



Bookshelf

2002

[Introduction to] South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture

Suzanne W. Jones

University of Richmond, sjones@richmond.edu

Sharon Monteith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/bookshelf>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Regional Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jones, Suzanne W., and Sharon Monteith, eds. *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

NOTE: This PDF preview of [Introduction to] *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* includes only the preface and/or introduction. To purchase the full text, please click [here](#).

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bookshelf by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

SOUTH TO A NEW PLACE

Region, Literature, Culture

Edited by **Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith**

Foreword by **Richard Gray**

Introduction: South to New Places

Sharon Monteith and Suzanne W. Jones

Place? It isn't that we don't *have* roots anymore. There is still a unique continuity to the southern experience. . . . We have roots, yes, but we have become like those plants that send . . . rootlets out into the air: a sense of *places*, not a sense of place.

—Jack Butler, “Still Southern After All These Years”

To write, form rhizomes, expand your own territory by deterritorialization.

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *On the Line*

At the end of Alan Gurganus's *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (1989), his elderly protagonist gazes out of an airplane window as she flies over Georgia. Her view is a bird's-eye view, tracing the route Sherman's army took through the South. Tom Dent and Gary Younge track similar paths in *Southern Journey* (1997) and *No Place Like Home: A Black Briton's Journey Through the American South* (1999), following the route the Freedom Riders took in 1961.¹ In each case, it is the historical framework through which an individual views the South that determines what is seen. One is reminded of Eudora Welty's child protagonist in “A Memory” who watches the world through the frame she makes with her fingers. It is possible both to delimit what one sees and to create a paradigmatic framework through which to see further and more clearly—or simply differently from those who studied the South before you. Walker Percy's urban, apocalyptic vision frames the South very differently from William Alexander Percy, whose *Lanterns on the Levee*

1. See also Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), which concentrates on a sense of southern place by mapping the locales in which civil rights demonstrations and events took place.

(1941) is one of the most nostalgic (and reactionary) of place-defining southern memoirs. The Mississippi Delta that Larry Brown describes, with its rabid consumerism and depressing poverty, extends our apprehension of the places expatiated upon by predecessors like Percy, Welty, Faulkner, and Wright. For Richard Ford, who lived in the Delta, the Delta is “the South’s South,” supporting James C. Cobb’s thesis that the region from Memphis to Vicksburg is “the Most Southern Place on Earth.”²

The South’s custodians, conservators, and gatekeepers have been many and various. They figure in diverse ideological contexts, as the tensions between what has become known as the “Rubin generation” and “post-Rubin” scholars demonstrate so well. Fred Hobson claims in *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World* (1991) that there are few contemporary fictions that explore what he calls the “old” southern themes. Hobson asserts that since the “old albatross of segregation” has been thrown off, novelists inevitably also cast off “the old southern subject” of race and racial conflict, “the old setting” of the rural South, and “the old theme” of community. For Hobson, contemporary southern fiction is hardy but depleted in specific ways. He has been followed closely by others, like Jan Nordby Gretlund, who, despite examining the South from a very different nonsouthern perspective, sees the region’s fiction in the same way. There is a notable and disturbing tendency to limit one’s critical perspective by judging new writers according to old precepts. Gretlund, while finding new southern writing “impressive” and arguing for its appreciation, continues to compare Larry Brown to Faulkner, or Clyde Egerton’s humor to Faulkner’s in “Spotted Horses,” and feels the need to test how writers of the 1980s compare “in determination and achievement” to Faulkner’s “stoic resolve.” As long ago as 1983 in “No More Monoliths, Please,” C. Hugh Holman warned critics not to “shut too many doors to the fresh, the vital, and the new” in what he called the “Multi-Souths.” In *South to a New Place*, the American South remains the datum, a given whose mythic properties have traditionally exceeded its realities and that consequently impels continued investigation, but the novum, the new places that extend our understanding of the South beyond traditional conceptions of regionalism, demand our special attention.³

2. Richard Ford, quoted in James C. Cobb’s *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 325.

3. Fred Hobson, *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Jan Nordby Gretlund, *Frames of Southern Mind: Reflections on the*

Most theories of national literature function metonymically, as in Jay B. Hubbell's discussion of the South's literary dependence on the North or Sacvan Bercovitch's *The American Jeremiad* (1978), where the South exists only as a footnote to a thesis in which the Puritan North is the seat of American identity, deriving its cultural credibility from its elevation over the Old South. But disavowing the South is simply one way of registering its presence, and elsewhere in American literary history "Souths"—Old and New, antebellum and postbellum, Upper and Lower, and Deep, together with Souths of the mind and imagination, and Nu-Souths and postmodern Souths—have proliferated.⁴ Telling about the South in order to ratify its regional distinctiveness has a long and successful history through texts with titles like *The Everlasting South* (1963), *The Enduring South* (1974), and *The Prevailing South* (1988). Carl Degler argues, by predicating place over time, that the idea of the "South" overrides modernity, and in his essay in *The Prevailing South*, Louis D. Rubin Jr. ensures that place is capitalized (as is the Past and southern Problems) when he adjudges that a "firm identification with a Place" is a defining trope of southern literature. Rubin is hardly unusual in this claim, but many more critics like Leonard Lutwack have written of the "pain of placelessness" in modernist and postmodernist writing. Southern place is becoming a much more fluid concept than such parochial axioms would imply. For Jack Temple Kirby, for example, the "solid

