

INTRODUCTION

To facilitate study, the literature that has been produced in the territory which comprises today the South of the United States is often divided roughly into five periods: Literature of the Colonial South; Literature of the Old South (i.e., Antebellum); Postbellum Literature; the Southern Literary Renaissance; and Literature After the Renaissance. The division also points to the fact that "Southern Literature" can be seen to go back to the days of the colonies. The reader of the present issue of *Ilha do Desterro*, entitled *Literature of the South of the United States*, will readily notice, however, that all articles deal with twentieth-century writings and authors. Initially, as guest editor, I intended to publish articles on earlier periods as well, since, as Louis Rubin and others have shown, the earlier literature contributes in concrete and fascinating ways to the development of the literary imagination and intelligence that would flower in the twentieth-century Southern Literary Renaissance and later. Yet, the focus on the twentieth century "is as it should be", as Rubin himself states in his Introduction to the long-awaited *The History of Southern Literature*, published by LSU Press in 1985, edited by Blyden Jackson, Rayburn S. Moore, Lewis P. Simpson, Thomas Daniel Young, under Rubin's own general editorship. In the same Introduction, he reminds us of the fact that more and better writing has appeared in the South in this century than in all previous years combined. Accordingly, the present issue of *Ilha do Desterro* includes five articles, respectively, one on an array of recent fiction writers in the South, two on William Faulkner, one on Truman Capote, and one on Flannery O'Connor. The issue also includes book reviews and a bibliography for the study of Southern Literature.

Robert Kiernan's bibliographical essay comprehensively surveys and appraises the "new southern novel" as a genre, departing from provoking questions that address the survival and the very validity of the traditional notion of sectional awareness among writers flourishing in the last years of the present century. Arguing that postmodernism wanes in America, Kiernan proposes to attend the contemporary southern novel "in its richness, in its evolution of forms and impulses, and in its outreach to a reality not only southern", from John Barth's and Ishmael Reed's postmodernism, and George

Garrett's and Mary Lee Settle's experiments, to the resilient adherence to traditional modes of storytelling, with the maintenance of the usual realistic, idiomatic voice and of a strong sense of place, *mutatis mutandis*, in Elizabeth Spencer, Louise Shivers, Bobbie Ann Mason, Dorothy Allison, M. A. Harper, Jill McCorkle, and Padgett Powell. For Kiernan, the reaction against postmodernism is typified by the "folksiness" and "sweet-temperedness" found in the work of Allan Gurganus, William Price Fox, Fannie Flagg (Patricia Neal), Fred Chappell, and Harry Crews. New variations of southern gothicism erupt in Cormac McCarthy, Barry Hannah, and, unpredictably, in Doris Betts. The tradition of the family novel is distinctively alive in the work of Reynolds Price, Anne Tyler, and Josephine Humphreys; and in Mary Lee Settle, Lee Smith, and Pat Conroy, the family saga receives an added generational focus. Gail Godwin, Beverly Lowry, and Robb Forman Dew also explore family psychology. The return-home theme survives in Peter Taylor, Ellen Gilchrist, Madison Jones, and Lisa Alther. Small-town tales reappear in Clyde Edgerton, T. R. Pearson, and James Wilcox. The epistolary novel revives in Alice Walker, Lee Smith, John Barth, and George Garrett. Among black writers, besides Walker, Kiernan stresses the work of Toni Morrison, Ernest J. Gaines, and Susan Straight. Addressing the feminist socio-political agenda in different ways, Rita Mae Brown, and Blanche McCrary Boyd appear in Kiernan's essay as exemplary, and Joan Williams is presented as a response to feminist acculturation. And among writers of the "postsouthern" novel, whose work outreaches the south, we have Madison Smartt Bell, and Richard Ford. With lucidity, Kiernan concludes that the "south endures as a state of mind", that a distinctive southern novel thrives, but hurries to suggest that this is not to say that the so-called Southern Renaissance lives on intact. In the work of the best contemporary southern novelists, many of the traditional themes indeed recur, but these writers are in no way "impoverished Faulkners".

With remarkable insight, in "Out of the Mire: Faulkner's Dualistic Vision of Women", Gail Mortimer borrows from Tertullian a peculiar notion of women uncleanness to criticize as anachronistic the vision of women exercised by male characters in Faulkner's novels. As is well known, Faulkner's female characters, rather than being fully rounded, tend to be primitive and even stereotyped, whereas the males tend to be rounded. Yet, as Mortimer shows, male characters invariably experience high degrees of anxiety whenever in close confrontation with women. Mortimer submits that, linguistically, this anxiety is expressed in consistent imagery, from

novel to novel. Her purpose, hence, is to focus on imagery of bodies of water, of the vase/urn, the grape, the bubble, and bursting, as emblems of women through which Faulkner is able to combine the complex attraction and repulsion that his male characters feel in relation to females. Evoking or related to the shape of a woman, these images suggest the idea of a "surface/shape attracting a man and then entrapping or enveloping him". Mortimer clearly demonstrates that when a female character is not perceived as sexually aggressive, she may be described as a pond, or any other tranquil body of water. Conversely, women who *are* sexually threatening are linked to bodies of water in turmoil. Ultimately, the contrastive nature of the images, as consistently attested by biographical evidence, reflects a duality in Faulkner's own vision of women, at once carnal and romantic.

