



Rough South, Rural South: Region and Class in Recent Southern Literature

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Essays in *Rough South, Rural South* describe and discuss the work of southern writers who began their careers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They fall into two categories. Some, born into the working class, strove to become writers and learned without benefit of higher education, such writers as Larry Brown and William Gay. Others came from lower- or middle-class backgrounds and became writers through practice and education: Dorothy Allison, Tom Franklin, Tim Gautreaux, Clyde Edgerton, Kaye Gibbons, Silas House, Jill McCorkle, Chris Offutt, Ron Rash, Lee Smith, Brad Watson, Daniel Woodrell, and Steve Yarbrough. Their twenty-first-century colleagues are Wiley Cash, Peter Farris, Skip Horack, Michael Farris Smith, Barb Johnson, and Jesmyn Ward.

In his seminal article, Erik Bledsoe distinguishes Rough South writers from such writers as William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell. Younger writers who followed Harry Crews were born into and write about the Rough South. These writers undercut stereotypes, forcing readers to see the working poor differently.

The next pieces begin with those on Crews and Cormac McCarthy, major influences on an entire generation. Later essays address members of both groups—the self-educated and the college-educated. Both groups share a clear understanding of the value of working-class southerners. Nearly all of the writers hold a reverence for the South's landscape and its inhabitants as well as an affinity for realistic depictions of setting and characters.

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