

2013

## An Apology for Confederate Poetry

Elizabeth J. Elliott '13  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjcwe>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Elliott, Elizabeth J. '13 (2013) "An Apology for Confederate Poetry," *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*: Vol. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/gcjcwe/vol3/iss1/4>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# An Apology for Confederate Poetry

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the reasons why poetry written in the Confederate states during the Civil War is rarely included in the American literary canon. Historians and literary critics have dismissed Confederate poetry as nothing more than jingoistic and sentimental "trash in rhyme." Nevertheless, poems buried in the mountains of Southern literary magazines and journals from the period tell a more nuanced story. Covering a wide and fascinating range of subjects, both good and bad Confederate poems aptly reflected how the Southern popular mind reacted to and dealt with the events of the war.

## **Keywords**

Confederate poets, poetry, Southern literature, Henry Timrod, Southern Illustrated News, Southern intellectual inferiority

## An Apology for Confederate Poetry

Elizabeth Elliott  
*Academic Essay*

Bob Dylan's 2006 album *Modern Times* sold over three hundred thousand copies in its first week of release. Critics and fans alike praised the legendary song writer's uncanny ability to compose lyrical folk rock songs reminiscent of his classics from the 1960s and 70s. "More frailer than the flowers, those precious hours," sings Dylan about two-thirds of the way through the slow-moving track number 4, "When the Deal Goes Down." But compare those words to lines from "A Rhapsody of a Southern Winter Night," an 1860 poem by South Carolina native Henry Timrod:

*A round of precious hours.  
Oh! here, where in that summer noon I basked,  
And strove, with logic frailer than the flowers...<sup>1</sup>*

Timrod's name is never once credited on the album jacket. Scott Warmuth, an Albuquerque disc jockey, discovered the similarities after he performed a simple Google search of the song's lyrics.<sup>2</sup> At once a public outcry ensued that demanded Dylan explain himself for what many regarded as an egregious act of plagiarism.

Perhaps it never crossed Dylan's mind that anyone would notice his "borrowing" in the first place. A *New York Times* op-ed piece commenting on the controversy described Timrod as "some guy we never heard of."<sup>3</sup> Few Americans today know that this man was not only one of the

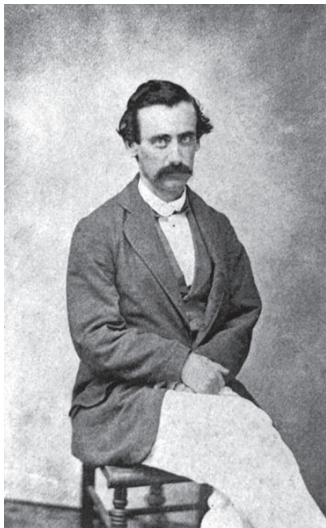
---

1 Lines 54-56, in *Poems* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 69.

2 Motoko Rich, "Who's This Guy Dylan Who's Borrowing Lines from Henry Timrod?" *New York Times*, September 14, 2006.

3 Suzanne Vega, "The Ballad of Henry Timrod," September 17, 2006.

Civil War's most respected poets, but one who had earned the unofficial designation of "Poet Laureate of the Confederacy."<sup>4</sup> Why have Timrod and his fellow Confederate poets, who produced an unprecedented amount of work during the four years of the war, been consigned to the dustbin of history? The answer is two-fold. Modern literature surveys, desiring to construct a progressive and democratic American canon, have found it easier to forget or suppress pro-slavery and pro-secession works than to analyze their merits. Secondly, Confederate poetry is commonly dismissed as jingoistic, sentimental rhyme, devoid of all serious literary or historic value. This is an unfair portrayal. Confederate writers found in verse a form of self-expression well-suited to combat notions of Southern intellectual inferiority. Refusing to restrict poetry to the domain of beauty, these poets, both good and bad, learned to harness even the most banal images for the service of their emergent country.



Henry Timrod, Confederate Poet  
(Source: Library of Congress)

---

4 Kerry Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 203.

The subject of Confederate poetry deserves a book-length analysis. Because of the sheer volume of literary material produced in the South during the Civil War, historians are bound to uncover interesting pieces forgotten in dusty archives and on endless rolls of microfilm. Richard Barksdale Harwell, one of the earliest scholars to become interested in the study of Confederate publications, wrote that “an adequate critical evaluation of the whole literature of the Confederacy... must await the day when Southern librarians and historians have succeeded in locating more adequate files of these Confederate periodicals.”<sup>5</sup> Recent works such as Michael T. Bernath’s *Confederate Minds* (2010) have begun to reflect how accessible the source material is, but Confederate poetry remains an understudied field.

