



William Cullen Bryant: Author of America

Gilbert H. Muller

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2008 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title

A biography of one of nineteenth-century America's foremost poets and public intellectuals.

Proclaimed by James Fenimore Cooper to be “the author of America,” William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) was one of nineteenth-century America’s foremost poets and public intellectuals. In this, the first major biography of Bryant in almost forty years, Gilbert H. Muller reintroduces a quintessential New Yorker who commanded the nation’s literary, cultural, urban, and political life for more than half a century.

A transplanted Yankee, Bryant arrived on the unpaved streets of Manhattan in the early 1820s and he would soon find himself at the locus of the many political and cultural transformations sweeping Manhattan and the nation. The bedrock of Bryant’s cultural authority was his reputation as “America’s first poet,” and he enthralled a nation and his peers—including Whitman, Poe, Longfellow, and Emerson—who praised the excellence of his verse. A literary celebrity for almost seventy years, Bryant served as the editor of the *New-York Evening Post* for five decades, and was a major force behind the establishment of Central Park, the National Academy of Design, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others. Drawing on previously unavailable letters and nineteenth-century files of the *New-York Evening Post*, Muller creates a humanistic portrait of New York City’s “first citizen,” establishes him as a first-rate poet, and makes a convincing case for Bryant’s role in defining the idea of democratic culture in America.

“The first full-length biography of William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) to appear in decades, Gilbert H. Muller’s worthwhile volume is overdue … Muller’s thoroughly researched and engaging biography represents an important contribution to the histories of American literature and journalism. If it impels readers to revisit Bryant’s poems with renewed appreciation, then Muller will presumably have achieved one of his major aims.” — *Resources for American Literary Study*

“…much of the book is engaging and informative … Muller is to be commended for trying to bring Bryant back into public consciousness.” — *Journalism History*

“…captivating … richly researched and readable…” — *The Wall Street Journal*

“…Muller splendidly chronicles the nineteenth century, narrates a vivid New York story, and offers a compelling portrait of an American genius. The man whom James Fenimore Cooper called ‘the Author of America’ deserves no less.” — *ForeWord Magazine*

“Muller’s absorbing, frequently astonishing biography forcefully reaffirms Bryant’s place in the pantheon of great Americans.” — *Booklist*

“What a remarkable life, and what a remarkable book! William Cullen Bryant’s life stretched from the beginnings of the Republic to the late nineteenth century, and, along the way, he helped shape how we think about our nation and ourselves. His influence is with us still, in his poetry, his journalism, and his abiding faith in the American spirit. Gilbert Muller reminds us of a time when language and words mattered, when a poet and newspaper editor wielded real power and influence. In doing so, Muller introduces us to Bryant’s

extraordinary friends and admirers: James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Catharine Sedgewick, Charles Dickens, and many others. This book is a wonderful work of history and biography.” — Terry Golway, author of *Washington’s General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution*

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