Stoic, Bi-Racial and Existential South (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), 248 and passim; C. Hugh Holman, "No More Monoliths, Please: Continuities in the Multi-Souths," in *Southern Literature in Transition*, ed. Philip Castille and William Osbourne (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1983), xiii–xxiv. The editors first had the idea for this project when they planned a special issue of the British journal *Critical Survey* called "South to a New Place." An MLA panel followed, and the interest generated in the U.S. and Europe is evidence of the continuing importance of place in southern studies.

4. Jay B. Hubbell, *The South in American Literature 1607–1900* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1954); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), xiii. "Defining" southern texts, from the apologist to the deconstructionist, include, for example: W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941); Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964); C. Hugh Holman, *The Roots of Southern Writing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972); Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael O'Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Lewis P. Simpson, *The Fable of the Southern Writer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); and, of course, the work of Louis D. Rubin over half a century.

South" dissolved in 1976 with the election of Jimmy Carter, and Richard Gray has consistently problematized backward-looking sectionalism by detecting forward-thinking regionalism. Jon Smith in his essay here reminds us of the six thousand South Carolinians who in January 2000 came out in force to keep the Confederate flag flying over their state-house.⁵

Many of the contributors to this volume revisit Eudora Welty's discussion in "Place in Fiction," wherein location is the "ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course." Welty, Faulkner, Percy, and the Vanderbilt Agrarians have each spelled out in differing ideological contexts the significance of southern place. But in a postmodern world, premodern and modern conceptions of place are inevitably insufficiently fluid. For Welty's insider-writer, the region signifies home, but ideas of nationhood, and the global as well as the local, complicate any discussion of regional veracity. Most tellingly, turning assertions about the "Americanization" of the South around, critical debate about the "Southernization of America" has established a model whereby the South is both a cultural filter and the barometer for the health (or sickness) of the nation. In a recent issue of *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Leslie W. Dunbar argues that the South has polluted America with its racism and violence. But writers, critics, politicians, and historians as different as James Dickey, Peter Applebome, Carl Degler, James C. Cobb, John Lewis, V. S. Naipaul, and John Hope Franklin have claimed that the South is a place of reconciliation, and this feeling strengthened over the last decades of the twentieth century. John Lewis asserted in 1966 that "here in the South where racial divisions were once the deepest, I can see the day breaking when this will be considered a region of hope." More recently in his autobiography *Walking with the Wind* (1998), Lewis believes his prediction has come true: "Despite the setbacks of recent years, there remains in the South, an inherent sense of purpose, of belief, of people pulling together and actually effecting change. Despite all the failures and frustrations of the past

5. Carl Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Louis D. Rubin Jr., "Changing, Enduring, Forever Still the South," in *The Prevailing South*, ed. Dudley Clendinen (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1988), 26; Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984); Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Rev. ed.; Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 172. For Richard Gray's most recent work, see *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

three decades, there is still a *spirit* in the South, a spirit that was not and *is* not felt in the same way in the North." In 1972, John Hope Franklin was careful and coded in "The Great Confrontation: The South and the Problem of Change." But later he advances the belief that the South, the nation's most visible crucible of national racial guilt, is nevertheless the nation's hope for racial peace.⁶

Much has been invested in the contemporary South's abilities to redeem the nation at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, despite the kinds of inherent regional contradictions that Peter Applebome has summarized: "Looked at one way, it's a place of grace and faith that has purged most of its old sins while maintaining most of its old virtues, a place that for all its bloody past and the ambiguities and unresolved issues of the present, offers the nation's best blueprint for racial peace. Looked at another way, it's a Potemkin Village of mirrors and trap doors, where old inequities are cloaked in new forms, a chameleon South changed only on the surface, now pumping old poisons into new veins, a place where even in the most neutered suburbs, what was still lives, beating insistently away like Poe's telltale heart." A number of southern writers keenly demonstrate a sense of the South as appalling as well as enthralling. For Carson McCullers, a visit to Columbus, Georgia—a key setting for her fiction—was "a stirring up of love and antagonism," and James Baldwin, visiting Martin Luther King Jr., encountered a "great, vast, brooding, welcoming and bloodstained land, beautiful enough to astonish and break the heart." When Eudora Welty writes "Where Is This Voice Coming From?" immediately following the news of Medgar Evers's assassination in her hometown of Jackson, Mississippi, on June 12, 1963, she succeeds in apprehending the smoldering hatred that gives rise to a racist killing.⁷

6. Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 128; Leslie W. Dunbar, "The Final New South?" *Virginia Quarterly Review* 74, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 49–58; John Lewis, "Statement" to the Voter Education Project, Atlanta, 13 January 1966, as quoted by Stephen A. Smith in *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1985), 92–93; John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line: Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).

