"Now He Belongs to the Ages": Contemporary Fiction's Supernatural Contribution to the Cultural Memory of Abraham Lincoln

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"Now He Belongs to the Ages": Contemporary Fiction's Supernatural Contribution to the Cultural Memory of Abraham Lincoln

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Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework: Remembering Lincoln 10

1.1 Collective and Prosthetic Memory 10

1.2 Examining the Myth 13

1.3 Savior of the Union and The Great Emancipator 14

1.4 The American Memory Communities 18

1.5 The Supernatural 23

Chapter 2 – Uniting a Country: *Lincoln in the Bardo* 26

2.1 A Bardo of Unity 26

2.2 Looking Inside: Lincoln and the Ghosts 28

2.3 The Bardo and the Civil War 35

2.4 The Ghosts of Slavery 39

Chapter 3 – Abolishing Slavery: *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* 43

3.1 A Monster-Slaying President 43

3.2 The Nation's Vampires 46

3.3 The Monstrosities of Slavery 53

3.4 The Great, Axe-Wielding Emancipator 58

3.5 Lincoln in Adaptation 62

Conclusion 68

Works Cited 74

Introduction

Among the most well-known monuments in Washington, D.C.'s National Mall is the Lincoln Memorial, which has been standing at its west end in completed form since 1922. This neoclassical temple houses a 19 feet tall statue of Abraham Lincoln, seated, yet overlooking all who come to visit him. Henry Bacon and Daniel Chester French, the monument's architect and sculptor respectively, "opened up a space for subjective experience" with the monument, helping visitors toward understanding "Lincoln's achievement by immersing themselves in the emotional history of suffering and endurance that he himself had experienced" (Savage 218). An important purpose of the monument is therefore to make Lincoln relatable to the viewer, despite the fact that by the time it was completed Lincoln had already been dead for nearly 60 years. Regardless of this time gap, the Lincoln Memorial stresses understanding of Lincoln as well as remembrance, as above the seated figure of Lincoln a large inscription by art historian Royal Cortissoz states that "In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever" (220).

Abraham Lincoln (12 February 1809-15 April 1865) is perhaps the most well-known American president worldwide. Born in Kentucky, he eventually settled in Illinois for his political career, where "he helped found the Republican party" in 1856. Afterward, he "emerged as the state's Republican leader" when giving a speech in Bloomington on 29 May (McPherson). This "lost speech" is a strong indicator of Lincoln's eloquence and its effect on the nation, as "newspaper reporters were supposedly so entranced by [the speech] that they neglected to [record it]" (McPherson). Apart from his eloquence, Lincoln is mostly known for guiding the United States through the Civil War and abolishing slavery. To accomplish these two feats, however, he had to balance keeping white Southerners and other pro-slavery Americans content while also aiming for a nation of freedom and self-governance. Although

he initially favored colonization, Lincoln ultimately wanted to abolish slavery as he recognized it was morally wrong and did not fit within his idea of an ideal nation. However, many other white Americans disagreed, as proven by the Southern states' efforts to secede. Lincoln's Address at his inauguration as the 16th president of the U.S. in 1861 therefore "offered both a sword and an olive branch," with the sword being an "affirmation of the illegality of secession" and the olive branch being "a reiteration of Lincoln's pledge not 'to interfere with slavery where it exists'" (McPherson). Nevertheless, the Civil War still came and Lincoln spent the last four years of his life trying to establish his nation of freedom while also fighting to keep that nation intact. In the years following his assassination on 15 April 1865, different interpretations of Lincoln's intentions and deeds have surfaced. In that sense, Lincoln has become a vessel accessible to many different memory communities. His memory therefore remains prominent even in contemporary times, as his adaptability to the needs of different communities ensures he stays relevant.

This need of communities to both relate to and remember figures of the past has not lessened, and the memory of Abraham Lincoln has lived on in many other forms and places than the example of the Lincoln Memorial offers. Our current age is characterized by an easy access to numerous forms of media, such as novels and films. It is in these that the memory of Lincoln is preserved, yet apart from the novels that aim to recreate him as true as possible to how history documents him, there are other novels that add certain elements in order to shed a different light on him.

In the previous decade, two such novels gained considerable renown: *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders, which was published in 2017 and won the Man Booker prize of that same year, and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* by Seth Grahame-Smith, which was adapted into a film (*Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, directed by Timur Bekmambetov) no more than a year after its publication in 2011. While the novels offer vastly different takes on

Lincoln's life—one only spans a single day while the other follows Lincoln from when he was young until his assassination and beyond—they both include elements of the supernatural. Despite this obvious link, little research has been done on the effect of fiction's use of the supernatural on Abraham Lincoln and his accomplishments as they are regarded today. While Stephen B. Oates writes that Lincoln showed "an almost supernatural tact in keeping the ship afloat" (9) during the Civil War, most writings of Lincoln and his legacy are true to facts and what we perceive as realistic. The fact that *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* deviate from this factuality so obviously is therefore an important reason to analyze them alongside each other, as their approaches to depicting Lincoln likely affect the collective memory about the President and his accomplishments.

The myth of Abraham Lincoln, to which both novels pay a large amount of attention, largely deviates from factuality as well. Two of the most prominent myths depict him as either the "Savior of the Union" or "The Great Emancipator." These images refer to his success in keeping the U.S. together throughout the Civil War and to his efforts in abolishing slavery (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 116), and still take up a prominent place in the American collective memory. As explained by Oates, "no real-life person has ever risen to such mythic proportions, to epitomize all that [Americans] have longed to be since 1776" (16). The images of Lincoln serve as both symbols and examples: the Lincoln that exists in the collective memory "fulfills [Americans'] deepest needs as a people—a Father Abraham who in the stormy present still provides an example and shows [them] the way," yet ultimately this Lincoln is an invented one (16). The myth that is based on both Lincoln's person as well as his accomplishments, and to which all that has been documented about him over the years contributes, is then also no more than an invention. However, this reliance on invention does not reduce the myth's importance, as is evident from the prominent place Lincoln takes up in the American collective memory.

It is important to note, however, that the term "American collective memory" indicates there is only one specific memory shared among all groups of U.S. citizens, even though it should contain the memories of U.S. citizens with many different roots and cultures. The term "is challenged by the diversity that arises out of immigration," as "the narratives of a bounded community … rest uneasily with the diversity of memories and origins found among its citizenry" (Booth, "Work" 257). Therefore, this thesis will focus on the term "memory community" as an alternative to "collective memory." Memory communities are bound together across generations by acts of commemoration. Collective memory is the source of their "persistence … across time" (237) and they are able to assume "manifold forms" (240). These various forms are especially prevalent in the U.S., as "it is overwhelmingly an immigrant nation—that is, one composed of a kaleidoscope of memories brought from the various countries of origin" (249). While all U.S. memory communities can nevertheless be termed "American," their memories about Lincoln presumably still differ greatly. To account for these differences, this thesis will take numerous American memory communities' views on Lincoln into consideration. However, as the novels' authors are white Americans writing about another white American, it can be assumed their novels will mostly affect the white American community's memory about Lincoln.

In their portrayal of Lincoln as fitting into either of the two myth-like representations as the Savior of the Union or as the Great Emancipator, *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* use elements of the supernatural to enhance readers' insight into Lincoln's mind. After all, the supernatural is marked by a "provocative unconventionality," allowing it "to voice otherwise unspeakable truths" (qtd. in Smajić 3). Through the supernatural elements' removal of speculation by conveying Lincoln's thoughts directly, the two novels are seemingly void of any filters normally put in place by historians and non-supernatural novelists. These filters naturally still exist, as readers are offered an insight that

is shaped by the novels' authors' intentions: Grahame-Smith's intention "was to add as much real factual history as possible … to actually trick people into thinking they were reading a real biography" (Salvati 98), and Saunders wanted to explore the image of a "grief-stricken Lincoln … [holding his son's] body" after he died, although he mentions that it is not always the case that "art is about having a clear-cut intention" (Saunders, "What Writers").

Through the supernatural, the novels introduce a sense of relatability, which contributes to how Lincoln is remembered in the American memory communities. This relatability is reached through Saunders' use of ghosts and Grahame-Smith's use of vampires. The ghosts in the cemetery of *Lincoln in the Bardo* are stuck in the bardo, a place between life and death. Through them, readers gain direct access into Lincoln's mind: the ghosts enter Lincoln's body and hear his thoughts, which they convey to the reader, while simultaneously symbolizing unity and Lincoln's role as the Savior of the Union. In *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, the vampires have no such abilities, but the way in which Lincoln writes about them in his journals—the entries of which are revealed in detail to the reader throughout the narrative—makes explicit the connection between the vampire problem in the U.S. and the issue of slavery. The myth of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, as portrayed in the novel, therefore relies heavily on the supernatural.

Worthy of note is that the supernatural is a common trope in literary representations of the experience of slavery. For example, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the presence of a ghost moves the narrative away from more realistic interpretations. As Morrison suggests, "realism is not sufficient for representing the experience of slavery" (Vint 243). *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* are vastly different novels from Morrison's. They do not take the experience of slavery as their main subject, but focus on a white president who has been well-documented throughout history. By contrast, neo-slave narratives such as *Beloved* make use of the supernatural in order to fill in the gaps left open by the lack of

historical records on the experience of being enslaved. Despite Lincoln's life being so well-documented, the way in which he is presented in Saunders' and Grahame-Smith's novels shows a similarity to the trend of neo-slave narratives' use of the supernatural: although the history on Lincoln is not lacking, it is apparently still in need of something extra. Therefore, there seems to be a similarity in the use of these novels' elements of the supernatural in order to contribute to history. This connection leads to another important reason to analyze the two novels on Lincoln, as both use tools that were first realized by the neo-slave works. As a result, part of the magic of neo-slave narratives is found in the novels' representations of Lincoln, which this thesis will investigate further.

In order to analyze more thoroughly to what effect the two novels use the supernatural when it comes to the American memory communities' views on Lincoln and his legacy, this thesis will first establish a theoretical framework centered around theories of collective and prosthetic memory. According to Barry Schwartz, "[c]ollective memory is a representation of the past embodied in *both* historical evidence and commemorative symbolism" (*Forge* 9). Schwartz focuses on what commemoration adds to history, especially in the light of "its articulating … images of the past that never existed before" ("Collective Memory" 471). As mentioned before, it must be acknowledged that the use of the term "collective memory" does not account for the many different communities that have their own memories and their own acts of commemoration. However, due to Schwartz's clear formulation of commemorative symbolism surrounding Lincoln, this thesis will nevertheless use his theory in order to analyze the novels' contribution to the American memory communities.

Schwartz' use of commemorative symbols is complementary to the concept of prosthetic memory as described by Alison Landsberg. Prosthetic memory "circulate[s] publicly" and is made possible by "an emergent commodified mass culture capable of widely disseminating images and narratives about the past" (25-26). Schwartz provides a bridge

toward Landsberg's theory by stating that the process of transforming collective memory into a framework for people to rely on "must be examined in other times and contexts," such as mass entertainment ("Collective Memory" 492). This thesis will attempt to provide this examination by taking Schwartz's commemorative symbols as a basis for the analysis of Lincoln as existing across memory communities and Landsberg's theory as a further means to determine the effect of Lincoln's portrayal in the novels and the film.

In connection to the focus on memory communities and prosthetic memory, this thesis will conduct close readings of the ways in which the supernatural is used to affect and contribute to Lincoln and his legacy in *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, with special attention to the effects of the supernatural itself and the process of myth-making. The aim is then to show that the strand of contemporary fiction on Abraham Lincoln that uses supernatural elements affects the views about him and his accomplishments as existing in American memory communities, and subsequently contributes to the myth that continues to surround him even today. The inclusion of the supernatural makes Lincoln more relatable to contemporary readers, as it gives them intimate glimpses into his thoughts, but more importantly allows for a different light to be shed on him and his accomplishments than can be achieved through non-supernatural fiction.

So as to support this claim, the two novels will be analyzed separately. *Lincoln in the Bardo* will mostly be linked to the myth-like image of Lincoln as Savior of the Union, focusing on how unity is symbolized through the ghosts in the novel and thus paying attention to Lincoln's accomplishment of uniting the country. The analysis of *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* will focus on the image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator because of the novel's prominent focus on slavery. It will examine how Lincoln is portrayed during his efforts to abolish slavery in the novel, as well as in the film, and how these efforts are tied to his wish to see all vampires eradicated from America.

Chapter One

Theoretical Framework: Remembering Lincoln

1.1 Collective and Prosthetic Memory

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis will rely on Barry Schwartz's theory of collective memory and on Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory. Schwartz emphasizes the symbolism of commemoration, explaining that "[c]ommemoration mobilizes symbols to awaken ideas and feelings about the past" (*Forge* 9). Relating this to Lincoln, this thesis will interpret commemorative symbols to include the various images of him and, in doing so, will take these images as its main focus in applying Schwartz's take on memory. These images of Lincoln are recounted by Schwartz as they were identified by Merrill Peterson: Savior of the Union, The Great Emancipator, Man of the People, The First American, and The Self-Made Man (*Post-Heroic* 116). The titles help people feel connected to the past through their perception of the titles' symbolism, as "symbolism of commemoration does more than idealize the past; it makes the past conceivable" ("Collective Memory" 491).

Next to making the past conceivable, Lincoln's images also open him up as though he were a vessel for memory communities to project their own expectations of him on and to seek guidance. Therefore, Lincoln's images are still relevant today: they offer the opportunity to deal with memories of the past, and they serve as a model for contemporary society by "articulat[ing] collective values and provid[ing] cognitive, affective, and moral orientation for realizing them" (492). Schwartz's theory on collective memory thus explains how commemoration adds to history and also how it establishes "images of the past that never existed before" (471).

Similarly, Landsberg's theory on prosthetic memory addresses the adaptation of images of the past in order to fit the present, resulting in memories for people nowadays that

are “not strictly derived from a person’s lived experience” (25). Landsberg explains that prosthetic memory is made possible by “an emergent commodified mass culture capable of widely disseminating images and narratives about the past” (26). She stresses that more so than picking up a historical narrative, prosthetic memory allows a person to “[take] on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live” and that “[t]hrough the technologies of mass culture, it becomes possible for these memories to be acquired by anyone, regardless of skin color, ethnic background, or biology” (2). *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* can be seen as products of the technologies of mass culture, as advancement of technology allowed for the novels to be distributed far beyond the places they were written, entering into the collection of media that makes up a large part of mass culture. According to Landsberg’s theory, they then give readers memories of Lincoln regardless of who these readers are. While Landsberg mainly focuses on more immersive mass media texts, which are able to draw viewers or readers in through a high level of engagement—for instance through pictures in comic books—this thesis will expand her theory to novels such as *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, showing that despite their lack of visual aids, these novels still enable readers to develop deeply felt memories in connection to Lincoln. This connection between the reader and a subject of the past then leads not to “simple identification but [to] a more complicated form of engagement” (47).

