

The Enduring Relevance of the Poet Laureate of the Confederacy: Antinationalistic and Antiwar Themes in the Civil War Poetry of Henry Timrod

Paul Tewkesbury

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

[Abstract]

Henry Timrod (1828–67), known informally as the “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy,” is a largely unknown yet significant figure in nineteenth-century American literature. Timrod’s Civil War poems, from the celebratory “Ethnogenesis” of 1861 to the elegiac “Ode” of 1866, trace the Confederacy’s rise and fall, and his earliest, most propagandistic works give insight into the nationalistic ideology of the pro-secession, pro-slavery South. Yet when Timrod’s poems from the period between 1861 and 1866 are read together in their totality, they also reveal the poet’s evolving perspective—from nationalistic fervor to profound disillusion. Initially an ardent supporter of the Southern cause, Timrod eventually takes a pro-peace stance. Despite Timrod’s postwar association with a Lost Cause mythology that romanticizes the South’s role in the Civil War, this essay argues that Timrod’s poetry, like the great 1929 antiwar novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque,

transcends its historical context and reminds modern readers of the dangers of nationalism and the futility of war.

Key Words: Henry Timrod, 19th century American literature, Civil War literature, Southern literature, Antiwar literature

I. Introduction:

The Complicated Legacy of Henry Timrod

Henry Timrod (1828-67) is an important nineteenth-century American poet who is virtually unknown to contemporary readers. On the one hand, Timrod's obscurity is somewhat shocking, for his historical significance is indisputable. After the Southern states, led by Timrod's home state of South Carolina, seceded from the Union and triggered the American Civil War in 1861, Timrod became known informally as the "Poet Laureate of the Confederacy." His most significant poems trace the rise and fall of the short-lived republic of the Confederate States of America, from his nationalistic "Ethnogenesis," written in 1861 to celebrate the Southern states' secession, to his greatest work, "Ode," a somber poem written in 1866 to commemorate the Confederate dead one year after the South's final defeat in 1865. Beyond his historical significance, Timrod is also a skilled poet. Prominent nineteenth-century American poets Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and John Greenleaf Whittier express admiration for Timrod's work, and one apocryphal story attributed to Longfellow has Alfred, Lord Tennyson, exclaiming that Timrod "deserves to be called the laureate of the South!" (qtd. in Henderson 35n1). In its biography of Timrod, the *Poetry Foundation* website even goes so far as to proclaim that "Timrod

is, after Poe, the most important Southern poet of the 19th century” (“Henry Timrod”).

On the other hand, Timrod’s relegation to the dustbin of literary history is not altogether surprising, for his early Civil War poems are unabashedly Confederate propaganda, and his enthusiastic support for the slaveholding South is odious to most modern readers. Moreover, even after the Civil War’s end and Timrod’s death, the white South, resisting Reconstruction reforms and maintaining racial subjugation through unrestrained violence, continued to use Timrod’s poetry to memorialize the Confederacy and to give rise to “Lost Cause” mythology, “an American legend,” as historian Gary Gallagher describes it, that reimagines the war as “a mawkish and essentially heroic and romantic melodrama, an honorable sectional duel, a time of martial glory on both sides” (12). The introduction to a 1901 memorial edition of Timrod’s poems celebrates him as “the poet of the Lost Cause, the finest interpreter of the feelings and traditions of the splendid heroism of a brave people” (*Henry Timrod’s Poems* viii), and an early biographer, Henry T. Thompson, begins to refer to Timrod as the “Laureate of the Confederacy.” As a result of Timrod’s ongoing association with the Confederacy and the Lost Cause, Claud B. Green writes: “the critical evaluation of Timrod’s best poetry has ... been less objective than it should be because the subject matter of that poetry is so definitely identified with the South and with a period in Southern history when the South was most out of favor with the rest of the nation” (28).

Yet Timrod’s work remains relevant for two reasons. First, his Civil War poems give insight into the ideology that leads white Southerners not only to support secession from the United States, but also to embark on a devastating conflict with their Northern brothers and sisters. As Timrod scholar Edd Winfield Parks puts it: “the progress of the war can be spiritually though not literally traced through

[Timrod's] poetry" (91). Second, and more important, Timrod's war poetry chronicles the transformation of one patriot's initial, wrongheaded enthusiasm for war into profound grief and resignation. As such, Timrod's Civil War poems convey to modern readers as strong and as chilling an antiwar message as does Erich Maria Remarque's great 1928 antiwar novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. At the beginning of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the teenaged protagonist Paul Bäumer and his high school classmates join the German Imperial Army during World War I because their teacher Kantorek aggressively goads them into fulfilling their patriotic duty; by the end of the novel, most of the boys, including Paul, are dead. Timrod's Civil War poems trace a similar arc from patriotic fervor, to warfare, to death, from the first poem, "Ethnogenesis," to the last poem, "Ode." Granted, Timrod did not experience combat as a soldier during the Civil War because of poor health resulting from the latent tuberculosis that would eventually kill him, whereas Remarque did experience combat during the Great War. Nevertheless, Remarque and Timrod have in common their representing the losing side of the conflict: Remarque Germany and Timrod the Confederate States of America. From their position of the defeated, Remarque and Timrod are uniquely suited to document the disastrous consequences of war. This essay seeks to introduce Henry Timrod to a new audience and to make the case that his Civil War poems, when read chronologically, convey an antinationalistic, antiwar message.

