

From the South as the Abjected Regional Other to Kaleidoscopic Souths

The American South has never been a homogenous concept yet there exists, according to W. J. Cash, “a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity” (xlvi). In the 1993 inaugural issue of *Southern Cultures* Harry Watson and John Shelton Reed claimed in “The Front Porch” that “although it may be said that there is one South, there are also many Souths, and many cultural traditions among them ... There is one South spawned by its many cultures” (1993). Yet, up until the late nineteenth century southern writers tried to evoke an image of their region based on “slavery, mocking birds, hominy grits and Bourbon whisky” (Lawson 47). By eliminating from literature any experience which contradicted their own (e.g. of poor whites, African Americans, women, immigrants, and others), white southern writers tried to create a monolithic image of the patriarchal South. Such a partial projected image was of course reductive in nature, as the South has always been a union of opposites – such as “calm grace and raw hatred, polished manners and violence, individualism and conformism” (Holman 1). Indeed, such opposites inspired various twentieth-century writers to reflect on differing dimensions of the region. Writers such as Flannery O’Connor, William Faulkner, Carson McCullers and Barry Hannah employed alternative modes of representation (southern gothic, grotesque, irony, black humor, to name a few). Harry Crews and Dorothy Allison visualized the poor white existence in southern letters. Racial struggles and the issue of passing were memorably depicted by Charles Chesnutt. Tennessee Williams’, Reynolds Price’s, and Charles Nelson’s texts show how the South perceived and dealt with masculinity and homosexuality. Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full* depicted immigrants as the Other. Writers seek the Caribbean connection by re-positioning the South in the global discourse. Asian and Latino diasporas below the Mason and Dixon line are becoming more visible and vocal. The southern landscape has also lured television producers, and such varied TV shows as *True Blood*, *Treme*, *American Horror Story*, *Walking Dead* and *True Detective* have attracted huge audiences.

The present themed issue of *Polish Journal for American Studies* devoted to the study of “Other Souths on Page and Screen” does not seek a holistic image of the South, because, to quote Hugh Holman again, “[e]ach of these monistic concepts is true within its own limits, and each is false as a picture of the entire region. For each of these concepts has been an attempt to bind together a heterogeneous land and a varied people through the application of a Procrustean model made of monistic and simplistic – although often highly sophisticated – generalizations” (97). Keeping in mind the inexhaustibility and complexity of the South as a region, the special issue of *PJAS* aims to reexamine and reassess the image of Other Souths presented in literature, cinematography and popular culture. The contributors to this issue grapple with a land spanning from Appalachia to the Delta, from the Tidewater to the Sunbelt, a land which is equally fraught with history and as it is with mythology.

The relationship between the United States and the American South, its most exceptional region, has always been complicated. It was shaped by various economic, historical and political factors, but what

remains constant across U.S. history is the conceptual structure provided to us by our South: it is an *internal other* for the nation, an intrinsic part of the national body that nonetheless is differentiated and held apart from the whole. On the one hand, the United States simply never would have existed without the five southernmost of its original thirteen states ... On the other hand, our South in its most enduring associations – slavery, white supremacy, underdevelopment, poverty, backwardness – bluntly contradicts the national ideal. (Greeson, *Our South* 1)

The South looms as a projection of Northern imagining. The idea of the South was imagined in nation-building through various regional fantasies. The South became “the negative reference point” in the formation of a national identity (Cobb 4). James Cobb also explains that the “inclination both to make invidious comparisons between the South and the North and to see the latter as the normative standard for the entire nation dated back well before the civil rights era to the earliest days of American independence” (4). The South thus becomes the aberrant Other, while the Nation at large is the norm. Such “othering” of the South illustrates a discursive process by which, according to French geographer J.F. Staszak, “a dominant in-group (‘Us,’ the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (‘Them,’ the Other) by stigmatizing a difference real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (43). Such a process is clearly based on an asymmetrical power distribution: only the dominant group can impose identity, the out-group is at the receiving end of the othering process (Staszak 43). The choice of others tells us as much about the abjected group as about the identity of “Us”/the self, since “[o]therness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa” (Staszak 43). Thus, when “one understands the South as the negation of America ... one is also likely to understand more deeply what America is, and what it is (or ought to be), in particular, is the opposite of the South” (Griffin 67).