7. Applebome, *Dixie Rising, How the South Is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1997), 20; Carson McCullers, "The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing," in *The Mortgaged Heart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 279; James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 68; Eudora Welty, "Where Is This Voice Coming From?" in *The Collected Stories* (London: Penguin, 1983), 603–7.

The southern landscape has always meant more than the sum of its parts. For nonsoutherners traveling through the South, it is often the bloody past that remains the most pervasive. They often begin their journeys trapped within confining and predetermined expectations; travelers to and through the southern states, from whites like Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau in the nineteenth century to blacks like Eddy Harris and Gary Younge at the end of the twentieth, tend to revise their preconceptions.⁸ New York journalist Harris, who rides South to “confront the source of [his] anger” on behalf of those “tempered in the kiln of Jim Crow,” is surprised to find that by the end of his journey the South feels like home. Like Baldwin before him, he finds that it is the contradictions that fuel his conclusions. Gary Younge finds himself turned away from a motel in Senatobia, Mississippi, with a racist assumption that spurs him to remember the “bad old” 1960s rather than bask in the “new” 1990s. But he continues to long for the “heartfelt affinity that both blacks and whites in the South seemed to have with their environment,” and his disaster-filled predictions are slowly transformed into clear-sightedness. Southern *place-ness* has obsessed those outside the South, like Jean Renoir, whose films *Swamp Water* (1941) and *The Southerner* (1945) celebrated the land and the struggle of those who work it.⁹ The South has captured the imaginations of those not born in the region but who seek to tell “southern” stories, like Octavia Butler in *Kindred* (1979), Sherley Anne Williams in *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (1987), and Pete Dexter in *Paris Trout* (1988). As Suzanne W. Jones and Wes Berry point out in their essays, African American writers often turn to the South in order to explore personal and family history forged in the crucible of slavery and segregation.

An ever-evolving critical axis of investigation widens the parameters

8. See Frances Trollope (mother of Anthony), *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) and *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitelaw* (1836), and Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (1837), as discussed in detail by Diane Roberts in *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Eddy Harris, *South of Haunted Dreams: A Ride Through Slavery's Old Back Yard* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 22–23, 238; Gary Younge, *No Place Like Home: A Black Briton's Journey Through the American South* (London: Picador, 1999), 24.

9. Joel Williamson, in his biography of William Faulkner, selects the word *place-ness* as the single word that conveys his sense of Faulkner's South. In his context, it resonates with the designation of specific places and social spaces to blacks and whites in ways that worked to uphold segregation. Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 403.

within which the South may be examined, critiqued, and understood. Brian Morton, in an essay on the South published in the British press, argued recently that “the American South has never had to rely on the theories of strangers.” Morton reworks the idea that “the” South has been elaborated over generations by southerners for southerners. In *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998), Michael Kreyling opens out such ideas to scrutiny, allowing that “cultural waves originating outside the South” may “wash through its literature and change it.” And when George Brown Tindall in *Natives and Newcomers* (1995) allows for a keen sense of ethnic diversity in southern places, he forces us to acknowledge that we are almost as likely to encounter new southern fictions by Vietnamese Americans on the Gulf Coast or by Cuban Americans in Florida as we are to find the myth of southern place still tied to the biracial small town. For Tom Dent, small towns are “more interesting, more resistant to change, more reflective of the South as a region,” but in contemporary novels like Roberto G. Fernández’s *Holy Radishes!* (1995), Lan Cao’s *Monkey Bridge* (1997), and Susan Choi’s *The Foreign Student* (1998) those same small southern towns are changed forever by new immigrants. In a strangled effort to convey his homeland in terms that may mean something to his United States audience, Korean Chang Ahn (otherwise known as Chuck) asserts in Choi’s novel, “Korea is a shape just like Florida. Yes? The top half is a communist state, and the bottom half are fighting for democracy!” He tries to compare the thirty-eighth parallel with the Mason-Dixon Line, casting around for “southern” tropes through which southerners might begin to imagine his homeland. It is to a sense of place that he turns: “You maybe don’t believe it but Korea, the land, looks very much like Tennessee.” He feels the comparison looking out over the Tennessee hills as he studies at Sewanee in the late-1950s: “sometimes he woke in the morning and just for an instant was sure he was home.” Edward Said attests that home is always provisional, and exiles crossing borders “break barriers of thought and experience.” Negotiating a sense of place involves reassessment of one’s past in a new present, and writers like Choi provoke a cultural remapping of the region that allows us to inquire into new coordinates of southern identity.¹⁰

10. Brian Morton, “Not So Much a Region, More a State of Mind,” *London Sunday Times*, 24 July 1994, 10–11; Michael Kreyling, “The Extra: Southern Literature: Consensus and Dissensus,” *American Literature* 60, no. 1 (March 1988): 83–95 (for a fuller discussion, see Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998]); George Brown Tindall, *Natives and Newcomers: Ethnic Southerners and Southern Ethnics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Tom Dent, *Southern Journey: A Return to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1997) (this

In Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Falls Church, Virginia, just a few miles from Washington, D.C., becomes Little Saigon, and her protagonist Mai builds horizontal communities with others to find her way through moral panics in the press over immigration, and the "eerie topography" of her memories of Vietnam. Such novels can be read as syncretic models in which the fusion of cultures overrides what Freud once described as "the narcissism of minor difference," wherein communities living on the boundaries of one another make manifest their inclination toward aggression by undermining each other. New immigrant writers turn a mirror on the South, and the images refracted tell the South in new ways. They complicate the South's predominantly biracial literary history and reveal the South's demographics as complex and changing. A key text in this regard remains Robert Olen Butler's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992), explored in detail by Maureen Ryan in this collection.¹¹

Comparative studies are sometimes viewed with suspicion by those who maintain that hegemonic centers of power leave the comparative context auxiliary and inferior. In a special issue of *South Atlantic Review* dedicated to "The Worldwide Face of Southern Literature," the editors point to Poe's artistic reception in France and Twain and Faulkner's in Japan, but it is difficult to reconcile just why the successful exportation of southern writers should come as such a surprise to them: "conferences on southern authors have taken place, often more than once, in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Soviet Georgia, and Japan." A tinge of provincialism remains in the assumption that southerners rather than South-watchers will inevitably discover new ways of eliciting meaning from southern places. A socio-cultural approach to literature, which examines the South

quotation appears on the dustjacket); Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 51–53; Edward W. Said, "Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile," *Harper's*, September 1984, 54.

11. Lan Cao, *Monkey Bridge* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 16; Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Collins, 1927–31), Vol. 21, 123. For exemplification of the biracial literary tradition, see Suzanne W. Jones's anthology of short stories, *Crossing the Color Line: Readings in Black and White* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), and for critiques of interracial connections, see, for example, Minrose C. Gwin, *Black and White Women in the Old South: A Peculiar Sisterhood* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985) and Sharon Monteith, *Advancing Sisterhood? Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

from a distance or sets the South at the periphery, can draw out distinctions, break open frontiers, and question those boundaries that hermetically seal the South, as in, for example, Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr.'s *Remapping Southern Literature* (2000). Essays on transcultural cross-overs—Deborah Cohn's study of Faulkner and Latin American writers and Helen Taylor's circum-Atlantic reorientations of traditionally southern tropes in European contexts, for example—focus on particularized "new places." But across the volume, "traveling theory," especially when related to contemporary interrogations of regionalism and to postmodern geographies, helps to change the contours of southern studies. Writers revisit specific southern terrain (from cities to small towns and rural places), and what they find in the representations they read allows us to inquire into new coordinates of southern identity.¹²

In 1971, Albert Murray published *South to a Very Old Place*. Commissioned by the editor of *Harper's* magazine, Willie Morris, to write about "home" in a series of articles, the African American writer produced much more: *South to a Very Old Place* is memoir, travelogue, and social commentary. Orchestrated as a jazz-and-blues composition, it is a meditation on the American South. Taking his title as our starting point, we have gathered contributors who are critically and creatively remapping the American South, a region that exasperates as it inspires definition(s). Just as Murray's blues-informed jazz forms are open-ended, improvised, and hybrid, the blues metaphor and jazz form are key to our collection, which surveys representations of the South within a postmodern, diverse, inclusive, and international context. In fact, when V. S. Naipaul began his "turn" in the South, he visited Albert Murray in Harlem, and Murray helped the writer to "see" differently: "with Al's help, my eye changed. Where at first I had seen only Harlem gloom, I began . . . to see . . . the splendor of the original Harlem design." Heading south with *A Turn in*

12. Pearl Amelia McHaney and Thomas L. McHaney, eds., *South Atlantic Review* 65, no. 4 (2000): 2; Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000). This study examines those writers like Cormac McCarthy, Barry Hannah, and Doris Betts who head west in their plotlines but whose fiction, Brinkmeyer argues, remains thematically and stylistically rooted in the South. For a fuller discussion of transcultural crossovers, see Deborah N. Cohn, *History and Memory in Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999) and Helen Taylor, *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture Through a Transatlantic Lens* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

the South (1989), Naipaul is initially surprised to discover that what he feels are “some of the most important ‘American’ things” are actually southern—“Coca-Cola, and country music, and even the idea of supermarkets.” Whereas Naipaul fails to examine many of the southern clichés that prompt his search for southern distinctiveness, once his eyes are accustomed to the South he does succeed in elucidating points of comparison with the Caribbean, ones that draw on past associations via slavery and other pointed parallels between the historical area of Charleston, with its horse-drawn carriages and souvenir stalls, and “the tourist Caribbean of today.”¹³

As recently as 1999, Randall Kenan, following Murray, entitled the final section of his epic *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* “Home to a Very Strange Place.” Raised by his grandfather in Wallace, North Carolina, and in nearby Chinquapin by his great-aunt, he casts back to a place that was “unincorporated and rural, largely tobacco fields and cornfields and hog farms,” but that now “coexists” with a world that includes cyberspace. Freighted with memories, some of which are harbingers of fear and the desire to leave, Kenan realizes that “the many feelings engendered by life in a small town are much more complex and tangled than most people who’ve never lived in one, belonged to one, could ever imagine,” and he ensures that his own small-town experience—“strange” now to the grown man who has lived in New York—is incorporated into the epic sweep across the changing social geography of African American lives.¹⁴

