speaks to Timrod’s exposure to classical poetry. Well-read in the classics and known for carrying a copy of Tennyson’s poems with him “constantly for many, many years” (Parks 40), Timrod makes a bold statement to literati everywhere by choosing a poetic form reserved for celebrating formal occasions: The new Confederate States of America *exist*. That first convention, their new leaders and Constitution, and the ode resulting from Timrod’s attendance combined ceremoniously mark the South’s epic birth.

Timrod understood that this solemn moment meant so much more than signing a document and leaving the oppressive Union. Unlike the Founders’ deliberate absence of God references in the US Constitution, the Confederate Constitution embraced their religiosity as evident in the preamble of the Confederate Constitution, and Timrod feeds off this distinction, acting as “prophet as well as poet—*sacer vates*” (Grayson 136), prophesying God’s blessings on the South and “Thank[ing] Him who placed us here / Beneath so kind a sky” (150). He begins by deeming the day one equal in importance to the creation of the world. Just as Milton describes how “In the beginning, . . . the heav’ns and earth / Rose out of chaos” (1:9-10), Timrod references the Bible’s Genesis in his first

lines: “Hath not the morning dawned with added light? / . . . Out of the infinite regions of the night, / To mark this day in Heaven?” (150). By evoking authority above that held by man, Timrod establishes the Confederacy as a country of chosen Christian people, differentiating itself from a nation that only practices Christianity as the North does.

In *Epic in American Culture: Settlement to Reconstruction*, Christopher Phillips enhances the connections between ancient epic and the Founders, pointing out how both used verbiage to “linguistically construct” beliefs. He postulates that “the Constitution itself,” like descriptions found in the ancient epics, “embodies a kind of *ekphrasis*, as it claims to linguistically *represent* as well as *constitute* the state—to stand in for and to stand as at the same time” (90). The Confederate Constitution never reaches this level of emotional connection and representation with the people of the South, but “Ethnogenesis” seems to have attained that level in the eyes of many. Timrod expands the symbolism in Stanza I beyond Christianity and North/South differences into an elaborate allegorical *ekphrasis* connecting the earth, its seasons, and its willingness to fight alongside the idyllic South and its domestic citizenry. Timrod’s “gentle daughters” (the twelve months of the year) wind their way through the South’s fields “under God” and “so kind a sky” (151), mimicking Milton’s “skylike one” Urania (Milton 7:1, fn 158), and her interaction with “Wisdom, thy sister . . . In presence of th’ Almighty Father,” (7:9-10). Unlike Milton’s more objective muses, Timrod’s muses act as both warrior and mother for the South, first “Marching in our ranks” wielding “Long spears of golden grain!” (151). June carries “A yellow blossom as her fairy shield” (150), an allusion to cotton’s distinct flowers and the protection cotton extends over the South’s economy and her people. Finally, the motherly muses safely tuck the “endless sheets” of “THE SNOW

OF SOUTHERN SUMMERS” (151) around their beloved South, completing Timrod’s *ekphrasis* of his cherished land.

By writing “At last” in line 4, Timrod incorporates dual interpretations into two concise syllables of spondee. First, global recognition as “A nation among nations” (150) with an identity separate from the North was long overdue in the eyes of the South, where elites even before the war “were constantly considering their ‘relative standing [with] nations’” (Hutchison and Richardson 7). Second, the narrator validates the cumulative actions of the now-independent South, from secession through Constitution to war if necessary. Timrod’s language embodies the aspirational South, “provid[ing] the primary expression of Southern nationalism, literary and otherwise” (Budd 445), portraying her crowning moment of birth. The people quickly adopt this vision as reality. Unfortunately, even after their defeat, many (with the benefit of hindsight bias) adopt this aspirational vision as a past reality to reflect upon, grieve, and memorialize—despite it never coming to complete fruition.

## Stanza II

Even though Stanza II contains similarities to ancient epic, this stanza relies heavily on symbolism more overtly connected to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, references to the American Revolution, and the nearly constant bad blood between North and South since Washington surrendered his sword. Timrod quickly changes direction from his picturesque description of the South to incrimination and villainization of the North. North and South clashed ideologically from the beginning of their union in 1787, making numerous compromises in the US Constitution, especially regarding slavery. Timrod

intimates nothing of slavery or previous compromise in this stanza, instead accusing Lincoln of “Set[ting] up his evil throne” and “leagu[ing] with him of old” (151), boldly equating the North’s government with Satan, threatening the pastoral Southern peace in Stanza I with the possible action of not Northern brothers but “Our foes” who could “with a hostile step profane our sod!” (152). Here, the poet echoes Milton’s description of Satan’s fight as “So unimaginable as hate in Heav’n / And war so near the peace of God in bliss” (*Paradise Lost* 7:53-54). In “A Theory of Poetry,” Timrod equates reading *Paradise Lost* “with the reverence of one who enters upon holy ground” (107), and he quickly elevates the South to sacred status by including similar sacred symbols in Stanza II. Timrod assembles the future Confederate army firmly behind Jesus Christ, “the Lord of Hosts,” extending the metaphor further to include “the mighty ghosts / Of Moultrie and Eutaw” (152), two Revolutionary War generals who heralded from the South. By associating the Rebels with both Christian and Revolutionary leaders, Timrod quickly creates the vision of an army not only of Southern heroes but of Southern victors—before a single shot is ever fired at Fort Sumter nearly two months after the first publication of the poem.

Descriptions of the South in “Ethnogenesis” underscore the symbiotic relationship between the agrarian Southern people and the rich farmland that they husband. In the initial years of the war, the “noble land” acted as the primary muse for many poets who, like Henry Timrod, wrote of “Tree, fruit, and flower, . . . [and] The strength of pine and palm!” (152). Touched upon in passing in Stanza II, Timrod’s brief mention of “The heart of woman, and her hand,” reflects a view of women during the early war that was primarily peripheral, but in light of how their role changed, this reference may be

interpreted as foreshadowing how society evolved from viewing Southern women as fragile, bit players at the beginning of the war to seeing their strength, devotion, determination, and sacrifices as the war dragged on.

### Stanza III

Adhering to the nineteenth-century literary convention of including Christian symbolism without equivocation or explanation, Timrod bases Stanza III on imagery that links the newly liberated Southern people with biblical imagery of God's "chosen people." This intentional association motivated the Christian South to rally behind the South's boldly Christian Constitution, leadership, and values. Étienne Balibar and Maurice Wallerstein confirm the importance of religion's role in establishing a new society like the Civil War South, attesting that "the sacralization of the state" not only binds individuals to the new government, but religious solidarity between the people and the government also elevates the idea of "law" to one of "truth" due to God's endorsement of their belief system. This elevation of perspective from man's law to God's law "institute[s] . . . community [and] prescribe[s] a social 'morality' . . . [and] bond of sacrifice" among the people (96). By constructing parallels with well-recognized Bible stories and heroes, the Confederacy legitimized itself and created their own infallible "truth": God wants the South to win, so of course they will.

In "Ethnogenesis," Timrod intimates God's support of Southern secession and possible war (despite a lack of resources when compared to the North) by acknowledging that with God "Though weak as we are strong;" and that it was the South's sacred duty to "test the right and wrong!" (152). How could the North win a war when their attacks

were “built upon a broken pledge” (152) left unwritten in the US Constitution to ignore the South’s “peculiar institution” of slavery? He incriminates the North’s lack of “Unblemished honor, truth without a stain” and “pure and Christian faith” (153), comparing Northern absence of charity (which allows the poor “To starve and shiver at the schemer’s door”) and their laws (“Repulsive with all Pharisaic leaven,” (153)) to the New Testament murderers who crucified Jesus. Timrod concludes that God could never support this type of hypocrisy, especially in light of the godly South and its “Faith, justice, reverence, charitable wealth,” and “laws which give, / Not the mean right to buy the right to live, / But life, and home, and health!” (153). This statement rings with no moral irony and blissfully ignores the glaring reality that the South’s economy existed on the premise that God condoned “the mean right to buy” and sell and condemn an entire race into slavery.

This need to identify who was right and who was wrong in the Southern reverse epic wasn’t a pressing issue for Homer or the Greeks reading the *Iliad*. Setting aside the fact that Achilles and Hector fought in the very distant past and that readers already knew the outcome of the war, Greek gods ficklely switched their alliances with little to no explanation of why one day they sided with Troy and the next with the Achaeans. Omniscience and omnipotence were not part of their belief system or qualities of their gods, unlike the Christian God worshiped by the South. Of course, at the beginning of the conflict Southern poets, preachers, politicians, and the people refused to recognize the potential conflict between tying the South’s fate to the God championed by *both* North and South: One side would win. One side would lose. One philosophy would be proven right in God’s eyes. The other would not be.

Building an epic in reverse requires prediction and construction of contradictory and systemic outcomes that cannot be erased when the end result refuses to match the original vision. In the final lines of Stanza III, Timrod acknowledges that the outcome is far from guaranteed. The Confederacy knew they would be forced to fight without the guarantee of independence at the conclusion, but their doubts in 1861—a time of high hopes and irrepressible faith—were fleeting, and Timrod records one of what may be the first of hundreds of poems equating the underdog Southerners with the children of Israel:

Who, if He has decreed  
That we must pass a redder sea  
Than that which rang to Miriam's holy glee,  
Will surely raise at need  
A Moses with his rod! (153)

With no irony relating to their country's enslavement of millions, the white South now saw the day of their liberation from Northern slavery as imminent and inevitable, just as Moses liberated his people from Egypt.

Buried in Stanza III is this brief (and later proven to be prophetic) observation of Timrod's: "To doubt the end were want of trust in God," (153). Admittedly, Confederate views of God's role in the outcome of the war become more and more problematic as battlefield results refused to fall in line with their 1861 predictions. Scholars today, however, struggle with different contradictions. Modern readers, with their knowledge of the Civil War's outcome, often bring hindsight bias to their analysis of the South's Civil War poets—writers who had no such limitations placed on their hopeful expressions. Hutchison and Richardson concede that it is difficult to "return to a moment when both a

Confederate nation and a Confederate national literature were possibilities, not merely lost causes” (2); however, refusing to attempt a degree of objectivity limits analysis of the period to the perspective of a “losing” side and a “losing” morality, neither of which the South believed, especially in 1861 when Henry Timrod wrote “Ethnogenesis.” Louis Rubin accurately labels Timrod as “the great Might Have Been in the literary history of the Old South” (*Edge of the Swamp* 219), lending strength to the argument that the world may see his work differently today had the South won the Civil War. Viewing this nationalistic Confederate poetry not as the now-irrelevant literature of an extinct culture (and its morally objectionable slavery practices) but more in its historical context as an aspirational literature of a newly born country, “emphasizing its great expectations rather than its stultifying disappointments” (Hutchison and Richardson 2) opens modern-day readers to think beyond the Civil War’s inevitable outcome and focus instead on interpreting Timrod’s intents for a hopeful new nation.

#### Stanza IV

In Stanza I, Timrod paints a Romantic, pastoral view of the South’s past and present. In the final stanza, Timrod chooses to portray the South not as festive and jovial like the dancers on Achilles’ shield but as a responsible and benevolent contributor to the world. Here, he expands upon his vision to include the South’s future impact on the world, inspiring contemporary readers to see past the uncertainty of the present moment filled with rebellion and possible conflict to the imminent, inevitable, and glorious future awaiting them once they secure their independence. His vision for the Confederacy reflects the hope held by much of the South in 1861, that they had successfully created “a Union of men . . . who are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,” sharing “institutions,



habits and blood” and “rights and interests” as they formed a Confederacy where men “can depend on each other in life or death, in peace or war, now and forever.—” (*RDD*, 26 Apr. 1861). Flushed with newly declared freedom and deeply held resolve, Timrod looks to speak for the South as he articulates the philanthropic motives behind their secession from the Union. He predicts that through Confederate “wealth, and power, and peace . . . the distant peoples we shall bless,” soothing “the hushed murmurs of a world’s distress:” (154). Acknowledging that “God makes us great and rich!” to “save from want and crime the humblest door,” Timrod elevates the South’s intentions and removes any tinge of greed, unlike the materialistic North whose “Fair schemes . . . leave the neighboring poor / To starve and shiver at the schemer’s door” (153).

Timrod devotes twenty-two of the poem’s lines to the inevitability of the South’s future, yet the first line of Stanza IV departs from this idealized view of the future South and allows for one negative emotion: “But let our fears—if fears we have—be still.” By including fear, Timrod sets “Ethnogenesis” apart from ancient epics like the *Iliad* where heroes seldom reveal their fear but instead resign acceptance of future outcome to fate and the will of the gods. This expression of fear mostly disappears from Confederate newspaper poetry over the next few years (replaced with calls to action and declarations of valor and courage in the face of the enemy), rarely surfacing until much later. Even the poems of 1864-65 reflect more resignation and/or anger at the possibility of reunification with the North rather than fear of repercussions or punishment for their treasonous actions.

So why does he allow the negativity of fear into his celebratory ode near its conclusion? Louis Rubin posits that this ability to seamlessly juxtapose good with bad—

and, in this case, of foreordained victory with the admission of fear of war (and possibly losing that war)—elevates Henry Timrod as a Southern poet markedly above his contemporaries. While conceding that Timrod’s poetry may be “less than perfect,” Rubin grants that the Poet Laureate of the South “recreate[s] the complexity of the community’s experience . . . encompassing doubt as well as hope, apprehension as well as resolve” (*Edge of the Swamp* 211), carefully treading a path that neither panders to the nationalistic fervor of the moment nor plays down the emotional toll war wreaks on society.

This contrasting depiction of sectional wealth utilization and distribution marks the beginning of the Confederacy’s “epic” myth-building. Leaders and literati understood the importance of quickly identifying the South as a political, cultural, and economic entity separate from the North, and Timrod adds to that mythos, concluding “Ethnogenesis” with rhetoric dedicated to the future, outlining characteristics that John Budd views as “embod[ying] the heart of Southern nationalism” (437). The South already acted as a viable player in the global economy, producing about two-thirds of the world’s cotton before the Civil War (Hutchison and Richardson 9), and their future independence would only amplify their global contributions and value.

While it took the *Iliad* centuries and many iterations before landing on the language and phrasing used to describe the rift between the Achaeans and the Trojans, the South did not have the luxury of time to carefully formulate their differences from the North. Vilifying Northern motives and sanctifying Southern motives quickly delineated the sections and contributed to a Southern belief structure that, as Catherine Henderson observes, “the Confederacy represents God’s perfect vision for society, while Northern

efforts to dismantle this vision display godless rebellion,” (25), an important difference between the disputing sides that provoked more questions for Southerners than it answered over the next four years of war.