The American South was shaped by its economic dependence on chattel slavery, the cultural impact of Africans, the Civil War, Reconstruction, forced and voluntary Black migrations, the persistence of Jim Crow, and – most recently – shifting immigration patterns, and “the New Jim Crow” of mass incarceration, to use Michelle Alexander’s phrase. Despite those historical changes, “[o]n the one hand, the South is rightfully and naturally ours because it is part of the United States” claims Jennifer Rae Greeson; “on the other hand, it is ours in subjection or thrall because it is apart from the United States” (*Our South* 9). In each historical period the South became a screen onto which writers projected their various concerns about the nation.¹ Since the

1 “In the early republic, ‘the Plantation South’ serves writers negotiating nationalization itself; in the antebellum decades, ‘the Slave South’ provides the baseline against which industrialization and continental expansion are conceived; and in the latter part of the nineteenth century, ‘the Reconstruction South’ becomes the imaginative field for writers confronting the question of empire head-on” (Greeson, *Our South* 13).

South is central to the evolving idea of the nation, it has always been hailed by some and despised by others.

America's defining features, sentiments and fears found their most extreme manifestations in the South, which is a region blighted with unspeakable poverty and great wealth, gratuitous violence and devout piety, prevalent racism and benign paternalism. By projecting their anxieties onto southern culture white Americans, as it were, quarantined below the Mason-Dixon line their sentiments which could (not so) potentially harm their fragile self-image/ self-fashioning. At the same time Yankees could live vicariously observing the South from the distance of both their homes and the moral high-ground. Having whitewashed their own racist sentiments some Yankees could deny their own guilty conscience and detach themselves from the regional "Other." Through ascribing extreme manifestations of America's imperatives to the southern states Americans not only could distance themselves from the abjected regional "Other," but also they could, if they chose to, demonstrate that the backward region could be domesticated and integrated.

Jennifer Rae Greeson also argues that "[w]ith remarkable fluidity, 'our South' aligns with and diverges from 'the United States' writ large, creating a symbiotic *ideological juxtaposition* in which each term is defined by reference to the other" (*Our South* 1).² As a result of this "us versus them" dichotomy southerners "traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to a presumed American norm," and consequently they became the aberrant version of the norm (Hackney 287). Yet with new analytical angles which encompass a multitude of theoretical approaches and methodological interventions,³ the revisionist spirit broadens the analytical perspective of the South as the abjected Other to the South in relation to other regions in the USA (not just the North), to the Americas, or to the Global South. The act of imagining connections and disruptions repositions the South in configurations not pictured before. Recent theoretical reconfigurations of the South allow us to see new alignments, which open doors to multiple articulations of the South.

The present issue of *Polish Journal for American Studies* offers a critical voice in the debate about the American South and Southern studies. Contributors to this issue explore "Other Souths" which supplement, compete with, or even at times contradict each other. Such often overlapping cultural and symbolic contexts can inform us about the complexity of the region which in itself has become, according to Tara McPherson, "a point of condensation for various regional and national narratives

2 Jennifer Rae Greeson also argues that "the nationalization of the United States was built in part upon an intranational, regionally-inflected symbolic geography" structured on the "ideological juxtaposition" to the American South ("The Figure of the South" 210).

