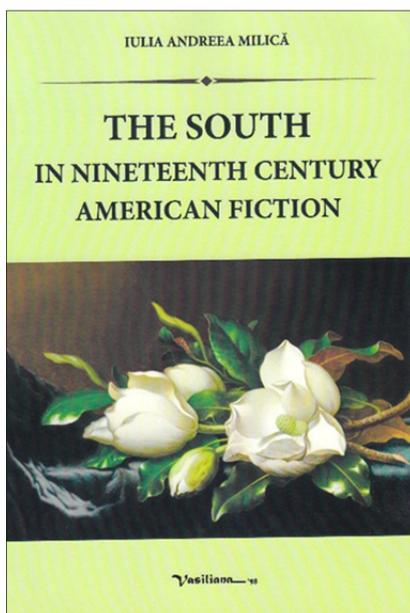


BOOK REVIEW

IULIA ANDREEA MILICĂ, *The South in Nineteenth Century American Fiction*, Iași, Vasiliana '98, 2014, 373p.

Iulia Andreea Milică has already made a name as a specialist on the culture and literature of the American South. The author's assiduous scholarly efforts to present the complexity of this regional literary culture beyond the popular clichés have enriched the contribution of Romanian scholars to the field of American literary studies. Iulia Andreea Milică's interest in the American South began with her doctoral research, published as *Southern Cultural Dimensions in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction*. Her contribution later materialized in several books and articles on Southern writers such as William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, or Katherine Anne Porter. In her 2013

book *Literary Representations of the Southern Plantation*, Iulia Andreea Milică supports the inclusion of the founders of the plantation romance in the discourse on the evolution of American literature. Although the scope of her other book on American literature, namely *Studies in American Literature* (2013), is wider, Milică's interest in the American South is still very clear in her analyses of Southern identity. The reader under review, *The South in Nineteenth Century American Fiction*, falls into the same category of valuable resources for students and scholars interested in the literary representations and representatives of the nineteenth-century American South.



With texts organized into four distinct sections following the introduction, *The South in Nineteenth Century American Fiction* revisits

regional literary (self) portrayal with a view to contributing to the destabilization of a clichéd cultural topology, of a monolithic image of the American South. The volume attempts to emphasize the complexity of the “literature out of which the South emerges as if out of a puzzle of images” (10). The puzzle Milică created with this volume is, indeed, elaborate, since the texts included here reflect the cultural (self)positioning of the region by reuniting both Southern and Northern perspectives.

The first section in the volume, “The Romance Tradition in the South”, creates a space for the inclusion of competing standpoints. It engages the slavery controversy and opposes the image of the South as reflected by the plantation and the historical romance, in the works of John Pendleton Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms respectively, to the abolitionist propaganda of antislavery literature (Harriet Beecher Stowe) and slave-narratives (Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs). The next section is the richest of the volume and is dedicated to regionalism and local color in the post-Civil War period. It includes texts by Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Kate Chopin, George Washing-

ton Cable, Mark Twain, Charles Waddell Chesnut, and Ellen Glasgow. The first subsection takes the reader from the nostalgic recollection of the antebellum 'good ole times' in the often anthologized "Marse Chan" to the dark side of the plantation myth in "No Haid Pawn", and then to slave folklore in the tales of Harris' Uncle Remus. The reader's journey continues with the painful and ironical treatment of racial and gender oppression in Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde", the insightful take on the collision between the old ways and the new order in Cable's "Jean-ah Poquelin," the exploration of genealogical determinism in the excerpt from Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and the dynamics of interracial relationships and mixed-race identity in Chesnut's most anthologized short story, "The Wife of His Youth." This section ends with excerpts from Ellen Glasgow's Civil War novel *The Battle-Ground* that invite the reconsideration of the conventions of the plantation romance and of the traditional notion of heroism. The following section illustrates and discusses Southwestern humor in the work of Augustus B. Longstreet, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris. The stories in this section move away from the plantation life to the frontier experience. The last section of the anthology offers additional theoretical resources meant to add to the student's understanding of the complexity of the changes and challenges of ante- and post-bellum Southern culture. The section presents the pro-slavery stance expressed in George Fitzhugh's *Sociology for the South* and Caroline Lee Hentz's Preface to *The Planter's Northern Bride*, the refusal of the defeat of Southern values in Edward A. Pollard's *The Lost Cause*, and the concern for the identity of mixed-race individuals in Charles Waddell Chesnut's *What Is a White Man?*

The South in Nineteenth Century American Fiction is a valuable academic resource for several reasons. First of all, besides reproducing well-known and often anthologized texts, it makes available texts that would otherwise be more difficult to find for the Romanian reader.

Moreover, the texts are organized into sections meant to guide the student through the intricacies of the composite representations of the American South. The introduction to each section is clear and easy to follow, offering enough details and references for a proper understanding of the particular aspect that guides the organization of the texts in that section. For example, "Postbellum Literature: Regionalism and Local Color" – the richest section in the anthology – begins with an introductory explanation that presents the social, political, economic, technological, and cultural factors that led to the emergence of realism, regionalism, and 'local color' literature. It also explains the impact of the Civil War on Southern literature and ends with pointing out the continuation of the regional movement beyond the period covered by the volume, into the work of twentieth-century Southern writers. Such approaches are welcome as they contextualize early writers and texts and show their relevance for the evolution of literary forms, genres, and preoccupations. The writers included in the anthology benefit from similarly clear and relevant introductions and, when only fragments of a longer text are included, details are provided to help the reader understand the story and locate the excerpts. The set of questions at the end of each text enhance the reader's experience; they challenge the reader to identify and examine the specificity of each text, while also inviting the analysis of the multifaceted constructions of regional literary tropes across texts.

The volume is intended as a reader for students interested in the literary representations of the American South. It can be easily used for class discussions or as a self-study guide. Moreover, the texts anthologized here and the reading recommendations in each section can also serve research purposes, as they successfully present the complexity of the writings on the American South and challenge popular regional clichés.

AMELIA PRECUP
(amelia.nan@gmail.com)