Harwell, ironically, had a fairly low opinion of Confederate poetry himself. In the introduction to his bibliographic finding aid for Southern wartime literature, he wrote, “Confederate poetry as represented in the titles of contemporary publications can most kindly be described as undistinguished. It often set out to be little more than doggerel – and almost never was.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these sentiments have found plenty of company: the near-universal consensus by historians is that the vast majority of Civil War poetry, both Northern and Southern, is sub-par. Aside from rare exceptions like Walt Whitman, Ritchie Devon Watson found that “the poetic landscape of the Civil War is a metaphorical wasteland, an artistic terrain of shocking banality.”<sup>7</sup> In Watson’s view, both sides were so obsessed with being

---

5 Richard Barksdale Harwell, *Confederate Belles-Lettres: a Bibliography and a Finding List of the Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Songsters, and Miscellaneous Literature Published in the Confederate States of America* (Hattiesburg, MS: The Book Farm, 1941), preface.

6 Harwell, *Confederate Belles-Lettres*, 23.

7 Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 202.

“right” that they were unable to dissociate their work from their prejudices and reflect on current events with dispassionate irony. What Whitman did differently was “his refusal to allow his poem to be a vehicle of propaganda and his concomitant rejection of simplistic moral distinctions between ‘good’ Northern soldiers and ‘bad’ Southern ones.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, his egalitarian classics such as “Bivouac on a Mountainside” and “The Wound-Dresser” have become the darlings of American poetry anthologies. And with Whitman representing one of the only glimmers of light on the Northern side, what redemptive value could the South offer? Randall Fuller’s survey of Civil War literature, *From Battlefields Rising*, seems to answer that question quite clearly: no mention is made at all of the literary contributions of Confederate publications.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the modern distaste for Confederate poetry arises not from a blanket condemnation of the region itself, but from the different purposes served by verse in the nineteenth century. Poetry in that time was commonly read from magazines on street corners, quoted in church sermons, and recited by children in schools. Southern poetry was rhetorical in purpose, created for public oratorical performance, and frequently “declaimed by the poets themselves.”<sup>10</sup> History, not personal intimacy or psychology, was the dominant literary model. Nineteenth-century poetry tended to “turn art’s moral light on public matters and private deeds,” using sweeping and romantic narrative structure to honor important stories.<sup>11</sup> There is also little colloquial speech in Civil War-era poetry to give it a unique flavor; lines

---

8 Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons*, 201.

9 Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

10 Richard Marius, ed., *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), xiii.

11 J.D. McClatchy, *Poets of the Civil War* (New York: Library of America, 2005), xviii.

such as “Sister, hark! Atween the trees cometh naught but summer breeze” from a late Confederate poem called “All is Gone” use the antiquated language of traditional English literature.<sup>12</sup> The distinctions we make today about what constituted “high” writing and “low” (popular) writing would not have been recognized by nineteenth-century readers.

However, it is not only a generational gap that causes us to dismiss Confederate poetry as “barren reading.”<sup>13</sup> Historians and literary critics are frustrated with it because they want to condemn it morally. It seems offensive to us, even disturbing, that poetry printed in widely accessible, every-day periodicals could buy so fully into the myths of the Southern aristocracy, with its praises of the sanctity of white womanhood and the trivialization of human bondage.

*And Sumner, snarling poodle-pet  
Of virgins past their prime;  
And even the sluts of Women’s Rights –  
Tray, Blanche, and Sweet-heart, all –  
Are yelping shrill against us still,  
And hunger for our fall!*<sup>14</sup>

This poem appeared in the most prestigious Southern literary magazine of the time, the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Its crude language (“snarling poodle-pet;” “sluts”), dispensed without any touch of irony, would scarcely be permitted in a modern publication. Its blatant condemnation of Union martyr Charles Sumner forever prevents it from being tolerated by a Northern audience. The Shakespearean reference (the dogs “Tray, Blanche,

---

12 Anonymous, originally printed in the *Memphis Appeal*. Reprinted in William Gilmore Simms, *War Poetry of the South* (New York: Richardson & Company, 1866), 470-474.

13 Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962), 466.