3 The most recent interventions of New Southern studies include, among many others, Jon Smith, *Finding Purple America: The South and the Future of American Cultural Studies*, 2013; Keith Cartwright, *Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways: Travels in Deep Southern Time, Circum-Caribbean Space, Afro-Creole Authority*, 2013; Eric Gary Anderson, Taylor Hagood, and Daniel Cross Turner, eds. *Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond*, 2015. Brook Thomas, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Not in Plain Black and White*. 2017; Lisa Hinrichsen, Gina Caison, and Stephanie Rountree, eds. *Small-Screen Souths: Region, Identity, and the Cultural Politics of Television*, 2017; Michele Grigsby Coffey and Jodi Skipper, ed. *Navigating Souths: Transdisciplinary Explorations of a U.S. Region*, 2017; and Meredith McCarrroll, *Unwhite: Appalachia, Race, and Film*, 2018.

of place, race, and gender” (18). In a sense *Other Souths on Page and Screen* offers a critical reflection on kaleidoscopic Souths. Much like bits of colored glass in a shifting symmetrical geometric design, the topics analyzed on the following pages reflect the intricate design of the Southern imaginary.⁴

Similarly to a kaleidoscope, the ever-changing and shifting images of the South amaze scholars and readers of the region. Objects in the kaleidoscope – bits of colored glass, pebbles, or beads – are never arranged exactly the same way twice. With each turn of the kaleidoscope tube, these objects will never be perfectly identical. When we look at the South through varying lenses, the elements of the South under analysis are realigned to form new articulations. Thus, the contributions to the present issue of *Polish Journal for American Studies* – be they about Appalachian and/or African American presence in the South, Hollywood infatuation with the South, or about (internal) conflicts and tensions in southern culture and literature – discuss issues which are not alien to Southernists; yet the originality and novelty of these contributions result from the realignment of angles and methodologies which explore the analytical potential of the American South. The concept of multiple reflections, the key to a kaleidoscope’s patterns, also captures the complexity of the South’s shifting, multiplying images which are best activated when informed by different discourses (e.g. critical race studies, rhetorical, critical regionalism, or literary genre studies).⁵

A few words are in order about the contours of “Other Souths on Page and Screen.” The contributors to this special issue of *PJAS* are Americanists and Southernists from Europe. Most of us have made the South a continued object of our research. More than half of us belong to the *Southern Studies Forum* (of *European Association for American Studies*), whose biennial conferences give us an opportunity to converse about things southern at various European universities. The rest of us have devoted our academic careers to studying American literature and culture, while making occasional academic excursions into southern territory. This special issue of *PJAS* is a meeting ground for European literary and cultural studies scholars, both tenure-track and early career researchers, who want to reconceptualize the American South in the fields of fiction, film, and other cultural manifestations.

The first part of this themed *PJAS* issue – “Appalachia and Beyond” – is dedicated to mapping Appalachia, which has always been perceived as “the South’s South” (Reed, *Southern Folk* 42). This section consists of two articles, both of which capture a powerful image of communities and livelihoods from the hills of the Ozarks, the Appalachian mountains, and adjacent islands. In “Appalachia as Trumpland: Honor,

4 I use the word imaginary as a noun after Charles Taylor for whom the term social imaginary “mean[t] something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go in between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underline these expectations” (*Modern Social Imaginaries* 23).

5 The theme of the Biennial Conference of *The Society for the Study of Southern Literature* in 2014 was “Other Souths: Approaches, Alliances, Antagonisms” (<https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/cfp/2013/03/05/sss1-biennial-conference-march-27-29-2014>). Since there is a number of Other Souths, neither the present volume nor the papers delivered at the SSSL conference in Arlington, Virginia exhaust the analytical potential of the American South.

