



After the Lost War

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Sidney Lanier was a Georgia-born poet and flute player; he fought as a Confederate in the Civil War and, never fully recovering from his war injuries, died at forty, leaving behind a wife and children. The more than forty poems in AFTER THE LOST WAR are divided into four sections that move more or less chronologically, from the war years, through Lanier's return home after the war, to marriage and rearing children, then to his failing health and subsequent death. Throughout, the war casts the longest shadow over Lanier's reflections, its unforgettable images of death and moral failure somehow bound up with both the cruelty of childhood and the love of brother for brother--and witnessed by a nature that is by turns compassionate and indifferent.

Hudgins holds his subject as one might hold a rock in one's hands, turning it over and over and seeing it anew from several different angles. With Hudgins' Lanier it is as though the young soldier in Stephen Crane's THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE had been allowed to grow up and mature, now digesting more fully the American experience of the Civil War. In particular it is the book's seemingly unrelated moments of tenderness and family life that offer the most profound illumination of that chapter in American history.

Hudgins shares the novelist's gift for stepping into his characters and for fully re-creating a world. He provides a rich and intimate portrayal of the South, and, while staying within the historical boundaries of Lanier's biography, his fictive re-creation of selected moments in Lanier's day-to-day life seems to produce more of the sweep of a life than a three-hundred-page biography might have done. The highly readable narrative transports the reader into moments of great beauty and complexity. To the tradition of American narrative verse, Hudgins has contributed an outstanding new work.

Sources for Further Study

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