Beginnings to 1880

INTERNATIONAL ORIGINS

The literature of the American South is probably the most internationally famous of the regional literatures of the United States. Fascination with the American South has a long history, reaching back to the earliest writing about it, in particular, narratives of exploration and settlement by authors from several European backgrounds, including Spain, Portugal, France, and England. Still older, although not recorded in print until comparatively recently, are the myths, tales, and songs orally performed and communally transmitted by the native peoples of the American South. It is important to remember that indigenous oral expressive traditions thrived in the South before the Europeans or Africans arrived, even though few scholars have tried to track the imprint of Native American oral traditions on the literary expression of European Americans or African Americans in the South. Cherokee songs were translated into English as early as 1765. Yet to most European Americans in the South, literature remained the province and signature of the literate white elite, to whom the oral traditions of Native American verbal artistry usually signified little.

This anthology includes two southeastern American Indian origin stories, the Yuchi tale of the creation of the earth and the Cherokee legend of the daughter of the sun, along with the tale of Rabbit's filing Deer's teeth, which focuses on a trickster widespread in southern American Indian lore. Native-born narratives such as these contributed to the matrix from which oral storytelling among southerners, red, black, and white, drew inspiration and technique. Some early white southerners were duly impressed by Native American oral expression and performance. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Thomas Jefferson recorded a speech by Logan, a "Mingo chief" in northwestern Virginia in 1774, whose oratory, Jefferson maintained, rivaled that of Demosthenes and Cicero. This was no small compliment, especially from a southerner who had witnessed the rhetoric and oral argumentation of most of the great southern orators of the Revolutionary generation.

Several Europeans compete for the distinction of being the South's first notable writer. Spain nominates Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose *Relacion* (1542) recounts his harrowing journey from Florida to Texas and northwestern Mexico. Portugal offers the anonymous *Relacam verdadeira* (1557), written by a follower of Hernando de Soto who chronicled the Spanish conquistador's expedition from Florida through the Carolinas and west to the Mississippi River. France promotes René Goulaine de Laudonnière, creator of *L'histoire notable de la Floride* (1586), a history of the rise and fall of the Huguenot colony in Florida. England advances

Thomas Harriot, an Oxford college professor who wrote his *Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) to provide a blueprint for colonization based on the author's observations of the North Carolina coast in 1585. Insofar as southern literature is concerned, the last of these texts has become the first, due to the simple historical fact that the colonies established by the English outlived those of their European rivals in North America. Harriot's *Briefe and True Report,* the first English book about the first English settlement in North America, may be said to have launched the literary tradition of the South on an optimistic note, but the settlement Harriot described on Roanoke Island failed after little more than a year.

To found a permanent colony on the American coast, a man of unusual vision as well as practicality and endurance was needed. In 1607 he stepped forward, bearing a prophetically American name, John Smith, the democratic ordinariness of which belied the irrepressible individuality and ambitious leadership of the man himself. Without Smith the settlers of Jamestown, a fort established in 1607 on the James River about forty miles inland from the Atlantic coast, had little chance of surviving their ineptitude and internal divisions, not to mention an increasingly hostile American Indian population. Through Smith, Virginia became a viable colonial enterprise, especially after 1616, when tobacco, hitherto cultivated by the native peoples, became an exportable cash crop to an expanding English market. Smith's voluminous writing about Virginia, epitomized in his *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624), gave the South an ageless literary myth—the touching, though often disputed, tale of Smith's rescue from death by Pocahontas, a Pamunkey Indian princess "of compassionate pitiful heart." Smith became the South's first literary mythmaker. A cottage industry of promotional tracts extolling the good life in Virginia endorsed Smith's claims about the bounties of the New World. The American Dream of the fresh start and limitless possibilities in a new land untainted by history began to take root in the minds of English men and women. "Be assured," Reverend Alexander Whitaker told prospective colonists in *Good News from Virginia* (1613), "that in the end you shall find riches and honor in this world, and blessed immortality in the world to come." Thus the idea of becoming a planter, one who brought forth from American soil not merely a crop but a new civilization, took on heroic—though sometimes overblown—proportions.

Virginia became a royal colony in 1624, an unmistakable sign of King James's commitment to the venture. Despite the hazards of ocean voyage, unknown diseases, starvation, and Indian attack, thousands left England every year to seek a better life in Virginia. New colonies in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island attracted religious dissenters determined to erect a purified City of God in the wilderness. But for the most part those who migrated to Virginia, Maryland, and, after 1660, the Carolinas had more secular goals in mind. Although their descendants endowed many of the early planters of Virginia with aristocratic pedigrees, most of the white inhabitants of the seventeenth-century South came from the middle classes of England, with a sprinkling of well-born adventurers and a substantial layer of down-on-their-luck indentured servants (many of them women) bringing a degree of class stratification to what was still an unprecedentedly fluid social structure. Those who adapted to the rigors of frontier life learned practicality and self-reliance, from which personal pride and independence grew. Fostered by a heightening sense of economic commonality and by an evolving culture of their own, white men and women of the southern colonies began to identify themselves by the early eighteenth century less as English folk than as Virginians, Carolinians, Marylanders, and even, occasionally, as "Americans."

SLAVERY

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the South's economy centered increasingly on the growth and export of market crops, particularly tobacco in Virginia and North Carolina and rice in South Carolina. Large-scale cultivation of these crops held down costs and raised profit margins, encouraging landowners to expand their holdings and the workforces needed to cultivate them. As a plantation-centered economy developed along the southeastern seaboard, plantation owners surveyed the available labor supply and recognized the handicaps that white indentured servitude placed on production and profits. Indentured servants bound themselves voluntarily to a master for a stipulated period of time, from four to seven years, after which they were free to go where they pleased. Servants who chafed under the terms of their indentures could easily run away, and it was hard to find them when they did. A fixed, identifiable, and controllable labor source was needed. African slavery, already instituted in the sugar plantations of the British West Indies, provided an answer.

Introduced into Virginia in 1619 when at least twenty Africans were brought to Jamestown by a Dutch captain, the small black population of the colony during its first half-century of existence was composed of indentured servants and a number of free persons who had served out their terms of indenture. Not until 1661 did Virginia law admit the idea of lifetime servitude as a legitimate condition for African Americans. In 1664 Maryland followed suit. In 1662 Virginia lawmakers required children born in the colony to follow the condition, slave or free, of their mothers. Such laws helped to create a self-perpetuating class of slaves who, unlike indentured servants, had neither the opportunity nor the right to earn their freedom. Under the aegis of this evolving slave code, the Virginia colony accelerated its importation of Africans. Those who survived the desperate Middle Passage from their homeland—a voyage so harsh that one in eight is believed to have died in transit—were relegated to a condition that the historian Orlando Patterson has termed "social death." Although much evidence demonstrates that some African religious beliefs, cultural practices, and linguistic forms survived the Middle Passage, the system of slavery in the South after 1700 was designed to prevent Africans and their descendants from building a new identity, except in accordance with the dictates of the whites. Instead of an individual, slavery devised what Patterson calls "a social nonperson," a being that by legal definition could have no family, no personal honor, no community, no past, and no future. The intention of slavery was to create in the slave a sense of complete alienation from all human ties except those that bound him or her in absolute dependence to the master's will. Independence and self-reliance, much-prized personal qualities among white southerners, were forbidden the slave, since the very notions of individuality and selfhood had no meaning or application to those who could not even possess themselves. Some slaves resisted this brutal acculturation; news of sabotage, flight to the frontier, and organized uprisings (such as that led by Cato in Stono, South Carolina, in 1739) bedeviled slaveholders intent on enforcing their regime.

What gave American slavery in the eighteenth century its uniquely oppressive character and power was its insistence that enslavement was the natural and proper condition for particular *races* of people. Reinforced by theories of racial difference promoted by prestigious European philosophers such as Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume, most eighteenth-century Americans assumed that differences in externals—complexion, hair, and other physical features—between blacks and whites signified differences in the inherent character—intelligence, morality, and spirituality—of the two races. Few southerners questioned these racial assumptions any more than they seriously considered the morality of the colonial governments' steady appropriation of territory on which American Indians had lived for centuries. Since the majority of white men in the southern colonies lacked the means to become slaveholders, and since most of those who did own slaves worked alongside them on small farms, not expansive plantations, slavery as an institution, entailing a social, political, and moral rationale, did not preoccupy southern writ-

ers in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. The more deeply slavery became ingrained in the economic lives of the planter class, the more cultured and literate whites accepted it as a practical fact, a necessary and inevitable precondition to their situation in the South. Participation in the plantation economy and in slave ownership gave the planter class reason to feel mutually identified and allied by common interests and anxieties. But the culture under the planters' leadership in the eighteenth century felt little need to carry a literary banner for slavery.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL CULTURE

Although the southern colonies generated the earliest literature produced by English North America, socioeconomic conditions in the region during the eighteenth century did not make it easy for writers to extend their imaginations beyond the utilitarian purposes of promotional pamphlets, newspapers, agricultural guides, and religious tracts. The agricultural character of the South meant that its population was dispersed; towns, which usually provide centers for writing and publishing, were literally few and far between, and the roads and communication networks connecting them were poor. Printing presses did not get a firm foothold on southern soil until the 1730s. Although a handful of prosperous individuals such as William Byrd II of Virginia enjoyed well-stocked private libraries, a high illiteracy rate, exacerbated by the lack of public schools, restricted the audience that could support an aspiring southern writer. Classical Greek and Latin literature and the works of established English authors, such as Shakespeare, the essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, and the poets John Milton and Alexander Pope, absorbed most of the time and determined the tastes of those southerners who had the opportunity to read for pleasure as well as instruction. Thin-skinned colonials confronted by *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1708), Ebenezer Cook's first-person satirical broadside against Maryland—"where no Man's Faithful, nor a Woman Chaste"—were undoubtedly put off by the author's flailing and railing but were just as likely to find him irresistible because he wrote in rollicking hudibrastic couplets, skillfully adapting to an American setting the style and tone of one of England's most popular poets, Samuel Butler.

The conservatism of eighteenth-century southern culture is partly attributable to the social outlook of the developing planter class, which more than anyone else in the South had the money to buy and the opportunity to read books for pleasure as well as instruction. The most outstanding representative of this class in early southern literature, William Byrd II, wrote very little for publication, as befit the traditional idea of writing as a gentleman's leisure activity. But Byrd regularly circulated his manuscripts among his friends in England and Virginia, and there is evidence that he intended to publish his *History of the Dividing Line* (which he began in 1728 as a journal and revised in the 1730s) in London. Like most southerners of his time, Byrd devoted himself to practical, as opposed to belletristic, writing. But in his correspondence and in his *History of the Dividing Line*—ostensibly a report on a surveying expedition—we find this early planter self-consciously inventing himself as a Virginia aristocrat, a bastion of taste and tradition in a rude and (to Byrd) often ridiculous frontier world. Byrd used a more finely pointed and discriminating irony than Cook's to distinguish himself from the lower orders of the rough-and-tumble South. Testifying to the inconsistent development of color and class prejudices in the early-eighteenth-century South are Byrd's pronouncements in the *History* on the improvability of the American Indians, whose "Natural Dignity" he affirmed, in contrast with his perpetual carping at the "Indolent Wretches" of poor white North Carolina, whose degenerate, swinish condition may have made him forget his maxim

that "the principal Difference between one People and another proceeds only from the Different Opportunities of Improvement."

POLITICS AND LITERATURE

In the second half of the eighteenth century the planter class of Tidewater Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas reached its literary zenith in political writing, most of it agitating for or in justification of the Revolution of 1776. After English victory in the French and Indian War in 1763, tensions between the planters and the English government rose in the face of what the Americans saw as mounting economic and political inequities: a balance of trade favoring England; a growing debt to English merchants; and a series of taxes levied on the colonies by the English Parliament without consultation, let alone agreement, on the part of the Americans. In 1769 the Virginia state assembly announced its exclusive right to tax Virginians and urged the other colonies to unite in protest. A year later violent attacks on British troops broke out in Boston. In North Carolina the royal governor had to put down the rebellion of a small army of western settlers incensed by English taxes and English rule. By virtue of his incisive essay, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), Thomas Jefferson became well known among his fellow Virginia assemblymen and to democrats throughout the colonies as an exponent of natural rights and a vigorous opponent of royal privilege. He led an impressive group of Virginians, including James Madison, Patrick Henry, George Wythe, George Mason, and Landon Carter, whose thought and writing helped convince Americans that the cause of independence was imperative and right. The Declaration of Independence, authored by Jefferson, constitutes in an important political respect the high-water mark of southern literature, although few readers in the South are likely to have thought of the Declaration either as "literature" or as particularly southern. Still, the Declaration articulates a moment of remarkable, though transient, convergence of national and sectional purpose. Never again would a writer from the South speak so confidently on behalf of "the people," the body politic, of the entirety of North America. Never again would the intellectual worldview of the South represent so unreservedly the nascent ideals of the United States as a whole.

Most of the ablest writers of the South's revolutionary generation were, like Jefferson, of the patrician class, well educated in the law and well read in classical literature but seldom disposed to writing as an art, except in the service of argument and persuasion. As essayists, however, Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) and Madison in his contributions to *The Federalist* (1787–88), a series of newspaper articles that prepared the new nation for a new Constitution, set a standard for national discourse on a host of issues—agriculture versus manufacturing, states' rights versus a strong central government, slavery versus abolition—that molded southern literature, journalism, and political thought for decades to come.

THE RISE OF SECTIONALISM

Ultimate ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1790 seemed to paper over differences between northern and southern political leaders on such questions as the limits of the power of the national government, the basis on which congressional representation from each state would be apportioned, and the status of slavery in the new republic. The Constitution's system of checks and balances mollified many southerners worried about the reach of the new government's authority. When the delegates to the Constitutional convention not only acquiesced to the legality of

slavery but permitted three-fifths of the enslaved population of any state to count in that state's apportionment of representation and taxes, slaveowners entered the Union secure in the knowledge that the institution of human bondage had national legal sanction. Optimism about the future of the South received fresh stimulus in 1793, when Eli Whitney's cotton gin, which mechanically separated the fiber from the seed, revolutionized the cultivation of cotton, thereby engendering a vast new market for a slavery-based economy. As textile manufacturing boomed in England and demand for raw cotton climbed, slaveholders migrated westward into the Mississippi Valley, fashioning an empire whose motto was Cotton Is King.

At his death in 1826 Jefferson knew that his ideal of an agrarian nation nurtured in egalitarianism and simplicity was giving way to forces of centralization in the North and in the South. As factories and cities began to concentrate power in a fledgling capitalist class in the North, the slaveholding elite of the South turned to various forms of protectionism, both economic and political, to consolidate their own interests. Whether the issue was a national bank, a tariff to protect new industries, or the extension of slavery into the western territories, representatives of the southern states found themselves increasingly united in their opposition to what they saw as encroaching federal power. In the early nineteenth century Congress was able to work out arrangements, such as the Missouri Compromise of 1820, that maintained an uneasy balance of power between southern supporters of states' rights and northern supporters of federal authority. By the 1830s, however, the issue of slavery, and in particular the extension of slavery into the West, had taken on a deepening moral urgency in national discourse that defied the efforts of politicians, southern or northern, to confine it to legislative solution.