This group of states temporarily titled the Confederate States of America holds a singular place in US history as the only instance where states left and then received readmission to the Union. Lending a supporting and defining voice to the Confederate cause, Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis” prophesies a Southern epic fit for the centuries, predicting “The hour perchance is not yet wholly ripe / When we shall own it,” but this vision of the Confederacy hushing the “murmurs of a world’s distress” and the possibility of the South being “known in every land” as a benevolent and charitable nation (154) thrilled its citizens, assisting in the creation of a uniquely Southern belief system. They anticipated combat with their Northern enemy over their differences, but they did so with rarely expressed fear or doubt, seldom manifesting anything other than conviction of victory and moral superiority on most occasions.

#### Slavery in “Ethnogenesis”

As effective as “Ethnogenesis” may be in explaining Southern mindset and anticipated trajectory into nationhood, perhaps even more telling is what Henry Timrod hedges to articulate. Hidden in his stanzas are oblique references to the South’s “peculiar institution” of slavery and the “ideal of Southern heroic, implicitly racially inherited, nobility” as Cristanne Miller terms it (105). In Line 22 of Stanza I, Timrod describes the coming cotton harvest as “grow[ing] white beneath their steps,” with “their” referring back to his “gentle daughters” personification of the months of the year, not the poorly

shod feet of millions of slaves. Timrod speaks endearingly of these endless cotton fields, but notably missing from his allegory is the equivalent of Homer's king, "scepter in hand at the head of the reaping-rows" (Fagles 18.647)—either the plantation owner or the overseer. Stanza II introduces Christian and Revolutionary War allusions, but "the very soil, / And all the generous wealth it gives to toil," (152) refers not to the toiling slaves whose labor went without monetary compensation but that of the whites, most notably the planter class to which most Southerners aspired on some level. "Not the mean right to buy the right to live," in Stanza III Line 23 was not interpreted by Southern readers at the time of publication as a reference to the chattel slave trade, but to what the rebel nation obtusely referred as the "slavery" of white Southerners to the North and its industrial economy and tariffs.

Vagueness when referring to slavery appears to resolve the cognitive dissonance that began in 1776 with the application of Jefferson's declaration that "all men are created equal" even in a slaveholding society, and as a way of saving face internationally as the world became increasingly opposed to slavery. In his final stanza, Timrod pens the poem's most recognizable reference to slavery, indicating the South's unapologetic intention "to give labor to the poor," by spreading their "peculiar institution" "The whole sad planet o'er" (154). From its birth, the Confederacy intended to extend the reach of slavery as far as possible.

"Ethnogenesis" represents the South at its conceptual best, "in the past or in the future as *if* [Southerners] formed a [unique] community . . . which transcend[ed] individuals and social conditions" (Balibar and Wallerstein 97) heretofore held in common with the North. In this case, the South wanted a country built upon three pillars

written into their Constitution, setting them apart as distinct and different from the North and its Constitution: states' rights, "negro slavery," and Christianity. They were to be a republic of states "acting in [their] sovereign and independent character[s]," formally "invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God" to "recognize[ ] and protect[ ] . . . the institution of negro slavery" (CS Constitution preamble; art. IV, sec. 3, cl. 3).

Hutchison and Richardson contend that "Ethnogenesis" is "no mere occasional ode but instead a declaration of ethnic emergence and solidarity" (11), publicly voicing Timrod's support of the new Confederate nation. It acts as the informal fourth pillar of Southern independence, versifying their desires for the Confederate Constitution to mimic the US Constitution's successful ability to use "a written text to create a nation [and its government] as well as . . . [establishing] the cultural values that stood behind those laws" (Phillips 72). As recorded in the introduction of *Henry Timrod's Poems*, even four decades after its initial publication the South continued to view "Ethnogenesis" as "prophecy linked with the hope and aspiration of the newborn nation of the South" (xxxiv). Timrod's bold declaration acts as a unifying symbol of emerging Confederate independence, appearing in publications throughout the South for the four years of the war, with his themes fueling the Lost Cause mentality even generations after the death of the nation whose birth he heralded.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> When driving the streets of Richmond in January of 2020, the author saw advertisements for an upcoming reading and discussion of "Ethnogenesis" to be held at the University of Richmond. This stands as a testament to the longevity and impact of Timrod's work still today.

## Chapter IV.

### The Southern Reverse Epic

Because the South acted as “the *mise-en-scène* distinctive and romantic” of the Civil War, it only seems appropriate that “the great War novel or epic everyone was calling for . . . ought to have been written by a Southerner,” as Daniel Aaron contends (227). Aaron’s assertion proved partially true. The great epic of the war *was* written in the South, but not by a singular author or from one isolated perspective. Southern poems published during the Civil War exemplify Christopher Phillips’s claim that the territory of ‘epic’ itself continually expands” (2). Though their efforts produce what was “often feeble indeed in aesthetic quality,” because their work “was almost overwhelming in sheer quantity” (Moss 3), these numberless and yet nearly forgotten poets elevate mere mortal soldiers to heroes, fervently and almost unwaveringly support the Confederacy’s battle for independence, and in real time explore the various emotions and impact surrounding overwhelming death tolls, all while whitewashing the topic of slavery and unwaveringly avoiding the ugliness surrounding its existence in their society.

### Heroes of the Reverse Epic

The South herself acted as the reverse epic’s first Confederate hero, with the battle for independence playing out figuratively in newspaper spreads and literally on pastoral landscapes across the South—from the hills of Manassas and Antietam and the

blockaded ports of Charleston and New Orleans to the fields surrounding Atlanta and Vicksburg. Even a poem titled “WAR!” hides hints of the Romantic antebellum pastorals that were popular before the shells of battle pocked the land:

When the sweet smiling moon rolls her orb through the sky,  
And the white clouds are flying afar,  
I rove  
Through the grove,  
While no danger is nigh,  
And with pensiveness utter a heart broken sigh,  
As I think on the horrors of war! (*MW* 15 Nov. 1862)

Battles fought in the South hurt twice: first, the taking of Confederate life, and second (and felt just as deeply), the scarring of the Confederate countryside. Poems calling Southrons to defend their beautiful South and their way of life flooded the papers, beginning before the first shots fired. As Joseph Brennen penned for the *Southern Literary Messenger*’s February 1861 edition:

Men of the South! Look up—behold  
The deep and sullen gloom—  
Which darkens o’er your sunny land  
With thunder in its womb!

.....

Are ye so base that foot to foot  
Ye will not gladly stand  
For land and life, for child and wife,  
With naked steel in hand? (“A Ballad for the Young South” 100, 103)

Most of the Southern states had seceded at this point, but this poem acted as motivation for the final states (most notably Virginia) to defend their Southern way of life with their honor and their lives.

Unlike life lived in the warrior culture of the Greeks, these new violent circumstances were unfamiliar to a South that had previously fought most of its political battles with rhetoric. In the *Iliad*, Homer artfully employs “rivers of language” to portray Achaean society, with passages recording the Greeks as “an aristocratic, warrior society, centered on battlefield achievement and its rewards” (Murnaghan xxi). The *Iliad* dwells on the violence everywhere in nature—comparing the disembarking Achaean troops to “Swarming like insects over the beach, like bees” (Lombardo 2.93) and symbolizing the future rout of Troy by describing “A snake, and his back streaked red with blood, / a thing of terror!” eating a mother sparrow and her entire brood of hatchlings (Fagles 2.363-64). While the South had no intention of permanently adopting a warrior culture like that of the Greeks, many Southrons vowed to fight for her as long as they had breath. They understood that “the pleasures and power of Homer” were “a political act couched in the language of aesthetics” (Phillips 75), and homages confirming the Confederate response to defend the South abounded in newspaper poetry.

Surprisingly, women play a heroic role in this reverse epic. In the *Southern Literary Messenger*, one Charleston journalist wrote sixty-four lines of poetry dedicated to “The Ladies of Richmond,” where he highlights their sacrifices of “bright tinted dresses . . . no more delicate gloves, no more laces” in order to nurse the Confederate wounded, as they “chant[ ] of that glory which vastly / Transcends all the horrors of war”—the glory of God. The poem continues on as it lauds nurses who “wet . . . pale lips



with your tears” and attend to their “most sacred duty / Of dressing that poor shattered hand!” Poets throughout the South repeatedly confirmed the sentiments expressed regarding the important roles of these women in his final stanza:

And the lips of the mother will bless you,  
And angels, sweet-visaged and pale,  
And the little ones run to caress you,  
And the wives and sisters cry hail!  
But e’en if you drop down unheeded,  
What matter? God’s ways are the best:  
You have poured out your life where ‘twas needed,  
And He will take care of the rest. (57-64)

The war effort required this level of sacrifice from Southern women. After the war, with so many of their men gone or left permanently disabled, these same women carried on belief in their Cause for decades, tending graves and forming Daughters of the Confederacy societies to process and validate the grief they were forced to endure for the rest of their lives.

Unlike Hector’s wife, Andromache, who famously begs him to remain home with her and their infant son, crying, “your own fiery courage will destroy you! / Have you no pity for *him*, our helpless son? / Or me” (Fagles 9.483-485), Southern women exerted their influence to keep men at the front, penning poems confirming their commitment to the Cause, even if it meant losing the men they loved. In a poem titled “War Song,” A. B. Meek preserves the stigma and contempt assigned to men who inexcusably did not serve in the Confederate army. The poem begins with the glory bestowed on Rebel soldiers on

the battlefield, but it concludes with these lines: “Rather would I view thee lying, / On the last red field of strife, / ‘Mid thy country’s heroes dying, / Than to be a dastard’s wife!” (SLM XXXVII:627).

These situations that minimize the sacrifices of Southern women and the emotional toll placed on them may indicate a “repress[ion] of grief, lest they weaken soldiers’ resolve,” Drew Gilpin Faust observes (*Mothers of Invention* 18). While this poem was written with a humorous undertone, “War Song” most likely masked inexplicable grief as women all over the South watched their men depart for war, never knowing when or if they would return. Faust explicates on one of the few poems that documents an exception to this standard wartime behavior and documents how some women did acknowledge their pain in parting with their men. She quotes “I’ve Kissed Him and Let Him Go,” a newspaper poem discovered pasted in one of George William Bagby’s scrapbooks but with no further identifying source. This poem admits that while some “feel a strange pride / In giving their country their all,” the woman in this poem confesses that “For the boy that I love the tears will still start. / Yet I’ve kissed him and let him go.” (Bagby Papers, Virginia Historical Society 5:99, qtd. in *Mothers of Invention* 18). If the writer couldn’t conjure that “strange pride,” then second best choice was to still sacrifice for the Cause. God required their sacrifice—the sacrifice of their worldly goods, of their comfort, and of these men they loved “as my life,” (Thomas Hood, “The Southern Mother’s Charge,” *RCA* 4 Dec. 1862). It became a patriotic duty to “conceal her grief / . . . With no one but her secret God / To know the pain that weighs upon her.” (“The Brave at Home,” *RDD* 24 Sept. 1861). The interconnection of the press, the war effort on the front lines, and poetry had one important result: it left a written record of the

experiences of ordinary people like these “lone and stricken-hearted” women living behind the lines (*SLM* XXXVIII:169).

Southerners yearned for Confederate heroes of epic scale worthy of their glorious South, heroes like Hector who combined their fight for honor and country with defense of family and home. Initially, “[t]he only heroic guises [the Old South’s literati] could project . . . were those of the gentleman planter and the chivalric hero” (Simpson 44), but this definition expanded as Southern war heroes gradually overtook the view of the planter class in importance to the Confederacy and earned the right to share the title of “hero” with their beloved South. For the Greeks, Achilles and Hector provide a stabilizing link between the battle leaders of the elite ruling class and the myriad civilian warriors. Unlike Homer’s congenial portrayal of the relationships between Kings Peleus and Priam and their general sons in the *Iliad*, feuds between Vice President Alexander Stephens and President Jefferson Davis filled the papers on several occasions, as did editorials and articles accidentally revealing future military movement or purposely condemning a leader’s actions. Frustrated by the media’s intrusion and judgment, General Lee sent an incensed recrimination, subsequently printed in the Richmond *Semi-Weekly Enquirer*. He seethed, “We put all our worst generals to commanding our armies, and all our best generals to editing newspapers! . . . If some of these better generals will come and take my place, I am willing to do my best to serve my country editing a newspaper” (1 Dec. 1863). It was times like these when poetic tales of Lee’s miraculous escapes transferred Southern attention from governmental failures to wartime successes vividly embellished in the poetic world where (as Aristotle reminds us) “there is not the same kind of correctness in poetry as in politics” (67). By the middle of the war,

“President Davis meant relatively little to the future of the armies, but Lee meant everything to the armies *and* to the people,” argues Harry Stout, calling Lee “the sacred totem of the Confederacy” (*Upon the Altar* 434), and he quickly became a popular hero for the South’s reverse epic storyline.

Granted, the Confederate military participated in moments that parallel those found in the ancient epics. These words of Homer retelling a shared moment of mourning between Achilles and Priam corresponds with the moment at Appomattox Court House when Grant generously allowed Lee and his soldiers to retain their weapons:

The two of them remembered. Priam  
Huddled in grief at Achilles’ feet, cried  
And moaned softly for his man-slaying Hector.  
And Achilles cried for his father and  
For Patroclus. The sound filled the room.  
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.  
But come, sit on this chair. Let our pain  
Lie at rest a while, no matter how much we hurt.  
There’s nothing to be gained from cold grief. (Lombardo 24.547-51;  
24.561-63)

Priam knows loss and defeat, as does Achilles. Lee’s message to his troops of his surrender strikes a similar tone. Instructing his battered soldiers in a communication from the headquarters of the Army of Northern Virginia on the day of his surrender, Lee addresses his soldiers for the last time with these words:

feeling that valor and devotion could accomplish nothing that could compensate for the loss that would have attended the continuation of the contest, I have determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen. . . .

You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty fatefully performed; and I earnestly pray that a merciful God will extend to you His blessing and protection. With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country, . . .

R. E. LEE, General. (10 Apr. 1865)

With these words, Lee secures his role in the Southern epic as the ultimate hero, demonstrating his humility—and yet somehow retaining his valor and dignity and the loyalty of his troops—in loss.

J. V. Ridgely argues that through the pens of its writers, the South mythologized its leaders into “heroes, men far grander than those imagined by its romancers: the knightly Lee, the saintly Jackson,” and sacralized its battlefields “soaked with the blood of martyrs, stretched with across the land: [Manassas], Antietam, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness” (85-86). While poems published early in the war recognized their president (“Long live our gallant Davis!”) before naming generals (“Our Johnston and our Jackson, / Our Beauregard and Lee!” (“Battle of Manassas, *SLM* XXIII:169-70)), as the war progressed national opinion of Davis declined in favor of the South’s heroic military commanders. General Lee symbolized the Confederacy just as much as the Stars and Bars, King Cotton, and slavery, and in *The Confederate War*, Gary

Gallagher adds that “in Marse Robert and his army, rather than in Jefferson Davis and the government, resided Southern hopes for victory” (58). Nowhere do the heroic actions of the South’s generals appear grander than in the newspaper poetry, and homages poured out for Generals Bragg, Johnston, Early, and Lee. None received more poetic tribute than Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, both in recognition of his war contributions in life and in elegies mourning his untimely death. Southerners revered Jackson for his valor and religious piety on and off the battlefield, and poets immortalized him in ways that echo the ancient epicists paying tribute to their heroes.

