In the South and for the South: Southern Mind and Character in the Southern Literary Messenger 1852 - 1860

by

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the antebellum South and the search continues for those overarching themes that have created a popular conception of the region as particularly distinctive. As the last slaveholding region in the Western world, the Old South has been invested with many characteristics that seem to stem from its involvement with this one defining institution. When antislavery activists in the North began to focus upon the South denouncing the slave system and those who perpetuated it as cruel, immoral and anti-Christian, Southerners felt compelled to speak out in their own defense. This study deals with the nature of that response at it was expressed in the literature of the South in the decade before the Civil War.

In order to learn more about the South through its literature, a study was made of the material published in the antebellum South's most prominent literary journal, the Southern Literary Messenger. During the 1850's, the Messenger published material that not only denounced outside interference in the South's domestic affairs by a strident antislavery faction in the North but enforced rather than questioned the section's ideological belief

system. Slavery was adressed only by indirection and the South's defense came to rest upon the traditional values through which Southerners had found validation in the past.

When, in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe published Uncle Tom's Cabin, an inflamatory antislavey novel that deeply angered the South, the Messenger came to the defense of its section. Its response to Stowe's work provided a significant point of departure for this study as Southern writers were encouraged to promote their section through its literature. Thus, the Southern literary imagination can be seen to reveal recurrent themes, motifs and situations that not only provide a unique insight into the workings of the Southern mind when placed on the defensive but define the relationship between the historical reality and the literary interpretation of the South.

It becomes clear that the Messenger's contributors felt the need to defend the concept of slavery rather than slavery itself. Their work shows the antebellum South to be a conservative society that placed great emphasis on a traditional value system that not only provided support for the section in the face of attack but also provided comfort and reassurance to its inhabitants. This study, therefore, shows the role that a Southern journal played in creating a definitive portrait of Southern life and character in answer to the calumnies promoted by its enemies in the North.

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Introduction

In his book, Tell About the South, Fred Hobson lists the characteristics which he believes have been popularly assumed to define the "representative" Southerner. He is, so the definition goes, "conservative, religious, and suspicious of science and progress, he loves the land, has a sense of tradition and a sense of place, and he prefers the concrete to the abstract." While Hobson cautions that these qualities are not so specifically Southern as traditional American rural, he feels that Southerners were indeed different from their fellow Americans.1 The idea of the South as a separate entity with its own self-conscious brand of sectional peculiarities has been well explored and freely interpreted in both historical and popular writing. While there is a general consensus that certain characteristics and attitudes did exist that were distinctly Southern in nature, such assumptions have been questioned, re-evaluated, revised and, in many instances, discounted. The difficulty in any attempt to explore or explain the South is to get past the generalizations and determine if the region was indeed distinctive and what the nature of that distinctiveness was.

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1 Fred Hobson, Tell About the South (Baton Rouge, 1983) p.13.

C. Vann Woodward, writing in 1960, believed such an enterprise was, by its very nature, surrounded by formidable hazards. He argued that any attempts to substantiate a claim to a distinctive heritage or create a collective character for a particular grouping of people would lead to a bewildering variety of results.2 Southern scholars have accumulated a vast amount of evidence and put forward a wide range of theories as to the nature and quality of Southern uniqueness, and, as Woodward believed, often contributed to a new set of assumptions about the Southerner as misleading as those already in existence. Nevertheless, there is something compelling about re-entering the complex web of mythology from which Southern history has never quite managed to disentangle itself, not to attempt another explanation for the South's uniqueness but rather to gain a deeper and perhaps more revealing insight into the exact nature of Southern society. In searching for that revealing insight, however, it is necessary to understand the themes that have shaped and defined the images which dominated the historical perception of the antebellum South.

In 1941, W. J. Cash, a journalist and writer who has been called the South's foremost mythmaker, published The Mind of the South. Although the book has been

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2 C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1960) ix.

criticized academically, it presents a definitive view of the South as a separate culture and has provided a compelling point of departure for many subsequent enquiries into the myth versus reality dichotomy that underscores Southern studies. At its best, Cash felt, the South was proud, brave, honourable, generous and loyal, and at its worst was intolerant, violent, suspicious of new ideas, attached to false values, and sentimental to the point where it lost track of reality. He believed that Southerners' sentimentalized view of slavery, their intense loyalty to home and family, and the cult of honour and violence they perpetrated in its defense, were in fact manifestations of a society driven by the need to justify itself and its institutions while keeping in its "secret heart" feelings of shame and guilt.3 Such opinions proved intriguing and provocative. While historical interpretation has changed over time, the mythology has responded to and shared in both the continuities and changes of an on-going dialogue which has not diminished over the years. Hobson's "representative" Southerner is part of the myth. The task of the historian has been to accommodate the myth to what can be interpreted as historical reality so that both can fit comfortably within the scope of Southern scholarship.

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3 W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York, 1941), p.61.

C. Vann Woodward, although a critic of Cash, picked up on his idea that much of the South's intellectual energy went into the defense of its own self-image of innocence while, in reality, its experience was one of guilt and shame. In The Burden of Southern History, he expresses the belief that the South clung emotionally to its traditional values and assumed the moral burden of its defining institution, slavery. As a result, Woodward states, the region became insecure and intolerant of criticism and the mythic corollaries of innocence and virtue were born.4 The recurrent themes surrounding sin, slavery, guilt and innocence, whether real or mythic, appear to provide the foundation on which all other developments in Southern ideology can be constructed. The issue of slavery looms large in the analysis of the Southern experience and is seen by many as the determining factor in the development of this ideology in the antebellum years. There is little doubt it was a vital and dynamic force in the region's history; however, the degree to which it molded and influenced the character of the South and affected the attitudes and habits of its people remains an area open to debate.

Rethinking the South from a wider perspective has led historians to question the degree to which slavery and secession dominated the everyday lives of the Southern

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4 Woodward, The Burden of Southern History pp.200-202.

people. Eugene Genovese clashed with this mode of thought by concluding that while the guilt-complex theory was not necessarily wrong, it was irrelevant. He maintained that, while some planters may have felt guilty about slaveholding, many did not. For every inwardly torn slaveholder, he wrote, many went about their business "reasonably secure in the notion that they did not create the world... and that their moral worth depended on how well they discharged their duties and responsibilities defined by the world in which they, and not someone else, lived."5 While the guilt-complex theory has not been totally discounted, it is evident that other interactive and interdependent factors must be considered if we are to find the key to the Southerners' perception of their world, not as the Yankees made it but as they made it.

One by one, the legends of the Old South have fallen under the new, broader-based methods of analysis, and as a result have lost much of their credibility. The Old South as the land of the noble cavalier landowner on his vast baronial plantation surrounded by his happy Negroes and supported by his lovely, gentle wife, has been relegated to the pages of romantic fiction. Cash believed that the plantation ideal was responsible for the South's most profound retreat from reality because the acquisition of

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5 Eugene D. Genovese, The World the Slaveholders Made (New York, 1969), p.147.

land meant power and having power gave credence to claims of gentility and honour. While the plantation ideal was the aspiration of many it was the reality of very few. Eugene Genovese, in an influential study of the planter class and their interests, believed them to be a small but entrenched elite committed at all costs to the maintenance of their social and political hegemony. He felt that they were responsible for sustaining the pre-industrial conditions that continued to exist in the South when the rest of the nation was moving rapidly into the industrial age.6

More recent studies have argued that, after the 1830's, such honour-bound, pre-capitalist aristocrats, if they ever existed, were no longer in evidence and that prominent landowners were active, forward-looking entrepreneurs as interested in the cash nexus as any Yankee trader. As a result, the focus has switched from an elitist to a more heterodox view of Southern society in the belief that, by studying the common man, a more valid, less stereotypic insight into the mind of the Old South would be found. New questions arose: did the ideology of this broader group of Southerners in any way support the existing beliefs; could they be seen as representative of their section; was there indeed a consolidated thought

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6 Eugene Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery (New York, 1967), pp.3-5.

process with which the majority could identify? Southern whites became sufficiently excited about sectional rivalry and the Southern cause to support a military defense of their section. Bruce Collins, a social historian, believed that they did so not solely to preserve slavery, but because they endowed Southernism with a whole range of attributes and derived their sense of community and sectional loyalty from a variety of sources.7 The key to Southern identity lies in the understanding of these attributes.

In 1982, Bertram Wyatt-Brown published Southern Honor in which he argued at great length about ethics and behaviour in the Old South. He concluded that the concept of honour, in all its forms, was the source of Southern peculiarity linking all levels of society and providing a framework for handling problems and making life more meaningful than it might otherwise have been. Southerners, he argues, conducted their lives by the highest ethical standards. For the Southerner, true honour combined inner virtue with the natural order of reason and the innate desire of man for the good. However, Wyatt-Brown believes that, by the 1850's, Christian qualities became more compatible with the idea of an honourable man than just

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7 Bruce Collins, White Society in the Antebellum South (New York, 1985), x.

gentlemanliness alone.8 Research points to the fact that religion played an important part in Southern society which Cash described as "peculiarly Christian." To the Southerner, he stated, God was an imperious master who had set every man in his place and ordained everything to be as it was. As a result, the assurance that virtue and piety would bring heavenly reward became a necessary and important element of Southern religious belief.9 Therefore, Hobson's "representative" Southerner would have found in his religious faith a sense of personal worth and self-esteem as well as the assurance of a place in heaven.

Samuel C. Hill, author of several works on Southern religion, believes that Southern religious faith served a dual purpose. He states that the South began with an Anglican notion of ethical responsibility which was replaced by piety, resulting in the dramatic adaptation of its religious beliefs to a system that was more compatible with its social and cultural needs.10 Southerners dreamed of heaven and feared hell. Wyatt-Brown, on the other hand, argues that honour had more influence in the Old South than either the shame or guilt which may have resulted from a spiritual or moral conflict. In his view,

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8 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York, 1982), p.22.

9 Cash, Mind of the South p.81.

10 Samuel C. Hill, The South and North in American Religion (Athens, 1980) p.11.

inner merit, personal valour, physical appearance, moral integrity, sexual conduct, familial and legal obligations and indications of self-worth were all based upon the concept of honour which, because it gave meaning to life, was not a myth but a vital code.11 Thus, if we accept Wyatt-Brown's portrait of antebellum society in the light of what historians have told us about Southern religious concerns, we can argue that the moral burden of proof that Woodward believed Southerners felt compelled to assume was not only in defense of slavery but in defense of themselves as Southerners and all that being Southern implied. To reach a greater understanding of the formative values of the Old South, it is necessary that the issues of religion, class, race, honour and slavery be viewed as an intriguing whole rather than separate concepts. The part that each played in the formative process of the Southern identity can best be understood by examining the intellectual process of the antebellum Southerner as he/she attempted to define and substantiate the singular qualities of the South.

I believe that the most efficacious way of reaching the heart of the South is through its literature. Words, both spoken and written, were the region's primary means of intellectual and political expression. Language both

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11 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor p.22.

explained and defended slavery in the South. In the past, the use of literary material as an historical tool was criticized on the grounds that the information it contained could not really speak for an entire social aggregate. Writers in the antebellum South are believed to have been particularly bound by their society's conventions and, as a result, to have drawn heavily upon the perceived distinctions between the South and its Northern rivals in their attempts to promote the growth of a Southern sectional identity. In her study of the antebellum South's literati, Drew Gilpin Faust claims that the relationship between the intellectual and his/her society has always been problematical. However, she is confident that there is merit in studying Southern thinkers for an insight into broader patterns, values and popular expressions as keys to the ever-elusive Southern mentality. Their work, she feels, can serve as an example of how belief systems simultaneously influence and reflect social reality as well as individual psychological needs.12

In attempting to establish a relationship between literature and society, it is necessary to remain responsive to the established certainties that are brought into question and distinguish the imaginary life from that of reality. It is for this reason that I have tried to

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12 Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Peculiar South Revisited," Interpreting Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1987) p.4.

give a brief overview of the most dominant historical interpretations of antebellum society because, as Woodward cautioned, we do not want to create new myths to replace the old. Taken in its proper context, I feel that literature can provide a credible insight into some of the human and social problems of a time and place that we cannot know in any other way. Louis D. Rubin, a literary critic particularly interested in the relationship between the South and its literature, believes that "one of the most important roles of imaginative literature is that of knowledge" because it can instruct us about society in ways that nothing else can. It is his opinion that the recognizable constants in human nature can greatly enhance one's understanding of behaviour. By studying the writer in and of the South, Rubin argues, we can learn something about both.13 That is my intention in this study.

Scholars have paid much attention to antebellum Southern literature and, like the relations and institutions of the South, have determined it to be decisively different from the works produced in other areas of the United States. Literary criticism has confirmed what some antebellum Southerners felt about the quality and quantity of literature produced by their section. Hinton Rowan Helper, an ardent Southern polemicist, wrote in 1857

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13 Louis D. Rubin Jr & C. Hugh Holman, ed., Southern Literary Study, Problems and Possibilities (Chapel Hill, 1975) p.3.

that the South suffered from a literary pauperism that could only be blamed upon the institution of slavery which he felt had extinguished the ability of Southerners to speak or print their thoughts freely.14 Henry Timrod, in 1859, stated that, because Southerners were a provincial rather than an educated people, the opinions and theories of the last century were still held in reverence. However, he argued that the purpose of Southern literature was to portray the social state, manners, moral opinions, passions and prejudices of the people so that they could reach a higher truth than was often reached by historians.15 Writing more than a century later, Louis J. Rubin supports this contention in his belief that antebellum writers had a moral blindness toward the flaws and blemishes of their society and, as a result, never reached the level of detachment and objectivity needed to produce great literature.16 Drew Gilpin Faust claims that even William Gilmore Simms, the antebellum South's most preeminent man of letters, felt ambivalent about his need for social recognition and his place as an intellectual within Southern society which severely limited the scope of

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14 Hobson, Tell About the South (Baton Rouge, 1983) p.55.

15 Henry Timrod, "Literature in the South," Russell's Magazine 5 (August,1859): p.39.

16 Louis D. Rubin Jr., The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South (Baton Rouge, 1989), p.9.

his work.17

If the closed nature of Southern society and the need to work within the framework of its institutions restricted Southern writers' freedom of expression, their fiction and non-fiction will, in one way or another, present a specific vision of the region that may explain some of the suppositions upon which the history of the Old South rests. If authors of note were unable or unwilling to transcend their region or their time, then it is possible that writers with lesser talent and more limited aspirations maintained a greater degree of objectivity and a less elitist perspective of their society. To find these lesser-lights and the more out-of-the-way pieces, I decided to research literary magazines. Such magazines, I felt, provided a vehicle for a wide variety of contributors with different levels of literary aspiration and a wealth of self-conscious beliefs and assumptions that may never have come to light in more formalized areas of publication. The broad spectrum of literary material that magazines encouraged can furnish the themes of Southern experience that lead to the heart of Southern life. The magazine I found best fitted my purpose was the Southern Literary Messenger.

My reasons for choosing the Southern Literary

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17 Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle (Baltimore, 1977) p.55.

Messenger are as follows. In an era when literary magazines, especially those in the South, blossomed and died with alarming regularity, the Messenger survived from 1834 until 1864 when the consequences of war made it impossible for the magazine to continue printing. The purpose of its founder, Thomas Willis White, was to create a vehicle that could promote Southern literature and alleviate what the magazine's first editorial described as the South's "vassalage to [its] Northern neighbors" and its "dependence for [its] literary food upon [its] brethren."18 White felt strongly that the South needed a voice to speak in its defense, to create a sense of pride and a sense of place in a society presumed inferior to the North in its literary talent and taste. The magazine's purpose was not so much to promote a distinctly regional literature but to provide an outlet for the latent literary talent of the South and to encourage new writers to present their work to the public. Considering the small literary circle that existed in the city at the time, founding a literary magazine in Richmond, Virginia, a city of less than 20,000 people in 1834, was considered a bold but rather foolish enterprise. There were few professional writers in the South, most of whom relied to a great extent upon Northern publishing houses which were larger and more

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18 Robert D. Jacobs, "Campaign for Southern Literature: The Southern Literary Messenger." in the Southern Literary Journal Fall 1969, pp.67-98.

fiscally sound than any in the South. Although they were often criticized for doing so, Southern writers felt obliged to publish in the North where they were more likely to get paid for their endeavors.

Despite its lofty aspirations, money matters plagued the Messenger throughout its life and, unable to offer any meaningful monetary incentive, editors were forced to rely on the many enthusiastic amateurs whose contributions were often less than desirable. Although the Messenger often reflected the values of what is called the plantation class, it became primarily a journal of the professional middle class. Lawyers, educators, clergymen, physicians and leisured ladies seemed most disposed to fill the pages of the magazine.19 It has been established that, by 1859, a growing Southern middle class occupied an economic and social position above that of any other non-planter group. The more affluent members of this class often owned land and slaves which, in a society dominated by an agrarian philosophy, connected all strata of society.20 Therefore, as a group, the professional middle class contributors to the Messenger maintained a direct relationship with both the lower and upper classes with whom they associated on both a social and professional

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19 Ibid., p.75.

20 James C. Bonner, "Profile of a Late Ante-Bellum Community," American Historical Review 49 (October,1943 - July,1944), p.671.

level. As a result, their literary presentations provide invaluable information on the Southern mentality from a less politically or socially influenced perspective than any other available source. This fact, combined with the eclectic nature of its contents and its uniquely Southern viewpoint, makes the Messenger a significant window through which to view the Southern world.

John Reuben Thompson, editor of the Messenger from 1847 until 1860, was perhaps the magazine's most committed and staunch supporter. A University of Virginia graduate, he preferred, like many of his contemporaries in the literary field, the pursuit of belle lettres to the practice of law. Thompson brought a high literary standard to his time as editor hoping to entertain his readers as well as to elevate their literary tastes. His initial aim was to put literature above politics but he also felt strongly about awakening a sectional spirit. As the antagonism between North and South intensified in the decade before the war, Thompson, like many of his contemporaries, was deeply affected by sectional tension and committed more space in his magazine to the slavery debate and issues of Southern nationalism.

During the 1850's it is believed that Southern writers began to rally behind the cause for Southern self-determination, and the Messenger strove to "bring forth the testimony as to the moral and mental qualities of the

Southern people" and to place before the nation the "history, topography, and manners of the South so that the Southern people could be fairly judged."21 In this study I intend to ascertain what values the Messenger upheld as being peculiarly Southern and if it did indeed support the historical perceptions that have become part of the Old South myth. The familiarity and ease of the Messenger's contributors with the texture of community life is what, from an historical rather than literary perspective, make their work valuable to this study. Although the Messenger contained both fiction and non-fiction material, I decided to make fiction the focus of my enquiry on the assumption that, in the process of writing it, the authors would be enforcing rather than questioning Southern tradition, telling about their particular South, its people, its land and its beliefs.

Southern belief systems developed within a distinctive social, economic and cultural environment. As a result, Southerners imparted a special meaning to ideas that evolved outside the mainstream of their society. Values that could be presumed to be shared by both North and South were profoundly altered in a Southern setting. Although a degree of Southern sectionalism was created early in the nineteenth century by the differing economic and social structure between the Northern and Southern states, the

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21 Ibid., p.98.