CONVENTION AND CRITIQUE

The growing sectionalism, defensiveness, and insularity of the South in the first half of the nineteenth century created an intellectual climate in which law and politics more than poetry and fiction engaged the best minds of the region. In the early nineteenth century anti-intellectualism and indifference to literature were not markedly worse in the Old South than in the rest of the country. Literary magazines, theater, poetry, and fiction were hardly invisible in Dixie. But southern tastes remained conservative, preferring the familiar to the unusual, even if this meant embracing well-worn English or even popular northern authors, from Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott to the New Yorker James Fenimore Cooper, rather than buying contemporary southern writers. Nevertheless, the antebellum South generated a literature, although most of its purveyors have faded into obscurity, their triple names—Thomas Holley Chivers, Edward Coote Pinckney, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, Caroline Lee Hentz—betokening merely a quaint and musty gentility to most readers today. The large majority of Old South writers have met the fate of similarly conventional literary men and women from the North and the East in the early nineteenth century. They have been mostly forgotten, not because they were intrinsically bad writers but because what they wrote has spoken less and less meaningfully and memorably to succeeding generations.

In part, this eclipse of Old South literature is attributable to the fact that almost all white writers of the region took for granted institutions, such as slavery, that twentieth-century readers consider repugnant. In addition, most "literary" writing from the Old South savors of a romanticism that to today's tastes seems oversweetened and lacking in bite. Antebellum southern culture did not encourage the kind of psychological introspection, social critique, or individual self-expressiveness that led northern writers, such as Herman Melville and Henry David Thoreau, to experiment with first-person narration in *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Walden* (1854), in which individual point of view and societal convention often meet head-on. Instead of looking inward, most southern writers in the early nineteenth century looked outward, feeling an ever-heightening obligation to represent the consensus of their peers, rather than to explore and articulate their personal view of the world. By the time of the Northeast's literary "renaissance" of the 1850s, led by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman, southern literature was already withdrawing into a fortress mentality, the better to defend slavery and the planter aristocracy, which, in reaction to increasing attack by northern antislavery forces, demanded a united intellectual and political front—a Solid South—from its leading writers. Those who would not conform, at least outwardly, either kept silent or moved to the North.

Hardly noticed or lamented in this repressive climate was the early defection of two of the antebellum South's most enduring writers: Edgar Allan Poe, who left Virginia in 1837 for better literary opportunities in the North, and Frederick Douglass, who fled bondage in Maryland in 1838 to become one of slavery's most vociferous critics as a lecturer, editor, and author in the North. Temperamentally, intellectually, and politically, Poe and Douglass were diametric opposites. But in one respect their best writing—such as Poe's short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837) and Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845)—exemplified a way of writing and examining the world, both internal and external, that southern literature sorely missed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Poe and Douglass each gave narrative voice to a resolutely, even radically, individual point of view. From the margins of sanity, in the case of many of Poe's narrators, and from the margins of society, in the case of Douglass as ex-slave narrator, it became possible for these two writers, through very different styles, to expose disparities between seeming and being, romance and reality, dream and nightmare, which, when applied to the Old South, could have only devastating sociopolitical implications. There was little room in the South, especially after the advent of militant abolitionism in the North in the early 1830s, for the kind of outspoken subjectivity and unruly irony that Poe and Douglass seemed bent on articulating in the 1840s. Yet in the 1830s and 1840s, before an obsession with slavery and self-defense overshadowed almost all else in its literature, the South generated two literary traditions that have proved to be enormously influential in American writing: the plantation novel and southwestern humor.

PLANTATION MYTH, BACKCOUNTRY HUMOR, AND SOUTHERN REGIONALISM

The earliest fictional celebration of the plantation as a social institution and a way of life appeared in George Tucker's *The Valley of the Shenandoah* (1824), an up-country Virginian's fond but not uncritical portrait of a world he knew intimately. If the plantation tradition is traced back to Tucker's novel, its origins are decidedly mixed with regard to slavery, which Tucker depicted as an "evil," though one that lacked a ready cure. One might argue that anxieties about the evil of slavery, as much as a disposition favoring it, colored the writing of *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832), the antebellum South's most famous and most complex contribution to the plantation tradition. John Pendleton Kennedy, a Baltimore lawyer, completed *Swallow Barn* scarcely four months after the South's most notorious slave revolt, led by Nat Turner in August 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia, not far from the Tidewater setting of Kennedy's novel. The trauma of this

event gave impetus to the most heated debate ever heard in the Virginia legislature over the abolition of slavery. In 1832 Virginia's lawmakers voted not only to preserve slavery but to toughen statutes governing slave activities and the rights of so-called free Negroes. Led by Kennedy, plantation novelists of the South did their part to shore up the status quo by portraying the plantation as a bulwark of benevolent paternalism overseen by provincial but good-hearted gentlemen and ladies and attended by their deferential and contented black "servants." At Swallow Barn, men and women, white and black, all know their place almost instinctively; the tranquillity of the patriarchal order is tested at times but never seriously disturbed.

Unlike his late-nineteenth-century successors in the plantation tradition, Kennedy did not overly indulge in nostalgia for country life, though by the second edition of *Swallow Barn* in 1851 he regretted the gradual passing of the plantation. *Swallow Barn* contains realistic details, sometimes tinged with gentle irony, but a pervasive romantic overtone charmingly softens potentially troubling revelations, such as the fact that the plantation master "is always very touchy on the point of honor." In succeeding generations the model established by Kennedy was appropriated by devotees of the southern cavalier myth such as William Alexander Caruthers; politicized aggressively by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851) and by Caroline Lee Hentz in her novelistic defense of the South, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1851); and immortalized in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and the feature film made of it three years later. African American southern writers from William Wells Brown to Margaret Walker have portrayed the plantation realistically from the vantage point of the slave quarters. All this attention has given the plantation a special cultural resonance in America, North and South. To many nineteenth- and twentieth-century American readers seeking a refuge, if only in myth, from the forces of urbanism, industrialism, and social reform, the plantation has come to symbolize a timeless arcadian ideal.

Readers of the 1830s who wanted an alternative to plantation romanticism found it in the realistic humor writing of the southern frontier. A circuit-riding lawyer from Georgia, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, author of *Georgia Scenes* (1835), pioneered a key comic device in southern writing, the contrast between a framing narrator, whose refined tone and style identify him as a gentleman, and an uncouth backwoods character who speaks in a racy, often raw, but wonderfully vivid dialect. The clash between the cultured southern gentleman and his vernacular antithesis, frequently a bragging roughneck or rogue, pointed up the southern frontier's impatience with artificial privilege, pretense, sentimentality, and in general, the official standards of the upper class planter elite. Longstreet's successors in this tradition of humor—notably Johnson Jones Hooper in *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845), Joseph G. Baldwin in *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853), and George Washington Harris in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (1867)—helped to democratize southern literature, peopling it with a cross-section of earthy, lusty, hustling, and grasping humanity that defied most of the class and gender stereotypes of the plantation tradition. This humor showed graphically that there was more than one South and more than one way to write about it. The humorists' incorporation of elements of southern oral storytelling, particularly the tall tale and the trickster, stretched realism to the borders of the grotesque, where southern writers from Poe (who enthused over *Georgia Scenes* in 1836) to Carson McCullers and Cormac McCarthy have followed with conspicuous literary success.

In the 1840s a handful of writers from the South found imaginative ways of exploiting southern history, mythology, local color, and humor. A few earned national recognition and reached a wide audience. William Gilmore Simms of Charleston, the literary lion of the Old South, made his fame as a historical novelist who in his heyday rivaled James Fenimore Cooper as a popular romancer of the American past. During an extraordinarily productive literary career, Simms published eight historical novels about the Revolutionary era in the South beginning with *The Partisan* (1835) and carrying through *Joscelyn* (1867). The nationalistic, rather than sectional tone, of Simms's Revolutionary romances, together with their enthusiastic critical reception in the North, confirmed the author's assertions in the 1840s that he was a national writer devoted to the creation of a distinctively American, not merely southern, literature. In *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845), a collection of some of his best short fiction, particularly on African American and American Indian subjects, Simms tried to exemplify his conviction that a truly original national literature had to be grounded in specifically rendered regional materials. Simms had in mind something deeper than picturesque effects. He believed that the "special characteristics" of an American region and its history, steeped in a "regional consciousness" and outlook on life, could give a national cast to poetry and fiction that took up the most universal problems and themes. In his yoking of regional subject matter as the vehicle for the most searching and ambitious literary undertaking, Simms anticipated the kind of regionalism that William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Eudora Welty practiced in the twentieth century. It is not hard to see Frederick Douglass employing a similar kind of regionalism in his *Narrative,* since the growth of the author's mind and his quest for an American identity—archetypal themes in American literature, to be sure—are predicated on a detailed account of an individual slave's struggle to comprehend his material and spiritual situation in the South and then to escape it.

Writers from the antebellum South helped make the year 1845 a watershed in American literature. In June a respected New York publisher brought out *Tales by Edgar A. Poe,* containing some of Poe's best short stories; in November *The Raven and Other Poems* appeared in New York, the title piece soon to become a fixture in the popular mind. In May the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* an international best-seller, was launched by Douglass's antislavery cohorts in Boston. In 1845 New York publishers printed Simms's *The Wigwam and the Cabin; Helen Halsey,* the last of his historical novels about life along the antebellum South's western borders; and *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction,* a major collection of his literary criticism. A key anthology of southern humor, *The Big Bear of Arkansas,* edited by William T. Porter, came out in 1845, along with Johnson Jones Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs,* a signal contribution to the satiric tradition (going back to Ebenezer Cook) in antebellum southern literature. Output of this diversity and quality would have been hard for any region of the country to sustain year in and year out. For the Old South there was no encore. After 1845 a preoccupation with slavery, states' rights, and, by the late 1850s, secession had robbed Simms of his national audience and had impelled Hooper and many others like him into full-time political writing. Proslavery disquisitions such as James Henry Hammond's *Letter to an English Abolitionist* (1845), a minority report from the Old South in its literary watershed year, and proslavery fiction, such as Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* and Simms's *Woodcraft* (1852), became by the 1850s the South's chief literary export.

PROSLAVERY AND ANTISLAVERY SOUTHERNERS

Since the Jeffersonian era the South had come to insist on the triumphantly rational and integral nature of its social and political institutions, which, it claimed by midcentury, had culminated in the fulfillment of classical ideals of the democratic republic. The self-evident contradiction between democracy and slavery, which spurred the black Marylander Benjamin Banneker to upbraid Jefferson about his

own slaveholding in a private letter in 1791, was not lost on the author of *Notes on the State of Virginia,* who had acknowledged with uncharacteristic apocalyptic dread the power of slavery to subvert reason and reduce the slaveowner and his regime to chaos. By the 1850s, however, white southern intellectuals gravitated toward a monolithic position that denied any dissonance, logical or moral, in their republic's foundation on human bondage. From Hammond to Simms these intellectuals declared that the upper crust of white society in the South was best qualified to lead, that the enslavement of black people ensured the continuation of rule by the best, and that under such rule the slaves' best interests were most likely to be protected and preserved. As the war of words between antislavery and proslavery partisans heated up in the 1850s, slaveholders and their scribes went on the offensive, proclaiming slavery a "positive good" and denouncing the North's concern for the slaves' welfare as hypocritical in light of the degraded conditions that many working-class "wage slaves" faced in factory towns and cities above the Mason-Dixon line.

Of the many literary weapons forged in the flame of the antislavery crusade, none except for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* moved readers of the North more effectively than the fugitive slave narratives dictated and written by southern refugees from slavery between 1830 and 1860. All but one of the nineteenth-century South's most noteworthy African American authors—Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, William Wells Brown, and Booker T. Washington—launched their writing careers via narratives of their experience as slaves. The exception, Charles W. Chesnutt, made his initial fame with *The Conjure Woman* (1899), a collection of fictive narratives told by an ex-slave and centering on antebellum slave experience. The plot of the typical antebellum slave narrative follows a fugitive, such as Douglass or Jacobs, from bondage in the South to relative (and sometimes disillusioning) freedom in the North. The antebellum slave narrative is predicated on ironic exposure of popular myths of the South through distinctly unsentimental firsthand recollections of actual slave experience. Usually the antebellum slave narrator depicts slavery as a condition of extreme physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual deprivation, rendered all the more galling in light of the complacency and obtuseness of self-indulgent, often dissipated and perverse, southern whites. No single writer, southern or northern, ever deconstructed the plantation myth more thoroughly than Frederick Douglass.

After Douglass's immensely successful *Narrative* of 1845, the presence of the subtitle, *Written by Himself,* on a slave narrative bore increasing significance as an indicator of an ex-slave narrator's political and literary self-reliance. In her unprecedentedly candid autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861), Jacobs took on the myth of slavery as "the patriarchal institution," offering a devastating critique of white male privilege in the South and illustrating the complicity of slavery in the exploitation of white as well as black women in the South. Through Jacobs's autobiography black women of the South gained an advocate determined to speak frankly about the particular oppressiveness of slavery for African American women. In demonstrating how she fought back and ultimately gained both her own freedom and that of her two children, Jacobs proved the inadequacy of the image of victim that had been too often applied to female slaves in the male-authored slave narrative. From William Wells Brown's novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), which traces the tragic career of a beautiful and idealistic light-skinned African American reputed to be the daughter of Thomas Jefferson and his slave mistress, through Jacobs's autobiography, to Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), which includes a respectful portrait of the author's slave-born, working-class mother, nineteenth-century African American writers from the South made a significant investment in sympathetic, historically specific representations of southern black women in American literature.

The masses of white women in the nineteenth-century South had their own struggles to gain a measure of fair-minded representation in literature. While slave women in the South were saddled with an image scarcely superior to that of a sexual animal, white women much higher in the social scale had to bear the burden, along with the dubious honor, of the pedestal. By the 1830s the plantation tradition had identified the male southern aristocrat with the cavalier, whose dedication to gentility, as opposed to the profit motive, along with courtly manners and manly virtue, guaranteed that he knelt daily at the altar of pure southern womanhood and all that she was reputed so nobly to represent. Not surprisingly, encomia to the Southern Lady overflowed in antebellum southern magazines, whose contributors harped on her beauty and grace; modesty and hospitality; submissiveness and devotion to husband, children, household slaves, the poor, the unsaved, in short, to practically everyone except herself. Befitting her much extolled selflessness, the lady in most Old South fiction evidences little individuality or self-consciousness. Although the lady of the plantation was hardly typical of the majority of white southern women, who raised children and worked hands-on from dawn to dusk on small farms without the benefit of slave labor, the women of the yeoman class in the South received little literary attention before the end of the nineteenth century.