#### Death and the Southern Reverse Epic

As mentioned above, Henry Timrod’s reverse epic vision in “Ethnogenesis” was written before any official bloodshed, but the introduction of death into the epic’s narrative, in truth, was unfortunately inevitable. In “Our Martyrs,” Paul Hamilton Hayne (close friend of Henry Timrod) mourns “the martyred heroes / Cut down at their golden prime, / In a strife with the brutal Neroes / Who blacken the foot of time!” (*RCA* 24 Dec. 1863). Though the newspapers did publish many elegies seeped in grief, the mourning poetry of the South slowly transitions to words that elevate and sacralize the loss of a loved one in the South’s epic fight for freedom. Written “to the memory of GEORGE WALTER ROGERS, who was mortally wounded at the battle of Stone River, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1863,” Ed. Porter Thompson’s “Leave Me Here” expresses these complicated emotions when he writes “Father, mother, sisters loving / Weep ye not his early doom; / Still your hearts with sweet reproving, / For he fills a hero’s tomb” (*SLM* XXXVIII:270). This approach to understanding overwhelming grief and loss is a precursory viewpoint to

the “Glorious Lost Cause” mentality that becomes prevalent in the poetry written in the first years post-war, as will be addressed later in this work.

This “rhetoric of gallantry,” as Harry Stout defines it, “was impervious to defeat—and to the future,” evolving into an army that fought not to win, but simply “to keep deaths from being in vain” (*Upon the Altar* 251). Like Achilles’ rage articulated from the beginning of the *Iliad*, Southern newspaper poetry provided battle cries, embellished battle accounts, and prayers for divine intervention, but this poetry also acted as voice for a nation processing the overwhelming and ever-increasing death toll and its accompanying crushing public and private grief. Homer “offers a full-scale examination of strife as an inescapable feature of human experience” (Murnaghan xix) because centuries of rewriting and refining allow for deeper analysis and perspective. Southern Civil War poets attempted to do so as well, but because they composed poems concurrent to or recently after the battles, most poets did not have the time to fully examine the war experience (especially the experiences surrounding death) as they faced the daily possibility that a loved one’s name would appear on the newspaper casualty lists.

“Death and suffering had become too random and unpredictable to savor,” Harry Stout writes (*Upon the Altar* 290), but poets felt driven to find some meaning, relying heavily on Christian symbolism and doctrine in their work. Described by Esther Parker Ellinger as “the worst blow the Confederacy could have sustained (35), Stonewall Jackson’s death on 10 May 1863 (from a wound sustained from one of his own soldiers at the battle of Chancellorsville) electrified Southern poets and generated countless elegies. Poems flooded every publication, shifting Jackson’s role in the Southern epic from “God’s first warrior hero” who fully embraced the duality “of wholesale violence and

Christian faith” (Stout, *Upon* 73) to his sanctification as God’s irreplaceable martyr and, as Reverend Robert Dabney eulogized, as “God’s sermon to us” (qtd. in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* 164). Similar to the death of Patroclus in the *Iliad* where “the Greeks / Mourned Patroclus the whole night through” while “Achilles began the incessant lamentation, / Laying his man-slaying hands on Patroclus’ chest / And groaning over and over like a bearded lion” (Lombardo 18.345-349), the loss of Stonewall Jackson triggered both public and private mourning reverberating throughout the South. Before his death, poems respectfully described him as “the war-worn chieftan, / With bowed and humble head / Pours forth a prayer for his native land, / . . . Of the wounded and slain, he bids them turn / To the eternal LORD.” (“Stonewall Jackson,” *SLM* XXXIV:589). The tone becomes much more somber, reflective, and idolizing in “Jackson,” by H. L. Flash, originally published in the *Mobile Advertiser and Register* and republished in June of 1863 in both the *Southern Literary Messenger* and Richmond’s *Record of News, History, and Literature*. Flash elegizes the fallen general with these words:

Though his alone the blood that flecks the ground  
Recalling all his grand heroic deeds,  
Freedom herself is writing with the wound,  
And all the country bleeds.

He enter’d not the nation’s Promised Land  
At the red belching of the cannon’s mouth;  
But broke the House of Bondage with his hand—

The Moses of the South! (9-16, *SLM* XXXVII:379)



In 1861, when Henry Timrod petitioned the South to raise “A Moses with his rod!” in “Ethnogenesis,” he couldn’t envision how heavy the loss of their Moses would weigh upon them. Similar to Hera’s imploring the devastated Achilles mourning over his friend’s body to “Defend Patroclus / It’s all for him, this merciless battle / . . . up with you— / no more lying low!” (Fagles 18:200, 207-08). the South would not forget Jackson’s loss and would use it as a rallying cry until the war ended.

In *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, a study of the effects of death on society during the Civil War and its lasting effects for generations afterward, Drew Gilpin Faust writes that around the time of Jackson’s death, “Loss became commonplace; death was no longer encountered individually; death’s threat, its proximity, and its actuality became the most widely shared of the war’s experiences.” She concludes that “[f]or those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War, the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death” (xiii). The grief-stricken population attempted to process their incomprehensible losses in verse. Their elegies for the dead often rang sentimental and generic, even when mentioning loved ones by name, and after mourning their lost son, husband, brother, or lover, poets would frequently champion the Cause and the God that had exacted such a price from them. In a poem dedicated to the “MEMORY OF THE LOVED AND DEEPLY LAMENTED CAPT. L. GRILLS,” the anonymous author alternately elegizes Grills as “Warrior,” “Hero,” “Victor,” “Soldier,” “Patriot,” “Brother,” and “Christian” while trusting “Our God will keep, / Beneath His watchful eyes / Thy precious dust” that was spent heeding “Our country’s call” for “sainted Heroes” who “thy laurels reap” in their “dreamless sleep. / Which knows no waking here” (CP 12 Jan. 1864). Alice Fahs justifies the

countless poems in the “dying soldier” genre as playing an important cultural role by “making those often anonymous deaths appropriately meaningful,” effectively marking a single soldier’s place “in a war of unprecedented slaughter” (100, 101) as valuable and seen. This mourning process adopted across the South not only hallowed the death of individual soldiers, but it also elevated their losses to fulfilling a sacred duty to the Confederacy, encouraging new soldiers to enlist and refill the now-vacated corps. One contemporary publication described this sacrifice for the South as “ordered by God not only as a privilege but as a duty” and their “blood seals upon you the obligation to fill their places in your country’s host” (*The Christian Soldier*, 1862, p. 13, qtd. in Silver 56).

#### Henry Timrod’s “Unknown Dead”

As the Southern epic progressed, the vision of bucolic pastoral life faded farther from view—and from possibility—unlike the *Iliad*. By the end of the war, the Southern epic not only recognized death as part of the storyline, it becomes one of the most prominent—and hardest—concepts to process. Southerners seek to find meaning in the overwhelming death tolls that can be reduced to intimate, individual losses of fathers and brothers, husbands and sweethearts. Combining elegy with the ultimately victorious impending conclusion of the Southern epic became a necessity for Southern writers, and this process “is in fact endemic to the [epic] genre,” Christopher Phillips writes, for “without mourning the fallen hero, there would be no *kleos*, no glory for Achilles or Hector or Odysseus” (9)—or for the Confederacy. From the outset, the South knew there

would be loss. But Southerners could not prepare for the number that they would ultimately lose in their failed march to glory.<sup>15</sup>

About two months after Jackson's death, the *Southern Illustrated News* published in its 4 July 1863 issue a meaningful exception to the mournful doggerel that frequented their Poet's Corners. Henry Timrod's "The Unknown Dead" skillfully mourns the loss of nameless, faceless soldiers without the jingoistic versification employed by his contemporaries (see Appendix). Though it may be impossible to establish exactly when Timrod wrote this poem from Charleston where he was working or when the newspaper office in Richmond received it, publication on 4 July 1863 (a choice with "unintended appropriateness" in hindsight, as Louis Rubin expresses (*Edge of the Swamp* 212)) should not be overlooked since the poem's original publication date coincides with two of the biggest blows Southerners received to their morale over the course of the war: Lee's repulse on the battlefields of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania and Vicksburg's final surrender to Ulysses S. Grant after more than forty days under siege, combining for nearly 60,000 Confederate casualties on both fronts (see McPherson, *Battle Cry* Ch. 21). Accurate news from these fronts took time to reach the South. In *Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War*, Ernest B. Furgurson notes that on 7 July, the Richmond *Sentinel* still claimed victory at Gettysburg, with Lee taking 40,000 prisoners. That same day, the Richmond *Dispatch*

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Gallagher, in *The Confederate War*, presents these statistics: "The Confederacy mobilized between 750,000 and 850,000 men, a figure representing 75 to 85 percent of its available draft-age white military population (only the presence of slaves to keep the economy running permitted such an astonishing mobilization) At least 258,000 of them perished during the war (94,000 on the battlefield and 164,000 from disease), and those wounded in combat totaled nearly 200,000. Deaths thus ran to about one in three of all men in uniform, and killed and wounded in battle between 37 and 39 percent. The North mustered at least 2.2 million men, about half of its 1860 military-age population, of whom 360,000 died (110,100 in battle and the rest from disease or accidents) and 275,175 were wounded. With a death rate of one in six, and killed and wounded in battle amounting to about 17.5 percent, the North paid a relatively much lower price in blood than did the Confederacy" (28-29).

published a report that General Grant, not the South's General Johnston, had lost the siege of Vicksburg. "Later that day, Secretary of War Seddon reluctantly forwarded to Davis the official report that Vicksburg had fallen," Furgurson concludes (213). The stories of these battles, mingled with exaggerations and denials, arrived piecemeal throughout the South, and the population did not know the full outcomes of either fight for weeks afterward. While unintentional, the timing of Timrod's elegy on this date in retrospect was certainly appropriate.

Composed in twenty-three pairs of heroic couplets but structured without breaks between the pairs, "The Unknown Dead" effortlessly sweeps away much of the *kleos* aspects of the war to dwell in the details of the overwhelming sadness lurking behind all the warrior bravado. As Louis Rubin points out, "None of Timrod's Southern contemporaries was capable of this descriptive use of commonplace sensory detail to re-create a shared experience" (*Edge of the Swamp* 213), and the difference in his work is striking. Using "I" throughout the poem to establish that these are his thoughts and experiences, Timrod the artist paints a somber picture (unlike the bucolic and hopeful images composed for "Ethnogenesis"), transporting the reader to different places on his canvas. He begins in his room with his private thoughts on a rainy day listening to the bells for a funeral in the churchyard. The sound of the bells "made me think," the spondee echoing both the sounds that surround him and the force by which his thoughts wander "Beyond my streaming window-pane," to visions "Of nameless graves on battle plains" throughout the South (157). Here, Timrod guides the reader through Southern vistas where "A myriad unknown heroes rest" (157). His use of "nameless" and "unknown" purposely contrasts with the first grave—one in a churchyard where a stone

will designate the deceased's final resting place—indicating how little is known about the soldiers who continued to lose their lives so far from home.

In Lines 21-26, Timrod abruptly yanks the reader from these scenes, zooming in on two dying battle chiefs, one victorious and one defeated. These men are the “known” and “named” heroes, and while it is unclear if the poem was written before or after Stonewall Jackson's death, mentioning “their monumental beds” (157) could be an oblique reference to the eight days Jackson spent between receiving his wound and dying from the subsequent infection. “Monumental” stands out as the only four-syllable word in the entire work, drawing the reader's attention to the poet's word choice. “Monumental” connotes something enormous, important, memorable, or lofty, but Timrod extends meaning beyond that surface definition. By choosing the word “monumental,” he elevates the deaths of Southern commanders as more important, visible, and valuable than those experienced by the common soldier in the public arena. The people reserve “The bitterest tears a nation sheds” for leaders, and as Harry Stout explains, the deaths of beloved leaders mark the public evolution of “a Confederate civil religion . . . incarnated through a violent atonement.” Southerners felt the loss of their generals intimately, and when Jackson died, the people constructed a savior Christian mythos around his memory, creating a “a messianic figure who ‘can never die’” (229), and erecting physical monuments to his memory throughout the South soon after the war.

In the *Iliad*, Homer expounds in detail upon both the death rites and the deaths of Hector and Patroclus, mentioning the deaths of minor leaders, but glossing over the totals of the enlisted men. Conversely, “The Unknown Dead” highlights and memorializes the forgotten and the unsung. While Timrod does express sadness over the losses of great

leaders, he does not dwell there long. In Lines 27-29, he directs the reader away, instead finding “the spot, / By all save some fond few forgot—” where “the true martyrs of the fight” lie buried. In contrast to the glorified and public mourning for heroic leaders, there will be no public outcry for those buried in unmarked graves, only “that so many bravely fell;” (158). Timrod reminds the reader that this public fight demands private grief as its price. These “worlds” were the center of someone’s entire world, yet Timrod sees them and feels their “utter woe, despair, and dearth,”. Bringing the reader back full circle to the rainy day, he declares that “Just such a sky as this should weep / Above them, always, where they sleep;” (158), providing these unknown soldiers a timeless marker and due recognition of their sacrifice. Despite the current state of the South, Timrod realizes that “Nature’s self, with eyes unwet” will not reel from these losses, despite the cruelties man perpetrates against man, and she will forever “Laugh[ ] gayly o’er their burial place” (158), and as Nature always does, move quickly on from mankind’s wars.

Although Timrod does include three lines addressing the grander scope of the war, he expresses tribute to “patriot zeal and pride,” and “lofty faith” (158) with reserve and without descending into the exaggerated expressions of civil religion or Confederate nationalism so evident in his contemporaries’ poetry. His words reveal a somber, personal respect for the Confederacy, national pride without jingoism, sadness without despair, all while removing the North completely from his work and keeping his vision for future victory still in view. Louis Rubin describes “The Unknown Dead” as “both dignified and restrained, . . . simple and evocative in the clear precision of its diction and thought” (*Edge of the Swamp* 214). While the loss of Jackson (combined with the severe losses at Gettysburg and Vicksburg) sparked for the first time in many Southern minds a

“gloom of despondency” (*REX* 13 Aug. 1863), the war was far from lost. Timrod’s “The Unknown Dead” contains no hint of nostalgia; instead, it stands as a historical marker of a time when the South saw in their mounting casualty lists not certain defeat but opportunity to trust God and fight on. Loyal to the Confederacy to the end of the war, Timrod does not use this poem to abandon his vision of the epic Southern outcome in the poem he penned just two years earlier. In “The Unknown Dead,” he recognizes that the time has come when the Confederacy must “Call up the clashing elements around, / And test the right and wrong!” (“Ethnogenesis” 152) despite the cost and the grief unavoidable in war.

