



The History of Southern Women's Literature (Southern Literary Studies)

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Many of America's foremost, and most beloved, authors are also southern and female: Mary Chesnut, Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Zora Neale Hurston, Eudora Welty, Harper Lee, Maya Angelou, Anne Tyler, Alice Walker, and Lee Smith, to name several. Designating a writer as "southern" if her work reflects the region's grip on her life, Mary Louise Weaks and Carolyn Perry have produced an invaluable guide to the richly diverse and enduring tradition of southern women's literature. Their comprehensive history -- the first of its kind in a relatively young field -- extends from the pioneer woman to the career woman, embracing black and white, poor and privileged, urban and Appalachian perspectives and experiences.

The History of Southern Women's Literature allows readers both to explore individual authors and to follow the developing arc of various genres across time. Conduct books and slave narratives; Civil War diaries and letters; the antebellum, postbellum, and modern novel; autobiography and memoirs; poetry; magazine and newspaper writing -- these and more receive close attention. Over seventy contributors are represented here, and their essays discuss a wealth of women's issues from four centuries: race, urbanization, and feminism; the myth of southern womanhood; preset images and assigned social roles -- from the belle to the mammy -- and real life behind the facade of meeting others' expectations; poverty and the labor movement; responses to Uncle Tom's Cabin and the influence of Gone with the Wind.

The history of southern women's literature tells, ultimately, the story of the search for freedom within an "insidious tradition," to quote Ellen Glasgow. This teeming volume validates the deep contributions and pleasures of an impressive body of writing and marks a major achievement in women's and literary studies.

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