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Book Review: Still in Print: The Southern Novel Today

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Still in Print: the Southern Novel Today. Jan Norby Gretlund, editor. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2010. 304 pages. ISBN 978-1-57003-944-7. pbk. \$ 29.95.

Few regions of the world have stirred more literary interest than the American South. Beginning in the 1920s such writers as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Robert Penn Warren produced a body of work which drew the world's attention to the eleven states of the former Confederacy.

In the twenty-first century the question arises: is there still a South which deserves a separate literature? Are there writers working today whose work measures up to those giants of the past? The authors of the collection of essays under review think so and want to offer some writers whose work they think should be kept in print.

The authors, all professors of literature in the United States or Europe, offer eighteen writers whom they have grouped in four categories: "a sense of history," a sense of place," "a sense of humor," and a sense of malaise." They chose their writers from those "who have lived mostly in the South and have written since 2000." They have also been careful to pick those who have been "faithful to the reality of life today."

Each essay focuses on one book, usually a recent one, by the chosen writer. In the introduction the editor maintained that the authors are aiming their essays at lay readers to convince them "that this one book is worth reading"...and that "it is not necessary to have read other novels by the same author...to appreciate that one book." Each essay also includes a brief introduction and a useful bibliography of criticism at the end.

Readers will find authors with whom they are familiar, such as Charles Frazier, Josephine Humphreys, Kaye Gibbons, James Lee Burke, Clyde Edgerton, and Cormac McCarthy, as well as many who are less well known. This reviewer has read the work of George Singleton and Ron Rash and agrees that they should be recognized for their achievements.

The difficulty with this book is that the level of writing is too scholarly for the lay readers for whom it is written. It would be better used by college professors looking for a textbook or graduate students looking for a dissertation topic, two target groups also mentioned in the introduction. Lay readers would be better served by looking for book reviews on the individual books under discussion. This book should be an optional purchase for academic libraries.

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