Nullification crisis -- a dispute over federal tariffs in 1832 -- convinced many Southerners that they were becoming politically and economically disadvantaged by the rest of the Union. By the 1850's, such feelings had become intensified by persistent attacks upon the South's slave system. The Messenger, caught up in the movement toward Southern nationalism and the dislike of Yankees in general, was anxious to promote its version of an ideal society and show itself to be loyal to the South. The feelings, attitudes and ideas expressed in the magazine during this time will illuminate the dominant motives and emotions that were propelling the South toward affirmative action in its own defense.

I chose to locate this study between 1852 and 1860, a time when Southern anxiety over the section's rightful place within the Union was at its height. Strident antislavery activists were expressing views that ran contrary to everything Southerners had come to believe about themselves and their peculiar institution. William R. Taylor, writing in Cavalier and Yankee, argued that Southerners, put on the defensive, were quick to discover that "the strongest weapon they possessed for justifying their peculiar institution to themselves and others was the argument of plantation paternalism."22 As previously

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22 William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee (London, 1963), p.300.

mentioned, the plantation setting, in its classical form, and the idyllic relationship between master and slave, was a pervasive image in the creation of the Old South. It was a prominent genre for Southern authors such as Beverly Tucker and William Gilmore Simms whose romanticized imagery played upon the idea that the natural bonds of loyalty and affection, not the bonds of ownership, connected master and slave. The value of this portrait lay in its ability to allay Southerners' anxieties over a system which had been condemned by the rest of the Western world. However, in 1852, this particular literary convention underwent a re-evaluation at the hands of a Northern female writer that transformed the image of the American South in the eyes of the world.

When Harriet Beecher Stowe, the daughter of a Calvinist minister and the wife of another, sat down in 1851 to write Uncle Tom's Cabin, "her soul was all on fire with indignation" at the wrongs inflicted upon Southern negro slaves by their owners.23 Although she had published several short stories and sketches in various journals, her sympathy with the aims of abolitionist movement compelled her "to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which [she had] ample opportunities to

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23 Forest Wilson, Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe (Philadelphia, 1941), p.240.

study."24 In March 1852, Uncle Tom's Cabin was published in book form and became an overnight success in the North and in Europe. By May 1852, 50,000 copies had been sold and, by March 1853, worldwide sales had reached an estimated 2.5 million.25 It was felt to be, at the time, the masterwork of the century and one of the greatest novels ever written. However, such accolades were not heard south of the Mason-Dixon line. Stowe had effectively invalidated the idea of plantation paternalism. In her novel, the slave rather than the planter had taken centre stage, and the system had been openly portrayed as immoral and inhumane.

Stowe's intention was to portray slavery as an evil that had to be mitigated for the good of both blacks and whites. Her antislavery stance was founded upon religious and moral principle rather than sectional bitterness and she hoped that her readers would keep in mind "the more amiable qualities of those with whose principles [they] were obliged to conflict."26 However, the barrage of abuse which she received from the South showed that Southerners failed to find anything amiable or attractive

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24 Quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin (Cambridge, 1986) p.14.

25 Josephine Donovan, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Boston, 1991) xiv.

26 Thomas F. Gossett, Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture (Dallas, 1985) p.291.

in either the author or her book. Although Uncle Tom's Cabin did not contain any direct indictment against the South, it gave flesh and blood reality to a system which Stowe believed was a great unredressed injustice. While Stowe insisted that at all times she tried to "balance [her] mind by keeping before it the most agreeable patterns of Southern life and character," Southerners saw her portrait as a gross distortion of the truth.27

Whatever her intent, Stowe convinced Southerners of the seriousness of the times and of the need to rise to their own defence with a new sense of urgency. Although a work of fiction, Uncle Tom's Cabin demonstrated what James G.Randall described as "the potency of literature in the governance of men's minds."28 Stowe forced the South to look at itself through a Northerner's eyes, and the Messenger provides an invaluable and unique perspective on the results of this self-scrutiny. The task the Messenger set for itself was to counteract Stowe's distortions with a fair and honest image of the Southern people. The heart of the South, therefore, lay in the hands of its writers. Only they could find the words that would calm the anger and anxiety, give meaning to cultural relationships and affirm a Southern sense of community.

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27 Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee p.308.

28 James. G. Randall, The War and Reconstruction (Boston, 1937) pp.169-170.

I believe that the feelings, attitudes and ideas of the characters created by Southern writers at this time provide an illuminating perspective on Southern sectional character. Through the literary imagination, the most vexing questions of the day could be transformed into a moral and social assertion of Southern objectives without direct involvement in the polemics of sectional rivalry. In the existing climate of opinion, the Messenger's fiction reflected a blending of those themes to which the cultural conditions of the time were receptive. Therefore, by initially examining the most defensive posture of Southern writing, issues can be clarified that were central to the South's whole value system. Then the fiction writer can be located within his or her culture, and fiction can be related to fact in a way that will provide a deeper understanding of the society it was meant to interest, inform and entertain.

Chapter One

"As We Will And Not As The Winds Will" Answering Uncle Tom

Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, considered herself a painter, someone who could show slavery to the world in the most graphic and lifelike manner possible. "There is no arguing with pictures," she stated, "...everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not."29 Thus, when the beautiful quadroon slave-girl Eliza Harris leaped with bleeding feet across the ice floes of the Ohio River in a desperate flight to freedom, and when Tom, with his dying breath, forgave his tormentors and commended them to Jesus, Stowe gave a living dramatic reality to the most repulsive images of slavery. The power of such graphic portraits was critical, not only in the evolution of the antislavery movement, but in re-shaping the image of the South and its peculiar institution in the eyes of the world. Stowe had drawn upon many of the conventions of the plantation novel for Uncle Tom's Cabin; however, she had introduced the ugly specter of human bondage into one of the South's favorite literary conventions.

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29 Harriet Beecher Stowe to Gamaliel Bailey, 9 March,1851. quoted in Gossett, Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture p.97.

Many works in this genre had, in the past, been established according to well-defined, uniform and richly romantic values and were, to quote Francis Pendleton Gaines, "the pure essence of sentimentality."30 However, in using this genre for Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe demonstrated her awareness of its adaptability to the abolitionist cause. She portrayed a black world of pain, anxiety and fear, not the benign, contented world depicted by the plantation tradition. Stowe's readers were, probably for the first time, forced to imagine what it would be like to be a slave. Through her vivid portraits which showed that the basic elements of human nature existed under a black skin as well as white the Negro became a person rather than a thing.

Although Tom was intended to be the novel's major protagonist, it was Eliza who, as a black female, depicted the slave system at its most morally vulnerable. Her character, more than any other, presents a counterpoint to the fundamental elements of Southern ideology that justified the slave system. Both as an imaginative creation and as an effective antislavery argument, Eliza can lead us to the issues that initiated an explosion of bitterness in the South and propelled Southern writers into the forefront of the campaign to defend their section.

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30 Francis Pendleton Gaines, The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition (Gloucester, 1962), p.50.

Eliza is a young, attractive female of racially mixed blood; she is also a wife, a mother, and most importantly, a slave. It is not surprising that Stowe, herself a wife and the mother of six children, should identify with the issues of motherhood and the bonds that exist between a mother and her child. However, in creating Eliza, Stowe effectively combined these fundamental human emotions into her portrait of slavery, and a "fine female article" became, for thousands of readers, a poor creature, hunted down "jest for havin' natural feelin's, and doing what no kind o' mother could help a doin." 31 The quadroon girl showed the world all that Stowe found evil and ugly in the South's peculiar institution.

As the product of interracial coupling, Eliza confirmed the existence of miscegenation in Southern society, and her beauty, a "fatal inheritance to a slave," marked her as a sexual commodity.32 She was powerless, not only over her own body but also over her family. Her husband was kept from her by his hard master, and her son had been sold to a slavetrader by her seemingly indulgent owner. In this one character, Stowe brought together the cruelty, immorality, licentiousness, and inhumanity of slavery. And, by having Eliza cross the river from the

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31 Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly (Cleveland, 1852), p.149.

32 Ibid., p.17.

slave South to the free North, she was able to draw her contrast between North and South, freedom and slavery, good and evil. Stowe took one of the lowest and the most vulnerable inhabitants of the slave community, a young, black woman, and turned her into one of the most powerful antislavery portraits in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

When, in October, 1852, J.R.Thompson reviewed Uncle Tom's Cabin for the Southern Literary Messenger, his reaction to the implications of Stowe's work was uncharacteristically angry. His initial intent as editor of the Messenger had been to keep the journal free from the inflammatory issues of sectional dissent. However, Stowe's portrait of slavery and the South compelled Thompson to speak out against the way in which she had used her talents to "sow the seeds of strife and violence," "foment heart-burnings and unappeasable hatred," and "libel and vilify" the noble men in the "blooming garden of freedom."33 Her slanderous work, he stated, had found its way into every section of the country filling the minds of those who knew nothing of slavery with hatred for the institution and the people who upheld it. Stowe was accused of slandering the South on three very sensitive issues: the cruel treatment of slaves, the sundering of family ties by selling children away from their parents, and the lack of religious

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33 "Notices of New Works," Southern Literary Messenger (cited thereafter as SLM)18 (October, 1852), p.630.

instruction within the slave communities. Such accusations, Thompson believed, implied that Southerners were cruel, heartless and indifferent to the basic tenets of Christian morality. His rebuttal was formulated around his belief that the moral underpinnings of Southern society were derived from two sources, the law of God and the law of Man. When both were in place and supported by society as a whole, then even the most subordinate classes were guaranteed basic rights according to their position in life.

Thompson argued at length that the laws existing within his section were designed to protect the slave. The combination of both law and reason, he asserted, guaranteed, in almost all cases, the fair and humane treatment of black families when mitigated by the "salutary influences of enlightened public opinion."34 The issues raised by Eliza's character openly violated these beliefs and therefore became a major part of Thompson's attack upon Stowe. At this point in his argument, Thompson developed a defense of Southern morality based upon one of the fundamental components of the plantation legend, the ideal of the Southern woman. From his perspective, the "Titianesque" touches that Stowe gave Eliza was a major fault of Stowe's production. The way in which the Negro, under her brush, became handsome in person and in character

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34 Ibid., p.638.

proved a particular source of indignation to the reviewer because, he protested, while Stowe could see "Helen's beauty in the brow of Egypt" she was unable to look upon a white face without tracing in it "something sinister and repulsive." As a result, she had "sullied the idea of female purity and left "the trail of the serpent...over them all."35

The real focus of plantation life, as William R. Taylor states in Cavalier and Yankee, was not the planter but his wife, and, in the early plantation novels, women were not only committed to the plantation system but were its "heart and soul."36 Southern white women were, according to the tradition, "beyond description in beauty,... carefully nurtured hot-house creatures,...dainty damsels - tender and true."37 Such beliefs were expressed in the commentary of Southern authors such as Daniel R. Hundley and Thomas Nelson Page who affirmed that the plantation mistress was the centre of the home and the power behind the throne. Hundley summed up the legend when he wrote, "In her proper sphere woman wields the power, compared to which the lever of Archimedes was nothing more than a flexible blade of grass. It is she who rules the

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35 Ibid.,

36 Taylor, pp.162-163.

37 Gaines, The Southern Plantation p.50.

destinies of the world, not man."38 The pattern of this belief system as it developed in the South during the 1850's, can be clearly discerned in Thompson's review. Women like Harriet Beecher Stowe stepped outside the realm for which nature had intended them and spoke out on subjects that were not their concern. In creating Eliza, Stowe had shone a spotlight on areas of the slave system that a "lady writer" should not be permitted to portray, and by so doing had not only "o'erstepped the modesty of nature" but had exhibited a total ignorance of the safeguards within the slave system that Thompson claimed protected slaves from the brutality of slavecatchers and irresponsible masters. She had exaggerated the sundering of family ties in Negro families and, most importantly, had circulated a brand of falsehood which placed her "outside the pale of kindly treatment at the hands of Southern criticism."39

Two months later, the Messenger published a second review of Uncle Tom's Cabin attributed to George Frederick Holmes. This lengthy critique was more an apology for slavery and a defense of the South than a review of the offending book. However, Holmes' argument closely followed that of Thompson. Every fact, he claimed, had been

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38 Daniel R. Hundley, Social Relations in Our Southern States (New York, 1860), pp.14-15.

39 Ibid., p.631.

distorted by Stowe and every incident exaggerated in order to "awaken rancorous hatred and malignant jealousies between the citizens of the same republic." Holmes' anger against Stowe was intense and his language full of invective. Her novel, he claimed, was full of "poisonous vermin and putrescence," and Stowe herself was a "termagant virago" and "foul-mouthed hag" who had defiled the "halo of divinity" that encompassed a true lady. Interestingly, in his eleven page tirade against the novel, Holmes mentioned only Eliza directly calling her a "tawny Venus" of a "particular shade of tainted blood." Holmes recognized Eliza's pivotal role in Stowe's tale, but dismissed her as a total misrepresentation of Southern reality.40 Eliza's mixed parentage raised the sensitive issue of miscegenation in Southern society, and Holmes clearly recognized the danger a frank discussion of the subject posed for the South's image. Stowe, who exhibited none of the reticence expected of a Southern woman on such a socially taboo subject, had, in her disregard for female propriety, slandered the innocence of the South by transmuting a "dirty fancy" into an alleged truth and embarked upon a vulgar mission to defame the slaveholding section.41

In June, 1853, Holmes had a second opportunity to

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40 "Uncle Tom's Cabin," (review) SLM 18 (December, 1852), pp.722-726.

41 Ibid., p.731.

reproach Stowe for her treacherous doctrines as she had just published A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin which, in citing the sources upon which she had based her novel, was intended to allay some of the intense criticism directed at her work and at herself. However, Stowe's new book only served to provoke more Southern indignation. Again the issue turned on female tact and sensitivity. "If Mrs. Stowe will chronicle the incidents of debauchery, let us hope that women - and especially Southern women, will not be found poring over her pages," Holmes wrote in the Messenger. He was indignant that "scenes of license and impurity...loathsome depravity and habitual prostitution" should be made the "cherished topics of the female pen." With a flagrant disregard for propriety, Stowe, and other writers of the "women's rights" school, had "unsexed ... the female mind, and shattered the temple of feminine delicacy." It was unacceptable that a Northern woman should be instrumental in disseminating a "vile stream of contagion" that, if they brought its "putrid water to their lips, could defile Southern women."42

Like Thompson's, Holmes' argument conforms on the surface to the Southern ideal of womanhood. However, it is evident that something deeper was agitating Holmes. He was certain that Stowe's message, couched in the guise of

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42 "A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," (review), SLM 19 (June, 1853), pp.322-323. Signed G.F.H.

fiction, contained a force which, by weakening the resolve of Southern women to maintain and support their section's cultural ideals, could ultimately undermine Southern unity. Holmes' reaction to Stowe's "dirty insinuations" not only provides evidence of male ideology concerning the proper sphere of women in Southern society, but indicates, more significantly, the existence of a distinct fear that women, inspired by the "fatal contamination" of the "Stowe-ic philosophy," might be encouraged to redress their grievances through social action.43 Stowe's book not only proclaimed the South's peculiar institution to be an evil but made it clear that a double standard of morality existed within Southern society which linked slavery to the paradoxical issues of female influence and impotence within the slave regime.

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, it was Eliza the slave girl who risked everything in her fight against the injustice of the slave regime while her white Southern counterparts proved ultimately to have little practical influence over existing conditions as Mrs. Haley, the wife of Eliza's master, best illustrates. As a Christian woman, she tries to stop her husband from selling Tom and Eliza's son Harry. However, her husband's will prevails, and she finally admits that she was a fool to think that she "could make any good of such a deadly evil." Slavery, as she saw it, was both "a

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43 Ibid., p.323.

curse to the master and a curse to the slave."44 Such beliefs, expressed by an otherwise obedient and virtuous Southern woman, cut deeply into the heart of the slave-holding ideology.

The Messenger provides strong evidence that a strict code of behaviour surrounded Southern women, and that the South's particular ideology relied heavily on the maintenance and promotion of women's traditional role. It was not only men, however, that chose to promote this particular viewpoint. Julia Gardner Tyler, writing in the Messenger in 1853, gives a female perspective of the issues at hand. "A woman," Mrs. Tyler stated, "confines herself within that sphere for which the God who made her seems to have designed her. Her circle is literally and emphatically that of her family." Any Southern woman who followed Stowe outside the female area of concern would, according to Mrs.Tyler, be "dethroned from her high position and face the odium of her society."45 A few months later Stowe, described as the "perfect female Hercules," was accused of trying to keep up with the masculine mind, unlike an honourable woman who stayed "within her own peculiar path" and listened to the "earnest

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44 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.38.

45 Julia Gardner Tyler, "To the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England," SLM 19 (February, 1853), pp.120-121.

invocations of home."46

What concerned these writers most was that Southern women had become implicated in the perpetuation of a great social and moral evil. Thus, for the South, the concept of unsullied, undefiled womanhood became an integral part of the pro-slavery line of defense. The anti-Stowe rhetoric proves that Southern women provided the moral fibre which wove itself throughout Southern society. Therefore, if their resolve became weakened as a result of Stowe's powerful argument, it could have devastating consequences at a time when the section most needed to maintain solidarity. From this standpoint, the qualities and characteristics assigned to Southern women represent more than just the idealization of the plantation matriarch, they were linked to the very survival of the South itself.

In 1859, long after Harriet Beecher Stowe had been dismissed as a cause for concern, Alexander H. Sands addressed the women of the Hollis Female Institute in Virginia and began, like his contemporaries, by reaffirming the belief that the social values of the section were reflected in its women's character and culture. "Men may rule the court, the camp, the grove," he stated, and "dictate the regimen of the State,... but, the social problems which [were] the subject and the origin of the

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46 "A Woman's True Mission," SLM 19 (May, 1853), p.303. Signed E. Charleston.

laws, the manners and customs of the people [were] the product, directly or indirectly, of the women."47 However, the crux of his argument focused upon a fear that a "false sentiment," suggesting that the institution of slavery was wrong, was spreading among Southern women. The true philosophy of an educated woman in the South was to "contribute to the good order of the State by promoting the growth of a popular sentiment on [slavery] and to lend sympathy and encouragement to her home in its strife with Northern fanaticism and folly."48 Women had a critical task to perform. "Slavery," Sands told his female audience, was the institution around which "the dearest interests of the State are gathered." One of the most disquieting issues facing Southern partisans, Sands noted, was how to reconcile the finer sensibilities of their section into a system with an undeniably commercial base which Stowe had exposed and condemned as the most degrading and morally perverting aspects of slaveholding. Sands admitted that this was not an easy task because the slave population of the South constituted a "species of property" estimated at $1,600,000,000."49

The Messenger clearly indicates, however, that the

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47 Alexander H. Sands, "Intellectual Culture of Women," SLM 28 (May 1859), p.329. An address delivered before the Hollis Female Institute, April 6, 1859.