The few insightful treatments of white women in southern literature before 1880 come from southern women themselves. Sarah and Angelina Grimké of Charleston shocked their elite slaveowning family by writing abolitionist and feminist tracts in the North in the 1830s, in which the southern chivalric ideal of women as "pretty toys" was one of several Dixie shibboleths protested in the name of expanded freedom, justice, and opportunity. Sarah Grimké was perhaps the first southern white woman writer to refer openly to parallels between the condition of white women and that of slaves. Novels by the Old South's most widely selling woman writer, Augusta Jane Evans, author of domestic fiction such as *Beulah* (1859) and *St. Elmo* (1866) and the decidedly pro-Confederate *Macaria* (1863), sounded much more orthodox about woman's place; but as feminist critic Anne Goodwyn Jones has argued, Evans still found ways to inject into her southern heroines "unladylike erudition, political passion, and oratorical instincts" quite at variance with the standard image of southern womanhood. The most fertile resources for an understanding of nineteenth-century southern women remain their private diaries, journals, and correspondence, which since the 1960s have emerged in scholarly editions that have reintroduced American readers to the women behind the marble mask of Old South femininity. Among the more noteworthy southern women's personal narratives of the Civil War era are Mary Blackford's antislavery journal, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (1954), Cornelia Peake McDonald's wartime diary of the homefront, *A Woman's Civil War* (1992), Phoebe Yates Pember's narrative of her work in a Confederate hospital in Richmond, *A Southern Woman's Story* (1879), and the best known of all the texts in this genre, Mary Boykin Chesnut's diary of her four years (1861–65) at the center of the Confederate power elite.

In her diary and in the massive first-person narrative that she developed from it after the Civil War was over, Chesnut recorded a social history of the southern slaveocracy at its zenith and in its precipitous decline toward utter defeat in 1865. Like many white women of her class in the Old South, Chesnut felt very ambivalent about slavery. Publicly she accepted it as a fact of life; privately she harbored a deep resentment of it, having seen its demoralizing and destructive effects on friends and family members entangled in its web. Chesnut's complex attitude toward slavery stemmed from her conviction that "there is no slave, after all, like a wife." Her feminist analysis of male privilege in the Old South was trenchant; her recognition of the link between slavery and wifehood gave her a powerfully ironic perspective on the mythic underpinnings of the planter class. Nevertheless, when she died in

1886, Chesnut had not settled on a literary form that let her articulate her dilemma as a woman writer in the Old South. Privileged by class and race, handicapped by sex, Chesnut as southern lady had the capacity and the will to write both as eulogist of the planter class and as ironist on behalf of white women in that class. But in the Old South, especially after the Civil War, it was impossible, except in private, to write like a Simms *and* a Douglass, upholding the ideals of the Old South on one page and subverting them on another. The doom of the Old South as a literary community is exemplified, therefore, in the fate of Mary Chesnut, who heroically refused her society's self-defeating either-or proposition—unquestioning endorsement on the one hand or alienated critique on the other—but who paid for her literary independence with public silence. Her complete personal narrative, under the title *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* did not see print until 1981.

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Excitement over the founding of the Confederate States of America in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1861 inspired a renewed literary nationalism in the South, making the fame of Henry Timrod, whose identification with the southern cause led to his being dubbed, for better or worse, the "poet laureate of the Confederacy." War fever whipped up plenty of martial poetry and fiction, along with biographies, reports and histories of battles, songbooks, and other literary by-products of the conflict. Aside from Mary Chesnut, however, no southern writer of the short-lived Confederate era has retained a readership today. The Confederacy had to die before it could live again in literature.

As the literary historian Jay B. Hubbell has observed, the decade from 1865 to 1875 was the most dispiriting time for literature in the history of the South. The collapse of the Confederacy in 1865 brought literal bankruptcy to many southern writers. Those who had championed slavery and secession, such as Simms, Timrod, and Paul Hamilton Hayne, seemed utterly discredited. With no alternative but to seek publishers and readers in the North, once established, now impoverished southern writers in the post–Civil War era adopted reconciliation as their watchword, at least in public. The less said about slavery, sectionalism, and secession the better. In the late 1860s northern editors and publishers were willing to listen to southern writers who adopted a chastened, "reconstructed" posture befitting the nonpunitive, voluntaristic, integrative Reconstruction policies of Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson toward the South. Writers who were flexible and imaginative enough could see that as a literary entity, the South had not suddenly lost its distinctiveness of locale, of speech and dialect, of manners and outlook on life. These were, if anything, even more fascinating to the North after the war, once it was free to examine the former rebels with a conqueror's curiosity.

Older southern writers, especially those who preferred poetry to prose and historical romance to contemporary forms of realism, did not adapt successfully to the new conditions for southern authorship. By the mid 1870s a new generation of writers was starting to replace them, ready to supply a growing demand in northern periodicals for stories about southern life that were regionally specific in their surface details but predictably national in their sociopolitical outlook. Southern local color writing of the 1870s still harked back to the prewar era, usually to the farm and the plantation, but did so without an obvious social or political ax to grind. Wistfulness replaced defensiveness; humor became more genial; there was more attention to the lower orders of the southern hierarchy, especially the slave and the ex-slave, than was characteristic of prewar southern writing. In 1875 Samuel Langhorne Clemens of Missouri suavely introduced himself to readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* with *Old Times on the Mississippi,* a series of evocative reminiscences of steamboat days before the Civil War. Three years later George W. Cable of Louisiana published *Old Creole Days,* a collection of stories that endowed the New Orleans Creole caste with a dignity it had never enjoyed in American literature before. In *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880), Joel Chandler Harris of Georgia regaled a fascinated northern audience with animal fables drawn from southern African American folklore, situated in a plantation setting and rendered in something that sounded like genuine Negro dialect. The appeal of these kinds of local color realism led the editor of New York's *Scribner's Monthly* in 1881 to welcome the South and the West as the literary equals of New England. By 1888 these writers, along with Thomas Nelson Page and Charles W. Chesnutt, had brought southern fiction to such a pinnacle of national literary recognition that one prominent northern magazine, the *Forum,* concluded that, judging from the character of the nation's fiction, "the South was the seat of intellectual empire in America, and the African the chief romantic element of our population." The problem, as William Wells Brown wrote in his Reconstruction requiem, *My Southern Home,* in 1880, was that the demise of Reconstruction and the rise of white supremacy in the South threatened to render the southern African American "a nonentity in politics," regardless of the name "the African" seemed to be making as a popular character in new southern literature. The question of the African American's contradictory literary and political representation in the New South pointed up an even larger question for the region's writers in the decades to come: should southern literature be a catalyst for or a restraint against change; and if the former, how and to what extent could literature effect change in the most conservative region of the country?

The New South 1880–1940

THE CULT OF THE LOST CAUSE

"Alas! for the South. Her books have grown fewer / She never was much given to literature." So proclaimed, in the 1890s, J. Gordon Coogler, known in some quarters as the Last Bard of Dixie. What he said was not altogether true. The antebellum South had indeed produced writers in the form of Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Douglass, the Southwestern Humorists, and others (although Coogler in all likelihood would have included neither Douglass nor the Humorists). But, on balance, compared to the Flowering of New England—the American Renaissance of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville—the antebellum South did not seem "much given to literature." As the poet and critic Allen Tate later wrote, "We had no Hawthorne, no Melville, no Emily Dickinson. We had William Gilmore Simms. We made it impossible for Poe to live south of the Potomac." And such, even more, was the case immediately after the Civil War.

The problem, of course, was that the immediate postbellum South, just as the South from 1830 to 1860, was too much involved in its own defense, in writing as a form of propaganda, to produce a broadly based literature of the first rank. The "savage ideal"—defined by W. J. Cash in 1941 as "that ideal whereunder dissent and variety are completely suppressed"—was operative in the South both antebellum and postbellum. The late Confederacy came out of the war still not convinced that it had been beaten; the South may have lost the "military phase" of the war, diehards maintained, but their cause—a defense of traditional agrarian values and an attack on what they characterized as the money-mad, materialistic, progressive North—they still proclaimed the nobler one.

Thus began the cult of the Lost Cause, that glorification of the Confederacy and of the older South that had preceded it. That cult existed in all parts of Dixie and, in time, was characterized by monuments to the Confederate dead, the fervent devotion of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and frequent reunions and parades of Confederate veterans. The seeds of that cult had been sown even as the guns fell silent at Appomattox; but it had been given impetus by what was, from a southern point of view, a harsh plan of Reconstruction imposed on the South from 1867 to 1877, a period in which northern Republicans ensured Negro suffrage and enforced measures that meant that the former white southern ruling class would be without power or influence.

By 1877, however, whites had regained control in all states of the former Confederacy, and by the early 1880s the federal government as well as the people of the North seemed content to let the white South return to its old ways, including—

nearly—the former racial status quo. The economic system of agricultural sharecropping, in the manner it developed in the southern states, stopped just short of slavery. And in the 1880s and 1890s, following a brief postbellum period in which the freedman could vote and hold office in most parts of Dixie—that is, approach political and legal, if not social or economic, equality—the dark age of segregation fully descended on the South. Cotton may still have been king, but Jim Crow ruled. Even such influential southerners as Henry Grady of Atlanta, espouser of a "New South" creed of industrial progress, also paid homage to the Old South and did not challenge legal segregation. The South's leading African American spokesman of the 1880s and 1890s, Booker T. Washington, founder and head of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, acquiesced as well. His famous 1895 speech at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta gave voice to his belief—or his reluctant conclusion—that southern blacks had to sacrifice political and social rights for economic ones.

White southern writers gave abundant support to the Lost Cause, although in the immediate postwar days those writers had little outlet for their work. The war had destroyed the South's capacity to publish, and northern publishers at first were hesitant to provide a forum for ex-Confederates. The reigning writers of the immediate prewar period, William Gilmore Simms, John Esten Cooke, Paul Hamilton Hayne, and Henry Timrod, had been silenced by the war and its aftermath; and Simms and Timrod had died not long after Appomattox. Hayne continued to write poetry well into the 1880s; and through his verse and essays as well as his extensive correspondence with writers in other parts of the country he became, as Rayburn Moore has written, "the acknowledged literary spokesman of the South, the representative poet and laureate of the South." His nearest, and much younger, competitor for that honor was Sidney Lanier, whose major poetry appeared between 1875 and 1881. Other poets emerged: Irwin Russell of Mississippi became well known for his dialect verse of the late 1870s and 1880s, and John Bannister Tabb, a Virginian, for his short lyrics, largely on nature. Albery Whitman of Kentucky, a prolific versifier given to long narratives, became one of the best-known African American poets of the late nineteenth century, and other poets—Margaret Junkin Preston, Madison Cawein, and Lizette Reese—claimed a number of followers. But none of these poets really broke out of the southern literary tradition of the mid-nineteenth century; many of them still served, at some level, the Lost Cause, or at any rate the traditional South that had given rise to it.

LOCAL COLOR FICTION

In fiction the dominant mode of the South in the 1870s and 1880s was local color, a variety of writing that focused on regional landscape and speech patterns and localized characters and attitudes and was characterized by a generally sentimental approach to southern life. A result of the movement toward national reconciliation in the years after the Civil War—and of a keen interest Americans were taking in their newly reunited countrymen in other regions—local color fiction was hardly confined to the South. In New England, Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman held forth and, before them, Bret Harte in the Far West. But the South was particularly fertile ground for the local color writer, partly because ex-Union soldiers and other northerners, having pushed South during or after the war, were curious about the ex-Confederacy and partly because New York publishers, seeing a good commercial product, encouraged southern writers. Local colorists flourished in abundance: George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin, and others in Louisiana; Joel Chandler Harris in Georgia; Thomas Nelson Page in Virginia; Mary Noailles Murfree in Tennessee; James Lane Allen in Kentucky; and various other writers around the South. Some of these writers, as we shall see, were more attentive to southern social problems than the popular notion of local color would suggest; but the qualities more frequently praised in the work of the local colorists, particularly that of Page and the Louisiana writers, were picturesqueness and charm.

Most local color fiction was in the form of short stories. Its close cousin was the plantation novel, which flourished as well in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The plantation novel belonged to a much older tradition, going back before the war to the work of John Pendleton Kennedy and John Esten Cooke (one finds as well an antiplantation tradition in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and others), and Cooke continued to write after 1865. But the most notable of postbellum plantation romancers was Page, who in the 1890s would have been a strong contender for the title of Dixie's favorite writer. A largely unreconstructed southerner and devotee of the Lost Cause, yet also a Virginia gentleman who cultivated good relations with the North, Page first came to prominence with the publication of his nostalgic tale *Marse Chan* in 1884 and his collection of stories *In Ole Virginia* in 1887. In the 1890s and beyond he became known for his novels, most notably *Red Rock* (1898) and *Gordon Keith* (1903), celebrating the life and the values of the older plantation South. He also wrote several works of nonfiction, including *The Old South* (1892) and *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (1904), defending the southern social and racial status quo.

THE RISE OF THE CRITICAL SPIRIT

What was lacking in the South between 1880 and 1920 was precisely what had been lacking in the antebellum South—that is, a vibrant critical spirit. Before 1890 such a spirit was seen, among white southerners, in only two notable writers, one of whom paid a great price for his apostasy. George Washington Cable of Louisiana, earlier known as a local colorist, soon could not be contained within that form. A moralist with a strongly Calvinist sense of right and wrong, he first slipped social commentary into his fiction—such as his finest novel, *The Grandissimes* (1880)—and then in the 1880s spoke openly about the social and intellectual ills of the South in such works as *The Silent South* (1885) and *The Negro Question* (1890). Cable's social criticism was met with a hostile reception; after feeling the sting of attacks from fellow southerners, he moved his family to Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1885.

A southern writer with an even bolder vision than Cable's—and the South's leading literary figure of the late nineteenth century—was a writer who, if one assumes a twentieth-century definition of the South, never lived in Dixie at all. But Samuel Clemens was born in and grew up in a slave state, Missouri, and he was the son of a Virginian and a Kentuckian. His heart was with the South—he served very briefly in a volunteer Confederate company in the Civil War—but his was one of the first of those celebrated love-hate affairs southern writers have had with their homeland: his head told him that the South was a greatly flawed society. His indictment of slavery and his satire at the expense of southern pride, honor, and hypocrisy were at the center of his greatest novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). His remarks on the South in the second half of his nonfiction classic *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) are equally damning. But much of the vitality and fullness of Mark Twain's fiction came from the richness of his own boyhood experience on the banks of the Mississippi, and his greatest literary influence was perhaps the tales of the earlier Southwestern Humorists. Although he lived in Missouri, Nevada, California, and Connecticut, Mark Twain never ceased to be a southerner, and as such he was the South's greatest nineteenth-century truth-teller.