South to a New Place begins to chart connections with “other” Souths in ways that open up spaces and places from which we might read the region as a site of exchange. Taking as our starting point Wendell Berry’s incredulity that contemporary scholars of the American South could attempt to “redefine Southernness without resort to geography,” we have collected essays that tie the mythic southern balloon down to earth. Our contributors examine both new southern places and old southern landscapes—from fiction set in postsouthern suburbs to a Thoreauvian impulse in contemporary southern writing about nature. The essays pay attention to the ways that regional typologies are fictive, as Richard Gray points out in his foreword to this collection. Gray demonstrates one of the key conceptions that underpin *South to a New Place*—that it opens

13. V. S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 22, 105, 77–78.

14. Randall Kenan, *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 607–8, 624.

up to scrutiny the literary and cultural practice that has come to be known as "regionalism." Larry McClain in "The Rhetoric of Regional Representation" has argued that regional writing is afforded canonical status only when region is disguised in a "vague 'American' universalism" and that, in this way, "the boundaries of 'mainstream' literature are patrolled." Whereas McClain believes that one only explores regional counter-traditions by examining noncanonized regional fiction, Gray in his foreword and other contributors to this collection succeed in opening up debates about regionalism precisely through their examination of canon and context.¹⁵

Part I, "Surveying the Territory," theorizes definitions of place and region. In "Where Is Southern Literature? The Practice of Place in a Post-southern Age," Scott Romine wraps his mind around southern literary regionalism from the 1930s to the present, skillfully analyzing the evolution of southern literary scholarship and its fascination with place. Finding that throughout its history the South has been variously defined as a region—geographically, economically, ideologically, culturally, historically, and orientationally—Romine argues that "all these 'Souths' have been subject to or implicated in distinctive forms of representation." He wonders which criteria will be necessary for southern literature to survive and concludes by speculating on the effect that the loss of southern distinctiveness will have on the writing of southern fiction. In "Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places—Past, Present, and Future," Barbara Ladd takes a look around Atlanta and its outlying suburbs as she speculates about how contemporary scholars might theorize place. Ladd's wide-ranging study shows that, although the symbolic landscape of "the South" continues to shape many of our perceptions, the South is continually undergoing demographic changes. She demonstrates that the South is neither insular nor homogenous, and she argues that while "the *experience* of place remains dynamic and vital," it is the theorizing of place that is problematic. Sharing a concern with Michael Kowalewski that we "lack a vocabulary with which to ask engaging philosophical, psychological or aesthetic questions about what it means to dwell in a place, whether actually or imaginatively,"¹⁶ Ladd proposes a number of new

15. Wendell Berry, "Writer and Region," *Hudson Review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 25; Larry McClain, "The Rhetoric of Regional Representation: American Fiction and the Politics of Cultural Dissent," *Genre* 27, no. 3 (1994): 227–53.

16. Michael Kowalewski, "Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism," *American Literary History* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 174.

areas for exploration, many of which other contributors begin to map in detail. Together she and Romine expand the conceptual framework in which the South has traditionally been mapped and monitored.

In "Race and Intimacy: Albert Murray's *South to a Very Old Place*," Carolyn M. Jones returns to Murray in order to rethink what it means to dwell in a place. Murray recognized the hybridity of southern culture long before the concept became trendy in contemporary theoretical circles. He showed how the South has, within its indigenous African American musical forms, some of the tools it needs to reconstruct its society and to think differently about its region. Via Toni Morrison's ideas of "intimate things in place," Jones argues that in the structure of *South to a Very Old Place*, Albert Murray illustrates how the blues-inspired jazz form can become a model both to locate the self and to improvise new communities. Through his conversations with white southerners—Robert Penn Warren, C. Vann Woodward, Edwin Yoder, Walker Percy, and others—Murray, playing the role of the trickster, tests to see if they will acknowledge the hybridity of southern culture, all the while hoping to spot the "downhome angle of vision" beneath their cosmopolitan intellectualism and their southern politeness. Much less "polite" are Jon Smith's subjects in "Southern Culture on the Skids." Southern rock music with its lyrics about Civil War rebels and nostalgia for the "Lost Cause" is a resistant romanticization of "history" and "home," as Paul Wells and Ted Ownby have discussed.¹⁷ But for Jon Smith, it is punk-influenced subcultures that function to reveal white southern self-presentation as especially fetishistic and narcissistic. Deploying psychoanalytic paradigms, he shows how subcultures can operate to maintain a specific identity and the extent to which "love of place" can be a self-displacement. In a wide-ranging piece that reads southern signifiers from flags to ads, trucks to perfume and Elvis Jell-O molds, Smith studies the punk dynamic alongside southern surf bands to survey an intrinsically southern popular-cultural terrain.