48 Ibid., p.331.

49 Ibid., p.330.

South's defenders preferred to see slavery as a moral problem that required a solution firmly grounded in moral principles. Southern writers turned to the ideals embodied by their womenfolk to mount a righteous challenge that would humanize the institution of slavery, strengthen their society and dispute the abolitionist doctrine which claimed slavery to be a moral evil. The South had been charged by Stowe with the most degrading aspects of human behaviour. She portrayed slaveholders as being indifferent to Christian morality and motivated solely by economic interests. For the slaveholders in Uncle Tom's Cabin, economic considerations took precedence over humanitarian values. When the slaveholder Shelby is castigated by his wife for selling Tom and young Harry, he defends his actions on the grounds that he needs the money the slaves will bring. "I can't help myself," he answers weakly.50 Augustine St. Clare, another seemingly benign and indulgent slaveowner, also justifies the institution on the grounds of economic self-interest. Although he admits to having vague yearnings to be an emancipator, he lives an indolent life supported by the system which he claims to abhor, and when confronted about the evils inherent in the system he states, "the best we can do is shut our eyes and ears."51

Where St. Clare was self-indulgent and lazy, Shelby

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50 Ibid., p.330.

51 Ibid., p.328.

was weak and fiscally incompetent and, although both had consciences, they acted contrary to their beliefs. Stowe showed that, despite the South's protestations to the contrary, the cold, hard values of the marketplace took precedence over the benevolent patriarchal authority with which slaveholders, according to the tradition, were supposed to govern the lives of their charges. The slavetrader Haley and the overseer Legree showed this aspect of slavery at its worst. To these men on the fringe of slaveholding society, slaves had no other worth other than their monetary value. "When one nigger's dead," says Legree, " I buy another; and I find it comes cheaper and easier, every way."52 Stowe's black male hero Tom, like Eliza, was seen as a commodity to his owners, and by having Tom whipped to death by the ruthless Legree, Stowe showed that it was the black man who was willing to endure cruelty and injustice for the sake of his Christian values, while the white man was unwilling to reject slavery for the sake of his. A great deal of anger was expressed by Southerners over the accusation that they would compromise their Christian beliefs rather than relinquish their human property.

In response to such accusations, Southern writers fell back upon the basic tenets of the Southern social code. Wherever evil existed, one supporter argued, evil results

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52 Ibid., p.348.

would follow, but slavery in the South derived its moral character from those who were involved in it. It becomes clear why Southern women, considered so critical to the South's wholesome image, became a vital factor in the proslavery argument. Within the South, the writer declared, there existed a body of wholesome, spiritually pure women who could not have passed unpolluted through such a "fiery furnace of abominations" as Stowe had depicted.53 Another contributor confirms that a particular line of defense was being carefully formulated around the women of the South. "The institution of slavery," the writer claimed, not only "supplied a school of moral discipline to the men of the South" but "had a direct agency in preserving the noblest, loveliest and purest race of women ever sent by Heaven to comfort and adorn humanity."54

Anti-Northern rhetoric had served to vent passions and salve wounded pride, but Southerners also saw a real need to protect the welfare and stability of their own society. This required a different, more subtle approach to the problem, and women provided a solution that would cleverly

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53 "Charity Which Does Not Begin At Home," SLM 19 (April 1853) pp.196-198. signed L.S.M. attributed to Louisa S. McCord in David K. Jackson, Contributors and Contributions to the Southern Literary Messenger (Charlottesville, 1936), p.117.

54 "De Servitude: a brief enquiry into the moral question," SLM 20 (June 1854), p.425. Signed J.A.W., M.D.

turn the antislavery argument on its head. If, as its women proved beyond doubt, Southern society was inherently noble, then any institution that thrived in its midst could not, by association, be inherently flawed. Once such a satisfactory basis for the proslavery defense had been established, Southern writers grasped the means of protecting their society against Northern falsehood. If they could not convince Northerners that slavery was a beneficent institution, they could at least provide their own section with a rationale for the preservation of their way of life. The slaves themselves provided additional material which Southern defenders used to further substantiate this line of reasoning.

The fact that the Negro was considered inherently inferior to the white race was a major factor in the South's proslavery defense. Southerners believed that the Negro, like every creation of God, was "beautifully fitted to his intended position," and that "the finger of Providence manifestly interfered to maintain slavery."55 Negroes in the South, it was stated, were the happiest, most contented and enlightened class of rural labourers in the world. The portrait of slavery found in Uncle Tom's Cabin had slandered not only Southern whites but the Negroes themselves who, in physical comfort, moral and religious improvement and civilization, were vastly

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55 Ibid., p.425.

superior to their brethren in Africa.564 Life in bondage had turned the African from a savage into a civilized being, and the condition of the slaves themselves proved that "the beneficial influence of slavery on the negro, [was] beyond dispute."57 A slaveholder wrote to the Messenger to dispute the idea that, by owning slaves, he was committing an immoral act. "The scripture," he stated, "directs me how to act to my slaves and directs my slaves how to act towards me...hence this state in social life being under Divine regulation, has the Divine sanction."58 Slavery, so the argument ran, was sanctioned in the scriptures with the consent of the Apostles under "the open direction and express inspiration of God."59 Because the slave was bound by God to render obedience to his or her owner, the real sinners were those who tempted them from their designated place. Stowe, however, negated this contention by depicting her black characters as morally superior to their white owners.

Eliza was both brave and beautiful, and Tom was filled with a type of holiness that Southerners admired in

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56 "A Few Thoughts on Slavery," SLM 20 (April, 1854), pp.195-197.

57 "American Slavery in 1857." SLM 25 (August, 1857) pp.81-94.

58 W.S.Grayson, "Is Slavery Right?" SLM 28 (October 1860), p.251.

59 E. Boyden, "The Epidemic of the Nineteenth Century," SLM 31 (November, 1860), p.367.

themselves but regarded as totally implausible in a slave. Holmes illustrated the Southern viewpoint in the Messenger. "The whole tenor of this pathetic tale," he wrote, "derives most of its significance and colouring from a distorted representation or a false conception of the sentiments and feelings of the slaves." What would have been a "grievous misery" to a white man was, Holmes claimed, "none to the differently tempered black," and thus the institution of slavery constituted "no portion of his misery."60 Although these racist beliefs were by no means exclusive to the slaveholding South, they were used at length to diffuse Stowe's charges of the South's inhumanity against the black race. The Messenger shows, however, that Southerners believed the real force of Stowe's attack to be directed at white society rather than at slavery itself. As a result, two major issues had to be integrated into the Southern defense: the wholesome purity of the Southern white population as reflected in its womenfolk, and the God-given right of a white race to hold a naturally inferior black race under its control.

Southern writers blamed the widening rift between the North and South on a vast difference in mind and character between the two sections. Slavery, they advocated, was only at variance with Northern ideas of liberty and

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60 "Uncle Tom's Cabin," SLM 28 (December, 1852), p.728.

Northern ideas of religion. Northerners, in their ignorance, could not grasp the true nature of the enslaved race nor the true character of the Southern people. The South's enemies had represented slavery as a system of brutal oppression and social wrong without stopping to examine the realities of the situation. Therefore, when dealing with what had become the most important issue in the history of the South, Southerners fell back upon the perceived strengths of their section and grouped their forces around the controlling elements of Southern society that gave character to the whole. A writer in 1860 summed up the Southern idea of who and what they were. "The Southern mind," he stated, "is disposed to quiet and to gentleness...and equal to the highest flight of genius... naturally generous...fierce and fearless in a contest yet generous and gentle in command."61

The glorification of Southern women as ethically and culturally pure, the tender feelings between owner and slave, the sense of responsibility of the white race toward the blacks in their charge -- these were the consoling beliefs that had been challenged by the publication of a single best-selling book. In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Southerners found themselves faced with contradictions of a particularly disquieting kind, for Stowe had destroyed the

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61 "The Difference of Race Between the Northern and Southern People," SLM 30 (June, 1860), p.405.

formula upon which the slavery apologia relied. At a time when slavery was being portrayed as an unacceptable contradiction of the fundamental values of a Christian, moral, democratic society, the task for Southern authors was to find a balance between fact and fantasy, fiction and truth in framing a rebuttal to Stowe's indictment.

The Messenger's polemical response to Uncle Tom's Cabin is a clear expression of the preferred arguments used to justify the Southern world view particularly in regard to the opinions, tastes, and cultural values that dominated the South in the decade before the war. It is evident that the defamation of the Southern character aroused the most anger and that the undermining of an established Southern world view created the most fear. Southerners never denied that slavery supported the social edifice of the South and, as the Messenger shows, they fully realized that its removal would destroy Southern society as they knew it. Stowe's Southern critics looked for the strengths within their society which could prevent such destruction from taking place. According to Thompson, the Southern people were at last awakening to a true sense of what they owed themselves, and the Messenger could only benefit from the agitation of the Southern mind brought about by Stowe.62 If Southern authors were to secure a dispassionate hearing for their section, a prescription for a new literary order

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62 "Editor's Table," SLM 30 (January, 1854), p.59.

had to be generated, and Southern literary endeavors had to move toward a single objective consonant with what Southerners perceived as their destiny. Thompson, throughout his years as editor, contended that the Messenger supplied a repository for the chance ideas of thinking men and captured valuable thoughts that would never have otherwise been committed to paper. As resentment grew over the North's use of the written word to defame the slaveholding section, the Messenger's motto, "As We Will And Not As The Winds Will," was seen as a particularly fitting choice for a magazine eager to exemplify Southern independent thought. Benjamin Blake Minor, editor and proprietor of the Messenger from 1843 to 1847, had chosen "In the South and for the South: In the Union and for the Union," as the original motto for the magazine. However, Thompson was convinced that the South had been betrayed by "Harriet Breeches Stowe" and her Northern supporters and enthusiastically endorsed the idea that the South's writers should be charged with "an independent but sublime mission" to "mediate between angry passions of opposing parties, heal the wounds of sectional strife...and to hold up in its true light ...the character and condition of that great region of the Confederacy, around which ignorance, prejudice and fanaticism [had]

spread it darkening mists."63

As the South drew upon its women to hold together the social fabric of its society, so it began to look to its writers to put its case before a skeptical world and prepare the hearts and minds of the Southern people for the the trials which lay ahead. Although intellectual activity in the South was by no means confined to the formal defense of slavery, the primary motive according to Southern apologists was to champion the fundamental belief systems of their section. Therefore, beneath the pro-slavery, anti-Northern rhetoric can be found the workings of the Southern mind.

The works discussed so far provide the necessary background for the consideration of the true focus of this investigation because they point out the prevailing arguments used in favour of the Southern cause. The Messenger makes it clear that Southerners were not ready to give up slavery and felt they still had the means to defend themselves. The South's defenders fell back upon the support afforded by a well-established cultural identity. Southern writers of importance contributed to the Messenger as did those whose names left no imprint on the pages of

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63 "Notices of New Works," SLM 19 (September, 1853), p.583.

history. Taken together, their stories can represent an invaluable source for analyzing Southern ideology and suggesting conclusions about the nature of antebellum culture in the slaveholding States of America.

Chapter Two

Fulfilling the Law of Heaven
Southern Womanhood

The Messenger demonstrated that the ideological belief system that encompassed women in the Old South was not only integral to the basic issues of everyday life but charged with the values and ideas which gave meaning to the Southern experience as a slaveholding society. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown pointed out, the myth of Southern womanhood took on an exaggerated importance in the South when the section's most fundamental social values came under attack. It not only ensured the outward submission of women to male will, he claimed, but also incorporated the ideas of inner constraint and hardiness within the framework of the softer feminine values of modesty, reserve, warmth and affection. It was hoped that Southern women would bear the burdens of life with grace and courage and, most especially, silence, while maintaining an outward appearance of restraint and composure that would belie any inner turmoil or anxiety.64 As the Messenger shows, the burden of proof had fallen upon the entire South and, as W.J.Cash pointed out, in the face of Yankee hatred, the South made its women

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64 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor p.234.

into the "standard for its rallying, [and] the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe."65

The mythology surrounding Southern women was, at this point in the section's history, used in a new and more dynamic way - to exonerate the South. Placed on the defensive by the abolitionist attack, Southern writers appropriated the myth of Southern womanhood to meet the altered demands of their section. Southern women became larger than life, a symbol of the purity and morality not only of the family, but of the entire slaveholding section. The women who populated the Messenger's fiction provide an invaluable insight into the way the South wished to see itself and to be seen by others. Although such women were only pictures in the minds of their creators, the evidence indicates that they could be much more.

An address given before the Ladies' Mount Vernon Association illustrates the function of the myth when it became integrated into the emotional struggle over slavery. Focusing upon the higher mission of women the speaker asks "if there be on earth a sacred cause which may successfully appeal to the most elevated and womanly attributes of woman - is it not the cause of extinguishing, in our country, sectional feelings and sectional asperities?" Because man was a "victim of fierce and ungovernable passions who would sacrifice the higher and more ennobling aspirations to

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65 Cash, p.86.

purchase a satisfactory vengeance," it fell to women to "dash the cup of vengeance from their lips" and with a "whisper of rebuke or gentle admonition ...silence the ravings of a besotted fanaticism, and crush the plottings of a Satanic treason." As the "Ship of State plunged headlong upon an angry sea, amid tempest tossed waves and threatening breakers", it appeared that Southern women had been given the helm.66 Southern writers and orators were in little doubt that their women were capable of the task because, the speaker explains, a Southern woman "[proffered] her homage at no shrine save that of virtue." Their instincts and spirits would prove an effective rallying cry "were the foot of an insolent invader again to be planted on [Southern] soil" and would "speed the sons of South to the rescue."67

During a time of crisis, a woman could no longer remain confined within the domestic circle, nor could she remain passive and powerless. Nevertheless, because she lived in a society based upon a rigid caste system, the Southern woman remained limited by the weapons put at her disposal - her purity, her virtue and her inner strength. Looking at the women in Southern fiction with these ideas in mind, what we need to consider is if their behaviour

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66 "Address," Delivered before the Ladies' Mount Vernon Association, July 4, 1855, by Beverly R. Wellford, Jr., SLM 21 (September,1855), pp.562-566, p.564.

67 Ibid., p.562.

either promoted or challenged such prevailing beliefs and how, if at all, they resolved the contradictions that existed within the slave South. When examined both for what they are and also for what they are not, the women who live within the pages of the Messenger provide a crucial point of departure into the mind of the South. The Messenger's authors drew widely upon the themes that were readily available in the South: the patriotic fervour of its colonial period and the Revolutionary War, the patriotism and bravery of its people, the beauty and grandeur of its scenery, but none was more enthusiastically embraced than the relationship of female characteristics to society as a whole. Readings thus far have given us some understanding as to why this may have been so. It is clear that a woman's role in Southern society, while not necessarily directly related to slavery and the issues raised by Stowe, could not, as far as the South was concerned, be divorced from them.

We shall begin with Sybil Gray, perhaps one of the most notable treatments of the idealized woman in the Messenger. Initially, her character serves to reinforce a stereotype central to nineteenth-century literary fiction. Sybil was the creation of a "gifted author" in a romantic novel called "Vernon Grove, or, Hearts As They Are."68

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68 "Vernon Grove, or, Hearts As They Are" SLM 26 (January, 1858), pp.33-51; (February, 1858), pp.99-118; (March, 1858), pp.193-215; (April, 1858), pp.273-287;

An ingenuous orphan whose life has been fortified with lessons in goodness and truth, her worth stems, not from wealth or social status, but from a fund of inner merit. She is Stowe's Evangeline St. Clare grown to womanhood. Like Eva, Sybil is childlike, docile and innocent, and inspired by a driving spiritual force. In this story, she shows how a cultural ideal can be used to connect the female experience with the different historical forces that influenced its portrayal. Eva's personal qualities were commendable by Southern standards but her motives were not, for Stowe had created Eva to become the embodiment of antislavery sentiment, an innocent child who would speak for the slave in God's name. Sybil, in contrast, reflects the concerns and ideals of the social and literary milieu in which "Vernon Grove" was created.

The hero of "Vernon Grove," Richard Vernon, is a wealthy landowner who, blinded by a fever, has become embittered and cynical. He sees no purpose in his existence and has no hope for the future. However, when he takes the ingenuous young Sybil into his home as a companion/protegee, his life is irrecoverably changed. "The soft accents of her truthful voice fell like dew upon his angry heart" opening it to the "holier influences of

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(May, 1858), pp.360-382; (June, 1858), pp.433-450; (July, 1858), pp.33-48; (August, 1858), pp.95-111. 27

life."69 Although Sybil frequently feels she is too weak for the task, God is her strength. With an indomitable spirit and unerring piety, she stirs the "stagnant waters of his soul by speaking truths which he had never dwelt upon" and thereby conquers a "proud, rough, and unfeeling man."70 Once this task is accomplished, its beneficial influences become apparent. Vernon's dark, chaotic world becomes peaceful and contented. Although Sybil is beautiful, her appearance is not important in this story, and Vernon's blindness effectively illustrates this fact. To him, Sybil "might be as beautiful as an angel, or as repulsive in appearance, he only saw the purity of her heart and loved her."71 If we peel away the layers of fantasy and romance surrounding Sybil's unworldly perfection, the motives of the author are, interestingly enough, not so far removed from those of Harriet Beecher Stowe when she decided to expose the evils of slavery in a novel.

Stowe hoped that her graphic portrayal of slavery in Uncle Tom's Cabin, would prick the Southern conscience and compel the South to bring about its abolition. If only the South could be convinced that slaveholding was a sin, it could be ended by a great act of sectional repentance.

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69 "Vernon Grove," SLM 26 (February, 1858), p.104.

70 Ibid., p.109.

71 Ibid., (January, 1858), p.115.

Because she believed women to be the moral and spiritual base of their communities, Stowe considered them an effective starting point from which to bring about the conversion of the entire South. As the Messenger illustrates, Southerners were not unaware of the efficacy of this idea. In "Vernon Grove", a Southern female author attempts to show how a woman who is steadfast in her beliefs and dedicated to the most elevated ideals of Southern society cannot be corrupted by harmful influences. The South needed women who, armed with the courage of their convictions, could do for their section what Sybil did for Richard Vernon. Where Stowe hoped for women's conversion to her cause, the South desperately needed their compliance with its own. In "Vernon Grove", this message was made clear to the women of the South. No sacrifice had been too great and no pain too difficult to bear for Sybil in her desire to create a safe haven for Richard Vernon. His world was in darkness and chaos and Sybil filled it with light. What this one strong, devout woman did for a recalcitrant man, many women could do for an entire section in need of comfort and stability as dark shadows of fear and uncertainty gathered over it.

Heroines like Sybil, who exercised great control over themselves in order to influence others, were greatly favoured by the Messenger's writers. Southerners were particularly incensed by Stowe's assertion that the slave

system encouraged immorality, idleness and cruelty, not only among its menfolks, but among Southern women. Marie St. Clare, the indolent, spoiled and cruel mother of the saintly Eva, was considered one of the most defamatory characters in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Thompson declared that, "as a portraiture of Southern female character, she [was] a gross and stupendous libel."72 Because of her callous and self-indulgent attitude, the St. Clare home was chaotic and inefficient and its master, Augustine St. Clare, had no ultimate control over its future. Such an image, in a society desperate to maintain some semblance of order, could not be allowed to occupy the popular imagination. Southern sensibilities could only be restored by positive confirmation that their women could overcome the moral pitfalls that Stowe implied were the legacy of a slaveholding society.

