

The Rhetoric of the Civil War:
Literary Devices of the North and South

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Abstract

While both Northern and Southern antebellum writers employed religious imagery for their persuasive purposes, their specific rhetoric differed: Timrod pictured the South romantically, as the revival of Camelot even after the Confederacy's death; Stowe, heavily influenced by her personal background, enacted emotion accompanied by an appeal to ethics in her fictional apologetic for the end of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although history handed both authors the opportunity to affect the nation's trajectory, only Stowe achieved this feat, and she owes her triumph over Timrod, the victory of the North over the South, to her emotional rhetoric concerning slavery. This victory manifests itself in the comparison between Timrod's underwhelming influence on Southern literature and Stowe's indisputable effect on American history.

The Rhetoric of the Civil War:

Literary Devices of the North and South

The ability to use literature as persuasive rhetoric often separates a good author from a great one, and distinguishes a revolution that receives only a passing mention in a history textbook from a revolution that dictates reality and changes the course of history. An American Revolution without *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine or a 1970s Civil Rights Movement without a “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. might have appeared much differently without the influential rhetoric that inspired their audiences to action. Similarly, the era of the American Civil War felt the power of the pen as literature waged an ideological war of rhetoric. As they endorsed their respective sides while condemning the other, Northern and Southern authors, alike, joined the Civil War. With authors as soldiers and soldiers as authors, the American Civil War weaponized literature and its rhetoric.

While both Northern and Southern antebellum writers employed religious imagery for their persuasive purposes, their specific rhetoric differed: Southern poet Henry Timrod pictured the South as the revival of Camelot, God’s perfect, idyllic society, even after the Confederacy’s death; Northern author Harriet Beecher Stowe, heavily influenced by her personal history, enacted emotion accompanied by an appeal to ethics in her fictional apologetic for the end of slavery in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Although history handed both authors the opportunity to affect the nation’s trajectory, only Stowe achieved this feat, and she owes her triumph over Timrod, the victory of the North over the South, to her emotional rhetoric concerning slavery. Timrod’s poems have mainly exerted

influence on the future of Southern literature; on the other hand, Stowe's novel essentially changed a nation and started a war. Therefore, the political and social influence of her novel, politically and socially, provides evidence for her victory in the war of rhetoric. With this victory, Stowe earns her place among America's greatest authors, while Timrod falls victim to relative anonymity.

The South: The Poems of Henry Timrod

The Civil War inspired many unique voices to surface. Like the North, the South used religion to further its causes; however, unlike their Northern counterparts, Southern authors utilized a certain idyllic nature, or images of a perfection no longer achievable, when referring to the time during and after the Confederacy. Many renowned Southern poets favored this rhetoric as they pictured the South as an "Edenic paradise" (Barrett, 2012, p. 187). These themes gave rise to an air of Romanticism for Southern authors, who also put a large emphasis on scenery, especially nature, in their poems. During the South's time as the Confederacy, the general Southern public viewed their newfound secession with an air of awe, believing that their new nation represented a small part of heaven on earth. Even after the South's fall, authors pictured the Confederacy with a mythic quality to it, longing back to earlier days. No Southern poet mastered this longing voice better than Henry Timrod.

Henry Timrod

Henry Timrod served as the most influential poetic voice for the Confederacy. Scholars have often linked Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Timrod, with his contemporary, author Maud Dickson, calling Timrod "the Tennyson of South Carolina" (as cited in

Henderson, 2013, p. 19). Tennyson himself named Timrod “the poet laureate of the South” (as cited in Henderson, 2013, p. 19). Because of Timrod’s poetic prowess, his poems serve as a microcosm for Southern Civil War rhetoric.

Timrod’s personal history remains relatively unknown until the start of his professional career. Timrod found his voice, like the famous poet Walt Whitman, in the years leading up to the Civil War, publishing his first collection of poetry entitled *Poems* in 1859 (Henderson, 2013). The poet fully supported the Confederacy and their split from the North from the beginning and remained faithful even until the war’s end. After the war, Timrod found himself in extreme poverty because he traded all of his American currency for the currency of the Confederacy. In a correspondence with a friend, he admitted to being “so poor at present as to put even the petty cost of a photograph utterly beyond [his] means” (as cited in Robillard, 1961, p. 130). Timrod’s personal history and career indicate his commitment to the South, making him the perfect candidate for the position of a poet with the potential for widespread power.

Nature

Between the view of the South as untouched perfection and the emphasis on nature, Timrod provided a decidedly Romantic voice to Southern rhetoric. Timrod committed himself to vibrant descriptions of the South’s physical and natural setting, and he argued for the South on the terms of its natural superiority to the North. He especially showcases this argument in “The Cotton Boll” (1861). In this poem, he argues that the growth of cotton, an aspect of nature, elevates the South to a place of natural superiority

to the North. Because of cotton, according to Timrod, the South would be unable to ever fall:

It shall not end
As long as rain shall fall and Heaven bend
In blue above thee; though my foes be hard
And cruel as their weapons, it shall guard
Thy hearth-stones as a bulwark; make thee great
In white and bloodless state. (lines 122-127)

This imagery allows Timrod to enlist the powers of nature to stand in the ranks of the Confederate army. Author Faith Barrett (2012) enforces nature's fighting role in this poem: "The poem represents cotton as a mystical substance that contains whole worlds within its strands that will weave the continent together in pastoral peace and natural plenitude" (p. 191). Timrod's rhetoric clearly establishes the South as superior because of the natural entity of cotton—an entity that the North notably lacks. He included this imagery for more than just decoration and showcase his artistic abilities; he hoped to proclaim the superiority of the South.