Precarity, and Affect in Literature from the Mountain South Appalachia,” Marianne Kongerslev and Clara Juncker analyze the Grit Lit novels which depict the destitution and devastation of this region’s communities. In a sense these fictional portrayals – Wilma Dykeman’s *Family of Earth*, Breece D’J. Pancake’s *Stories*, and J. D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy* – illustrate Edgerton’s sarcastic remark that “[i]n the well-educated Northern imagination, the rural South is a vast, forbidding wasteland of poverty, prejudice, and despair.” Appalachia has been represented in national imaginary as the poorest, the most ignorant and the most preposterous community. It comes as no surprise that “critical stereotypes of Southerners [which] are (and always have been) part of the Northern DNA conflate a whole host of issues – white resentment, gun worship, religious fundamentalism, racism – and apply that uniformly to millions of people” (Edgerton). Indeed, Kongerslev and Juncker’s analysis confirms Appalachia’s legacy of disadvantage, but also points out the mountain folk’s particular relationship to the land and a distinctive sense of honor. Unfortunately, frustrated honor codes lead to anxiety, anger, and violence. Kongerslev and Juncker explain how rural folk mediate white liberal anxieties and contextualize why Trump voters were depicted as reactionary hillbillies. Interestingly enough, a few years prior to Trump’s election John O’Brien in his regional memoir *At Home in the Heart of Appalachia* captured the exploitation of Appalachia for political purposes: “One of my best friends told me that his father sometimes said that Appalachia had wheels on it. It rolled around the mountains, and like a traveling circus of hillbillies, stopped wherever the politicians wanted it to stop” (52).

In the second contribution, “Out of Eden: Old South, Post-South and Ur-South in Sara Taylor’s *The Shore*,” Marco Petrelli offers a stimulating analysis of Taylor’s harrowing debut novel through the prism of magical realism. The implementation of magic realist strategies in “Othered” cultures shows the experience of a threat of extinction and erasure in coastal cultures. Petrelli also sees the location of the novel – a group of lush, isolated islands off the coast of Virginia – as part of the aesthetic category of magical realism which gives voice to those silenced and excluded in the region but also in the family saga as well. Magic realism augments a southern “sense of place” in these offshore islands in a region long colonized and ignored. They are located at the edge of Appalachia – the already peripheral part of the South, the fringe space where nature is not only intimately connected with humans but also affected by them. Analyzing psycho-geographical and socio-historical dimensions allows Petrelli to arrive at the conclusion that the novel depicts “deep archetypal structure as an ‘Ur-South’: the most primeval and untainted (and therefore intrinsically regenerative) form of the southern pastoral myth.”

Part 2 – “The Hollywood South” – brings attention to the South’s richly documented flirtation with moving pictures.⁶ For years now American and international audiences have been flooded with a tsunami of large- and small-screen portrayals of

6 Book-length representations of the South in American cinema include (listed chronologically): Edward Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981; Warren French, ed. *The South and Film*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981; Larry Langman and David Ebner. *Hollywood’s Image of the South: A Century of Southern Films*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001; Deborah E. Barker and Kathryn McKee eds. *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

the South. Even historians, who do not work with movies as a source of historical material, realized that “millions of Americans have had their vision of the South, race relations, and even the entire panorama of our past shaped if not wholly defined by the movie business” (Clinton 204). Movie makers conjured up the kind of South that would “construct and ... unsettle national narratives” (Barker and McKee 1). Hence, the Hollywood film industry participated in the process of “othering” the American South. Movies featuring the “moonlight and magnolia South,” so popular at the beginning of the 20th century, were the antithesis to encroaching modernity, while the post WWII movies whitewashed their racial guilty conscience by presenting a “South populated by pitiful poor farmers, sadistic rednecks, sex objects, and greedy, ambitious members of a corrupt upper class” (Campbell 143). Regardless of its image – the sugarcoated or backwards, violent South – the region’s identity was used as the already mentioned “the negative reference point” in the formation of a national identity (Cobb 4). This process of cinematic “othering” bears similarity to David R. Jansson’s term “internal orientalism,” which implies that “representations of a degenerate South inform an exalted national identity” (293). If this “internal orientalism” is used to explain Hollywood’s exploitation of South’s “tales, myths, culture, and sometimes the great talents,” then the moviemaking-business becomes a “colonizer” of sorts who imposes “its own language and concerns on the southern raw material, feeling no particular obligation to ‘get it right’” (Cheshire).