In "Chronicles of a Planter's Hall", we encounter the South's answer to Marie St. Clare - women who remained pure and uncorrupted while living in a slaveholding environment.73 It is harvest time on a plantation named Hope. The setting is idyllic, the landscape is beautiful, the sheaves in the fields are ripe and golden and the

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72 "Notices of New Works," SLM 18 (October, 1852), p.635.

73 "Chronicles of a Planter's Hall," SLM 20 (September, 1854) pp.616-624, (November, 1854), pp.674-685.

master, Horace Effingham, welcomes his sister Emily home from boarding school. She has brought a friend to stay at the plantation, a Methodist girl who frightens Horace with her extreme piety. "What a confounded fool I have let you make of me," he tells his sister, "inviting Elizabeth here, preaching, praying, all the time. I such a sinner and she such a saint...what is to become of us?" Emily defends Elizabeth on the grounds that she is so truly good that she makes others feel good by her presence. "Nobody can see her and not feel it," she tells her skeptical brother.74

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth's healing influence falls upon Horace whose soul is scathed by years of sin and hardened by habit. When fever strikes the plantation and the crops are left to wither in the fields, Horace easily curses Fortune for wishing evil upon him. However, Elizabeth prevails upon him to pray and, when he finally kneels to ask forgiveness of the Lord, a change comes over him which is "visible to every eye." A state of tranquility comes upon Horace's harassed soul, and a "crowning peace" descends upon Hope.75 The danger passes, the crops are saved and everything on the plantation is restored to its former order. Through this sequence of events, the author shows his readers that, in desperate times, a good woman had the ability to calm

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74 Ibid., (October, 1854), p.617.

75 Ibid., (November, 1854), p.674.

fears, restore faith and bring order out of chaos.

Elizabeth, like Sybil, is subtly understated as a heroine. Her meek and tender demeanor belies the strength of purpose with which, despite trials and temptations, she performs her duty. "Perform it steadily," Horace tells Elizabeth, "it may prove a beacon-light on earth and a crown of rejoicing hereafter."76 Such women clearly identify the cliches associated with the South, but they also offer solutions for some of the deficiencies that were seen to exist in the Southern character. For many of the Messenger's authors, the weaknesses that dwelt within Southerners themselves were more likely to enervate the South than the attendant evils associated with slavery. In her book on the Southern belle, Kathryn Lee Seidel defines this belief as it pertained to Southern women. Because Southern men had the most to lose if slavery was abolished, it was to their advantage to promote the Southern woman as an American Eve who could transform the land into an undefiled garden. She argues, however, that after 1850 it was difficult for Southern writers, especially women, to make this argument convincing because the garden was already polluted by the evil of slavery.77 The Messenger's fiction suggests otherwise. Its contributions

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76 Ibid., p.520.

77 Kathryn Lee Seidel, The Southern Belle in the American Novel (Tampa, 1985), p.119.

indicate that it was antislavery rhetoric that, if allowed to insinuate itself into the minds of the Southern people, had the power to undermine the fabric of their society. Hence, the magazine's writers turned to an accepted formula which defined women as the guardians of the South's way of life. The nature of this guardianship is well defined by the literature and embodies many of the more complex issues surrounding the South's defense of its institutions than may be indicated by the often overly sentimental nature of the material.

The sketch "A Rose of North Alabama" elaborates upon this point. The sketch deals in its entirety with the virtues of an unidentified young woman who shows the idealization of the Southern woman at its extreme. We meet this heroine reclining on a mossy bank, a picture of grace and elegance with a "placid and holy light" gleaming from her dark brown eyes. She is guileless and innocent with a heart as "pure as that of Eve, when first she opened her eyes upon the beauties of Paradise."78 She brings a peaceful serenity to the Southern garden which is seemingly perfect but, as the author warns his readers, at any time this lovely creature may be overwhelmed by changing times. He believes that attempts were being made to uproot a woman's simplicity - "the brightest and purest jewel in her

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78 "A Rose of North Alabama: A Sketch," SLM 23 (November, 1856), pp.375-385.

coronet," and, while no flaw can be found in this Southern Eve, corruption will come from the introduction of "unnatural forces" which "tinge the spirit with an unnatural hue."79 The author suggests, like Holmes and Sands before him, that the guileless innocence of the Southern woman could be destroyed by any knowledge that would cause her to view her life in the slave states in a different light. As the biblical Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and destroyed the beautiful innocence of Eden, the Southern woman, tempted to imbibe knowledge equally as destructive, could lead the South towards its demise. Conversely, if she held firm to the established beliefs that supported the Southern world view, she had ultimate power over its fate.

A short story called "The Literary Wife" works to quiet this fear over such potential threats to a woman's purity. It attempts to show how, if a woman acquired the right type of knowledge, under the right circumstances and put it to its correct use, she would benefit rather than harm the South. A chance encounter reunites two young men who discuss how their lives have changed since they last met. Harry Norwood is a wealthy, unmarried socialite, while Frank Weston has become a family man and a stalwart member of his community. It is Frank's wife who becomes the focus of the conversation. Mrs. Weston, the reader learns,

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79 Ibid., p.377.

is not only the perfect wife and mother but a writer of considerable talent. This fact shocks Norwood who declares he has a perfect horror of "literary women" who he believes are "monsters...malformations in every variety of the works of nature" who neglect their appropriate duties and "allow personal proclivities to usurp the place of moral principles."80

The Messenger's angry evaluation of Harriet Beecher Stowe is clearly brought to mind by these negative opinions. However, in this case, the author makes the point that the woman under discussion is Southern and, unlike her Northern counterpart, has been thoroughly and rightly educated and made fully appreciative of her duties and privileges. Weston calls his wife a "glorified spirit...pure and guileless as the dew-drop that sparkles on the rose bud [and]...as spotless as the sun-beam itself [which] gathers naught of the impurity with which it comes in contact."81 He assures Norwood that such women, who have learned their own true and beautiful position in society, are not to be feared but encouraged. Only they, he believes, can lay a good foundation for the "rearing of a noble structure of wisdom and virtue, that shall defy all

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80 "The Literary Wife," SLM 23 (December, 1856), pp.401- 410., p.403. Signed F.G.R.D. Charlottesville., Va.

81 Ibid., p.402.

the after attacks of fanaticism, infidelity and ultraism".82 By using this line of reasoning, attention could be focused on the moral worth of those who formed the foundation of the slaveholding section, counteracting Stowe's claim that slavery had a corrupting influence upon the Southern people.

By the 1850's, however, this ideal woman, guardian of the ideal home, had also become the guardian of an ideal South, incontestible proof of its gentility, its pride and the harmonious arrangements of its society. Defined as the weaker sex, yet invested with a great deal of power in the social realm, women in the Messenger's fiction mirror the paradoxical issues of the slavery debate. Slavery, held as the South's greatest economic strength, had been presented to the world as the cause of its moral downfall. This disparity presented Southern intellectuals with a host of contradictory evidence from which to compose a coherent rebuttal. The female issue, on the other hand, provided an easy means of resolving any apprehension about the potential misdirection of Southern loyalties and restoring optimism over the state of Southern society. Portraits of morally strong and righteous women could also serve to humanize a society seen by the outside world as the perpetuator of a dehumanizing institution. This led the Messenger's authors to attempt a reconciliation of the more

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82 Ibid., p.407.

socially desirable strengths of the female sex with what were considered its inherent weaknesses. Although the character of Marie St. Clare offended the South, its writers did not deny that weak and unethical women could be found in Southern society. However, as previously stated, their flaws were seen to stem, not from the corrupting influences of slavery as Stowe had implied, but from a lack of moral and mental training which was necessary to sustain a woman's best qualities.

The story, "Shade and Sunshine" gives an excellent example of the development of this argument. Alice and Anna are the daughters of two wealthy brothers living in Richmond, Virginia. Alice, the spoiled child of a vain, extravagant woman, has become, through lack of supervision, conceited and heartless. Anna, by comparison, was raised by a lovely, intelligent woman who educated her in such a way as to fit her for the higher post of woman. Because of their differences, the cousins live very different lives. Alice pursues a hedonistic lifestyle and marries for money and status. Anna, in stark contrast, is "guided toward the purest light of domestic love," and sacrifices her future to care for her parents through times of hardship and fatal illness.83 Ultimately, Alice's wealthy husband deserts her and her life becomes desolate. On her deathbed, she

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83 Augusta Greenwood, "Shade and Sunshine," SLM 21 (January, 1855), pp.48-56. (February, 1855), pp.105-113., p.111.

realizes that Anna, despite her hard and self-sacrificing life, has found the happiness and contentment that she will never know. Anna is never tempted to enter Alice's world of self-indulgence and superficial pleasure. With unfailing goodness and all-forgiving love, Anna prevails upon her wayward cousin to repent of her sinful career and give herself to the God of Mercy.

Here the author deals with the dual perception of women in Southern society while, at the same time, providing models for female behavior which support and confirm the myth. She confirms the belief that of all the many threats to a woman's purity, their own inherent weakness was the greatest. The cousins represent the two sides of woman, the shade and the sunshine implied by the title. Alice is merely a foil for the idealized Anna who, even in close association with her cousin's weakness and corruption, cannot be swayed from her convictions. At this point in the South's history, a woman like Alice could not be allowed to dominate either in Southern literary fiction or in Southern society. The frequent use of this theme proves its worth as a literary tool.

In Unloved, we again meet two cousins, Mary and Ida, who, like Alice and Anna, are totally dissimilar in their personalities. Mary, is plain but kind and self-sacrificing. Ida is a "golden-haired darling" petted and spoiled by the maiden aunt with whom the two girls live.

On her death bed, the aunt asks Mary to be a mother to little Ida - "guard her as you would your own soul and lead her up to heaven," she begs.84 True to her Aunt's wishes, Mary turns to writing to support her vain and selfish cousin. Unfortunately, Ida, who has no sense of loyalty, repays her devotion by seducing the young man that Mary loves then rejecting him for a wealthy merchant. When Ida runs away, Mary shows no malice toward her cousin but is filled with remorse for failing in the duty entrusted to her by her late aunt. She cannot believe that Ida would reject a good and loving home for the pursuit of pleasure and shallow self-indulgence. As the years pass and Ida fails to return, Mary is overcome with self-recrimination and eventually "the loveliest of earth's flowers" goes to that "blessed land" where "the weary are at rest."85 The reader is left with an image of a Southern woman whose very being was founded upon a dedication to duty so intense that it overshadowed all other demands upon her life. In the longer, serialized stories this dual image of Southern women finds its most positive application as an guide to the South's moral and cultural demands upon its fairer sex and upon itself.

Returning to "Vernon Grove," we can look more closely

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84 "Unloved," SLM 30 (February, 1860), pp.139-144, signed Mabel, Newtonia, Miss.

85 Ibid., p.144.

at women who contradict the popular image of the idealized Southern woman yet, by the very nature of their deficiencies, reinforce its most valued concepts. By affirming the goodness of one woman over the corruption of another, Southern authors could strengthen the belief that Southern life was founded upon the ideal. Richard Vernon has a sister, Isabel, a radiant beauty for whom pleasure was the only end. Her equally beautiful friend, Florence, loved wealth better than life itself and schemes with Isabel to part Vernon from Sybil and become his wife. Unlike Sybil, who seeks only to bring light into a blind man's lonely world, Florence does not care if Vernon has lost his sight as long as he hasn't lost his fortune. Together, these two women represent every vice and weakness that could destroy the image of Southern innocence. They are vain, greedy, selfish and cruel. However, as the story unfolds, Isabel's cruelty and Florence's greed are proved powerless against the guileless innocence and pious strength of Sybil. Feeling like a dove in the presence of a hawk, Sybil resorts to her one safeguard - prayer. Her unshakable trust and virtuous heart lead her back to Vernon's side and her adversaries are left to reap the consequences of their actions.

Isabel gives birth to a long awaited daughter but is devastated to learn that the child is blind. Unlike her mother, however, the child Eva is patient and loving

despite her handicap and has a longing to be useful. "God seemed to have sent her as a messenger to soften [her parent's] hearts, to turn [them] from self-worship, and to teach [them] to live for others." The author tells her readers that, "we each have a mission assigned to us in our pilgrimage if we would but view the purpose of life aright."86 Where Stowe's little Eva was sent to soften men's hearts to slavery, this Southern version of an almost identical character promotes the need for solidarity in the face of discord. Sybil's child, Ruth, is also loving and giving, and encourages Florence, who is left lonely and full of sorrow, to understand the harm that her self-seeking actions brought to others and, most importantly, to herself. "God grant that you may never have sorrow like mine" the repentant woman tells the child.87

Such characters emphasize the prevailing belief that a better life came through caring for others rather than living only for oneself. Their example was particularly relevant at a time when the South needed its women to support Southern ideology even if it ran contrary to their own desires. When the morally weak among them could be convinced to work for the greater good, Southern society held onto its idealizations about itself. Further weight is given to this concept in two lengthy stories by Laurence

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86 "Vernon Grove," pp.107-108.

87 Ibid., p.110.

Neville and John Esten Cooke which were both serialized in the Messenger over a period of several months. These romantic adventure stories, although set in the Southern past, promote many Southern ideals that had remained constant over the years and embrace a number of the established literary conventions that promote the more acceptable aspects of Southern life.

Neville's story, "Lilias," set in the late eighteenth century, is a complex tale of love, honour, betrayal and revenge that required a number of sub-plots and an even greater number of characters to achieve its ends. However, a major theme, which promotes the need for order, stability and harmony in the South, dominates the action. As we have seen, when dealing with the enemy within, the South hoped that its women would step into the forefront of the battle. Laurence Neville models his heroine, Lilias, on the image of the Southern woman which best suited this requirement. To further substantiate the function of Lilias within the plot, he creates Biddy Marston as a woman on the other side of the archetype. Disruptive forces, in whatever form they may appear, could be defeated in two ways, by strength of arms or by strength of will. In the Southern belief system, men relied upon the former and women upon the latter. Neville's female characters serve to prove this point.

Biddy Marston is a rustic beauty who cared for little

else but her own good-looks, fine clothes and male admirers. Giddy-brained and foolish, the girl has little self-control and is easily led into series of indiscretions which eventually destroy her life. Infatuated by a bold and reckless womanizer, Biddy fails to see how she is being manipulated. The wealthy George Dalzell has no intention of marrying the simple girl whom he considered far beneath him in rank in society. With lies that appeal to her vanity and overcome her ability to reason clearly, he is able to lure her from the safety of those who truly love her. In contrast, when Clayton Torrey, a gentle, romantic young man, first sees Lilias he thinks her "a very Eve - an impersonation of female loveliness, purity and perfection."88 Her naive simplicity, however, is in no way similar to Biddy's simple-mindedness, for Lilias had been inculcated with "a reverence for God and a conscientious sense of duty; a love of goodness and truth, and an abhorrence of evil."89 The reader learns how holy prayers had made Lilias' heart clean and saved her from the sin and dishonor into which Biddy is led by her lack of

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88 Laurence Neville, "Lilias," SLM 23 (August,1856), pp.115-131; (September,1856) pp.191-207; (October,1856), pp.257-269; (November,1856), pp.337-357; (December,1856), 419-434. 24 (January,1857), pp.35-45; (February,1857), pp.113-125; (March,1857), pp.191-203; (April, 1857), pp.294-305; (May, 1857), pp.381-391; (June,1857), pp.425-432; (August,1857), pp.104-113; (September,1857), pp.171-177; (November,1857), pp.336-343.

89 Ibid., (November, 1856), pp.341.

moral fortitude.

"Woman," Neville writes, "has been compared with a willow that bows before the storm. She bows beneath a weight of sorrow, which would crush ten men, to rise and smile again. But disgrace is what she cannot endure."90 Unaware of the existence of any cause for shame on her part, a woman maintains the confidence in herself and her surroundings which is vital to the morale of her home and community. The author felt, however, that if some great wrong intruded upon the illusion and shattered her confidence, her sensibilities would grow morbidly acute and misery or ruin would follow. Whether Southern women in the 1850's were innocently unaware of the shameful practices associated with slavery is a debatable point. However, writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe were determined that they should be forced to look into the face of reality. In Neville's story, Biddy's reputation, like that of the South, had been sullied because she listened to the lies of someone who did not have her best interests at heart. When Biddy realizes how she has been dishonoured, she ceased to be "the light-spirited, laughing girl she used to be...she became moody and abstracted...her countenance was altered...[and] she had an air of general debility." "Alas," the author writes, "the giddy, vain girl was

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90 Ibid., (February, 1857), p.125.

serious enough and humble enough now."91

For a reader in the slave South in 1856, it is possible that Biddy's character provided more than just a lesson in morals, especially when presented in direct contrast to a character like Lilias. Obedient and docile with a heart swept clean by holy prayers, Lilias becomes stronger as she deals with many difficult and dangerous situations. Although she bends under the strain, she never breaks and, as a result, becomes one of the happiest ladies in the land and "many bright and blissful years succeeded that dark and dreary time."92 While this was by no means an uncommon theme in the literature of the time, it had, for the South, a significant application. In a society that put such great store on the honour and purity of its women, it would be hoped that, if an honourable woman was made to feel contaminated by her association with slavery, she would resolve to emulate Lilias rather than be broken like Biddy under the weight of her guilt. In the stories examined thus far, the dual image of women can be seen to parallel that of the South in its struggle to maintain its innocence against those who called it sinful.

In "Greenway Court; or, The Bloody Ground," John Esten

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91 Ibid., (September,1856), p.197

92 Ibid., (November, 1857), p.345.

Cooke draws upon similar patterns and relationships.93 This adventure story, also set in the eighteenth century, takes place in the wild and untouched wilderness of Virginia when "Injuns" roamed the forests and pitted their strength against the white settlers. Cooke weaves both romance and adventure into his tale and introduces female characters who embody his beliefs about the role of women at a time in Southern history when life was insecure and the future was uncertain much as it was in the 1850's. Cannie Powell and Bertha Argal are Southern females that again represent the dual image of women so frequently used in the Messenger's fiction. This pervasive motif reflects a distinct preoccupation with the idea of the Southern woman as someone who could protect and fortify the South at times when its security was threatened. Cannie Powell is young and pure, an ideal female whose innocence matches that of the wild creatures in her woodland home. When first introduced, she is standing on a mossy rock picking primroses innocently unaware that there is anything to fear in the sun-filled grove in which she lives. Bertha Argal, however, has no such illusions. A dark-haired beauty with crimson lips and flashing eyes, Bertha is a skilled

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93 John Esten Cooke, "Greenway Court; or The Bloody Ground," SLM 28 (April,1859), pp.265-277; (May, 1859), pp.337-354; (June, 1859), pp.419-426; 29 (July, 1859), pp.35-53; (August,1859), pp.113-130; (September, 1859), pp.187-205; (October, 1859), pp.249-268; (November,1859), pp.353-375; (December,1859), pp.440-465.

manipulator who takes advantage of those whose trusting nature makes them vulnerable.