The final essay in this section develops out of a keenly theorized sense of place. Paul Lyons argues that Larry Brown's *Joe* (1991) is "an exem-

17. Paul Wells, "The Last Rebel: Southern Rock and Nostalgic Continuities," in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Culture*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 115–29; Ted Ownby, "Freedom, Manhood, and White Male Tradition in 1970s Southern Rock Music," in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 369–88.

plary test-case for critiquing the usefulness of theories of global/local conjunctions and American cultural remapping for the residual regionalism” that he detects in contemporary southern literature. In this sense, *Joe* is a liminal text; Larry Brown’s characters lack a sense of “place-history” which, though it signifies a lack of future direction, may also inspire a certain “freedom to pursue their order of things.” The only job that Joe manages to secure in rural Mississippi is poisoning trees; his job is to “kill” a forest. But through Joe’s introspection, the novel opens up “glimmers” of eco-consciousness, and Lyons calls for a “critical regionalism” in his discussion of the “uses and abuses of the region concept” based in and on the land itself.

Part II, “Mapping the Region,” examines different representations of contemporary southern places. The essays in this section serve as a reminder that the South is rhizomic in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari, whereby diverse literary speculations on southern places connect and intertwine like crabgrass—or, more appropriately in the southern landscape, like kudzu—with multiple crossings and taproot systems flourishing everywhere. The contributors to this section consider rural landscapes and small towns, cities and suburbs, as well as the liminal zones in which new immigrants make their homes. Anxiety over place—Stephen Flinn Young’s idea that some southerners have become “prisoners of our fascination with the ‘sense’ of place” rather than “aware of the living thing that place really is”—provides a starting point from which to begin to read the essays.¹⁸

Revising Agrarian definitions of the South and southern literature, Suzanne W. Jones’s “new agrarians,” Ellen Douglas and Madison Smartt Bell, refute the pastoral, conservative South of the Vanderbilt credo. Instead, the South to which their protagonists return in *The Rock Cried Out* (1979) and *Soldier’s Joy* (1989) is the post-Vietnam and post-civil rights South. Bell writes lyrical landscapes but underpins them with a keen appreciation of the tangled racialized economics of land ownership for blacks and for whites even toward the end of the twentieth century, as Jones’s reading of the end of *Soldier’s Joy* makes clear. Jones shows how Douglas pushes interracial agrarianism a step further than Bell, by rewriting Ike McCaslin’s story in “The Bear.” Jones locates her contemporary agrarians from their writerly beginnings. Bell grew up with the

18. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Rhizome,” in *On the Line* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), 1–65; Stephen Flinn Young, “Post-Southernism: The Southern Sensibility in Postmodern Sculpture,” *Southern Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 41.

Vanderbilt Agrarians from whom he draws but whose tenacious romanticism he revises. Douglas, from an older generation of writers, recalls Faulkner, but in her fictional Homochitto (Natchez) she reasserts the southern landscape by “unburdening” it of Faulkner’s “mythic configuration.” Wes Berry turns to ecocritics and environmental philosophers (Lawrence Buell, William Cronon, Barry Lopez) in “Toni Morrison’s Revisionary ‘Nature Writing’: *Song of Solomon* and the Blasted Pastoral” to explore “the healing potential of southern woodlands” when those very landscapes are fraught with historic violence. In Morrison’s novel, Milkman Dead returns to his ancestral “homeland.” Berry tracks the “regenerative moments,” the disquieting experiences that pull him up short in his merging with a “more-than human nature.” He concludes that the strain of African American pastoralism that Buell detects together with the “language of ego-dissolution” in Euro-American writing combine in Morrison’s progressive and historically inflected “nature writing.”

Other contributors to *South to a New Place* shift our attention from the rural to the urban and suburban South. One of the most succinct descriptions of the origins of suburbia in the 1950s occurs in a novel set in the South. In Julius Lester’s *And All Our Wounds Forgiven* (1994), John Calvin Marshall, a fictional Martin Luther King Jr., declares: “for centuries we had been rooted to place. home and work and leisure occurred in one place and created a whole—community. the interstate highway system made it possible to live thirty, forty, fifty, sixty miles away from where you worked. work and home and place ceased to be interrelated. . . . you could live without belonging to a community. . . . the interstate highway system brought into being a geo-political entity called sub-burbs.”¹⁹ Matthew Guinn in “Into the Suburbs” reminds us that Richard Ford has visited many different locales in his fiction. It is the rootlessness of protagonist Frank Bascombe that prompts Guinn’s exploration of postmodern writing in which “the local and the regional have been subsumed by an anarchic mix of architectural references.” For Ford, the past recedes in favor of a continuous present. Guinn reads the shifts in postmodern place and placelessness from Ford’s *The Sportswriter*

19. Julius Lester, *And All Our Wounds Forgiven* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1994), 5. For a detailed reading of the novel, see Sharon Monteith, “Revisiting the 1960s in Contemporary Fiction: ‘Where Do We Go from Here?’” in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith (New York: Garland, 1999), 215–38. See also Alex Harris, ed., *A New Life: Stories and Photographs from the Suburban South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), especially Alan Gurganus’s afterword, “Toward a Creation Myth of Suburbia.”