Hollywood created its own version of the southern imaginary, which Barker and McKee see “as an amorphous and sometimes conflicting collection of images, ideas, attitudes, practices, linguistic accents, histories, and fantasies about a shifting geographic region and time” (1).⁷ The first contribution in this section – Marie Liénard-Yeterian’s article “Wither the South on Screen: Revisiting Some Recent Releases” – offers a contemplative look at the Other South on screen in the posthuman context. Her analysis of post-millennial films, such as *No Country for Old Men* (2007); *The Road* (2009); *Django Unchained* (2012); *The Counselor* (2013); *The Hateful Eight* (2015); *The Birth of a Nation* (2016); *The Beguiled* (2017), and *The Mule* (2018), demonstrates how Hollywood constructs the southern past and consequently how this imagined past shapes contemporary southern identity. Liénard-Yeterian’s informative analysis reveals that “contemporary aesthetics characterized by violence and human reification” rewrites the formulaic tropes of the southern imaginary. With the re-imagined plantation, the southern belle and gentleman, and historical events (Civil War), southern movies envision a better future through reworking of the haunted (racial) southern past.

The possibility of reworking the South’s past through Hollywood discourse about geography, whiteness and masculinity is also the subject of the next contribution. Peter Templeton’s article “James Stewart and the Changing Face of the Confederate in Mid-Twentieth Century Hollywood Cinema” analyzes two divergent depictions of the Confederate rebel, who synecdochally represents the Old South, in two movies

7 The imaginary South does not necessarily overlap with the geographical region. In fact southern imaginary on the big screen “is not contained by the boundaries of geography and genre; it is not an offshoot or subgenre of mainstream American film but is integral to the history and the development of American cinema” (Barker and McKee 1).

Winchester '73 (1950) and *Shenandoah* (1965). In an illuminating way Templeton writes about the changes in the presentation of the Old South and the Lost Cause in Hollywood cinema. He points out that Hollywood movies reach into the historical past for source material, an opinion which echoes C. Vann Woodward's claim that the key element in the development of the South's identity is its history, or "the collective experience of the Southern people" (16). Interestingly, Templeton does not search these two movies for historical evidence; he is, rather, interested in the general moods and anxieties which are indirectly revealed at a moment of historical changes, such as the tumultuous Civil Rights Movement. He concludes that Hollywood movies "bring with them contemporary interpretations and the concerns of the national political climate in which they are produced." Hence "the ugly portraiture of the white South" in the movies from the early 1960s (Kirby 121), which in itself represents animus the nation harbored towards the segregated, white supremacist South. This "ugly South" is emblematic of the trend Templeton identifies "for less sympathetic depictions of southern white men and for more manifest content relating to the politics of the Civil War and its legacies in twentieth century America."

The next article also offers a glimpse into the southern imaginary through the lens of racialized Others on the big screen. In "Appalling! Terrifying! Wonderful!: Blaxploitation and the Cinematic Image of the South" Antoni Górný interrogates the ways in which the Hollywood movie business, refracting and affecting American imaginary at the same time, constructs the historical memory of the nation. Górný demonstrates that Blaxploitation movies and "race problem films," which offer competing perspectives on race and the southern past, impact filmic depictions of southern racial history in divergent ways. Instead of analyzing movies through a neoliberal lens,⁸ Górný explores the legacy of abolitionist propaganda and blackface parody in order to substantiate his claim that "the (proximate) presence of slavery provides the backdrop to a peculiar morality play." His analysis of two movies which achieved critical and commercial acclaim in 2013 – Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* – proposes that the latter "offers a more powerful and transformative means of addressing America's 'race problem.'"

Part 3 – "African American Experience of the South" – continues explorations of the interconnectedness of identity, race and the southern past. Despite that, the legacy of race and the heritage of white supremacy effect American society unequally, maybe because cruelty, ignorance and guilt, as Maya Angelou explains, are inscribed and accumulated in southern history (qtd in Joyner 25). Contemporary culture attempts to deal with (post)-plantation reality through various outlets: from Kara Walker's cut-out plantation burlesques (eg. *African t*), a reboot of *Roots*, the comedy/history online show "Ask a Slave," to many "slave movies." The three articles included in this section are a timely intervention in America's racial landscape in the wake of the Paula Deen scandal, blackface incidents on college campuses, and the events in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charleston.