Furthermore, although the century and a half separating us from Lincoln leads to the presumption that any feelings we have about him in contemporary times are not as deeply felt as those of his contemporaries, Landsberg argues that prosthetic memories are nevertheless “‘personal’ memories because they derive from engaged and experientially oriented encounters with technologies of memory” (143). She nuances her statement, however, by adding that “prosthetic memories are not natural, not the possession of a particular family or

ethnic group," but that they "evoke a more public past, a past that is not at all privatized" (143). In other words, while the memories that exist about Lincoln according to prosthetic memory theory are just as valid as they would be from the perspective of someone who lived in the nineteenth century, they are much less privatized, making up a public past instead. The effect, then, of prosthetic memory is that it "bring[s] people into experiential and meaningful contact with a past through which neither they nor their families actually lived, … open[ing] the door for a new relation to the past, a strategic form of remembering that has ramifications for the politics of the present" (152). Like Schwartz's commemorative symbols, the theory of prosthetic memory merges commemoration with history, leading to a form of remembering that has a profound effect on contemporary times. Schwartz's Lincoln of commemoration is therefore complementary to the mass-mediated Lincoln of prosthetic memory. While the commemorative images of Lincoln originate in early cultural memory, they have been adapted in the context of mass mediation, as will be demonstrated in this thesis' discussions of the two novels: the novels take the commemorative symbols of Lincoln as their foundation and adapt them through their use of the supernatural.

Connecting the two theories further, it is noteworthy that Schwartz describes commemorative objects as "'appropriate symbols' … [that] transform collective memory into a framework on which people rely to make sense of their experience" ("Collective Memory" 492). He explicitly establishes symbols of commemoration as means by which people are enabled to relate to their place in time. Schwartz mentions that this process of sense-making through commemoration "must be examined in other times and contexts," one of which is mass entertainment (492). As Landsberg puts heavy emphasis on technologies of mass culture, to which mass entertainment belongs, the two theories are clearly connected in this area. By analyzing *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, this thesis will provide an examination of the process of commemoration through the context of mass

entertainment, paying attention to how this process affects the way in which American memory communities remember Lincoln.

1.2 Examining the Myth

Abraham Lincoln is mostly known for his image as Savior of the Union, which refers to his efforts in uniting America after the South had seceded, and his image as the Great Emancipator, which refers to his efforts in abolishing slavery. These two accomplishments, paired with the titles they granted him, have played an important role in elevating the President to mythical status. As explained by Oates, "[m]yth … is a grandiose projection of a people's experience" and "the grandiose dimensions and symbol-building power of the myths we create reveal our deepest longings as a people" (4). As a mythical symbol, Lincoln is therefore expected to exemplify both peoples' experiences and expectations, part of which he does by possessing what Americans deem their most noble traits. These traits include "honesty, unpretentiousness, tolerance, hard work, … a dedication to God and country, and an abiding concern for all" (16). Nevertheless, despite his mythical status, Lincoln has always been a subject of controversy, being both "condemned and canonized" throughout history (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 235). Part of this condemnation is aimed at his status as Savior of the Union and Great Emancipator, with arguments ranging from Lincoln misjudging how long and devastating the Civil War would be, to him never really intending to abolish slavery and only doing so to strike a significant blow against the South—where "the southern master class depended [on slavery] for its existence" (Oates 140).

Despite this condemnation, however, Lincoln's influence on Americans nowadays is profound. While the symbols of commemoration that surround him are a great help toward this large level of influence, it is also "[t]he essential achievements … of Lincoln's life and presidency [that] render him unforgettable" (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 253). "Unforgettable"

relates to the constant need to revise Lincoln's image over time, both in positive and negative ways. As a result of this revision, his image is kept alive and often invoked during times when Americans have need of him: as stated by Schwartz, "[s]ince individuals engage the past as they adapt to changing environments, every turning point in American history has led to a revised Lincoln image" (*Forge* xii).

An important event that led to Lincoln being glorified was his assassination, which "transformed [him] from a controversial president into an emblem of Northern society" (23) and "chastened his legion of critics" (Oates 17). John Wilkes Booth's reasons for assassinating Lincoln "were obvious: revenge; provoking fear in the North; rekindling hope for the South" (Newton ch. 1). He believed murdering Lincoln would make him a hero. However, while he gained "the admiration of some among the defeated Confederates," Southern newspapers "reacted to his heroism with horror" (ch. 1) and "dissociated the South from his crime" (Schwartz, *Forge* 79). Furthermore, Booth's actions started the myth-making of Lincoln, as the assassination led to "ritual acts of national affirmation and national communion" (33), all of which "affirmed [America's] indestructibility" (54). Through these rituals, Lincoln was elevated to "a new and higher plane" (33). In trying to destroy Lincoln and his legacy, Booth thus made the President a martyr instead and set him well on his way to becoming a mythical being.

1.3 Savior of the Union and The Great Emancipator

Focusing on Lincoln's two mythical images, it is worthwhile to establish how Lincoln is remembered as Savior of the Union and as Great Emancipator. This section will discuss the two images separately at first and then pay attention to what connects them.

Apart from his accomplishments, Lincoln is well-known for his eloquent speeches as well. His choice of words and use of literary devices such as, as exemplified in the Gettysburg

Address, repetition—"that government *of the people*, *by the people*, *for the people*, shall not perish from the earth"—and antithesis—"The brave men, *living* and *dead*" (Lincoln 329, emphases added)—make his speeches memorable to such an extent that they have helped elevate Lincoln to mythical status. A large part of the cultural memory of Lincoln and his two images heavily relates to his eloquence and his remarkable way with words. Traces of this articulateness can be found in *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, as the following chapters will demonstrate. It is then also through his speeches that Lincoln laid the foundation for his images as Savior of the Union and as the Great Emancipator. As explained by Eric Foner, "Lincoln did not explicitly mention either slavery or emancipation at Gettysburg," but none "could mistake the meaning of the 'new birth of freedom' to which he alluded" in the Gettysburg Address, "offer[ing] a powerful definition of the reborn nation that was to emerge from the Civil War as a land of both liberty and equality" (268). The Address focuses on the need for unity and the importance of democracy, and even implies that the U.S.'s democracy is a model for all the world: if government of the people, by the people, and for the people were to disappear from America, it would also "perish from the earth" (Lincoln 329). Preserving the Union, Lincoln thus implied, was not only in America's best interest, but in that of the world. Reconciliation between North and South was therefore essential.

In order to maintain the Union, Lincoln was initially not set on abolishing slavery. From the beginning of the war, he had insisted "that legally the Confederate states remained in the Union, which … meant that they retained authority over slavery within their borders" (Foner 268). In fact, given his earlier stance on the institution of slavery, the image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator is perhaps a curious one: he "believed in emancipation followed by colonization (deportation) of all former slaves and free blacks" (Schwartz, *Forge* 2). While Lincoln did oppose slavery, the idea of former enslaved people living among white Americans, with "the right to vote, petition, or serve on juries" (2) was not on his mind from

the start. Over time, however, his views toward slavery changed. Where he was already a progressive thinker for his time when it came to the issue of slavery, Lincoln eventually began to see that the nation he envisioned had no place for something as morally wrong as slavery: "he detested slavery. It was a blight on the American experiment in popular government, the one institution that robbed … the United States of the hope it should hold out to oppressed people everywhere" (Oates 61). Getting closer to his Great Emancipator image, it was, again, through his speeches that he further laid the foundation of this image. His Second Inaugural Address is significant in relation to his Great Emancipator role, as Lincoln explicitly states that the Civil War was a punishment from God for America's greatest offense:

> If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? … Yet, if God wills that it continue, … until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.' (Lincoln 367)

While Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address also aims at unity by stating "With malice toward none; with charity for all" (367), putting the blame on both sides of the conflict and promoting reconciliation, the emphasis on the abolishment of slavery is significant. Lincoln "had come to see [the war] as divine punishment for … slavery, as a terrible retribution God had visited on a guilty people, in North as well as South" (Oates 118). It is evident that Lincoln's role as the Great Emancipator continued even after he signed the Emancipation Proclamation in

1863, as the Address was held about a month before his assassination in April 1865. Lincoln alluded to this continuation himself, as after he signed the Proclamation, he said, “If my name ever goes into history,” “it will be for this act” (qtd. in Oates 110).

While his accomplishments of keeping America united and abolishing slavery have attributed Lincoln with two separate titles, the preservation of the Union and the abolishment of slavery are intrinsically connected. In fact, as soon as the Civil War broke out on 12 April 1861 with the Confederacy’s attack on Fort Sumter, “Senator Charles Sumner rushed to the White House and told the president ‘that under the war power the right had come to him to emancipate the slaves’” (Foner 164). Before the war, the Southern states that would go on to form the Confederacy were still part of the Union and still had authority over slavery within their own borders, meaning that Lincoln could not forbid them from continuing the institution of slavery at that time. The Southern states’ secession and the subsequent process of uniting the country during the war therefore contributed to opening up the road toward the abolishment of slavery. Along with working toward unity, then, Lincoln also endeavored to create a future of a free nation. In order to achieve that future, even before the Civil War “it was imperative that Lincoln and his party block … the expansion of slavery onto the frontier” (Oates 70). While Lincoln was not yet set on abolishing slavery in the Southern states, he was nonetheless determined not to let it spread beyond its borders.

Whatever his opinions on slavery were, Lincoln was aware of it being a sensitive subject. The way in which he spoke of it, and how he presented himself in these early stages of becoming the Great Emancipator, had a profound influence on whether or not he would succeed at uniting the country: on the one hand, “he feared that white Americans were too prejudiced to let [former enslaved] live among them as equals” (63), but on the other, it was his “devotion to the war’s central idea—to preserving a system that guaranteed to all the right of self-government—[that] dictated his course of action” (93). Despite trying to juggle these

two sides, Lincoln was ultimately forced to "speak of slavery strictly in terms of preserving the Union," as these "were the only terms the white public was likely to accept" (107).

To sum up, then, the two images of Lincoln connected to his greatest accomplishments exist in the American collective memory as follows: Lincoln as Savior of the Union encompasses his wish for unity and democracy, his focus on reconciliation, and his setting an example for the world by preserving the U.S. as a nation. Lincoln as the Great Emancipator emphasizes his wish to create a nation wherein all have the right of self-government, stressing the importance of equality and freedom yet again in the sight of the world as well as in the sight of God, while at the same time aiming to keep various groups of U.S. citizens content.

1.4 The American Memory Communities

The collective memory about Lincoln established in the previous section is somewhat general, as there is not one single memory of Lincoln that accounts for all U.S. citizens' experiences: memory is not shared among all inhabitants of the U.S., but is "the fabric of a community's way of life" (Booth, *Communities* xiii). In other words, memory communities all have their own recollection of past events that "sets defining boundaries, distinguishing one person or community from another and giving individuals a part of the foundation of their embeddedness in communities" (12). In order to address these differences, this section will offer a more nuanced insight into the way in which various American memory communities regard Lincoln.

Given the divide during the Civil War and its influence on later generations, there is a difference between the memory of Northerners and Southerners. The memories of black Americans and white Americans also differ, as the former feel the influence of a history of slavery much more prominently, and the latter might more easily identify with Lincoln due to him being white as well. These divisions between various memory communities correlate

with the contrasting reactions to Lincoln's assassination: while "[t]o many, Lincoln's death seemed like that of a father," there were also those that "passionately hated Lincoln" and even some Northerners "were content to see that Lincoln had been killed" (Newton ch. 1). The contrasting reactions point to a way of remembering Lincoln where each community perceives him differently: as Booth explains, "lives led in common … have an enduringness about them that is anchored in the persistence of the memories which frame them and give them sense" (Booth, *Communities* 15). Each community thus makes use of Lincoln's status as a vessel in order to make sense of their own place in the nation.

Turning to how Lincoln is regarded over time, it was ultimately the case that "his reputation had grown" among all groups of U.S. citizens (Schwartz, *Forge* 109). Additionally, the image of the Savior of the Union and the Great Emancipator is prominently present in the memories of these groups. That these images have persisted for so long, even into contemporary times, is not unusual: "[e]ven now, many people think of Lincoln as did his contemporaries, for today's Lincoln … is largely constituted by the Lincoln of yesterday" (*Post-Heroic* 145). Lincoln's tendency to see the U.S. in connection to the world by regarding "the slavery problem and the future of his country in a world dimension," and to acknowledge "that what menaced Americans of his day affected the destinies of people everywhere" (Oates 75) is not so strange an idea to keep alive in a world that is globalizing more and more. Despite the suggestion that Lincoln then also takes up a prominent place in the collective memory of the world, this thesis will focus on American memory communities only as the President finds his roots there.

Lincoln has been regarded differently over time across American memory communities in order to fit the environment of each time period. After the Civil War, it was "the rapid disappearance of a generation that had experienced the hardship of the Civil War and known Lincoln as a cause of personal suffering; and the maturation of a new generation"

(Schwartz, *Forge* 140) that adapted him to a new society's needs. There was a clear difference in how two generations regarded the President: by not having experienced the Civil War, the generation following the Civil War soldiers saw Lincoln as "a half-mythical figure, which in the haze of historic distance, [grew] to more and more heroic proportions" (qtd. in *Forge* 108). However, "it was not until the early twentieth century that [Lincoln] became a national idol" (74), as by then the larger distance between those remembering him and the Civil War enabled Lincoln to elevate to mythical heights. In addition, it is also his "long struggle against adversity" (Oates 146) that enabled Lincoln to achieve mythical status, especially when considering that "[h]e summoned Americans both North and South, Americans both black and white" (147) in the process, an accomplishment many thought impossible at the time.

Focusing on how Lincoln exists across memory communities of Northerners and Southerners, the "Southern/non-Southern gap in admiration of Lincoln [has] greatly narrowed" (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 242-43). Due to Lincoln's role in the war, it is a natural conclusion that the Southern memory communities are not as positive about him as the Northern communities. Nonetheless, while old men and women in the South "continued to resent [him], … 'the younger generation … accepted him from the first as a national hero'" (qtd. in *Post-Heroic* 173). Despite attitudes becoming "strongly pro-integration" (239), there remained a group of Southerners, mainly those who had been defeated in the war, who were more focused on "building a cult" around Robert E. Lee (*Forge* 96). As we look toward more contemporary times, however, "Southerners recalled [Lincoln's] understanding of the Confederate cause, [his] affection for the South and its people, and [his] longing for regional reconciliation" (222). In fact, many white Southerners in Lincoln's time were in favor of his views of reconciliation after the Civil War. Given the fact that the Reconstruction was much more radical than it would have been under Lincoln's guidance, these Southerners lamented Lincoln's death. While memories of ancestors fighting a war against Lincoln may thus remain

in current generations, it seems that both the rift in the South and the rift between Northerners and Southerners is not as significant as might be assumed.