II. Foremost Literary Propagandist of the Confederacy

Timrod was born on December 8, 1828 in Charleston, South Carolina, where he

lived for most of his life. During his lifetime, only one volume of his poetry, *Poems*, was published, and that in 1859, well before the Civil War started. Timrod's poetry before the war reflects only modest ability, and his works are largely derivative, revealing the Romantic influence of William Wordsworth. Timrod's friend Paul Hamilton Hayne, a fellow Charlestonian and poet, recalls that early in Timrod's career, "Timrod looked up to Wordsworth as his poetical guide and exemplar" (21). Timrod's later poems also reveal "the influence of Tennyson" (Hayne 24). The outbreak of the Civil War, however, unleashes in Timrod a creativity that leads to his becoming widely regarded as the Laureate of the Confederacy. When Hayne publishes the posthumous *The Poems of Henry Timrod* in 1873 to honor his friend, he asserts that Timrod's war poems are his best: "It was in 1861 that he inaugurated that remarkable *series* of poems, suggested by the incidents of the great conflict, tragic or triumphant, in which he struck a higher and firmer note than any hitherto elicited from his lyre" (36). Subsequent analyses of Timrod's poetry have borne out Hayne's assessment. Writing almost a century after Hayne, for example, Parks concludes his book-length study of Timrod with the assertion: "In its beginning, the new nation and the war gave Timrod a theme. It matured his poetic talents. ... Before the war, he had mastered a technique, without really having much to say. Now this technical mastery and his intellectual turn of mind served him well" (115). Unremarked in this praise of Timrod's work about a new nation is the fact that this new nation is a slave state that incites a civil war to preserve human bondage.

Timrod's first major poem is the Pindaric ode "Ethnogenesis: Written during the Meeting of the First Southern Congress, at Montgomery, February, 1861." As the subtitle indicates, Timrod writes the poem to commemorate the formation of a white supremacist Confederate government after the Southern states have begun seceding from the Union. The title itself, "Ethnogenesis," bespeaks Timrod's and the South's

belief that a new nation and a new people have been born of the act of secession, and the opening lines of the poem herald that birth:

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! (lines 1-7)

By using the term “genesis” in the title, and referring to the first “morning” and the first “evening,” Timrod evokes the Creation story from the biblical Book of Genesis to celebrate the first day of the Confederacy.

A few lines later, Timrod exalts the South’s preeminent crop, cotton, which will become the source of the new nation’s power, prestige, and wealth. The poem evokes the image of “many an ample field” (21) with “endless sheets” of cotton “unfold[ing]” (22), and Timrod celebrates this sea of whiteness that covers the South:

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 intrenched behind
Whole leagues of Russian ice and Arctic storm! (24-29)

For modern readers, this paean to the South’s cotton-based economy is problematic because of the South’s dependence on the forced labor of enslaved Africans, whose

presence this poem—and most other Timrod poems—erases. The overwhelming white imagery of the cotton fields in this poem also calls to mind the overwhelming white supremacist ideology of the slaveholding South, and the complete absence of black Southerners from the work reflects the white South's utter dehumanization of African Americans. Indeed, the use of "ethno" in the poem's title underscores the Confederate States of America's status as a white ethnocracy, and as Faith Barrett points out in *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War*, Timrod's repeated use of the first-person plural "Confederate nationalistic 'we,'" not only in "Ethnogenesis," but also in most of his other war poetry, reflects his determination "to address—and thus to forge—a unified *white* community within the newly created Confederate nation" (189, emphasis added).