Mark Twain and Cable indeed possessed the critical vision, but they did their most honest writing outside (or, in Cable's case, on the verge of leaving) the South. What the white South still lacked, in 1890, was a broadly based critical temper, the courage to attack southern social, racial, and intellectual inadequacies. That broader critical vision came in some manner in the 1890s, largely through the writings of young southerners Walter Hines Page, William Peterfield Trent, and John Spencer Bassett. Page, first a Raleigh newspaper editor and later a New York publisher, blasted the southern "Confederates" and "Mummies" who lived in a bygone age as well as the "insufferable narrowness and mediocrity" of "provincial and ignorant men" who held power in the South. Trent and Bassett, both academics, chimed in and, unlike Page and Cable, remained in the South during a great part of the time they were being most critical. Bassett, in particular, attacked white supremacy and came under great fire in 1903 when he proclaimed the African American leader Booker T. Washington "the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years." Despite calls from Raleigh editor Josephus Daniels and others for Bassett's ouster from Trinity College (later Duke University), the Trinity president and trustees stood firmly behind him. Trent, under fire, received similar support from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

The new spirit in the South was beginning to be seen in southern fiction as well. Charles Chesnutt, the son of free Negro émigrés from North Carolina, was born in Cleveland in 1858 but came back to North Carolina with his parents just after the Civil War and remained there until he was twenty-five. A local colorist on one level, Chesnutt was also a critic of southern race relations; with works such as *The Conjure Woman* (1899), *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), and *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) he would become the most notable African American fiction writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kate Chopin was another local colorist who moved far beyond the genre with several bold short stories in the 1890s and, particularly, with her controversial novel *The Awakening* in 1899. In her depiction of a young wife and mother trapped in a society that offered few other options for women, Chopin challenged traditional gender roles and paid a price for her boldness. Her novel, roundly criticized for its iconoclasm and its sexual frankness, would have to wait three-quarters of a century to find its most appreciative and enthusiastic audience.

In Richmond, Virginia—the capital of the late Confederacy, the domain of Thomas Nelson Page, and the spiritual home of the Lost Cause—a new critical spirit was also at work. Ellen Glasgow, the descendant both of Shenandoah Valley Presbyterians and of Tidewater gentry, broke with the plantation tradition and cast a critical eye on her native Virginia. Beginning to publish just before the turn of the century, she was to devote nearly five decades to the writing of realistic novels, comedies of manners, and memoirs. Glasgow's prescription for the ills of the South and its literature was "blood and irony"; that of her fellow Richmonder James Branch Cabell was satire. Together in the first two decades of the twentieth century they gave the South a dose of irreverence and criticism it had sorely lacked before.

The state of southern letters as a whole, however, was still so undistinguished in 1920 that the nation's reigning social and cultural critic, H. L. Mencken of Baltimore, felt compelled in that year to write a lengthy essay in which he proclaimed the South "the Sahara of the Bozart"—a desert of the fine arts. Never had a single essay written about Dixie created such controversy; none has, in fact, to this day. Mencken charged that a much earlier southern civilization—the age of Washington and Jefferson, which, he contended, was the finest civilization the Western Hemisphere had seen—had become after the Civil War a sham and a fraud, and such it remained in the early twentieth century. Mencken said more eloquently, and with marvelous hyperbole, what certain other southerners felt, and his essay, and others

to follow, had a curious effect. In conservative southern circles *The Sahara* was met with a withering counterattack, an impassioned defense of the South. But for many young southerners of literary ambition and an iconoclastic disposition—Thomas Wolfe, Paul Green, W. J. Cash, and many others—it served as a call to arms, indeed served to embolden those writers who would themselves become part of that movement of the 1920s and 1930s known as the Southern Renascence.

THE SOUTHERN RENASCENCE

Whatever its causes—the birth of a new, bold critical spirit, the opening up of the South in World War I, the coming south of industry on a large scale, and the response of those who took a "backward glance" at what was slipping away—whatever the reasons, the Southern Renascence of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s remains one of the greatest outbursts of literary excellence the nation has witnessed. Indeed, it might be compared in many respects to the New England Renaissance, which had occurred nearly one century before, in the 1830s and 1840s; and it had come for many of the same reasons as that earlier movement—a transition from a largely agrarian economy to an emerging industrial one, thus the threat to an older way of life and a looking backward, with a mixture of pride and shame, at what had come before. All of that made for a searching literature.

Many literary historians have traced the beginnings of the Southern Renascence to the activities of a remarkable group of poets and critics who converged at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, just after World War I. John Crowe Ransom (a professor at Vanderbilt) and students Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren—among others—began to meet to discuss poems they had written. Out of their efforts came the magazine *The Fugitive*, so named because the editors announced that they fled "from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South." The Fugitives later changed their minds; with the Scopes evolution trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in July 1925—and its aftermath in which Mencken and numbers of Mencken apostles heaped criticism upon the South—the four most notable Fugitives turned to a defense of the older South.

The importance of the Scopes trial in southern intellectual life of the 1920s cannot be overestimated. When John Thomas Scopes, a science teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was charged with teaching evolution in the public schools—in violation of a recently passed state law—the entire South braced for a clashing of the forces of religious fundamentalism and modernism in the Tennessee hills. The Fugitive response to that clash—in which Scopes was convicted and fined but the South, in terms of public relations, was the true loser—was to line up on the side of the fundamentalists and to turn to a spirited defense of the traditional South.

Five years after the Scopes trial, Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren joined with eight other southerners, most with Vanderbilt ties, to produce a book titled *I'll Take My Stand*, in which they proclaimed their strong preference for a traditional agrarian, as opposed to a modern and industrial, way of life. Ransom wrote for the volume the essay *Statement of Principles*, in which, speaking for the group as a whole, he maintained that religion, the arts, and the "amenities of life" all suffered "under the curse of a strictly-business or industrial civilization." To some readers the Agrarians—for such had the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* come to be called—seemed prophets, nearly latter-day Thoreaus asking the incisive question of industrial society and its boasts of progress: Progress toward what? The Agrarians seemed all the more prophetic since their volume had appeared in November 1930, just as the Great Depression was beginning to take hold. But it was difficult in other quarters for Americans, including many southerners, to see the Vanderbilt writers

as anything other than hopeless romantics—and staunch defenders of racial prejudice and segregation, which were, after all, a great part of the traditional South. To fully appreciate *I'll Take My Stand,* as Louis D. Rubin Jr. has written, one must remember that the most notable of the Agrarians were not sociologists or economists but were poets and, as poets, were given to the image—"an image of the agrarian South that provided the essayists with a rich, complex metaphor."

The staunchest of the Agrarians (particularly Donald Davidson) continued their southern crusade in the years after *I'll Take My Stand,* but more important in the long run than their polemics are the contributions the most notable of their number—Ransom, Tate, and Warren—made to southern and American letters in a larger sense, both before and after the writing of their southern manifesto. Ransom, a poet of classical restraint, emerged in the 1930s and 1940s as the leader of the American "New Critics," those literary scholars who felt the study of literature should be a study of the literary work itself—its form, texture, imagery, and verbal ingenuity—rather than (as had often been the case) its biographical or historical context. Similarly, Tate, more a literary modernist than Ransom, was to gain great prominence as poet and critic, and Warren—poet, critic, novelist, biographer, playwright, and social commentator—was to become perhaps the leading and certainly the most versatile American literary figure of the mid and late twentieth century. Although many would celebrate his poetry as his greatest work, Warren's novel *All the King's Men* (1946) is his best known. Arguably the finest American political novel, it is a study in power and pragmatism as well as a lively and colorful story of a changing order in the Deep South.

The Southern Renascence, however, did not "begin" altogether with the Fugitive-Agrarians. Nor did it begin with Thomas Wolfe, Paul Green, T. S. Stribling, and the other southern iconoclasts, largely social realists and satirists, of the 1920s. Contributing greatly to the first phase of the Renascence was also a remarkable group of southern women writers—Frances Newman, Evelyn Scott, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, among them—most of whom challenged old assumptions and questioned earlier southern values. In some respects the new women writers represented the literary wing of a more widespread new spirit among southern women after World War I. Indeed, since the turn of the century southern women had taken the lead in many areas of social reform, particularly education, temperance, and the antilynching crusade. Now in 1919, with women's suffrage secured—and, at least in some circles, a movement toward liberation coming with the aftermath of war and the development of southern industry—southern women were speaking out in larger numbers. Writers such as Newman, an Atlanta librarian who in 1926 produced her iconoclastic novel *The Hard-Boiled Virgin,* and Evelyn Scott, who in her life as well as her writing broke all the established rules, were hailed in the 1920s as major new voices.

Before any of these writers—truly the first phase of the Southern Renascence, although it would hardly have been recognized as such at the time—came groundbreaking works by two African American writers, James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1922). At a time in which the South was beginning to take small, halting steps toward racial justice and southern blacks were migrating North in greater numbers than ever before, Johnson took a lead both in the arena of social change (as field secretary, then general secretary of the NAACP) and in the world of letters. Toomer, born in Washington, D.C., but with ancestral ties in the Deep South, wrote his lyrical tribute to the "pain and beauty" of the southern black experience after he himself spent several months in rural Georgia. In his poems and sketches of the South, and his harsh portrait of northern industrial civilization, Toomer showed himself to be an agrarian of some variety several years before the Vanderbilt writers declared their allegiance to an agrarian life.

The year 1929 must be seen as something of an *annus mirabilis* in southern literature. Thomas Wolfe's first and finest novel, *Look Homeward, Angel,* appeared along with the first two novels of William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha series—*Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury*—as well as Evelyn Scott's *The Wave,* another modernist novel hailed at the time more enthusiastically than *The Sound and the Fury.* Wolfe was first acclaimed the greatest writer of the three, and his lyrical gifts and power of memory were unmistakable. But Wolfe's unchecked autobiographical impulse and his inability to control his flow of words brought him harsh criticism in the 1930s, from critics both on the right (the Agrarians and New Critics) and on the left (American Marxists).

Faulkner's great period had just begun in 1929; in the next seven years he would also write *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and perhaps his greatest work, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)—arguably the most productive short period of a single writer in American letters. Faulkner seemed little affected by changing American literary tastes of the 1930s; his four great tragedies, beginning with *The Sound and the Fury,* were grounded in, yet transcended the American South. Given his subjects and themes—the decline and fall of great families, the conflicts of father and son, brother and brother, and the clash of the old with the new—they might easily have taken place in ancient Greece or Elizabethan England. In his treatment of one great theme, however—the racial burden of southern history—Faulkner was unmistakably southern. Not only in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* but in later works such as *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), he dealt with that burden in all its troubling complexity. Seeing the universal in the particular and the regional, Faulkner was unquestionably the great American tragedian of the twentieth century. And the shadow he would cast over southern writing for the half century following his greatest period would be virtually impossible to escape.

THE DEPRESSION AND SOUTHERN WRITING

The Great Depression had its beginnings in the nation at large in late 1929 and 1930, but to the American South hard times, particularly in agriculture, had already arrived before the crash of 1929. The early 1930s, however, brought an even crueler period, and southern agriculture, industry, and education suffered such blows that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was moved to call the South the nation's number one economic problem. Southern writers, however, responded to the Depression in a manner distinctly different from writers in the East and Midwest. In the industrial heartland as well as in parts of the West, many novelists turned to literary naturalism, a creed that, with its portrait of humans as creatures at the mercy of social and economic forces, seemed appropriate, after all, for a nation in economic and social crisis. No writer living in the South, however, could be termed a naturalist.

Erskine Caldwell, at times seeming to come close, built a reputation as critical realist and satirist; his depictions of poor southern whites in novels such as *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933) were in a broad tradition of rough humor going back as far as the writings of William Byrd in the early eighteenth century. Another southerner, Wolfe, tried after 1935 to move, at least in part, from the romantic lyricism of his earlier novels toward an examination of social concerns; he was not altogether successful in that pursuit. Faulkner himself, although too much an advocate of the triumph of the human spirit to give in to naturalistic assumptions, nonetheless was seen by many outsiders in the 1930s not as mythic chronicler but rather as social realist, graphically depicting southern poverty and degradation. In truth, however, the sociological impulse was foreign to Faulkner, and he did not share the spirit of the age.

Other than the novels of William Faulkner, the most notable work written by southerners in the 1930s was produced by two African American writers. Richard Wright, a Mississippian who had migrated to Chicago in his late teens, published his collection of stories of southern racial conflict, *Uncle Tom's Children,* in 1938 and his American classic, *Native Son,* in 1940. With that story of Bigger Thomas, a restless and rootless young black man in Chicago (like Wright himself, up from the South), and the killing of a young white woman, which enables Bigger finally to define himself, Wright became the most dominant force in African American letters. His autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945), described—with some narrative license—his early days in the racially segregated and oppressive Deep South. Unlike Jean Toomer in *Cane,* Wright saw far more pain than beauty.

At the same time Wright was ascending to literary heights he could not earlier have imagined, Zora Neale Hurston, a black Floridian with a great interest and expertise in anthropology, was producing studies of black folk life as well as a remarkable novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a story of the loves and trials of a strong black woman. Unlike Wright, Hurston preferred not to focus on American blacks as victims of racial prejudice and oppression; rather she sought to capture in her work the richness and vitality of African American folk life. But like Kate Chopin forty years before, she would have to wait several decades—in Hurston's case, until the 1970s and 1980s—to claim her most enthusiastic audience.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMPULSE

In 1942 Hurston produced an autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road,* a work describing her youth in an all-black town in Florida and, later, her strange odyssey toward academic and literary success. It was but one of many notable autobiographies or books of very personal social commentary written by southerners, black and white, in the 1930s and 1940s. The times, indeed, called for reflection. Not only was the 1930s South, like the rest of the United States, in the midst of the Depression but World War II loomed. It was a time that called for taking stock, and works such as James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941), Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* (1949), Ben Robertson's *Red Hills and Cotton* (1942), and Katharine DuPre Lumpkin's *The Making of a Southerner* (1947), as well as Hurston's *Dust Tracks* and Wright's *Black Boy,* were works both of self-exploration and of social and cultural analysis.

Agee's study of a white tenant family in Depression-era Alabama was anything but a sociological treatise; it was a "celebration" of people who, in many quarters, would have been labeled "poor white." *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was also the most intensive kind of self-exploration, a work in which the author returned (after years in New England and New York) to the rural South at least in part in search of a personal past. Percy expressed in *Lanterns on the Levee* a tribute to a way of life that was rapidly slipping away; his was a frankly nostalgic work as well as a conservative treatise, which was nonetheless praised by reigning southern liberals for its eloquence and its charm. Smith's *Killers of the Dream* was as different from Percy's memoir as a work by another white southerner could have been. Also a product of the Deep South, but a woman haunted by southern racial inequities, Smith was perhaps the most outspoken white southerner of her day on the subjects of race and gender as well as the leading spokesperson of what might be called the white southern tradition of shame and guilt.

The autobiographical impulse, so strong in the 1930s and 1940s, manifested itself another way in W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941). This work of south-

ern history, which was both more and less than history, was one man's attempt to understand and to come to terms with his own South. Limited in many ways—rather than the "mind" of "the" South, Cash's book traces the character and temper of the white, male Protestant upcountry South—*The Mind of the South* is nonetheless a brilliant dissection of the plain white southern mind, one unequaled to this day. Cash's work, in fact, provided a fitting conclusion to that liberal-conservative debate, conducted largely between the Chapel Hill Regionalists and the Vanderbilt Agrarians, that was so central a part of southern intellectual life of the 1920s and, especially, the 1930s.