14 Lines 75-80, *Southern Literary Messenger*, February 1861, 100-103.

and Sweet-heart” from *King Lear*) sounds more like pre-school mockery than a serious literary allusion. But despite (and perhaps because of) these things, the poem is endlessly fascinating to behold. The biting language and relentless insults encapsulate the combination of anger, fear and excitement Southerners were feeling on the eve of secession. “A Ballad for the Young South” is a second-rate poem by literary standards, but through it we see the emergence of a uniquely Confederate style.

Like Southern prose literature, Confederate poetry was inflamed by Romantic literary tropes. Literary critic J. D. McClatchy points out that Confederate poets “rhapsodized about knights and cavaliers and paladins, terms that drew a romantic scrim over the realities.”<sup>15</sup> However, the “realities” of Southern life during the war period – marches, battles, enlistment, struggles on the home front – were all summarily addressed in the poetry of the latest newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. From Susan Archer Talley’s “Battle of Manassas” to John R. Thompson’s “England’s Neutrality” to Alethea S. Burroughs’s “Savannah Fallen,” Southerners demonstrated a remarkable capacity to use poetry as an outlet for rhetorical reaction to almost every significant aspect of the war.<sup>16</sup> Especially within a leisured agrarian class, poetry could be produced quickly and was appropriate to read during both good and bad occasions. And while the Confederate version of this art was colored too often by melodramatic effusion, elegies and rallying cries became the energy-filled backdrop “against which stronger poems were illuminated.”<sup>17</sup>

---

15 McClatchy, *Poets of the Civil War*, xx.

16 These poems are reprinted from their original sources in William Gilmore Simms, *War Poetry of the South*.

17 McClatchy, *Poets of the Civil War*, xvii-xviii.



We need look no further for these “stronger poems” than in the collected works of Henry Timrod, “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy” and anonymous muse to Bob Dylan. Born in 1828, Timrod’s life was marked by a series of tragedies, including the loss of his only son.<sup>18</sup> He could not enlist in the Confederate army due to poor health. The decline of the Confederacy after 1863 seemed to mirror his descent into poverty and tuberculosis, which claimed his life only two years after the war’s end. Nevertheless, Timrod was a prolific poet and one of the few future Confederate writers that gained widespread praise in the North before the war. One 1859 article from the *Charleston Courier* discussed how thrilling it was that Timrod’s poetry was published in Boston, saying that “we believe it will not only confirm an individual reputation, but add greatly to our best and sectional literature.”<sup>19</sup> The thematic focus of Timrod’s work shifted once the war began, as he abandoned his usual verse on the beauty of nature for poetry more martial in style.<sup>20</sup> While Timrod still constructed lovely images honoring the Southern landscape, his wartime poetry integrated the aesthetic with another domain: political urgency. Paul Hamilton Hayne, one of the Confederacy’s most celebrated poets, revered Timrod as a crusader against anti-Southern intellectual prejudice, writing that “the objection [to Timrod’s poetry in the North] is that the majority of his pieces, and the ablest, deal with Confederate topics, and praise Confederate heroes.”<sup>21</sup> Though the stress of rebellion would eventually accelerate the poet’s death, Timrod “found in the crisis of the war an intensity of artistic purpose that made his Civil-War era poems some of his strongest.”<sup>22</sup>

---

18 Faith Barrett and Christianne Miller, eds., “Words for the Hour:” *A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 311-312.

19 “Henry Timrod,” *The Charleston Courier, Tri-Weekly*, November 11, 1859, col F.

20 Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, 202.

21 In Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, 203.

22 Barrett and Miller, “Words for the Hour,” 15.

Timrod wrote several powerful poems about fiery Southern patriotism during the first two years of the war. The few works of his that do occasionally surface in modern American poetry anthologies (“Ethnogenesis,” “A Cry to Arms,” “Charleston,” and “The Cotton Boll”) all date from this period. “Ethnogenesis” is perhaps the best “call-to-arms” poem produced by the entire Confederate literary circuit. The title proclaims the birth of both a new nation and a new race “out of the infinite regions of the night.”<sup>23</sup> Here, Timrod enlists imagery as a weapon to fight for the Confederacy. Line 24, “The snow of Southern summers!” is a metaphor for cotton, one of the most iconic symbols of Confederate independence. This cotton “snow” is portrayed as being immeasurably warmer than the frozen water that blankets the North every winter. Appealing to a slaveholding South, the “kinder, gentler snow will help the South, along with the rest of a more amenable, milder climate, win the war.”<sup>24</sup> The poem builds up to a closing line that posits the South as a positive, moral force for good that is defined by “Strange tropic warmth and hints of summer seas.” Modern readers conscious of the injustice of slavery will likely object to Timrod’s sunny treatment of the “slave crop.” However, suppressing the poem blinds us not only to its structural and lyrical merit, but also its interesting illumination of the complex Southern attitudes towards secession. Whereas Joseph Brenan was inspired by belligerence to write “A Ballad for the Young South,” Timrod was drawn to a beneficent vision of gentleness and prosperity with “Ethnogenesis.”