### The Underworld in the Southern Reverse Epic

From its origin, the mythos surrounding the Old South and the Lost Cause painted its heroes and culture without flaw or error, unlike the ancient epics which more even-handedly celebrate “the achievements of its leaders” alongside their “flaws and weaknesses as they emerge under conditions of severe strain” (Murnaghan xxiii). Heroes of the epics often journeyed to danger-ridden lairs to engage mythical creatures as they battled with their inner demons before achieving their status as hero. Over time, legends and ancient epics whittled their heroes down to their most important experiences and traits, not overcomplicating narratives with excessive details but focusing on climactic fights and victories. The South thought it was taking this same path, but instead of ending in a climactic victory, the Civil War ended with mythos-shattering loss. Their return home would not be sheathed in laurel victory wreaths as Achilles or Odysseus. Because they refused to face the societal rubble left behind after centuries of practicing slavery, the return of their heroes rang hollow and somehow incomplete. From 1865 on, the South

would attempt to minimize the errors and flaws of both the South and her heroes while slowly erasing from Southern memory the ugliness of institutionalized chattel slavery. This practice had brought them to war in the first place, and its dissolution brought no real substantive reflection. Instead, it brought a second reverse of their mythos that eventually drew flawless caricatures and storybook heroes to take the places of complicated, flawed individuals.

From the outset, Southerners villainized Abraham Lincoln as the otherworldly monster they needed to defeat—a beast as hideous as anything described anciently set on destroying everything the South treasured, from consuming profits and exploiting their agrarian lifestyle to abolishing their system of production and preventing its spread into new territory. Southerners fixated on this epic fight against the encroachment of Northern ideals as their demon, but their underworld epic battle was actually slavery—a purebred American monster avoided since the time of the Founding Fathers and one Southerners refused to recognize that they were fighting or even fully to admit as a problematic facet of their culture. Erich Auerbach notes that when reading the ancient epics, readers can easily “separate the historical from the legendary in general” and “distinguish the true from the synthetic” by the patterns and themes used, but also from how easily events fit together and circumstances play out in legend. Unlike history, legend “runs far too smoothly” (19). In the case of the Southern reverse epic, muddying the line between legend and history is most evident in they address the topic of slavery. By ignoring or reframing the practice of slavery, Southerners successfully separated the mythological South and its bucolic agrarian ideal from the historical South and the ugliness associated with slavery’s existence.



It would be at this moment in the narrative that a traditional epicist would present their hero with a life-threatening battle against a powerful enemy or an encounter with a monster that challenged their core beliefs so the hero emerges scarred but battle-wise. Instead, at this point of reckoning, rather than engaging and accepting and restoring like the epic heroes preceding them when forced to face their demon, Southern heroes choose denial as a route away from confrontation. The South opts to ignore the truths about slavery written in their Constitution at the beginning of the war: “No bill of attainder, ex post facto law, or law denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves shall be passed” (CS Constitution, art. I, sec. 9, cl. 4). Now, rather than seeing God as their victor as initially prophesied, He was their chastiser, punishing the South not for losing the war and not for the sin of owning and abusing other human beings, but because they (like the Children of Israel) were a chosen people meant to be cleansed, tried, humiliated, and eventually saved for a greater destiny at some undetermined future time. This punishment, however, did not reflect on the South as a slaveholding nation, but rather as a people that had descended into the sins of greed and pride. A letter written on 19 November 1865 verbalizes this Southern mindset as it emerged soon after the war: “God has often chastised nations for their sins, and often has chose [sic] the Heathen round about to chastise his chosen people” (Samuel Matthews to Robert Matthews, qtd. in Genovese 63). From Matthews’s point of view, God was using the North to teach lessons the war itself had missed. One Georgian Baptist from Macon conceded that man could not know the mind and will of God, but His people “must wait the developments of Providence, before we presume to decide concerning the righteousness of God’s judgments” (*Christian Index* 30 Mar. 1865, qtd. in Rable 361). If the people repented and

turned to God, the South still remained His people, despite losing the war. Chastised but still chosen; bowed but still unbroken.

An intrinsic feature of the new Confederate nation was a Southern civil religion that accepted slavery as “permitted by God in order to teach us the way in which dark races are to be elevated and civilized . . . the path which was marked out by Providence” (Holcombe 83). Southern civil religion during the war contained parts “religious *and* ideological, cultural *and* theological” (Stout, *Upon the Altar* xx), leaving no doubt that this new nation professed the Christian God’s hand in their new government. These nation-builders formed a new government, strongly grounded in the political ideals of the Founding Fathers (ideals that they felt had been abandoned in the North), while altering the Founders’ perceived mistakes created from hedging on slavery in the Constitution and elsewhere. In *The Creation of Southern Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, Drew Gilpin Faust emphasizes that in their secession documents, states almost without exception claimed slavery as the most significant factor in leaving the Union (59). Not only did the US Constitution permit slavery, Southerners used scripture to prove further that God actually condoned its practice, and protecting it defined Confederate beliefs on a spiritual level. Faust continues, “Superintending inferior, helpless Africans, assisting in their ‘remedial advancement,’ converting them to Christianity, protecting them from the destructive notions prevalent in much of the rest of the world—these were God’s purposes for the South” (60). As an added exclamation point to their declaration of independence, the Confederate Congress chose *Deo Vindice* (“With God as Our Defender” (Beringer et al. plate 1)) as the motto for their new nation,

confirming their government as unequivocally and outspokenly partnered with God on a grand scale for guidance, for governance, for race relations—and for victory.

Even though political rhetoric from Southern leadership strongly voiced support for the South as a slaveholding nation all the way to Appomattox, Southern poets rarely wrote of slavery from the beginning (and even before) the war. For example, in its 1861 issues, the *Southern Literary Messenger* began most issues with vitriolic editorials about slavery from the editors, such as one published in its February issue, claiming, “Left to themselves [the negro race] would no doubt remain barbarous forever; but when domesticated by the white man, they are elevated and Christianized” (Holcombe 83). By contrast, the poetry in the *Messenger* (averaging about ten poems per issue) exercised a strange silence about slavery. Not one of the *Messenger*’s poems published in 1861 overtly championed African slavery as a reason to go to war or even as a cultural practice. One poem, “A Ballad for the Young South,” openly advocates fighting “For land and life, for child and wife, / With naked steel in hand,” understanding that God will fight with them, for “Beside the prayer-book on his desk / The bullet mould is seen, / And near the Bible’s golden clasp / The dagger’s steely sheen;” (Brenan, XXXIII:103). In this poem’s 160 lines, not once does Brenan mention that slavery was integral to the Confederacy, as stated in their Constitution. In order to make their “peculiar institution” more palatable as they campaigned for international recognition, writers softened and obscured their references, following in the tradition of Homer who, as Aristotle wrote, “more than any other has taught the rest of us the art of framing lies in the right way” (66). When read carefully, veiled references to slavery do appear, as in “Ethnogenesis,” where Henry Timrod masked slavery behind these lines, “But for the distant peoples we

shall bless, / And the hushed murmurs of a world's distress: / For, to give labor to the poor, / The whole sad planet o'er," implying that they intended to spread the practice of slavery wherever possible ("Ethnogenesis" 154). There is no extant record of Timrod as a slaveowner, and since he lived most of his life impoverished, it is highly unlikely he owned a slave. Yet he supported the practice, claiming slavery provides "the utmost freedom" for master and slave (*Essays* 91). The South's slavery-based class system separating white from black protected poorer whites like Timrod from the bottom of the system, and they fought primarily to preserve their class ranking, harboring hopes to one day join the upper planter class.

Taking these poems both in context and at face value allows Southerners to define "Confederacy" to themselves and to the world at large as they chose to define it, not necessarily as the facts reflected. However, the attempt to create a unified façade "forces down the atrocities of . . . slavery, and 'free' labor exploitation in [the] Achillean history" written by Homer (Phillips 11), in the history of the United States generally, and in the Confederacy specifically. Admittedly, for white Southerners, despite their protestations, there was little of the Romantic ideal associated with slavery, and if any poem had been written addressing the atrocities, it never could have reached print in such a segregated culture. Very few Southern poets at the time would have pinned the sectional crisis on the presence of African slaves in their society, but as Daniel Aaron contends, "Without the Negro, there would have been no Civil War, yet he figures only peripherally in the War literature" (xviii). Slavery divided North from South more dramatically than any other issue and found defense in the newspapers much more often than the issues of taxation or states' rights, notwithstanding the "Lost Cause" positions

vociferously taken post-war that taxation and states' rights represented the main Southern grievances. Slavery provided the South her labor, certainly, but at its core, the practice of slavery "was considered an essential means of social control over a race which at that time was regarded by almost everyone (including most abolitionists) as an inferior branch of the human species" (Ahlstrom 655). With no touch of irony, Southerners often equated their subservient position to the North with the bonds of slavery, as J. M. Kilgaur does in "Harp of the South Awake!":

Harp of the South awake!  
From every golden wire,  
Let the voice of thy power go forth  
Like the rush of a prairie fire;  
With the rush and the rhythm of a power,  
That dares a freeman's grave,  
Rather than live to wear  
The chains of a truckling slave. (*SLM* XXXII:483)

By printing poems like this one, publishers confirmed in the minds of their readers the possibility of a "good slavery in a [Southern] 'Christian Republic,' while denouncing abolitionists as the real enemy manipulating Northern public opinion" (Stout *Upon the Altar* 44). If the US federal government had the power to restrict the freedom of innocent, God-fearing slaveowners, Southerners were willing to go to war.

Although the mass media still included pastoral and love poetry on occasion, much of the poetry published during the war references Southern nationalism in some way, providing constant fodder for the expectations of their readers. Any poetry written

in the South during the war had to reflect pro-South, pro-slavery philosophies, or as Timrod summarized the writing climate on 18 January 1864, “[A] very common error among the critics of the South . . . [is] all [a poet’s] trees should be palmettoes, and all his fields white with cotton” (*Essays* 161). Requiring fanatic support for the Cause (and, by association, slavery) in the literature of the time stilted the creative development of Southern literature during the war and for decades after. Lewis P. Simpson affirms that, in order to be considered for publication during the war, “Old South literary pastoralism became devoted wholly to the defense of [Southern slave culture] instead of the defense of poetry” (43), leaving little room for dissent or even partial disagreement with basic Confederate philosophies. While Jefferson Davis famously refused to censor the press for any editorial, Southern literati continually self-censored to fit the mythos of the Southern pastoral vision and its class hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

Southerners defended slavery and their class system to the end, regardless of Jefferson Davis’s last-ditch petition to Congress in March of 1865 to fill the desperately thinning Confederate ranks with black soldiers promised their freedom if they defended the South, a suggestion that dangerously threatened the precarious racial balance of power. As late as 1864, the Southern Presbyterian church published a statement that part of their mission was “to conserve the institution of slavery, and to make it a blessing both to master and slave” (in Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion*, p. 60, qtd. in Ahlstrom 671-672). Inexplicably, the practice of slavery ended with little opposition to retain it. In *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War*, Kenneth Stampp observes

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<sup>16</sup> Poetry published in the South during the war does not identify the race of the poet, but it can be assumed that few if any poems by people of color purposely made it to press at this time. It is therefore impossible to balance views from the perspective of the slave, however valuable and insightful that would be to this discussion.

that “slavery collapsed with remarkably little resistance. . . . soon after the Confederate surrender no Southerner except an occasional eccentric would publicly affirm the validity of the proslavery argument” (266-67). Why this occurred has never been fully explained and the answer lies outside the scope of this work. Because surrender at Appomattox no longer allowed them the privilege of portraying themselves as the victors of their epic, Southerners retreated from the searing character test that now faced them: Southerners could not bring themselves to repudiate slavery.

## Chapter V.

### A Final Reverse of the Southern Reverse Epic

There was one crucial problem with this unconventional approach of generating a reverse Southern epic to dictate their nation's future: Unlike Milton's and Homer's poems, the South possessed no omniscient narrator soliciting the Muses before the final, inevitable victory, no matter how hard Southerners attempted to apply the hopeful trajectory established in "Ethnogenesis." Therefore, despite their unflagging efforts to do so, Southern poets could not will into existence "The rapturous sight" ("Ethnogenesis" 153) of Confederate victory and freedom. In the beginning, this impending victory was viewed as merely a technicality, and poets across the South accepted the responsibility of projecting this win into existence as the patriotic purpose of their work. By the end of the war, this was no longer possible and Southern poets were "adapting their memories to suit their sufferings" as Thucydides observed centuries before in *The Peloponnesian War* (161). Daniel Aaron avers that "a story of exploded expectations and of military and social disaster lends itself to literary treatment more readily than the vulgarity of victory" (227), and the unconditional surrender of the South fits Aaron's parameters perfectly.

In *Ordeal by Fire*, Civil War historian James McPherson calculates that by the end of the war, Northern armies had killed "two-fifths of the South's livestock, and one-quarter of her white men between the ages of 20 and 40. More than half the farm machinery was ruined, and the damages to railroads and industries were incalculable."



He concludes with this poignant fact: “Southern wealth decreased by 60 percent” from 1860 to 1865 (476), decimating their agrarian economy by instantly dissolving their enslaved workforce and killing or disabling a substantial number of their working men.

By January of 1865, there was no “united face” put on by Southerners, and newspapers argued for peace talks, including Richmond’s *Examiner*, which went a step further and began “pushing for a convention of Southern states to abolish the Confederate constitution and depose Davis” (Furgurson 291). Both Davis and Lincoln attended unproductive peace talks aboard Lincoln’s *River Queen* on 3 February 1865, just outside Hampton Roads, VA. With Lincoln unwavering in his proposal for reunification without slavery and Davis’s insistence on Confederate independence (despite increasingly horrific living conditions in the army’s ranks and throughout the South’s civil population), little of consequence regarding peace came of this meeting. However, between Davis’s insistence on independence at the peace talks and his impassioned speech at the African Baptist Church two days later where he “consolidated resistance of a nation [into] which is now of one heart and one mind,” Southern fight reignited, and “under the blessing of Heaven our Independence is secure” (*RDD* 10 Feb. 1865). As a result, John B. Jones, a clerk in the Confederate war department, recorded in his diary, “Every one thinks the Confederacy will at once gather up its military strength and strike such blows as will astonish the world” (493). The South as a nation was breaking under the toll of war, but Southerners as a people remained defiant. As late as the end of March 1865, an editorial in the *Richmond Dispatch* asserted “that a territory like the South is worth fighting for” (30 Mar. 1865), and the *Richmond Christian Advocate* published “Hymn to the National Flag,” which contains this strident call for God’s intervention:

Strike Thou for us, King of armies!

