

Early Reviews of English Poets: A Literary Retrospective



Early Reviews of English Poets by John Louis Haney

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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The early reviews of English poets offer a fascinating glimpse into the literary landscape of the time. These reviews, found in various sources such as prefaces, letters, and journals, provide invaluable insights into the critical reception of poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and John Milton. By examining these early reviews, we can gain a better understanding of the literary tastes and values of the era, as well as the impact these poets had on their contemporaries.

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400)

One of the earliest English poets to receive critical acclaim was Geoffrey Chaucer. His masterpiece, "The Canterbury Tales," was widely praised for its vivid storytelling, rich language, and insightful portrayal of human nature. A contemporary reviewer, John Gower, wrote that Chaucer's work was "a

mirror of all that this world doth contain." Another reviewer, the Scottish poet Robert Henryson, described Chaucer as "the well of English undefiled," suggesting that his writing set a high standard for English literature.



Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599)

Edmund Spenser, a poet of the Elizabethan era, was another figure whose work garnered significant attention from critics. His epic poem, "The Faerie Queene," was highly praised for its imaginative allegory, lyrical beauty, and moralistic themes. The literary critic William Hazlitt, writing in the 19th century, described Spenser as "the poet's poet." Another contemporary reviewer, the poet and playwright Ben Jonson, wrote that Spenser was "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas."



Edmund Spenser, an Elizabethan poet whose work was highly praised for its imaginative allegory and moralistic themes.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

William Shakespeare, arguably the greatest writer in the English language, was also subject to early critical reviews. While some of his contemporaries criticized his work for its lack of classical polish, others recognized his genius. The poet and critic Ben Jonson wrote that Shakespeare was "not of an age, but for all time." Another contemporary reviewer, the writer John Heminge, described Shakespeare as "the soul of the age." Despite some initial skepticism, Shakespeare's work went on to receive universal acclaim and is now considered one of the most important literary figures in history.



John Milton (1608-1674)

John Milton, a poet and polemicist of the 17th century, was another figure whose work received early critical attention. His epic poem, "Paradise Lost," was widely praised for its grandeur, theological depth, and poetic beauty. The poet and critic Samuel Johnson described Milton as "the most sublime poet in any language." Another contemporary reviewer, the writer

and critic John Dryden, wrote that Milton was "the most universal genius of his age." Despite some controversy surrounding his political views, Milton's work was ultimately recognized as one of the greatest works of English literature.



John Milton, a 17th-century poet and polemicist whose work was highly praised for its grandeur and theological depth.

The early reviews of English poets provide a valuable window into the literary tastes and values of the era. These reviews reveal the critical acclaim that these poets received from their contemporaries, demonstrating their profound impact on the literary landscape. Whether it was the vivid storytelling of Chaucer, the imaginative allegory of Spenser, the timeless insights of Shakespeare, or the epic grandeur of Milton, these early reviews attest to the enduring legacy of these great poets. By studying these reviews, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the literary heritage that has shaped English literature and continues to inspire and captivate readers to this day.



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