Religion and Slavery

The public of the American Civil War era shared a value of religion; therefore, any author attempting to engage in persuasive rhetoric needed to master the argument of religion. Poets from both the North and South claimed that God endorsed their respective sides. For example, Northern poet Julia Ward Howe (1862) claims in "Battle-Hymn of the Republic" that God served as a soldier, fighting alongside the Union soldiers. She

writes, “I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps; / They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; / I can read His righteousness sentence by the dim and flaring lamps. / His Day is marching on” (lines 5-8). Howe serves as one example among a company of many who employed the rhetoric of religion and insisted that God was not only on their side, but fought alongside them.

Timrod (1861b) uses similar tactics to Howe’s for the advancement of the South in “Ethnogenesis”; he argues that God fights with the Confederate army *because of*, rather than in spite of, their practice of slavery. Timrod features religious imagery in many of his poems, but his most thematic and well-written defense of the South lies in “Ethnogenesis.” Throughout his poem, Timrod argues that God aligned Himself with the Confederacy as a metaphorical soldier: “And, under God, whose thunder need we fear? / Thank Him who placed us here” (lines 8-9). Timrod argues that God sides with the Confederates because their social customs, including both their treatment of women and African Americans. As humans exist “under God,” so slaves and women exist under white men. These social restrictions, argued Timrod, all contribute to what author Christina Henderson calls “God-ordained social hierarchy” (2013, p. 23). The Union presented the South with a threat to their God-ordained society, which essentially transformed the North into workers of the devil, the enemy of God; specifically, Timrod describes the headquarters of the North as the source of an “evil throne . . . [warring] with God” (Timrod, 1861b, line 35). Timrod hoped to convince his audience of the propriety of the South through this rhetoric of religion, as he tapped into the deeply religious nature of America.

The South as Camelot

In a technique that differed from Northerners, Southern poets uniquely imagined the Confederacy as the rebirth, or second coming, of the legendary Camelot. Timrod found some of his greatest strengths as a writer in constructing a Camelot in the seceded South, and he showcases this theme in “Ethnogenesis,” as well. This poem, originally named “Ode on Occasion of the Meeting of Southern Congress,” written about the birth of the Confederacy, features Timrod’s belief that the newly seceded South was destined for mythical greatness (Henderson, 2013). Timrod, who admitted to finding much of his inspiration in Lord Tennyson, identified four qualifications for remaking Camelot: “a just cause, an oppressive enemy (the North), the favor of Heaven, and the capacity to bless the world” (p. 23). In addition, the two nations also shared similar social orders. Therefore, Camelot reincarnated finds a home in the South.

Furthermore, Timrod believed in the morality of the South so firmly that he hoped the South’s way of living could penetrate into more than the Union. He hardly believed that the goal of the Confederacy should be victory in the Civil War, but he argued that the South, or at least the Southern way of living, should permeate the rest of the world; he writes, “The distant peoples we shall bless, / and the hushed murmurs of the world’s distress” (Timrod, 1861b, lines 97-98). Through these lines, he pictures the South as the embodiment of civility, the reincarnation of the chivalrous knights of Camelot. Timrod envisioned the South as bearers of God’s will on earth and encouraged the Confederate troops to fight for their destiny.

These Camelot metaphors did not cease after the Confederacy’s downfall, but

they continued to dictate the Southerner's perception of this lost nation. When Timrod sensed the imminent downfall of the South, he shifted his metaphor slightly, ensuring that the South would remain in a state of mythic perfection, the same lost state of Camelot. To accomplish this purpose, he committed himself to picturing the Confederate soldiers as martyrs for their cause. Timrod (1863) began this elevation of Confederate soldiers in his poem "The Unknown Dead," which commemorates some of the fallen soldiers from the Battle of the Bulge. He compares the fallen Confederate soldiers to legends, saying, "Beneath yon lonely mound – the spot . . . / Lie the true martyrs of the fight, / Which strikes for freedom and for fight" (lines 27, 29-30). Through this rhetoric, Timrod aims to preserve the Southern ways of life in serene memories and legend, similar to the way King Arthur and his Knights of the Roundtable find their place in history. Henderson writes, "To Timrod, the Old South deserves to be commemorated because the soldiers fought for a land – and a cause – worth defending" (2013, p. 30). Rhetoric like this Camelot metaphor dictates the depiction of the South even after its death. This viewpoint has affected the common day perceptions of the Confederacy, as many Southerners recall this time with the same reverence, tainted with despair, associated with the days of King Arthur. Timrod's transition from hope and vibrancy in the Confederacy to despair after its death delineate the Southern theme of a lost Camelot society, as Southerners grieve the loss of their idyllic society and look back on it with longing.

Timrod's Effect

Timrod's salient themes, like the South as Camelot, primarily influenced Southern authors and their depictions of the South. Margaret Mitchell based her entire 1,000-page,

iconic book *Gone with the Wind* on this premise. The quintessential Southern gentleman Ashley Wilkes summarizes this premise best in his remark to Scarlett: “I want the old days back again and they’ll never come back, and I am haunted by the memory of them and the world falling about at my ears” (Mitchell, 1936, p. 1288). As indicated by Mr. Wilkes, Southern authors voiced both bliss in their Antebellum-constructed society and despair during and after its eventual downfall.