Grant us room in Thy broad world!

Loosen all the despot's fetters.

Back be all his legions hurled!

Give us peace and liberty!

Let the land be love be free—

Then, oh bright and stainless Banner,

Never shall thy folds be furled! (23 Mar. 1865)

Nationalistic rhetoric and tempers still flared, and despite the ever-encroaching Union army besieging Richmond since June of 1864, cries for Southern independence once again drowned out peace talks in Richmond. Even the Richmond *Examiner*, famous for skewering Davis for his policies and piety over the last four years, rejected vociferously the Northern demand for unconditional Southern reassimilation: “New life was visible everywhere” (7 Feb. 1865). Two months later, on April 4, President Lincoln walked the streets of the Southern capital as the city finally collapsed after seven months of siege, and two weeks later, General Lee presented his sword to General Grant on the ninth of April.

Because the Southern victory “guaranteed by God” never happened, Southern leaders and literati (who had continued to maintain their view of the war as a noble epic) were now forced to reverse their initial plotline, climax, and denouement and to construct a way for God to still fit into a narrative that now included their bitter defeat. This reversal needed to fit retroactively with all the jingoistic literature written and civil religion preached throughout the South for four years. Instead of paralleling Achilles’ victories and the conquest of the Greeks, the South ended up thwarted Troy, with their

hero Lee more akin to Hector and their “Ethnogenesis” pronounced a stillbirth. Southerners hadn’t succeeded in mimicking the miraculous victory of the Founding Fathers during the American Revolution; they hadn’t left Satan behind in his fiery pit like Milton’s archangel; and no “Moses with his rod” (“Ethnogenesis” 153) had arisen from the Southern ranks, despite their efforts to paint the deceased Stonewall Jackson as such. As Lee’s surrender to Grant completed the disappointing closing stanza of the great Confederate epic with lines perforated with unanticipated defeat, circumstances necessitated a noble yet unyielding route out of the guaranteed victory corner into which the leadership (led by the still-unbowed Jefferson Davis) had led the people.

Hutchison and Richardson define Confederate literature as being “aspirational,” “future-oriented,” and as a body of work “practiced [in] a near perpetual process of deferral” (8), and writers would follow this pre-plotted path until the moment their projected future came to fruition when they won the war. However, the valiant, honor-bound, God-blessed martyrs/soldiers failed to secure the predetermined success on the battlefields guaranteed by Southern writers and politicians since the first shots four years earlier. Now it was up to this war-worn cadre of writers to align what *didn’t* happen with their theories of how this epic was supposed to end—and where they were headed from this point forward. In *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South*, Drew Gilpin Faust acknowledges that people require “an organizing framework of belief” that both “restructure[s] perceptions, as well as . . . legitimate[s] them.” Humans,” she concludes, “have an incredible need for meaning” (145). The Confederacy as a nation reabsorbed back into the Union of states, but the ideas that had led Southerners to separate themselves from the North in the first place lived on in a new,

amplified form. Unlike the soldiers, leaders, and citizens whose losses lay as gaping wounds across the South, Southern writers had concocted a victorious literature both predictive and projective of the outcome. They simply had chosen the wrong outcome. The literature representing and defining Confederate ideals remained standing, but now the distinctly Southern civil religion and its reinforcing literature stood without the support of their Constitution's foundational structure of slavery and God-sanctioned states' rights beneath them.

Where would Southern ideals and belief systems go from here? When studying the writing of this period, it is vital to remember that Southerners "viewed their cause as nothing less than a revolution," (Muhlenfeld 180), with their leaders not traitors but comparable to Washington and Jefferson. While the literature composed during the war may be found lacking by critics (both then and now), Confederate literati of the period started out the war viewing their literature as an introduction that laid a foundation for "a genuinely Southern literature [that] would flourish, producing a new classical age with the war itself inspiring great epics poems, and romance" (Muhlenfeld 180) after a successful war effort. Unfortunately, Southern loss meant there would be no new classical age. Once again, the responsibility descended on the writers to blaze a trail of public interpretation. Their job entailed recasting men they had intended to immortalize in halls of honor similar to the Founding Fathers in a way that minimized the sting of loss (or even repainted it as a sort of victory) in a region where the infrastructure, labor force, leadership, and economy had been decimated. Not only that, but this region housed a people who refused to surrender their souls and beliefs to the North. This improbable new mythos required reinterpreting actual events while remaining inside the narrative of

Southern chivalry, heroism, white superiority, and a quickly eroding Southern pastoralism centered on Christian belief and status as God's favored people.

Once again, the epic tale of the South quickly reversed, but not in the way poets like Henry Timrod could have predicted. "This moment when Southerners explain[ ] themselves to themselves," as Drew Gilpin Faust articulates it, is "the moment they [come] closest to explaining themselves to us" (*Creation of Southern Nationalism* 84). Allowing the words written by the people to direct scholarly investigation not only gives researchers an opportunity to hear their voices, but it also allows for removal of moral judgment regarding what they believed, since moral judgment, as David Blight writes, cannot be executed "with precision" and is plagued by inexactness because moral judgment is inherently related "to the irrelevant fact" of who is in power and who defines morality for that society (4). Removing moral judgment allows readers today to see Confederate poetry instead as a "timely literature, one very much of and for its specific historical moment" (Hutchison and Richardson 101). Initially, published Southern poetry hoped for, fought for, and predicted a "victory for the ages," rarely faltering from that vision or conceding the possibility of failure. In the revision, however, rather than a triumph, the story of the South would reverse from epic victory and now be told as an epic tragedy through the eyes of Southerners who lived to see the end of the war and its aftermath.

The unfathomable number of dead, the nature of weaponry, the enormity of scope: "Nothing had prepared our writers" on both sides "to absorb and transfigure facts like those before their eyes" during and following the Civil War, says J. D. McClatchy (xvii). The complexities of this war made it difficult for poets and authors to find work,

let alone take extended periods to compose something for publication. At the beginning of the war, Timrod wrote of searching for a publisher for “The Cotton Boll,” conceding in a letter that he searched not only for the most elite publication to justify and qualify his work but “certainly however in the paper which I think will pay me the highest price. Am I not mercenary?” (letter to Rachel Lyons, Aug. 20, 1861, qtd. in Cisco 69). While it had been difficult to find consistent payment even before the war, writing poetry during the war (dubbed the “days of shabby genteel rhyme and threadbare fustian” by the Richmond *Dispatch* (31 Mar. 1864)) made it virtually impossible. The days of the highly regarded professional poets like Longfellow and Coleridge sporting figurative wreaths of acclaim were coming to an end across the entire nation, and never would poets return to the glory and honor bestowed upon them before the war.

Deprived of the privilege to recount the epic victory they had anticipated, Southern writers at the end of the war fell to crafting a second, more complex reverse epic that would create Southern mythos from the select ashes of Southern fact. It devolved on these Southern writers to “arrange[ ] . . . material in a simple and straightforward way . . . detach[ing] it from its contemporary historical context, so that the latter [generation would] not confuse it” (Auerbach 19) with Northern perspectives and interpretations of the same events. After the war, they worked to remold public interpretation of those facts from what happened into what these facts *could* mean to future generations, and Southerners intended not to be viewed by fellow Southerners as the losers of the war, as impossible as that task may have appeared initially. As Aristotle extrapolates in *Poetics*, “The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse; . . . it consists really in this, that the one describes the

thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be” (34) with no fierce dedication to actual events and often no clear delineation between the two.

This is what transpired as the South gradually reversed the population’s understanding of the Civil War, creating a Southern mythos emphasizing states’ rights and minimizing or eliminating the brutalities inherent to a slave-holding nation. George Steiner wrote of the ancient epics that “myths are among the subtlest and most direct languages of experience. . . . the mythographer—the poet—is the historian of the unconscious. This gives to the great myths their haunting universality” (3). More than anything, the South wanted to create “haunting universality” and a lasting positive interpretation of their four years at war. J. V. Ridgely calls this the creation of the “transcendent fiction” of the Old South, a heroically personified figure in her own right with “a divinely sanctioned social order which alone could fulfill the destiny of the true America: to establish an agrarian empire which would override the soul-crushing, industrialized North” (75-76). Even in loss, the South remained the proud heir of the traditions created by the Founding Fathers.

They failed in their attempt to achieve independence as a nation, but if Southerners refused to acknowledge loss as defined by the North, were they truly defeated? Much of the turmoil connected with losing the war stemmed from Confederate belief that God wore Rebel grey—and that He acted as personal guarantor of Southern eventual victory. The Greeks, when embroiled in a battle at the mercy of a pantheon of gods, could justify away turns on the battlefield as godlike whimsy or unavoidable doom because the gods only acted to fulfill the unchangeable declarations of Fate. This is a difficult claim to establish when worshiping the omniscient, omnipotent, monotheistic

God of the Christians. Belief in this God sustained Southern soldier and civilian alike through brutal defeats, starvation, and siege; belief in that God foundationally supported their efforts in the creation of the Confederacy, based in slavery and states' rights. But how could that argument hold up in the face of a region-crushing loss? Where was God in that? Lincoln had struggled with this same issue for months of his presidency, writing endlessly and pondering on how two sides can "read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes his aid against the other." In the end, he concluded, "the prayers of both could not be answered" ("Second Inaugural Address" 686, 687) and that since the North won, the extensive war was a just God's judgment against an entire nation for sanctioning chattel slavery.

Southern writers had a much more difficult outcome to reconcile than did Lincoln. As Kenneth Stampp observes, post-war Southerners "denied that slavery had anything to do with the Confederate cause, thus decontaminating it and turning it into something they could cherish" (268). The poetry of the war left little public record of slavery in the Confederacy, but it would be reasonable to assume that such an undertaking—rewriting four years of political vitriol and religious justification, hundreds of years of brutality, oppression, enslavement, misery, rape and murder; plus, ignoring the pro-slavery arguments recorded in countless articles, editorials, sermons, journals, government documents, and letters—would take generations. But, as Stampp determines, "The speed with which white Southerners dissociated themselves from the cause of slavery is striking" (268). Not only were they able to successfully separate "the Confederacy" from slavery, they avoided confronting that most terrible mythical monster by asserting that the reason they left the Union at all was (like the original thirteen



colonies) the issue of states being allowed to govern themselves. This rejection (not renunciation) of slavery as part of the “Lost Cause version of the war is a caricature, . . . str[iking] at the core of the truth of the war, unhinging cause and effect” quite successfully. Slavery had been “in both secular and religious discourse the central component of the mission God had designed for the South” and the most compelling argument for the South to secede (Faust, *Creation of Southern Nationalism* 60), but once the original attempt to write the epic success of the South in reverse had failed, the South needed to reverse it yet again.

In this second reversal, the South did not go to war over the “peculiar institution” of slavery. They went to war to fight for their freedom from Northern tyranny, individual state sovereignty, and to defend their way of life. First, they reversed the reasons for secession from the controversial slavery-centric ideas preserved in their Constitution and other written records to the lofty and indisputable and morally defensible ideals of Southern pride, states’ rights, and independent governance. Second, unhinging the “Confederacy” and what it stood for from the institution of slavery shifted the mythos and motivation of the Confederate nation into a much more positive light. Modifying Southern beliefs on slavery from endemic to Confederate nationhood at the outset, to only peripherally relevant at the end of the war, and ending up as irrelevant by the beginning of the next century denotes the largest and most successful reverse achieved by Southerners attempting to write the epic history of a fallen but still beloved nation. But, in refusing to face their demon, they enabled it to feed for generations to come on underlying racism, discrimination, prejudice, and hatred lingering in a culture still divided by color, by experience, and by privilege.

Ironically, “Timrod—and the South—emerge from defeat to finally find victory,” as Christina Henderson asserts, and Robert Penn Warren contends “that the Confederacy was born when Lee offered Grant his sword at Appomattox” (qtd. in Harwell vii), not when South Carolina seceded from the Union. As backward as this claim appears (and using “Ethnogenesis” as an early example of the South’s claim of God’s favor), Henderson continues on, positing that, “[d]espite the brutal war, Southern writers . . . refuse to relinquish the claim [of God’s favor]. It is deferred, but not disavowed” (32). They reversed the structure of their original epic by asserting that it was God’s will that they *lose*. Somehow, they needed to make sense of this seeming contradiction of being God’s favored loser. Strangely, after the war ends, the claim regarding God as the champion of the right (Southern) side evolves further, and “though they lost, they don’t accept the logical conclusion that if God is on the side of right, and the right side won, then they must be wrong” (Richards, *Battle Lines* 157). Instead, writers, preachers, and political leaders generate an elaborate reverse apologetic centered on justifying the holy sacrifices of their war dead on the altar of a now-nonexistent country.

Harry Stout maintains that “[n]o one in 1861 could have predicted that ministers would claim war—and defeat—as a moral and religious good that made men Christians. Yet, by 1864, that was indeed their claim” (*Upon the Altar* 292). By the end of the nineteenth century, Southerners widely accepted Stout’s assertions as accurate. With independence no longer a possibility, Southerners exercised their freedom to memorialize and sacralize their “ideal nation, the nation of myth” (Henderson 33) by preserving Southern values grounded in Christianity and white superiority. Paradoxically, losing the war and creating a “mythologized and memorialized Confederacy” (Henderson 35) did

more to sustain and solidify Confederate ideals than fighting the war for their independence did. In myth form, the post-war Confederacy could not be beaten and “[t]he identity that they created as Confederates outlasted the Confederacy itself” (A. Rubin 1), manifesting itself in racial discrimination and persecution throughout the South for decades after the last of Grant’s peacekeeping forces left the South in 1877.

As the war drew to a close, Southern poets appear to accept that their war-era work was written for a “vanishing present” (Hutchison and Richardson 7), and that the mythical Southern way of life would never materialize into a vision spreading throughout the world. While poets had written furiously during the war rushing work to print that elegized the glorious deaths of heroes or their valiant efforts on the battlefields, they felt drawn again to preserve Southern romanticism in verse after the war’s surprising conclusion. Much like the mythical Camelot, the Confederacy would only exist in imagination, and the “poems and essays [of the time] draw on—and revise—the history of the Civil War to privilege Southern loss” (Henderson 21), sentimentalizing it in a way that did not exist during the war. Perhaps part of its appeal to Southerners rests in the tragedy of the loss: “an outraged, self-deceived, vainglorious, brave people, (not without fear and apprehension) tilted against the ever-replenished armies of the North” (Aaron 227). There had to be some “transcendent purpose, a ‘sacred significance,’ as Frederick Douglass had insisted in the middle of the war” (Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* 268) to justify the catastrophic slaughter and immeasurable suffering that followed such loss. Southern writers reversed the features of the epic to square this circle.