In "'Father to No One': Gender, Genealogy, and Storytelling in *Go Down, Moses*", Barbara Ladd points out that readers have paid too much attention to Ike McCaslin, accepting "too readily" the patrilineal paradigm in which Ike functions, "as the only structure within which literary and cultural authority is distributed in *Go Down, Moses*". For Ladd, under a closer look, the novel suggests that Faulkner's "understanding of the relationship between creativity (originality) and tradition (history) was not so exclusively patrilineal". Drawing attention to the woman-descended storyteller McCaslin Edmonds, Ladd proposes that the creative power to transform the past is not conferred on Ike, the patrilineal heir. With acumen, she demonstrates that Cass's storytelling in "Was" makes an eloquent "revisionary comment" on certain manifestations of the southern tradition, literary and otherwise, particularly on the plantation romance. In fact, Cass's storytelling becomes, in her words, "more than a means through which Cass appropriates and revises tradition; it is as much a metaphor for Faulkner's own struggles with traditions both literary and familial". Eventually, Ike's apocalyptic outlook is displaced by Cass's historical — and far more affirmative — vision. In Ladd's observation, Faulkner ends up placing tradition and history in a matrilineal genealogy of descent which "authorizes" a male speaker, Cass Edmonds. She concludes that Ike is "Faulkner's construction of the failed artist" and, at the same time, "a means through which Faulkner can construct another, and more successful, representation of the artist in a woman-descended and decentered speaker whose capacities for revision are not subverted by the repressive demands of male-derived, and therefore officially recognized, genealogy".

Thomas LaBorie Burns's "Truman Capote: Life as Fiction/Fiction as Life" surveys Capote's short and long fiction,

measuring up the writer against the southern literary tradition of the grotesque, violence, and "extravagant language", as in Poe, O'Connor, McCullers, and Faulkner, and contrasting him to a "most un-southern writer", and contemporary, Norman Mailer. Burns insightfully addresses Mailer's and Capote's construction of a public self, as "contemporary cultural phenomena" in their own right, quite as much as the published works. He discusses key thematic issues in the novels *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms*, and *In Cold Blood*, as well as in the collections of stories, *Tree of Night*, and *Music For Chameleons*, providing useful review of germane criticism, and making in passing references to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *The Grass Harp*, and *House of Flowers*. He bids that throughout Capote's career there is "a conflict between the serious artist and the public ego that manipulates the media and craves mass recognition" and concludes that although Capote's fiction displays sharp observation, technical skill, and emotional power, "it lacks depth".

John Somerville discusses precisely the element that has attracted most attention in Flannery O'Connor's recent scholarship: variety of humor. Arguing that there is no contradiction between the ubiquitous humor found in the writer's work and the profoundly theological perspective she is known to have had on life, in "A Reflection of Grace: The Place of Humor in the Theology of Flannery O'Connor", Somerville assesses the theological importance of laughter in O'Connor's stories. He is, therefore, particularly concerned with the question of "where humor fits in the world of 'mystery'", i.e., the "moral landscape of O'Connor's fiction", the unseen, and not merely in the obvious world of "manners", the seen. Amassing impressive textual evidence both from the writer's fiction and non-fiction, he demonstrates that the comic element in O'Connor "becomes a clue from the author to the Christian context within which her stories take place, an expression of faith, hope, and compassion". The notion, of course, is at once challenging and inviting, especially as it counteracts reductionistic readings according to which Flannery O'Connor's fiction seems to suggest solely a vision of life as cruel and hopeless.

In terms of contributions, the issue closes with William Harmon's review of recently published anthologies of southern fiction and poetry. I shall not attempt to review the review; I shall, however, advance that, as is invariably the case with Harmon's criticism, the piece is not only scholarly informative and lucid but also witty and highly readable.

The guest editor wishes to conclude these introductory remarks thanking the contributors for the excellent pieces submitted and addressing the readers in language borrowed from Flannery O'Connor's celebrated introductory note to the second edition of *Wise Blood* (1962): the present issue of *Ilha do Desterro* "was written with zest, and if possible, it should be read that way".

José Roberto O'Shea
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