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Co-Editors' Introduction

KATE COCHRAN AND WILLIAM DUNLAP

Kate Cochran: Mama Didn't Want to Raise Yankees

The topic of this special double issue of *The Southern Quarterly* lies very close to my heart: as a so-called Southerner raised outside of the deep South, I've felt like an expatriate my whole life. My parents, both Mississippians, moved to northern Virginia when I was two years old, following my father's election to the U.S. Congress. While Virginia's centrality to the Confederacy is undisputed—Richmond being its capital and Robert E. Lee its venerated Army Commander; the Battle Flag of Northern Virginia now synonymous with the Confederacy—any Washingtonian will tell you that northern Virginia is more a suburb of D.C. than a remnant of Old Virginny. The history celebrated in Old Town Alexandria is colonial rather than antebellum; George Washington's Mount Vernon downplays its past as a slave plantation on the Potomac. Our house was in a neighborhood situated midway between the two, and from the beginning of our tenure there my mother despaired of raising Yankee children.

Both of my parents told my older brother and me that we were Mississippians merely living in northern Virginia. Certainly that's how our classmates and neighbors saw us: our cars had Mississippi license plates after all, and our father purportedly represented Mississippi, first in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate. Mama taught us southernisms like "Hey, how you" and "double first cousin"; my brother Clayton and I were as likely to call a convenience store a Tote-Sum as a 7-11. And for the first several years after moving to Virginia, we returned to Mississippi for the entire summer and holiday vacations. Mama, Clayton, and I would pile into the used olive-green Buick coupe and Mama would drive all night, from the Shenandoah and Smoky Mountains through the flat sameness of Tennessee, stopping only for gas and bathroom breaks at various evil-smelling Stuckey's,

until we arrived at her parents' house in north Mississippi. We stayed with Mama's parents in New Albany and then with Daddy's parents in Byram; a couple of times we took a sparsely-furnished apartment in Jackson; Clayton and I went to camp at Strong River in Pinola.

But you can't build your regional identity merely on holiday breaks and through linguistic tutelage. Despite our family's best efforts, neither my brother nor I ever developed solid relationships with anyone in Mississippi, save our grandparents. If we were Mississippians in D.C., Mississippi saw us as Washingtonians, no matter how carefully we curated our accents. Clayton and I were doubly expatriated, and both of our regional identities were equally performative.

Perhaps surprisingly, we both decided to live in Mississippi after college graduation. The key moment came during my debut season (about which I will not be taking questions at this time), when we interacted with a great many natives our own age. Everyone was so nice. Everyone thought we were so *interesting*. It all felt so *welcoming*, in contrast to the innate snobbishness of the East Coast. So we both moved home to a place that had really never been home before and I ultimately decided to study Southern literature in graduate school at Ole Miss. I'd been studying Southern culture for my entire life. I dedicated my dissertation to "Mama, who didn't want to raise Yankee children." Of course, she didn't actually raise Yankee children—but she also didn't raise Southern children.

After an accumulated twenty-three years living in Mississippi (ages 0-2; 21-23; 25-32; 38-present), I'm still not a Mississippian. When people ask me where I'm from, I might answer that I was born in Jackson but raised in northern Virginia, or that I live in Hattiesburg but grew up outside of Washington, D.C. There's always a qualifier to distinguish my expatriated status (and to explain my [lack of] accent). Most people persist in wanting to align my identity with D.C. or with Mississippi, as in "oh, but you're really from [chosen location]," which in my advancing years I have decided to ignore entirely.

Given Thomas Wolfe's famous sentiment "you can't go home again," it's impressive how many Southerners elect to leave home in the first place, much less stay away from the South. Of course, the most famous exodus from the South is that of Black Southerners, sometimes divided into the First Great Migration (1910s-30s) and the Second Great Migration (1940s-70s); however, Isabel Wilkerson's National Book Critics Circle Award-winning *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*

(2010) regards the northward movement as one expatriation of six million souls. Her title nod to Richard Wright's poem, included in his memoir *Black Boy* (1945):

I was leaving the South
to fling myself into the unknown...
I was taking a part of the South
to transplant in alien soil,
to see if it could grow differently,
if it could drink of new and cool rains,
bend in strange winds,
respond to the warmth of other suns
and, perhaps, to bloom.