#### Reverse Epic as Nostalgic Southern Mythos

The South had failed created to its reverse epic as predicted in “Ethnogenesis,” and so Southern poets rewrote and reframed the events of the war and of antebellum society to fit a new retroactive version of these events. It was time to construct a supporting mythology (following more in the steps of the ancient epicists) to preserve this final, nostalgic version of their epic. In the preface to his 1866 compilation, *War Poetry of the South*, William Gilmore Simms justifies the preservation of the South’s poetry as

essential to the reputation of the Southern people, as illustrating their feelings, sentiments, ideas and opinions. . . . It shows with what spirit the popular mind regarded the course of events, whether favorable or adverse; and, in this aspect, it is even of more importance to the writer of history than any mere chronicle of facts. (v)

These justifications for publishing exclusively Confederate poetry must have been necessary in the country’s political climate only a year after the sharply divisive war. A poem titled, “Ashes of Glory,” written by A. J. Requier, concludes Simms’s collection of Confederate verse (see Appendix). The author and provenance of this poem are impossible to trace today, but by including this poem in the original version of *War Poetry*, the poem’s original publication date can be established as sometime between the end of the war and the release of the book in 1866.<sup>17</sup> Requier’s work indicates how quickly some writers adopted the “Lost Cause” mentality: mourning the loss of a never

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<sup>17</sup> An attempt to research the poem’s provenance yielded no original source, but Ernest Furgurson titles his extensively researched history of Richmond during the war *Ashes of Glory*, possibly after Requier’s poem. It is interesting to note that this poem (with a few alterations from the version printed in 1866) is included on a “pro-Confederacy” website with the recommendation that the poem “is an excellent source for Confederates” (Confederateshop.com/archives).

fully realized but beautiful, idealized dream devoid of slavery's brutality and the brutal degradation required to sustain that dream society. When read in its entirety, it is evident that Requier mourns, but is he mourning as the winner or the loser? The answer to this question is not quickly nor easily assessable by the reader. The poem portrays the South as both victor *and* loser of the war, a duality of mind that reflects the cognitive dissonance prevalent in the South at the time and for decades to come. He includes several references to ancient traditions and legendary and medieval European heroes from Camelot's Arthur, Admiral Lord Nelson in the War of the Roses, and St. George, the military saint of the Crusader. By tying the South to these historic heroes (some winners, some losers), Requier places the Confederacy's loss in lofty company, because "Not all the antique fables fame, / And Orient dreams disgorge;" (481). In sum, not all heroes are winners. Much of the poem treads a murky line between triumph and defeat, and if read by a reader unaware of the US Civil War, it would be difficult if not impossible to determine if he writes of the victor or the vanquished in lines such as "And heap the laurels it has won," or "It was outnumbered—not outdone; / And they shall shuddering tell / Who struck the blow, its latest gun / Flashed ruin as it fell." (480, 481).

Most interesting is the third stanza, where Requier references the two greatest heroes of the Lost Cause, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, tying the South in life to Lee but "It sleeps the sleep of Jackson now— / As spotless and as calm." (481). By linking the South to the "spotless" Christian character of Stonewall Jackson and the mythos that surrounded his life and death, Requier absolves the South from any guilt or blame from the war and from sin (possibly slavery, possibly more along the lines of God's chastisement of His chosen people and the delay of their ultimate victory). By the

end of the poem, Requier concedes that none of the heroes and crusaders heralded in the poem “Can bid thee [the South] pale!” and her “crimson glory” outshines any of those in the previously mentioned “kingly lines” (481, 482). He concludes with a tribute to the South, allowing it to ascend to Heaven as “*A warrior’s Banner takes its flight, / To greet the warrior’s soul!*” (482).

While his work lacks the subtlety and beauty of more skilled poets and his imagery is often clumsy, Requier’s poem is stereotypical of the final reverse epic ideass common in Southern poetry at the time—both for what it says and for what remains unsaid. The people still struggled with the war, but they were beginning to see it as a fleeting moment of Southern loss before their merely postponed future glory. It illustrates well how the South associated itself with the chivalric crusaders of the Middle Ages and the great heroes and kings of England. Most importantly, Line 8 (“That frees a dauntless soul!”) may confuse modern readers, but it marks the beginning of a new mindset across the South, one still believing that the spirit of the South (which persisted unconquered) remained free and proud and unbeaten.

#### Timrod’s Last Contribution to the Southern Reverse Epic

Despite his willingness to take the oath of loyalty to the Union and his uncommon openness (North or South) regarding changing sides post-war, Timrod’s poetry outlived him and, according to Christina Henderson, acted to renew the Confederacy and allowed it to exist as a nation “in a radical form of preservation impossible for a politically realized state. Defeat paradoxically made it impossible to erase” the visions he presented

(35). The last stanza of Timrod's "Poesy" proved to be more autobiographical than he probably intended when he composed it in 1859:

And therefore, though thy name shall pass away,  
Even as a cloud that hath wept all its showers,  
Yet as that cloud shall live again one day  
In the glad grass, and in the happy flowers,  
So in thy thoughts, though clothed in sweeter rhymes,  
Thy life shall bear its flowers in future times. (100)

In these lines, Timrod somehow predicts the end of his own life, but he would not leave before penning one of the most significant poems of his career, "Ode Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead at Magnolia Cemetery," written the same year as Requier's "Ashes of Glory" (see Appendix). In this ode, he demonstrates an ability "as no other poet, [to] truly express[ ] the soul of the Confederate South" (Cisco 126).<sup>18</sup> Timrod's work was remarkable before 1861, but "[t]he war gave depth to [Timrod's] thought, intensity to his feelings. His note of melancholy was wrenched into the deeper, more abiding note of tragedy," according to Edd Winfield Parks (3), and as much as Timrod hated war, it served as his muse, making him an exception to his own declaration that the "thoughtful sublimity" required to compose great poetry conflicted with the "spasmodic vehemence and the short-lived power" of war (*Essays* 106). This ability to reach a "more abiding note of tragedy" is what elevates "Ode" and "The Unknown Dead" above standard Southern poetry of the time.

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<sup>18</sup> Memorial services like this one dedicating Magnolia Cemetery occurred across the South in the years following the war, as families located remains or could now afford to bring bodies home to their final resting places. William Gilmore Simms and William Grayson, poets and colleagues of Henry Timrod, are both buried at Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston. Henry Timrod lies buried in Columbia, South Carolina.

Timrod considered himself a Confederate throughout the war. In an editorial in the *Daily South Carolinian*, he penned this epigraph: “The nation which forgets its martyred dead can do no honor to its living heroes” (Cisco 101), and his “Ode” displays both his deep feelings for the South’s fallen heroes and his ability to paint Romantic landscapes with his words. Read on Saturday, 16 June 1866, at the memorial’s dedication, the poem was reprinted in the Monday edition of the *Charleston Courier*, which called the work “beautiful and soul-stirring” (Cisco 113). In Lines 3-4, he invites the reader into the cemetery with its freshly dug yet unmarked graves: “Though yet no marble column craves / The pilgrim here to pause.” Like Requier, Timrod references the bay garlands used in classical civilizations to bestow honor, but Timrod’s garlands are still “In seeds of laurels in the earth,” just as the marble for the columns “waiting for its birth, / The shaft is in the stone” (164), anticipating both the upcoming improvements of the memorial and the full development of this final incantation of Southern mythos. His word choices throughout the first stanza convey hope, possibility, and the Lost Cause mentality of delayed and future glory, despite the overwhelming tragedy of the occasion. In a moment of prescience, Timrod shifts the reader’s attention in the next stanza to the mourning women who will “hold in trust your storied tombs,” (164) in organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy for generations, and with this one line, Timrod passes the fight for the Lost Cause from the martyred men to the countless mourning women who survive them, impoverished yet proud women who have nothing left to decorate the graves but their tears and bouquets.

Henry Timrod was an artist, creating beautiful images for the reader and the visitor to the cemetery that day even with marble statuary yet to be installed. The last four



lines of this “Ode” provide the model for dozens of future monuments to the fallen dead for the Lost Cause:

Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!  
There is no holier spot of ground,  
Than where defeated valor lies  
By mourning beauty crowned. (165)

E. Merton Coulter argues that “the Confederacy never became an emotional reality to the people until Reconstruction made it so after the war had been lost” (105). As Drew Gilpin Faust states, “The cult of the Lost Cause and the celebration of Confederate memory that emerged in the ensuing decades were in no small part an effort to affirm that the hundreds of thousands of young southern lives had not, in fact, been given in vain” (*This Republic of Suffering* 193). Works such as this by Timrod afforded the South honor in defeat, connected the surviving to the dead, and bestowed responsibility upon the living to preserve the Cause for which they died.

The Southern reverse epic of 1861 could not stand as it was initially conceived by Timrod and maintained valiantly by other poets throughout the war. Even in its rewritten form—bygone Southern glory, adjusted expectations of God’s involvement, glorification of the loss of lives and livelihood, and elevation of an ephemeral bucolic past that erased the imprint of chattel slavery and replaced it with black codes and Jim Crow laws—the Southern reverse epic ultimately fails for these reasons: their inability to accept the outcome; their inability to face their responsibility for slavery and repair the damage from their sins; and their inability to see beyond their stilted Southern view of their world to the world around them. Gary Gallagher notes, “The Lost Cause is therefore an American

legend, an American version of great sagas like *Beowulf* and the *Song of Roland*.” He concludes that the *legend* of the South (not its history) exposes the war as “a mawkish and essentially heroic and romantic melodrama, an honorable sectional duel, a time of martial glory on both sides, and triumphant nationalism” (*Confederate War* 12). This melodramatic interpretation of events gradually morphed into a Southern mythos perceived by many to be actual facts, not interpretation of those facts. In the *Iliad*, King Priam fully accepts defeat in his grief, saying to Achilles, “. . . pity me. / I am more pitiable. I have borne what no man / Who has walked this earth has ever yet borne. / I have kissed the hand of the man who killed my son” (Lombardo 24.540-43). The South would never stoop low enough to kiss the Northern hands who killed their Southern sons. Too prideful even in defeat, the final version of the reverse Southern epic poem sings of regret, unrequited vision, simmering anger, and a shortsightedness that leaves them unable to accept the verdict of war, leaving them to scramble for shreds of glory and justification in the rubble of their society.

Appendix.

Poems

Lines by Henry Timrod (*SLM* XXVII:89)

We met but once—and yet—and yet—

(O! Truth! thou dar'st not doubt me,)

I know that I shall not forget,

And she'll—ask God about me.

My heart!—she had it years ago—

It seemed so one rapt minute—

And hers—when I arose to go,

I left—a bud within it.

Perhaps this happy April day

Shall wake that bud to growing,

Perhaps the blue-eyed maiden May

Shall see it sweetly blowing.

A Vision of Poesy by Henry Timrod (*Poems* 74-100)

PART I

I

In a far country, and a distant age,  
Ere sprites and fays had bade farewell to earth,  
A boy was born of humble parentage;  
The stars that shone upon his lonely birth  
Did seem to promise sovereignty and fame—  
Yet no tradition hath preserved his name.

II

'T is said that on the night when he was born,  
A beauteous shape swept slowly through the room;  
Its eyes broke on the infant like a morn,  
And his cheek brightened like a rose in bloom;  
But as it passed away there followed after  
A sigh of pain, and sounds of elvish laughter.

III

And so his parents deemed him to be blest  
Beyond the lot of mortals; they were poor  
As the most timid bird that stored its nest  
With the stray gleanings at their cottage-door:  
Yet they contrived to rear their little dove,  
And he repaid them with the tenderest love.

IV

The child was very beautiful in sooth,

And as he waxed in years grew lovelier still;  
On his fair brow the aureole of truth  
Beamed, and the purest maidens, with a thrill,  
Looked in his eyes, and from their heaven of blue  
Saw thoughts like sinless Angels peering through.

V

Need there was none of censure or of praise  
To mould him to the kind parental hand;  
Yet there was ever something in his ways,  
Which those about him could not understand;  
A self-withdrawn and independent bliss,  
Beside the father's love, the mother's kiss.

VI

For oft, when he believed himself alone,  
They caught brief snatches of mysterious rhymes,  
Which he would murmur in an undertone,  
Like a pleased bee's in summer; and at times  
A strange far look would come into his eyes,  
As if he saw a vision in the skies.

VII

And he upon a simple leaf would pore  
As if its very texture unto him  
Had some deep meaning; sometimes by the door,  
From noon until a summer-day grew dim,  
He lay and watched the clouds; and to his thought

Night with her stars but fitful slumbers brought.

VIII

In the long hours of twilight, when the breeze  
Talked in low tones along the woodland rills,  
Or the loud North its stormy minstrelsies  
Blent with wild noises from the distant hills,  
The boy—his rosy hand against his ear  
Curved like a sea-shell—hushed as some rapt seer,

IX

Followed the sounds, and ever and again,  
As the wind came, and went, in storm or play,  
He seemed to hearken as to some far strain  
Of mingled voices calling him away;  
And they who watched him held their breath to trace  
The still and fixed attention in his face.

X

Once, on a cold and loud-voiced winter night,  
The three were seated by their cottage-fire—  
The mother watching by its flickering light  
The wakeful urchin, and the dozing sire;  
There was a brief, quick motion like a bird's,  
And the boy's thought thus rippled into words:

XI

“O mother! thou hast taught me many things,  
But none I think more beautiful than speech—

A nobler power than even those broad wings  
I used to pray for, when I longed to reach  
That distant peak which on our vale looks down,  
And wears the star of evening for a crown.

XII

“But, mother, while our human words are rife  
To us with meaning, other sounds there be  
Which seem, and are, the language of a life  
Around, yet unlike ours: winds talk; the sea  
Murmurs articulately, and the sky  
Listens, and answers, though inaudibly.

XIII

“By stream and spring, in glades and woodlands lone,  
Beside our very cot, I’ve gathered flowers  
Inscribed with signs and characters unknown;  
But the frail scrolls still baffle all my powers:  
What is this language and where is the key  
That opes its weird and wondrous mystery?

XIV

“The forests know it, and the mountains know,  
And it is written in the sunset’s dyes;  
A revelation to the world below  
Is daily going on before our eyes;  
And, but for sinful thoughts, I do not doubt  
That we could spell the thrilling secret out.

XV

“O mother! somewhere on this lovely earth  
I lived, and understood that mystic tongue,  
But, for some reason, to my second birth  
Only the dullest memories have clung,  
Like that fair tree that even while blossoming  
Keeps the dead berries of a former spring.

XVI

“Who shall put life in these?—my nightly dreams  
Some teacher of supernal powers foretell;  
A fair and stately shape appears, which seems  
Bright with all truth; and once, in a dark dell  
Within the forest, unto me there came  
A voice that must be hers, which called my name.”

XVII

Puzzled and frightened, wondering more and more,  
The mother heard, but did not comprehend;  
“So early dallying with forbidden lore!  
Oh, what will chance, and wherein will it end?  
My child! my child!” she caught him to her breast,  
“Oh, let me kiss these wildering thoughts to rest!