However, his rhetoric remained unable to move a nation, as a whole, into any kind of consequential action. Author James Reitter postulates that some of the most artistic American poets, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Sydney Lanier, and Timrod, all Southern Civil War poets, struggled to gain notoriety because of their inability to produce any poems with rhetoric that caused any significant reaction from the public. Instead, especially when contrasted with their Northern counterparts, these authors fall to “side notes in the canon of American poets” (Reitter, 2008, p. 78). Timrod’s major downfall as a poet does not lie in a lack of technical abilities, but a lack in content. Though his poems included beautiful language that called back to a mythical country with luscious landscapes, he failed to provide a tenable defense, or even somewhat informed response to, the problem of slavery (Reitter, 2008). His Camelot metaphors, complete with their social codes, did nothing to persuade a nation into action. This failure in rhetoric stipulated the downfall of this otherwise venerable poet and his Southern peers, as “their poems have been lost, buried under the rubble of the Civil War” (p. 69). For this reason, Timrod finds himself merely “the Poet of the Lost Cause” (p. 72), rather than a champion of a cause, pictured alongside notable historical characters.

Ironically, Timrod believed that poetry should have the ability to penetrate the hearts of his readers, though he failed to accomplish this himself. Discussing purposes for poetry, Timrod writes, “It is wholly impossible to reduce them all to the simple element of beauty. Two other elements, at least, must be added, and these are power, when it is developed in some noble shape, and truth, whether abstract or not, when it affects the common heart of mankind” (as cited in Reitter, 2008, p. 69). Timrod failed to do exactly this; his poetry remains an intricately woven and beautiful representation of the South, but it still lacks both the power and truth that he deemed necessary for the poetry of war rhetoric. Southern poets, Reitter believes, stunted their place in American history in their failure of rhetoric:

Regardless of talent or technique, they will never be in league with the established great American poets. When they had the opportunity, these men did not change the culture or country when inspiration was most needed . . . They could have changed the course of history, but ultimately fell short of what poets should be, given a chance. (p. 79)

The American Civil War era provided authors with a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to insert a footprint on American history, but Southern authors, ill-equipped with the ineffective rhetoric of nature and visions of Camelot, proved unable to complete the task. On the other hand, Northern authors, in particular a woman by the name of Harriet Beecher Stowe, accomplished what Timrod only dreamed of, developing literature that promoted both truth and power.

The North: Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Since the novel's publication, Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1850 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has served as a vital piece in the conversation of American Civil War literature. This fictional narrative features two of the most memorable characters in American literature, namely the villainous Legree and the borderline angelic Uncle Tom. This compelling narrative follows a few slaves and their mistreatment by their masters, all of which was allowed under the American institution of slavery. The practice of slavery affects the characters personally, causing some of their deaths, and within the context of community, stunting their relationships with their families. In the end, Tom sacrifices himself on the behalf of others, allowing Cassy and Emmeline's escape, only to be beaten to death before his own rescue. George, another slave who achieves his freedom, thematically remarks of Tom after his death, "So, when you rejoice in your freedom, think that you owe it to that good old soul . . . Think of your freedom, every time you see Uncle Tom's Cabin; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind" (p. 406). This statement would prove very prophetic, as the power of rhetorical devices in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would, in part, lead to a war that instigated the liberation of slaves.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Stowe's place in history as a social reformer did not begin with the publication of her famous novel; rather, the philosophy that she showcased in her novel finds its roots in her personal background. In particular, her interaction with religion and rebellion against New England logic and gender norms all influence her book and work together to create the great apologetic that is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet Beecher was born in Litchfield,

Connecticut on June 14, 1811, to Lyman and Roxana Foote Beecher, both prominent figures in their society (Seiler, 1949). Harriet's father served as a devout Calvinist preacher and carried this profession into the home: he desired to train his six sons to eventually step into the ministry. Though Lyman exerted much of his energy on the education of his sons, Harriet Beecher seemed naturally bright from a young age, and even excelled further than her brothers. Her father wrote in one of his journals that he "wished Harriet was a boy [because] she would do more than any of them" (as cited in Seiler, 1949, p. 129). She mirrored her father in valuing both academia and religion, and even at the young age of 12, she wrote a complex theological piece entitled "Can the Immortality of the Soul Be Proved by the Light of Nature?" (Seiler, 1949). These two areas, academia and Christianity, assisted her in writing a deeply religious, yet reasonably argued, apologetic in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Harriet Beecher's younger years were hardly all positive. Because of her strict exposure to Christianity through her father's Calvinist preaching, Beecher struggled continuously with her propensity for evil and even evil's existence, wondering why God would allow it in His holy order (Seiler, 1949). Stowe manifests this struggle in her novel through characters like St. Clare, who doubts God's purpose for allowing slavery to continue to plague America. Stowe's novel, itself, seems to scream the question "why, God?" as the author attempts to understand, what she believes to be, a senseless practice so deeply embedded in the American social system. These religious doubts fuel this internal struggle featured within the novel.