---

23 Line 3, in Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, 7-11.

24 Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth Century American Poetry*, 126.

The best Confederate poets, including Timrod, Paul Hamilton Hayne and William Gilmore Simms, were highly involved in crafting a unified vision for Southern poetry that was to be reflected in the elite literary magazines of the day. Timrod and the rest revered Edgar Allan Poe, whose literary career flourished in the South before his death in 1849. Hayne, for example, referred to Poe as “that mystic bard whose ‘Raven’ broods.”<sup>25</sup> But while Poe’s work was marked by a “transcendental concern with romantic aesthetics,” Confederate poets were also driven by Romantic nationalism.<sup>26</sup> (Ironically, Poe was “explicitly hostile to the notion that literary works of a writer such as himself should be viewed as a badge of honor for that writer’s nation.” Poe himself lamented, “We... often find ourselves in the gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American.”)<sup>27</sup>

Notable Confederate publications such as the *Southern Illustrated News*, *De Bow’s Review*, the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, and the *Charleston Mercury* joined with scores of other small-scale papers to create a thriving environment for Poe’s hated “badges of honor.” The expressed purpose of the *Southern Illustrated News* was to “forever [chase] out the catch-penny papers of Yankeedom, [so] that the South may see ‘There’s life in the old land yet!’ – that industry and perseverance do not belong solely to Yankeedom.”<sup>28</sup> It was a treasure-trove of literary and artistic contributions from prominent Confederate men and women. The first issue of 1863 boldly declared, “Our special agent in London is now negotiating

---

25 *Southern Illustrated News*, July 4, 1863.

26 Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, 193.

27 Larson, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, 199.

28 *Southern Illustrated News*, October 4, 1862.

with THACKERAY, DICKINS, and WILKIE COLLINS for novels, to be written expressly and solely for this paper.”<sup>29</sup> The magazine was also printed on such bad paper that all but a few surviving copies have disintegrated.<sup>30</sup> Unrealistic expectations and poor funding aside, the *News* predicted “the dawn of a new day of Southern letters, a day when the anthologies would abound with the noble thoughts and exquisite poetry of the old classic literature of England.”<sup>31</sup> The *News* sustained itself by embracing liberality; indeed, one newspaper declared, “If an article is accepted [to the *News*], the author only has to name his price, no matter how high, and he instantly receives a check for that amount.”<sup>32</sup> Another newspaper from Charleston enthusiastically reported that “the *News* is well printed on good paper, has a clever salutatory, and a thrifty, promising look.”<sup>33</sup>

An extended analysis of the *Southern Illustrated News* is necessary because of how aptly it and similar magazines reflected changing Southern morale. One notable work by Paul Hamilton Hayne called “The Southern Lyre” was put to print in the magazine only days before its editors were aware of the outcome of the battle of Gettysburg. “The Southern Lyre” is a sort of “roll-call” of Confederate poets, directly naming individuals like Timrod who he believed helped contribute to the rebel nation’s military successes. The poem is not a great one, containing hackneyed constructions such as “whiter than the snow” and “warm as sunshine.” Still, the heroic language with which he celebrated the poets reflects the vitality of

---

29 *Southern Illustrated News*, January 3, 1863.

30 Mark Neely, Harold Holzer, and Gabor S. Boritt, *The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 23.

31 Richard Barksdale Harwell, “A Confederate View of the Southern Poets,” *American Literature* 24 (1952): 55-56.

32 *The Weekly Raleigh Register*, March 25, 1863, col. E.

33 “The News from Richmond,” *The Charleston Mercury*, September 12, 1862.