XVIII

“They cannot come from God, who freely gives  
All that we need to have, or ought to know;  
Beware, my son! some evil influence strives



To grieve thy parents, and to work thee woe;  
Alas! the vision I misunderstood!  
It could not be an angel fair and good.”

XIX

And then, in low and tremulous tones, she told  
The story of his birth-night; the boy’s eyes,  
As the wild tale went on, were bright and bold,  
With a weird look that did not seem surprise:  
“Perhaps,” he said, “this lady and her elves  
Will one day come, and take me to themselves.”

XX

“And would’st thou leave us?” “Dearest mother, no!  
Hush! I will check these thoughts that give thee pain;  
Or, if they flow, as they perchance must flow,  
At least I will not utter them again;  
Hark! didst thou hear a voice like many streams?  
Mother! it is the spirit of my dreams!”

XXI

Thenceforth, whatever impulse stirred below,  
In the deep heart beneath that childish breast,  
Those lips were sealed, and though the eye would glow,  
Yet the brow wore an air of perfect rest;  
Cheerful, content, with calm though strong control,  
He shut the temple-portals of his soul.

XXII

And when too restlessly the mighty throng  
Of fancies woke within his teeming mind,  
All silently they formed in glorious song,  
And floated off unheard, and undivined,  
Perchance not lost—with many a voiceless prayer  
They reached the sky, and found some record there.

XXIII

Softly and swiftly sped the quiet days;  
The thoughtful boy has blossomed into youth,  
And still no maiden would have feared his gaze,  
And still his brow was noble with the truth:  
Yet though he masks the pain with pious art  
There burns a restless fever in his heart.

XXIV

A childish dream is now a deathless need  
Which drives him to far hills and distant wilds;  
The solemn faith and fervor of his creed  
Bold as a martyr's, simple as a child's;  
The eagle knew him as she knew the blast,  
And the deer did not flee him as he passed.

XXV

But gentle even in his wildest mood,  
Always, and most, he loved the bluest weather,  
And in some soft and sunny solitude

Couched like a milder sunshine on the heather,  
He communed with the winds, and with the birds,  
As if they might have answered him in words.

XXVI

Deep buried in the forest was a nook,  
Remote and quiet as its quiet skies;  
He knew it, sought it, loved it as a book  
Full of his own sweet thoughts and memories;  
Dark oaks and fluted chestnuts gathering round,  
Pillared and greenly domed a sloping mound,

XXVII

Whereof—white, purple, azure, golden, red,  
Confused like hues of sunset—the wild flowers  
Wove a rich dais; through crosslights overhead  
Glanced the clear sunshine, fell the fruitful showers,  
And here the shyest bird would fold her wings;  
Here fled the fairest and the gentlest things.

XXVIII

Thither, one night of mist and moonlight, came  
The youth, with nothing deeper in his thoughts  
Than to behold beneath the silver flame  
New aspects of his fair and favorite spot;  
A single ray attained the ground, and shed  
Just light enough to guide the wanderer's tread.

XXIX

And high and hushed arose the stately trees,  
Yet shut within themselves, like dungeons, where  
Lay fettered all the secrets of the breeze;  
Silent, but not as slumbering, all things there  
Wore to the youth's aroused imagination  
An air of deep and solemn expectation.

XXX

"Hath Heaven," the youth exclaimed, "a sweeter spot,  
Or Earth another like it?—yet even here  
The old mystery dwells! and though I read it not,  
Here most I hope—it is, or seems so near;  
So many hints come to me, but, alas!  
I cannot grasp the shadows as they pass.

XXXI

"Here, from the very turf beneath me, I  
Catch, but just catch, I know not what faint sound,  
And darkly guess that from yon silent sky  
Float starry emanations to the ground;  
These ears are deaf, these human eyes are blind,  
I want a purer heart, a subtler mind.

XXXII

"Sometimes—could it be fancy?—I have felt  
The presence of a spirit who might speak;  
As down in lowly reverence I knelt,

Its very breath has kissed my burning cheek;  
But I in vain have hushed my own to hear  
A wing or whisper stir the silent air!"

XXXIII

Is not the breeze articulate? Hark! Oh, hark!  
A distant murmur, like a voice of floods;  
And onward sweeping slowly through the dark,  
Bursts like a call the night-wind from the woods!  
Low bow the flowers, the trees fling loose their dreams,  
And through the waving roof a fresher moonlight streams.

XXXIV

"Mortal!"—the word crept slowly round the place  
As if that wind had breathed it! From no star  
Streams that soft lustre on the dreamer's face.  
Again a hushing calm! while faint and far  
The breeze goes calling onward through the night.  
Dear God! what vision chains that wide-strained sight?

XXXV

Over the grass and flowers, and up the slope  
Glides a white cloud of mist, self-moved and slow,  
That, pausing at the hillock's moonlit cope,  
Swayed like a flame of silver; from below  
The breathless youth with beating heart beholds  
A mystic motion in its argent folds.

XXXVI

Yet his young soul is bold, and hope grows warm,  
As flashing through that cloud of shadowy crape,  
With sweep of robes, and then a gleaming arm,  
Slowly developing, at last took shape  
A face and form unutterably bright,  
That cast a golden glamour on the night.

XXXVII

But for the glory round it it would seem  
Almost a mortal maiden; and the boy,  
Unto whom love was yet an innocent dream,  
Shivered and crimsoned with an unknown joy;  
As to the young Spring bounds the passionate South,  
He could have clasped and kissed her mouth to mouth.

XXXVIII

Yet something checked, that was and was not dread,  
Till in a low sweet voice the maiden spake;  
She was the Fairy of his dreams, she said,  
And loved him simply for his human sake;  
And that in heaven, wherefrom she took her birth,  
They called her Poesy, the angel of the earth.

XXXIX

“And ever since that immemorial hour,  
When the glad morning-stars together sung,  
My task hath been, beneath a mightier Power,

To keep the world forever fresh and young;  
I give it not its fruitage and its green,  
But clothe it with a glory all unseen.

XL

“I sow the germ which buds in human art,  
And, with my sister, Science, I explore  
With light the dark recesses of the heart,  
And nerve the will, and teach the wish to soar;  
I touch with grace the body’s meanest clay,  
While noble souls are nobler for my sway.

XLI

“Before my power the kings of earth have bowed;  
I am the voice of Freedom, and the sword  
Leaps from its scabbard when I call aloud;  
Wherever life in sacrifice is poured,  
Wherever martyrs die or patriots bleed,  
I weave the chaplet and award the meed.

XLII

“Where Passion stoops, or strays, is cold, or dead,  
I lift from error, or to action thrill!  
Or if it rage too madly in its bed,  
The tempest hushes at my ‘peace! be still!’  
I know how far its tides should sink or swell,  
And they obey my sceptre and my spell.

XLIII

“All lovely things, and gentle—the sweet laugh  
Of children, Girlhood’s kiss, and Friendship’s clasp,  
The boy that sporteth with the old man’s staff,  
The baby, and the breast its fingers grasp—  
All that exalts the grounds of happiness,  
All griefs that hallow, and all joys that bless,

XLIV

“To me are sacred; at my holy shrine  
Love breathes its latest dreams, its earliest hints;  
I turn life’s tasteless waters into wine,  
And flush them through and through with purple tints.  
Wherever Earth is fair, and Heaven looks down,  
I rear my altars, and I wear my crown.

XLV

“I am the unseen spirit thou hast sought,  
I woke those shadowy questionings that vex  
Thy young mind, lost in its own cloud of thought,  
And rouse the soul they trouble and perplex;  
I filled thy days with visions, and thy nights  
Blessed with all sweetest sounds and fairy sights.

XLVI

“Not here, not in this world, may I disclose  
The mysteries in which this life is hearsed;  
Some doubts there be that, with some earthly woes,



By Death alone shall wholly be dispersed;  
Yet on those very doubts from this low sod  
Thy soul shall pass beyond the stars to God.

XLVII

“And so to knowledge, climbing grade by grade,  
Thou shalt attain whatever mortals can,  
And what thou may’st discover by my aid  
Thou shalt translate unto thy brother man;  
And men shall bless the power that flings a ray  
Into their night from thy diviner day.

XLVIII

“For from thy lofty height, thy words shall fall  
Upon their spirits, like bright cataracts  
That front a sunrise; thou shalt hear them call  
Amid their endless waste of arid facts,  
As wearily they plod their way along,  
Upon the rhythmic zephyrs of thy song.

XLIX

“All this is in thy reach, but much depends  
Upon thyself—thy future I await;  
I give the genius, point the proper ends,  
But the true bard is his own only Fate;  
Into thy soul my soul have I infused;  
Take care thy lofty powers be wisely used.

L

“The Poet owes a high and holy debt,  
Which, if he feel, he craves not to be heard  
For the poor boon of praise, or place, nor yet  
Does the mere joy of song, as with the bird  
Of many voices, prompt the choral lay  
That cheers that gentle pilgrim on his way.

LI

“Nor may he always sweep the passionate lyre,  
Which is his heart, only for such relief  
As an impatient spirit may desire,  
Lest, from the grave which hides a private grief,  
The spells of song call up some pallid wraith  
To blast or ban a mortal hope or faith.

LII

“Yet over his deep soul, with all its crowd  
Of varying hopes and fears, he still must brood;  
As from its azure height a tranquil cloud  
Watches its own bright changes in the flood;  
Self-reading, not self-loving—they are twain—  
And sounding, while he mourns, the depths of pain.

LIII

“Thus shall his songs attain the common breast,  
Dyed in his own life’s blood, the sign and seal,  
Even as the thorns which are the martyr’s crest,

That do attest his office, and appeal  
Unto the universal human heart  
In sanction of his mission and his art.

LIV

“Much yet remains unsaid—pure must he be;  
Oh, blessed are the pure! for they shall hear  
Where others hear not, see where others see  
With a dazed vision: who have drawn most near  
My shrine, have ever brought a spirit cased  
And mailed in a body clean and chaste.

LV

“The Poet to the whole wide world belongs,  
Even as the teacher is the child’s—I said  
No selfish aim should ever mar his songs,  
But self wears many guises; men may wed  
Self in another, and the soul may be  
Self to its centre, all unconsciously.

LVI

“And therefore must the Poet watch, lest he,  
In the dark struggle of this life, should take  
Stains which he might not notice; he must flee  
Falsehood, however winsome, and forsake  
All for the Truth, assured that Truth alone  
Is Beauty, and can make him all my own.

LVII

“And he must be as armed warrior strong,  
And he must be as gentle as a girl,  
And he must front, and sometimes suffer wrong,  
With brow unbent, and lip untaught to curl;  
For wrath, and scorn, and pride, however just,  
Fill the clear spirit’s eyes with earthly dust.”

PART 2

The story came to me—it recks not whence—  
In fragments. Oh! if I could tell it all,  
If human speech indeed could tell it all,  
’T were not a whit less wondrous, than if I  
Should find, untouched in leaf and stem, and bright  
As when it bloomed three thousand years ago  
On some Idalian slope, a perfect rose.  
Alas! a leaf or two, and they perchance  
Scarce worth the hiving, one or two dead leaves  
Are the sole harvest of a summer’s toil.  
There was a moment, ne’er to be recalled,  
When to the Poet’s hope within my heart,  
They wore a tint like life’s, but in my hand,  
I know not why, they withered. I have heard  
Somewhere, of some dead monarch, from the tomb  
Where he had slept a century and more,  
Brought forth, that when the coffin was laid bare,

Albeit the body in its mouldering robes  
Was fleshless, yet one feature still remained  
Perfect, or perfect seemed at least; the eyes  
Gleamed for a second on the startled crowd,  
And then went out in ashes. Even thus  
The story, when I drew it from the grave  
Where it had lain so long, did seem, I thought,  
Not wholly lifeless; but even while I gazed  
To fix its features on my heart, and called  
The world to wonder with me, lo! it proved  
I looked upon a corpse!

What further fell

In that lone forest nook, how much was taught,  
How much was only hinted, what the youth  
Promised, if promise were required, to do  
Or strive for, what the gifts he bore away—  
Or added powers or blessings—how at last,  
The vision ended and he sought his home,  
How lived there, and how long, and when he passed  
Into the busy world to seek his fate,  
I know not, and if any ever knew,  
The tale hath perished from the earth; for here  
The slender thread on which my song is strung  
Breaks off, and many after-years of life  
Are lost to sight, the life to reappear

Only toward its close—as of a dream  
We catch the end, and opening, but forget  
That which had joined them in the dreaming brain;  
Or as a mountain with a belt of mist  
That shows his base, and far above, a peak  
With a blue plume of pines.

But turn the page  
And read the only hints that yet remain

### PART 3

#### I

It is not winter yet, but that sweet time  
In autumn when the first cool days are past;  
A week ago, the leaves were hoar with rime,  
And some have dropped before the North wind's blast;  
But the mild hours are back, and at mid-noon,  
The day hath all the genial warmth of June.

#### II

What slender form lies stretched along the mound?  
Can it be his, the Wanderer's, with that brow  
Gray in its prime, those eyes that wander round  
Listlessly, with a jaded glance that now  
Seems to see nothing where it rests, and then  
Pores on each trivial object in its ken?

#### III

See how a gentle maid's wan fingers clasp

The last fond love-notes of some faithless hand;  
Thus with a transient interest, his weak grasp  
Holds a few leaves as when of old he scanned  
The meaning in their gold and crimson streaks,  
But the sweet dream has vanished! hush! he speaks!

IV

“Once more, once more, after long pain and toil,  
And yet not long, if I should count by years,  
I breathe my native air, and tread the soil  
I trod in childhood; if I shed no tears,  
No happy tears, ’t is that their fount is dry,  
And joy that cannot weep must sigh, must sigh.

V

“These leaves, my boyish books in days of yore,  
When, as the weeks sped by, I seemed to stand  
Ever upon the brink of some wild lore,  
These leaves shall make my bed, and—for the hand  
Of God is on me, chilling brain and breath—  
I shall not ask a softer couch in death.

VI

“Here was it that I saw, or dreamed I saw,  
I know not which, that shape of love and light.  
Spirit of Song! have I not owned thy law?  
Have I not taught, or striven to teach the right,  
And kept my heart as clean, my life as sweet,

As mortals may, when mortals mortals meet?

VII

“Thou know’st how I went forth, my youthful breast

On fire with thee, amid the paths of men;

Once in my wanderings, my lone footsteps pressed

A mountain forest; in a sombre glen,

Down which its thunderous boom a cataract flung,

A little bird, unheeded, built and sung.

VIII

“So fell my voice amid the whirl and rush

Of human passions; if unto my art

Sorrow hath sometimes owed a gentler gush,

I know it not; if any Poet-heart

Hath kindled at my songs its light divine,

I know it not; no ray came back to mine.