That debate had begun in some measure with Mencken's *Sahara* in 1920, a work embraced by nearly all of the North Carolina writers. At stake seemed to be no less a matter than what the South would become. The Chapel Hill school, including sociologists and journalists as well as belletrists such as Paul Green, saw Dixie as a deeply flawed society, economically and socially, and believed that radical change was needed in many areas. The Vanderbilt school, deeply conservative, wanted the South to remain much as it was. Few southern writers of the 1930s (Faulkner being an exception) could escape the debate over the future of the South, and many of the notable southern books of that decade were, among other things, contributions to that debate. Just as *I'll Take My Stand,* in 1930, had been a response to Mencken and his North Carolina allies, so Cash's *The Mind of the South,* in 1941, was, among other things, a response to *I'll Take My Stand.* Cash was unabashedly in the liberal school of southern thought, and he held, with Howard W. Odum and the Chapel Hill sociologists, that Dixie had a great deal of reforming to do.

In some quarters Cash, like the Agrarians before him, was hailed as a kind of southern prophet; but even Cash, concluding his book in 1940, was hesitant in his final pages to "venture . . . definite prophecies." "It would be a madman," he wrote, who would venture them "in face of the forces sweeping over the world in the fateful year of 1940." Cash spoke not only for himself but for an entire generation of southern writers. The United States as a whole, and the South in particular, found itself on the brink of a conflict that would ensure only that life would never be the same again. Neither would the writing of the American South. Thomas Wolfe had died in 1938, at the age of thirty-seven; William Alexander Percy and Cash would both die—Cash by his own hand—shortly after their southern classics appeared in 1941; and in 1940, Faulkner's greatest days were already behind him. New voices were being heard or were about to be heard—Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams primary among them—but their full emergence would have to wait until after the war. The South's first great literary outpouring—a renascence that was in some measure more of a nascence—would be on hold while the world went to war.

by a sort of sub-daylight: and heard the sounds of dressing and movements in the house, and saw the wall of their room slit with yellow light, only with a deep and gentle sorrow, in some memory out of childhood which seemed now restored like the ghost of one beloved and dead: and was taken out of full sleep by the sound, a little later, of his shoes on the floor, as he came to the side of the bed and spoke to me.

1941

The Contemporary South 1940–Present

THE CHANGING STORY OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE

In 1952, prize-winning African American writer Alice Walker was growing up in a sharecropper's shack in the middle of a Georgia pasture. The land on which the four-room house stood fronts a wooded road that runs from Eatonton to Milledgeville. Minutes away down the same road, Flannery O'Connor, stricken with lupus in her twenties, resided at the second home, called Andalusia, of her mother's well-to-do white family. The house overlooked the farm where O'Connor raised peacocks and wrote searing stories about the wavering morality of rural folk until her premature death at thirty-nine from the wasting disease that had rendered her a semi-invalid for most of her adult life. Despite their geographic proximity the two inhabited vastly different worlds. In *Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor,* Walker describes her return in 1974 to Georgia and the two dwellings. She relates a conversation with her own mother as they lunch at a Holiday Inn across the road from Flannery O'Connor's house in a restaurant that, had it existed in 1952, would not have been open to blacks:

> "When you make these trips back south," says my mother, as I give the smiling waitress my credit card, "just what is it exactly that you're looking for?"
>
> "A wholeness," I reply.
>
> "You look whole enough for me," she says.
>
> "No," I answer, "because everything around me is split up, deliberately split up. History split up, literature split up, and people are split up too. . . . I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after."

"The whole story" of southern writing—in both literature and cultural studies—is more discernible now than it has ever been. Much of the wholeness that Walker sought in 1974 has evolved in the last half-century across the shifting firmament of southern letters and with the emergence of a body of contemporary writing that is as marked by difference as by similarity, by disjuncture as by continuity. It has also come with significant changes in how cultural and literary histories of the South have been recorded. As southern literature enters the twenty-first century, it is important to recognize that only a few decades ago the body of writing considered southern was, as Walker puts it, "a segregated literature" within a literary canon that omitted not only nearly all black writers and many white women but also any writer

as the background for a contemporary woman's changing understanding of her life and marriage. Alex Haley engages the past in yet another direction. His historical novel *Roots* (1976) firmly locates the African American past in Africa and thereby works to absolve black Americans of their "shore to shore" mentality, as poet Eugene B. Redmond calls it; instead of believing that they are without expansive history or that the history of slavery should be foregrounded above everything else, black Americans, Haley suggests, should make slavery merely an unpleasant part of the long continuum of African American history. Randall Jarrell, James Dickey, and William Styron focus on the ordeals of the common soldier in World War II. A younger generation of southern writers has probed the devastations and ironies of Vietnam, for example, Mason and Jayne Anne Phillips in their respective novels *In Country* (1985) and *Machine Dreams* (1984); Robert Olen Butler in the Pulitzer Prize–winning stories of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992); and Yosef Komunyakaa, another Pulitzer recipient, in his poetry.

DECODING SOUTHERN EXPERIENCE

For these and other contemporary southern writers, the past becomes refracted through the lens of a postmodern present. "The past is always with us, even when we don't recognize it," observes New Orleans writer Brenda Marie Osbey, who is almost a generation younger than Walker and two generations removed from O'Connor. "Our culture, or our cultures, are identifiable, even when we don't know what the signs and the symbols are. They're here. It's on us to decode them, if you're interested, as I am, in decoding, and in understanding how things work together, or against one another."

The increasing diversity and eclecticism of contemporary writing in the South, not to speak of the changing character of the region itself, have raised certain questions: Is there still a body of literature with characteristics we can call southern? And if so, what are those characteristics? It has been said, in fact, that at the end of the twentieth century the South exists more in the imaginative landscapes created by its writers than in the realities of a terrain made up of Burger Kings, Wal-Marts, and the network of expressways that have linked it to the rest of the country. Perhaps answers to these questions about contemporary southern literature reside not so much in a list of themes, traditional or postmodern, that connect writers of the South, but rather in an examination of Osbey's claim that the past, recognizable or not, continues to be decoded—that is, examined and translated—in the southern present through an understanding of its signs and symbols, its shifting images, and its language. Contemporary southerners, in fact, may understand more than anyone else about how the past and present engage each other in a vast network of tensions, ironies, and ambiguities that the contemporary southern writer continually encounters.

What sets some contemporary writers apart from some—not all—earlier writers is an insistence on decoding those signs and symbols of southern experience—on attempting to reveal how they work, psychologically and socially. Peter Taylor's story *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time,* for instance, reveals the incestuousness of a southern community through the grotesque behaviors of the Dorset siblings. The strong suggestion of brother-sister incest is in turn translated and foregrounded by the imitative antics of the children who attend the elderly Dorsets' annual party that marks the children's coming of age. In its disturbing examination of social behavior, Taylor's story suggests that a continual process of decoding is essential to cultural analysis. In the hands of Randall Kenan—a black writer who is making his reputation by upsetting the comfort level with which subjects on southern soil get treated—incest becomes a topic for meditation in *Cornsilk* (1992), as a lustful brother, who is now a lawyer, reflects on his carnal desire for his sister. Having almost pornographically satiated his desire over a period of years in Tims Creek, North Carolina, and now keeping the memory alive with trips to sadomasochistic prostitutes in Washington, D.C., the narrator indirectly indicts the community's insistence on a moral code that prefers silence to censure.

A different twist to this cultural decoding emerges in Ellen Douglas's 1988 novel *Can't Quit You, Baby,* the story of a white woman, Cornelia, and a black woman, Tweet, who works as her housekeeper. This is the narrative of a southern cross-racial relationship with a difference: in the end, it is Cornelia, who had previously turned a deaf ear to Tweet, who is taking care of Tweet and begging her to speak to her. The novel's white narrator questions even her own story and wonders aloud, "What a tangle of snakes have I been skiing over?" in writing about such risky matters.

Whether observed in O'Connor's doctor's waiting room, where books may suddenly fly through the air and hit the pompous; in Walker Percy's Trav-L-Aires, which carry his less-than-stable characters across the country; or in Margaret Walker's civil rights poetry of mourning and renewal, southern writers of the past sixty years have created remarkably mobile images of human beings transformed by and transforming a changing world and a vastly altered South. Like many of their predecessors, these contemporary writers are extraordinarily talented individuals whose subjects and themes are never limited to the regional. What links them to their southern predecessors are shared signs and symbols—linguistic and cultural—emerging from southern experience, past, present, and future. In such works as these, and many more examples could be cited, "the whole story," as Walker puts it, of southern experience emerges as a montage of moving parts and relationships that are always working together or against one another, or perhaps both at once.

HISTORY AND COMMUNAL MEMORY

It should be pointed out as well that the whole story of contemporary southern literature needs to take into account the translucency and mobility of so-called periods of southern writing. There are no hard-and-fast divisions—either chronological or thematic—that would distinguish southern writers whose work flowered in the first half of the twentieth century from contemporary writers. The Southern Literary Renascence moved well into the mid-1950s; some of the most important southern writers of this century span both periods. Perhaps most conspicuous are Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989), who published fiction in his early career and turned almost exclusively to poetry later in life, and Lillian Hellman (1906–1984), known first for her drama and then, toward the end of her life, as a memoirist. William Faulkner (1897–1962) moved from his tragic vision of the South more toward the arena of comedy in the novels of his later years; and Katherine Anne Porter (1890–1980), after making her name in short fiction and especially with her brilliant novellas of the 1930s, spent about twenty years writing her long-awaited novel *Ship of Fools,* published in 1962 when she was seventy-two.

For contemporary southern writers the decoding impulse described above is inevitably linked to history and communal memory. The 1960s, for example—years of intense, violent change in the region—have been viewed as a watershed decade for southern culture and literature: forced desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, and other southern cities and towns; the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott; the murders of three young civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi; the assassination of King in Memphis, Tennessee—such events created a new South from which there was no turning back.

whose themes and philosophical approaches to those themes were not coded, or formulated, as "southern." Subtly but distinctively mitigated by gender, class, and/or race, such themes traditionally included a sense of tragedy and masculine diminishment from defeat in the Civil War and a resulting obsession with the past; a devotion to agricultural life; an attachment to place and community; a strong religious sense; and in some instances, feelings of deep racial guilt. As Peggy Whitman Prenshaw has pointed out, "The focus on the Southern past, so central in the works of [William] Faulkner, [Robert Penn] Warren, and [Allen] Tate, concentrates typically on slavery, the Civil War, and the tragic blend in nineteenth-century leaders of guilt, courage, moral blindness, and honor."

In the 1970s and 1980s, challenges to what previously had been considered the defining features of southern writing emerged, especially from feminist and African American literary scholars, and the field of southern literature slowly began to undergo what would become a radical transformation. In 1983 C. Hugh Holman, a prominent scholar of tradition-based approaches to southern literature, offered the following self-critique: "Most of us, by omitting a little that cannot be made to fit, selecting from the rest rather carefully, and, like Procrustes, fitting what we select to our particular narrow beds, arrive at conveniently simple answers to the question of what southern literature is all about." Before such important shifts in scholarly approaches to southern literature were to reach fuller fruition, however, most students of twenty-five years ago, as John Lowe pointed out in 1996, found themselves in "southern literature courses focused on white male writers; even Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor were considered 'minor' writers and not worthy of study, and the only black writer who made the list from time to time was Booker T. Washington, for obvious reasons." In reviews and literary studies, Welty was accused of being a southern lady writer whose themes and stories lacked the mythic weightiness of a Faulkner; and O'Connor, in turn, was criticized for her unsettling focus on the grotesque propensities of humankind. Neither Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) nor Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), works that have had enormous influence on contemporary African American literature, were considered part of the flowering of southern literature called the Southern Literary Renascence, or Renaissance, which began in the 1920s. The forced removal of southeastern American Indians in the nineteenth century and the loss of many of the oral traditions of Native American tribal culture left the southeastern region of the country with few Indian writers.

Some writers from the South, like Hurston and Richard Wright, were considered outside the borders of a regional identity deemed "southern" and thought to belong instead under other categories. In the late 1960s into the 1970s, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez emerged as "black writers," "civil rights writers," and "black women writers," but not as "southern writers." Today Dorothy Allison's fiction and poetry are thought to belong more to the category of gay and lesbian writing than southern literature, despite the fact that few southern writers have produced more exacting descriptions of the life of poor southern whites and particularly poor southern white females. Definitions of southern writing have been so rigidly enforced and internalized that Virginia novelist and short story writer Lee Smith once refused the label of "southern writer," saying in an interview conducted in the late 1980s that she preferred being called an "Appalachian writer" because she and many other Appalachian writers were not from privileged backgrounds and were not concerned with the racial guilt that obsessed white writers from the deep South.

As Lee Smith's remark suggests, subregional differences between Appalachia and the Deep South have left Appalachian writers such as Smith, Harriette Arnow, Gurney Norman, Mary Lee Settle, and Denise Giardina—and to a lesser degree Fred Chappell—outside the mainstream of southern literary history. In response to these issues raised by advocates of a more inclusive canon, Louis D. Rubin Jr., like Holman a notable purveyor of traditional interpretations of southern literature, maintained in 1988: "The bane of so much Southern literary scholarship has been cultural oversimplication. The South has been *this*, or *that*, and no other. Its literature is therefore supposed to exemplify the monolith. To study it has been to work at demonstrating that the monolith exists."

SOUTHERN LITERATURE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Clearly, during and since World War II—a period of extraordinary change in the South and the world—writing by southerners has become so multifarious as to spill over and dissolve the defining features of that mythic monolithic creature called "Southern Literature." Even more than the Southern Literary Renascence of the early twentieth century—featuring the Agrarian Movement, Fugitive Poets, and New Critics (all connected to Vanderbilt University, in those days certainly a paternal/fraternal community of white scholars) and William Faulkner's compelling sagas of southern families, failed dynasties, and racial and class tensions—the contemporary period has seen a veritable explosion of diverse and talented writers, of which this section of the anthology can offer only a sampling. As the primarily rural South of the 1920s and 1930s has become steadily homogenized into the mainstream of American culture, the subjects and techniques of this body of literature have also become increasingly unstable and far-ranging. Such destabilization would seem to be a natural outcome of the past sixty years, which saw cataclysmic events and cultural shifts of massive proportions in the South, the United States, and the world over the second half of the twentieth century. The following list is long, but by no means comprehensive: a second world war and the development and deployment in 1945 of the atomic bomb over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the Cold War of the 1950s, with the threat of nuclear annihilation and government persecution of many writers and actors as communists; the interconnected civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and Black Arts movement of the 1960s; the women's movement of the same decades; the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and of his brother Robert five years later; the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the largely unpunished murders of other civil rights leaders and workers; the calamitous war in Vietnam and brutal responses to student protests at Kent State in 1970 and on other university campuses throughout the country; the resignation of President Richard Nixon as his and his advisers' illegal activities in the Watergate affair came to light in 1974; the 1980s dissolution of the Communist block in Europe and ensuing ethnic strife in the following decade; the decay and impoverishment of large urban environments in the United States and the growing drug and gang cultures in northern and southern cities; and the pandemic of AIDS.

