

New Approaches to the South

BILL HARDWIG, *Upon Provincialism: Southern Literature and National Periodical Culture, 1870-1900* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2013), 184 pp.

MARK J. NOONAN, *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2010), 235 pp.

WALDEMAR ZACHARASIEWICZ, and CHRISTOPH IRMSCHER, eds., *Cultural Circulation: Dialogues between Canada and the American South*, Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse 843 (Wien: VÖAW, 2013), 398 pp.

Few subfields of American studies have profited as much from recent perspectival changes and methodological developments in the discipline, such as the transnational turn or Periodical studies, as the field of Southern studies has. The three books under review here all look at the U.S. South through the lenses of either “new Southern studies” (Zacharasiewicz’s and Irmscher’s *Cultural Circulation*) or Periodical studies (Noonan’s *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*) or a combination of the two (Hardwig’s *Upon Provincialism*), and the insightful and illuminating readings of literature and culture from and about the South offered in these volumes clearly demonstrate how these new approaches have, each in its own way, revitalized and invigorated Southern studies.

New Southern studies, perhaps the more prominent of the two, can be traced back to the early 2000s. In the preface to a special issue of *American Literature* on “Violence, the Body and ‘the South’” (2001), Houston A. Baker Jr. and Dana D. Nelson coin the term “new Southern studies” and call for a “complication of old borders and terrains [as well as] wishes to construct and survey a new scholarly map of ‘The South.’”¹ More special issues in the same spirit followed, among others in the *Southern Quarterly* (2003), the *Mississippi Quarterly* (2003-2004), the *South Central Review* (2005), and again in *American*

Literature (2006). In the latter journal, guest editors Kathryn McKee and Anette Trefzer respond to Baker Jr.’s and Nelson’s call by giving the new Southern studies an explicitly transnational orientation,² thus bringing it in line with the rest of the discipline. The transnational turn in new Southern studies is also reflected in the titles of a number of essay collections (e.g. Jon Smith’s and Deborah Cohn’s *Look Away: The U.S. South in New World Studies*, 2004) and monographs (e.g., James L. Peacock’s *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World*, 2007), some of which appeared in the newly established series “New Directions in Southern Studies” and “The New Southern Studies” by UNC Press and the U of Georgia Press, respectively. The work of scholars such as Patricia Yaeger, Michael Kreyling, Scott Romine, and Martyn Bone has complemented these efforts by more generally interrogating and deterritorializing the idea or myth of the U.S. South.

Though perhaps less prominent, Periodical studies is, in fact, older than the new Southern studies (the Research Society for American Periodicals and the journal *American Periodicals* were both founded in the early 1990s already). Nevertheless, seminal programmatic articles, such as those by Judith Yarros Lee and Sean Latham and Robert Scholes (see below) did not appear until the mid-2000s. The central premise of Periodical studies is that magazines constitute a distinct form of publishing that calls for distinct analytical approaches and methodologies. Rejecting a view of magazines as mere “aggregations of otherwise autonomous works,”³ Periodical studies calls for the examination of “linguistic” texts along and in conjunction with the material that immediately surrounds them in periodicals and for investigating the ways individual features of a magazine interact with other articles in the same or in earlier issues. In addition, Periodical studies also aims at seriously exploring the means of production

² Kathryn McKee and Anette Trefzer, “Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies,” *American Literature* 78.4 (2006): 677-90; 678.

³ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” *PMLA* 121.2 (2006): 517-31; 521.

¹ Houston A. Baker Jr. and Dana D. Nelson, “Preface: Violence, the Body and ‘The South,’” *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 231-44; 231; 243.

that characterize periodical publications. Periodical scholars should, Judith Yarros Lee maintains, “examine the published periodical as the result of a collaboration among editors, contributors, readers, and other stakeholders of a particular time and place.”⁴ Ideally, then, in Periodical studies the analysis of the interrelations among periodical contents is complemented by an investigation of the interrelations among periodical actors.

