

The Southern Quarterly

Volume 57
Number 1 *Horticulture*

Article 1

November 2020

Editor Introduction

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Recommended Citation

(2020) "Editor Introduction," *The Southern Quarterly*. Vol. 57 : No. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/soq/vol57/iss1/1>

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Guest Editor's Introduction

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“The Global South” is a term that entered the lexicon relatively recently to describe the conditions that arise from the unfettered movement of global capital. Social inequality and political unrest followed, exacerbating the already widening gulf between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” The political fallout of these conditions has been the focus of countless studies and even the founding of a journal devoted to the topic of geopolitical stratification. While issues of immigration, refugee crises, climate change, environmental degradation, and other potential threats to stability have tended to foreground the political dimensions of globalization, this special issue of *The Southern Quarterly* takes a different tack. Though politics certainly informs many contributions, this eclectic collection of scholarship, public-interest pieces, and artistic expression—verbal and visual—aims to start a conversation about how working the earth to provide sustenance of various kinds is an important commonality for all of us. Inequality is never far from concern in the scholarly pieces included here; but at the same time, ingenuity and resilience emerge as equally important facets of the human response to globalization. In the spirit of curiosity about what we can learn from studying the role of horticulture and gardening in the Global South, then, this special issue foregrounds both the continuity and the turmoil that accompany the need to adapt to and even find new opportunities and directions in otherwise adverse circumstances. Whether in the context of antebellum slavery in the US or indigenous peoples’ adaptations to the state’s incursions on their sovereignty in Honduras, all items herein express the advantages of flexibility and innovation.

While the Global South has tended to refer to the underprivileged groups who bear the brunt of the exploitation that global capitalism thrives on, we find here occasions when politics falls away and instead, we ponder the relief and sustenance of immersing oneself in gardening. Though such a privilege may not be readily accessible to all, we also see here the rejuvenating aspects

of this work and the necessity to partake in it if we want to be effective when addressing broader social ills. Readers may perhaps take solace in the unforeseen solace of gardening and the new-fangled ways in which horticultural knowledge makes possible new alliances and renewed self-reliance. Here, then, is an overview of the contents of this special issue.

In “Slave Gardens in the Antebellum South: The Resolve of a Tormented People,” Dwight Eisnach and Herbert C. Covey explore the physical and spiritual sustenance that gardens provided for enslaved people. They emphasize the agency embedded in horticultural practices that enabled otherwise powerless people to exert a measure of control over their diet, health, and spiritual condition. Particularly fascinating are the accounts of the seeds and plants that captured Africans brought with them on the Middle Passage. Effectively transporting a piece of Africa with them, the captives also brought the horticultural knowledge to cultivate the wild grasses and other plants they would grow in the meager plots of the slave quarters on the plantations where they labored.

This essay serves as an evocative precursor to “Aztec Gardens: Representations of Political Power, Innovation, and Technology,” which offers another iteration of how horticultural knowledge functions as a form of agency. The vassals beholden to the Triple Alliance (i.e., the Aztec Empire) marshaled remarkable horticultural ingenuity when facing increasingly daunting demands for tribute. The floating gardens and tropical transplants of this culture attest to the skill and innovation that helped the Aztecs construct a socially and politically robust society whose population peaked at over three million people. The agricultural sophistication required to feed these numbers emerged from the pressures of tribute. Water management also proves a uniquely important component of this society, and so the article traces an Aztec cosmology that imbues all things—including water—with divinity. In such a system, even filth and ordure contribute to a divine cosmos that seeks balance and treats rot, decay, and its corollaries as manifestations of imbalance. On the other end of the spectrum of ways to treat horticulture as a means to an end, Aztec rulers such as Netzahualcoyotl and Moctecuzoma I—unlike antebellum enslaved peoples—commanded vast populations to do their bidding. Jeanne Gillespie and I suggest that although these ethnically diverse groups of people were beholden to Aztec rulers, we do not have adequate historical records to determine whether they experienced their labor as exploitation. Thus, although it may be tempting to assume that they were united in the consciousness of their subjugated status, we avoid conflating an array of political and social arrangements that hinge on an empowerment/subordination binary. The subtleties of Aztec social structure—and of the various forms of subjectivity it generated—disappear when we impose con-

cepts such as the Global South onto circumstances so chronologically distant from our own time. Thus, one of the insights to emerge from this special issue is an awareness of how crucial globalization has been in effecting the realignment of the international community into conceptual—but not always geographical—Norths and Souths.

Chris Hair and David M. Cochran, Jr. share their geographical expertise in the next two scholarly articles, shedding light on several aspects of the Global South in a Latin American context. In “Roses Along the Equator: Situating Ecuador and Colombia Within the Global Cut-Flower Market,” Hair studies the emergence and expansion of the cut-flower industry. Focusing on Colombia and Ecuador, where the industry took root in response to steadily increasing demand in the United States, Hair identifies the climatic conditions, including consistent temperatures and high average monthly daylight, that make the high Andes an ideal location for this industry to flourish. The underside of such geographic advantage is the cheap labor that also propelled the growth of the industry. He observes that, “You can purchase a dozen long-stem roses for as low as USD \$3 in Ecuador, but they increase in value by tenfold or more in the United States.” Exploitation of cheap labor also produces predictable consequences in terms of social inequality and increased exposure to noxious pesticides that are illegal in the US. The availability of ideal growing conditions, lax environmental regulations, and a cheap labor force have led the cut flower industry to flourish in equatorial locations around the globe; Hair also glimpses its emergence in Kenya, Malaysia, and Ethiopia. A dynamic whereby a poor population produces luxury goods for the wealthy few exemplifies how the cut-flower industry perpetuates the social inequality that is the *sine qua non* in a global economy divided into North and South.