The memory communities consisting of black Americans and those of white Americans are divided as well. Where many groups looked at Lincoln as a symbol for "the justice they desired," "[t]he relation between Lincoln and the black community … was more complex" (211). Despite knowing he was ambivalent toward black Americans, this group still admired Lincoln "more than any other group in the nation" starting from the time of his presidency, an admiration that grew even in 1909, 100 years after his birth (211-12). This admiration was not shared by all members of the black community, however, and many returned Lincoln's ambivalence during the postwar years (82). Nevertheless, the images of Lincoln that resulted from his actions are prominently present in the memory community, much more so than these actions themselves: despite doubts as to his true intentions with the Emancipation Proclamation, black Americans "continued to express their interests" at his image, and as a result, "his stature remained secure, if not preeminent, in the African American mind" (*Post-Heroic* 232). The myth of Lincoln, then, resulted in a strong position of the President across American memory communities. In the end, "blacks celebrated their emancipation and regretted that conservative whites did not put into practice Lincoln's belief in a fair starting place in the race of life" (*Forge* 222). It was not Lincoln they were disappointed in, but white Americans, as after Lincoln's assassination, this group did not deliver Lincoln's promise of a society where blacks were equal to whites. In the meantime, white Americans placed more value in Lincoln's other efforts: with how careful Lincoln had been not to spook white Americans with talk of equality, white Americans "commemorated his views on labor" instead, and they "saw the guiding force of Lincoln's life to be his respect for the right to accumulate property" (222).

What is most important in all communities' memory about Lincoln, then, is the possibility to reshape his image to the needs of each community. One of the dictionary entries for the word "image" suggests that it is "[a] mental representation of something … created not by direct perception but by memory or imagination" ("image"). An image is therefore subjective and, as a result, empty until given meaning by a person's own interpretation. Despite the images of Lincoln then connecting to different aspects of his life and to his different accomplishments, he remains accessible as a vessel to the needs of many different memory communities. In filling up this vessel, Northerners and Southerners, and black Americans and white Americans all maintain the image of Lincoln as both the Savior of the Union and as the Great Emancipator, but to their own purposes and expectations. It is apparent that ever since his death, Lincoln has been invoked to give each group, at different times, support and inspiration. Nowadays, this habit is still in place and hinted at to be a joined habit of all groups of U.S. citizens together rather than a separated process: as stated by Adam Gopnik in 2020, "[w]ith the recent degradation of the American Presidency—our four-year nightmare has provided no spectacle more nightmarish than that of Trump sitting at Lincoln's feet … —it is a truism to say that we need Lincoln again." He further states: "Lincoln will not return from the dead, … but his broadly balanced, extravagantly compromised democratic pluralism may be all there is to rescue us yet again," hinting toward a continuing need to fall back on Lincoln, even for U.S. citizens of the future.

Within Lincoln's commemoration, texts have played an important role as they allow the past to become "part of life, learned and relearned in the mind of the living" (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 222). Through texts, contemporary readers are enabled to return to the past and get to know the history around Lincoln in an intimate manner. Despite this accomplishment, however, texts are not able to stand alone in fueling contemporary affection for Lincoln: "They reflect and sustain, rather than create, affection for him" (240). Texts thus build on the

cultural memory of Lincoln that is already in place, to which they can contribute and which they can perhaps even affect. In *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, this process of contributing to and affecting how memory communities remember Lincoln is, as stated before, largely influenced by the presence of supernatural elements.

1.5 The Supernatural

One aspect of Lincoln's life that is still shrouded in mystery is his assassination. Through the enormous web of conspiracy theories that soon surrounded this event, many explanations arose that were not based on facts alone. These theories "[testify] to the desperate human need to see vast intrigues behind events too large to comprehend" (Oates 170). It seems that humans are geared to make up their own stories when unable to make sense of something that cannot be explained.

The same trend is applicable to Lincoln's image: his status as Savior of the Union and as the Great Emancipator makes him larger than life, allowing people to make sense of him in a way they would not be able to if he existed in history as an ordinary man. Instead, Lincoln was depicted as "a man of superior if not supernatural powers," ultimately becoming "the remote demigod with whom no ordinary mortal could compare" (Schwartz, *Forge* 261-62). Lincoln thus transcended the ordinary to become something out of myth. Moreover, ever since his assassination, "there has been an emotional and literary yearning to see [the President] in terms of resurrection, to have him consort with the living and the dead and even the undead" (Mallon). The connection between Lincoln and the supernatural has thus been strong for as long as people have been remembering him. However, it is only recently that fiction on Lincoln has drawn on the supernatural so explicitly.

In fiction, explanations are sometimes offered to make sense of what is not deemed in line with reality. These "supernatural explanation[s]" refer "to the influence of the invisible

world … including beings and events that have no natural explanation" (Braudy 92). As further explained by James McCosh, "[t]he raising of the dead [is] supernatural, for there is no physical or physiological law capable of producing such a result" (102). The supernatural is therefore the complete opposite of the natural and the realistic. In *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, the elements of the supernatural are confined to the presence of ghosts and vampires, with the novels remaining largely realistic in their further depictions of Lincoln's life. This interaction between the supernatural and a realistic setting is associated to "weird fiction," which originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was popularized by H.P. Lovecraft. This genre of fiction "was marked by an emphatic use of the strange and uncanny intruding upon contemporary reality" (Kincaid 44). Being a "decidedly American form" (44), the echo of the genre in contemporary fiction on Lincoln is fitting.

Additionally, the presence of the supernatural in an otherwise realistic setting relates to the magical realism of neo-slave narratives. These narratives belong to "an African-American genre that investigates the history of slavery and reworks the nineteenth-century slave narrative tradition" (Vint 241). As mentioned in the introduction, the supernatural is a common trope in literary representations of slavery, with realism not being "sufficient for representing the experience of slavery" (243). However, neo-slave narratives use the supernatural to fill in the gaps of recorded history, while texts on Lincoln are so well-documented they do not need to fill these gaps. However, texts on Lincoln are apparently still looking toward the supernatural in order to add something extra, pointing to a similarity to neo-slave works in the use of the supernatural. Sherryl Vint mentions that both Octavia E. Butler and Toni Morrison "deal with the continued haunting presence of a past, and use fantastic devices to confront readers with the antebellum period as an active part of [their] present," and that in doing so, "[b]oth … offer a corrective to official discourse by adding the

interior life of the slave" (245). Apart from filling in the gaps, neo-slave narratives thus also use the supernatural in an attempt to alter and improve the discourse already in place. Although the discourse surrounding Lincoln is too vast to be influenced by the two novels this thesis will discuss, it is still worthwhile to investigate if their use of the supernatural initiates the process of working toward the same effect. While the novels will then not drastically alter readers' memories of Lincoln, they can still affect and contribute to the memory communities through their continuation of the tradition set by neo-slave narratives. It can then be assumed that through their use of the supernatural, the two novels do not only aim to contribute to the cultural memory about the President, but also manage to pay homage to the tradition of neo-slave narratives.

Chapter Two

Uniting a Country: *Lincoln in the Bardo*

2.1 A Bardo of Unity

The idea for writing *Lincoln in the Bardo* came to George Saunders when he learned that after Willie Lincoln's death, "newspapers of the time reported that Lincoln had returned to the crypt several times to hold his son's body" (qtd. in Mallon). It is not clear whether Lincoln actually held his son's body after Willie passed away from typhoid fever in February 1862, but Saunders' novel makes this a reality. The novel focuses on the President's grief for his son. Part of this grief is conveyed to the reader through the presence of the ghosts that reside in the cemetery. Saunders explains that these ghosts all ended up "working together, without [him] having decided they should do so … and they were, it seemed, working together to save young Willie Lincoln" ("What Writers").

Labeled as an experimental novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo* takes an unusual approach toward depicting Abraham Lincoln's life. The action takes place at Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., where Willie was laid to rest. Only one evening is recounted on which Lincoln returns to the cemetery, overcome by grief, to hold his son's body. The experimental label comes in through the novel's use of the ghosts inhabiting the cemetery as narrators, and of sources, both real and fictional, as historical context. Author Colson Whitehead describes the novel as "a kind of oral history, a collage built from a series of testimonies … some delivered by the novel's characters, some drawn from historical sources." These characters in the novel are all inhabitants of the cemetery in Georgetown, but they are unaware they are dead. Instead, they believe their coffins are temporary "sick-boxes." Unable to move on, the ghosts are stuck in a place between life and death termed "the bardo." Saunders, a Buddhist, explains the bardo as a realm that is derived from "the Tibetan notion

of a sort of transitional purgatory between rebirths" ("What Writers"). The word "bardo" comes from the Sanskrit word "meaning 'transitional state' and the dead in Saunders's novel are truly in a liminal state … according to their belief that they will shortly return to life" (Morse 29).

Three of the ghosts in the bardo stand out the most by taking on the role of "tour guides [that] explain the rules of this afterworld" (Whitehead). Hans Vollman is introduced as a 46-year-old man who recently married a much younger girl. Out of respect for the girl, Vollman did not force their marriage to be consummated, proposing to live as friends instead. Yet on the day the consummation would finally occur, he died while working at his printing offices when "[a] beam from the ceiling came down, hitting [him] just *here*" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 5). After Vollman's story, Roger Bevins III is introduced. While alive, Bevins developed a romantic relationship with another man named Gilbert. However, after Gilbert "stated his intention to henceforth 'live correctly'" (25) by renouncing his homosexuality in order to conform to the social norms of the time, Bevins explains how he slit his own wrists with a butcher knife "rather savagely over a porcelain tub" (25). He changed his mind when it was already too late, and this moment of doubt leads Bevins to believe he is still alive and waiting to be discovered by his family (27).

Both Vollman and Bevins have "strong ties to the world of the living" (Bale and Bondevik 73), but the third ghost who plays a large role in the novel does not: Reverend Everly Thomas knows he is dead. "Unlike *these* (Bevins, Vollman, the dozens of other naifs I reside here among)," he explains, "I know very well what I am" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 187). Upon arriving in the afterlife, the Reverend witnessed how final judgments were handed out to those waiting in line before him. The display struck him with such terror that he ran away and now remains stuck in the bardo. He cannot reveal to the other ghosts they are dead: if he does, his judgment "*will be worse upon* [his] *return*" (193). The Reverend therefore keeps his

knowledge a secret, meaning that Willie Lincoln is not aware of his death upon arriving in the bardo. He explains: “My mother, I said. My father. They will come shortly. To collect me” (29), and that “I am to wait” (30). He is further encouraged to stay by his father’s visits, until he finally enters Lincoln’s body and realizes he is dead through hearing his father’s thoughts (282). Having no restrictions like the Reverend does, Willie ends up telling the other ghosts they are dead as well, resulting in a large departure of ghosts from the cemetery.

Willie entering Lincoln’s body and hearing his thoughts points to a prominent theme in the novel, which is unity. This chapter will analyze the different ways in which Lincoln bringing unity is emphasized throughout the novel by first looking at the ghosts’ interaction with Lincoln, then at the connection between the setting of the bardo and that of the Civil War, and finally at the presence of the black ghosts in the bardo. Relying on Schwartz’s Lincoln of commemoration and Landsberg’s theory of prosthetic memory, this chapter will provide an insight into how *Lincoln in the Bardo* takes Lincoln’s image as Savior of the Union as a commemorative symbol and subsequently uses elements of the supernatural to create a prosthetic version of this image.

2.2 Looking Inside: Lincoln and the Ghosts

Lincoln’s interaction with the dead sets him apart from other people. The novel makes clear that the way Lincoln mourns his son does not correspond to what is deemed “normal.” Both the living and the dead comment on Lincoln’s way of dealing with his grief, with the cemetery’s watchman recording in his logbook that “[the President] has been gone for ever so long. … Lost in there or fell and broke something lying there crying out” (65). Where the living only comment on the duration of Lincoln’s visit, however, the dead are able to see much more of Lincoln’s grief and its peculiarity. When Lincoln takes his son’s body out of its “sick-box” and holds it to him, Vollman notes that “no one had ever come here to hold one of

us, while speaking so tenderly," and Bevins supports this statement with a simple, "Ever" (72). The living are restricted by barriers, as the watchman is unable to see into the crypt, but the dead have no such restrictions and can get up close to witness all Lincoln does. When the ghosts see Lincoln holding Willie's body, Lincoln is singled out as unique in his behavior and made to exist apart from others. This singling out by the ghosts relates to how Lincoln's image as Savior of the Union makes him larger than life and no longer merely human.

Clearly, the ghosts add an extra layer to Lincoln's image: the living in the novel see Lincoln from the outside and therefore in line with Schwartz's Savior of the Union's simple need for a united country during the Civil War. The ghosts, however, are able to uncover another Lincoln, one that is so deeply struck by his grief that he clings to his dead son's body in a desperate attempt to remain close to him. As a result, readers gain a prosthetic memory of Lincoln as a father explicitly grieving his son. This memory is "personal" and "deeply felt" despite originating in a time through which readers "did not live" (Landsberg 2). The dead in the novel, rather than the living, thus provide readers with additional information about Lincoln.

In the bardo, the living and the dead are able to influence each other (Bale and Bondevik 72). The bardo is therefore crucial to the novel's depiction of Lincoln bringing unity and the dead being receptive to this unity. The ghosts' receptiveness to Lincoln mostly stems from their interest in Willie, who gives meaning to their existence, "owing to the extraordinary grief his father displays when he returns to the coffin in the crypt" (73). Through his interactions with his son, Lincoln gives hope to those stuck in the bardo, showing them they are still of interest to the living. In doing so, and through the ghosts occasionally inhabiting Lincoln's body, the novel draws up a connection between Lincoln and the dead.

Additionally, the ghosts' perception of Lincoln's grief relates to the overall grief of the nation during the Civil War: many people were grieving dead sons and relatives, so Lincoln's

grief for his son can be taken as a metaphor for Lincoln being the country as a whole grieving its dead sons. This metaphor runs parallel to Lincoln and the country both falling apart during the Civil War, the latter due to the impossibility of freedom and slavery existing alongside each other. Since "[a] house divided against itself cannot stand" and the nation "cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*" but will "become *all* one thing, or *all* the other" (Lincoln 129), the war had to end for both Lincoln and the nation to become whole again.