Stowe also rebelled against the idolizing of logic in New England. In *Oldtown Folks* (1869), another novel by Stowe, she writes, “If there is a golden calf worshipped in our sanctified New England, its name is Logic . . . the parson burns incense before it with a most sacred innocence of intention. He believes that sinners can be converted by logic” (p. 99). Therefore, her replacement of an emotional, fictional narrative for the typical cold-hearted, logical essay of New England serves as the most salient feature in her work. Stowe believed that, in order to most effectively incite people with the desire to reform a society, she must touch their hearts with tales born out of heartbreak and emotion, not logic. Only sentiment, thought Stowe, could thaw and soften hard, evil hearts.

This appeal to emotion, however, required some unlikely participants: women. Stowe believed that only women could accomplish this job; she writes, “Where theorists and philosophers tread with sublime assurance, woman often follows with bleeding footsteps; women are always turning from the abstract to the individual, and feeling where the philosopher only thinks” (as cited in Seiler, 1949, p. 131). Throughout Stowe’s novel, women consistently serve as emotionally charged, Christian mouthpieces who influence those around them positively. Stowe also believed that the mother should serve as the religious nucleus of the family. In *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859), Stowe argues that home is “the appointed sphere for woman, more holy than cloister, more saintly and pure than church . . . Priestess, wife, and mother there she ministers daily in holy works of household peace” (pp. 567-8). Therefore, as a female author, Stowe embarked on rejecting men’s logic in favor of women’s compelling emotion and reminding the country of its religious obligations to African Americans.

Though she enacted an emotional plea in her novel, Stowe almost strayed away from these emotional tendencies: important people in her life, namely her father and husband, almost stifled her embrace of emotional rhetoric. When the Beecher family moved to Ohio for her father's job, Lyman Beecher took the opportunity to introduce Harriet to Calvin Stowe, an associate professor at his university, and the two were wed in 1834 (Seiler, 1949). Her marriage to Calvin Stowe seemed to repress her imagination and emotion in some ways. For example, in 1849, when Stowe received a letter from her husband saying that he had fallen ill and did not expect to see her once more before he died, she reacted in a rather cold-hearted manner, writing, "I read the letter, poke it into the stove, and proceed" (as cited in Seiler, 1949, p. 134). Though Calvin Stowe's sickness did not claim his life, this anecdote provides some insight to the changing attitude of Mrs. Stowe.

However, Stowe would regain her emotional tendencies after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, one of the immediate causes of the Civil War. Issued in 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law required those who lived in Free states to honor slave-holders by returning their runaway slaves. For many Northerners, allowing slavery to continue in the South, a seemingly far-off land was tolerable, but to force them to participate in slavery by returning fugitive slaves trespassed into immoral territory; therefore, this legislation marked the turning point for many, including Stowe, in their attitudes toward anti-slavery efforts. Shortly after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act, Mrs. Edward Beecher, Stowe's sister-in-law, wrote to her in a letter, "Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something to make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is"

(as cited in Seiler, 1949, p. 134). According to Stowe, almost immediately after reading the letter, she sat down and penned the death of Uncle Tom, one of the most emotional scenes in her novel (Seiler, 1949). Upon finishing the scene, Stowe embarked on a work that would leave American history forever changed.

Themes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

All of Stowe's personal background thoroughly influenced *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's commitment to emotional rhetoric, after a temporary surrender to New England's logic, dominates her novel in its very nature as fiction. However, she does not rely solely on emotion, but she uses the academia of her childhood to create a convincing plea from ethics. While the presence of both emotion and logic proved influential for her audience, her most effective rhetorical tool was her use of religion, as Stowe creates a biblical apologetic for the end of slavery.

An emotional plea. Bringing the abstract debate of slavery into a concrete, fictional world provided Stowe with the opportunity to lodge an emotional plea for the end of slavery, putting names and faces to economic statistics. These emotional pleas take residence situationally all throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, not the least of which is Tom's death. Stowe also makes thinly veiled emotional pleas using various characters; for example, talking about his slave master, George says to Eliza: "I have been patient, but it's growing worse and worse; flesh and blood can't bear it any longer . . . I thought I could . . . keep on quiet . . . what do I owe? I've paid for all my keeping a hundred times over. I won't bear. No, I won't!" (Stowe, 1852, pp. 33-34). Through passages like these, Stowe touches at the heart of the reader, rather than the mind, in order to accomplish her

goal of ending slavery. She does not solely offer a logical argument for the end of slavery, but she memorably presents the problem as the particular adversity facing a downtrodden slave, who feels nothing but despair.

Stowe's methods in depicting slavery delineated a sharp contrast compared to her predecessors and contemporaries. According to author Alfred L. Brophy (1996), Stowe's use of emotion revolutionized the conversation of slavery. Many of the laws that allowed for slavery to remain in business resulted from politicians with intellectual arguments, influencing many to value slavery's social code rather than question its morality. In the mind of many indifferent citizens, and especially Northerners, to proclaim rights for African Americans would revolutionize a society, and disrupting the peace defied logic. Stowe, in response to this line of thinking, targeted the rational, unfeeling side of humanity and attempted to leverage an emotional plea (Brophy, 1996). Her use of emotion as rhetoric differed from that of her contemporaries, but these methods contributed to the novel's success.