Cochran’s “Territory, Legibility, and the Ecologies of Horticulture in La Mosquitia, Eastern Honduras” takes a historically wide-ranging approach to the Global South, offering a case study of indigenous peoples’ efforts to preserve their self-determination, which hinges upon their control over land use. Focusing on the Mosquitia, a remote region of what is now Honduras, he assesses how indigenous peoples—primarily the Moskito—negotiated European colonialism, strategically allying themselves with Britain in order to resist Spanish colonial efforts to conquer the region. Using the concept of legibility to identify the conditions that enable state institutions to exercise sovereignty over otherwise independent indigenous populations, Cochran traces a long history during which time legibility gradually became advantageous to independence rather than an obstacle to it. Moskito horticultural practices decisively contributed to their ongoing independence, for their land-use customs “mimic natural forest disturbance and regeneration,” such that they do not deplete the natural resources; instead they interplant fruit

trees with annual crops, resulting in a steady supply of fruit even as they clear a new plot each year for their rice, beans, corn, bananas, and plantains. Perhaps most remarkable is the innovative establishment by UNESCO of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a formal mechanism that made the Mosquito legible precisely by codifying their self-governance. As Cochran explains, “With the [Biosphere Reserve] management plan now codified as law in Honduras, biosphere residents have legal claim to their lands for the first time in history.”

Offering a more public-facing rather than scholarly perspective on gardening in the US South, Felder Rushing—known as the “Gestalt Gardener” in his weekly broadcasts on Mississippi Public Broadcasting—conducts an interview with Robert Brzuszek, a professor of landscape architecture at Mississippi State University and former curator of the Crosby Native Plant Arboretum. Their conversation ranges over differences in gardening habits among Americans in the North and the South; they suggest that while Northerners tend to collect native plants, Southerners swap them. Gardening is very much about socializing, as their title suggests: “Over and Under the Fence—Southern Gardening as Social Glue.” Alongside an appreciation for the comfort and beauty that gardening provides, Brzuszek notes that, “Climate change is real,” and Southern gardening habits are slowly adapting to the fact. Lawns are less ubiquitous and wildflower meadows more widespread as people figure out what works and what doesn’t.

In keeping with the ethos that gardening involves whatever works in the eye of the beholder, Katy Simpson Smith’s excerpt from her forthcoming novel takes a playful and sometimes bittersweet approach to the notion that cataloguing plant-life can somehow bring order to this chaotic experience we call life. Entitled *The Weeds*, the novel offers a first-person narrative that questions the meaning of “weed” to show how a supposedly useless or invasive plant may actually have medicinal value, not to mention beauty and symbolic meaning. Organized as a flora—a treatise surveying the flowers of a particular bioregion—the novel uses the language of plants to describe the ambition, frustration, and pain of the narrator, a young female graduate student in botany who is tasked with replicating Richard Deakin’s 1855 *Flora of the Colosseum of Rome*. A native of Jackson, Mississippi, she plays with the possibility of writing a flora of the Coliseum there, “the once yellow-sided, now mirror-sided big-top where the circus came and sometimes Bobby Rush, where you went for the science fair, for graduation, for monster trucks.” When her advisor scoffs at this proposal, telling her to write a memoir instead, she rages inside at his insistence that she be either a botanist or “a woman who likes to keep journal.” Herein lies the thorny issue of gender, which Smith navigates by playing with botany’s uncanny tendency to anthropomorphize

in the process of identifying plants. Indeed, Smith builds upon the fact that flowers are the sexual organs of plants to generate an eroticism that serves as the baseline in a story of longing and loss (of the narrator's mother, who protects her crocuses from hungry deer and teaches her daughter that plants mean something). A potential romance emerges with a man the narrator meets at the Roman Colosseum; when she shows him her proposal, "He drags his thumb below my copy of Deakin's description—*the lips violet, spotted in the throat; anthers, before bursting, converging together into the form of a cross*—and nods." Elsewhere, the narrator describes a sycamore tree growing up the side of Jackson's Coliseum: "A woman with wide hands, wide breasts, wide hips, flattening herself in desperation beside something immovable." Images such as these suggest how we come to know plants by seeing ourselves in them.

Interspersed among these variegated works in prose are poems that evoke the flora of Southern climes. . . and the pests, too. From Jeanne Larsen's poem memorializing Harlem Renaissance poet Anne Spencer and her garden at Edankraal (the home she and her husband made in Lynchburg, Virginia) to the erotic allure of spotted flowers in Angela Ball's "Arriving in Mississippi I Encounter My First Tiger Lily," the poets here offer images that resonate with the sultry climate, the teeming bugs, and the riotous growth that humidity generates. Rather than attempt to reduce what the poets express better than I can, I leave their words to speak for themselves, noting only that like Larsen and Ball, Julia Johnson, and Jean-Mark Sens use language that invites us to see and feel the South's plant life in unfamiliar ways. Bamboo and cattails, shrimp plant and milkweed—the litany of flower and plant names that tip-toe into the animal kingdom offers another occasion to marvel at the many metaphors hiding in plain sight.

Also interspersed throughout the issue are images by the renowned Hattiesburg photographer Betty Press (including the one on the cover). In her subtle attention to the texture of landscapes in the Southern US, she casts a deft eye on creeping kudzu and sprawling wildflowers. Something of the slow pace of rural life comes through in her photos, and also the drift into strangeness that occasionally happens when we twist the kaleidoscope to see something new in the familiar or banal. Because I write this introduction under the unnerving and disquieting conditions of self-quarantine due to the corona virus, I try to take solace in strangeness and uncertainty, but also in the familiar comforts of a well-tended garden that will grow regardless of the trials of a global pandemic. For all that changes, we can always count on the garden to grow.