The explicit way in which the ghosts perceive Lincoln allows for the novel to convey his thoughts to the reader, seemingly unfiltered. There are three stages to the ghosts' perception of Lincoln's thoughts: identification, unification, and reconciliation.

First of all, as demonstrated, the ghosts identify Lincoln in a way that goes further than the living can achieve. When Vollman and Bevins enter Lincoln for the first time, Vollman notes that "[t]here was a touch of prairie about the fellow … [l]ike stepping into a summer barn late at night" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 147). Bevins adds "[o]r a musty plains office, where some bright candle still burns" (147). While these descriptions of Lincoln allude to another image of him—The First American, which relates to "Lincoln the frontier youth" and is "symbolized by log cabins and axes" (Schwartz, *Post-Heroic* 116)— Vollman and Bevins' intimate descriptions hint to a union of the three personalities, allowing for an unfiltered impression of Lincoln that reveals his power to unite. Rather than just conveying Lincoln's wish for unity that is intrinsic to his Savior of the Union image, the ghosts—through hearing his thoughts and through literally becoming one with Lincoln—leave no doubt as to Lincoln's intentions of unification. More so than with the Lincoln of history, the ghosts' perception of Lincoln transcends "simple identification" and leads to "a more complicated form of engagement" (Landsberg 47) in which Lincoln's wish for unity is made literal.

Nevertheless, the ghosts are also shown to identify Lincoln in a manner more similar to the living: at one point, the Reverend gets a good look at Lincoln's face. "And what a face

it was" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 195), he notes. This comment is followed by a chapter of many different historical excerpts, both real and invented, commenting on Lincoln's appearance (196-201). As a result, a bridge forms between the ghosts' perception of the President and that of the living. However, these perceptions are only similar when they concern Lincoln's outward appearance. When it comes to Lincoln's thoughts, the ghosts have much better access. For while inside Lincoln's body, Vollman learns of his grief for Willie and, by extension, the war: "*He is just one. And the weight of it about to kill me. Have exported this grief. Some three thousand times*" (155). Vollman serves as messenger to the reader, as his status as a ghost grants him with access to information about Lincoln's grief that goes further than what secondary sources merely perceive as "the saddest face I ever knew" (197). The supernatural therefore helps to increase readers' knowledge on Lincoln's inner life, rather than his outward actions. As a result, the novel has taken Schwartz's Savior of the Union, which is at its basis composed of Lincoln's outward actions, and has adapted it into a prosthetic Savior of the Union who is made much more accessible to readers than the Lincoln of history as readers can interpret the thought process of the novel's Lincoln on a much more intimate level. Given Lincoln's status as a vessel, however, his thoughts will likely be interpreted in a way that suits each memory community's own purposes and expectations of the President. Within these thoughts of Lincoln, the aspect of grief is vital as the ghosts "are summoned to embody a web of connections between the living and the dead," with this grief as "the impetus to those connections" (Bale and Bondevik 70). Grief is what brings Lincoln to the cemetery in the first place, and is therefore what makes him accessible and identifiable to the ghosts by entering the confines of the bardo.

The second stage of the ghosts' perception of Lincoln's thoughts is characterized by unification. As stated by Bale and Bondevik, "the nearness between the dead and the living brings about certain effects" (75), the most evident of which is the ghosts' ability to form a

picture of the person they inhabit and hear their thoughts. When Vollman and Bevins enter Lincoln's body together, they note that "the three of us were one" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 146). It is not until later in the novel, however, that a much larger group of ghosts gather inside Lincoln when he is about to leave the cemetery. Willie tries to follow his father as he walks away: "Gone? The boy cried out. … He pushed out form the wall and, staggering a few steps away, sat on the floor" (248). Willie is then immediately taken by "tendrils" again, which keep him in the bardo and prevent him from moving on. Noticing this, Vollman, Bevins and the Reverend join forces in order to help Willie, as where before Willie entered the bardo the ghosts felt "utterly inessential," they now feel different ("What Writers"). In fact, upon hearing from Willie that Lincoln would come back to visit, the Reverend feels "immeasurably and inexplicably moved" (*Lincoln* 63), because he realizes they have not been forgotten by the living. Willie's presence provides the ghosts with hope, but also causes them to focus on Willie and pay less attention to their own troubles. As a result, they have become more unified and less individualistic.

This unity is exemplified by Vollman, Bevins and the Reverend entering Lincoln's body: "I, alone, was insufficient" (249), Vollman states. Soon, the three are joined by many more ghosts who also wish to contribute. Their individualities then merge and gain power through unity. This power is emphasized by Vollman when he states: "It occurred to us now … that we might *harness* that mass power, to serve our purpose" (252). In other words, the ghosts have become aware of the power of unity through their experience of entering Lincoln's body, and are now ready to make use of this power. The barriers set up by their former individuality disappear, resulting in a "[u]nited … common purpose" in which the ghosts are "together, yet also within one another, thereby receiving glimpses of one another's minds, and glimpses, also, of Mr. Lincoln's mind" (253). The ghosts thus achieve unity by their initiative to enter Lincoln, but it is Lincoln himself who sets in motion the events toward

unity. As a result, he saves the Union in the novel in a similar way to how he saved the Union of the U.S. in history. While Schwartz's Savior of the Union was set on preserving the U.S. as a nation, the novel adapts this image toward that of a savior of the cemetery's unity. The complete access readers have into the thoughts and feelings of many members of the cemetery's Union makes this Union tangible. Therefore, Lincoln's saving of it is made extremely memorable as well as valuable. Ultimately, however, both Lincolns—the one of commemoration and the prosthetic one—provide those who are separated with the impulse to come together and unite with a common cause in mind. In both cases, then, Lincoln serves as a vessel again: communities attribute him with their own needs and expectations, with the ghosts subconsciously working toward reconciliation through Lincoln's image as Savior of the Union, and Lincoln's contemporaries looking for unity through that same image.

Finally, the novel suggests that the unity created by Lincoln allows for the ghosts to let go of what was keeping them stuck in the bardo and regain their former selves. This ability to let go points to the third stage of the ghosts' perception of Lincoln, which is reconciliation. As explained by Bevins: "We found ourselves (like flowers from which placed rocks had just been removed) being restored somewhat to our natural fullness" (256). This "natural fullness" at the cemetery relates to the ghosts reconciling with their former selves, but when looking at it from a larger perspective, it points to the country returning to its natural state of being whole after the war. According to Oates, Lincoln saw the war as

> the supreme irony of his life: that he who was sickened at the sight of blood, who abhorred stridency and physical violence, who dreamed that 'mind, all conquering *mind*,' would rule the world someday, was caught in a national holocaust, a tornado of blood and wreckage with Lincoln himself whirling in its center. (86)

As stated before, the commemorated Savior of the Union is mostly remembered for his outward actions. However, the image of Lincoln as depicted in *Lincoln in the Bardo* is given much more emphasis on his thoughts rather than his actions. Lincoln's dream of the mind ruling the world instead of violence, then, is exactly what the novel exemplifies by placing his mind on the forefront: the ghosts perceive what happens in the cemetery only. They do not have access to the outside world, making Lincoln's mind the greatest source of his accomplishments to them. Furthermore, since the ghosts are the largest source of information to readers, their lack of knowledge on the outside world allows for readers to be distracted from it as well (with the historical excerpts in the novel being the exception in this process). As a result, readers value Lincoln's mind above all else in a similar manner to the ghosts. The supernatural therefore draws the focus away from Schwartz's Savior of the Union as an image of Lincoln ending the Civil War and bringing the U.S. together and focuses instead on the Savior of the Union as existing on a much smaller scale: the site of the Civil War is replaced by the cemetery and Lincoln uniting the U.S. is replaced by him uniting the ghosts that linger in the bardo. This union of the dead allows the ghosts to reconcile with their pasts and move on after Willie learns through his father that they are all dead.

Lincoln's effect on the cemetery and its inhabitants thus reflects the image of the Savior of the Union as both salvaging the Union and mending the wounds caused by the separation that existed prior to the unification of the U.S. The novel's depiction of Lincoln echoes the criteria of Schwartz's Savior of the Union through Lincoln uniting the ghosts and helping them work toward reconciliation by leaving their grievances behind. Throughout this process, the ghosts' perception of Lincoln enables readers with a high level of access to his thoughts, resulting in a more prosthetic version of the Savior of the Union: had the inhabitants of the cemetery not been ghosts, they would not have been able to come together and hear Lincoln's thoughts and learn of his grief so intimately. The grief that is tied to Lincoln's role

as Savior of the Union is revealed to readers much more explicitly through the ghosts' abilities of identifying with Lincoln and recognizing his powers of unification and reconciliation, making possible a new relation to the Lincoln of history.

2.3 The Bardo and the Civil War

The established connection between Lincoln's grief for his son and his grief for the nation during the Civil War reveals a link between the bardo and the war, with Lincoln being the Savior of the Union in both settings. In order to show how the setting of the bardo adds to this image, this section will analyze the bardo's relation to the setting of the Civil War.

Firstly, the manner in which those who leave the bardo are described by Vollman and Bevins is similar to a situation of soldiers losing a war: "Smiling, grateful, gazing about themselves in wonder, favoring us with a last fond look as they—" "Surrendered." "Succumbed." "Capitulated" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 144). The departing ghosts are smiling while they surrender, however, revealing that unlike the soldiers fighting in the Civil War, the ghosts have little to lose and are better off moving on once they are able to do so. As pointed out by Colson Whitehead, "[t]he stakes grow, from our heavenly vantage, for we are talking about not just the ghostly residents of a few acres, but the citizens of a nation." While the situation in the bardo reflects that of the entire nation, the stakes for those fighting the war and those in the bardo are completely different: the soldiers dying in the Civil War did not do so with a smile on their face. One of the historical excerpts in the novel notes: "We found two little fellers holding hands couldn't been [*sic*] more than fourteen fifteen apiece as if they had desided [*sic*] to pass through that dark portel [*sic*] together" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 154). Just as he helped the ghosts in the bardo move on to the beyond, Lincoln calls the young soldiers to this dark portal. A large difference, however, is that the portal soldiers are led to is dark, whereas the "portal" that takes the ghosts in the bardo to the beyond is described as "the

matterlightblooming phenomenon" (96). The word "light" is explicitly incorporated in its name, leading to the obvious indication that the process of dying in the bardo is much more positive than the process of dying in the Civil War. Due to the similarities between the two settings, it is as if Lincoln is given a second chance in the novel: his role in the deaths of the many soldiers during the Civil War is mirrored in his role in the passing on of the ghosts in the bardo. This mirroring leads to a much more positive outcome, as the dark portal of the Civil War soldiers is replaced by one of light.

The close connection between the ghosts and the soldiers is fitting to the Civil War time period, as the ghosts lived "alongside the living," and "the belief in ghosts was, in part, a way of registering the mass killing of ordinary boys—and their persistence as a constant harrowing of the soul" (Gopnik). By helping the ghosts, then, the novel's Lincoln is given the chance to reconcile with the effects of his actions on the many soldiers that died and to do better in the setting of the bardo. The setting thus allows for a prosthetic version of the Savior of the Union to form: while the bardo is seemingly just the place between life and death, it ultimately turns out to be an experimental, imaginary space where new meaning is given to historical events. To clarify, Schwartz's Lincoln of commemoration is referred to in the novel through the historical excerpt recounting Lincoln calling the soldiers to the dark portal in order to win the war and ultimately unite the nation. This image of the Savior of the Union is then adapted toward a more positive interpretation by replacing Lincoln's guiding of the soldiers into the dark to Lincoln's guiding of the ghosts into the light. This alteration allows for "a new relation to the past" (Landsberg 152) wherein readers are reminded of Lincoln's power of reconciliation rather than his role in the deaths of the many soldiers, resulting in a more benevolent interpretation of the President.

In an attempt to describe the bardo to Lincoln while in his body and make him return to Willie's crypt, Bevins thinks the following: "*[Willie's] headstrong nature, a virtue in that*

previous place, imperils him here, where the natural law, harsh and arbitrary, brooks no rebellion, and must be scrupulously obeyed" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 166). This description enforces the idea that there is a large difference between the land of the living and of the dead, as Bevins emphasizes that Willie's headstrong nature is no longer appreciated in the bardo. However, his use of the words "brooks no rebellion" reveals a similarity between the bardo and the land of the living, as the U.S. did not tolerate rebellion either during the time of the Civil War. While Confederates called the Civil War "War for Southern Independence," the Northern states referred to these Confederates as rebels and called the war "War of the Rebellion." Favoring unity, this rebellion was not tolerated by the Union and needed to be dealt with. In Bevins' words, the "natural law" of the nation had to be "scrupulously obeyed."

As head of the Union, it was Lincoln against whom the Southern states rebelled. Similarly, in the bardo, it is God against whom the ghosts rebel: the Reverend, after revealing what the afterlife had been like for him before he ran away, states that "*[w]e are in rebellion against the will of our Lord, and in time must be broken, and go*" (194). It is the lingering in the bardo by which the ghosts rebel against God (Bale and Bondevik 74), an act which echoes the Confederates' wish to remain self-governing as both the ghosts and the Confederacy show a need to hold on to what is passing. In doing so, the Confederacy defied Lincoln while the ghosts defy God. The mirroring of these two situations causes *Lincoln in the Bardo* to compare Lincoln to God, and subsequently to enforce the larger than life aspect of his image as Savior of the Union which sets him apart from others and elevates his status to that of a "remote demigod" (Schwartz, *Forge* 262). While the Lincoln of commemoration is already mythical and set on a pedestal in cultural memory due to the great accomplishments associated with his image as Savior of the Union, the novel takes this mythical status a step further by comparing Lincoln to God, leaving no doubt as to the extent of the elevated status of this prosthetic version of Lincoln. The novel achieves this elevation through its setting of

the bardo. Adding the fact that the bardo "holds not only white characters but also, in a segregated section, black ones" (Silber) to its connection between the rebellion of the ghosts and the Confederacy, it is clear that the cemetery serves as a small model of the United States around the time of the Civil War.

Of final note in terms of the bardo in relation to the Civil War is the novel's reference to one of Lincoln's speeches. Vollman and Bevins reveal—when Lincoln passes through them—that through Willie's death, Lincoln is able to refocus on the war: "His mind was freshly inclined toward *sorrow*; toward the fact that the world was full of sorrow" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 303), but at the same time, "[h]e was in a fight. Although those he fought were also suffering, limited beings, he must—" "Obliterate them." "Kill them and deny them their livelihood and force them back into the fold" (305). Lincoln is determined to end the war as quickly as possible in order to prevent further bloodshed. Vollman explains that "[t]he swiftest halt to the thing (therefore the greatest mercy) might be the bloodiest" (307).

