

The Literary Reception of Paul Hamilton Hayne and His Place in the
American and Southern Literary Canons

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Abstract

Although Paul Hamilton Hayne was the acknowledged poet laureate of the South at the time of his death in 1886, he and his poetry have virtually disappeared from the recent American literary histories and anthologies. Even the literary histories and anthologies of Southern literature tend to down play his role as a man of letters and poet of consequence. This diminution of Hayne's literary reputation has taken place despite the respect for his poetry and criticism that came from leading poets and critics in the United States and England during the mid to late nineteenth century.

In this thesis, I analyze the neglect of Hayne's work by first outlining his reception history as a poet. Certain trends are evident, specifically a movement in the United States away from the Anglo-American tradition to a new style of poetry, best represented by Walt Whitman. This change in what was fashionable in poetry has had the effect of undermining Hayne's reputation as a poet. Moreover, Hayne's literary reputation became more tenuous after the War Between the States given his strong affiliation with the conquered Confederacy. To bolster my argument that Hayne's reputation ought not be left to the whims of literary fashion, I conduct a preliminary examination of Hayne's poetry by analyzing several poems. I conclude, after examining the evidence, that Hayne deserves inclusion in the literary canons of American and Southern literature as an important representative nineteenth-century Southern poet writing within the Anglo-American tradition.