Wright's poem reflects the understanding that Black Southerners needed to leave the South to bloom, since the region remained so entrenched in racism and economic oppression. However, non-Black Southerners also felt the need to quit the South: according to James N. Gregory, in his 1995 article "The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed," the Great Migration of African Americans from the 1920s through the 1950s was accompanied by an even larger white migration out of the South. Robert Coles's *The South Goes North* (1971), the third volume in his five-volume series *Children in Crisis*, documented how both white and Black expatriates from the South were largely disappointed in their hopes for a better, more prosperous life in the urban North. Today, Southerners of all races and ethnicities continue to leave the region: in January 2018, *U.S. News & World Report* indicated the main reason was a lack of job opportunities.

Do Southern expatriates retain their southernness? Mary Weaks-Baxter's recent *Leaving the South: Border Crossing Narratives and the Remaking of Southern Identity* (2018), looks at twentieth-century "border narratives" about Southern expatriates. In her examination of different texts encompassing gender, race, genre, and time periods, she articulates how a "Southern identity" is both formed and reinforced. Particularly relevant to our current period, in which erecting a wall along our national southern border remains a hot topic, Weaks-Baxter's notion that narratives of and about imaginary regional boundaries influence actual regional identities underscores the power of story, as well as the constructedness of region.

But from the earliest so-called "Southern expatriates" like Frederick Douglass to more recent examples like Robert Penn Warren, Dorothy Allison, Alice Walker, and Richard Ford, Southern writers who move away articulate unique viewpoints about their homeland. For some, returning to the South

was essential to being able to write about the South; novelist Ernest Gaines, for instance, remarked in a 1978 interview that he needed to come home to feed “this Louisiana thing that drives me”: “I come back not as an objective observer, but as someone who must come back in order to write about Louisiana. I must come back to be with the land in different seasons, to travel the land, to go into the fields, to go into the small towns, to go into the bars, to eat the food, to listen to the language... I come back to absorb things” (39-40). But for others, leaving was the crucial act. In his 1967 memoir *North Toward Home*, Willie Morris describes the necessity of leaving his childhood home in Yazoo City, Mississippi, to get beyond his childhood self. Despite his fond memories of that time, Morris comes to understand the great ambivalence he feels for the South, as illustrated in the final lines of the memoir:

Why was it, in such moments just before I leave the South, did I always feel some easing of a great burden? It was if someone had taken some terrible weight off my shoulders, or as if some old grievance had suddenly fallen away. The big plane took off, and circled in widening arcs over the city, over the landmarks of my past, and my people's, then, slowly, with a lifting heavy as steel, it circled once more, and turned north toward home. (437-38)

Thirteen years after the publication of *North Toward Home*, Morris returned to Mississippi. He was writer-in-residence at Ole Miss for a decade and then moved to Jackson, where he lived his remaining years. Turns out, you can go home again. And again.

This special double issue offers a bounty of artwork, from the poetry and songs of Roy Blount, Jr., Paul Burch, Buck Downs, Philip Carter, and Mary Chapin Carpenter to the visual art of John Alexander, Andrew Blanchard, Linda Burgess, Bill Dunlap, Will Goodman, Carol Harrison, and Sonja Rieger. We are showcasing prose pieces, including memoirs by Ralph Eubanks, Ethelbert Miller, Thomas Meyer, John Shelton Reed, Barbara Rose, Rod Smith, and Winston Groom, in his one of his last writings prior to his death in September 2020. We are pleased to include a piece of short fiction by Bill Dunlap, personal essays by Hal Crowther, Richard Gruber, Redge Hanes, Lisa Howorth, Jennifer Key, and Frederick Starr, and scholarly essays by Matthew Dischinger, Adam Nemmers, and Austin Svedjan. Our hope is that this issue will document, lament, celebrate, and

explain the variations on Southern expatriation studied and experienced by our esteemed contributors.

The cover art for this issue is Linda Burgess's *Solitary Man*, a beautifully expressive piece educing a sense of alienation and loss. Following the introductions, we begin with two pieces by my talented co-editor William Dunlap: first is his mixed-media piece *He'll Set Your Fields on Fire*, which represents some of the recurring themes in his visual art—a distant Southern landscape juxtaposed with highly detailed wildlife and provocative cultural symbols. Next is his story “Beat It Like It Owes You Money,” the hilarious tale of an expat author plagiarizing Faulkner. Of course, Bill never has to stoop to such chicanery: his *Short Mean Fiction* and most recent *Pappy Kitchens* and the *Saga of Red Eye the Rooster* need no help from that other Bill. Integrated throughout the issue are beautiful art pieces, including Andrew Blanchard's *Confounded*, William Goodman's *SouthLands*, and Linda Burgess's *Kite Crossing*, *On the Run*, and *Visitation*.