It is important to note here that Timrod himself was neither a slaveholder nor a landowner at any point during his lifetime, and this biographical detail could explain the lack of direct references to enslaved black Southerners and the institution of chattel slavery in his poems about the Confederacy, even as he champions the Confederacy. It is also important to note, as John Budd does in his study of Timrod's poetry, that Timrod was "not a proponent of secession" *before* it happened; only *after* the Confederate States of America came into existence did Timrod take up his "defense of the South" (446). Even though Timrod does eventually defend his homeland, an admittedly a white supremacist slaveholding society, he does not explicitly defend the institution of slavery itself in the same manner as does, for example, Robert Barnwell Rhett, the radical pro-secession "Fire-Eater" congressman from South Carolina, or William Gilmore Simms, the renowned South Carolina novelist who wrote *The Sword and the Distaff* in 1854 as a pro-slavery response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's bestselling abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In his poems, Timrod seems uninterested either in engaging directly with pro-slavery

arguments to defend the South, or in making a case for the Southern states' right to secede. This lack of engagement with contemporaneous debates on the role of slavery in the South leaves in Timrod's poetry a gaping hole that will eventually allow for its co-optation by proponents of the Lost Cause falsehood that the Civil War was not fought over slavery.

Throughout "Ethnogenesis," Timrod lays the groundwork for future Lost Cause revisionist history not only by eliding the central role of slavery in the internecine conflict, but also by couching the animosity between the South and the North in terms of good versus evil. To Timrod, the Confederacy is clearly an ally of God and an integral part of His plan for human history. As Christina Henderson argues, "Timrod attempts to build a political nation based on myth. According to this mythology, the Confederacy represents God's perfect vision for society, while northern efforts to dismantle this vision display godless rebellion" (25). Reflecting the belief of many white Southerners at the time, the second stanza of "Ethnogenesis" casts the North not only as the South's enemy, but also as God's enemy. Satan has "Set up his evil throne, and warred with God" in the North (35), so the South must "go forth / To meet them, marshalled by the Lord of Hosts" (39-40).

In the third stanza of "Ethnogenesis," Timrod continues his virulent anti-Northern rhetoric, making an explicitly religious case for the South's moral superiority over the North. On the one hand, the North's hostility toward the South is driven solely by greed, which the North has substituted for "a pure and Christian faith" (70). On the other hand, the South embodies a host of Christian virtues: "scorn of sordid gain, / Unblemished honor, truth without a stain, / Faith, justice, reverence, charitable wealth" (75-77). Concluding this third stanza with a final bit of biblical imagery, Timrod prophesies that God "Will surely raise at need / A Moses with his rod" (85-86) to guide the South through "a redder sea" (83) than that which the Israelites

passed through during their exodus from Egypt. The irony of these lines is that whereas Timrod casts the South in the role of the oppressed Israelites, thereby implying that the North is as tyrannical as Egypt under Pharaoh, abolitionists regularly ascribe the role of the oppressor to the white South, and African Americans routinely link their bondage in the South to that of the biblical Hebrews.

Timrod concludes “Ethnogenesis” in the same way that he begins it: eager anticipation of the day when the Confederate States of America will be recognized among the nations of the world. Ironically, Timrod evokes the famous American trope of “a city upon a hill” that the Puritan colonist John Winthrop first introduced in his 1630 sermon “A Model of Christian Charity”:

Could we climb
Some mighty Alp, and view the coming time,
The rapturous sight would fill
Our eyes with happy tears! (88-91)

Just as Winthrop had imagined his Puritan colony in Massachusetts as a role model for the world, Timrod imagines that the South will become renowned “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” (93-95). Timrod’s choice to use the language of “blessing” is also reminiscent of God’s promise to Abraham in the Book of Genesis that Abraham’s descendants will become a blessing to all nations upon the earth. Because of the South’s conformity to God’s will, “we shall be known in every land” (104).

In the final lines of the poem, Timrod employs the South’s temperate climate as a metaphor for the region’s blessings that will wash over the rest of the world, the citizens of which “May sometimes catch upon the softened breeze / Strange tropic

warmth and hints of summer seas!” (108-09). In contrast to the “redder sea” of the third stanza, an image that is associated with God’s destruction of the Egyptian army and is thus a portent of the bloodshed of an American Civil War, the “genial streams” to which Timrod alludes in this last stanza, the Gulf Stream, are warm, cleansing, and life-giving (107).

Timrod reiterates many of these nationalistic themes in another Pindaric ode from the first year of the war, his widely celebrated “The Cotton Boll,” which appeared in the September 3, 1861 issue of Robert Barnwell Rhett’s secessionist newspaper the *Charleston Mercury*. As Barrett observes, “The Cotton Boll” expands upon “the nationalist nature imagery” of cotton that Timrod deploys in “Ethnogenesis” (191). According to Barrett, the two poems together illustrate a core belief that underlies the writings of “white Confederate men” of that era: “the construct of the Confederate nation is inseparable from the Southern natural world.” The “South’s iconic status as an Edenic paradise, a land of natural harmony,” as Barrett describes it, gives rise to and reflects the perfection of the Confederacy (187).