8 Reed claims that through dehistoricization some recent productions sanitized the issue of slavery – notably *Django Unchained* – while others, such as *The Help*, trivialized Jim Crow. This allows Reed to conclude that dehistoricization allows for bogus happy endings and makes the movies entirely neoliberal ("Django").

Constante González Groba begins this section with an analysis of the award winning *The Underground Railroad*. In his article “Riding the Rails to (Un)Freedom: Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*” González Groba reads slavery and its contemporary consequences through the prism of the slave’s agency, which has so far been brought up by revisionist historians. Additionally, González Groba claims that the originality of the novel depends also on its departure from typical slave narratives. Setting his analysis within the context of African American literary history, González Groba explains that Cora’s travels through time and space are a means for the novelist to “deal with different racial terrors in different historical periods.” This special/spatial odyssey of the main heroine allows Whitehead not only to write about America’s evil past, but also rewrite it by transcending the predictability of slave narrative. By blending realism and imagination, González Groba elucidates, Whitehead can reimagine antebellum America and point to connections between slavery and American capitalism, and building an empire.

In her contribution, “The Neo-Gothic Imaginary and the Rhetoric of Loss in Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*,” Patrycja Antoszek presents a different perspective on Whitehead’s neo-slave narrative. An interplay of approaches from affect studies, critical race theory, and African-American literature offers a useful set of theoretical tools with which Antoszek interrogates the issue of race and identity. Antoszek delves into the reworking of historical facts in the novel and into Cora’s embodiment of the losses “inherited” from one generation of enslaved women to another. In her provocative analysis Antoszek arrives at the conclusion that “Cora’s melancholia is a strategy of dealing with the horrors of slavery and a sign of a black woman’s failed entry into the Symbolic.” Looking at the prolonged mourning and collective memory through the perspective of affect studies combined with the twenty-first century postsouthern literary studies allows Antoszek to creatively read how the violent past still haunts black subjectivity: “Whitehead’s novel, while showing melancholia’s productive potential, is yet more proof that slavery and its terrible legacy remains America’s most excruciating trauma, which perhaps can never be adequately mourned.”

“Protecting the Spirit of the American South: Representations of New Orleans culture in Contemporary Children’s Picture Books,” the essay closing this section, moves the analysis of the representations of African-American’s sense of identity in the time of crisis from a dystopian novel to children’s literature. In her article Ewa Klęczaj-Siara focuses on the fictional representations of the New Orleans spirit which was dashed by Hurricane Katrina of 2005 and eventually recovered from the trauma in *Freedom in Congo Square* (2016) by C. Weatherford, and *Trombone Shortly* (2015) and *The 5 O’ Clock Band* (2018) by Troy Andrews. In her analysis of the interplay of visual and verbal elements of the books Klęczaj-Siara proves that the discourse of children’s literature allows for a celebration of the transformative force of the storm (New Orleans’ culture kept people together after all) in contradistinction to scholarly research and journalistic documentaries which reveled in the depictions of the threat of obliteration of New Orleans culture.

The final part – “Southern Tensions and Contrasts” – deals with the residue of the region’s variance and frictions. Two articles here are interesting revisions of traditional southern tropes or literary modes of expression, while the third one will

introduce readers into the uncharted territory of southern forensic thrillers. In “Bataille in the South: James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Erskine Caldwell’s Depression Fiction” Joseph Kuhn argues that James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) and Erskine Caldwell’s Depression-era fiction used a discourse of the sacred connected with the taboo, repulsiveness and sacrifice to illustrate the strange otherness of the South ravaged by the Great Depression. Kuhn’s analysis is original in its discussion of Agee and Caldwell’s use of the sacred through the prism of Georges Bataille’s theoretical framework of the sacred. Offering a rich historical and social context, Kuhn explains Agee’s and Caldwell’s infatuation with the sacred through the discourse of transgression (the sacred was pitted against the profane – utilitarian and servile). The application of Bataille’s theories of transgression, sovereignty, and the need for wasteful expenditure sheds a new light on the Other South in the fictions of Agee and Caldwell.