As Fred Hobson has observed, contemporary southern writers live in a postmodern world of uncertainty, discontinuity, and profound anxiety. While writer-philosopher Wendell Berry responds to such a predicament by retreating to the past of his Kentucky forefathers, who taught him to handle a mule team and a plow, other southern writers, such as Bobbie Ann Mason, also a Kentuckian, take their stories and characters to the nearest Kmart and shopping mall or allow their compelling family dramas to unfold alongside an ever-present television spouting soap operas and sitcoms. While poet Andrew Hudgins sees the personal dimensions of Civil War history through the life of southern poet Sidney Lanier, Mason positions the battleground of Shiloh, site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War,

It is no accident that during and soon after the civil rights movement in the South, southern writers, especially black writers, were not only writing about issues of race in the present turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s but were also revisiting a history of oppression on southern soil, especially the nineteenth-century slavery experience. Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), the story of a black woman's experiences under slavery, and William Styron's Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967)—considered the most controversial American novel of the racially divisive 1960s—were published within a year of each other, followed a decade later by Alex Haley's resoundingly popular *Roots* (1976), which retrieved the African heritage of its characters. Ernest Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) linked, in the long life of one courageous black woman, the inequities of slavery and segregation. On the screen both of the latter two novels enjoyed wide dissemination with national audiences.

In vastly different ways each of these four novels revealed certain aspects of southern cultural history. In the tradition of the autobiographical slave narrative, Walker, Haley, and Gaines attempted to bring the historical struggles of black people into popular circulation in compelling, sympathetic portraits of African Americans. Styron, a white writer who shares Faulkner's obsession with the southern past, attempted to enter the psychology of the African American icon Nat Turner, leader of an early-nineteenth-century slave rebellion in Southampton, Virginia. The controversy surrounding Styron's novel is indicative of the temper of a time when African American activists were finding themselves increasingly at grave risk in both North and South. Styron's novel was vehemently denounced by many black intellectuals for its fictive depiction of Turner's sexual desires for white women and for another male slave, alleged historical inaccuracies, and for what Styron's critics felt were dehumanizing stereotypes of black characters. Styron responded that he was writing fiction, not history and that "the story of a nineteenth-century black slave may try to say at least as much about longing, loneliness, personal betrayal, madness and the quest for God as it does about Negroes or the institution of slavery."

RECLAIMING SOUTHERN SOIL

Southern black writers of the contemporary period have sought a sense of wholeness in transformed attitudes toward or reintegration with the land, with southern soil. This progression toward wholeness is an effort to dissolve the dissonance that was felt at one time between what might best be described as a sense of ownership, which certain white southerners were presumed to have, versus a sense of squatting in the South, the condition that blacks and poor whites were made to understand was theirs. Historically, the traditional pattern for black people, black writers among them, was migration out of the South and into northern cities. Richard Wright charts that pattern in his own life and Ralph Ellison charts it with his narrator in *Invisible Man* (1952). Yet a few black writers of previous decades and many more recent southern black writers have elected not only to remain on southern territory but to reintegrate their characters with southern soil. Margaret Walker, for example, was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and, after sojourns in Iowa and North Carolina, returned to Mississippi, taught for three decades, and still resides in Jackson. In Vyry Brown, she depicts a character who rivals Scarlett O'Hara in her refusal to leave the land, beginning with the plantation on which Vyry has spent her life as a slave in *Jubilee*. In this historical slice of African American life, the fictive imagination transforms historical reality.

More recent black writers, however, reclaim southern soil even as their characters are reclaiming spaces to live and thrive below the Mason Dixon line. Ernest Gaines may have migrated to California, but his characters remain in Louisiana. Within the limitations of that racist environment, they negotiate ways to live and thrive. Alice Walker's Celie becomes self-determining in Memphis, not in New York or Chicago; Henry Dumas's characters encounter their mythic destinies in a small town in Arkansas; and Ted Shine's Mrs. Grace Love discovers that militancy can blossom on southern soil as assuredly as it can in the North from which her grandson has come. South Carolinian Dori Sanders has become a model for black writers embracing the South; in *Clover* (1990), her novel about peach farming, she depicts a ten-year-old black girl who becomes reconciled to her white stepmother after the death of her father. The land and its produce are central to that reconciliation.

Though certainly racist and violent incidents still occur on southern soil in the works of many contemporary southern African American writers, they are nonetheless in a generation that has reclaimed that soil in an effort to make it sprout healthy black lives. When William Melvin Kelley's Tucker Caliban salts his southern farm, thereby destroying the land in *dem* (1964), he has concluded that no hope, no possibility for a healthy future, exists in the South. Today's black writers claim the soil as their own, claim their right to American democracy and southern heritage in a conscious reintegration process that was not apparent four decades ago. That process of reclamation often means that racism, while ever-present, is not the dominant guiding force in the lives of these characters. Several of Randall Kenan's characters are more oppressed by small town religion than they are by racism, while Alice Walker's have to struggle as much with female oppression as they do with oppression from whites. Albert Murray is more focused on black people's interactions with each other in a blues-centered culture that has its own customs and rituals; the world beyond it is merely coincidental. While none of these writers denies racism, they have nonetheless relegated it to a less prominent place in their fiction than Wright was able to do in the 1940s.

It is also noteworthy that black writers have reclaimed southern territory by founding writing workshops and publishing outlets south of the Mason Dixon line. Before the 1960s, the usual sources of southern encouragement for black writing may have come in the occasional teacher's comments on papers or meetings in homes. During the 1960s and after, a number of collectives were founded in the South with the express purpose of inspiring black writing and publishing. The Free Southern Theatre, founded in 1963 by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, encouraged writing and production and thrived until 1978. Although it was a traveling organization, its base was in New Orleans with writers Tom Dent and John O'Neal. The Southern Black Cultural Alliance (founded 1972) worked as well to get young writers to produce and publish their works. A loose affiliation of writers, the organization claimed units from Miami to Austin and consisted of regional components that included Black Fire Company in Birmingham, Theater of Afro-Arts and M Ensemble in Miami, Beale Street Repertory Company in Memphis, Ethiopian Theatre and Free Southern Theatre and Congo Square Writers Union in New Orleans, Urban Theater in Houston, and the Afro-American Players in Austin. Some of these units featured their own journals, such as *Bamboula* from the New Orleans groups.

The journal that has thrived longest from this era is *Callaloo*, first published in 1976 at Southern University in Baton Rouge and still edited by Charles H. Rowell, now on the faculty at the University of Virginia. The journal gave wider visibility to the works of such writers as Brenda Marie Osbey, Tom Dent, Lorenzo Thomas,

Pinkie Gordon Lane, Gayl Jones, and Rita Dove. Its early mission was to showcase southern black writers, though its focus has expanded in recent years to include Haitian, Jamaican, Martinigan, and Brazilian writers. *Callaloo,* together with the other journals and the organizations that sponsored them, signaled a further reconciliation of black editors and writers to southern soil and further extended the process of claiming, in positive ways, the territory most identified with African Americans.

RACE AND LITERATURE

Whether grounded in the historical burden of slavery, the civil rights movement, or contemporary life—or rendered in the genres of fiction, poetry, or drama—race is a subject that haunts southern literature of the twentieth century. Contemporary writers as divergent as Wendell Berry and Nikki Giovanni, Elizabeth Spencer and Ted Shine, Maya Angelou and Dave Smith have written powerfully about the issue of race in southern experience. Giovanni's and Sanchez's poetry galvanized the Black Arts movement to bring about change in American culture and art; Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) conveyed the day-to-day realities of the civil rights movement; Gayl Jones in *Corregidora* (1975) connected slavery and racism in the South to such practices in other countries; Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) brought together a racist culture, North and South, with the personal, existential anguish of the outsider, a black man who, for all intents and purposes, finds himself "invisible" in the world he inhabits and from which he finally withdraws. White writers such as Welty and Dave Smith have produced probing and disturbing portraits of violent white men. In *Where Is the Voice Coming From?* written the night civil rights leader Medgar Evers was killed in 1963, Welty penetrates deep into the chillingly violent personality of his fictive murderer with a first-person portrait so similar to that of Evers's accused killer that some details in the story had to be revised for publication. In Smith's disquieting memory poem *The Colors of Our Age: Pink and Black* (1981), the narrator describes an incident in the late 1950s or early 1960s in Portsmouth, Virginia, in which a Klansman drives a hammer into the skull of a young black man:

> Each detail enters my eye like grit
> from long nights without sleep.
> I might have been this man, risen,
> a small-town hero gone gimpy
> with hatred of anyone's black eyes.

The devastating effects of institutionalized violence against Native Americans are described in R. T. Smith's *Red Anger* (1983) by an Indian narrator who works "in a tourist lunch stand" and nurses his anger "like a seed." In recent years, southern writers have turned from stories of extreme racist brutality to more indirect examinations of race within an integrated society. Randall Kenan's story *The Foundations of the Earth* (1992), for instance, becomes a decoding of race; class; and religious, communal, and sexual mores in the contemporary South when Gabriel, a young white gay man from Boston, comes into a southern rural community to visit his dead lover's elderly black grandmother, Mrs. Maggie Macgowan Williams, who owns land sharecropped by a white man and who is beginning, at age seventy, to realize that now, "when she had all the laws and rules down pat, she would have to begin again, to learn."

DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE

Often connected to the Southern Gothic, violence itself is no stranger to the region's literature of the past sixty years. Backwoods violence in remote southern Appalachia is the source of brutal confrontation for four suburban men in James Dickey's controversial novel *Deliverance* (1970), from which the highly successful film was made. O'Connor more often than not pushed her characters to their spiritual limits through violent acts; Tennessee Williams shocked audiences and critics alike with rape and cannibalism in his plays; Alice Walker chose to begin *The Color Purple* (1982) with young Celie's frank discussion of her sexual abuse by the man she thinks is her father.

Cormac McCarthy's seven novels, which he no longer allows to be excerpted, chronicle men's capacity for mindless violence and perversity and trace the rippling effects of individual acts of violence on the human community. Strewn with corpses, some long dead, McCarthy's sagas are apocalyptic and macabre, featuring scenes of surreal horror and carrying with them an overpowering insistence on the inexplicable presence of evil in the world. "There's no such thing as life without bloodshed," McCarthy said in a rare interview. "I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom." In the tradition of O'Connor's fiction, the youngest of these writers, Andrew Hudgins, writes poems teeming with shocking moments of violence: rotting corpses of naked girls, drunken drivers who seem to aim for roadside walkers, the artist John James Audubon's dismemberment of the birds he would rebuild and draw.

Some contemporary southern women writers have chosen in their works to confront and disassemble male violence. Dorothy Allison's story *River of Names* (1988) and her novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992) as well as Walker's *The Color Purple* and her more recent novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), about female genital mutilation, trace the debilitating effects of male violence against women and girls. Ellen Bryant Voigt's narrator in the disturbing poem *Short Story* (1987) describes in excruciating detail a grandfather's beating a mule to death. The last lines of the poem link his violence toward the farm animal with his wife's death in childbirth after having a string of children in quick succession. Lee Smith's *Black Mountain Breakdown* (1980) and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) describe the devastating impact, long term and short term, of rape and sexual abuse; and Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster* (1987) is, like *The Color Purple,* a narrative of female survival of paternal abuse.

WOMEN'S WRITING

Have there been distinctively female traditions in southern literature? Among the earlier generation of white women writers usually studied together—Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and O'Connor—critics have found certain similarities: a subversive manipulation, or outright rejection, of gender roles (Porter's Miranda stories; McCullers's *Ballad of the Sad Café,* 1951); a connection with a feminine pastoral (Welty's *A Curtain of Green,* 1941); an interest in the private domestic sphere (McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding,* 1946); a sense of time not linked to traditional markers of history such as wars or large social movements (O'Connor's *Revelation,* 1965). There are, of course, important exceptions, for example, Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools,* which presents characters of many backgrounds and nationalities traveling to fascist Germany on the brink of war.

Significant linkages can be made among these earlier women writers and between them and the generation that came after them. The outsiders in the fiction of McCullers, O'Connor, and Porter—whether lonely adolescent girls such as Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding,* recalcitrant sinners with physical deformities like Joy-Hulga with her wooden leg in O'Connor's *Good Country People* (1955), or mentally disabled boys as in Porter's *He* (1930)—bear certain resemblances. When Lee Smith's, Ellen Gilchrist's and Bobbie Ann Mason's characters tell their stories or when we observe the predicaments of the MaGrath sisters of Hazelhurst, Mississippi, in Beth Henley's Pulitzer Prize–winning comedy *Crimes of the Heart* (1981), we may find ourselves thinking of some of Welty's indefatigable women talkers: the miffed Sister engaged in sibling rivalry with Stella-Rondo in *Why I Live at the P.O.* (1941), or Leota the gossipy beautician in *Petrified Man* (1941). The writer who has sought most self-consciously to develop a sense of female tradition of creativity is Alice Walker, whose essays (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* 1974 and *Looking for Zora,* 1975), fiction (*Everyday Use,* 1973, and *The Color Purple*), and poetry (*We Have a Beautiful Mother,* 1991) excavate black women's creative spirit and artistic traditions to articulate what Walker calls a "heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength." For Walker, black women's art has developed through "everyday use" under extraordinarily difficult situations; such art is communal, passed down from generation to generation as a daily, necessary part of life, in beautiful songs, imaginative stories, vivid decorations, colorful gardens.

ORAL TRADITIONS

As the vernacular section of this anthology indicates, another tradition still very much alive in the contemporary period is that of orality. Certain rhythms, sounds, dialects, musical effects—as well as a long tradition of tale telling—may be traced from hundreds, actually thousands, of years through the African and European heritages of southerners. In *Oral History* (1983) Lee Smith examines the relation of the outsider to such a heritage; college student Jennifer carries a tape recorder and notebook into Hoot Owl Holler for her oral history class project, naively believing that mountain folk, especially her Appalachian family, are cute and quaint. The real family history, told by various members past and present, is neither but is rather a haunted, winding tale of hatred and self-immolation.

The writings of southern African Americans are saturated with the folk traditions from which many of the works evolved historically. When literacy was forbidden to blacks from their arrival upon U.S. soil to the middle of the nineteenth century, they recorded in their oral narratives and songs the values that were most important to them. Rhymes, tales, beliefs in turn informed the first written efforts and thereby established a tradition that makes itself felt in all African American writing, especially southern African American writing. Albert Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* are textured with the blues, in sound as well as in theme and structure. Henry Dumas's *Ark of Bones* (1974) vibrates with echoes and variations of black spirituals; black folk church traditions inform Maya Angelou's autobiography; and Margaret Walker's poetry captures the tradition of conjuration, as does Brenda Marie Osbey's *Ceremony for Minneconjoux* (1983).