“The Cotton Boll” opens in this idyllic world with the speaker resting under a pine tree and meditating upon a cotton boll that he is holding in his fingers. The speaker experiences a mystical vision that reveals to him the reach of cotton not only in his immediate environs, but also across the globe. Rapturous while gazing upon an “endless field” of “white” (line 51), the speaker proclaims: “since the world began, / No fairer land hath fired a poet’s lays, / Or given a home to man!” (90-92). In its unqualified praise of cotton and the myriad ways in which it strengthens the Confederacy, “The Cotton Boll” is, as Parks identifies it, one of Timrod’s “longest, most ambitious, and most patriotically optimistic odes” (37).

“The Cotton Boll” differs from “Ethnogenesis” in two important ways, however. First, the poem includes one of Timrod’s very few, extremely indirect

acknowledgments of the slave foundation of the South's cotton economy, for the speaker begins by referring to the "dusky fingers" and "boastful smiles" that had brought him the "Small sphere" earlier in the morning (5-6). Yet then, for the rest of the 169-line poem, the nameless enslaved cotton pickers recede into the background, suggesting that Timrod, even as he unquestioningly accepts chattel slavery as part of the South's social fabric, is completely uninterested in engaging with slavery as a political issue. A second key distinction between "The Cotton Boll" and "Ethnogenesis" is the timing of their composition: Timrod wrote "Ethnogenesis" in February 1861, *before* the Civil War had broken out as a result of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in Timrod's hometown of Charleston on April 12; he wrote "The Cotton Boll" in September of that year, *after* the war was underway. As a result, the conclusion of "The Cotton Boll" acknowledges that the "quiet summer air" in which the speaker ruminates on the majesty of cotton is already astir "with the bruit of battles" and "the hum / Of many gathering armies" (142-45). In "Ethnogenesis," war is only a *possibility*, albeit a likely one; in "The Cotton Boll," war has become a *reality*. Nevertheless, Timrod infuses both poems with optimism that the South will ultimately triumph over the North, an optimism that modern readers now know is entirely misplaced.

III. Hardcore Nationalism in Timrod's Military Recruitment Poems

The extravagant jingoism of "Ethnogenesis" and "The Cotton Boll" takes a dangerous turn in 1862, when Timrod's poems become increasingly militaristic and are designed to encourage young Southern men to enlist in the war effort to defend their

homeland against Northern aggression. As Budd notes in his study of Timrod's nationalism, "Ethnogenesis" is "the anthem of a nation conceived in hope, not in blood," a poem that "romanticize[s] the idea of the Southern nation, a nation dedicated to the principles of agrarianism" rather than to warfare (441-42). In "A Cry to Arms" and "Carolina," however, Timrod adopts an aggressively warlike tone. "A Cry to Arms," which appeared in the March 4, 1862 issues of both the *Charleston Mercury* and the *Charleston Daily Courier*, calls on all Southerners—"Ho! woodsmen of the mountain side! / Ho! dwellers in the vales!" (lines 1-2)—to abandon their usual occupations and to enlist in the Confederate army, for the Northern "despot" has invaded the South and "roves your fairest lands" (9). Despite the importance of agriculture to the Southern economy—and seemingly forgetting the place of honor that he had assigned to cotton in "Ethnogenesis" and "The Cotton Boll"—Timrod insists that the most important fruit of war is bloodshed:

Your fields must grow but armed bands,
Your sheaves be sheaves of spears!
Give up to mildew and to rust
The useless tools of gain;
And feed your country's sacred dust
With floods of crimson rain! (11-16)

Likewise, "Carolina," which appeared in the March 8, 1862 issue of the *Charleston Daily Courier* and which would become the official South Carolina state song in 1911, serves as a "battle hymn" (line 11) to remind the young men of Timrod's home state specifically of their proud history of resistance against the British during the American Revolution, and to spur them into the current American Civil War against the Northern "despot" (1), "Huns" (45, 81), "foe" (58), "tyrant" (61) and

“ruffians” (69) so that valiant South Carolinians can “leave the future to [their] sons” (83).

To modern readers, the entreaties of “A Cry to Arms” and “Carolina” are horrific. The military objective of the Confederate army for which Timrod is recruiting is to preserve chattel slavery. Timrod’s home state of South Carolina alone enslaves more than 400,000 African Americans—more than half the state’s total population (“Which U.S. States”). Moreover, the ensuing conflict will result in the deaths of approximately 620,000 American soldiers, including 258,000 Confederate soldiers (“Casualties and Costs”). Close to 18,000 young men from Timrod’s home state will die (“Civil War Casualties”). Rather than dismissing these pro-war poems of Timrod’s as merely the products of a brutal death culture based on the enslavement of African Americans, though, modern readers should approach them as cautionary tales against the type of banal, patriotic rhetoric that societies have historically deployed not only to goad young men into enlisting for the armed forces, but also to rally civilian populations into supporting war. By promoting the Confederate cause, Timrod’s early work represents the kind of nationalistic poetry that the famed English antiwar poet Wilfred Owen rejects in his work about the Great War. Timrod’s “A Cry to Arms” and “Carolina” serve as clear articulations of “The old Lie” that Owen alludes to and refutes in his most famous antiwar poem, “Dulce et Decorum Est”: “*Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori*” (“It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country”). An even more important reason to continue reading Timrod is that his subsequent poems, those published after “A Cry to Arms” and “Carolina,” dramatically illustrate his real-time evolution from an advocate for war to a promoter of peace.