Confederate nationalism; Southerners were clearly thinking hard about how to remedy their perceived “intellectual inferiority to the North.”<sup>34</sup> The first stanza of the poem reveals that Confederates had no doubts about winning the war, even at the eve of its turning point:

*No longer shall the darksome cloud  
Of Northern Hate and Envy shroud  
The radiance of our Poets proud.*<sup>35</sup>

Other poems that lacked the stylistic sophistication of Hayne’s and Timrod’s work nevertheless reflected similar displays of political and social consciousness. This is the first stanza of a poem written by an anonymous poet, called “Enlisted To-day:”

*I know the sun shines, and the lilacs are blowing,  
And summer sends kisses by beautiful May –  
Oh! to see all the treasures the spring is bestowing,  
And think – my boy Willie is enlisting to-day.*<sup>36</sup>

Full of sweet and simple images like “summer sends kisses,” and “the lilacs are blowing,” this poem at first glance seems utterly superficial, without any redeeming innovation in form or rhyme. However, the successive stanzas, which describe the disorienting pain felt when families were broken up by the war, grant this poem its historical significance. For all of their unquestioned racism and hostility towards Northern culture, it can still be said that Southerners loved their children.

---

34 Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 220.

35 *Southern Illustrated News*, July 4, 1863.

36 In Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, 63.

Post-Gettysburg Confederate poems, such as Margaret Stilling's "The Buds That Fall," show how verse was quick to reflect the changing sentiments of a society increasingly haunted by death.<sup>37</sup> The editors of Southern periodicals themselves began to perceive poetry as a sort of barometer for the success of the war, lashing out at so-called "bad" submissions because they seemed to prove the South could not intellectually sustain itself. On August 6, 1864, *Southern Field and Fireside* wrote this message "To Young Writers:"

*Stop writing; not for your own amusement and improvement, but for publication... Lay your MSS [manuscripts] carefully aside and when you have arrived at a greater maturity of mind and cultivation, revise and correct them.*

George Bagby of the *Southern Literary Messenger* declared on his editor's page that "weak little compositions by turns pious, pathetic, and romantic ... are not, as a general thing, desirable for magazines. Such tender and sentimental trash had better be burned."<sup>38</sup> The *Southern Christian Advocate* implored poets to "send us no more poetical effusions, until, if they are real poets, they have pruned them thoroughly, or have submitted them to good judges, and they have recommended their publication."<sup>39</sup> To combat the Union with their poetry, writers needed to show up to battle with sharper weapons.

Perhaps that is what James R. Randall had in mind when he submitted his poem "At Fort Pillow" to the *Wilmington Journal* on April 25, 1864. It is amazing how soon Randall's piece was published after the actual Fort Pillow incident, which occurred on April 12. Stanza 12 reads:

---

37 *Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1863, 492-493.

38 "Editor's Table," *Southern Literary Messenger*, October 1864, 315.

39 Reprinted as "Literature in the South," *Southern Field and Fireside*, May 18, 1864, 3.

*With steady rifle, sharpened brand,  
A week ago, upon my steed,  
With Forrest and his warrior band,  
I made the hell-hounds writhe and bleed.*

The poem is colored by violent imagery that describes every movement of a Confederate soldier under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest. The line “I sought the white man, not the black,” directly predicts the charges that would be made by the Union that Fort Pillow was a massacre. Six stanzas later, the speaker is moved to an almost bloodthirsty ecstasy:

*Throbbing along the frenzied vein,  
My blood seemed kindled into song –  
The death-dirge of the sacred slain,  
The slogan of immortal wrong.<sup>40</sup>*

Randall has an ear for alliteration (“death-dirge” and “sacred slain”), and the image of the throbbing vein is quite elegant. While the inclusion of words such as “steed” and “immortal” betray romantic influences, this is a remarkably well-crafted and original poem. It is almost hard to believe that clever images can come out of such repugnant subject matter. The intense psychological vitality of this piece, as well as its sound construction, should rightfully save the poem from being dismissed as mere “trash in rhyme.”