At an earlier stage in the novel, however, Lincoln's thoughts about ending the war are already revealed. These thoughts have not yet taken on the decisive tone as shown above, but "fragments of the Gettysburg Address are … beginning to form in his mind" (Silber) nonetheless. When visiting Willie and reluctantly preparing to leave, Lincoln thinks the following: "*Therefore, resolved: Resolved: we must, we must now*—" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 245). These words echo the Gettysburg Address, when Lincoln emphasizes that the living must "highly *resolve* that these dead shall not have died in vain" (Lincoln 329, emphasis added). Sitting by Willie's "sick-box," Lincoln thus acknowledges he must be decisive about something he cannot yet name. It is then through his grief for Willie, which allows him to refocus on the war, that Lincoln can put this unknown factor into words. As a result, the notion of the Gettysburg Address emerges that those who died will not have done so in vain if the war is ended as swiftly as possible. Willie's part in steering Lincoln toward a quick

resolution of the war is therefore already evident before Lincoln realizes it: his contemplation over Willie's death provides him with the beginnings of a speech that would play a large role in explicitly showing his intentions of uniting the country and working toward a reborn nation. Lincoln thus starts to formulate his speech on unity while being motivated by a supernatural setting. By allowing readers to recognize this moment and to see how it develops itself within Lincoln, Lincoln's wish for unity becomes tangible and therefore more personal to contemporary readers, as all prosthetic memories are (Landsberg 143).

2.4 The Ghosts of Slavery

As briefly touched upon, the novel's cemetery holds a segregated section in which the bardo's black ghosts reside. The division between black and white ghosts shows that the "hierarchy among the residents is equivalent to the social stratification in real life" (Bale and Bondevik 76). Despite this obvious reference to the segregation in the U.S. at the time, the novel places more emphasis on the Civil War as is shown by the many historical excerpts that focus on the effects of the war "in contrast to the lack of equivalent material representing the mourning for dead slaves" (82). However, the novel "by no means neglects the horrors of slavery and how that, too, comes to weigh on Lincoln's conscience" (Silber). At numerous times, the ghosts of the enslaved tell their stories while in the bardo. For instance, Elson Farwell recounts how he was left behind by the Easts when he fell ill and could not keep up with the white family when they were traveling to the country for fireworks (Saunders, *Lincoln* 216).

The novel also shows the reaction of whites to black people during the time period. When the ghosts of the enslaved try to get into the part of the cemetery that is occupied by the white ghosts, the Reverend notes that "many people began shouting, saying, no, no, it was not appropriate, demanding that the 'darkies' … [r]eturn at once, from whence they had come" (213). The most prominent character who aims to uphold the segregation at the cemetery is

the ghost of a racist lieutenant named Cecil Stone. Toward the end of the novel when many ghosts are moving on to the afterlife, Vollman and Bevins come across Cecil Stone and Elson Farwell fighting each other. The fight is seemingly endless, with Vollman commenting that it "[w]as proceeding with a fury that suggested the two might well fight on into eternity" and Bevins adding: "Unless some fundamental and unimaginable alteration of reality should occur" (321). What they imply is that, unless something is done about the slavery issue, black and white people will never see eye to eye. What Bevins calls an "unimaginable alteration" refers to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which, before it was issued in 1863, was not deemed possible or even desirable by many U.S. citizens.

Nevertheless, in its depiction of unity, *Lincoln in the Bardo* does not exclude the black ghosts from entering Lincoln's body. As a result, the novel portrays the merging of black and white people as something positive, which is emphasized when the ghost of the formerly enslaved Thomas Havens enters Lincoln's body when he finally leaves the cemetery. Thomas finds the beginnings of acceptance toward black people in Lincoln, thinking the following:

> And suddenly, [I] wanted him to *know* me. My life. To know *us*. Our lot. I don't know why I felt that way but I did. He had no *aversion* to me, is how I might put it. Or rather, he had once had such an aversion, still bore traces of it, but, in examining that aversion, pushing it into the light, had somewhat, already, eroded it. He was an open book. An *opening* book. That had just been opened up somewhat wider. By sorrow. And—by us. By all of us, black and white, who had so recently mass-inhabited him. (311-12)

Although Thomas still picks up traces of aversion to black people in Lincoln, he notices that what is left of this aversion is on its way out. While this by no means depicts Lincoln as sympathetic toward black people, it opens up possibilities for Thomas as he realizes the sorrows of all the ghosts that have entered Lincoln, both black and white—all of whom the

novel has united “in their common humanity” (Clark)—have made the President receptive to the sorrows of all U.S. citizens. In other words, while “the impulse to do right by black men and women may not have come completely naturally to Lincoln, … the circumstances of the war … allowed him to move … closer towards addressing the human suffering of both white and black Americans” (Silber). Relating Lincoln’s new receptiveness to the suffering of multiple groups of U.S. citizens to his image as Savior of the Union, his knowledge of the sorrows of all people of his nation can be seen as a large motivator for Lincoln to put his efforts toward reconciliation.

After realizing Lincoln is opening up to the country’s grief, Thomas further encourages these efforts toward reconciliation by thinking of all the enslaved he knows: “I thought, Well, sir, if we are going to make a sadness party of it, I have some sadness about which I think someone as powerful as you might like to know. … [E]ndeavor to *do* something for us, so that we might do something for ourselves” (Saunders, *Lincoln* 312). He thinks of all the black people he has known, imploring Lincoln to recognize their sorrows and change things for the better. The novel’s revelation of the experience Thomas and other enslaved have had, is closely related to how neo-slave narratives include “the interior life of the slave” in order to reach “a corrective to official discourse” (Vint 245). Thomas sharing his thoughts with Lincoln can be seen as his attempt to improve the discourse already in place about slavery at the time by trying to influence the President: in doing so, it is Thomas, a ghost, who plays a large role in motivating Lincoln further toward his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and who therefore contributes to Lincoln’s image as the Great Emancipator, which the following chapter will focus on.

To return to Lincoln as Savior of the Union, it is clear that *Lincoln in the Bardo* mostly focuses on the unity Lincoln brought to the nation when looking at its final chapter: Thomas Havens is still inside Lincoln’s body, riding along with Lincoln on his horse as he returns

home. He describes how they "rode forward into the night, past the sleeping houses of *our* countrymen" (Saunders, *Lincoln* 343, emphasis added). No distinction is made between Lincoln's relation to the country's citizens and Thomas'. By extension, no distinction is made between the relation of a white man to the U.S. citizens and that of a black man. They are truly equal in this instance, as the same position is occupied by a white president and an enslaved black person. Lincoln's unifying image as Savior of the Union is thus shown to be all-encompassing, including everyone in this Union regardless of background. To further underline this inclusion, it is noteworthy that the novel does not address when, or if, Thomas leaves Lincoln's body to return to the cemetery. The possibility he "remain[s] with [Lincoln] in perpetuity" (Silber) emphasizes the long-lasting influence of the ghost on Lincoln.

Ultimately, Schwartz's formulation of the commemorative Savior of the Union is present in the novel's portrayal of Lincoln's interaction with the bardo's black ghosts: the former enslaved present in the bardo pick up on Lincoln's wish for unity, as well as his efforts toward reconciliation. This recognition is mainly portrayed through the ghost of Thomas Havens, pointing to the novel's use of the supernatural to contribute to the Savior of the Union image. A more prosthetic image of Lincoln as Savior of the Union is then offered to readers through Thomas: in explaining how Lincoln is like a book that has been opened up by the ghosts in the bardo, the same occurs for readers of the novel, resulting in a form of engagement that goes beyond "simple identification" (Landsberg 47). Thomas' description of Lincoln's mind makes the process of thoughts that went into Lincoln's decision to abolish slavery accessible and, subsequently, more relatable to readers. The unity Thomas feels with the President through supernatural means then leads to an image of the Savior of the Union as mediated by the novel. This prosthetic image not only includes a wish for unity and reconciliation, but also shows readers what it might be like for both black and white people when unity and reconciliation are actually achieved.

Chapter Three

Abolishing Slavery: *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*

3.1 A Monster-Slaying President

Initially known for *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, author Seth Grahame-Smith came up with the concept of his novel on Abraham Lincoln in 2009, when he "noticed how books marketed for the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, and those relating to the Twilight/pop-vampire phenomenon were invariably featured on adjacent tables" in a bookstore he was visiting (Salvati 104). The novel *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* was published in 2010 and retells Lincoln's life from his childhood up until his assassination (and beyond), but it deviates from actual history by including vampires. While the vampires clearly hint to the supernatural, their inclusion is not as far-fetched as it seems: some Americans believed in vampires in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1892, a man in New England even "dug up [his daughter's] body, cut out her heart and burned it" after "fearing [she] was afflicted" (Selby 64). In fact, it was a common belief in pre-modern times that "revived cadavers … could return to menace the living" (Oldridge 81), but although "perfectly rational, well-educated people" of the time "could accept the existence of roaming corpses" (83), the same is not true for most contemporary people. Modern culture "does not permit corpses to stir," leading to the condemnation of "vampires to the realm of fiction" (81).

Nowadays, belief in vampires has drastically dwindled. People only expect to encounter the supernatural in the media they consume and as a result, vampires have moved to the area of popular culture. The "vampire-centred US pop culture," for example, which "featur[es] younger imaginations of Professor Abraham van Helsing in *Van Helsing* … or rich vampires with sparkling skin as a substitution for politically powerful ruling lords in the *Twilight* saga" (Becker 147), is heavily marked by "anti-intellectual tendencies." This anti-

intellectualism is favored over a reliance on reason and "[t]heory-driven agendas" (133) and, as Sandra Becker argues, prevalent in our "globalised, social media-dominated age" (133). In earlier time periods, however, vampires were already used as metaphors for social issues, which this chapter's section on Grahame-Smith's vampires will elaborate on.

The inclusion of vampires in the novel serves a purpose beyond entertainment through make-belief. Yet in addition to the presence of vampires, "the playful references and exaggerations of mash-ups and parodies can allow [readers] to see old material afresh" (Salvati 98). The novel makes use of this re-evaluation of old material by connecting the vampires to the slavery issue. It is then implied that Lincoln's motivation to abolish this institution comes from his need to rid the U.S. of vampires, resulting in a connection of one of Lincoln's most well-known achievements to the supernatural.

Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter is divided into three sections: "Boy," "Vampire Hunter," and "President." It is essentially a biography of Lincoln that is supported by Lincoln's secret journals. These journals are brought to the author, Grahame-Smith, by a vampire called Henry Sturges at the beginning of the novel in 2010—a classic strategy to establish the "credibility of [the] source material by telling [readers] how they came into [the author's] possession" (110) that is often employed in monster narratives. The writings reveal vampires came into Lincoln's life at an early stage when his mother was killed by one named Jack Barts. Lincoln eventually avenges her, after which he resolves to "kill every vampire in America" (Grahame-Smith 62). Henry takes the future president under his wing and teaches him how to kill vampires.

Over the course of the novel, the connection between slavery and the vampires is made clear: vampires came to America as the system of slavery provided them with easy prey. They are therefore mostly holed up in the South, forming an alliance with the slave owners. There are still vampires who oppose these Southern ones, however, which is

eventually revealed to have led to a split within the vampire ranks that is similar to that between the Union and Confederacy. This split between "those who seek to coexist with man, and those who would see all of mankind in chains" existed "long before there was an America" (227). While the vampires feeding off of slavery therefore "made their cause the cause of the South" (227), the Northern vampires recruit Lincoln as their efforts are similar to his: fighting for a nation of freedom. In doing so, they choose Lincoln as their champion, which demonstrates what Grahame-Smith explains as "something in the American psyche" that leads to a wish for "presidents to be warriors" (Cieply). As with the portrayal of the President in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Lincoln is used as a vessel here as well: by being transformed into a monster-slayer, Lincoln is tasked with fulfilling the nation's need to see a president that is capable of saving the people from evil.

As in history, the novel's Lincoln wins the Civil War and the Southern vampires are defeated. Lincoln is then assassinated, but the novel's John Wilkes Booth is a vampire. Despite Lincoln's victory, Booth "refused to leave" as he "believed that the dream of a nation of immortals was still within reach—so long as Abraham Lincoln was dead" (Grahame-Smith 308). In a sense, Lincoln indeed dies in the novel, upon which Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War under the Lincoln Administration, declares: "Now he belongs to the ages" (327). This declaration is made literal when Henry turns Lincoln into a vampire in the final chapter, since "some men are just too interesting to die" (336). The novel then allows for Lincoln to physically attend Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, which means he has been "alive" for at least another 100 years after his assassination. Removing the supernatural layer, this immortalization of the President is similar to what his commemorative images have done for him in a more symbolic sense: the image of the Great Emancipator makes it seem as though Lincoln has not died either, ensuring his presence remains tangible across memory communities.

In the novel's introduction, the author refers to one of Lincoln's journals as "the Great Emancipator's long lost journal" (12). It is no coincidence that the introduction refers to this title, as the novel explicitly addresses this image of Lincoln through its focus on slavery and the vampires' role in this institution. Therefore, this chapter will concentrate on Lincoln's image as the Great Emancipator in the novel by focusing on the vampires and slavery and the explicit connection between them, and then analyzing Lincoln's elevated status. This chapter will also analyze the novel's film adaptation in order to determine how its depiction of the Great Emancipator relates or differs from the novel and to what effect. Throughout these analyses, it will be determined how the novel and film relate to Schwartz's explanation of the Great Emancipator as a symbol of commemoration, which emphasizes Lincoln's wish to abolish slavery in order to create a nation of self-governance with freedom and equality as its most important values. Subsequently, this chapter will define how the novel and film's use of the supernatural creates a more prosthetic image of Lincoln that contributes to and perhaps even affects his image as the Great Emancipator.

3.2 The Nation's Vampires

Before turning to the portrayal of the vampires in the novel, it is useful to establish a brief background of vampires in literature and film. The most famous vampire in literature is undoubtedly Bram Stoker's Dracula, the titular character of 1897's *Dracula*, who "has entered the popular imagination as the vampire *par excellence*—dark, brooding, powerful, *and* generally sensual" (Senf 2) and "has succeeded in defining a myth for over one hundred years" that "has permeated every aspect of western culture" (Miller 17). Though subsequent portrayals of vampires in popular media are not consistently similar, there "are some definite family resemblances among" them (Senf 8): all vampires are "bloodsucking" creatures, and display "rebellious behavior" as well as "overt eroticism" (9). Additional characteristics that

are less definitively present are “the ability to change shape, the aversion to certain culturally important symbols … and other purely physical characteristics such as sharp teeth, hypnotic eyes, and extreme pallor” (9). The similarities in characteristics point to a common origin of the vampire as used in popular media nowadays: it first appeared in “western European literature in the late eighteenth century … as a product of the Gothic movement” (Miller 5). Eventually, “nineteenth-century English writers learned about the vampire from at least three distinct sources: folklore, eighteenth-century German literature, and scientific discussions of primitive beliefs” (Senf 23). Despite evolving over time, contemporary portrayals of vampires find their roots in nineteenth-century writers’ reliance on these sources in their writings.