Bertha's first conquest is a sincere young officer named Falconbridge whom she meets at the home of Lord Fairfax, a distinguished landowner in the valley. His companion, Captain Julius Wagner, a worldly, rough frontiersman, suspects the woman's motives and tries to warn young Falconbridge with an analogy about "panthers" whose looks belie their predatory nature. "Tender-looking as the leaf of a flower in bloom, and at the same time as brilliant as a flame...they smile too sweetly and bite too ferociously. They caress too softly the victim before tearing him to pieces and lapping with a smile his heart's blood." The young man fully understands the meaning behind his companion's words but, because Miss Argal is so persuasive, he refuses to believe that she means him harm.94 It is evidently not only women who are unable to resist the lies of a cunning adversary. Once Bertha has insinuated herself into Falconbridge's heart, she cruelly rejects him for the powerful Lord Fairfax. As Wagner predicted, the young man became her prey and she "rolled him in a mortal hug" as she had done with others before him. In his distress, Falconbridge finds solace at Cannie's home where "a cheerful and inspiring influence seemed to fill every bosom," and the "shadows which had

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94 Ibid., (June, 1859), p.435.

lain upon his brow slowly passed away."95 Cannie's goodness is a powerful antidote for the suffering inflicted upon those who heed the words of a destructive woman.

Cooke assembles his cast of characters at the climax of his tale when both women are captured by raiding Indians and the men embark on a rescue mission. Falconbridge and the Earl are both aware of Bertha's predatory nature but cannot tear themselves free of her influence. "After all," Falconbridge convinces himself, "she was a woman, a weak woman!... a poor and feeble girl, smitten by the hand of the Almighty, and irresponsible." Although her actions are justified in this way, this is not all that Cooke wishes his readers to learn from this character. Initially, the fate of both women is in Bertha Argal's hands as she brings the hideous Half-Breed in charge of the raiding party under her influence. Although she is repulsed, Bertha uses the infatuated Indian to help her to escape. It is she who defines the action and takes her fate into her own hands. Cannie, in contrast, appears at first to be weak and ineffectual. "We will trust in God," she tells her companion, "you know if we trust in Him He will not desert us; and all he does is for the best." Faced with this trusting simplicity, however, the forceful Miss Argal begins to cry. I am so bad," she tells Cannie "and you make me so ashamed...I do not trust in God...I am evil and

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95 Ibid., (September,1859), pp.189-191.

miserable and He hates me." "Teach me to pray," she begs, "I know God will forgive me if you ask him to." After Cannie kneels and prays, the seemingly strong and confident woman sleeps like a child with a sad and tender smile on her previously sneering and disdainful lips.96

Cooke shows how Cannie's childlike dependence hides an inner strength. She maintains the ideal female temperament under the most frightening circumstances while offering atonement and moral regeneration for those who have fallen. Cooke creates a woman, who, like many of her fictional counterparts, is strengthened by adversity and provides an impregnable barrier between the land she loved and those who sought to destroy it. The peace and tranquility of the world in which Cooke's characters live was being turned upside down, and its peace and tranquility was about to be destroyed by evil. The savages that attacked from the darkness of the forests were a destructive physical force to be defeated by force of arms. Bertha Argal, a destructive moral force, was just as dangerous to the Southern way of life as the Indians. She, however, could not be rendered harmless in the same way. Only a woman like Cannie, filled with self-control, integrity and a Christian heart, can become an effective weapon in the battle over the soul. These two women perform a function which, for the Messenger's contributors, became a component

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96 Ibid., (December,1859), pp.444-445.

part of a regionally sanctioned ideology.

The power of Uncle Tom's Cabin stemmmed, in part, from the way in which the black characters become recognizable human beings who react in a complex way to their individual experience. Most of Stowe's Southern white characters, however, act according to a predetermined formula. Although Southern critics took exception to Stowe's Southern women, the women in their own fiction come closer than they would perhaps care to admit to that same formula. The women we have encountered thus far are one-dimensional and predictable. Their individual experience is of less concern than the way in which they act upon each other. When Stowe's Southern females attempt to influence the situation of the slaves, they are proved impotent. However, the women in Southern fiction, given the task of fulfilling a moral responsibility to Southern society (not to the slave) succeed. Their function, unlike Stowe's females, was not to promote change but to prevent it and any changes that they made were spiritual rather than physical. They acted, not upon slavery, but upon those who practiced it.

This was the sacred cause of which so many of the Messenger's commentators spoke. Women with low moral and religious standards detracted from the ideal model upon which writers could base an allegory of the South. But, drawn back into the fold by women of superior moral

strength, they could, as these stories demonstrate, challenge the abolitionist's claims that Southern society, either unwilling or incapable of alleviating its own sins, needed to be absolved by those on the outside. In the tension-filled decade before the war, the South looked for a way to protect its culture. They turned to their women to uphold their value system and defend their way of life. Southern women, in turn, turned to the one constant in their lives upon which they could rely: their faith in God.

Chapter Three

The Pathway to Blessedness
A Question of Piety

"Mrs. Stowe professes herself to be a Christian," George Frederick Holmes wrote in the Messenger in a biting response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. "She talks largely of Christianity, she throws an ultra Christian hue over all her writings, she appeals to all Christians throughout the world, and she arrogates to herself and her party the peculiar distinctions of true Christian views and motives."97 Stowe was a deeply religious woman and would no doubt have agreed that in writing Uncle Tom's Cabin and A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, she was indeed performing a Christian duty. In fact, later in her career, Stowe claimed that God had written the book and she merely did His dictation. However, where Stowe was convinced that her antislavery appeal was the manifestation of a divine purpose, Southern critics held a less than inspired view of her objectives. "We are certain," Holmes continued, that the "unco-righteous schemes of Mrs. Stowe and her coadjutors...are presided over by the arch-spirit of the Infernal Gulf." What Stowe saw as a righteous act

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97 Holmes, "A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," SLM 19 p.328.

of humanity toward an enslaved race, Holmes saw as blasphemy coming from the "unholy mouths" of fanatics who "busily prosecute the works of the devil" and "lie in the name of the Holy Ghost."98

Holmes commentary illustrates the way in which Stowe's work was seen to have undermined two of the central tenets of the South's belief system. She had not only undermined the sanctity of Southern womanhood but had denied Southerners Christianity. Stowe had actually stated that, where Christian ethics were concerned, there was little difference between the two sections. In her concluding remarks to Uncle Tom's Cabin, she wrote, "both North and South have been guilty before God," and "every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it the elements of its last convulsion."99 However, commentary in the Messenger shows that Southerners were unwilling to accept any degree of guilt for their actions, most especially on issues that demonstrated the moral and ethical legitimacy of the slaveholding regime.

Historian W. J. Cash believed that pressure from the North had a profound effect upon the South, especially upon their religious patterns. In contrast with the Yankee, he wrote, Southerners saw themselves as defenders of the Ark and as the chosen people. From the pulpits of the South,

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98 Ibid., p.329.

99 Stowe., Uncle Tom's Cabin p.456.

he wrote, the word went out that the "God of the Yankee was not God at all but Antichrist loosed at last from the pit."100 The Messenger shows how close Cash's definition came to the truth. Its contributors found little to admire in Stowe's religious convictions or those of her section and attempted to disassociate themselves with Northern religious ideals which they claimed to be hypocritical. A moral truth, as defined in the Messenger, involved a sense of duty that required action. "We may yet be called upon to assert the truth, and perchance to suffer for it," a contributor wrote. "What fools are we, if, for the fear of what man can do, we deny or pervert the truth, and thus give the lie to the great Being whose utterance it is!"101 Though Stowe had stated that all Americans should take responsibility for the wrongs being done to the Negro race, Southerners were well aware that they, not Northerners, held direct moral responsibility for the slaves. Therefore, when Stowe asked, "Are your sympathies in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy?," Southerners felt compelled to speak out.102

The Messenger shows how the Southern defense came to

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100 Cash., p.80.

101 "The Truth and the Love of It," SLM 28 (October, 1852), pp.593-598., p.597.

102 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.460.

rest, not upon the slaves, but upon the social arrangements which supported the order and tranquility of the section. Southern writers like George Frederick Holmes made it quite clear that, while it was possible for men like Haley and Legree to exist within the slave South, Stowe had committed a grievous error by assigning their callousness and depravity to the institution of slavery rather than upon the inherent weaknesses of the individual. By so doing, she had defamed an entire section. "The justice of so attributing it is what we most deny," Holmes claimed. "Slavery only furnishes the occasion and determines the form of the brutality; it neither generates it, nor would its abolition extirpate it."103 Here lies the key to understanding why the slave became subordinate to moral and religious issues in the Southern defense.

Because the South considered itself God-fearing and righteous, Stowe's attack upon the moral nature of their society drew the most powerful response from the section's apologists. "We must seek the truth in all places," the magazine's readers were told, "in the gentle hearts of woman, in the majesty of man, in the Christian's closet - but most of all...on the page of God's own word."104 In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe had shown that, by living in a slaveholding society, Christians were forced to compromise

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103 Ibid., p.325.

104 "The Truth and the Love of It," SLM 28 p.598.

their religious values. Southerners, on the other hand, held the opinion that the high moral character of the Southern people compelled them to act in the best interests of all concerned. As a rebuttal to Stowe's picture of the Southern world, the Messenger strove to publish stories which portrayed Southern society in a positive light, free from doubt, confident in its own self-worth and certain of the righteousness of its cause.

Stowe had actually spoken well of Southerners, calling them generous, noble-minded men and women whose "virtue, magnanimity and purity of character" were the better for the trials they had encountered. However, she cut deeply into Southern sensibilities by suggesting that Southerners felt, in their secret souls, that there were wrongs in the "accursed system" far beyond those that she had portrayed in her book but that they did nothing to correct them.105 Louisa S. McCord, an ardent defender of Southern values, spoke out against writers like Stowe who she believed spread falsehood through the written word. "Is it a sign of guilt that indignant blood rushes to the brow of the victim whom [the abolitionist] is endeavoring to crush beneath his accumulated slanders?" she asked. "We are charged with every folly, every crime and judged according to Northern ideas of morality...We are accused of daily acting foul scenes which our accusers are too pure

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105 Ibid., p.455.

even to whisper...It is sad to see the world gulled by the fictions of Mrs. Stowe," she argued, but, she assured her readers "over the sound in heart the blast whistles harmlessly."106

After a visit to the Boston church of Harriet's brother, the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, the Messenger's editor did not show the same degree of confidence. "Soon after entering [the church]," John R. Thompson wrote, "we had the satisfaction of hearing ourselves prayed for as among those steeped in the guilt of slavery...and began to feel a heavier sense of our individual depravity than had ever before oppressed us." The Rev. Beecher's sermon was full of invectives aimed at slaveholders whom he called "manstealers, hypocrites, and everything that [was] vile, brutish and despicable." Thompson expressed a great sadness that the "well-dressed, intelligent-looking" people of the congregation were being instructed, week after week, to despise their Christian brethren. The editor was particularly angered by Beecher's "fervent supplications" on behalf of slaveholders who he claimed were "servants of the Prince of Darkness." "We could not dismiss the painful apprehension," Thompson concluded, "that this instruction would work out its legitimate effect in fraternal strife," for which the Rev. Beecher and his associates would be

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106 McCord, "Charity Which Does Not Begin At Home," p.206.

responsible.107 Thompson took accusations of Southern impiety very seriously and his anger was reflected by several of the Messenger's contributors who did not consider themselves to be sinners and were incensed that arrogant Northerners felt the need to instruct them in their Christian duty. Their commentary shows the degree to which this type of the accusation not only inflamed Southern feelings against the North but potentially undermined the South's opinion of itself.

In their response to Uncle Tom's Cabin, both Holmes and Thompson put these issues above all others. The mind of man, as Holmes claimed, was beset by frailties, illusions and folly, but, through the beneficent Providence of God, it could also conceive of virtue, justice and fortitude. He had reached the conclusion, like many of his contemporaries, that a valid defense of the South could only be formulated by emphasizing its deep-rooted moral value system. Holmes urged Southerners to recall past times of purity and innocence in order to strengthen their hearts, elevate their feelings and resist the seductions of evil. Because he saw little hope that Southern commentators could secure a dispassionate hearing on the subject of slavery, it became imperative that Southerners remained confident in their ability to survive a crisis.

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107 "Editor's Table," SLM 20 (January, 1854), pp.59-62.

Religious faith, a fundamental part of the Southern way of life, became a vital thread by which the people could be drawn together against a common foe.

In "The Duty of Southern Authors," published in the Messenger in 1856, readers were told by an anonymous contributor that a living tide of hope had to be poured through the hearts of the Southern people to "strengthen [their] hearts for the day of trial, and cover [their] land with a shield of fire."108 Initially, Southern writers had attempted to reason with Northern antagonists, but the huge success of Uncle Tom's Cabin as an antislavery tract proved that it was unrealistic to believe that Northerners could be persuaded to see any good in the Southern system. If the South's virtuous image could not be rejuvenated abroad, then it remained to Southern writers to sustain the moral health of the South by asserting the virtuous nature of its society.

Samuel S. Hill, when discussing religion in Southern history, points out that the Evangelical tradition planted a sense of order and community and provided a moral basis for a viable social existence. By 1850, he believes, the South had crystallized into a unique culture and the glue that held it together was religion. 109 Donald G.

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108 "Duty of Southern Authors," SLM 23 (October, 1856), p.244. Signed W.R.A.

109 Hill, South and North in American Religion pp.86-87.

Matthews supports Hill's contention, stating that the most dramatic emergence of this religious ethic in the South occurred in the antebellum period when concern over the antislavery crusade was at its height. It was at this time, he states, that the tenets of Evangelicalism were used by Southerners to "fend off oppression, secure their personal and group identity, and assert themselves in new ways." When Stowe attempted to show the world that slavery and Christianity were not only incompatible but exposed a hypocritical inconsistency within Southern society, Southerners returned to the source through which they had found validation in the past. This, as Matthews points out, resulted in a rebirth of piety in the South.110

Religious belief had long been a matter of deep concern and importance in the Southern states but, like the idealization of women, it took on a more vital and portentous role in the antebellum years. From the Messenger, it becomes apparent that the purpose of Southern authors was not so much to promote a proslavery ideology as to emphasize the Christian foundation upon which the slaveholding society rested. What is found in their work is a sense of obligation and accountability, not to their Northern detractors, but to the superior authority of God. This approach to the ethics of slaveholding did not require that a great deal of recognition be given to the slave.

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110 Matthews, Religion in the Old South p.102.

A writer in 1852 provides an interpretation of the Southern view of Christian responsibility. Man, as a moral agent was answerable to God for his conduct, and His will provided the source of moral obligation. Therefore, when a man's actions passed under review, he would relate primarily to God and subordinately to his fellow man. The writer applied this perspective in particular to writers and poets "endowed with the nobler gifts and faculties than the mass of his fellowmen [sic]." These particular members of society not only had the power to do good, but also to wield their influence to the "injury of society."111 The irresponsible writer, the reader is told, "may be painting false but fascinating pictures of life - by disguising corrupt motives and false virtues, that awaken the reader's admiration in behalf of qualities that are spurious and base." In contrast, a writer whose particular province lies within the doctrines of Christianity could "unveil the shrouded face of nature, interpret the thousand thrilling voices of human life - voices eloquent with truth, in harmony with the voice of God in his word...gently opening the portals of the human soul, preparing the way for the entrance of Him alone who is 'the

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111 "Poetry and Religion," SLM 28 (February, 1852), pp.109-115., (April,1852), pp.225-230., (April, 1852), pp.225-230., (October, 1852), pp.618-628. Signed W.C.S. Attributed to William Cowper Scott in Jackson, p.112.

way, the truth and the life.'"112 Religion, therefore, was also considered to be the prime directive in the literary world and further explains why the Messenger's writers focused to such a large extent upon the role of Christianity in Southern life.

Although this article is entitled "Poetry and Religion" there is little discussion of poetry. Instead, readers are presented with a moral lesson designed to help them avoid the type of literature which could endanger their future prospects. The "perverted genius" of "certain" writers, the article warns, had the power to destroy "the only foundation upon which the soul and its interests may rest for eternity." It would be better, the article suggests, if writers employed a practical blindness towards their existence and concentrated upon their obligation "to lead a pure progressive life of humble piety, as the appointed pathway to heavenly blessedness." 113 All this can be linked by implication to the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, after which the fear was expressed that those in the South of weak or vacillating minds, especially women, would be influenced by such literary works containing ideas that ran contrary to the South's best interests. Indeed, such literature put the very souls of the Southern people at risk. Thus was

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112 Ibid., p.111.

113 Ibid., p.628.

religion enlisted in the South's defense. It is evident that the religious ideal, like that of the Southern woman, could be utilized to great advantage at a time when it needed it most.

In 1854, the Messenger ran an article entitled "The Days We Live In" which provides an informative insight into how a Southern writer viewed the state of his society. The text is liberally interspersed with religious ideology intended to convince readers of the need to maintain their "purified faith" in the "present carnal state of the world." "We must not despair of our nature," the writer warns, "if we do then all is indeed lost." Southerners must return to the "one true religion, the religion of the Bible" which alone offers security. This author relates the South's current situation to that of the Roman Empire which was "dissolved by the overflowing of the Northern nations" and "driven back to [its] own individual resources; [its] literature and philosophy overwhelmed by this barbarian deluge." "May not a more terrible warfare await us?" he asks.114

This article adheres to the doctrine which held that human society was structured according to a decree of God. The author states that "God has made men and women - the one strong, the other weak - the ladder of creation has a

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114 "The Days We Live In," SLM 20 (December, 1854), p.761.

bottom and a top, and both are equally necessary." Because the fashion of the day was to reverse this whole order of creation and to "reverse the decree of Providence" which could have dire consequences for the section, the article reinforces the idea that Southern society, at this critical time in its history, needed to maintain the status quo and resist forces that might instigate change. Women, and the "lower levels," could not be allowed to disassociate themselves from the common cause. The article concludes with a rallying cry for the Southern reader: "let all unite their efforts in the good cause, and strive to stem the deadly torrent of infidelity and wickedness that seems to threaten the very foundations of our society, and which, if unchecked, must destroy our happiness in time and eternity."115 The evidence shows that the overwhelming need for the Southern people at this time was to overcome their anxiety, maintain their honour and defend their principles all of which could be achieved, according to the Messenger's contributors, by confirming what was undeniably good and wholesome - their pious women and their pure faith, neither of which, properly defended, was vulnerable.

"Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty, and 'If the Son make [sic] you free, ye shall be free indeed.'" So wrote a contributor to the Messenger in 1858. God, according to this author, was the great physician who could

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115 Ibid., p.762.

cure the "all-pervading malady of the soul." For those who may have felt the weight of sin upon their souls, there was relief. Minds "moved by external influences" could be reassured that their faith would surround them and protect them against forces of evil.116 The relief from anxiety that could be found through a personal acceptance of God's grace became a consistent theme in the Messenger's fiction. What is significant is that any allusion to sin in the magazine's fiction is attuned to the spiritual life of the region and not to slaveholding. Sinners, as portrayed in the Messenger, were those who had chosen a path in life that led away from Christian duty to hedonistic and destructive pursuits or those who, like Stowe, attempted to destroy the peace and well-being of God-fearing people with lies. The Ninth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," was quoted on several occasions in response to abolitionist propaganda. Because Southern religious belief at this time was focused upon practical teachings from the Bible, which emphasized piety, moral rectitude and salvation, and rested upon the social ethos of Christianity not upon the ethics of slavery, the presentation of incontrovertible evidence proving the South's goodness was considered a sufficient answer to its critics. Thus, writers could fulfill a moral duty to their

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116 "The Great Religious Awakening," SLM 27 (August, 1858), pp.146-149., p.148.

readers while avoiding the prickly issues associated with a proslavery stance.

An allegory entitled "The Hill of Life," shows the way in which fiction could provide a moral lesson while, at the same time, guiding and reassuring the weaker members of society.117 In this short story, the narrator describes being overcome by a feeling of terror while walking through a gloomy forest. Falling unconscious to the ground, the narrator is transported to a spot of unsurpassed beauty on the top of a hill. From this vantage point, each side of the hill sloped differently. On one side it was a "gentle as the sleep of an innocent mind," but terminated in an unfathomable gulf. The opposite side fell in an undulating manner and, although it was marked by flowers of every form, it led to a point as "arid and difficult as the desert of Sahara." Another descent was rugged and tedious but, for those who accomplished it, it held a rich reward: "A vale, the quintessence of everything beautiful, seeming as if just dropped from heaven" awaited them. The last way down was broken, harsh and sterile and ended in a frightful abyss. A young, handsome man was on the hill, roving its sides uncertain of which descent to take. As the author observes the man's dilemma, an etherial being appears, "as from the deep vaults of heaven." "I know the cause of your

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117 "The Hill of Life," SLM 26 (June, 1858), pp.451-452. signed Zephyr.

disturbance," this etherial creature tells the man, "and if you permit me to be your guide, I will resolve all your doubts as to the course you shall pursue...Upon the decision you make now," she tells him, "rests the future weal or woe of your life."118

It is evident that the readers have been taken to the this place to be given guidance as to their own moral choices. The descent so velvety and full of pleasure is the road to "indolence and sloth," and leads the unwary into a "gulf of Regret and bitter Repentance." Another side of the hill is that of sensuality and vice, attractive yet "irremediably hideous and disgusting." Those who follow this route fall into the "damnable pit of Ruin, Remorse and Despair." On the third pathway, that of Ambition, there are spots of beauty and delight but, the reader is warned, it leads inevitably to a desert of bitter disappointment. There is, of course, one true path to which the young man is led by his guide - the path of "Religion, Industry, Honour and Love." Although it is toilsome and rugged, the traveller reaches a glorious recompense for his endurance. "A fair haven, like unto Eden, with Peace, Contentment and Happiness as its guardian angels" awaits those who make the right choice. As the etherial being guides her charge to the appropriate path, she assures him that it is her "duty and pleasure to assist

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118 Ibid., p.451.

those who stand in need of aid."119

A story of this kind could provide essential guidance to any Southerner confronted with particularly perplexing moral issues. The Messenger had given ample indication that those in doubt must be reassured, and this tale supports an already established model in which a pure, almost divine, female prevents an indecisive male from taking the wrong path through life. The antislavery attack had complicated the issues facing the antebellum Southerner with regard to his duty as a Christian and, as this story points out, moral choices were the most difficult to make in life, especially when they involved self-sacrifice. This was one of the main points Stowe had tried to make in her book and one that caused Southerners the most discomfort. What is important in this story, in light of the whole issue of the moral weakness of Southern society so strongly expressed in Uncle Tom's Cabin, is that this Southern man joyfully accepts the guiding hand that is held out to him and, like a lost child, is gently led from the path of self-destruction.

This story brings together the two most important influences at work in the South's attempts to justify itself - the virtuous woman and the holy power of God. If Southern men and women submitted themselves to divine guidance, Southern society would not only reap the benefits

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119 Ibid., p.452.

but confound its critics. In the past, the working code of the Old South had been perfectly adapted to the exigencies of the Southern order. But, by the 1850's, Southerners were fighting hard to hold onto a way of life which, as the Messenger shows, they believed was being assailed by a "deadly torrent of wickedness and infidelity." The magazine confirms that there was only one true way to avert the present danger. "Return to the rock from which we were hewn," its readers were told, and "return to the God who made us."120 Southerners needed to draw upon the customs and practices that had served them well in the past and theology was the decisive force.

The "Southron," who wrote "Gleams after Glooms; or 'Joy Cometh in the Morning,'" published in the Messenger in 1853, confirms that the Southern people did not want or desire change.121 He admits that no nation on earth was immune from the "season of gloom and trial" when change, like winter, "clothes nature in a general aspect of sadness." However, he wanted to instill confidence in his readers by ensuring them that, where the South was concerned, the blue sky and sunshine was waiting behind the gloomy canopy. "We have but to open our hearts to the

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120 "The Days We Live In," SLM 20 (December, 1854), pp.758-762.

121 "Gleams after Glooms, or 'Joy Cometh in the Morning': a cottage chronicle of Christmas in the South," SLM 19 (May, 1853), pp.267-278; (June, 1853), pp.345-362. signed A Southron.

smile and sunshine," he writes, "not close our eyes, or turn our backs, to the angelic visitor, who is always sure to stand on the threshold, whenever we deserve most need, and are willing to give him welcome."122 His story, about an ordinary man whose life was beset with problems until he learned to put his trust in the God's grace, serves to show how the hand of Providence was always held out to those in need of guidance. At a time when Southerners were expressing fears of being victimized by the unjust actions of others, a gentle reminder that there was a higher power that would uphold the cause of the righteous would not be unwelcome.

Jacob Downton was a good man, a hard-working farmer who always tried to set a good example for others. Nevertheless, his efforts always seemed in vain. Misfortune stalked Downton and his family, his crops failed year after year, and his spirits failed with them. It seemed unfair, the author comments, that the "blessing Providence should so completely have turned away its face, as it were, in anger, from the once happy little homestead." Although the pious farmer relied upon his Bible for strength, he came to believe that God "vouchsafed to men the knowledge of the wonderful possessions of the earth, only at the moment when he meant to deprive them

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122 Ibid., p.267.

altogether of their acquisition."123 Jacob's son, William, has a more positive view of the future and tries to revive his father's faith but to no avail. Because of his father's insolvency, William is prevented from courting Ellen Barclay, the pure and devout daughter of the man to whom Jacob is deeply indebted. In an effort to reinstate the family's good name, William leaves for the gold fields of California to make his fortune and return to claim his true love. Jacob begs his son not to leave, but, William prevails upon his father to submit quietly to the will of God. The sorrowful old farmer agrees. "I would rather be in His hands than in the hands of my enemies," he tells his son, "although He has tried me sorely in these latter days."124

What the elderly farmer is expressing are the religious convictions consistently defined by the Messenger during the period under study. God was the prime director of all living things, ready to chastise but equally ready to reward His faithful children. Because Jacob Downton could find no sin within himself to account for his suffering, he concluded that, like the Biblical Job, he was a good man being tested by his God. As the author explains, "it is a great secret to accommodate one's self readily to one's situation, so as to extract from even what

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123 Ibid., p.276.

124 Ibid., p.277.

is a mishap a wholesome advantage; and make an inconvenience and adversity the source of a new strength." While the writer appears to be showing his readers the value of waiting patiently on the will of the Lord, he cautions that it served no purpose to wait idly.125

This is consistent with the Messenger's social stance that the South be seen to act in its own defense. One can see a direct correlation between Downton and those in the South who felt they were being punished for sins they did not commit. If Southerners continued to believe in the righteousness of their cause and held fast to their faith, then when they needed help most God would be with them. This is not an argument intended to convince outsiders of the South's righteous position on slavery, but to sustain the faith of its citizens and ensure their continued commitment to the slaveholding ethic as it developed during the antebellum years.

The author of "Gleams after Glooms" creates a common man whose perspective on life upholds the religious ideals that are basic to the Messenger's fiction. Again, the religious ideals of a pious Southern female are seen to have a direct and positive effect upon a Southern man in need of guidance. Jacob's faith is gradually undermined when misfortune continues to be thrust upon him. "Lord, Lord! why hast thou abandoned me, into the hands of mine

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125 "Gleams after Glooms," (June, 1853), p.345.

enemies!" he cries.126 Because men's lives were thought of as practical and materialistic, their greatest fears were seen to stem from the loss of those things upon which they based their self-esteem - money, property and success. Women, on the other hand, allowed to own little of material worth, gained satisfaction from humble piety and a loving heart which was the pathway to heavenly blessedness. When Downton loses all he has to his unscrupulous neighbour, he turns to Ellen who maintains an unerring faith in God. Even in their darkest moments, she tells the skeptical farmer, He is with them, hearing the very voices in their souls and seeing into their most secret hearts. She convinces Downton to pray that, in God's own time, peace may be restored to their lives. The next day William returns home a rich man. Downton buys back the mortgage on his farm and William is able to ask for Ellen's hand in marriage. Jacob's endurance and Ellen's piety are seen to bring their own reward. "The night was dark to them, and long; but the promise was verified to faith - that 'joy Cometh with the Morning.'"

Here we see two sides of the God of the Southern people. For men, God was a hard, demanding task master who could lift them up but just as easily cast them down. Women, on the other hand, remained confident of His all-forgiving love. Through the literary imagination, these

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126 Ibid., pp.350-351.

two sides could be made to fit harmoniously together each complementing and supporting the other within the framework of the Southern ideological belief system. In this way, religion could be confirmed as the touchstone upon which all members of Southern society could rely in times of moral or spiritual anxiety. When men failed to acknowledge God's power over their lives, it was because their aspirations had become circumscribed by the immediate concerns of life and they had lost sight of the greater scheme of God for mankind. W. J. Cash wrote that the sense of sin moved darkly within the Southern male and he was always aware of having to pay the piper. Cash also contended that Southerners harboured strong feelings of guilt that could be directly linked to slavery.127

While it is evident that Stowe held similar assumptions about Southern slaveholders, the Messenger aimed to prove that they were without foundation. Its contributors submitted works that depicted Southern people with hearts and minds equal to those of their Northern enemies. While Southern men were seen as no less motivated by materialistic concerns than their Northern counterparts, writers pointed out one important distinction, that the men of their section were surrounded by the direct embodiment of God's word in their womenfolk which invested them with a much greater sense of morality than any Northerner could

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127 Cash, pp.134-137.

hope to understand. Although it was conceded that Southerners were sometimes led into temptation by moral weakness, it was imperative that Stowe's picture of their section be replaced with one of their own devising.

If we compare Stowe's Southern white males with the those depicted by Southern writers, we can see how the portrait could be subtly changed to create an acceptable Southern alternative. Stowe's male characters may have been motivated by the best intentions and truly cognizant of their moral duty, but they lacked moral fortitude and failed to follow what she considered God's holy law. However, in contrast to men like Augustine St. Clare who, as Stowe commented, "went up to heaven's gate in theory [and] down in earth's dust in practice," the Messenger presented men like Richard Vernon, Horace Effingham and Jacob Downton as Southern men who learned, through repentance, that God's love could be a positive force for good in their lives.

Where the Southern line of argument diverges from that of Stowe is that it bears no direct correlation to the moral issues surrounding slavery. Horace Effingham, like St. Clare, treats his slaves well and, as a result, they show him respect and loyalty. Jacob Downton is a common farmer who does not even own slaves. The lesson to be learned by these Southern males is that, when the hand of Providence seems to be working against them, they must put

their faith in the Lord. Only He would "arrange and direct for [them] - that all things would work together for good."128 Readings from the Messenger show that Stowe's book had significantly increased the likelihood that the South and all that it stood for would be destroyed by its enemies. Therefore, characters like Vernon and Effingham could speak to those who needed reassurance that the South could count on God's help to bring them safely through their darkest hours.

The idea that God meant man to suffer in order that he might be prepared for some great compensating joy predominated among the writers in this survey and within the antebellum South. However, at no time does the Messenger present any concrete evidence to support Stowe's belief that slaveholding provided just cause for the South to be punished by God. The Southern religious scene, as Hill has stated, required that its adherents live upright lives in response to the righteous demands of a strict father-God. Whether they were obedient, like Southern women, or rebellious, like Southern men, all that was required of them was an acknowledgement of moral obligation.129 Stowe's idea of personal redemption for the slaveholder was in the freeing of his slaves. In the

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128 "Chronicles of a Planter's Hall," SLM 20 (November, 1854), p.675.

129 Hill, pp.88-89.

South, this obligation was directed primarily at purifying the soul to receive God's grace. This was the fundamental difference between Stowe's religious perspective on slaveholding and that expressed in the Messenger. Where Stowe's interpretation of God's will for His followers included the zeal to perfect human society, religious dogma in the South did not lend itself to the social arena.

When the moral issues surrounding slavery were put before the Southern people, they felt that the way to improve the human condition was not by changing the status quo but by strengthening the spiritual well-being of the Southern people to resist the temptations that they confronted as slaveholders. Because so many of the Messenger's stories show how God offers pardon for the sinner and guidance for the weak, freely and without censure, it can be seen as a predominant ideological conviction behind which the men and women of the South could be united in a common purpose, each interdependent upon the other, to gain the strength and self-determination necessary to face whatever Fate had in store for them as individuals or as a nation.

Although the Messenger contains several polemical articles full of proslavery rhetoric equal to that of the most fanatical abolitionist tract, its fiction denotes an unwavering confidence in the virtues that the South held most sacred. Its social arrangements were mild and gentle,

its laws wise and just, and, most importantly, its people filled with human sympathies of the most admirable kind. This picture may appear idealistic and visionary and meant to cover a great deal of anxiety and soul-searching but, from the works published in the Messenger, we can only infer the degree to which Southern writers were motivated by guilt. Southerners were well aware of how much they could lose if the powerful arguments put forward in Uncle Tom's Cabin could not be refuted. Through its attempt to defuse the incendiary nature of the abolitionist attack, the Messenger defines the ideals upon which the South based its own self-image and which were upheld by the common consent of its people. What becomes clear is that, in constructing a proslavery ideology, Southern writers emphasized the moral responsibility of the white race towards itself and God without paying any attention to the rights of the black race. They exhibited a singleness of purpose in their stories which completely overlooked the one character that Stowe had thrust into the spotlight on the world stage - the slave.

Chapter Four

The Children of Toil
Slavery Portrayed

"Who made this man my master...what right has he to me?" George Harris angrily asked his wife Eliza. "What right has he to make a dray-horse of me?...that's what I want to know!" In this, one of the emotionally-charged passages in Uncle Tom's Cabin in which a slave tries to deal with the personal tragedy of bondage, Harriet Beecher Stowe directly challenged the South to justify the continuation of an institution that drove slaves to the brink of despair. "Flesh and blood can't bear it any longer," George tells his wife, "my heart's full of bitterness; I can't trust in God. Why does he let things be so?"130

Stowe hoped that, by asking such searching questions through the character of a slave, she could force the South to see its institution in a new light and conclude that the practice of slavery was unconscionable. George Harris illustrated all the aspects of slavery that the South found most harmful to its image. George had a master who abused and humiliated him and threatened to sell him "downriver" away from his wife and child. As a result, George lost his

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130 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.21.

hope for the future and his faith in God. To Southerners who prided themselves on extending the benefits of Christianity to their slaves such accusations required a response. However, instead of looking critically at the slave system, Southerners looked deeper into themselves, searching for cultural indicators that would prove them blameless. To this end, the Messenger solicited testimony intended to show that slavery was founded upon moral rather than economic standards.

John R. Thompson, as editor, led the way in 1852. A portion of every house of worship throughout the South was set aside for the slaves, he claimed, and instances of fervent piety were by no means rare among the Negroes. Despite his anger over Stowe's novel, Thompson pointed to Uncle Tom as an example of a Christian slave. "It is indeed a triumphant vindication of the institution of slavery," he stated, that "a character so perfect as Uncle Tom could be produced." Any hardships that the Negroes endured were compensated by the advantages they enjoyed. While slaves were protected from cruelty by Southern law, their greatest protection, Thompson claimed, came from a Higher Law under which the greater humanity of Southern men and women was developed. This "salutary influence" within Southern society was what Thompson and many of his contemporaries believed was the most positive route to the

exoneration of the South's peculiar institution.131

Stowe had stressed the economic aspect of slavery to great effect in her novel. Black people in the South, she believed, were regarded as things to be bought and sold like pieces of furniture or worked and beaten like livestock. This was, to Stowe, the most dehumanizing aspect of slavery and a direct affront to God's law. It was the aspect of slavery that turned George Harris into an embittered, desperate man and drove his gentle wife Eliza to risk death to keep the child she loved. It was also responsible for the death of Uncle Tom. While Southern critics of the novel might argue that its characters were implausible, its events improbable and its arguments false, they realized that it painted a devastating picture of the South which a great number of people found to be convincing. Arguing that most of Stowe's readership were either ignorant or uninformed of the true nature of slavery, one writer in the Messenger concluded that the South needed a "great and comprehensive history of African slavery" through which it could vindicate itself before the world. From such a book, "the streams of poetry and the drama would flow; fiction, too, would come and deck the honest forms of history with the gorgeous and attractive robes of the ideal." Southern authors, therefore, must commence their task by proving that slavery was a great

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131 "Notices of New Works," (October,1852), p.637.

conservative influence in Southern society with blessings and benefits that would "secure to the South permanent peace, prosperity and happiness."132

However, proslavery arguments formulated in the Messenger became an amalgamation of the ideals already expressed in defense of the Southern people. Slavery, like Southern women and Southern religious doctrine, became part of the bigger argument advanced by the South in support of itself. The Messenger's writers looked at slavery from every perspective, ethnological, historical and Biblical, and concluded that nature, reason and revelation proved it just. Their interpretation of liberty and slavery always returned to the fundamental principles of religious doctrine - the keystone of a Christian arch which supported and protected every aspect of Southern society including the so-called degraded race. "Slavery is a divine right, as much so as any moral precept contained in 'Holy Writ.' It has the sanction of God, and upon that sure foundation and none other, we would have it rest," wrote a slavery apologist in 1857.133

The South's preoccupation with the sacrosanct morality of its society led to a broadening of the term "slavery" from its heartless economic form to a symbolic embodiment

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132 "Duty of Southern Authors," SLM 23 (October,1856), p.246.

133 "Slavery - Is It Natural Or Unnatural," SLM 25 (December, 1857), pp.434-435.

of Southern Christian values. By focusing on a single perspective rather than on the wide range of issues raised by Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Messenger's writers united behind the South's peculiar value systems. Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued that, in this time, "white man's honour and black man's slavery became in the public mind of the South practically indistinguishable."134 While Wyatt-Brown identified honour as the source of Southern peculiarity, the Messenger shows that the hand of Providence held the most powerful influence over the lives of antebellum Southerners. As a result, the many facets of the proslavery argument became fused into a single theme intended to prove that the Southern people were not sinners and slaveholding was not a sin.