Mark J. Noonan’s *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* constitutes an excellent example of the Periodical studies approach. The first book-length examination of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* since Arthur John’s *The Best Years of The Century* (1981), Noonan’s study traces the development of the New York City-based magazine from its founding as *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1870 to the death of its long-time editor in chief, Richard Watson Gilder, in 1909, making two central claims: first, that the periodical pursued a genteel, Victorian, conservative ideological agenda that sought to promote national harmony, civility, and progress; and second, that this agenda was continually complicated and even contradicted by specific contents, particularly ones that appeared in serialized form. *Reading the Century* is organized both chronologically and thematically: the two parts of the book explore the magazine under the editorships of Josiah G. Holland (1870-1881) and Richard Watson Gilder (1881-1909), respectively, with each part consisting of several chapters that focus on particular groups of texts. In all of these chapters, Noonan is mainly concerned with the fiction and poetry that appeared in the periodical, although the two non-fiction serials for which the *Century* became famous in its time—namely, “The Great South” and “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War”—and the magazine’s illustrations are extensively discussed, too. By contrast, as one reviewer has already noted,⁵ other non-fictional content as well as advertisements have been comparatively neglected. Including them into the discussion

may indeed have strengthened Noonan’s intriguing exploration of the ideological tensions within the periodical even further.

The fact that the South figures prominently in both parts of the book—three of the seven chapters (one in the first part, two in the second) focus on the region—is ultimately due to the fact that the South also figured prominently in the magazine itself: contributions from and/or about the South were particularly welcomed by the editors, who sought to simultaneously promote their vision of southern redemption and national reconciliation and tap into the Southern market—as Noonan writes, the *Century* was “the first northern journal welcomed in southern parlors” after the Civil War (20). The second of the three chapters concentrating on the South, “‘Dey’s Mightily in De Grass’: Reconstructing the ‘New’ North in the Plantation Myth Fiction of *The Century*,” explores the racist component of the magazine’s reactionary ideological agenda by locating the origins and tracing the evolution of the “plantation myth” school of writing in the *Century* from the dialect verses of Thomas Dunn English in the 1870s to the short stories of Grace King in the 1890s. The other two chapters, “Discovering (Southern) Regionalism” and “Reading the War of *The Century*,” pitch selections of the periodical’s fictional against some of its non-fictional contents to illustrate the co-presence and interplay of contradictory viewpoints on the magazine’s ideological agenda in its pages. Contrasting Edward King’s travel series “The Great South” with George Washington Cable’s *Old Creole Days* stories and his novel *The Granddissimes*, and the enormously successful “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” series with the excerpts of Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* published in the *Century*, Noonan admirably shows how the fiction subverts and occasionally even parodies the editorial staff’s goals, as expressed in the non-fiction. The chapters thus depict the South as a highly contested discursive area.

The relationship between late nineteenth-century periodical fiction (especially local-color writing) and non-fiction (particularly travel writing) about the South also provides the ground for the central thesis of Bill Hardwig’s *Upon Provincialism*. Southern local color, Hardwig argues, “mirrors travel writing about the South in form, content, and purpose,” as both seek to respond to periodical readers’ desire “for ‘authentic’ moments of southern

⁴ Judith Yarros Lee, “The Future of American Periodicals,” *American Periodicals* 15.2 (2005): 196-201; 198.

⁵ Cf. David Welky, “Review: *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893*,” *Journal of American Studies* 45.3 (2011): n. p.

experience" (3). Like Noonan, then, Hardwig argues for the need to re-situate periodical writings within their original publication context. Yet while Noonan employs this approach to examine the ideological contradictions between fictional and non-fictional texts within one specific Gilded Age magazine, Hardwig reads Southern travel writing and local color from vastly different publications—national periodicals such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Century*, but also local newspapers like the New Orleans-based *Daily City Item*—in order to point to their shared strategies and goals, most notably providing readers with authoritative points of access to the "real" South. This becomes particularly evident in the first two of the altogether four chapters of Hardwig's study. Chapter 1 discusses the depiction of the postwar South in two series of travel writings (the *Century*'s "The Great South" and the *Atlantic Monthly*'s "Studies in the South") and in local-color sketches and novels by Thomas Nelson Page, Mark Twain, and Charles W. Chesnutt, stressing all of these texts' claim to tell the "truth" about the region. This argument is further developed in chapter 2, where Hardwig traces the shifting reception of Chesnutt and Mary N. Murfree after their public "outings" as an African-American and a woman, respectively, thus suggesting that the dependence of (Southern) local-color writing on a sense of authenticity even extended to the writer's body.