IV. Timrod's Brush with War and Its Effects on His Poetry

Cracks begin to emerge in the jingoistic thrust of Timrod's poems in the second year of the war. Although Timrod's poor health keeps him from fighting in the Confederate army, in 1862 he briefly serves as a war correspondent on the western front in Tennessee. There, the Confederate army suffers a major defeat to the Union in the April 6-7 Battle of Shiloh, which is the bloodiest day of the war up to that point. Timrod witnesses the chaotic Confederate retreat, a nightmarish experience that Hayne describes as follows in his account of Timrod's life: "Out of the refluent tides of blood, from under the smoke of conflict, and the sickening fumes of slaughter, he staggered homeward, half blinded, bewildered, with a dull red mist before his eyes, and a shuddering horror at heart" (42). It is during this period that Timrod begins to move, as Edd Winfield Parks and Aileen Parks write in the introduction to their variorum edition of Timrod's poems, "beyond the confines of possible victory for the Confederacy and over to the more humane realm of peace. Occasionally the patriotic strain broke forth, ... but for the most part it had disappeared from his writing. He wrote instead of the horror of war and of the desire for peace" (9). Having seen firsthand the horrific aftermath of Shiloh, Timrod tempers the idealistic nationalism of "Ethnogenesis" and "The Cotton Boll," and the militaristic propaganda of "A Cry to Arms" and "Carolina," in his two most significant poems from the end of 1862: "Charleston," which was published in the *Charleston Mercury* on December 3, and "Christmas," which was published a few weeks later in that same newspaper on December 25.

To be sure, in "Charleston," Timrod celebrates the preparations that his coastal hometown is taking to beat back the enemy should it attempt to besiege the city

from the North's blockade position in the Atlantic Ocean. Yet a sense of uneasiness pervades the poem. The first stanza establishes a sense of apprehension in the winter of 1862, with a tone that is curiously restrained in contrast to the overblown, confident rhetoric of Timrod's earlier poems about the Confederacy:

Calm as that second summer which precedes
The first fall of the snow,
In the broad sunlight of heroic deeds,
The City bides the foe. (lines 1-4)

Throughout the poem, Timrod juxtaposes his typical allusions to South Carolina's glorious revolutionary past and the bravery of its male and female citizens with the imagery of anxious waiting: "sleep[ing]" cannons (6); "dark" Fort Sumter "loom[ing]" in the city's "solemn" harbor (7-8); "couch[ing]" guns that lie "Like tigers in some Orient jungle crouched / That wait and watch for blood" (15-16); "grave and thoughtful men" walking through the city's streets (18). At every turn, the poet captures a sense of impending doom among Charlestonians as they continue to look seaward in anticipation of a Northern assault in the spring of 1863:

Thus girt without and garrisoned at home,
Day patient following day,
Old Charleston looks from roof, and spire, and dome,
Across her tranquil bay. (25-29)

The final two stanzas of "Charleston" reflect not the swagger of a poet who is convinced of the eventual triumph of the South's righteous cause, but the very real reservations of a private citizen who ponders whether victory is assured after all. After wondering whether Charleston will still be "As fair and free as now?" when

spring arrives (40), the speaker concludes with some trepidation:

We know not; in the temple of the Fates
God has inscribed her doom;
And, all untroubled in her faith, she waits
The triumph or the tomb. (41-44)

In this final stanza, Timrod finally acknowledges that defeat and death are very real options for the South.