In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) Tennessee Williams used the traditional sounds of New Orleans street life to heighten the reality of this tense drama of cultural and psychological confrontation between faded southern belle Blanche DuBois and the aggressive working-class Stanley Kowalski. In R. T. Smith's *Beneath the Mound* (1983), a poem of mourning for Native American history and culture, the speaker, an Indian hunter long buried in a mound built by slaves, laments the loss of oral heritage:

> Who recalls the sacred chants?
> Who can dance the steps of death?
> Who knows the dialect
> and stories that identified my tribe?

and declares:

> If I could speak,
> I would sing.

Poetry by James Dickey, Randall Jarrell, Fred Chappell, Wendell Berry, Andrew Hudgins, Ellen Bryant Voigt, and Dave Smith, like that of Robert Penn Warren, partakes in various ways of particular language patterns, story-telling techniques, and speech rhythms. It has been said, in fact, that what links southern writers today is a continuing sense of colloquial voice. As poet A. R. Ammons, who has lived outside the South for decades, puts it, "I feel my verbal and spiritual home is in the South. When I sit down and play hymns on the piano my belly tells me I'm home no matter where I am."

SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND REINVENTION

For today's southern writers, *home* may have multiple locations—in the contours of a vanishing South whose borders are always on the verge of fading completely and in a renewed sense of the complex relation between geography and identity. The artistic process described in Lillian Hellman's memoir *Pentimento* (1973) may best characterize the contemporary South and its ever-mutating body of literature. Pentimento is the effect created in a painting when the outline of an old stroke, which had been covered, shows through the new picture that has been painted over it. The new must itself begin to fade before the traces of old strokes can be discerned. This process of fading produces not one but multiple pictures in the same painting. Such art, according to Hellman, becomes "a way of seeing and then seeing again." Similarly, for many contemporary southern writers of the past sixty years, there remains a complex vision of a past always emerging in relation to the present—a present that itself is always in the process of fading to reveal the contours of the past. As it enters the twenty-first century, that body of writing we call southern literature has thus become self-transforming, never ceasing to reinvent itself on the large and multilayered canvas of past, present, and future.

days at the University of North Carolina in the 1920s, Green had been fascinated by the story of Walter Raleigh's colonists who vanished from Roanoke Island leaving no clue as to their fate, and early in 1937 he went to work on a script.

The script turned out to be not a historical pageant but a new kind of historical play suited for production before large audiences outdoors. Pageants are chronicles, with events following one another as historical chronology, not dramatic necessity, dictates. They have no characters in a dramatic sense but only representations of historical figures. And to a substantial degree, their impact depends on large casts, bright colors, loud noises, and other elements of stage spectacle. Although it makes direct use of historical material, *The Lost Colony,* by contrast, is unmistakably a play, a well-formed dramatic work with points of interest appropriate to a drama. Its characters are suitably developed, with two of them, John Borden and Eleanor Dare, emerging as representatives of the collective hero of the piece: the common people of the land. The characters carry forward a plot made coherent and significant by the play's theme. And the play's structure, episodic rather than tightly knit, focused on action rather than introspection, and including music, dance, a narrator, and other direct acknowledgments of the audience, makes it well suited for outdoor performance.

Thematically, *The Lost Colony* shows the development of a new kind of society on these western shores, a society different in structure and values from English society, indeed from European society generally. Old-World societies were rigidly stratified, with rank an inherited, not an earned commodity. And one's rank was always an underlying factor, frequently the determining factor, through the range of life's experiences, from general matters such as sense of self-worth to particular matters such as where one might live, whom one might marry, and what occupation one might enter. That is how *The Lost Colony* depicts English society in the time of the first Elizabeth, as hierarchical in structure, with individuals locked into their station by birth, and power always flowing down from above.

The opposite and distinctively American social ideal is the one that Green shows developing on Roanoke Island. In colonial and early republican days, when the memory of stratified European societies was still fresh, the principle was called "equality of condition." Based on a belief in the intrinsic worth of individuals, equality is fundamental to a democratic way of life, and Green used *The Lost Colony* to celebrate the discovery of this core value in American experience. The play works to that end by showing how frontier conditions in America broke down European class distinctions between serf, peasant, yeoman, and nobleman (social distinctions between men and women, too) and placed all citizens on a level playing field in the game of life.

Old Tom, a clownish but important character, illustrates the development. In England, he had no social position and therefore neither self-respect nor influence and responsibility. On Roanoke Island, frontier conditions quickly dispel all position-derived notions of worth and place a premium on individual qualities of imagination, energy, and social responsibility. In those conditions, Tom earns the respect of his fellow colonists. And on guard duty near the end of the play, he articulates a newly emerging sense of himself. It is night, and a younger man, exhausted, accepts Tom's offer to stand watch for him with a word of thanks and a promise that "You will be remembered." As Tom reflects on the remark, he makes a clear distinction between *there* and *here,* England and Roanoke, and the different results in individual development: "I will be remembered. I hope not. There in England all remembered me—aye, with kicks and curses and a terrible usage of tongues they did. Hah-hah-hah. And deep I drowned my sorrows in the mug. But here, where there is no remembrance, I who was lately nothing am become somebody. For—item—have I not now the keeping of some sixty souls in my care—I who could never care for me own? Verily, Tom, I hardly know thee in thy greatness. (Saluting the air.) Roanoke, thou hast made a man of me."

Laurence G. Avery

See also Outdoor Drama.

Laurence G. Avery, *A Southern Life: Letters of Paul Green, 1916–1981* (1994); William Free and Charles Lower, *History into Drama: A Source Book on Symphonic Drama* (1963); William S. Powell, *Paradise Preserved: A History of the Roanoke Island Historical Association* (1965).

LOUISIANA, LITERATURE OF

Louisiana has always been exceptional as a southern state: its colonial origins were more French and Catholic than the Anglo and Protestant roots of other states; its politics and culture were shaped as much by its cosmopolitan port as by the plantation culture that typi-

cally dominated the region. Even the Civil War did not mark the state as definitively as elsewhere: the sentiment for secession was lukewarm, New Orleans and the river fell under Union control early, and few significant battles were fought within its boundaries. Louisiana's literature bears the traces of that exceptionality. The earliest writing was in French (and Spanish), and when English finally came to be the principal tongue in the mid-nineteenth century, the exotic flavors of Gallic and Caribbean culture lingered palpably.

The French established the colony with a fort on the Red River near Natchitoches in 1714 and then, four years later, established the more successful settlement of New Orleans on the Mississippi. The Spanish controlled the territory after 1762; however, neither the French nor the Spanish were ever able to make Louisiana a profitable possession, a fact that helps to explain its eventual quick sale by Napoleon to the United States in 1803. There were, of course, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many official and semi-official descriptions of the Lower Mississippi Valley, both in French and in Spanish, including Cabeza de Vaca's *Relation* (1542), Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758), André Penicaut's fascinating *Relation,* and Jean-Bernard Bossu's *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes Occidentales* (1768). The letters and accounts of the Ursuline nuns' 1727 arrival in the colony by Marie St. Augustin de Tranchepain (*Relation du voyages des premières Ursulines à la Nouvelle Orléans,* 1859) provide a unique early perspective by women (many of these French accounts were collected by Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et établissements des français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale (1614–1754),* 1876–1886). Travel narratives about the state continued to appear throughout the next century, including such well-known works as Harriet Martineau's *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838) and more obscure but equally interesting accounts, like Elisée Reclus's astute 1853 commentary on slavery and the Americanization of the culture, "Fragments du voyage à la Nouvelle-Orléans," which appeared in an 1860 Parisian journal, *Le Tour du Monde.*

Nearly a century passed before colonial residents produced more conventional kinds of literary art. Julien Poydras de Lallande, a native of Brittany, who became a merchant and planter in Pointe Coupee Parish across the river from the outpost of Baton Rouge, is credited with the first published work of poetry in the Louisiana territory. Two anonymous poems (1777) in praise of the Spanish governor Bernardo de Galvez are attributed to him as well as his equally occasional "La Prise du Morne du Baton Rouge" (1779), two hundred and seven lines on the capture of the bluffs of Baton Rouge. Somewhat more interesting is Louisiana's first extant drama, *La Fête du Petit-Blé, ou L'Héroisme de Poucha-houmma* (The Festival of the Young Corn, or the Heroism of Poucha-Houmma), staged in 1809 and printed in New Orleans in 1814. Its elderly author, Paul Louis Le Blanc de Villeneufve, had been an officer of the French army who had spent much of his career among the Choctaw people, whom he greatly admired. Based on an event in the early 1750s, his "tragedy in five acts" couples a stiffly neoclassic form with a romanticized view of the noble savage, but it also incorporates knowledgeable details of native life.

But while these works claim the honors as Louisiana's earliest published literature, the oral tradition was developing its own rich contribution to the state's literary ethos. Creole folk songs and tales, incorporating and often blending elements of African folklore with French, German, Indian, Caribbean, and other disparate sources, were an early reflection of the profound ethnic diversity that has characterized Louisiana's people since very early in its history. Because the primitive conditions and malarial climate made the colony unattractive to French settlers, many of the early inhabitants were largely involuntary: prisoners, vagabonds, and prostitutes impressed from the streets of France, together with African slaves, the first load of five hundred arriving in 1719. They were eventually joined by German farmers and successive waves of Acadian exiles from Nova Scotia after 1763, whose culture became extremely influential throughout the south-central parts of the state. Significant numbers of settlers from British colonies also ventured into French Louisiana, as well as groups from Spain and Haiti—and always, a continuing stream of slaves from Africa and the West Indies. The relative lenience regarding private emancipations in the French *Code Noir* (the "black code" regulating the lives of black people, whether free or slave) also helped to create a large and fairly prosperous population of free people of color—*les gens de couleur libre*—nearly 1,300 in New Orleans by 1803. Later in the nineteenth century, this diverse population were joined by large groups of Irish and Italian immigrants, as well as many more of "les Américains," both from upriver and from the more Anglicized South, who made their own impact on the state's language and culture. Henry Clay Lewis, writing in the Southwest-humor tradition as Madison Ten-

sas, contributed his versions of frontier Louisiana in *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* (1843) and *The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the Southwest* (1858). Less amusingly, Solomon Northup, a free black man who was abducted from Saratoga, New York, and sold in New Orleans to a Red River planter, provided in *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) a unique account of Louisiana's dreaded plantations "down the river."

Drawing upon and blending all this rich mix of cultures, the folk literature of Louisiana acquired an attractively exotic cast. Songs in the unique French patois of the Acadians and in the "gombo" French spoken by many blacks continued to circulate throughout the century. Both songs and stories were frequently collected in period anthologies, such as *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867), but they also regularly appeared in local periodicals such as *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane,* the first newspaper in the colony (founded by Louis Duclot in 1794) and *L'Abeille* (*The Bee,* a bilingual newspaper that lasted nearly a century, 1827–1923). This folk material, often in an exotic (and disappearing) language, became important inspiration for later writers such as George Washington Cable, Lafcadio Hearn, Sidonie de la Houssaye, Grace King, and Alcée Fortier, all of whom also collected this material as well. Fortier's numerous publications, including *Louisiana Folk-Tales, in French Dialect and English Translation* (1894), remain important and influential resources, as does Hearn's *Gombo Zhebes: A Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs* (1885) and *Réminiscences Acadiennes* (1907), a collection of tales gathered by Felix Voorhies, a St. Martinville judge.

But the coming of *les Américains* and their English to the tenaciously Francophile culture of Louisiana provided the real spur to French literature. In the nineteenth century, there were as many as 133 French-language newspapers and journals in New Orleans and 152 more in the parishes (or counties), producing a generous market for stories and poems. Edward LaRoque Tinker lists several hundred French authors in his bio-bibliography, *Les Ecrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIX*^e^ *siècle* (1932). Among the most interesting were the poets and writers who had begun publishing their work in *L'Album Littéraire: Journal des Jeunes Gens, Amateurs de la Littérature!* Founded in 1843 by Armand Lanusse and J. L. Marciacq, *L'Album* was the first literary publication by free people of color in Louisiana, established just when racial prejudice increasingly threatened their free status. Two years later, *Les Cenelles* appeared, a landmark anthology of poems by Creoles of color. Among the seventeen writers represented were Camille Thierry, Joanni Questy (whose work includes a serialized novella, *Monsieur Paul,* 1867) and Victor Séjour, who later achieved considerable fame as a playwright in Paris. The most famous (white) poets of the era were the Rouquette brothers, Dominique and Adrien. Dominique, the elder, locally notorious for his derelict habits, published two volumes of romantic poetry that were highly praised in the French press, *Les Meschacebéennes* ("the Mississippians") (1839) and *Les Fleurs d'Amérique* (1857). Likewise influenced by French romanticism, Adrien eventually became a priest and was well known for his work among the Choctaw in St. Tammany Parish. The published works of "L'Abbé Rouquette" include several volumes of nature poetry and an idyll of Indian life, *La Nouvelle Atala* (1879).

Foremost among the French novelists were Albert Mercier and Sidonie de la Houssaye. Mercier, a Paris-trained physician who was born in New Orleans, composed poems and plays and was a founder of the French literary club L'Athénée Louisianais (1875) and editor of *Comptes rendus de l'Athénée Louisianais* (1876), both of which were major forces in keeping alive Louisiana's French literature and language—at the very moment when the social upheavals of the Civil War and Reconstruction were making that struggle patently futile. Of Mercier's six novels, the most interesting is *L'Habitation Saint-Ybars, ou Maitres et Esclaves en Louisiane* (St.-Ybars Plantation, or Masters and Slaves in Louisiana) (1881), a detailed account of slave society from his youth. Sidonie de la Houssaye (née Hélène Perret, whose nom de plume was Louise Raymond) is perhaps best known as having provided Cable with some materials for his *Strange and True Stories of Louisiana* (1889). Her *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1894–1895), a group of four novels, some of which were published serially, develop a complexly eroticized version of the popular quadroon stereotype. *Pouponne et Balthazar* (1888) purports to give a true rendition of Evangeline, a continuing preoccupation in Louisiana ever since Longfellow had created her fictional odyssey.

The struggle to maintain French language and culture in the face of an inevitable American victory elicited a final flurry of Francophone literature in Louisiana after the Civil War, including many writers of substance, such as Charles Testut, Charles Gayarré, Albert Delpit, and Alcée Fortier. But it was in English that

the full flowering of Louisiana literature finally occurred. Not surprisingly, much of its cachet for the rest of the nation derived precisely from Louisiana's fascinating culture conflicts. Certainly, the first major American writer of Louisiana founded his career on an insightful use of those frictions. George Washington Cable was a native of New Orleans and a keen observer of Louisiana culture, but his critical perspectives on Creole life, which he made an emblem of the defeated South, did not endear him to this threatened and defensive society. His collection of short stories *Old Creole Days* (1879), together with his superb novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), established Creole culture as a major locus for exploring America's simmering struggle with race and racism. Like *Bonaventure* (1888), which offered an early and engaging portrait of Acadian life (which Kate Chopin also chronicled with great success), Cable's fiction established Louisiana as a valuable source of local color, a popular genre of the 1880s and 1890s.