The scene that most clearly articulates Stowe's value of passionate approach above a logical one occurs in a conversation between Senator Byrd and his wife, Mrs. Byrd, upon the arrival of Eliza. This scene appears noteworthy for a few reasons, namely the conversation's participants themselves—two white characters, one of whom works in politics. After Senator Byrd asks his wife to accept his reasoning for not allowing Eliza entrance to their house, Mrs. Byrd replies, "I hate reasoning John,—especially reasoning on such subjects. There's a way you political folks have of coming round and round a plain right thing; and you don't believe in it yourselves, when it comes to practice"

(Stowe, 1852, p. 122). In this passage, Stowe essentially takes on the role of Mrs. Byrd and directly addresses the politicians of her day. Throughout the novel and in this scene in particular, slavery presents itself, not as a statistic or point of logic, but as a terrified mother, standing on the doorstep, asking for refuge. Through these scenes, Stowe leverages emotion in order to combat the debate that had formerly been monopolized by logic.

Ethics and morality in the society. Stowe did not rely purely on the use of emotion to make her case for the end of slavery; she also engaged in a logical discussion about ethics. Realizing that a thorough case for end of slavery could not exist without provoking the interest of white people in power, Stowe confronted the problem of slavery from an intellectual standpoint through deliberately targeting those with the power to put an end to it. Not only did Stowe view slavery as a travesty for African Americans; she also believed that slavery would mark the moral downfall for society as a whole, including whites. Stowe pictures St. Clare as the embodiment of this principle. While speaking to his cousin Ophelia, the conflicted slave owner St. Clare remarks, “For pity’s sake, for shame’s sake, because we are not men born of women, and not savage beasts, many of us do not, and dare not, use the full power which our savage laws put into our hands” (Stowe, 1852, p. 126). Stowe placed great importance on the morality of a society, and she believed that slavery served as a terrible testament to America’s declining morality. With the institute of slavery, slave owners had the unfortunate legal ability to become vile human beings, and this danger would not remain so readily available upon slavery’s abolishment. Thus, comments author Thomas Joswick (1984),

freeing African slaves “will not be so much to a declaration of rights as to a conversion of character” (p. 259). With this rhetoric, Stowe’s novel engaged in a logical debate, not touching just the heart or just the mind, but touching both.

Religion. Stowe’s least disguised and most effective argument for the end of slavery sprouts from religion, an unsurprising principle given the author’s devout religious background and the social situation of a generally religious nation. Stowe’s religious references allow her to “[recruit] God in a deeply felt crusade” (Bellin, 1993, p. 282). Stowe’s ability to effectively enlist God on the side of the Union serves as one the novel’s greatest strengths, and the author fleshes out this theme through not shying away from legitimate doubts and penning an abundance of biblical allusions.

Religious doubts. Though religion plays an important role, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* still includes some of the doubts that religion inspired in the debate on slavery, doubts founded in Stowe’s negative childhood experiences with the faith. According to Bellin, as a Calvinist, Stowe struggled with the justification for rebelling against the practice of slavery, or any negative practice of those in authority for that matter; she did not doubt the evil of slavery, but she feared a rebellion would directly attack God’s ordinance (Bellin, 1993). The novel lives in a fluctuation between these two realities, “dramatizing not only the struggle of humans seeking to respond to and resist the slave system, but also the struggle of humanity seeking to negotiate and comprehend its proper role in God’s design” (p. 275). Stowe embodies this struggle through St. Clare, one of the only characters in the novel who can actually change the current social climate, unlike Uncle Tom, a slave, or Eva, a young girl. Therefore, St. Clare becomes “the battlefield upon

which the struggle of the novel's opposing tendencies will be fought" (p. 280). This religious battle rooted in uncertainty proves not so easily won, however. An African American who resists slavery might act in direct disobedience to Jesus' famous command to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison communicates Stowe's confusion over these two, the activist and the silent sufferer: he asks, "Is there one law of submission and non-resistance for the black man, and another law of rebellion and conflict for the white man? . . . Are there two Christs?" (as cited in Bellin, 1993, p. 281). St. Clare's carefully constructed character allows Stowe to face this threat presented by religious doubts.

Stowe provides the answer to this question in the character of St. Clare. He both denounces slavery here on this earth, while also citing the end times as a possible relief from slavery, thus addressing both the temporal and spiritual. St. Clare exists symbolically in an in-between land for many of the characters in the novel, and this principle, Bellin argues, answers Stowe's questions of religious doubts:

Significantly, he exists between the "heaven" of Tom's life in Kentucky and the "hell" of Legree's Louisiana plantation; St. Clare, like the ice over which Eliza crosses to safety, serves as a bridge which breaks apart once crossed, dissolving the connection between the sinner and the saved, the profane and the divine, the Now and the Eternal. (Bellin, 1993, pp. 285-6)

While freedom for the slaves will ultimately come in heaven, St. Clare, and by application white citizens of America, should still work for the abolishment on slavery on the earth. By using St. Clare, Stowe does not merely avoid the somewhat problematic,

religious questions; rather, she answers the question resoundingly, as St. Clare, before his untimely death, fights for the end of Tom's slavery. St. Clare serves as Stowe's plea for slave-owners to put an end to the corruption of slavery in their own lives, denouncing their right for slaves and transforming America's culture in the process.

