ForeWord Reviews

Teaching Nineteenth - Century American Poetry
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Most readers will easily recall the nineteenth-century American poets they studied in college because they were so few and indeed so memorable: Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson largely make up the very short list. Published in the Modern Language Association's Options for Teaching Series, *Teaching Nineteenth Century Poetry* intervenes in that brief arc to expand the repertoire of poets and interpretive approaches. The three editors—Paula Bernat Bennett, professor emerita at Southern Illinois Carbondale; Karen L. Kilcup, professor of English at UNC-Greensboro; and Phillipp Schweighauser, professor at the University of Berne—are all Americanists, scholars of American literary history and culture. Together the editors have assembled a body of essays directed toward active teaching professionals at the university level who are looking to reinvigorate their teaching syllabi in survey courses, specialty period courses, and classes in American poetry. The collection offers a "challenge to today's scholars and students to approach what they read from an aesthetic and pedagogical but also from a social and political perspective, even as those who wrote this poetry did."

The editors have divided the book into three major sections. Part one, "Teaching Various Kinds of Poems," contains excellent studies of minstrelsy, Civil War poets, realism, and other subjects. The section "Teaching Poets in Context" presents informative and stimulating essays on Lydia Sigourney, Emma Lazarus, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Stephen Crane, among others. "Strategies for Teaching" is highlighted by shrewd analyses of Poe and the American Renaissance as well as essays that use extraneous discourses, painting, spiritualism, etc., to illuminate nineteenth-century poems. A helpful and wide-ranging bibliographic essay in the final section brings together the extensive body of print scholarship and reference with the growing array of resources available online for instructional and general use.

Frances Smith Foster and Valerie L. Ruffin observe in specific terms that while "slave narratives …were not that important to most nineteenth century African American readers…Poetry, on the other hand, was very important." *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Poetry*

makes the latter point clear in general terms as well. Poetry was widely circulated in newspapers and periodicals, avidly consumed by Americans across class and ethnic lines, and a feature of public events and recitations throughout the nation. Unlike the typical college student today, Americans found poetry enjoyable; it was "a form of entertainment: a pleasure to read, if the interpreter were literate, but equally a pleasure to hear or recite."

While this collection targets an academic audience, all readers interested in American history or poetry generally would benefit from a sampling of the essays here. There is much to be learned, relearned, and many acquaintances renewed with American poetry of the nineteenth century.

Vince Brewton