(1986) to *Independence Day* (1995), and Martyn Bone pursues the term *postsouthern* in the specific literary context of Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full* (1998). Engaging with Lewis Simpson and Michael Kreyling's discussions of the term as well as with postmodern geographies, Bone embarks upon an examination of both the capitalist production of suburban spaces and the fetishization of place, focusing on Atlanta. In "Placing the Postsouthern 'International City,'" Bone explores a postconsensus South in an examination of Wolfe's much-hyped depiction of capitalist land-speculation. In Bone's reading, Wolfe exposes how the spectacle of the "panorama-city" is a real-estate projection, and he raises issues of race and place, capital and real estate against the "concrete geography" of Atlanta. Whereas Tom Wolfe and Richard Ford left the South and Larry Brown stayed, reading their novels as closely as Bone, Guinn, and Lyons do in this collection serves to open up a wider discussion of how significant region has been in the development of individual consciousness in local and national context.

Robert McRuer in "Queer Locations, Queer Transformations," a study of Randall Kenan's 1989 novel, *A Visitation of Spirits*, examines how stories of "difference" are told as stories of location, via Kenan's fictional Tims Creek in rural North Carolina. McRuer contends with Henry Louis Gates Jr., who in his praise for the novel expresses the hope that Kenan will take his protagonist Horace "to the big city" in his next book. Gates suggests a path that has been well trodden by lesbian and gay characters migrating from country to city, whereas what is much more interesting to McRuer is the fact that "queer transformations can begin in the queerest of locations." Tims Creek is a fundamentalist Christian and African American locality, and Horace's suicide is firmly set against any mythical, pastoral sense of community. Eric Gary Anderson contends with another kind of fragile presence in the South—Florida Indians in a novel by Linda Hogan, a Chickasaw novelist at several times remove from the South. Anderson provides a nuanced ecocritical reading of a landscape we know best through the writing of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas but are also coming to know through the novels of Connie May Fowler. Anderson asks how we should locate Hogan's *Power* (1998) on the southern literary map when it is impossible to retrieve so many lost stories of American Indian culture. He probes this question of inaccessibility and concludes that we are beginning to "stretch and complicate our understanding" of both American Indian literature and the South.

For novelists and for critics, the “region concept” is transmogrified by the changing dictates of transnational postmodernism, not least of which is the recent influx of immigrants to the South. Maureen Ryan’s intervention into debates about southern place is distinguished by its focus on some of the South’s newest citizens, those Vietnamese refugees for whom the land itself is a sacred constant (one is reminded that the word *country* translates as earth and water in Vietnamese). Most tellingly, traditional Vietnamese emphases on family, home, the land, and the past echo agrarian concerns from earlier decades, as Ryan points out. But Ryan counters the “changeless” South with the changing South in which the Vietnamese make their new homes following the fall of Saigon. She examines a large cast of Amerasian and Vietnamese characters across fictions by Robert Olen Butler, Wayne Karlin, Lan Cao, and Mary Gardner, set in Louisiana, Maryland, Virginia, and Texas. Across the South, these novels not only address the melee of feelings that persist around the Vietnam War, the “watershed event” of late-twentieth-century America, they open up what Ryan calls a “new frontier of cultural hybridism.”

Amy J. Elias unpacks the irony that just when southern writers and critics are questioning the notion of a unique southern literature, “popular culture and the travel industry seem intent upon constructing and marketing southern regional identity.” In “Postmodern Southern Vacation: Vacation Advertising, Globalization, and Southern Regionalism,” Elias emphasizes how the construction of the American South has become a global issue, and she examines the ways in which some advertisements recuperate the Old South’s construction of race and others illuminate the New South’s anxieties about ethnicity. Her focus on the lifestyle magazine *Southern Living*, with a readership of twelve million, reveals a complex fantasy South, which has become a playground for consumers from all over the United States and around the world. *Southern Living* has long been a lifestyle primer for middle-class southerners in which emblems of the former Confederacy and of the New South sit intriguingly, if uncomfortably, side by side. In reading representative advertisements for southern vacationing, Elias uncovers a wealth of contradictions, and her cultural-studies approach elicits our understanding of mass cultural theory and reception studies in a very specific southern context.

The essays in Part III, “Making Global Connections,” challenge notions of southern distinctiveness like those mass-mediated in *Southern Living* by reading the region through comparative frameworks: Southern Italy, East Germany, Latin America, and the U.K. Such frameworks facil-