Biblical allusions. Stowe furthers her use of religious rhetoric through somewhat subtle biblical allusions. She begins these references from the very cover of the novel, with its subtitle "Life among the Lowly" as a direct reference to Matthew 25:31-46 (Smylie, 1995). In this passage, Jesus predicts His own return, focusing mainly on the final judgement. After warning that some souls will face damnation, Jesus explains the reason behind this judgement, saying, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me . . . As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matthew 25:43, 45: English Standard Version). Stowe wished to call back to this warning, which she clearly admitted to in her own hermeneutical key to her book entitled *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1854). Paraphrasing Jesus' famous words to fully support her own purposes, she writes the following:

In the last judgment, will he not say to you, "I have been in the slave-prison – in the slave coffle; I have been sold in your markets; I have toiled for naught in your fields . . . I have been denied a hearing in my own Church, and ye cared not for it. Ye went one to his farm, and another to his merchandise." And if ye shall answer, "When, Lord?" He shall say unto you, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (p. 504)

Therefore, Stowe's subtitle "Life among the Lowly" contains an implied message, which charges its readers with the responsibility to treat African Americans with respect, releasing them from their bonds of slavery, lest they face the judgment of God. These subtle biblical allusions continue the rhetoric of religion, an effective tool for Stowe's argument in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Eva as Christ. Stowe also communicates her religious themes by creating two Christ figures, who both represent different aspects of Jesus, in Eva and Tom. Stowe deliberately places her Christ figures in a young girl and an African American slave, both of whom belong to oppressed, or looked down upon, people groups. According to author Thomas J. Steele (1972), throughout the story, Eva serves as a clear religious role model, as she exhorts those in social rank higher than her to treat others with respect and dignity. In fact, even her appearance, usually consisting of colors of gold in her hair, and white and blue for her dress, indicates a traditional angelic presence. Even Tom recognizes a certain angelic quality in Eva upon their first meeting (Stowe, 1852). Stowe also nods to Eva's place as a Christ character in her very name of Evangeline; Steele (1972) writes, "She is so named (by kind of antonomasia) because she sums up in herself the essential message of the gospel, that of love" (p. 85). In other words, Eva personifies the gospel in her role in the novel, and the gospel fights for the dignity of African American slaves.

Eva's particular portrayal closely aligns with the portrayal of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, who not only anticipates his death but also accepts it. Throughout the entirety of the novel, Eva seems to acknowledge that her entrance into eternity looms near. For example, she says, "I'm going there to the spirits bright, Tom; I'm going, before

long” (Stowe, 1852, p. 160). As Jesus accepts his death with serenity at the Last Supper, Eva accepts her fate. Extending the metaphor of Eva as Christ awaiting his death, Stowe also crafts Eva’s final words to echo Jesus’. In John 15:12-14, Jesus provides some of his last commands, saying, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you . . . These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” In the same vein, shortly before her own death, Eva charges everyone with the command to love (Steele, 1972). Therefore, Eva establishes herself as a Christ character, especially in light of Jesus at the Last Supper.

Even Eva’s death mirrors that of Jesus. Eva’s death consequently inspires St. Clare’s decision to release Tom from his possession and into freedom, allowing Tom to potentially reunite with his family. Even though St. Clare dies before he can ensure Tom’s liberty, Eva’s death ushers in life and freedom for Tom—the same way Jesus’ death brings freedom and life to His followers. Joswick (1984) states, “Eva’s death dramatizes a belief that death is not the equivalent of defeat but of victory; it brings an access of power not a loss of it; it is not the only crowning achievement of life, it *is* life” (p. 255). Life through death dominates as an essential doctrine in Christianity, and Stowe manifests this doctrine in Eva. Jesus Christ returns to earth to become an abolitionist, in the form of a young girl.

Tom as Christ. Tom also serves as a Christ character, though he exhibits different traits of Christ than Eva. If Eva embodies Jesus at the Last Supper, expecting and embracing death, then Tom represents Christ’s role as the “Suffering Servant,” bearing

the weight of the world's sin and discrimination (Steele, 1972, p. 87). Tom spends the majority of the novel suffering in order that others will not have to, which, of course, is Christ's essential mission on earth. Unlike Eva, who manages to, in essence, preach a few small sermons, Tom's role as Christ lies mainly in his actions—the Jesus who “preaches, heals, unifies, and loves . . . who fulfills his destiny by suffering and dying” (Steele, 1972, p. 87). Both Tom's actions and his thematic death establish him as a Christ figure.

Tom arguably fulfills the role of the Suffering Servant according to the description in Isaiah 53. This bleak passage delineates the great cost of Jesus' sacrifice and establishes the description of Christ as the Suffering Servant. Much of the passage easily applies to Tom, even at a superficial glance. The passage begins, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . he was despised and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). Should this passage be removed from its context, it could easily apply to any slave during this time, between the public humiliation and pain that accompanied slavery. However, the following verses, which outline Jesus' sacrifice, not only mirror Tom's life, but also the exact circumstances of his death. Jesus remained docile toward his wrongful death; Isaiah describes him as “a lamb that is led to the slaughter” who “opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). In the same way, Tom accepts his death with silence, as he refuses to reveal to Legree the whereabouts of Cassy and Emmeline (Steele, 1972). Both Jesus and Tom die an undeserved death, sacrificing themselves for others. They remain accepting of their fate and committed to the good of others until their end.

In another point of comparison, Tom refuses to condemn Legree, his wrongful murderer; similarly, Jesus asks forgiveness on the cross for those crucifying Him (Luke 22:34). Before dying, Tom says, “If taking every drop of blood in the poor old body would save your [Legree’s] precious soul, I’d give ‘em as freely, as the Lord gave his life for me” (Stowe, 1852, p. 273). Jesus and Tom’s attitude toward their respective deaths mirror each other. Tom even establishes his own likeness to Christ by citing Jesus as an example for his actions. While Stowe includes this statement to indicate Tom’s literal desire for Legree’s salvation, she also uses this statement metaphorically, hoping Tom’s death can usher the beginning of salvation for a nation.

