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### William Gilmore Simms

William Gilmore Simms was the most prominent literary figure of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Charleston, and during his lifetime he was one of the most widely read and popular authors the United States had produced.

Simms entered this world on the 17th of April 1806, the son of an Irish immigrant turned tavern keeper. When he was an infant his mother died and his devastated father left Charleston- unable to bear his memories in this "place of tombs."

He was raised by his grandmother, a Patriot spy during the Revolution, who regaled him with stories of heroes and adventure from that epic time. From her he learned the power and craft of a good tale well told.

At the age of 19 his first volume of poetry was published and over the course of his life he wrote nearly 2000 poems.

His first novel, *The Partisan*, was published in 1835. Many more would follow. Simms was part of the first great generation of American authors, writers who produced a distinctive American literature, one which featured American themes, settings and character. Edgar Allen Poe considered him the best American author of his time.

The major theme of his works is the sweep of American history itself. He sought to depict in fiction the growth and development of American society. His works are a meditation on the development of American civilization. For Simms, the genius of American society was found in its localism, and thus his works were set in the South. Some have called him the father of Southern literature. In addition, Simms authored biographies of Revolutionary War heroes Francis Marion and Nathanael Greene. He also wrote an early history of South Carolina

The Civil War consumed Simms, however. His literary life was "overwhelmed by the drums, and the cavalry, and the shouting". Simms' home and library of 12,000 volumes were burned in the wake of Sherman's army. This left him destitute and writing for poorly paying newspapers to feed his family. William Gilmore Simms died in Charleston in 1870. **After some years of neglect Simms' vast literary output is being put on line by the University of South Carolina.**

[This last sentence is from the Simms Initiative published by the University of South Carolina which is putting all of his Simms' works on line. <http://simms.library.sc.edu/>

Todd Hagstette, ed., *Reading William Gilmore Simms: Essays of Introduction to the Author's Canon* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992).

John M. McCardell Jr., "William Gilmore Simms," Walter Edgar, ed., *The South Carolina*

*Encyclopedia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 868-869.

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William Gilmore Simms, ed. David Aiken, *A City Laid Waste: The Capture, Sack, and Destruction of the City of Columbia* (University of South Carolina, 2011).