

Poets of the South

Poets of the South, by F.V.N. Painter, is a biographical and analytical collection of a handful of authors, that argues that these are prominent writers from the South that do not receive the credit or attention they deserve. Writers being primarily from the pre-Civil War era and just after Reconstruction, it is argued that they are overlooked due to them residing from the South, particularly due to the fact that there were no publishing houses in the South during those time periods; they were all located in the North, in areas like New York and Boston. Painter argues that because of this, the South was heavily reliant on publication from the North, which did not occur as frequently for them because of the contrasting writing style prevalent among Southern writers. Authors in the North were predominantly transcendentalist and theological writers, while Southern writers did not indulge in writing of social reformation, but rather, kept their loyalties strictly to their love of art and their Southern homes.

Painter begins his analysis by highlighting a few minor poets of the South, including Francis Scott Key, the author of "The Star Spangled Banner," George Prentice, William Gilmore Simms, Edward Coate Pinkney, Philip Cooke, Theodore O'Hara, Francis Ticknor, and John R. Thompson. Painter briefly discusses each writer and their background, and using examples from each writer's poems and writings, analyzes how their writings directly correlated with their beliefs and daily lives. Painter does the same for the major authors he highlights later in his text, applying a greater variety of writings and ideas to writers like Edgar Allen Poe, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Henry Timrod, Sidney Lanier, and Abram J. Ryan.

All of the minor poets are connected by their recognition as “great singers” of the South, and though a great deal of poets were not mentioned in the minor section of this work, Painter explains that this is due to not being able to fully examine newer poets of the South today, particularly because “here and there delicate notes are heard, but there is no evidence that a great singer is present among us (17).” He does not seem discouraged though by the future of literary and poetic achievement, and remarks that “the changed conditions and the new spirit that has come upon our people may reasonably be expected to lead to a higher poetic achievement (17).”

Though the volume gives great detail about the happenings of each author and the background of their lives and death, the Southern poets are not altogether entirely compared or contrasted by Painter. He does highlight at one point in Poets of the South, that three of the authors, Hayne, Timrod, and Ryan, were all alike in their shared connection with the Confederate Army. Other than that, Painter states that:

“The major poets of the South stand out in strong, isolated individuality. They were not bound together by any sympathy other than that of a common interest in art and in their Southern home. Their genius was nourished on the choicest literary productions of England and of classic antiquity...” (6).

Painter gives a thrilling recollection and historical background of all of these authors, but hardly criticizes their writings. He gives a more detailed description of each writer's life, which isn't necessarily a negative thing because of how little is known about each of these poets, especially the minor ones. Painter merely applies a few of

each writer's poems, or excerpts from other writings, to some of the writers seemingly contrived viewpoints. For example, Painter applies a few of Poe's writings with his stated viewpoint of music. Painter records a remark by Poe: "Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea, is simply music (22)." To enforce this notion, Painter applies Poe's comment to an excerpt from Al Aaraaf, as well as an excerpt from Israfel, in which suggests Poe's musical rhythm, since both refer to melody, harmony, and song.

The most notable of the very limited comparisons of this work, is that of the Al Aaraaf, the excerpt previously mentioned by Poe, as well as an excerpt from Tamerlane. Painter examines these two excerpts and concludes that these two works are imitations of two other writers, Moore and Byron. Painter does not, however, give a strong reasoning for the similarity of the two works, except to say that the rhyme and rhythm of the works, particularly that of Al Aaraaf, are so similar to Lalla Rookh that it could easily be mistaken as being part of the same work of writing. Though the rhyme and rhythm cannot be argued that they aren't similar, the writing itself does not altogether seem that they could be mistake for one another because each writing has its own, clearly distinct voice.

Overall, Painter compiled a great collection of poets from the South and sufficiently supported his argument that poets in the South are generally overlooked, particularly because of the heavy reliance of production being completed by the North, not only during the Pre-Civil war era and Reconstruction, but also shows signs of the reliance still being prominent today. His critical analysis of the works of the poets,

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however, were not as in depth or detailed as I imagined it would be upon reading the introduction and synopsis of the work. Painter gives a better depiction of the writers themselves and how their work applied to their lives, rather than an analysis of the writings themselves.

Work Cited

Painter, F.V.N. *Poets of the South*. Project Gutenberg EBook, 2003. EBook.