



Guy Vernon: A Novelette in Verse

John Townsend Trowbridge

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Many writers are deservedly forgotten, yet not every act of erasure is just. John Townsend Trowbridge (1827–1916) was a prolific American writer whose novels, plays, and poems, though critically acclaimed in his day, have with good reason not been remembered. He wrote one poem, however, that has been unfairly consigned to oblivion. *Guy Vernon*, a long seriocomic work about race, racism, and sexual intrigue in antebellum America, was first published in 1878 in *A Masque of Poets*, an anthology of anonymous poems featuring works by Louisa May Alcott, James Russell Lowell, Henry David Thoreau, and Emily Dickinson (whose contribution was her only poem to be published in book form during her life).

Guy Vernon is a novelette in verse portraying an unhappy marriage between North and South on the eve of the Civil War. Guy Vernon, a dashing plantation owner, takes as his wife a penniless young charmer named Florinda whom he meets at the Saratoga balls. Soon estranged, they are joined in their travels around New Orleans, Havana, and the abolitionist North by Vernon's freed black manservant, Saturn, a "mulatto" dandy who exerts a mysterious power over his former master, and by Florinda's previous suitor, Rob Lorne, a journalist and would-be poet.

Composed in rollicking rhyme royal stanzas, this verse–narrative is at once comic and gothic, recalling in its cynicism and rhythms Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*. Edited and extensively annotated by the renowned poet and critic William Logan, this edition incorporates revisions Trowbridge marked in his own copy of the anthology. Back in print for the first time since 1878, *Guy Vernon* reemerges as a lost classic of American literature, one that both reflects and criticizes the social and literary conventions of its time.

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