IX

“Alone in crowds, once more I sought to make

Of senseless things my friends; the clouds that burn

Above the sunset, and the flowers that shake

Their odors in the wind—these would not turn

Their faces from me; far from cities, I

Forgot the scornful world that passed me by.

X

“Yet even the world’s cold slights I might have borne,

Nor fled, though sorrowing; but I shrank at last



When one sweet face, too sweet, I thought, for scorn,  
Looked scornfully upon me; then I passed  
From all that youth had dreamed or manhood planned,  
Into the self that none would understand.

XI

“She was—I never wronged her womanhood  
By crowning it with praises not her own—  
She was all earth’s, and earth’s, too, in that mood  
When she brings forth her fairest; I atone  
Now, in this fading brow and failing frame,  
That such a soul such soul as mine could tame.

XII

“Clay to its kindred clay! I loved in sooth  
Too deeply and too purely to be blest;  
With something more of lust and less of truth  
She would have sunk all blushes on my breast,  
And—but I must not blame her—in my ear  
Death whispers! and the end, thank God! draws near!”

XIII

Hist! on the perfect silence of the place  
Comes and dies off a sound like far-off rain  
With voices mingled; on the Poet’s face  
A shadow, where no shadow should have lain,  
Falls the next moment: nothing meets his sight,  
Yet something moves betwixt him and the light.

XIV

And a voice murmurs, "Wonder not, but hear!

Me to behold again thou need'st not seek;

Yet by the dim-felt influence on the air,

And by the mystic shadow on thy cheek,

Know, though thou may'st not touch with fleshly hands,

The genius of thy life beside thee stands!

XV

"Unto no fault, O weary-hearted one!

Unto no fault of man's thou ow'st thy fate;

All human hearts that beat this earth upon,

All human thoughts and human passions wait

Upon the genuine bard, to him belong,

And help in their own way the Poet's song.

XVI

"How blame the world? for the world hast thou wrought?

Or wast thou but as one who aims to fling

The weight of some unutterable thought

Down like a burden? what from questioning

Too subtly thy own spirit, and to speech

But half subduing themes beyond the reach

XVII

"Of mortal reason; what from living much

In that dark world of shadows, where the soul

Wanders bewildered, striving still to clutch,

Yet never clutching once, a shadowy goal,  
Which always flies, and while it flies seems near,  
Thy songs were riddles hard to mortal ear.

XVIII

“This was the hidden selfishness that marred  
Thy teachings ever; this the false key-note  
That on such souls as might have loved thee jarred  
Like an unearthly language; thou did'st float  
On a strange water; those who stood on land  
Gazed, but they could not leave their beaten strand.

XIX

“Your elements were different, and apart—  
The world's and thine—and even in those intense  
And watchful broodings o'er thy inmost heart,  
It was thy own peculiar difference  
That thou did'st seek; nor did'st thou care to find  
Aught that would bring thee nearer to thy kind.

XX

“Not thus the Poet, who in blood and brain  
Would represent his race and speak for all,  
Weaves the bright woof of that impassioned strain  
Which drapes, as if for some high festival  
Of pure delights—whence few of human birth  
May rightly be shut out—the common earth.

XXI

“As the same law that moulds a planet, rounds

A drop of dew, so the great Poet spheres  
Worlds in himself; no selfish limit bounds

A sympathy that folds all characters,  
All ranks, all passions, and all life almost  
In its wide circle. Like some noble host,

XXII

“He spreads the riches of his soul, and bids

Partake who will. Age has its saws of truth,  
And love is for the maiden’s drooping lids,

And words of passion for the earnest youth;  
Wisdom for all; and when it seeks relief,  
Tears, and their solace for the heart of grief.

XXIII

“Nor less on him than thee, the mysteries

Within him and about him ever weigh—  
The meanings in the stars, and in the breeze,

All the weird wonders of the common day,  
Truths that the merest point removes from reach,  
And thoughts that pause upon the brink of speech;

XXIV

“But on the surface of his song, these lie

As shadows, not as darkness; and alway,  
Even though it breathe the secrets of the sky,

There is a human purpose in the lay;  
As some tall fir that whispers to the stars  
Shields at its base a cotter's lattice-bars.

XXV

"Even such my Poet! for thou still art mine!  
Thou might'st have been, and now have calmly died,  
A priest, and not a victim at the shrine;  
Alas! yet was it all thy fault? I chide,  
Perchance, myself within thee, and the fate  
To which thy power was solely consecrate.

XXVI

"Thy life hath not been wholly without use,  
Albeit that use is partly hidden now;  
In thy unmingled scorn of any truce  
With this world's specious falsehoods, often thou  
Hast uttered, through some all unworldly song,  
Truths that for man might else have slumbered long.

XXVII

"And these not always vainly on the crowd  
Have fallen; some are cherished now, and some,  
In mystic phrases wrapped as in a shroud,  
Wait the diviner, who as yet is dumb  
Upon the breast of God—the gate of birth  
Closed on a dreamless ignorance of earth.

XXVIII

“And therefore, though thy name shall pass away,  
Even as a cloud that hath wept all its showers,  
Yet as that cloud shall live again one day  
In the glad grass, and in the happy flowers,  
So in thy thoughts, though clothed in sweeter rhymes,  
Thy life shall bear its flowers in future times.

Ethnogenesis by Henry Timrod (*Poems* 150-54)

Written during the meeting of the first Southern Congress, Montgomery, February 1861

I  
Hath not the morning dawned with added light?  
And shall not evening call another star  
Out of the infinite regions of the night,  
To mark this day in Heaven? At last, we are  
A nation among nations; and the world  
Shall soon behold in many a distant port  
    Another flag unfurled!  
Now, come what may, whose favor need we court?  
And, under God, whose thunder need we fear?  
    Thank Him who placed us here  
Beneath so kind a sky—the very sun  
Takes part with us; and on our errands run  
All breezes of the ocean; dew and rain  
Do noiseless battle for us; and the year,  
And all the gentle daughters in her train,  
March in our ranks, and in our service wield  
    Long spears of golden grain!  
A yellow blossom as her fairy shield  
June flings her azure banner to the wind,  
While in the order of their birth  
Her sisters pass, and many an ample field  
Grows white beneath their steps, till now, behold,  
    Its endless sheets unfold  
THE SNOW OF SOUTHERN SUMMERS! Let the earth  
Rejoice! beneath those fleeces soft and warm  
    Our happy land shall sleep  
    In a repose as deep

As if we lay entrenched behind  
Whole leagues of Russian ice and Arctic storm!

## II

And what if, mad with wrongs themselves have wrought,  
In their own treachery caught,  
By their own fears made bold,  
And leagued with him of old,  
Who long since in the limits of the North,  
Set up his evil throne, and warred with God—  
What if, both mad and blinded in their rage  
Our foes should fling us down their mortal gage,  
And with a hostile step profane our sod!  
We shall not shrink, my brothers, but go forth  
To meet them, marshaled by the Lord of Hosts,  
And overshadowed by the mighty ghosts  
Of Moultrie and Eutaw—who shall foil  
Auxiliars such as these? Nor these alone,  
But every stock and stone  
Shall help us; but the very soil,  
And all the generous wealth it gives to toil,  
And all for which we love our noble land,  
Shall fight beside, and through us; sea and strand,  
The heart of woman, and her hand,  
Tree, fruit, and flower, and every influence,  
Gentle, or grave, or grand;  
The winds in our defense  
Shall seem to blow; to us the hills shall lend  
Their firmness and their calm;  
And in our stiffened sinews we shall blend  
The strength of pine and palm!



### III

Nor would we shun the battleground,  
    Though weak as we are strong;  
Call up the clashing elements around,  
    And test the right and wrong!  
On one side, creeds that dare to teach  
What Christ and Paul refrained to preach;  
Codes built upon a broken pledge,  
And charity that whets a poniard's edge;  
Fair schemes that leave the neighboring poor  
To starve and shiver at the schemer's door,  
While in the world's most liberal ranks enrolled,  
He turns some vast philanthropy to gold;  
Religion, taking every mortal form  
But that a pure and Christian faith makes warm,  
Where not to vile fanatic passion urged,  
Or not in vague philosophies submerged,  
Repulsive with all Pharisaic leaven,  
And making laws to stay the laws of Heaven!  
And on the other, scorn of sordid gain,  
Unblemished honor, truth without a stain,  
Faith, justice, reverence, charitable wealth,  
And, for the poor and humble, laws which give,  
Not the mean right to buy the right to live,  
    But life, and home, and health!  
To doubt the end were want of trust in God,  
    Who, if He has decreed  
    That we must pass a redder sea  
Than that which rang to Miriam's holy glee,  
    Will surely raise at need

A Moses with his rod!

IV

But let our fears—if fears we have—be still,  
And turn us to the future! Could we climb  
Some mighty Alp, and view the coming time,  
The rapturous sight would fill

Our eyes with happy tears!

Not only for the glories which the years  
Shall bring us; not for lands from sea to sea,  
And wealth, and power, and peace, though these shall be;  
But for the distant peoples we shall bless,  
And the hushed murmurs of a world's distress:  
For, to give labor to the poor,

The whole sad planet o'er,

And save from want and crime the humblest door,  
Is one among the many ends for which

God makes us great and rich!

The hour perchance is not yet wholly ripe  
When all shall own it, but the type  
Whereby we shall be known in every land  
Is that vast gulf which lips our Southern strand,  
And through the cold, untempered ocean pours  
Its genial streams, that far off Arctic shores,  
May sometimes catch upon the softened breeze  
Strange tropic warmth and hints of summer seas.

The Unknown Dead by Henry Timrod (*Poems* 157-58)

The rain is plashing on my sill,  
But all the winds of Heaven are still;  
And so it falls with that dull sound  
Which thrills us in the church-yard ground,  
When the first spadeful drops like lead  
Upon the coffin of the dead.  
Beyond my streaming window-pane,  
I cannot see the neighboring vane,  
Yet from its old familiar tower  
The bell comes, muffled, through the shower.  
What strange and unsuspected link  
Of feeling touched, has made me think—  
While with a vacant soul and eye  
I watch that gray and stony sky—  
Of nameless graves on battle-plaints  
Washed by a single winter's rains,  
Where, some beneath Virginian hills,  
And some by green Atlantic rills,  
Some by the waters of the West,  
A myriad unknown heroes rest.  
Ah! not the chiefs who, dying, see  
Their flags in front of victory,  
Or, at their life-blood's noble cost  
Pay for a battle nobly lost,

Claim from their monumental beds  
The bitterest tears a nation sheds.  
Beneath yon lonely mound—the spot  
By all save some fond few forgot—  
Lie the true martyrs of the fight,  
Which strikes for freedom and for right.  
Of them, their patriot zeal and pride,  
The lofty faith that with them died,  
No grateful page shall farther tell  
Than that so many bravely fell;  
And we can only dimly guess  
What worlds of all this world's distress,  
What utter woe, despair, and dearth,  
Their fate has brought to many a hearth.  
Just such a sky as this should weep  
Above them, always, where they sleep;  
Yet, haply, at this very hour,  
Their graves are like a lover's bower;  
And Nature's self, with eyes unwet,  
Oblivious of the crimson debt  
To which she owes her April grace,  
Laughs gaily o'er their burial place.

Ashes of Glory by A. J. Requier (Simms 480-82)

Fold up the gorgeous silken sun,  
By bleeding martyrs blest,  
And heap the laurels it has won,  
Above its place of rest.

No trumpet's note harshly blare—  
No drum funereal roll—  
No trailing sabres drape the bier  
That frees a dauntless soul!

It lived with Lee, and decked his brow  
From Fate's empyreal Palm:  
It sleeps the sleep of Jackson now—  
As spotless and as calm.

It was outnumbered—not outdone;  
And they shall shuddering tell,  
Who struck the blow, its latest gun  
Flashed ruin as it fell.

Sleep, shrouded Ensign! not the breeze  
That smote the victor's tar,  
When death across the heaving seas  
Of fiery Trafalgar;

Not Arthur's knights, amid the gloom  
    Their knightly deeds have starred;  
Not Gallic Henry's matchless plume,  
    Nor peerless-born Bayard;

Not all the antique fables feign,  
    And Orient dreams disgorge;  
Not yet, the Silver Cross of Spain,  
    And Lion of St. George,

Can bid thee pale! Proud emblem, still  
    They crimson glory shines  
Beyond the lengthened shades that fill  
    Their proudest kingly lines.

Sleep! in thine own historic night,—  
    And be thy blazoned scroll,  
*A warrior's Banner takes its flight,*  
    *To greet the warrior's soul!*

Ode Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead, at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, SC, 1867 by Henry Timrod (*Poems* 164-65)

Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,  
Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause!—  
Though yet no marble column craves  
The pilgrim here to pause.  
/In seeds of laurels in the earth,  
The garlands of your fame are sown;  
And, somewhere, waiting for its birth,  
The shaft is in the stone.

Meanwhile, your sisters for the years  
Which hold in trust your storied tombs,  
Bring all they now can give you—tears,  
And these memorial blooms.  
Small tributes, but your shades will smile  
As proudly on these wreaths to-day,  
As when some cannon-moulded pile  
Shall overlook this Bay.

Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!  
There is no holier spot of ground,  
Than where defeated valor lies  
By mourning beauty crowned.

## Abbreviations

<i>CP</i>	<i>Central Presbyterian</i> . Richmond, VA: Moore, Hoge & Co., 1861-1865, microfilm and originals, Library of Virginia.
<i>MW</i>	<i>Magnolia Weekly</i> . Richmond, VA: Haines & Smith, 1862-1864, originals, Library of Virginia.
<i>RCA</i>	<i>Richmond Christian Advocate</i> . Richmond, VA: W.A. Smith, M. Brock, and J. Early, 1861-1865, microfilm, Library of Virginia.
<i>RDD</i>	<i>University of Richmond Daily Dispatch Family of Sites</i> . Citations include daily, semi-weekly, and weekly issues. Boatright Memorial Library, U of Richmond, 1995-2014. <a href="https://dispatch.richmond.edu/">https://dispatch.richmond.edu/</a> .
<i>REQ</i>	<i>Richmond Daily Enquirer</i> . Citations include daily, semi-weekly, and weekly issues. Richmond, VA: T. Ritchie & Sons, microfilm and originals, Library of Virginia.
<i>RNHL</i>	<i>Record of News, History and Literature</i> . Richmond, VA: West & Johnson, June-December 1863, originals, Library of Virginia.
<i>REX</i>	<i>Richmond Examiner</i> . Citations include daily, semi-weekly, and weekly issues. Richmond, VA: William Lloyd and Co., 1861-1865, microfilm and originals, Library of Virginia.
<i>SIN</i>	<i>Southern Illustrated News</i> . Richmond, VA: Ayres & Wade, 1862-1865, microfilm, Library of Virginia.
<i>SLM</i>	<i>Southern Literary Messenger</i> . Richmond, VA: Jno. R. Thompson, 1861-1864, originals, Widener Library.



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