The vampire that originates from folklore clearly deviates from the one that became a literary character, however: “literature has greatly reworked and remolded the vampire into a recognizable literary type to suit its own needs and purposes” (qtd. in Senf 25). Importantly, “the literary vampire generally chooses victims outside his own ethnic group and of the opposite sex” and “the literary vampire is much more powerful” (25), as “the social background of the undead is commonly transformed from the peasantry to the nobility” (qtd. in Senf 25). These two characteristics relating to ethnicity and social background are valuable in the analysis of Grahame-Smith’s novel, as many of the vampires Lincoln hunts are white vampires preying on enslaved black people, and are put in positions of great influence.

As mentioned, vampires have long been used in literature as metaphors for social issues. For instance, in his analysis of “capitalist, consuming culture,” Karl Marx argues that “capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (qtd. in Drawmer 42). In his parallel between vampirism and capitalist consumerism, Marx emphasizes that the “modes of mutual dependence in society [are] not benign … but benighted, parasitic and grotesque – a master-slave dialectic, with teeth” (qtd. in Drawmer 42). Put more simply, “[t]he usual Marxist metaphor is that of capital

sucking the blood out of the workforce" (qtd. in Peters 178), with vampires representing a consumerist society and the workforce being at the consuming monsters' mercy. Another frequently mentioned vampiric metaphor that relates to this Marxist interpretation, is that of "aristocratic vampires" symbolizing "wealthy landlords" (McCarthy 196). The uprising of the common folk against vampires is then "not just … an example of debauched vigilantism, but … a metaphor for the potentially anarchic and revolutionary movement of the ever growing working-classes against the over privileged few who feed off the poor" (196). Furthering this connection between vampires and wealthy landlords, it is noteworthy that "the vampire motif serves primarily to emphasize the horror that is sometimes part of ordinary human life" wherein vampires are "a significant metaphor for destructive human behavior" (Senf 94). The atrocities committed by landlords—and, as will be analyzed further in this chapter, slave owners—are thus highlighted by the replacement of these humans with actual monsters.

In *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter*, the vampires symbolize all that is wrong with the nation to Lincoln. Before he is made aware of the role of vampires in slavery, it is his mother's death that leads him to resolve to kill every vampire in America. His efforts to avenge his mother and destroy the vampire that killed her takes up a large part of the novel's part titled "Boy." It is not until the end of Lincoln's subsequent training under Henry—who has taken on the role of Lincoln's mentor for a few weeks—that he writes in his journal: "So long as this country is cursed with slavery, so too will it be cursed with vampires" (Grahame-Smith 114). The connection is now made explicit, and from this point onward the vampires motivate Lincoln toward efforts that are no longer restricted to his personal life, but toward efforts that concern the nation and eventually contribute to his image as the Great Emancipator.

The novel places a significant amount of empathy in Lincoln for those that are enslaved. When his close friend, Joshua Speed, uses the words "healthy buck" and "wench

with child" to describe enslaved people that were sold by his father to vampires, Lincoln reacts by saying: "Enough! How can you speak of them so? Speak of men as cattle led to slaughter?" (180). Speed replies that he does not take the murders lightly, yet Lincoln's reaction stresses that he recognizes the dehumanizing language Speed uses. Regardless of Speed's assurance that he is bothered by the murders, his descriptions of the enslaved betray that he facilitates the murders, at least psychologically. The difference in how Lincoln and Speed regard enslaved people is therefore emphasized here, with Lincoln going a step further in his sympathy by not even wanting to place the enslaved beneath himself in a verbal sense.

Before this exchange between Lincoln and Speed, Lincoln writes in his journal that "[i]t causes me no small discomfort to be among [the enslaved]. To be surrounded by them. Not only because I think their servitude a sin, but because they remind me of all that I wish to forget" (180). More so than demonstrating Lincoln's hatred for the institution of slavery, the novel clarifies that a large part of this hatred stems from his knowledge that slavery enables vampires to thrive in the U.S. In other words, the novel remains true to Schwartz's explanation of the Great Emancipator in that it focuses on Lincoln's need to abolish slavery to achieve a nation where people are free, equal and able to govern themselves. However, an extra layer is added through the vampires and Lincoln's journal entries about them.

This extra layer leads to a prosthetic image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator that, while deriving from Schwartz's commemorative symbol, brings something different to Lincoln: readers are presented with a Lincoln that interacts with a world where vampires are normal, which allows them to relate to the novel's Lincoln in a way they cannot relate to his commemorative image. After all, contemporary readers are not directly familiar with the Civil War—an event that is intrinsically tied to Lincoln's image—yet they can imagine what it would be like to fight vampires as that is as unrealistic to people nowadays as it was to Lincoln at the start of the novel. Neither Lincoln nor contemporary readers have experience

with vampires, regardless of their respective time periods. Therefore, Lincoln's reaction to the supernatural is more relatable to contemporary readers than his reaction to the Civil War. Through this feeling of kinship, then, readers are invited to share Lincoln's feelings on the Civil War and the issue of slavery as well: far more than the commemorative symbol of the Great Emancipator, the prosthetic image of the Great Emancipator as provided by Lincoln's interaction with vampires allows for a relatable representation of him. This relatability leads to what Landsberg describes as "engaged and experientially oriented encounters with technologies of memory" that allow for memories to become personal (143).

During his first meeting with Henry, Lincoln learns that not all vampires are the same. Henry tells him: "Judge us not equally, Abraham. We may all deserve hell, but some of us deserve it sooner than others" (Grahame-Smith 90). As is revealed over the course of the novel, the vampires

> were among the earliest English settlers to arrive in the New World in the late sixteenth century (Grahame-Smith attributes the disappearance of the Roanoke colonists to a vampire posing as the settlement's physician). Not long after, the development of the colonial slave economy and its growing supply of chattel would attract masses of European vampires to the prospect of a gruesome buffet. (Salvati 105)

What is made clear is that the vampires benefited from the European colonizers' arrival in the New World. While the colonizers settled on this "new" land and exploited it to suit their own needs, the vampires exploited this land for its supply of the colonizers' enslaved. Apart from the metaphor of vampirism symbolizing capitalism, consumerism, and wealthy landlords, then, vampires are also used to refer to the exploiting effect of colonialism, enabling them to be seen "in relation, historically, to colonial and imperial processes" (Tobias 159). As is also the case in Grahame-Smith's novel, "[t]he call of the vampire is … alien to the locality" and

"hails from beyond the borders of the national imaginary" (159). Once they entered the borders of the New World and slowly became more familiar within this "national imaginary," the novel's vampires split into two groups that would eventually support either the Union or the Confederacy. Those heading south struck up a deal with Southern slave owners, enabling them to feed on enslaved people. Lincoln comments on this apparent "friendship" between vampires and slave owners a few days after taking office: "Yet here, in the halls of power, it is the secret everyone seems to know. Many in our delegation are rife with whispers about 'those damned Southerners' and their 'black-eyed' friends" (Grahame-Smith 197). The novel's association between vampires and slavery is not new, as abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison already referred to "the institution as 'the Vampyre which is feeding upon our life-blood'" in 1829 (qtd. in Salvati 107). In making the connection explicit by using Southern vampires as one of the main factors keeping slavery in existence, however, the novel can be said to take away the blame from human slave owners to a certain extent. Instead, it then creates something more reminiscent of the aforementioned "master-slave dialectic, with teeth" (qtd. in Drawmer 42).

In his discussion on the institution of slavery, Garrison refers to both the North and South. Lincoln, on the other hand, was clear in his distinction between the two: he "identified the 'only substantial difference' between North and South" by saying to Southerners that "[y]ou think slavery is right and ought to be extended; we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted" (Foner 153). In the novel, this clear divide exists as well, as Lincoln is recruited by Henry and the vampires of the Union, while the "evil" vampires—the ones feeding off of slavery—have allied themselves with slave owners. More so than allying themselves with slave owners, however, the Southern vampires show many similarities to them as well. Being "symbols of greed and depravity," these vampires feed on the enslaved "much like the aristocracy of the 18th century fed on the young blood of the peasants" (Selby 63): an image

that is parallel to how Elizabeth McCarthy argues that vampires symbolize the "wealthy landlords" who are "over privileged" and "feed off the poor" (196).

However, while using vampires as "a significant metaphor for destructive human behavior" (Senf 94), it is important to note that the novel's Southern vampires and those vampires belonging to the Union do not equally contribute to this metaphor. While the slave owners are equated with monsters, it is only one faction of these monsters they are associated with: the other group of vampires supports Lincoln. Nevertheless, the slave owners' committed atrocities are emphasized by the parallel between them and the Southern vampires, as while all vampires are bloodsucking monsters, the Southern ones are portrayed in the novel to commit truly horrifying acts. The monsters supporting Lincoln have better intentions as they want to prevent the enslavement of the entire nation. They therefore reveal that the divide between good and evil is not as simple as it seems. The fact that both slave owners and Lincoln are then supported by supernatural monsters shows that it is not their natures but their actions that determine whether they are as monstrous as vampires traditionally are. As a result, through the Southern vampires' violent acts against the enslaved that are reminiscent of slave owners' actions, the novel manages to use the vampires as a metaphor for the monstrosity of racial slavery, regardless of the existence of some well-intentioned Northern vampires that are arguably only slightly less monstrous than their Southern counterparts.

The Southern vampires are not just monsters for Lincoln to slay, then, but are used to address those things wrong with the U.S. that Lincoln sought to eradicate in order to achieve freedom and equality. The existing "Lincoln mythology" is thereby elaborated upon through the "metaphorical connection between slave owners and vampires which, according to the author, are 'one in [*sic*] the same … both creatures basically steal the lives, take the blood of others to enrich themselves'" (qtd. in Salvati 99). The commemorative image that exists of the Great Emancipator advocating the abolition of slavery to ensure a free and equal nation, is

thus exaggerated to such an extent through the supernatural that readers come to see Lincoln as a warrior-like president that allows "for a new relation to the past" (Landsberg 152): by presenting him with monsters rather than human antagonists, the act of abolishing slavery becomes that much more heroic. However, as mentioned before, these monsters also replace the human slave owners' part in maintaining the institution of slavery to a certain extent, which is an issue that will be addressed in the following section.

3.3 The Monstrosities of Slavery

The institution of slavery plays a large role in the novel. As noted by Andrew J. Salvati, *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* "proposes a way of talking about [this] monstrous and horrifying American institution by, ironically, underscoring its ineffability" as well as through "referencing of the … supernatural" (104). In other words, while both slavery and vampires are taboo subjects in the novel, these subjects are nevertheless its most prominent aspects. Due to the duality in the novel's approach to the subjects, "the moral repugnance of institutional slavery" is reframed while "the insufficiency of modern analytic methods … to fully elaborate and represent the horrors of the past" is laid bare as well (104), as readers are made aware of slavery's injustice through its prominent role in the novel but are simultaneously confronted with the lack of knowledge that is available nowadays to reveal the extent of this injustice.

One passage that connects slavery and vampires at an early stage in the novel, occurs when Lincoln is traveling downriver as a young man in Mississippi and sees a group of enslaved people fleeing a plantation. When his companion, Allen Gentry, condemns the enslaved for trying to steal their boat in their escape, Lincoln tells him: "Judge them not equally" (Grahame-Smith 100). Lincoln sympathizes with the group of enslaved, as he realizes they are running from a vampire. The phrase Lincoln uses, however, echoes Henry's

plea to Lincoln earlier on in the novel to not judge all vampires equally. The novel therefore goes a step further in its connection between vampires and slavery, as it equates the way in which readers should regard vampires to how they should regard the enslaved: members of both groups should not be generalized, but should be regarded individually.

Yet, more prominently, Lincoln's words reveal that he is opening up to the issue of slavery: the vampire preying on the enslaved makes the immorality of slavery explicit to Lincoln and causes him to sympathize with the fleeing group. Due to them being at the mercy of a vampire, Lincoln feels a connection to the enslaved as he knows what it is like to be in that position, having lost people to the vampires himself. What Lincoln witnesses on the riverboat is therefore a key moment in initiating Lincoln's sympathy for the enslaved. Over the course of the novel, this sympathy continues to grow as Lincoln comes into contact with vampires at numerous times. The way in which the novel then depicts Lincoln's growing sympathy for enslaved people echoes the image of the Great Emancipator of commemoration by emphasizing his growing need to abolish slavery.

The connection Lincoln makes between slavery and vampires is emphasized at numerous times. At one point, shortly after leaving his father's home and setting out on his own, Lincoln writes the following:

> Not long after the first ships landed in this New World, I believe that vampires reached a tacit understanding with slave owners. I believe that this nation holds some special attraction for them because here, in America, they can feed on human blood without fear of discovery or reprisal. … I believe that this is especially true in the South, where those flamboyant gentlemen vampires have worked out a way to 'grow' their prey. Where the strongest slaves are put to work growing tobacco and food for the fortunate and free, and the lesser are

> themselves harvested and eaten. I believe this, but I cannot yet prove it to be true. (125)

It is evident that Lincoln is now fully aware of the arrangement between vampires and slave owners, the importance of the slavery system in the U.S. for this arrangement, as well as the consequences of this arrangement for the enslaved. From this perspective, Grahame-Smith's depiction of slavery is in line with the setting of "America as the scene of centuries of inhuman exploitation" (Salvati 105). Similarly to how it existed in history, slavery is presented in the novel as an unfair system in which enslaved people are at the mercy of those who have the power over them. Attributing a large portion of that power to vampires—who "[choose] victims outside [their] own ethnic group," preying on enslaved African American people in this case, and who are more powerful by having their "social background … transformed" to a more aristocratic one (qtd. in Senf 25)—the novel intensifies the feelings of injustice surrounding slavery by making the vampires too powerful an opponent. In their disadvantaged states, the enslaved people have no hope of winning from such an opponent. Therefore, by introducing the vampires to this part of history, the novel emphasizes and even increases the powerlessness of enslaved people within the institution of slavery as their repressors are no longer merely human, but supernatural.