itate other telling comparisons, too. A glance across to South Africa, for example, leads us to recall Steve Biko's correlation between Black Consciousness in South Africa in 1976 with the African American freedom struggles that developed out of southern civil rights initiatives of the 1950s and 1960s. The "South" in Africa and the United States acts as a focalizer through which the American South and the struggles of the black population can be set in a transnational context.²⁰ Rob Nixon, for example, faces the other way in *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (1994), and Ann Seidman's comparative approach has recently exposed specific links between South African and Appalachian mineworkers. In this section of *South to a New Place*, Michael Kreyling goes to Italy in "Italy and the United States: The Politics and Poetics of the 'Southern Problem'" to illuminate how both southern regions were "made" in the 1860s and have been remade since. Via a range of texts and contexts—from early reconciliation romances through the works of Antonio Gramsci, the Southern Agrarians, Norman Douglas, and William Faulkner to the rural expeditions of urban intellectuals James Agee and Carlo Levi—Kreyling argues that in both countries the idea of the "South" functions similarly in national discourse. In 1945 at the end of the Second World War, Ralph McGill found himself discussing Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* with a Roman bookseller: "The American South was a regional abstraction with a capital S. It possessed, like his Naples and Sicily, a stubborn, often unjustified, pride; it was easygoing and yet violent when it chose to be; it shared as did Southern Italy, a common mystique in which there is grandeur, and pathos, and a note of falseness too. . . . Now fluid as quicksilver, now rigid and cruel in its adamant injustice and wrongs, now soft and merry, it was difficult to put into words." McGill searches for an Italian story with a southern angle as exemplification. He doesn't immediately find one. In his essay for this collection, Kreyling detects a series of "coincidences" linking Italian and American literature and history, and goes on to demonstrate that the place of the South in both countries shifts from "historical urgency" to "cultural politics," and thus from historical to ideological discourse.²¹

20. See, for example, John W. Cell, *The Highest State of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

21. Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Ann Seidman, "Apartheid and the U.S. South," in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, ed. Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley (London: Verso, 1994), 209–221; Ralph McGill,

Gunter Lenz has written at length about the ways in which an intercultural approach to the United States and Germany provides insights into how cultures “reproduce, represent, and reshape within themselves axes or fault-lines of difference.”²² Here, by examining the particular transnational context of the former German Democratic Republic and the American South, Christine Gerhardt enters the debate by engaging with contemporary definitions of regionalism in order to argue that region remains “a productive category of cross-cultural comparison.” Gerhardt compares six representative fictions that help her to gauge the ideological strictures that sustain regional identities by protecting their boundaries. Most tellingly, in her pairing of Welty’s “No Place for You, My Love” and Gabriele Eckart’s “Feldberg und Zurück,” protagonists who visit the South and East Germany help to show how regions—as heterotopic spaces—can resist attempts to penetrate them, or can resist those who crave an authenticity of place they can never find. In a very different comparative context, by examining Faulkner’s influence on a range of Spanish American writers from Borges to Márquez, Rulfo to Bombal, Deborah Cohn tests Faulkner’s legacy most specifically with younger Latin American authors, such as Rosario Ferré for whom “Faulknerian method” continues to resonate with cross-cultural meanings. Puerto Rican Ferré reorients traditionally Faulknerian themes of incest, miscegenation, and the plantation household. Building on her work in *History and Memory in Two Souths* (1999), Cohn demonstrates the continuity of Faulkner’s appeal at the same time that she reveals a new “South” American literary sensibility that seeks to revise shared histories regarding issues of race and gender.

When places are set in manichean opposition (North America over the American South; West Germany over the former German Democratic Republic), the strategies deployed to compare fictions of place and placelessness necessarily involve an understanding of sectarianism and nationalism as well as regionalism. Helen Taylor’s context here is rather different since it is the globalizing of the American South—its popular-cultural currency—that motivates her investigation of the British fascina-

“There Are Many Souths,” in *The South and the Southerner* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 6.

22. Gunter Lenz, “Historians, Histories, and Public Cultures: Multicultural Discourses in the U. S. and Germany,” in *TransAtlantic Encounters: Multiculturalism, National Identity and the Uses of the Past*, ed. Gunter Lenz and Peter Ling (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Press, 2000), 63–103.

tion with the American South. Specific place-defining fictions—the chivalric novels of Sir Walter Scott in the mid-nineteenth century; Erskine Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road* and *God’s Little Acre* and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* in the early twentieth—help us to see how peculiarly resonant images of places have been when produced at particular historical moments. Taylor extrapolates from Scott’s influence over a tradition of cavalier romances and Carlyle’s espousal of the Confederate cause to examine the way “the Celtic card” is played now by groups like the League of the South, Christian Identity, and Neo-Nazis. She traces the way that the white “cracker,” originally a Scottish term for “a noisy, boastful fellow,” has come to designate a specific southern type in an essay that exposes the intercultural penetration and pervasiveness of Celtic myths. It is most especially to *Gone With the Wind* (1936), Alexandra Ripley’s sequel, *Scarlett* (1991), and finally Alice Randall’s *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) that Taylor turns in her analysis of how contemporary updates of a classic southern novel draw on new markets to consume a specifically southern mass entertainment. They also create controversy. Taylor’s reading of Randall’s novel is especially interesting, not only because of the furor surrounding its publication but also when one remembers that Randall stated that her influences were diverse: a Caribbean novel, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); and eighteenth-century English novels like Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747); as well as southern classics like Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and, of course, the mythical *Gone With the Wind* in its Georgia setting.

Together, the essays in *South to a New Place* examine the roles that economic, racial, and ideological tensions in the South have played in the formation of “southern” identity through many different representations of southern places. Our contributors recognize how problematic narratives of regional consciousness and portraits of southern places continue to be, and they challenge southern boundaries and southern regional myths as they move “South” toward a “new place” in literary studies.