This point was well illustrated in a lengthy article published in the Messenger in 1854. The author of "De Servitude" argued that, since sin was inherent in all human nature, slavery could sometimes have disastrous effects upon the moral and physical well-being of the slaves but, he or she claimed, where the master held a deep religious commitment, the system could be highly beneficial.135 Rather than trying to idealize the system, this article focuses on the South's more pressing need to support its own self-image. "Slaveholding is right or wrong according

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134 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor p.16.

135 "De Servitude." SLM 20 p.421.

to the manner in which the duties of a master are discharged," the writer claimed, "and cannot be presumed to be immoral without a violation of the great principles of justice and charity."136 The admission that slavery was subject to abuses might seem to run contrary to the contention that it was a benign and beneficial system. However, this admission points to a crucial issue in the Messenger's pro-Southern stance which defended the South purely on the basis of its high moral standards.

An article taken from the Southern Planter in 1856 shows how this Southern perspective was related to the slavery issue. In interpreting the Declaration of Independence, it was decided that the abolitionists had misinterpreted the word "rights." A "right," according to this article, meant "consistency with the will of God or his Law."137 When a man demands his rights, the author states, "he only asks that which it is ordained that he shall have." What the Declaration of Independence proposed was, according to the writer, that "all men owe equal obedience to the laws of God; that among these are laws requiring them to live, to pursue their happiness by proper means, and to strive for that position in which obedience

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136 Ibid., p.429.

137 "Liberty and Slavery," a review of the work of Professor Bledsoe written for the Southern Planter and published simultaneously in the Messenger, 22 (May,1856), pp.382-388.

to divine law is practicable."138 Thus, because all men owed their allegiance to God, it followed that slavery was the true condition for the Negro race because freedom would incapacitate them from obedience to God. If slaveowners were bound by both secular and religious law, then so to were the slaves. Social relations, in turn, bound the slave to render obedience and submission to his owner and the Scriptures directed the owner how to act toward his slave.

Within this line of reasoning, Southerners developed a formula for their society which, in a time of change and uncertainty, would promote discipline and sustain order in both the black and the white communities. It could also provide an answer to George Harris. His condition, it could be proved, was not only sanctioned by the Declaration of Independence but was ordained by Divine Law. Therefore, by holding him as a slave, his master was performing both a legal duty and a solemn moral duty imposed by God. However, in the case of a slave like George Harris, who felt neither dignified nor enlightened by his condition and was instead consumed with anger and resentment towards his masters, this rejoinder was not complete. Stowe had presented a powerful emotional argument against slavery that also had to be addressed. Because of the emotional appeal of characters like George and Eliza Harris, sympathy

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138 Ibid., p.385.

for the slaves had deepened. Southern writers were urged to show the world how slavery, in keeping with the essential nature of Southern society, discharged both its obligations to justice and its debt to Christian humanity.

W.J. Cash took a cynical view of the South's protestations in this regard. "It must prettify the institution and its own reactions, must begin to boast of its own Great Heart," he wrote. "To have heard them talk, indeed, you would have thought that the sole reason some of the planters held to slavery was love and duty to the black man." Uncle Tom, Cash believes, was not so much a product of Stowe as a product of the South. He claims that both North and South utilized Tom's character for their own purposes, as an incarnation of a sentimentalized version of slavery. 139 However, the Messenger leads us to conclude that Southerners saw their duty to the black man only as an extension of the love and duty they felt they owed to God. Uncle Tom's experiences illustrated the best and the worst of slavery. He led a contented life in his cabin on Shelby's plantation, and a miserable tormented one with Simon Legree. His character also shows the slave as both a pious, highly ethical person and as a chattel. A viable Southern defense required the reconciliation of both views.

James P. Holcombe, speaking before the Virginia State

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139 Cash., pp.82-83.

Agricultural Society in Petersburg, Virginia in 1858, made just such an attempt.140 Slavery, he assured his audience, is "the main-wheel and spring of your material property, interwoven with the entire texture of your social life, underlying the very foundation of public strength and renown... to lay upon it any rash hand would put in peril whatever you value; the security of your property, the peace of your society, the well-being, if not the existence of that dependent race which Providence had committed to your guardianship."141 Personal slavery surrounds the black man with a protection and salutary control which his own reason and energies are incapable of supplying," he claimed. While admitting that white masters "through the wicked passions of [their] fallen nature" had committed acts of cruelty, Holcombe was confident that slavery had accomplished so much for the happiness and advancement of the Negro. "Cast in the sheltering bosom of the Southern home," the slave found solace, sympathy, kindness and protection. Again, Holcombe highlighted what had become such a fundamental part of the Messenger's proslavery argument: the North had to understand that the South was seeking to discharge "not simply the obligations of

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140 James P. Holcombe, "Is Slavery Consistent With Natural Law?" An Address delivered before the Virginia State Agricultural Society, at the sixth annual Exhibition, at Petersburg, Virginia, 4th November, 1858. SLM 27 (November, 1858), pp.401-421.

141 Ibid., p.401.

justice, but the larger debt of Christian humanity towards these Children of Toil."142

Stowe had shown that the slaves' happiness, safety and comfort were illusory since their lives were entirely at the whim of their owners. When Eliza tells George that her master is kind, he warns her that things might change at any time. Likewise, when Tom hears he is to be sold, he tells his wife, "Mas'r ain't to blame, Chloe, and he'll take care of you." Chloe has other opinions: "Them that sells heart's love and heart's blood, to get out thar scrapes, de Lord'll be up to em," she tells Tom.143 Stowe had claimed that the African was "naturally patient, timid and unenterprising," but would suffer cold, hunger and pain rather than be the slave of a cruel master.144 Surprisingly, the enduring patience of Tom under Legree's brutality would seem to contradict this opinion, and appears closer to the Southern portrait of the Negro under slavery. Even though Tom's piety was considered a little overdrawn, it became central to an important concern of Southern apologists who focused upon the slaves' religious well-being as evidence of their own Christian merit.

Southerners felt that by introducing an otherwise heathen race to the principles of Christianity, they were

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142 Ibid., pp.420-421.

143 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.99.

144 Ibid., p.101.

performing a moral task. How, then, could they be considered sinners? An article written in 1855 was chosen for publication in 1860 because it showed slavery as the design of the Creator and the South as part of His divine scheme.145 Southerners knew that slavery was right because their slaves, contrary to Stowe's defamatory portrait, were "in all elements of happiness...equal to any number of their race, anywhere else on the habitable globe."146 Hence, the obligations of the slaveholder were met and the piety of the master had redeemed the institution. Whether enforced externally by civil law or internally by self-discipline, slavery was bound by a Higher Law. Here was the essence of the proslavery defense in the Messenger and one of the basic means through which the South attempted to absolve itself. If we compare what was asked of Southern authors regarding the defense of their section to what was actually presented to the Messenger, we find little evidence that speaks directly in support of those in bondage. What becomes evident, however, is that the moral aspects of the institution were never far from the minds of the magazine's authors.

By 1858, John R. Thompson was convinced that the Messenger had more than done its duty in support of the

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145 Henry A. Washington, "The Races of Men," SLM 30 (April, 1860), pp.251-260.

146 Grayson, "Is Slavery Right," p.248.

peculiar institution. "The argument," he claimed, "has been stated over and over again in these pages by the ablest writers the South has yet seen within her borders...It has been viewed in all possible lights; it has been turned this way and that; it has been considered from the beginning to the conclusion...of slavery, its justice, its humanity, its happy social consequences, we verily believe there is nothing to be said that cannot be found in the volumes of the Messenger." However, he continued, "literature does not begin and end with the Slavery discussion,...we want other culture in the South besides the Cotton culture."147 In truth, while the Messenger carried many articles that dealt directly with slavery, it played a very small role in the Messenger's fiction. However, the few exceptions are worth examining, since they add the final touches to the portrait of the South painted in the South's leading literary magazine.

During the 1850's, talk of secession was in the air and Southern optimism was being replaced with mixed feelings of anger and sorrow. However, in the Messenger's fiction, the world of hostility and fear seemed far away, and the Southern ideal still existed. "Chronicles of a Planter's Hall" for example, gives an idealized portrait of slavery associated with Southern mythology. Horace and Emily Effingham think of the slaves as family members

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147 "Editor's Table," (May, 1858), p.392.

willing to work hard and long for the benefit of the plantation. Their unflagging loyalty to Horace is a result of his kindness and consideration toward their needs. When Horace's crop is threatened by bad weather, the slaves rally to save it, and when Horace finds himself in financial difficulties, he despairs of having to sell any of his servants and instead sells his favourite riding horse and his carriage.148 In light of what we have learned so far about the intent of Southern fiction, this idealized picture of plantation life serves a deeper purpose.

After Horace is encouraged by the pious women in his life to commit himself to the Holy Spirit, he transmits his religious fervour to his slaves. In so doing, he discounts one of Stowe's most destructive arguments that slaveowners deprived their charges of a spiritual life. Conflict became impossible within the mature human relationships that religion established between the two races. Horace Effingham's religious experience created an optimum relationship between himself and his slaves but, more importantly brought him that all-important sense of contentment which he had never before experienced. The thankfulness Horace experiences with his "good and faithful servants clustered round him, and his power ample to do

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148 "Chronicles of a Planter's Hall," p.618.

them good" shows slavery at its best.149 Such idyllic pictures became a powerful component of Southern mythology and, during the antebellum years, the Messenger's contributors used it effectively as part of the Southern world created in their fiction. Virtuous women, contented slaves and Southern piety were blended together to create a picture of the South in which love, honour and order still held sway.

In the early years of the decade, slaves in fiction were referred to as servants, labourers or domestics and their appearances were generally brief and of little consequence. The previous story shows black characters in a role that became an integral component of the Southern myth. In a story entitled "A Memory of Childhood," its author attempts to show how such a special bond between master and slave is formed.150 The slave in this story, Goodwin, was amiable, kind, gentle and eager to serve. Happy in his life as a slave, he kept his master's friends entertained with his singing and his "antics." However, he was severely beaten by an older Negro because he refused to tell a lie. Like Uncle Tom, Goodwin suffers unjustly because he clings to his personal code of ethics. The young slave bears no malice toward his attacker and, as he

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149 Ibid., pp.678-690.

150 "A Memory of Childhood," SLM 23 (October, 1856), pp.270-275.

lays dying, speaks of heaven and "the inhabitants of that sinless region" with whom he shall soon be united.151

The author compares the unenlightened souls who die like "wild boars" in the African jungle with slaves under the Southern system which allowed them to be "given over to bondage in the land of Sabbaths and Bibles."152 Long after Goodwin is dead, his master continues to study the sacred pages of his Bible and feels no regret over the slave's death because he has gone to the Lord. "I have learned from the incident," he states, "that the Christian slaveholder is God's missionary to the sons of Africa, and that he who faithfully meets the obligations of his position, will win for himself honor and glory which will survive the close of earthly history and the wreck of the worlds."153 Here, clearly stated, is the essence of the South's ideological perspective on slavery, religion and their society. There is no defensiveness, anxiety or uncertainty in this author's work just a calm, confident justification of both the slave system and those who uphold it. Only without the mitigating influence of Christianity, would the system become the cruel and evil institution that Stowe portrayed.

"Scenes and Sketches of Southern Life," also published

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151 Ibid., p.273.

152 Ibid.,

153 Ibid., p.275.

in 1856, again stresses the inter-relationship between slaves and their white owners.154 The story recounts, with great sentimentality, how the habits and characteristics of the Negro race have been allowed by "a mysterious Providence" to become strangely interwoven with that of the Southern whites. In this tale, a white family was gathered one evening in their brightly lighted parlour when a little slave girl who attended the oldest boy of the family stole too close to the open fire and was enveloped in flames. The grey-haired grandfather crushed the little girl to his chest to extinguish the flames -- too late to save her. Blackened and disfigured, her last thoughts are of her rescuer. "Mammy," she cries, "master took me out of the fire, thank him for me, won't you, Mammy?" "Poor little burnt child, how meekly she bore her sufferings," the author tells the readers. Tended by the white family she loves, little Caroline begs her mistress to pray with her. "The soft dark liquid eyes were raised, and the small dark hands clasped together, as the child followed each holy, and well known petition slowly and reverently uttered."155 Then she expires. The young man she attended never reconciled himself to her loss, proving that, despite the perceived disparity in intellect,

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154 "Scenes and Sketches from Southern Life: The Child on Fire," SLM 22 (February, 1856), pp.142-144., signed E.P.C.

155 Ibid., p.143.

feelings and abilities between the two races, slavery had formed an almost symbiotic union between them with each providing the other with what was needed most. The author atempts to show how, in a truly Christian environment, the slave acquired comfort and security and the master, a sense of personal merit and self-worth.

Such fiction, by integrating slavery with religion, provided a defense of the South itself. However, the South's discomfiture over human bondage has been an enduring theme in the historical analysis of the region and the idealization of the institution in Southern fiction has been seen as romantic wishful thinking on the part of a nation under stress. However, beneath the sectional image-making lay one of the most enduring features of Southern life. In their creative endevours, the Messenger's contributors defined the region's primary strengths in answer to those who chose only to portray its weaknesses. Stowe had raised some very pertinent questions about slavery and while the answers these authors gave may have seemed artificial and somewhat fanciful, they nevertheless defined the ritual beliefs by which individual and collective decisions were guided.

By 1858, however, a slight shift is noticeable in the way slaves are depicted in the Messenger's fiction. The idealistic portrait of life in the South, while still evident, becomes integrated with a more pragmatic approach.

"The Portfolio of a Rambler in Virginia," attributed to John Esten Cooke and published in 1858, raises an aspect of slavery unmentioned since the initial backlash against Uncle Tom's Cabin.156 The story tells of a brother and sister, Ephraim and Jael Gaunt, who grow up with a profound dislike for each other. Jael is a Southern woman devoid of all Christian virtue. Raven hair, black glittering eyes and sour and sneering lips are the outward manifestation of the bitterness that dwells in her heart. Ephraim Gaunt, in comparison, is an amiable man and an indulgent master but cannot tolerate the constant bickering of his sister. Finally, in exasperation, he drives her from his house and she joins the Negroes "sleeping on the floor of the 'quarters' by their side; brooding over her wrongs, and resolving projects of avenging herself."157

This type of behaviour was previously unseen in the Messenger's portraits of Southern women. Jael not only consorts with the slaves but encourages three of them to kill her brother. The slaves confess that, by murdering their master, their lives would become even easier. "The charge of promiscuous association with the negroes, on the woman's part, was terribly significant in its bearing on this statement." the author notes. The tragedy culminates

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156 "The Portfolio of a Rambler in Virginia," SLM 27 (September 1858), pp.206-215. Unsigned but attributed to John Esten Cooke in Jackson, p.145.

157 Ibid., p.208.

with the hanging of the three slaves, but Jael, against whom there was no evidence, as slaves could not testify against their owners, goes free. The specter of miscegenation, which Southern apologists found so offensive in Uncle Tom's Cabin, takes on a new form when a white woman chooses to associate with black males. It is interesting to note that the slaves in this story show no loyalty to a master who treats them well and are willing to kill him to make their own lives easier.

Miscegenation, slave violence and depraved, immoral women were antithetical to the idealized portrait of the South the Messenger had sought to promote. Nor did the author provide a moral lesson for his readers. The slaves are violent and dangerous, and Jael, who avoids retribution for her sins, shows no remorse. It can only be supposed that the author's intent in devising such a story was to shock his readers with a cause celebre. However, because the deaths of Ephraim Gaunt and his slaves are the direct result of the actions of an evil woman, the story perpetuates the belief that sinful behaviour stemmed from a lack of religious guidance within the individual. For the pious Southerner, sin was defined in individualistic and personal terms. Jael's character gave a ghastly example of the devastating effect a depraved and ungodly woman could have upon those around her. The point to be made here is that the sinfulness of the individual, not that of an

entire section, was what needed to be addressed.

It was not until 1858 that the word "nigger" first appeared in print in the Messenger although Stowe had used it freely in her novel. While this particular delineation held no negative connotations to nineteenth-century Southerners, its use adds a harshly realistic tone that such favourite euphemisms as "servant" or "ebony bondsman" did not. In 1860, the author of "Love in the Country," who signs himself Klutz, talks about the way in which niggers on a large farm maintain an interest in the activities of the white family. "The nigger is learned in winds, social and domestic." he writes. "The nigger keeps an eye upon young Miss - the veering welcomer of every gale; the bright, the beautiful - wonders, ponders, and often blunders to the truth."158

The slaves in this story talk in an untutored dialect and exhibit an easy-going, free-hearted but rather cunning attitude toward their situation. Old Jerry, an ancient rogue, swears that the jug of bitters he is imbibing is for the aches in his limbs. The author describes how "in his cabin Uncle Jerry took bitters for his own health, and then sneaked afield with many a ready lie for his master, should he encounter him."159 While this old slave loves his

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158 "Love in the Country," SLM 31 (August, 1860), pp.92-103., p.98. Signed Klutz but attributed to William C. Elam, in Jackson, p.145.

159 Ibid., p.100.

white family, he nevertheless lacks the pious dedication to truth and duty found in the slaves of earlier Messenger fiction. His primary concern, like the slaves in the previous story, is for his own comfort and ease. If he cannot get them from his master then, with cunning and artifice, he will obtain them for himself.

By 1860, the pious, subservient image captured in Stowe's Uncle Tom, gave way, in the Messenger to one that more resembles the wily, self-serving Sam, who, when he learns Tom is to be sold, begins to speculate on how it will benefit his own future. "Now, dar, Tom's down - well, course der's room for some nigger to be up - and why not dis nigger?" Sam is a slave who plays the fool with a child-like simplicity that belies his acquisitive and deceptive nature.160 The story "Hannibal, A Nigger" written in 1860, identifies this type of slave with discerning clarity.161 A parody of the whole slave question, it provides a rather tongue-in-cheek view of Southern society. The Negro in question, Hannibal, is owned by the proprietor of a Southern hostelry. When Towhed Blower, a rich and gullible Northerner, arrives at the inn Hannibal is sent to take care of his needs. The visitor holds many of the misconceptions about slavery considered

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160 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.111.

161 "Hannibal: A Nigger," SLM 30 (June, 1860), pp.410-420., signed Klutz.

common among those unfamiliar with Southern practices. "Sambo," Blower asks Hannibal, "are you a slave?" "Yes Sir; A fifteen-hund'ed dollar darkie," Hannibal replies. "Where are your iron shackles - your hand-cuffs and chains?," asks the incredulous Northerner. "Ain't got no i'ons," replies Hannibal, "They don't put 'em on a 'spectable person."162 This line of questioning convinces Hannibal that Blower is an abolitionist but, instead of being pleased to see him, the slave raises the alarm.