Where *Lincoln in the Bardo* then attempts to improve the discourse about slavery through the character of Thomas Havens inhabiting Lincoln's body, *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* does not manage to do the same. Although the novel makes use of the fantastic in its portrayal of slavery, hinting to the neo-slave narrative's trend that "realism is not sufficient for representing the experience of slavery" (Vint 243), there is no portrayal of "the interior life of the slave" that could lead to "a corrective to official discourse" (245). There are no prominent enslaved characters in the novel. Instead, slavery is mainly presented as an institution as a whole and as a means for Lincoln to oppose the vampires. This is

exemplified when Lincoln writes in his journal that "[s]leep provided no refuge, for I was nightly visited by a sea of black faces, each the nameless victim of a vampire" (Grahame-Smith 214). The entry does not pay attention to enslaved people as individuals, as Lincoln sees a "sea of black faces" belonging to "nameless" victims. Unlike *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Grahame-Smith's novel therefore does not pay homage to the tradition of neo-slave narratives through its use of the supernatural as its treatment of the enslaved does not add anything "corrective" to the existing discourse about slavery. As a result, it can be said that the novel does not make Lincoln's image as the Great Emancipator seem more sympathetic, despite depicting him as growing more sympathetic toward the enslaved over the course of the novel: where Lincoln is regarded as extremely compassionate toward enslaved people in cultural memory, the prosthetic version of this image created by the novel does not add to this compassion.

For instance, the way in which the novel uses vampires to motivate Lincoln toward abolishing slavery is questionable, as it makes it seem as though the only reason Lincoln wants to free the enslaved people is to stop the vampires. This contrasts greatly with him advocating the abolishment of slavery in actual history as both a war measure and an effort to get closer to his ideal nation wherein all would be free and equal. The novel's Lincoln is almost exclusively motivated by his need to destroy the Southern vampires, and as president, he proposes the following: "let us starve the devils into defeat by declaring every slave in the South free" (295). This Great Emancipator does not care about the freedom of the enslaved primarily. While his characterization as a vanquisher of the darkness that is a blight on the nation makes him seem more heroic to readers, the wish of the commemorated Great Emancipator to reach a nation in which all are free and equal purely because that is truly what he deemed best for all citizens is diminished.

One of Henry's letters to Lincoln further emphasizes this focus on vampires as the main problem: he refers to Lincoln being well-known for his eloquent speeches, and implores him to use his "oratory skill to combat slavery at every turn" as his opposition, Senator Stephen Douglas, "is one of the many living men who have fallen prey to our enemy's influence" (232). Henry motivates Lincoln toward focusing on abolishing slavery as he knows it will devastate the Southern vampires if the institution disappears. Where the Great Emancipator of history did not need supernatural monsters to convince him of the right course of action and to make him aware of the injustice of slavery, Grahame-Smith's prosthetic version of the Great Emancipator needs these monsters, as he is unable to see for himself that slavery is wrong without this supernatural motivator. The novel's dramatization of history thus denies the Great Emancipator part of his compassionate character, not just in his aforementioned approach to enslaved people, but in his approach toward the nation as a whole as well. This less compassionate image is then adopted by readers as their own memory of the President, even though this image is not "derived from … lived experience" (Landsberg 25).

Additionally, by depicting the vampires as key elements in keeping the institution of slavery running, the novel can be said to take part of the blame for slavery away from the human slave owners and benefiters: while the equation between supernatural monsters and slave owners shows how twisted slave owners were in their ways, the replacement of humans by something more supernatural also "absolves the South from moral culpability" (qtd. in Salvati 106). The Southern vampires are the ones actually feeding on the enslaved, after all, which tops the atrocities of the slave owners and arguably makes their wrongdoings seem less severe, for "if demons were responsible for slavery, [it] would be a whole lot less horrible than what really happened" (qtd. in Salvati 106). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the novel ultimately depicts the institution of slavery as a "specifically human sin" as vampires "did not design the institution" (106). This depiction makes the connection between slave

owners and vampires more nuanced: in the end, the Southern vampires are enabled to prey on the enslaved by human slave owners, resulting in a shared blame between the two parties rather than the vampires absolving humans of theirs. The image of the Great Emancipator that is presented to readers therefore consists of a savior of enslaved people who are held down both by humans and the supernatural and have no autonomy of their own. This representation is different from Lincoln's merging with Thomas Havens in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which points to unity between Lincoln and the enslaved. *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* elevates Lincoln to great heights while further weakening the position of the enslaved instead.

3.4 The Great, Axe-Wielding Emancipator

Lincoln's superior position in the novel is a fitting reflection of his image as the Great Emancipator, which elevates him beyond the status of a "mere mortal" as well. Both this image and the novel give the President mythical qualities, but a large distinction is found in those that support Lincoln and help elevate him to such mythical heights: the Lincoln of history was chosen as president by the citizens of the U.S. As mentioned before, his mythical character relies heavily on his representation of American values. Tying the commemorative image of the Great Emancipator into that, his significant efforts to create a nation where all people could govern themselves and be free as well as equal is what sets Lincoln apart from all others. While it is still the case in the novel that Lincoln is chosen by the people to become president, an extra layer is added as Lincoln is chosen by the vampires of the Union as well to aid them in their cause and fight for them as their champion—not metaphorically, as the novel's Lincoln is a skilled axe-wielder.

The vampires play a large role in elevating Lincoln's status, with Henry Sturges doing so most prominently: upon first meeting Lincoln, his reaction to Lincoln's name is "The 'father of many.' A pleasure, indeed" (Grahame-Smith 70). Henry's use of the words "father

of many" refers to God naming Abram "Abraham" in the Old Testament, saying "for a father of many nations have I made thee" ("First Book" 17:5) and "I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" ("First Book" 17:6). The novel passes the Bible's Abraham's characteristics as a father of nations—and the root of all nations and kings that are to come—on to Lincoln. Again, Lincoln takes on the role of vessel: the depiction of him as a father to all, both present and future, makes him vacant and therefore accessible and open to many memory communities. The novel hints at Lincoln fulfilling this role toward the end, when Henry writes to Lincoln: "Like your namesake, you have been a 'father to many' these four long years. And like your namesake, God has asked impossible sacrifices of you" (Grahame-Smith 307). Henry makes clear that Lincoln made some great sacrifices: as in history, Lincoln lost two of his sons and was not only dealing with his own grief, but with that of the nation as a whole during the war. While the "impossible sacrifices" Henry refers to are tied to the vampires in the novel, the historical Lincoln's sacrifices are ultimately no less severe. Yet, as discussed before, the monstrosities of vampires are more imaginable to contemporary readers than the monstrosities of the Civil War.

Another way in which the novel lifts Lincoln to myth-like status is through its comparison of Lincoln to Julius Caesar, the Roman Emperor who also became mythical after his death. This connection is most prominently made in two instances: first of all, when Lincoln dreams of the theater where he would later be assassinated, the production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* diverts from its original lines when the words "Beware the Ides of April" are spoken (237). The original line "Beware the Ides of March" refers to the day on which Caesar was assassinated, so the replacement of March by April is significant: the words in Lincoln's dream now warn him of April 15, the date on which he would be assassinated himself. Secondly, Caesar is referred to again when John Wilkes Booth assassinates Lincoln in the novel. After shooting the President, Booth declares "Sic semper tyrannis!" (324), which

translates to “Thus always to tyrants!” As he declares these words at the performance of *Julius Caesar*, the connection to Caesar is easily made, especially since Caesar was accused of tyranny (Morgan 34). Booth, a vampire, accuses Lincoln of the same and forms a connection between him and Caesar, elevating Lincoln to the same heights as the Roman Emperor. On the other hand, Henry tells Lincoln at an earlier stage that “[y]our purpose is to fight tyranny” (Grahame-Smith 162). In the novel’s establishing of Caesar as a tyrant, these words would then remove Lincoln from the Roman Emperor rather than draw up a parallel between them. However, if that is the case, Lincoln is still elevated in status by the vampires, as fighting tyranny would put him in a superior position to Caesar, a supposed tyrant. The novel thus allows for Lincoln to mirror the mythical aura surrounding his historical image as the Great Emancipator, but also adds a heavy emphasis on how the supernatural elevates him further as he is supported by vampires as though he is their chosen one and he is likened to Caesar by a vampire: as a result, the prosthetic image of the Great Emancipator draws up a Lincoln that is removed even further from “mere mortals.”

The novel’s emphasis on Lincoln’s eloquence also elevates him. As mentioned in chapter one, many of Lincoln’s speeches were so memorable that they added to his mythical status. Like *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Grahame-Smith’s novel refers to the Gettysburg Address. The Address’ lines advocating “a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (304) are repeated, echoing Lincoln’s wish for freedom and self-governance for all people as Great Emancipator. Afterward, the speech is described as follows: “He’d spoken for all of two minutes. In that short time, he’d given perhaps the greatest speech of the nineteenth century, one that would be forever ingrained in America’s consciousness” (304). In its inclusion and description of the Gettysburg Address as such an important speech to American memory, the novel relates

Lincoln's eloquence to his elevated status and prominent position within memory communities.

Ultimately, the one thing that fully removes Lincoln from ordinary human beings is the fact that he becomes a vampire in the novel. Where other vampire victims simply die, Lincoln gains immortality. He is the exception to the rule, which makes explicit that he is treated differently from other people, even when it comes to death—which is the one thing everyone is supposed to experience without exception. By withholding Lincoln from this equalizing process of dying, he is firmly secured in the superior status to which the novel elevates him. Additionally, as mentioned before, this immortalization of Lincoln is similar to how his image as the Great Emancipator has kept him alive in cultural memory. His continued presence enables him to be involved in all that followed the historical Lincoln's death: Lincoln and Henry are present at Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, as they

> had come to help finish the work begun a century before. They'd been there during Reconstruction, driving out the vampires who continued to terrorize emancipated slaves. … They'd been there in Mississippi, dragging white-hooded devils to their deaths by the light of burning crosses. … And they'd been there in Europe, where millions gave their lives defeating the second vampire uprising between 1939 and 1945. But there was still work to be done. (335-36)

Much like the historical Lincoln, the vampire version of Lincoln is present whenever the world has need of him, though in a much more tangible way. His status as a vessel is therefore highlighted: by remaining physically available throughout time, the idea that communities can turn to him and attribute him with their own needs and expectations transcends the realm of imagination—as he is still "alive" and therefore not just existing in memory—and gains much more prominence. By then giving Lincoln a prominent role in all the issues that followed his

death, Grahame-Smith "[interacts] with the past on his own terms in a way that juxtaposes established historiographical conventions" and that "imagine[s] new ways of organizing historical representation" (Salvati 101). By bringing Lincoln to the present in such a literal sense, the way in which history influences the present is emphasized: this allows for the novel's Lincoln to reach contemporary times and, as Landsberg describes, "[bring] people into contact with … other histories divorced from their own lived experience" (47). Where the historical Lincoln thus continues to exist in the memory of all generations following him, the physical immortalization of the novel's prosthetic Great Emancipator makes explicit to readers how present Lincoln still is in their contemporary lives.

3.5 Lincoln in Adaptation

As opposed to novels, films have to get their messages across "by images and relatively few words" and have "little tolerance for complexity" (qtd. in Hutcheon 1). Where novels allow audiences to consume words and make up an imaginary representation of those words for themselves, films do this for their audiences through their heavy reliance on the visual. As explained by Linda Hutcheon, there is the "telling mode" in which "our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the … words of the text and liberated" and there is the "mode of showing" in which "we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story," moving audiences "from the imagination to the realm of direct perception" (23). While different in their manners of engagement with audiences, novels and films come together in film adaptations, which are based to varying extents on the novels that inspire them. Adaptations include "repetition without replication" (7), as there are always differences between novels and films due to the change in medium. Adaptations "adjust, … alter, … [and] make suitable" (7). They can take from the novel what they deem usable, and change all else to their specific purposes. The film adaptation of *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire*

Hunter is one such case in which the novel's contents are used and subsequently adjusted and made more suitable to the film's intentions. What those intentions are and what effect they have on the portrayal of the Great Emancipator will be addressed in this section.

Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter is the 2012 film adaptation of Grahame-Smith's novel, directed by Timur Bekmambetov. Tim Burton is among the film's producers, and Grahame-Smith himself wrote the screenplay. The film is "an action-horror hybrid" that, similarly to the novel, "cast[s] Lincoln as a secret assassin who battles vampires, destroying the creatures who feed on the blood of slaves, and with them the need for slavery itself" (Snee 24). The film covers the same period of time in Lincoln's life as the novel, but leaves out Lincoln's assassination and alleged further existence as a vampire.

More differences between the novel and the film are worthy of analysis, the most prominent of which is the film's explicit focus on the slavery issue above all else. The slavery issue is also the novel's main focus, but the novel leaves plenty of space for other aspects of Lincoln's life to be explored. The film often steers clear of Lincoln's personal life and his inner thoughts, incorporating slavery and the vampires' use of this institution wherever it can. As a result, the film only focuses on the abolition aspect of Lincoln's Great Emancipator image. This portrayal was "radical … for Honest Abe in Hollywood," as despite the numerous Lincolns that had already "appeared on-screen, never before had the Great Emancipator been given a starring role" (15). *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* aims to fix this: barely three minutes into the film, Lincoln is already helping and defending black people when he is just a boy (00:02:30). The setting is a plantation owned by Jack Barts where Lincoln's parents work. While at the plantation, Lincoln sees an African American boy called William Johnson being beaten by a slaver. Johnson is Lincoln's friend, causing Lincoln to defend him. These actions are implied to be strongly influenced by Lincoln's mother, as she notes that "until every man is free, we are all slaves" (00:02:55). By showing Lincoln to be sympathetic

toward black people so early on and by having his mother say these words, the film zooms in on the slavery issue much earlier and much more explicitly than the novel. Additionally, this portrayal of Lincoln relates to the film director's description of the President, as he stated that "[w]hat Lincoln did … was like what Jesus did 2,000 years ago: he freed people" (Cieply). With these words of the director in mind, such a large focus on Lincoln's hatred of slavery in the film is not surprising.

As a result of Lincoln's actions, however, his father is dismissed by Barts. Now unable to pay off his debt, Barts assures Lincoln's father that there are other ways to pay: later that night, Barts—revealed to be a vampire—attacks Lincoln's mother. She dies shortly afterward, planting the seed for Lincoln's hatred toward vampires in a similar manner to the novel. However, through the introduction of the character of Will Johnson, Lincoln's early sympathy for black people is not tied to his hatred for vampires. Although Johnson's family is not enslaved, Lincoln friendship with him nevertheless opens him up to the plight of black people. The image of the Great Emancipator is then tailored to focus on Lincoln's sympathetic feelings toward black people, resulting in a prosthetic image that emphasizes Lincoln's morally just character. As Landsberg explains, "prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the 'other'" (9). In other words, by watching Lincoln connect to black people in the film, viewers are encouraged to recognize his ethical thinking in their ability to relate to this prosthetic image of the President. However, it must be noted that the encouragement to regard Lincoln in this way is addressed to an audience of white viewers as it supports a "white savior" understanding of Lincoln's role in the Civil War and the abolition. This process is similar to the elevation of Lincoln's status and the weakening of that of the enslaved, as the opportunity that is thereby created for Lincoln to save the day is an interpretation of his achievements most favored by a white audience.