Timrod erases almost all traces of nationalistic bluster from “Christmas” and instead crafts an explicitly pro-peace poem. Rather than reiterating his support for the Confederate cause or rousing Southerners to continue fighting in the coming new year of 1863, Timrod opens the poem with a rhetorical question about how one should celebrate Christmas during a time of war:

How grace this hallowed day?
Shall happy bells, from yonder ancient spire,
Send their glad greetings to each Christmas fire
Round which the children play? (lines 1-4)

Then, in the body of the poem, Timrod twice more asks: “How shall we grace this day?” (17, 33). Thinking of the war dead, among whom is “some loved reveler of a year ago / Keep[ing] his mute Christmas now beneath the snow / In cold Virginian earth” (30-32), the poem’s speaker senses that joy and celebration would be unseemly. He concludes that if the significance of Christmas Day is to commemorate the birth of “the Prince of Peace” (35), it would not be out of line for Southerners to offer up a “prayer whose theme is – peace” (52). “Christmas” thus becomes an antiwar rather than a pro-Confederacy poem. Among the poem’s nineteen stanzas, the

final four call for peace, the first line of each stanza beginning with a plea for “Peace” (61, 65, 69, 73). It is significant that Timrod calls not for victory for the South, nor for defeat of the North, but for the restoration of peace—in fact, the word “peace” appears twenty-four times in the poem. Almost two years into the war, Timrod’s commitment to the conflict is wearing thin.

This is not to say that Timrod wholly abandons the propagandistic tone that cements his reputation as the Laureate of the Confederacy. “Christmas,” for example, still includes a reference to “the foe” whose “impious drum” disturbs the South’s tranquility (9-10). And in “Carmen Triumphale,” which was published in the *Southern Illustrated News* on June 7, 1863, the speaker rejoices one month after the Confederate army’s victory at the Battle of Chancellorsville (Virginia) in May 1863: “Our foes have fallen!” (line 21). Indeed, Timrod’s malevolence toward the Northern enemy is much more pronounced in “Carmen Triumphale” than in most of his other war poems:

They fought as tyrants fight, or slaves;
God gave the dastards to our hands;
Their bones are bleaching on the sands,
Or mouldering slow in shallow graves. (33-36)

Nevertheless, as the war drags on throughout 1863, Timrod’s poems become darker, increasingly focus on death, and hint at the meaninglessness of the ongoing carnage, particularly after two crushing defeats for the South in July 1863: the three-day Battle of Gettysburg (Pennsylvania), which was the bloodiest battle of the entire Civil War, and the Confederacy’s surrender at Vicksburg (Mississippi), which resulted in the Union’s complete control of the Mississippi River.

V. Toward a Universal Poetry of Grief and Peace

The most poignant of Timrod's mid-war poems is "The Unknown Dead," which was published in the July 4, 1863 issue of the *Southern Illustrated News*. Although Timrod had likely finished writing the poem well before the Battle of Gettysburg, the fact that it debuts in print the day after the bloody battle ends adds a particular layer of pathos. "The Unknown Dead" is especially noteworthy because Timrod abandons any specifically pro-Confederate messaging. Whereas his early Civil War poems abound with direct, nationalistic references to South Carolina's heroes, history, and geography, "The Unknown Dead" can be read as a universalist work that acknowledges all the slain in the conflict, whether they be from the North or from the South. As a matter of fact, "The Unknown Dead" could serve as an elegy for any unknown soldier, from any time, from any place, from any war.

The poem opens on a rainy day as the speaker looks out his window at home, hears a nearby church bell tolling, and reflects on the rain falling on the graves in the churchyard. The melancholy mood causes the speaker to think beyond his community to the "nameless graves" of the dead "on battle-plains / Washed by a single winter's rains" (lines 15-16). Significantly, the speaker articulates loyalty toward neither the South nor the North, only sympathy for the dead. Despite the speaker's commendation of these "true martyrs" who struck "for freedom and for right" (29-30), the dead are, as the title of the poem suggests, already receding into the shadows, forgotten "By all save some fond few" among those who loved them as individuals (28). The future "grateful page" of history may acknowledge that, in general, "so many bravely fell" (33-34), but it will go no further: the "myriad unknown heroes" will remain forgotten (20). Indeed, the speaker's mournful contemplation one rainy day in "The Unknown Dead" anticipates the mournful

conclusion of James Joyce's famous 1914 story "The Dead," in which a late-night snow, falling "upon all the living and the dead," compels Gabriel Conroy to meditate on the inevitability and the universality of death (278).

The poem concludes with a surprising reversal of the melancholic imagery and suggests that the natural order and the flux of the seasons will triumph over the foibles of humankind:

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 gayly o'er their burial-place. (41-46)

The conjunction "yet" signals a jarring contrast between the speaker's bleak, rainy, somber present, and the joyful, sunny, spring day that he imagines unfolding over the graves of the dead elsewhere. If, as Barrett argues, the Edenic natural world of the South reflects the utopic human world of the Confederacy in Timrod's earlier poems "Ethnogenesis" and "The Cotton Boll," then in "The Unknow Dead," nature "betrays the human world" and has become "out of joint with human purposes" through her obliviousness to suffering and death (Barrett 195). Indeed, the poem's final emphasis on the happiness, gaiety, and laughter of nature hints that maybe, just maybe, the sacrifices of the unknown dead have ultimately been inconsequential.