Hannibal holds as many misconceptions about the abolitionists as Blower has about slavery. In the kitchen, Hannibal shares his feelings with the other slaves. "They kills us fer kirled har, I hear," he tells his incredulous audience, and launches into a story describing the horrors that befall two Negroes who are "ticed" by abolitionists who promise to make them free. "Dey runned away f'om good marsters, gib se Aberlishuniss all dere money watches and what not, and after all he went to starvin um," Hannibal tells the frightened group. Short work was made of the abolitionist when he was caught. "Dey flung' im to a pack o' blood-hounds", the slave relates gleefully, "and dey made short work on 'im." "Whar does you reckin der Abolishuniss' ondyin soul went?" asks Aunt Sally. "Towards de bottom o' de bottomless pit, wid a mill-stone for a

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162 Ibid., p.413.

sinker," states Hannibal.163

These slave characters may seem gullible and naive but their simple dialogue illuminates several of the most divisive issues surrounding slavery. The writer attempts to show, through the foolish, narrow-minded attitudes of his characters, how a once united country was now threatened with disunion. Major Igniphagus, a frequent patron of the hostelry, represents the worst traits of the fire-eating Southern patriot who, despite the fact that he does not own any slaves, expounds upon the virtues of slavery with great bravado. After questioning Hannibal about the Northern visitor, the Major and a few "bar-room suckers, loafers and fast boys," decide to tar and feather the suspected abolitionist. "Gentlemen," Towhed pleads with the mob, "I am an American, and I beseech you as fellow countrymen to hear me." To the Major and his cohorts, any "fellow countryman" is someone whose beliefs are Southern beliefs. "Are you in favour of our institutions?" demands the Major. Towhed is anxious to agree. "No-one could discover anything godlike in the negro, from the flat of his foot to the kinky crown of his head," he swears. "Shape, colour, smell alike" forbade the "blasphemous idea" that God created the Negro in his own image. The mob is placated by this confession and they retire to the bar to drink to their

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163 Ibid., p.414.

shared ideas.164

The next morning, Towhed Blower awakes to learn that, in order to prove his unerring sympathy with white Southern ideals, he had bought Hannibal for fifteen hundred dollars. "Of course," Hannibal's former owner tells him, "I knew your real motive in purchasing the boy - to give him his freedom." "Free," exclaims Towhed, "I'm not such an ass as to throw fifteen hundred dollars away." The Yankee is caught in a trap, and the more he tries to extricate himself the more he demonstrates the hypocrisy behind abolitionist ideals. He talked, like others, of the Negroes' inalienable liberty, and now he owned a slave. How could he possibly sell his brother? The author states that, "not long since it was a clear case that Southern owners were bound, by the most holy law of heaven and earth, to free their millions of slaves. When a Northerner owned one, why - the case was not so clear."165 Hannibal is not so simple that he cannot see an advantage in the game. He tells Towhed that he will be more than happy to go North and to leave his three wives who are only "poor, ignorant niggers." In the North, he expects to get "rich and edicated" and have a white woman. At this point, Towhed loses all patience with the Negro and sells Hannibal back to his original owner at a greatly reduced price --

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164 Ibid., p.416.

165 Ibid., p.417.

an act that fills him with shame. On his way out of town, Blower flings Hannibal twenty-five cents from the carriage window as a token gesture of kindness. "He is lucky to have escaped hanging," states the Major, "lucky for him this disgraceful community is the most infernally orderly and law-abiding hole in the civilized world."166

The serious aim behind this story's wry humour is to show how the Northern antislavery argument floundered when confronted with slavery's realities. Abolitionists had often been accused of hypocrisy, and, when Towhed Blower chooses money over freedom for Hannibal, he proves the point. Although the idyllic picture of slavery that Southern authors had been encouraged to promote is conspicuously absent in this tale, it makes a strong statement in the South's defense. Rather than promoting the virtuous traits of the Southern people, the article attempts to defend the South by denigrating Northern values. In creating a cowardly, hypocritical character like Blower as a representative Northerner, the author struck a direct blow at the enemy.

In June 1860, a new editor, George W. Bagby, had taken over the Messenger from John R. Thompson. Bagby was a secessionist who took a stand against sentimentalized fiction even when it idealized the South and called for a realistic regional literature. He was, however, a

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166 Ibid., pp.419-120.

confirmed Southern patriot who held fast to the accepted ideology of his section and, like Thompson before him, he continued to look for writers who could "paint with pen and ink the real life around [them]" filled with both humour and pathos.167 "We desire especially," he wrote in his first editorial, "to obtain home-made, purely Southern articles - tales, stories, sketches, poems, that smack of the soil." However, as North and South poised on the brink of war, Bagby was forced by currents of opinion to publish many more articles with a political bearing and, in December, 1860, he declared for a Southern Confederacy and urged Virginia to lead the way. "Let us tear from the national flag the fifteen stars which the despots of the North have attempted to sully with the imputation of barbarism," Bagby demanded, "let us fight for our honour, for our rights, for our homes, let us fight for our wives, our children, and our aged sires, whom the mercenary hordes of the North would fain deliver over to the sword of the invader and the pike of the negro insurrectionist."168 Bagby's use of such fiery rhetoric shows that Southern attempts to overcome sectional misunderstandings by showing themselves in a pure and honourable light had failed. Under Bagby's editorship, the Messenger turned from a

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167 Joseph Leonard King, Dr. George William Bagby: A Study of Virginia Literature, 1850-1880 (New York, 1966), p.81.

168 "Editor's Table," SLM 30 (December, 1860) p.466.

defensive to an offensive position towards its enemies.

Stowe had attempted to promote a moral argument against slavery through Uncle Tom's Cabin; Southern writers in the Messenger had attempted to promote an equally moral argument on their own behalf. As a vehicle for social criticism, Stowe's novel had been very effective but as the sections prepared for war the Negroes were still in bondage and the South was still defending its right to keep them there. Stowe had chosen her examples adeptly in the antislavery cause and had shocked the South into a reply. In the Messenger we have seen the examples Southern writers chose and the picture of the South they fostered. It is evident that, for the South, the central issue of the slavery controversy was not the slaves as individuals but the slaves as representatives of the South. Humble and ignorant though they might be, it was through their circumstances that the world looked at the South and judged its people. In this way, slaves were vital to the image of the South. As the Messenger indicates, if the slaveholding community could prove itself to be moral, law-abiding and righteous in all spheres of social intercourse, slavery could be defended.

Conclusion

"What can any individual do when confronted with the evil among themselves?" Harriet Beecher Stowe asked in concluding Uncle Tom's Cabin.169 With these words, she presented the South with what became the burning question of the 1850's. This survey of the Messenger has shown that Southerners, despite their protestations, were not unaware that the slave system had grave fundamental weaknesses, nor were they blind to the evil within their society. They did not, however, accept slavery as the root cause. As George Frederick Holmes admitted, "In thousands of instances, of almost daily occurrence, the affliction or the crime has sprung as directly from existing laws, manners and institutions, as in the examples charged to the score of slavery in Uncle Tom's Cabin." Sin and evil, he felt, existed in all societies due to the "innate frailties of humanity, the native wickedness of particular individuals, and the inability of human wisdom to repress crime without incidentally ministering to occasional vices."170 Here, Holmes defined the crux of the South's defense against the

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169 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.456.

170 "Uncle Tom's Cabin," SLM 22 (December, 1852), p.727.

antislavery attack which embodied the most fundamental precepts of the slaveholding section.

The moral arguments presented in the Messenger's fiction come very close to mirroring the beliefs of Stowe herself. Stowe's antislavery appeal was firmly based upon the tenets of Christianity, and she was convinced that those who upheld the system could not be in harmony with the sympathies of Christ. Therefore, she proposed, when confronted with evil, it was the duty of Christian men and women to look into their own hearts to "see to it that they feel right." "The man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity," she claimed, "is a constant benefactor to the human race."171 The material published in the Messenger shows that this line of reasoning was actively embraced by Southern writers and became critical to the ideological defense of the South.

After the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, John R. Thompson had urged Southerners to seek justice for themselves through his magazine. He felt, however, like many of his contemporaries, that the world would fail to acknowledge their theoretical reasoning as long as it held a misinformed and distorted opinion of the South itself. George Frederick Holmes went further, claiming that slavery apologists were fighting a lost cause as the world was

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171 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.457.

blind and deaf to their protestations of innocence. By clinging to a system which had already been repudiated by the rest of the western world, Southerners were acutely aware of the insurmountable difficulties they faced when formulating a defense based upon the slave system alone. They could not allow their society to be identified with this single institution. They needed to be seen as much more than just slaveholders. Although slaves were an integral part of the Southern community, the fictional world we find in the Messenger, unlike that portrayed in Uncle Tom's Cabin, was white. It was white faces that Southerners saw denigrated and distorted in Stowe's portrait of the South, and it was these images that mattered most. Where Stowe had focused on the slave, Southern writers focused on the masters. If Northern authors had distorted the shape of Southern life, the South's authors could at least structure the world of their imagination to portray a society that could feel right about slavery by feeling right about itself.

The Messenger strove to elicit testimony that would instruct as well as entertain, and distinct guidelines were laid out for Southern writers who chose to undertake this task. While polemics played a useful role in assuaging the anger of the moment, writers like Holmes were convinced that the most fruitful avenue of defense lay in fiction which, as Stowe had effectively proved, carried a greater

power of persuasion. Where Southern polemics actively defended slavery, imaginative literature showed how Southern individuals were living rational, virtuous and autonomous lives despite the pressures being exerted by Northern demagogues. The fundamental Southern ideology, defined in the pages of the Messenger, challenges the idea that proslavery thought was a guilt-ridden reaction to outside criticism. The magazine's imaginative literature was neither repentent nor defensive on the matter of slavery. It was often romantic and idealistic, promoting the peaceful and orderly world that Southerners felt was theirs when left alone. It provided images of stability and comfort in a world created and sustained by God's love. Southern writers saw slave society as normal and humane as any other. Much of the Messenger's fiction shows Southern life and character according to the Old South myth, but, where Stowe thrust the slaves into the spotlight, Southern writers preferred to leave them waiting in the wings to be called upon only when needed to justify the South's central focus - the God-fearing, moral character of its society.

George Frederick Holmes had indicated that slavery, especially where women were concerned, could not be relied upon to unite all Southerners behind a common cause. The Messenger, however, has clearly shown that one common theme in Southern life provided a solid base for Southern homogeneity, that of religion. Antebellum Southerners have

been described as a deeply religious people for whom, as Donald A. Matthews argues, the Bible was the guide for everyday living at a time when they needed a "written warrant from unquestionable authority to justify themselves."172 Southern religion, as we see it interpreted in the Messenger, advocated moral accountability, enforced a sense of Christian responsibility and promoted a code of ethics that solved the South's most pressing dilemma by developing a solid slaveholding ethic. Not only does this particular perspective lead us to what was evidently the heart of antebellum Southern ideology, but also helps explain why Southerners reacted with such vehemence to Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Sinful behaviour was considered a sign of weakness. Fictional characters in the Messenger who committed sinful acts were shown to lack the direct influence of God in their lives. Stowe used her Southern white characters to effectively illustrate how even well-intentioned men and women did little to protect the Negroes from cruel and unjust treatment. Those who professed themselves to be Christians, like Shelby and his wife, were weak and ineffectual, compromising their faith for the sake of expediency. Augustine St. Clare knew that slavery was morally indefensible but, while fully aware of his

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172 Matthews, p.177.

complicity in a system that his mother taught him was wrong, he lacked the moral fortitude to openly oppose it.

The key difference which this study had found to exist between the Messenger's fiction and Stowe's is that Southern writers created the image of a society where the weak and unethical men and women who may have been tempted to act in a sinful way were brought back into the fold by the strong Christian influences with which they were surrounded. When Bertha Argal remarks, "I do not trust in God, I am evil and miserable," she defines a religious perspective which was integral to the South's view of itself and its institutions. Without God, misery and evil could indeed take over the beautiful Southern garden; but with God, that garden would remain a peaceful, undefiled haven.

Much of the Messenger's fiction shows that Southern writers found ample evidence within their society to promote the idea that evil, when it insinuated itself into the Southern Eden, could be dealt with effectively. The primary example was the South's women who, because they were nurturing, deeply pious and conscientiously practiced their religious beliefs, validated the moral defense of the South. Exceptions to this ideal found in the Messenger served only to strengthen the belief that religion could restore a lost soul to God's love and lead the sinner to salvation. Although this particular belief was by no means exclusively Southern, the Messenger demonstrates that Southern writers

saw a positive benefit in using this line of defense against those who claimed that evil flourished unchecked in Southern society.

In the Messenger's assessment of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Marie St. Clare was singled out as a particularly objectionable image of a Southern woman, and the reason is easily understood in light of the evidence already accumulated. Marie showed none of the ideal qualities that Southern writers promoted in their female population. She goes to church just to show off her finery. As Stowe writes, "Marie patronized good things, and she was going now, in full force, - diamonds, silk and lace, and jewels, and all, - to a fashionable church, to be very religious. Marie always made a point of being very pious on Sundays."173 The South did not want its women to be judged by the standards of Marie St. Clare, because she was not only weak and selfish but a hypocrite. Southern women like Isabel Clayton in "Vernon Grove," might be as coldly indifferent to Christian values as Marie St. Clare but, in the hands of Southern authors, served to show how, by receiving God's grace through repentance, the most unworthy woman would be redeemed.

Scholars have focused upon the Old South as a system of interlocking parts in which each "theme" is integrally related to all the others. Drew Gilpin Faust believed that,

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173 Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin p.186.

"within such a seamless web of influence, it becomes difficult to identify an obvious center."174 From this study, we learn that religion was the principal concern in the antebellum South and became central to the development of its proslavery ideology in literature produced prior to the Civil War. By the same means that promoted pious women as a positive image in the literary defense of the South, religion was given a vital and formative role in promoting a positive perspective on slavery.

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the inter-relationships between black and white characters form the basis of the plot. In Southern fiction, however, the most important relationship was between the individual and God. Because the Messenger's non-fiction clearly shows that slavery and the abolitionist campaign were burning issues in the South, we must seek an explanation for the discrepancy found between works of fiction and non-fiction. This study of the Messenger has allowed us to put both within the same framework of explanation because they both hinged on one idea - that Southerners obeyed God's law. If Southern masters acted toward their slaves according to God's will, then Stowe's claims that one man's absolute power over another could never be benevolent was proved false.

The Messenger's fiction writers tried to give their readers literature that would, as a writer stated in 1856,

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174 Faust, The Peculiar South Revisited p.118.

"perform no other function than to be [the South's] witness before posterity...and vindicate her institutions in the happiness, repose and virtue that characterize her condition."175 Because, as Southern writers contended, sinful acts were committed by sinful men and women, if Christian slaves were owned by Christian masters both could be content. Religion, as we have seen, was also important in the lives of the slaves because, it was held, a master motivated by Christian principles treated his black charges well and would naturally inculcate them with his own religious faith. Religion, therefore, formed a common bond which united not only Southern whites but linked them to their slaves through the ultimate hope of salvation for all men through Christ.

Both the fiction and the non-fiction in the Messenger promoted the belief that if Southern whites acted according to the Holy Writ and slaves accepted and acted upon the rules laid down by religious doctrine, harmony would reign in the South. Because Stowe's novel had claimed this to be a fallacy, it was paramount that Southerners prove themselves sufficiently pious to maintain this ideal state against in the face of all the temptations slavery was said to engender. Characters like Tom and Eliza in Uncle Tom's Cabin showed how Southern religious convictions, no matter

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175 "The Duty of Southern Authors", (October, 1856), p.246.

how strong, could be compromised to gain an economic advantage. Contributors to the Messenger again enforced the ideals that were central to the whole Southern value system to counteract these claims. Their stories contained no banner waving or sabre rattling, just a consistent assertion of the victory of good over evil. The themes of their stories and the lives of their characters all worked towards completing a picture of the South in which the ugly images painted by Stowe were eliminated. She had challenged the South to look into its heart to search out the evil within. During the most turbulent years of antebellum Southern history, the living tide of hope needed to sustain the hearts of the Southern people was seen to flow quite naturally from the South's religious experience.

It is apparent that by 1860 Southern writers were moving away from the established formula. The tenor of the Messenger's fiction became less idealistic and the characters created by its writers acquired a more worldly outlook. As we have seen, some of the fictional characters came closer to Stowe's depiction of Southern reality than those favoured by Southern writers in previous years. Perhaps as the sections perched on the brink of war, the Southern literary community realized that the slavery issue had overpowered all others in the minds of its enemies. Their efforts to overcome the Southern dilemma over slavery and its implications for the Southern image had only led

them to the dilemma of secession. George W. Bagby, as the new editor of the Messenger, told his readers that the "catastrophe now in progress could neither have been accelerated nor retarded." However, he still held to the established belief that, freed from the attacks of the abolitionist, the South could "commence at once the upward and onward career which a homogenous and gallant people, possessed of a fertile land, a settled religion, a stable polity, a common and high sense of honour, must in the nature of things and in the providence of God, be called upon to accomplish."176 Bagby's words show that, even if the rest of the world had rejected the South's picture of itself as false, the section needed to remain confident in its own self-worth. "We go forth," he stated, "with only the soil under our feet for our heritance, asking but to be let alone by those who have proved themselves our enemies, and determined to fight if we are not let alone."177

The ideals that Bagby endorses lead us back to Fred Hobson's "representative" Southerner with whom we began this study. Indeed, the literary imagination of the Messenger shows the extent to which the mythology of the South, of which the "representative" Southerner was a fundamental part, shared in both the continuities and changes that were

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176 "Editor's Table," SLM 31 (December, 1860), pp.468-475., p.469.

177 Ibid., p.471.

part of the antebellum Southern experience. We find that the South's mythology was a vital and living force that its inhabitants cherished and defended at all costs. However, because of slavery, the South assumed a different role in American life that was in many ways distinctive. Through its writers, the South had an opportunity to define itself on its own terms. The creative Southerner no doubt wrote for a variety of reasons, the defense of his or her section being only one of them. But, as the abolitionists continued to strengthen their case against the slaveholders, Southern literature was charged with a duty to redeem the slave regime.

The Messenger's fiction writers articulated the South's traditional values in a reasonably orthodox manner, not in passion or anger but with calm, deliberate reflection. The "representative" Southerners that perform their various roles in the Messenger's fiction firmly believed that the Hand of Providence had set them in their appointed place. Fictional men and women rarely expressed secret doubts about the rightfulness of their position within that place. Indeed, they appeared deeply committed to one particular vision of the South. Their roles were founded upon the inherent strengths already seen to exist within Southern society. While pondering the issues raised by antislavery activists, Southern writers showed a remarkable absence of guilt over slaveholding. Instead they focused upon the

alleviation of individual sin rather than attempting to deal with the guilt attributed to their entire section. If Southerners lived under a burden, it was the burden that God had placed upon all humanity to remain pure and upright in His sight. The fear of the dissolution of the Union and the prospect of war did not deter the Messenger from maintaining a firm ideological stance on behalf of the South.

As they approached the darkest hour in their history, Southerners held fast to their one primary belief: as God's true and faithful servants, they would be victorious over their enemies. By 1860, however, Southerners faced a battle that could no longer be won with words. As John R. Thompson predicted when Uncle Tom's Cabin first riveted the eyes of the world upon the South, "what we do not put down with the pen, we may be compelled to put down with the bayonet."178

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178 "Notices of New Works," SLM 18 (October, 1852), p.639.

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