Upon Provincialism not only engages with Periodical studies, however, but also with the new Southern studies. Hardwig generally maintains a critical stance towards the latter, preferring a "constricting" perspective to the "expansive" gestures of new Southern studies' transnational orientation (7). Consequently, chapter 3 concentrates on local-color stories about what Hardwig terms the "fringes" of the South—mainly Appalachia and New Orleans—to stress the disjuncture of these sites not only from the rest of the nation, but also from the region itself. Hardwig rightly points to the prominence of Appalachia and New Orleans in Southern local color, which complicates received ideas about the postbellum South from within. Chapter 4, finally, does employ a transnational perspective after all: using Edouard Glissant's concept of creolization, Hardwig reads, amongst others, Lafcadio Hearn's sketches about New Orleans for the *Daily City Item* along with his texts about Martinique for *Harper's Magazine*. This minor

methodological swerve, however, heightens rather than lessens the volume's overall value as an impressive, stimulating contribution to the discussion about (Southern) local color.

Cultural Circulation: Dialogues between Canada and the American South, edited by Waldemar Zacharasiewicz and Christoph Irmscher, implicitly engages with the new Southern studies paradigm, too, but instead of exploring the South's relationship to the Caribbean, this essay collection looks north. Canadian studies have generally been reluctant to employ transnational or hemispheric perspectives, a reluctance that Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Philips Casteel have ascribed to Canadianists' "suspicion that hemispheric American studies is driven by an imperializing impulse on the part of the United States."⁶ Therefore, instigating a dialogue between Canada and another "marginalized" North American culture, such as that of the U.S. South, must have appeared to the editors like a promising approach to invite Canadian studies into the debate—and as the 21 intriguing essays in this volume (along with the superb "Overture" by Canadian writer Aritha van Herk and the thought-provoking "Envoi" by Canadian literary critic Laurie Ricou) amply demonstrate, it was a highly successful one.

Cultural Circulation is organized into four thematic sections that consist of four to seven essays each and that follow the course of North American political and cultural history from the so-called Great Upheaval in 1755 to Postmodernism.⁷ The first of these clusters, "Acadians and Canadians," makes the volume of special interest to those studying the Cajuns, the descendants of the French settlers of today's Nova Scotia who during the Great Upheaval were expelled by the British and resettled in Louisiana. Three essays explore the depiction of the Cajuns in the works of Kate Chopin and Acadian writer Antonine Maillet as well as the recent Cajun ethnic revival; Christoph Irmscher's richly illustrated

⁶ Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Philips Casteel, *Introduction to Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations*, ed. Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Philips Casteel (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2010) 3-28; 10.

⁷ I am following the editors' introduction to the volume here rather than the table of contents, where some contributions have apparently been placed into the wrong section.

contribution complements these articles by discussing the French-American ornithologist and painter John James Audubon's expedition to Labrador. "Transmigrations," the second cluster and, together with the first, the shortest of the collection, unites essays that address the Underground Railroad to Canada. Three essays focus on the role of Canada in two best-selling novels on slavery in the U.S. South, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Canadian writer Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007); the fourth contribution turns to drama and examines the lure of the Canadian garden in Pearl Cleage's *Bourbon at the Border* (1997). The names of well-known Canadian and Southern women writers, such as Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Eudora Welty, and Kate Chopin, turn up time and again the third section, which focuses on intertextual links between Canada and the South. Ian MacRae's contribution on Jack Hodgins is particularly noteworthy here for the way it extends the notion of the "south" to Latin America. The final cluster, entitled

"Circulating Genres and the Emergence of a Transcontinental Postmodern," consists of six essays that explore, on the one hand, parallels and mutual influences in the development of American and Canadian (short) fiction (cf. the contributions by Reingard M. Nischik, Dieter Meindl, and Caroline Rosenthal) and, on the other hand, postmodern portrayals of Canada by Southern writers (in the essays of Thomas L. MacHoney and Marcel Arbeit) or vice versa (see Nahem Yousef's discussion of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming through Slaughter*).

If anything, the extensive list of additional topics that could have been addressed in *Cultural Circulations* presented in Laurie Ricou's "Envoi" at the end of the volume, once again demonstrates one thing: namely, that new Southern studies and Periodical studies, the new approaches to the South employed in the books under review here, have turned the region (again) into a site of exciting and seminal scholarship.

Mainz

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