VI. Requiem for the War Dead

Capping Timrod's Civil War output is what the *Poetry Foundation* website calls his "most perfect poem": "Ode: Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead, at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, S.C., 1866" ("Henry Timrod"). Written one year after the Civil War had ended with the South's defeat in 1865, "Ode" was first sung at a somber June 16 memorial ceremony to honor the more than 600 Confederate dead who were buried in Charleston's Magnolia Cemetery. When one compares Timrod's "Ode" to "Ethnogenesis," which he had written just five years prior, one quickly comprehends the trajectory not only of the Confederacy's swift rise and fall, but also of Timrod's own evolution as a poet.

"Ode" is unique among Timrod's Civil War poems. For one thing, in contrast to the bombastic sprawl of "Ethnogenesis" and "The Cotton Boll"—and later of "A Call to Arms" and "Carolina"—it is a short Homeric ode of five quatrains in iambic tetrameter with an *abab* rhyme scheme, a simplicity that Parks notes with admiration: "There is no artistic exhibition; the verses are controlled and seem inevitable" (105). For another thing, Timrod does not seek to relitigate either the rightness or wrongness of secession, or the morality or the immorality of the Southern cause. In this regard, Timrod's stance is comparable to that of Remarque, who clearly states his position at the beginning of *All Quiet on the Western Front*: "This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war." Timrod's objective is similarly simple in "Ode." Rather than addressing fellow Southerners, South Carolinians, or Charlestonians, the poem's speaker addresses the dead, beginning with the first line: "Sleep sweetly in your

humble graves.” The poem’s speaker invites readers to join him in the cemetery, where the focus is on grief, specifically that of mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters who have lost someone to the ravages of the Civil War. The soldiers’ graves are so fresh that “no marble column” yet marks them (line 3), even as the speaker expects that, “somewhere, waiting for its birth, / The shaft is in the stone” (9-10). Themselves beaten down by years of war and its aftermath, the women “Bring all they now can give you – tears,” along with bouquets of “memorial blooms” (14-15). The speaker imagines that the “shades” whom he is addressing “will smile” at these “Small tributes” that their womenfolk have brought them, and the poem concludes with the image of an encounter between the living and their dead, whose presence hovers over the memorial ceremony:

Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!
There is no holier spot of ground
Than where defeated valor lies,
By mourning beauty crowned! (16-20)

From Timrod’s perspective, the heartfelt grief of the survivors is a far greater tribute to the fallen than is the monument of a sculptor—or even the words of a poet. The enduring power of “Ode” lies in its universality; the solemnity of the occasion transcends time and place, and the grief it memorializes applies both to victor and to vanquished alike.

VII. Conclusion:

Timrod's Message for the Twenty-First Century

Whereas Remarque continued to write critically about his experiences during World War I until his death in 1970, Timrod died of tuberculosis on October 7, 1867, shortly after the end of the Civil War. Although there is nothing to suggest that Timrod would have continued writing elegiac, pro-peace poetry had his literary career not been cut short at the age of thirty-eight, or that he would have developed liberal racial views regarding the newly freed African Americans of his home state, neither is there anything to suggest that he would have resumed writing propagandistic poetry in support of the vicious, post-Reconstruction, white supremacist Southern regime. Nevertheless, because the promoters of Lost Cause mythology have appropriated Timrod's Civil War-era poetry since his death to serve their own ends, Timrod tends to be considered today less an antiwar poet in the vein of Remarque than a spokesperson for the Lost Cause, merely the mouthpiece of an oppressive slaveholding regime that rightly suffered defeat.

Ultimately, however, Henry Timrod's Civil War poetry is of interest to modern readers not as a validation of the slaveholding South, but as a powerful indictment of nationalism and war. In our own era, in which nationalism, geopolitical conflict, and military intervention remain persistent problems, Timrod's work serves as a reminder of the danger of inflating national identity, military power, and economic might to the point of delusion. Just as Timrod's poems idealize a Confederate nation that will quickly collapse, modern nationalistic rhetoric often promises prosperity and honor, only to result in political instability, economic hardship, and human suffering. Timrod's misdirected faith in national glory stands as a cautionary tale for our own time, and his work speaks across the centuries not only as a reflection of the past but also as a warning for the future.