In the film, the vampires have an even larger presence than in the novel as they now have names and personalities, and thus more authority. After Lincoln meets Henry in the film, he sees Barts again (00:18:05). Henry reveals to him that it is not just about Barts, but more so about two other vampires: Vadoma and her brother Adam, "from whom all others are made" (00:18:30). Whereas the novel has Lincoln dealing with nameless targets, the film gives the vampires names in order to make them more tangible. Once Lincoln finally defeats Barts, the latter says "he won't stop until this whole country is ours" in reference to Adam and his need to dominate the U.S. (00:40:44). Attributing this wish of domination to one specific vampire rather than the group as a whole, the film gains a named antagonist. As a result, however, the film fails to keep the blame of slavery on the human slave owners to a much further extent than the novel through its personifying of the vampires: where "[t]he supernatural … refers … to the influence of the invisible world" (Braudy 92) and can thus be said to blend into the background at times, the film's vampires having names makes them visible and therefore easier to put the blame on than in the novel. After all, the medium of film moves audiences "from the imagination to the realm of direct perception" (Hutcheon 23), meaning it must be made easier to perceive the vampires as characters in order to form an opinion on them. Adam and Vadoma are in charge of the Southern vampires, so the idea that the vampires are organized and capable of maintaining the institution of slavery is emphasized in the film. As in the novel, this shifting of the blame of slavery to supernatural causes results in a weakened position of the enslaved, while the Great Emancipator's image rises to a more superior position through his defense of them.

Furthermore, Henry is given a more ambiguous role in the film. Where he is mostly of one mind with Lincoln in the novel, the film's Henry opposes Lincoln at times: shortly after Lincoln echoes his mother's words that "until every man is free, we are all slaves" (00:58:40), Henry tells him that he cannot take away slavery as it is the only thing keeping the vampires

in the South. The film reduces Henry's role in fighting against slavery and opposing the Southern vampires—despite his statement that Lincoln isn't "the only one who has lost everything to vampires" (00:42:00). As a result, the film portrays Lincoln as the one working toward the abolishment of slavery, whereas the novel portrays Henry as guiding Lincoln along this path. Therefore, in this instance, the film's Lincoln fits Schwartz's Great Emancipator's wish for abolition more so than the novel.

What further highlights the film's portrayal of Lincoln as Great Emancipator is that he fights for abolition alone without an alliance of Union vampires, as these do not exist. Toward the end of the film, Lincoln and his human allies trick Adam and Vadoma into thinking they are transporting silver to Gettysburg by train as, in the film, silver is the vampires' weakness. In reality, the train is filled with rocks and its only purpose is to gather all the vampires in one place in order to finish them off (01:25:05). Once the vampires realize what is going on, Henry reveals to Adam that "Lincoln set us up. We've been tricked, Adam" (01:24:02), showing that he ultimately helped Lincoln in opposing the Southern vampires. Nevertheless, due to the removal of Henry's role as a key figure in the vampires' Union, the film conveys the message that there are essentially no "good" vampires. It thus differs drastically from the novel in its generalization of the vampires as evil: the novel offers a more nuanced view of the morality of vampires, as the Southern vampires' atrocious acts emphasize the immorality of slave owners and the vampires of the Union support Lincoln in his almost heroic efforts. The novel demonstrates that one's acts rather than one's nature determine one's morality, but by showing that all vampires are evil, the film suggests this evil is simply in their nature. Therefore, the parallel between slave owners and vampires in the film shows much more prominently that slave owners are truly evil in nature as well. However, it can also be said that the blame of slavery is taken away from human slave owners in the film more so than in the novel, as the vampires that maintain slavery are truly evil and without redemption since

"good" vampires are unheard of. These evil vampires then take the blame in a way that fully accounts for "the hideousness of slavery" (Salvati 106) without any need to address human slave owners. Slavery then becomes an irredeemable "evil" in the film that is far removed from actual human beings.

The film does not include Lincoln's assassination and transformation into a vampire. The fact that Lincoln does not join the vampires' ranks is another indicator of their supposed wickedness, as this time, the President is not around to improve their morals. Nevertheless, with Lincoln stating that "vampires are not the only things that live forever" (01:32:30) when Henry offers to make him a vampire, Lincoln is still immortalized—this time mainly through the existence of his journals, which he entrusts Henry with. The film thus also hints at the lasting legacy of Lincoln, which lives on generation after generation. The prosthetic Great Emancipator of the film is therefore as symbolic as the Great Emancipator of commemoration, as both persist in cultural memory.

To sum up, then, it is clear that due to the explicit focus on slavery in the film, its intentions are to create an image of Lincoln that is focused on his accomplishment of abolishing slavery. The film takes Schwartz' Great Emancipator's need for abolition and freedom and adds the supernatural in order to create a prosthetic Great Emancipator that is incredibly sympathetic to black people. This prosthetic Great Emancipator is also made superior to others through the blaming of slavery on supernatural causes and the singling out of Lincoln as the one capable of putting a stop to the vampires' efforts. However, this shifting of the blame is done to a further extent than in the novel, rendering the enslaved people even more helpless and absolving human slave owners of their errors to an even more questionable extent—despite implying at the same time that slave owners are inherently evil. Nevertheless, the film's use of the supernatural to emphasize the immortality of Lincoln's image as the Great Emancipator is similar to that of the novel, though executed differently.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyze a specific strand of contemporary fiction on Abraham Lincoln that relies on the supernatural, in order to show how this fiction affects the way in which American memory communities remember Lincoln and his accomplishments through its inclusion of supernatural elements. It then determined how this fiction contributes to the myth surrounding the 16th president up to this day.

In the introduction, I claimed that the inclusion of the supernatural in *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* makes Lincoln more relatable to contemporary readers by offering glimpses into his thoughts, and allows for a different light to be shed on Lincoln and his accomplishments than could be achieved through non-supernatural fiction. In the chapters that followed, I analyzed Lincoln's image as Savior of the Union and as the Great Emancipator, linking the former to Lincoln's interaction with ghosts in *Lincoln in the Bardo* and the latter to his dealings with vampires in *Vampire Hunter*. While Schwartz's commemorative symbols of Lincoln originate in early collective memory, Landsberg's theory revealed how these images are adapted in the context of mass mediation through the novels in order to be tangible to contemporary audiences.

Using this framework, I showed that the two novels discussed adapt Lincoln's images through their use of the supernatural, resulting in a mass-mediated image that draws on the Lincoln of commemoration. Referring back to the Savior of the Union's focus on unity and reconciliation, and the Great Emancipator's efforts toward a nation of freedom, equality and self-governance, the novels add extra layers to these commemorative images. To sum up, the prosthetic images then created in the novels through the inclusion of the supernatural consist of Lincoln being: a unifying force that advocates reconciliation; larger than life, mythical, and often made to seem superior to others; accessible and relatable to readers; more benevolent

than history makes him out to be; a heroic savior; and immortalized. These characteristics are present in both novels to varying extents. They are, however, all standard components of the cultural memory of Lincoln: people will quickly think of these characteristics when remembering Lincoln. Nevertheless, the supernatural offers a new interpretation of how these characteristics came to be attributed to Lincoln, allowing them to take on a new form.

In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Lincoln's unifying role in the Civil War and in the cemetery are emphasized, as is the link that exists between these two settings: through the ghosts' depiction of his unifying force on the cemetery, readers are reminded of Lincoln's power to bring both the nation and its people together. In *Vampire Hunter*, unity is less explicitly present, but still noticeable in the fact that Lincoln is undeniably working toward unity within the nation as a president regardless of the vampire threat.

Lincoln is also made larger than life in both novels. In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, this elevation of his status is achieved through Lincoln existing apart from others due to his unique behavior in the cemetery as witnessed by the ghosts and the overall connection that is drawn up between him and the ghosts. In *Vampire Hunter*, Lincoln's status is elevated to that of myth through the novel's discussion of his name, the connection it draws up between Lincoln and Caesar, and through Lincoln being chosen by the Union vampires to fight with them. The fact that Lincoln seems to be one of the only humans able to defeat vampires puts him in a superior position—a position that contrasts greatly with the weakened positions of the enslaved in the novel. Additionally, both novels refer to Lincoln's eloquence as well in their efforts to make him superior through supernatural means.

Through his interaction with the supernatural, Lincoln becomes more accessible and relatable to readers: in *Lincoln in the Bardo*, Lincoln's mind is opened up to readers through the ghosts' ability to inhabit the President and hear his thoughts, resulting in a high level of intimacy. In *Vampire Hunter*, Lincoln's mind is opened up to readers through the journal

entries included in the novel. These often relate to vampires and are made accessible to the author of the novel through supernatural means, as Henry Sturges presents the novels to Grahame-Smith. Additionally, by making vampires a large problem in Lincoln's life rather than just the Civil War, a kinship is created between Lincoln and readers, as it is as absurd for contemporary readers to imagine fighting vampires as it is for Lincoln at the start of the novel.

Another effect of the novels' use of the supernatural is that it makes Lincoln seem more benevolent than history makes him out to be. *Lincoln in the Bardo*'s setting of the cemetery functions as an opportunity for Lincoln to have a second chance at helping those in pain, making him seem more benevolent to those who died in the Civil War. Furthermore, the merging of Lincoln with Thomas Havens results in Lincoln seeming extremely compassionate toward all, regardless of background. *Vampire Hunter* depicts a more benevolent Lincoln through its portrayal of him fighting monsters and through the film's emphasis on Lincoln's sympathy for black people from the start. However, in the novel's use of Henry as a motivator for Lincoln to oppose the Southern vampires and abolish slavery, the novel takes away from Lincoln's benevolent image by implying he needs supernatural intervention in order to do the right thing. Additionally, the replacement of human slave owners with vampires establishes the idea that Lincoln's hatred of vampires is what pushes him toward abolishing slavery, making it seem as though he cares more about the destruction of vampires than the freedom of the enslaved.

The novels then also depict Lincoln as being a heroic savior. In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, this depiction is noticeable through Lincoln's ultimate resolve to end the Civil War and through the ghosts singling Lincoln out in the cemetery as their eventual savior. *Vampire Hunter* depicts Lincoln as a hero much more prominently by making him fight actual monsters rather than human antagonists. While the parallel between human slave owners and vampires introduces a number of issues—such as the absolving of the blame for human slave

owners and the weakening of the position of the enslaved—it nevertheless manages to make Lincoln seem like a hero fighting evil.

Finally, the novels immortalize Lincoln through their use of the supernatural. In *Lincoln in the Bardo*, the ghosts' access to Lincoln's thoughts shows that supernatural elements can make history tangible. While not as reliable as recorded history, the ghosts transcend the border between past and present by conveying Lincoln's thoughts to contemporary audiences, similarly to how the novel shows that transcending the border between life and death is possible. *Vampire Hunter* immortalizes Lincoln more explicitly by turning him into a vampire. As a result, Lincoln is available to contemporary audiences through the idea that he is physically present among us. While Lincoln is not made a vampire in the film, his immortalization still occurs through the preservation of his journals. On another level, the novels can be said to immortalize Lincoln through their contribution to how memory communities remember him.

It is thus clear that many similarities exist in how the novels affect Lincoln's images through the supernatural and thus also in how they contribute to the way in which memory communities remember him. While the characteristics discussed are not particularly innovating due to being set components in Lincoln memory, the fact that they are emphasized and sometimes even exaggerated by supernatural elements nevertheless allows for a new light to be shed on the Lincoln of history and therefore contributes something new to Lincoln remembrance in American memory communities.

Despite their similarities, however, the novels differ from each other substantially when looking at their treatment of the discourse on slavery: Saunders' Lincoln allows for Thomas Havens to share his thoughts and address the plight of the enslaved. Through the use of the supernatural enabling enslaved individuals to speak up, the novel attempts to alter to some extent the discourse already in place about slavery and draws up a sense of kinship

between the enslaved and Lincoln. Grahame-Smith's novel does not manage the same. Instead, *Vampire Hunter* pays more attention to those oppressing the enslaved by providing readers with the classic metaphor of vampires symbolizing a social issue—in this case, slavery. In its use of this metaphor, the novel does not see the enslaved as individuals capable of having a voice. Instead, it regards slavery as an institution as a whole and as a means by which Lincoln can oppose the vampires.

Lincoln in the Bardo thus pays homage to the tradition of neo-slave narratives through its portrayal of Thomas Havens, but the same is not true for *Vampire Hunter*. Both novels use the supernatural to add to the history of Lincoln in a similar way to neo-slave narratives' use of the supernatural to fill in gaps in the experience of being enslaved. However, only *Lincoln in the Bardo* aims to give the enslaved a voice in this process. While it is important to take into account that in this case, a white author decides which words the enslaved are enabled to speak, Saunders giving the enslaved a voice points to a fundamental difference in the two novels' use of the supernatural in relation to slavery: *Lincoln in the Bardo* uses it to pay homage to the neo-slave narratives' efforts to let the enslaved speak, and *Vampire Hunter* uses it to emphasize that slavery is a societal evil. Nevertheless, both these approaches fit well within the images of Lincoln and his accomplishments as discussed in this thesis.

Overall, it can be concluded that the specific strand of contemporary fiction to which *Lincoln in the Bardo* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* belong, affects the way in which American memory communities remember Lincoln and his accomplishments through its inclusion of the supernatural. It should be noted that this thesis only analyzed two novels belonging to this type of fiction, but within the scope of these two novels, it is clear that through the inclusion of supernatural elements a Lincoln is established who is much more unifying, superior, accessible, benevolent, and heroic than historiography makes him out to be. The supernatural takes the components originating from the Lincoln in history and

magnifies them, just like Lincoln's commemorative images do, though often to exaggerated extents. Although *Vampire Hunter* in particular includes a few instances in which Lincoln loses some of his benevolent character, the novel's overall depiction of Lincoln nevertheless elevates him to mythical heights in a manner similar to *Lincoln in the Bardo*. At the same time, the novels manage to make Lincoln relatable to readers as though he were still walking among us in our own time. The ghosts and journal entries on vampires thus indeed offer more intimate glimpses into Lincoln's thoughts. However, it is the novels' handling of the Savior of the Union and the Great Emancipator images under the influence of supernatural elements that ultimately leads to more tangible and relatable, and often even exaggerated interpretations of Lincoln and his accomplishments, allowing for an innovative contribution to the cultural memory of the President.

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