Many of the important Louisiana writers of the era capitalized on the national, especially northern, fascination with regional difference. The Greek-born Lafcadio Hearn, for example, was drawn to New Orleans from Cincinnati in 1877 by Cable's stories. Like Cable, he was fascinated by Creole culture and language, in which he immersed himself. He wrote numerous newspaper sketches, collected as *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (1884), as well as a hauntingly beautiful meditation on a hurricane that devastated the Louisiana coast, *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* (1889). In 1887 Hearn left New Orleans for Japan and later became well known for his stories of Japanese life.

Cable's influence on Grace King was also strong, though in a very different way. Her writing career was launched in response to a challenge by a visiting northern editor, Richard Gilder, to "correct" Cable's version of Creole culture, which, as one of its adherents, she too viewed as one-sided. A subtle prose stylist, King's best work is evident in her fine collections of short fiction, such as *Balcony Stories* (1893) or *The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard* (1916). She also exhibits an impressive range, writing extensively and passionately about Louisiana's colorful history, as in *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (1895), and rather more coolly about her own life in *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (1932).

Like Hearn, Kate Chopin was not a Louisiana native, but she married one and lived in the state for more than a decade. Her first novel, *At Fault* (1890), portrays the social and psychological shifts that accompanied the economic transformations of rural Louisiana after the Civil War. Her stunning short fiction, gathered in two published volumes, *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897)—as well as in the uncollected stories included in the *Complete Works*, 1969—provide unmatched portraits of Louisiana life and character, especially among the rural 'Cadians (or Cajuns). These remained the substance of her reputation until the critical recovery in the 1970s of her extraordinary second novel, *The Awakening* (1899), established her as a major realist and a provocative explicator of women's experience, surpassing even Cable in literary reputation.

More famous in her own time, especially for her humor, was Ruth McEnery Stuart, who like Chopin found a rich fictional vein in Louisiana's diverse cultures. Stuart's many short stories and novellas capture a range of ethnic types and dialects, particularly among African Americans, and perhaps least patronizingly in her novella, *Napoleon Jackson* (1902). Stuart was one of the few prominent southern women to support suffrage publicly, and some of her most interesting writing features rural women, as in *In Simpkinsville* (1897) and *The Woman's Exchange of Simpkinsville* (1899), which draws on her experiences in southern Arkansas.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson is another important writer who exploited the national taste for local color. Herself a New Orleanian and a Creole of color, Dunbar-Nelson wrote both poetry and short stories, collected in *Violets and Other Tales* (1895) and in *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* (1899). Though her early work treads lightly upon the color line that might have kept it out of print in the emerging days of Jim Crow, she later became an outspoken proponent of the rights of African Americans and of women. Her journalism and extensive diaries provide a remarkable record of an activist's life in the early twentieth century.

The presence of so many excellent writers in Louisiana in this period rightly implies a great deal of literary activity. Among the many productive writers of the era were poet and short-story writer Molly E. Moore Davis; poet and publisher Eliza Jane Poitevent Nicholson; poets Mary Ashley Townsend ("Xariffa") and Martha Field ("Catherine Cole"); novelists Jeannette Walworth and Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore; and journalist Elizabeth Gilmer, who as "Dorothy Dix" wrote the first and longest-running newspaper advice column in America.

By the end of the century, the nation's interest in its distinctive "local" cultures had given way to more international ambitions and the sharper definitions that literary realism offered. Louisiana and its literature had pretty much resigned itself to Americanization, and while the state's idiosyncratic, exotic image remained intact, it became less useful to writers. By the end of World War I, the exploitation of the state's vast mineral resources began to alter the state's primarily agricultural economy. The populist rise of Huey Long, with his innovative plans for the poor and his reliance on longstanding patterns of political corruption, further jolted the state toward modernity. New Orleans's French Quarter, with its inexpensive housing and seductive ambience, soon became an agreeable, if mostly temporary, refuge for artists and writers, including the likes of Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Thomas Wolfe, and many others. As at Vanderbilt, the focus for literary activity was a progressive new magazine—in this case, *The Double Dealer.* Among its contributors were Roark Bradford and Lyle Saxon, who also figured prominently in contemporary interpretations of black culture. Bradford, a newspaperman originally from Tennessee, based much of his fiction on black folklore, including *Old Man Adam an' His Chillun'* (1928), on which Marc Connelly based his Pulitzer Prize–winning play *Green Pastures* (1930). Partly responding to the energy of the Harlem Renaissance, the era produced many such popular versions of black life by white southerners, including Edward Laroque Tinker's *Toucoutou* (1928), a fictionalization of a nineteenth-century incident of "passing" for white by a Creole of color.

A native of Baton Rouge, Lyle Saxon played a major role in the literary community of the 1920s and 1930s. His only novel, *Children of Strangers* (1937), examines the tensions of mixed races in rural Louisiana and was based on the history of Isle Brevelle, a unique community of free people of color along the Cane River. Nearby was Melrose Plantation, where Saxon often stayed and whose owner, Cammie Henry, had created a lively artists' colony in the 1920s and 1930s. Among the many writers who frequented Melrose were Ada Jack Carver, author of a number of prize-winning short stories and plays about Cajun life in the 1920s; nature writer and activist Caroline Dormon; popular historian Harnett Kane; and Gwen Bristow, who also lived for some time in New Orleans and published many well-regarded novels with Louisiana settings, including her plantation trilogy: *Deep Summer* (1937), *The Handsome Road* (1938), and *This Side of Glory* (1940).

The continuing attraction of Louisiana folklore and history between the wars is also evident in the considerable nonfiction of the era, including Saxon's *Father Mississippi* (1927) and *Fabulous New Orleans* (1928). As state director of the Federal Writers' Project, Saxon edited both the state and New Orleans WPA Guides, along with *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* (1945), which he wrote with Robert Tallant, author of *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1946). An often-unacknowledged collaborator in these landmark volumes was Marcus Christian, the supervisor of the all-Negro Writers' Project in Louisiana. Frequently critical of the shortcomings in these white southerners' research, Christian was himself a serious folklorist and a prolific poet, though most of his nearly 1,200 poems remain unpublished.

Louisiana's colorful past also remained serviceable to writers of historical romance, most notably Frances Parkinson Keyes, who restored and lived for many years in the Beauregard House in the French Quarter. With careful attention to historic and physical detail, Keyes wrote more than fifty religious biographies, travel narratives, and novels, most famously, *Dinner at Antoine's* (1948). While the state's exoticism seemed unsuited to the seriousness of most modernist fiction, two dramatists did effectively exploit the state's mythic potential. Tennessee Williams, who after a 1938 visit became a semipermanent resident of New Orleans, composed his most famous play there. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), *Vieux Carré* (1979), and other plays, Williams forged lasting images of the city as a refuge of illusion and desire in an otherwise blankly puritanical landscape. As a native, Lillian Hellman's view of New Orleans was somewhat less romantic, but much of her most successful work draws effectively on southern settings, particularly her best-known play, *The Little Foxes* (1939), and her remarkable three-volume memoir, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973), and *Scoundrel Time* (1976).

After World War II, with the state's petrochemical boom in full sway, Louisiana fiction began to reflect the more general southern consciousness of modern alienation and the tumultuous civil-rights struggles ahead. Robert Penn Warren, who taught at Louisiana State University and helped to found the *Southern Review* (another timely journal that fostered literary excellence in the state), based his gripping political novel, *All the*

King's Men (1947), on the disturbing career of Huey Long. Many of his poems and other fiction, especially his 1955 novel *Band of Angels,* reveal the state's powerful effects on his imagination. Shirley Ann Grau's work likewise concerns the struggles of white people to come to terms with racism and political power. In addition to her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Keepers of the House* (1965), Grau's fiction includes *The Black Prince and Other Stories* (1955), *The House on Coliseum Street* (1961), and *Nine Women* (1985).

Perhaps the most profound fictional meditations on modern alienation have come from Walker Percy. Born in Alabama to a prominent Mississippi family, Percy lived much of his life in Covington, across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans. His first novel, *The Moviegoer* (1965), is a quintessential evocation both of contemporary ennui and of suburban New Orleans. Percy's other novels are equally dark and funny, including *The Last Gentleman* (1967), *Love in the Ruins* (1971), and *Lancelot* (1977). Percy was also responsible for the posthumous publication of John Kennedy Toole's riotously sardonic novel about New Orleans, *A Confederacy of Dunces,* which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1980.

Another important Louisiana writer who came to prominence in the 1970s is Ernest Gaines. Rather than New Orleans, Gaines's fictional center is Pointe Coupee, a rural, largely Cajun parish not far from Baton Rouge. Gaines has created a rich tapestry of black life and the struggle for dignity in his many short stories and novels, including *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), and *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993).

The 1960s in Louisiana, as in the rest of the South, provoked profound and painful shifts in race relations. For black writers, these shifts seemed to demand a more engaged artistic practice. Tom Dent, son of the president of Dillard University in New Orleans, was a major force in organizing a series of workshops and journals in the 1960s and 1970s that helped to define this new black aesthetic. Beginning in December 1968 with the Free Southern Theater (succeeded by BLKARTSOUTH and the Congo Square Writers Workshop) and publications *Nkombo* (coedited by Kalamu ya Salaam), *Bamboula,* and the *Black River Journal,* Dent worked to provide both a focus and a vehicle for New Orleans's experimental black writers. His own publications include collections of poetry, *Magnolia Street* (1972) and *Blue Lights and River Songs* (1982), and several plays. Among the most iconoclastic of these Louisiana writers is Ishmael Reed, who links his fictional aesthetic to the syncretism of voodoo, as in his novels *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974). Among the essays in *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans* (1989), Reed also offers some correctives to white accounts of black urban folklore.

The Free Southern Theater and its successors were critical to the more inclusive, redefined Louisiana literature that has emerged at the end of the century. Not only African Americans but Acadians and others sought to reincorporate the state's distinct languages and cultural idioms too often diminished by their own exoticism. Sybil Kein, for example, worked thoughtfully to preserve and recreate Creole (Afro-French) language and folklore. Her poetry, collected in *Gombo People* (1981) and *Delta Dancer* (1984), is pointedly bilingual. Even more successful in drawing on the unique rhythms and motifs of black Louisiana, especially its women, is Brenda Marie Osbey. In four impressive volumes (*Ceremony for Minneconjoux,* 1983; *In These Houses,* 1988; *Desperate Circumstance, Dangerous Woman,* 1991; and *All Saints,* 1997), Osbey intricately weaves an array of voices and experiences that mirror the complexity of Louisiana's multiethnic past and present. Pinkie Gordon Lane, a Philadelphian who taught for many years at Southern University in Baton Rouge, evokes a more lyric but no less distinctive sense of place in her poetry, as in *I Never Scream* (1985) and *Girl at the Window* (1991). Similarly, playwright Elizabeth Brown-Guillory incorporates the languages and customs of her own Cajun/Creole past in such social comedies as *Bayou Relics* (1983) and *Snapshots of Broken Dolls* (1986).

The complex inclusivity of contemporary Louisiana literature is perhaps best reflected in the work of Robert Olen Butler. A native of Illinois who migrated to the oil-and-gas town of Lake Charles, Butler's Pulitzer Prize-winning fiction most memorably details the lives of modern Vietnamese immigrants, who found South Louisiana's climate and agricultural economy comfortably familiar. Butler's stories in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1994) and *Tabloid Dreams* (1996) sharply expose the unsettling strangeness produced by merging cultures. That strangeness, however, is what has always been attractive about Louisiana to writers—whether elicited by a fresh look at the past or the fresh looks of new settlers.

A host of highly talented fiction writers have exploited such opportunities for revisiting the state's imaginative resources. James Lee Burke, for example,

makes provocative use of Louisiana culture with a popular Cajun detective in novels such as *The Neon Rain* (1987) and *Heaven's Prisoners* (1988). Anne Rice's tales of eroticized violence have also proved immensely popular, especially her many vampire novels, beginning with *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), although she also explores nineteenth-century Creole society in *Feast of All Saints* (1979). Contemporary New Orleans society also attracts many novelists, most notably Ellen Gilchrist, who is best known for her wry exposure of the emptiness of the upper-class characters in her stories and novels, such as *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams* (1981) or *The Annunciation* (1983). Sheila Bosworth, Andrei Codrescu, Joyce and John William Corrington, Moira Crone, Andre Dubus, Richard Ford, Tim Gautreaux, Nancy Lemann, David Madden, Valerie Martin, Fatima Shaik, and Chris Wiltz are among the many writers whose fiction continues to refine our view of this eclectic place. Although few authors write exclusively about the city, the near-anomaly of John Dufresne's witty 1994 novel, *Louisiana Power and Light,* set in the underexploited fictional territory of North Louisiana, does suggest just how fully New Orleans and the southern half of the state continue to dominate Louisiana's literary self-image.

Poetry has also attracted a number of extremely able contemporary artists, many of them nurtured by the small journals that were founded in the early 1970s: the *New Orleans Poetry Journal* (edited by Maxine Cassin), *Outsider* (which published many "beat" poets), the *New Laurel Review,* and the university journals—Loyola's *New Orleans Review* (founded by John William Corrington and Miller Williams), the *Xavier Review,* and the more recent *Louisiana Literature* of Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. In addition to Osbey and Lane, the best-known poets include Ralph Adamo, Alvin Aubert, Catharine Brosman, Maxine Cassin, Debbie Clifton, Alice Claudel, Peter Cooley, Quo Vadis Gex-Breaux, Lee Meitzen Grue, Cleopatra Mathis, Sue Owen, Mona Lisa Saloy, and finally, Yusef Komunyakaa, whose powerful reflections on his Vietnam War experiences as well as his Bogalusa youth appear in collections such as *Dien Cai Dau* (1988) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning volume, *Neon Vernacular* (1993). As at the end of the last century, the conclusion of the twentieth finds Louisiana's literature as rich and varied as ever.

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See also Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Cajun Literature; Creole Literature; Dialect Literature; *Double Dealer, The*; Federal Writers' Project; Free Southern Theater; Fugitives, The; Local Color; Long, Huey; New Orleans, Louisiana; *New Orleans Times Picayune*; Novel, 1820 to 1865; Popular Literature; *Southern Review*; Travel Literature.

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LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Chartered in 1853, LSU opened its doors in Pineville on January 2, 1860, as the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy. William Tecumseh Sherman, who later achieved fame as a Union general during the Civil War, was the school's first superintendent. In 1870, after relocating to Baton Rouge, the institution became Louisiana State University. Louisiana State Agricultural and Mechanical College was established by an act of the state legislature, approved on April 7, 1874, to carry out the United States Morrill Act of 1862, granting lands for this purpose. Temporarily opening in New Orleans in 1874, the A and M College merged with Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge in 1877. LSU became coeducational in 1906.

Beginning in the 1930s, LSU acquired, founded, and, in some cases, lost branch campuses. The LSU System was formed in 1965. LSU currently has the status of both a land-grant and a sea-grant university.

Prior to World War II, LSU had a strong tradition in languages and literature, although it was more widely known as the "Old War Skule" because of the military training that was a required part of the curriculum for male students, and for its agricultural research and football teams. Instruction in classical and modern languages and literatures was at the core of its nineteenth-