In essence, Tom becomes America’s Christ. About Jesus in Isaiah 53:5, the prophet Isaiah writes, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” Tom bears the weight of sin in the form of racism and slavery, suffering from a side effect of another man’s sin nature, another’s transgressions, rather through than any fault of his own. For this reason, Tom’s final words to Legree serve as Stowe’s message to her readers and the nation of America; she hopes that Tom’s death will serve as a catalyst for redemption as America flees its corrupt ways (Steele, 1972). Therefore, Tom takes on the form of Christ; as Christ redeemed His people, so will Tom redeem America.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s Influence

Unlike Timrod’s poems, Stowe’s novel affected more than just the future of Northern literature; her work permeated every level of American life, including its social, moral, and political aspects. The dramatic reaction to it demonstrates that Stowe’s

rhetoric proved more effective than that of the Southern poet Timrod. *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* popularity and, in turn, its effect on society occurred virtually instantaneously, as the novel effectively swept the nation. In just the first year of its publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold 310,000 copies in America, which easily set a record, tripling the latest record-setting novels. In addition, one million copies sold in the United Kingdom alone and another two million throughout the rest of the world (Reynolds, 2011). These numbers might even appear somewhat skewed. The novel itself was hardly affordable like the other pamphlet-natured books of its time; it cost the equivalent of \$48 today, so what looks like one million copies, might have actually included up to ten million readers, as evidence suggests that copies were passed around among friends and family. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* so dominated the literary sphere, that it almost forced other novels, now considered classics, like *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*, into the background. Off the back of her novel, Stowe managed to become a notable Civil Rights activist. Touring Europe, Stowe received 500,000 signatures and raised \$20,000 for the Stafford House address, an anti-slavery protest (Reynolds, 2011). All in all, almost immediately after its release, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* swept the nation, and it hardly produced indifferent reactions.

Northern reaction. Perhaps the best summary of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influence on the North comes from author Charles Nichols (1958): "If Mrs. Stowe had done nothing else she had certainly created great sympathy for the slave" (p. 329). During the time leading up to the publication of this great novel, the North, by and large, grew hostile enough toward slavery that they rejected it on their own land, but they also viewed

the practice with an out-of-sight, out-of-mind policy. For many, including Stowe, the Fugitive Slave Law pushed the public over the edge, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* acted as the final grievance needed to make the North fully intolerant (Seiler, 1949). Stowe seemed to awaken the nation's deeply imbedded Christian principles, and "higher law," the idea that American law refused to account for the God-given dignity of African Americans became a point of conversation, especially with author Frederick Douglass, another main catalyst of the Civil War. This idea became a popular theme throughout American literature; for example, Reynolds (2011) describes the fictional short story by an unknown author entitled "The Freedman's Dream," which featured a Northern man who refused to help a runaway slave, and Jesus judged this man for these sins. Works like this one proved both popular and compelling for the American public. Douglass encapsulates the effect of Stowe's novel, saying, "The touching but too truthful tale of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has rekindled the slumbering embers of anti-slavery zeal into active flames. Its recitals have baptized with holy fire myriads who before cared nothing for the bleeding slave" (as cited in Reynolds, 2011, pp. 129-130). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* turned a rather indifferent North into an unstoppable force that would not only tolerate but fiercely fight in a War Between Brothers.

The influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also reached the political sphere, and its influence eventually culminated in Lincoln's election, a known anti-slavery candidate and the direct cause of the American Civil War. After the 1852 publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, protests against the injustices against African Americans grew. In 1854, officials seized Anthony Burns, a runaway slave, in Boston on the account of the Fugitive

Slave Act; however, 50,000 people lined the streets of Boston to protest, and the judge ruled in Burns' favor to remain free in the North. Professor and political commentator Nassau William Senior, remarked at the time, "The attempt will not be repeated. As far as the Northern States are concerned, 'Uncle Tom' repealed the Fugitive Slave Law" (as cited in Reynolds, 2011, p. 147). Senior's comment demonstrates the inflammatory influence of the rhetorical devices in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In addition, the Republican Party greatly benefitted from the influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After John C. Frémont's somewhat successful campaign, Henry Wilson, a founder of the Republican Party, admitted that the votes cast for Frémont represented "the rich fruitage of seed so widely broadcast by Harriet Beecher Stowe" (as cited in Reynolds, 2011, p. 150). Politicians had no choice but to accept the extreme influence that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exerted on the political passion of the North; another politician, Joshua Giddings admitted: "A lady with her pen, has done more for the cause of freedom, during the last year, than any servant, statesman, or politician of our land. The inimitable work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is now carrying the truth to the minds of millions, who, up to this time, have been deaf to the cries of the down-trodden" (as cited in Reynolds, 2011, p. 150). Off the back of this growing outrage, Lincoln won one of the most crucial elections in American history.

Quite simply, the compellingly constructed rhetoric of Stowe's novel essentially blurred the lines between fiction and nonfiction and incited Americans to action. Uncle Tom, himself, exited the confines of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and found a place among

historical characters. Referencing John Brown, a historical martyr for abolition, Oliver Wendell Holmes (1882) delineates this reality of Stowe's fictional novel:

All through the conflict, up and down
 Marched Uncle Tom and Old John Brown
 One ghost, one form ideal;
 And which was false and which was true,
 And which was mightier of the two,
 The wisest Sybil never knew
 For both alike were real. (lines 36-42)

Stowe's rhetoric managed to blur the lines between fictional and historical, and this skill allowed both Stowe and her characters to find a notable place among historical reformers, alongside men such as John Brown and Abraham Lincoln.