Works Cited

- Barrett, Faith. *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War*. U of Massachusetts P, 2012.
- Budd, John. "Henry Timrod: Poetic Voice of Southern Nationalism." *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1981, pp. 437-45.
- "Casualties and Costs of the Civil War." The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History,
https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/casualties_costs_civilwar.pdf. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.
- "Civil War Casualties by State." World Population Review,
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/civil-war-casualties-by-state>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.
- Gallagher, Gary W. *The Confederate War*. Harvard UP, 1997.
- Green, Claud B. "Henry Timrod and the South." *The South Carolina Review*, vol. 2, 1970, pp. 27-33.
- Hayne, Paul Hamilton, editor. *The Poems of Henry Timrod*. New York, 1873.
- Henderson, Christina. "A Nation of the Continual Present: Timrod, Tennyson, and the Memorialization of the Confederacy." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2013, pp. 19-38.
- "Henry Timrod." Poetry Foundation,
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/henry-timrod>. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- Henry Timrod's Poems*. Memorial ed., B. F. Johnson, 1901.
- Joyce, James. "The Dead." *Dubliners*, Grant Richards, 1914, pp. 216-78.
- Owen, Wilfred. "Dulce et Decorum Est." *Poems*, Chatto & Windus, 1920, p. 15.
- Parks, Edd Winfield. *Henry Timrod*. Twayne, 1964.

- Parks, Edd Winfield, and Aileen Wells Parks, editors. *The Collected Poems of Henry Timrod: A Variorum Edition*, U of Georgia P, 1965.
- Remarque, Erich Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Translated by A. W. Wheen. Little, Brown, and Company, 1930.
- Thompson, Henry T. *Henry Timrod: Laureate of the Confederacy*. State Co., 1928.
- Timrod, Henry. "Carmen Triumphale." 1863. *The Collected Poems of Henry Timrod: A Variorum Edition*, edited by Parks and Parks, U of Georgia P, 1965, pp. 127-29.
- _____. "Carolina." 1862. pp. 109-11.
- _____. "Charleston." 1862. pp. 115-16.
- _____. "Christmas." 1862. pp. 116-19.
- _____. "The Cotton Boll." 1861. pp. 95-99.
- _____. "A Cry to Arms." 1862. pp. 108-09.
- _____. "Ethnogenesis: Written during the Meeting of the First Southern Congress, at Montgomery, February, 1861." 1861. pp. 92-95.
- _____. "Ode: Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead, at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, S.C., 1866." 1866. pp. 129-30.
- _____. "The Unknown Dead." 1863. pp. 126-27.
- "Which U. S. States Had the Most Slaves at the Start of the Civil War?" World Atlas,
<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/which-u-s-states-had-the-most-slaves-at-the-start-of-the-civil-war.html>. Accessed 23 Jun. 2025.
- Winthrop, John. "A Model of Christian Charity." 1630. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History,
https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/A%20Model%20of%20Christian%20Charity_Full%20Text.pdf. Accessed 27 Apr. 2025.

국문초록

남부연합 계관시인의 지속적 중요성: 헨리 팀로드의 남북전쟁 시에 나타난 반국가주의 및 반전 주제

폴 투스베리

한국외국어대학교

비공식적으로 "남부 연합의 계관시인"으로 알려진 헨리 팀로드(Henry Timrod, 1828-67)는 일반 독자들에게 널리 알려진 작가는 아니나 19세기 미국 문학에서 매우 중요한 인물이다. 남북전쟁이 시작된 1861년의 작품 「민족의 탄생」("Ethnogenesis") 부터 애수어린 분위기의 1866년 작 「송가」("Ode")에 이르기까지 팀로드의 남북 전쟁에 관한 시 작품들은 남부 연합의 흥망성쇠를 추적하고 있으며, 그의 선동적인 초기작들은 연방 탈퇴와 노예제도 찬성을 기치로 하는 남부 연합의 국가적인 이데올로기에 대한 통찰을 제공한다. 하지만 팀로드의 1861년에서 1866년 사이의 작품들을 전체적으로 살펴보면 그가 가졌던 국가주의적인 열정이 심오한 환멸로 변화되는 과정이 드러나며 초기에 남부 연합이 내건 가치를 열렬히 지지했던 팀로드가 종국에는 평화를 지지하는 입장으로 선회하게 되는 관점의 변화를 보여준다. 본 논문은, 비록 팀로드가 남북전쟁에 대한 남부 연합의 정당성을 낭만적으로 포장한 "잃어버린 대의"(Lost Cause)와 연관되어 있음에도 불구하고 그의 작품들이 역사적인 맥락을 초월하여 위대한 반전소설인 에리히 마리아 레마르크의 1929년 작 『서부전선 이상없다』와 같이 현대의 독자들에게 국가주의의 위험성과 전쟁의 허무함을 상기시키고 있음을 주장한다.

주제어: 헨리 팀로드, 19세기 미국 문학, 남북전쟁 문학, 남부 문학, 반전 문학

논문접수일: 2025.5.15

심사완료일: 2025.6.20

게재확정일: 2025.6.22

이름: Paul Tewkesbury

소속: 한국외국어대학교 영미문학·문화학과 교수

이메일: paul_tewkesbury@yahoo.com