“Form and Diversity in American Crime Fiction: The Southern Forensic Thriller” examines forensic thrillers, a mainstream American genre, as transfigured in southern literature. Elena Avanzas Álvarez provides an examination of the aesthetic and cultural contexts out of which the southern forensic thriller narrative emerged. Álvarez’s analysis of Karin Slaughter’s “Grant County” series, especially its first novel *Blindsighted* (2001), approaches the topic of the southern forensic thriller from a number of perspectives: those of literary studies, philosophy and feminism. Álvarez demonstrates that the “southern turn” in forensic thrillers foregrounds a coalescing of southern gothic and hard boiled traditions. The continued presence of the southern Gothic, the South’s cultural richness, and the tension between tradition and innovation has an impact on the study of social/regional identities in southern forensic thrillers. Álvarez envisions the importance of this new genre which “make[s] the past accountable while accepting social change and innovation in an area as historically and culturally complex as the South.”

In the final contribution to the issue, Michał Choiński explores the figurative contrasts between the bodily and the spiritual in Tennessee Williams’s *Summer and Smoke* (1948). His article, “Figures of Contrast in Tennessee Williams’s *Summer and Smoke*,” focuses on the tragic impossibility of a conflation of opposites which is illustrated using the example of a failed love affair between two main characters, John and Alma. Choiński’s article adopts the figurative approach to study how Tennessee Williams “constructs main characters in metaphorical terms, as contrastive macrofigures, and to demonstrate how this figurative perspective allows him to escalate the tragedy of their impossible romance.” Choiński concludes that the playwright frames the unfulfilled romance through “a metafigurative act of reversal, ... [a] changing of perspectives which generates the effect of a paradox.”

Just as the kaleidoscopic design may be changed endlessly by rotating loose elements, the South yields itself to a mesmerizing display of fascinating images which keep on changing with applications of various theoretical perspectives. Interestingly enough, each turn of the kaleidoscope tube reveals the reflection of only a portion of the objects, while others are hidden, waiting for their turn.⁹ Likewise, the present

9 The present volume demonstrates that each turn of the kaleidoscope tube reveals the reflection of only a portion of the objects. The reoccurring themes of redneck South, child narrators, affect

issue of *Polish Journal for American Studies* affords only a selective insight into multiple Souths. The issue does not pretend to be exhaustive. A realignment of theoretical approaches and a different choice of analytical material may offer other fascinating reflections on the South in relation to other regions of the United States (notably including the West),¹⁰ to the wider Americas (seeking the Latin American connection),¹¹ or to the Global South.

The Global South, the concept which replaced the “Third World” in postcolonial studies, world literature and comparative literature, frees the American South from a nationalistic historiography. Instead of concentrating on national literatures, scholars of the Global South think critically about race, ethnicity and culture using hemispheric methodologies and race/ethnic studies research to explore translocal and transnational histories, cultures and influences. The Global South challenges existing Western representations and narratives, and it decenters the English and the Anglophone world which used to dominate world literary networks (West-Pavlov, and McKee & Trefzer). If we adopt transnational and postcolonial perspectives to southern studies (as some scholars of the New Southern Studies have already done), then we open the field to new developments in literary humanities and cultural studies (Cohn and Smith). Reconceptualization of southern studies within the Global South is a paradigm shift which allows scholars to recognize the fluidity of geographical boundaries – the South is no longer a contained space, but rather a permeable construct affected and affecting the global.

The next turn of the kaleidoscope could provide us with a novel lens for reconsidering “interstitial” racial/ethnic identities below the Mason-Dixon line (especially Asian and Hispanic geographies),¹² or the extant, continuing Native presence in the American South,¹³ both of which complicate the southern system of racial classification. Our understanding of the American South can be reshaped by the

theories, tensions, and violence run through most of the contributions to this issue, while remaining latent in some. Each article offers a different constellation of kaleidoscopic beads and stones.