The surrender of the South in 1865 sounded the death knell for Confederate poetry, but the remnants of it lingered on for just a little bit longer. *War Poetry of the South* was a collection released in 1866, beginning with Henry Timrod’s “Ethnogenesis.” The volume was published in New York, indicating at least some nominal Northern acceptance of it. In the

---

40 Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, 210-213.

introduction, William Gilmore Simms indicated his belief that Confederate poetry was substantial enough to be subsumed into “the national literature:”

*Now that the States of the Union have been resolved into one nation, this collection is essentially as much the property of the whole as are the captured cannon which were employed against it during the progress of the late war. It belongs to the national literature, and will hereafter be regarded as constituting a proper part of it, just as legitimately to be recognized by the nation as are the rival ballads of the cavaliers and roundheads, by the English, in the great civil conflict of their country.<sup>41</sup>*

The passage even discusses the potential for publishing more volumes in the future, as many other poems had to be cut out due to length. However, Simms would soon be disappointed. Six years after Henry Timrod’s death, Paul Hamilton Hayne remarked at how quickly the greatest Confederate poet was forgotten by the re-united country: “While hastily examining the volume, a gentleman came alongside, and asked which book I was purchasing. I answered, ‘*Timrod’s Poems*, by Paul Hayne.’ ‘Timrod! Timrod!’ says he, ‘I never heard of him.’”<sup>42</sup> One hundred and forty years later, identical quotes were being recorded in articles commenting on the Dylan plagiarism controversy. Nobody knew who Henry Timrod was and nobody cared.

---

41 Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, v.

42 “Henry Timrod’s Poems, by Paul Hayne,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, February 28, 1873, col. E.





William Gilmore Sims, Confederate Poet

(Source: Library of Congress)

Walt Whitman himself had predicted that out of the Civil War “a great literature will yet arise... those scenes – era compressing centuries of ‘native’ passion, first class pictures, tempests of life and death – an inexhaustible mine of the historic drama, romance ... of peoples to come.”<sup>43</sup> Whitman’s prophecy was never fulfilled, a sentiment that has been echoed by numerous historians from Richard Harwell to Edmund Wilson. But how could there have been no “inexhaustible mine of historic drama” present when poems with odd-ball titles like “England’s Neutrality” could find a captive audience? The creativity of certain Southern poets proves that the South was not merely “a stagnant and isolated backwater.”<sup>44</sup> Because Confederate poets stretched beyond aesthetic beauty to reflect on how the

---

43 In Lynn Clyde Surles, *Voices From Lincoln’s Time: “Bill Herndon” and Other Poems* (Hubertus, WI: Belman Press, 1997), ii-iii.

44 Bernath, *Confederate Minds*, 6.

popular mind reacted to and dealt with the events of the war, “we can forgive the muse who, in her fervor, is sometimes forgetful of her art.”<sup>45</sup>

Poetry achieves meaning by suggestive description, and Southerners were certainly suggesting a great deal of things in the thousands of poem circulating around the Confederacy during the Civil War. Confederate poetry was ubiquitous, enjoying popularity “unprecedented and almost certainly never to be equaled thereafter.”<sup>46</sup> The greatest flaw of Confederate poetry was not its literary quality. Indeed, the editors of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the *Southern Literary News*, and the rest knew what poetry was good and what was not, though it took them until the South was losing to finally admit this to their readers. Rather, Confederate poetry has been ignored for its content, which is arguably its most fascinating virtue. This field will continue to be side-stepped by academia because the subject matter cannot be reconciled with progressive modern views, and aversion will only increase with time. Though it may have been wrong to keep from crediting Timrod, Bob Dylan actually did the poet a service by using his lines. For a brief moment in 2006, a man who had once formed a significant part of a region’s epic struggle held the interest of the American people once more.

---

45 Simms, *War Poetry of the South*, v-vi.

46 Bernath, *Confederate Minds*, 182.

## Bibliography

- Barrett, Faith, and Cristanne Miller, eds. *"Words for the Hour: " A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.
- Bernath, Michael T. *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Fuller, Randall. *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Harwell, Richard Barksdale. "A Confederate View of the Southern Poets." *American Literature* 24 (1952): 51-61.
- Harwell, Richard Barksdale. *Confederate Belles-Lettres: a Bibliography and a Finding List of the Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Songsters, and Miscellaneous Literature Published in the Confederate States of America*. Hattiesburg, MS: The Book Farm, 1941.
- Larson, Kerry. *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Marius, Richard, ed. *The Columbia Book of Civil War Poetry*. New York: Columbia University, 1994.
- McClatchy, J. D. *Poets of the Civil War*. New York: Library of America, 2005.
- Neely, Mark, Harold Holzer, and Gabor S. Boritt. *The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- Simms, William Gilmore. *War Poetry of the South*. New York: Richardson & Company, 1866.
- Surles, Lynn Clyde. *Voices From Lincoln's Time: "Bill Herndon" and Other Poems*. Hubertus, WI: Belman Press, 1997.
- Watson, Jr., Ritchie Devon. *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the History of the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962.