Southern reaction. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* produced a Southern reaction equally as dramatic as their Northern counterparts, though they pointed this outrage at Stowe, rather than the corrupt business of slavery. The South's response of defending itself through personal attacks against Stowe and scathing reviews of her work indicate the South's perception of the novel as a potential threat to their way of life. A popular attack launched against Stowe was to accuse her of lying for the sole purpose of causing trouble. In "A Lady in New-York," author William J. Grayson (1856) described Stowe as "[gathering] gold and silver pence, / For pleading long in slave's defense . . . pockets it – well satisfied – 'Cost a lie – I'm glad I tried!'" (p. 65). In addition, many Southern authors attempted to use her own methods of rhetoric against her, writing novels in

defense of their way of life. In fact, at least twenty-nine novels were published under the classification of anti-Tom novels (Reynolds, 2011). Even the characters in the fictional works hit back at Stowe; in *The Man in Gray*, a novel by Thomas Dixon (1921), a fictional Robert E. Lee remarks about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "It is purely an appeal to . . . the passions of the mob and the men who lead mobs. And it's terrible. As terrible as any army with banners. I heard the throb of drums through its pages. It will work the South into a frenzy" (p. 79). This dramatic Southern reaction painted Stowe as a woman hell-bent on destroying a nation. Even though the South resisted her arguments, they still fell whim to the effects of her rhetoric, demonstrating their effects through outrage.

Uncle Tom's Cabin also inspired many Southerners to defend more violently their practice of slavery, attempting to capture the rhetoric of religion for their own purposes and painting slavery as a positive experience for African Americans (Reynolds, 2011). Louisa S. McCord, a Civil War era reviewer and zealous champion for slavery, described the practice as "the South's most charitable establishment," and "the brightest sunbeam which Omniscience has destined for its existence" (as cited in Hagood, 2012, p. 75). McCord enacted upon the same thread as Stowe; they both desired to pen an appeal that connected with a higher law. However, Stowe's rhetoric of religion obviously proved stronger.

Though infrequent, even some Southerners fell under the persuasive power of Stowe's rhetoric. A self-defining Southern gentleman and lawyer under the pseudonym Walpole admitted that, if Southerners allowed themselves to be impartial, they would find themselves "moved to tears reading its pages, or roused to indignation by its graphic

sketches” (as cited in Hagood, 2012, p. 78). In addition, Stowe seemed to have found a friend in many Southern women. In her journal, Mary Boykin Chesnut, wife to Jefferson Davis’ close confidant Senator Stephen Decatur Miller, writes that Stowe remained fairly lenient toward the concept of slavery, leaving out its destructive tendencies for families. Chesnut specifically laments the fact that Legree, the clear villain, and possibly one of the vilest characters in American literature, stays a bachelor, exempt from the sexual sins that mainly plagued the unfortunate wives of Southern planters (Hagood, 2012). These women, argues Chesnut, “hate slavery worse than Mrs. Stowe does” (as cited in Hagood, 2012, p. 78). In other words, Stowe’s rhetoric proved so effective that it even compelled its enemies to reconsider their viewpoints.

Poking the stove. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s rhetoric in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* can probably not be fully and solely accredited with starting the Civil War, but it inarguably served as a catalyst in a line of many events that sent the United States into its darkest days as a nation. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did not remain inflammatory or influential to only one people group or ideology specifically, but it set the nation ablaze, inspiring the South to protect its way of life and “demonize the North,” and the North, on the other hand, to passionately engage in the slavery debate that had previously produced lukewarm reactions (Reynolds, 2011, p. 117). Perhaps the Civil War’s political origins might be in the controversy of state’s rights, but *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* shaped the Civil War into a moral battle, which made both the citizens of the North and the South very hostile toward each other—even hostile enough to start a war.

Conclusion

The respective Northern and Southern rhetoric of the Civil War, exemplified by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Timrod features similarities, like the employment of religious language, and differences, like Timrod's motif of Camelot and Stowe's emotionally charged plea for the abolishment of slavery. Their shared use of religion consists of both authors claiming God as a fellow soldier on their respective sides; God as a Union soldier fights for equality, while God as a Confederate defends His ordained social order. In defense of the South, Timrod proclaimed the Confederacy as the reincarnated Camelot, a state of perfection that now exists only in the history books; he also enacted upon distinctly Romantic ideals, like the elevation of nature, to fight for the Confederacy. On the other hand, Stowe opted for an emotional tale of the horrors of slavery, touching her readers' hearts, in her memorable characters, and challenging their minds in her call for morality.

Though both authors attempted to exert influence on culture through their carefully constructed rhetoric, the Northern author Stowe proves more effective than Timrod, as evidenced by the large historical, cultural impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The Civil War era gifted both Stowe and Timrod the opportunity to play an integral role in American history, but only Stowe, equipped with the rhetoric of the North, fighting against slavery through emotional, logical, and religious pleas for the end of slavery, rose to the challenge; therefore, just as in the actual war, the North reigns victorious in the battle of Civil War rhetoric.

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