10 In his book *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*, Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr. turns his critical eye to new developments in contemporary southern writing which looks westward. Brinkmeyer’s analysis of writers such as Doris Betts, Barry Hannah, Cormac McCarthy, Madison Smartt Bell, Richard Ford, Barbara Kingsolver, Dorothy Allison, and Clyde Edgerton, who expand southern culture and at the same time reconfigure the myths of the West.

11 See for instance: Deborah Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 1999; Deborah Cohn, “U.S. Southern Studies and Latin American Studies: Windows Onto Postcolonial Studies.” *American Literature* 78.4 (2006): 704-7; and Deborah Cohn, “U.S. Southern and Latin American Studies: Postcolonial and Inter-American Approaches” *The Global South* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter, 2007), 38-44.

12 The most recent book-length comprehensive publications about Asian geographies in the South are Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*, 2010; and Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai, ed. *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Immigration in the South*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, 2013.

13 The most recent scholarship on indigenous South includes Tiffany Lethabo King’s *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, Duke UP, 2019.

exploration of the swamp South,¹⁴ peripheral spaces of Texas and Florida, or the entire coastal American South. The latter even opens possibilities of rearticulating the South through the prism of pirate fiction.¹⁵ Another turn of the kaleidoscope tube can reveal different alignments of southern elements: such as queer (black) South,¹⁶ transgender South,¹⁷ undead South,¹⁸ tacky South,¹⁹ Bohemian South,²⁰ and Speculative South,²¹ and many more.

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14 Since antebellum times the swamp has had a status as the geographical "Other" in the Southern terrain. In his book *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (2005), Anthony Wilson examines the swamp South and explains that depending on the perspective the swamp was either an obstacle to agricultural development of the region (the perspective of the white aristocracy) or a shelter and sustenance for those who were excluded from the dominant plantation culture (that is African Americans, Native Americans, and Acadians, as well as poor and rural whites). Wilson charts a transformation of the swamp in Southern culture finding illustrations of his thesis in the fictions of Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner. Additionally, swamps and bayous are more than passive settings in more recent novels: Tim Gautreaux's *The Next Step in the Dance* (1998), Linda Hogan's *Power* (1998), Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* (2011), or the first season of HBO's *True Detective* (2014).

15 A forthcoming edited collection of essays based on papers delivered at a panel at the 2018 conference of *Society for the Study of Southern Literature* is going to be devoted to the issue of piracy in Southern literature.

16 In recent years there has been a queering of the American South's cultural and literary imagination. The most recent queer studies of the region pointing out homoerotic forms of desire and/or identity include: Jaime Harker, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018; Darius Bost, *Evidence Of Being: the Black Gay Cultural Renaissance and the Politics of Violence*. University of Chicago Press, 2018; Johnson, E. Patrick. *Honeypot: Black Southern Women Who Love Women*. Duke UP, 2019.

17 Poppy Z. Brite's novel *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart* or *Southern Comfort*, a documentary by Kate Davis, could serve as texts of transgender Southern reality.

18 Southern undeadness was comprehensively discussed in *Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond in Southern Literature and Culture* edited by Eric Gary Anderson, and others. Riding the wave of academic success, a call for papers for the sequel to 2015's *Undead Souths* was issued in the spring of 2019.

19 A call for papers for an edited collection on *The Tacky South* was issued at the beginning of 2019, with the provisional publication date in 2020 (<https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/cfp/2019/01/29/the-tacky-south>).

20 Shawn Chandler Bingham and Lindsey A. Freeman edited *The Bohemian South: Creating Countercultures, from Poe to Punk*, a book which celebrates the New South as an epicenter for progress, innovation, and experimentation (an image which clearly stands in opposition to the prevalent perception of the South as a cultural backwater).

21 A call for papers for an edited collection titled *Speculative Souths* was issued by Amy Clukey, Erich Nunn, & Jon Smith. (<https://www.theasa.net/jobs-opportunities/cfps/speculative-souths>)

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