Our issue is divided into four thematic sections, each featuring both written and visual works. The first section seeks to define the expatriate: John Alexander's haunting painting *Ship of Fools* reflects the various viewpoints contained in this section. For author E.C. Hanes, the mind and the soul remain free from allegiance to one place. Novelist Winston Francis Groom, Jr. recounts his productive years in Washington, D.C., and New York City before returning home to Alabama with no regrets. Artist/scholar Barbara Rose and poet E. Ethelbert Miller had formative experiences in Washington, D.C.: Rose elected to leave its history of hypocritical racism for the European old country left by her immigrant parents, while Miller chose D.C. over his native New York, despite a profound sense of ambivalence. Miller's longing for the expatriate life of James Baldwin resonates in Philip Carter's incisive poem “Jim America”; Mary Chapin Carpenter's lyrics remember Hadley Hemingway's time in Paris with Ernest with rueful wistfulness. American literature scholar Adam Nemmers explores the transient reality of the Nashville Agrarians's defiant *I'll Take My Stand*: the Twelve Southerners who left the South espoused conscience over polemic.

The second section, Strangers in a Strange (Southern) Land, opens with Andrew Blanchard's *Waiting For The World To Come*, in which a pile of southern novels stacked atop a radio is crowned with the jack of diamonds. Roy Blount, Jr.'s pithy piece about a nation abandoning its citizens, written two months before the beginning of the pandemic and one year prior to the siege on the Capitol, feels remarkably prescient, while poet Jennifer Key's sketch of the Mississippi Delta describes scenes that culminate with the realization that “whole of the twentieth century slides by in the rearview mirror.” Paul Burch's lyrics take the point of view of famed musician Jim-

mie Rodgers reflecting on his mean hometown of “Meridian” in the early twentieth century. While author Lisa Howorth argues for an understanding of the South as a region of expatriates within a country of the same, poet R.T. Smith confesses his own ironclad ties to the music, food, literature, and culture of the South. Finally in this section, poet Claude Wilkinson captures the heartbreak of seeing the past and the present vying for dominance.

Carol Harrison’s color photograph *Untitled (Fez)* begins the third section, Making the Foreign Southron. Here, American literature scholar Austin Svedjan explores “(anti) southern expatriatism” in Truman Capote’s novella *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, in which Holly Golightly’s move to New York City harbors an erotic liberation echoing Capote’s own queerness. Two biographical sketches follow—J. Richard Gruber looks at artist John Noble, a.k.a. “Wichita Bill,” a European expatriate from the early twentieth century, and S. Frederick Starr explains how Lafcadio Hearn left his mark in “How a Fugitive from the South Transformed Japan.” Sociologist John Shelton Reed reflects on a decisive decade studying the South while living outside her borders.

The fourth and final section is called Leaving the Homeland, But It Don’t Leave You. The stunning archival pigment print *Nancy* by Sonja Rieger shows the unyielding resonance one’s individual past may hold. Hal Crowther’s piece on V.S. Naipaul highlights the rootlessness that plagued the Nobel Laureate all his life. Calling his work “the only postgraduate-level guide to the Age of Identity,” Crowther bemoans the divisive tribalism that currently characterizes the United States. Poet Thomas Meyer thinks back on his own yearning to flee the Pacific Northwest for anywhere else, wondering if he was running to or merely running from. Poet Buck Downs and essayist W. Ralph Eubanks both meditate on the decision to lose their Southern accents, while Matthew Dischinger frames Brad Vice’s work through loss: melancholia, postsouthernness, and reputation. This section closes with William Goodman’s evocative mixed-media piece *Homecoming*, which incorporates photographs, drawings, and collage elements.

In addition to mourning the loss of our contributor Winston Groom, whose novel *Forrest Gump* will remain an indelible twentieth-century picaresque, *The Southern Quarterly* remembers with sadness the December 2020 death of William Winter, former Governor of Mississippi and an esteemed member of our Editorial Advisory Board. Governor Winter was a staunch advocate of education and the arts, serving as a trustee on the board of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History from the 1950s and receiving the Profile in Courage Award by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library

and Museum for his work advancing education and racial reconciliation in 2008. We will miss his name on our masthead but will continue to treasure his legacy.

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William Dunlap: The Expatriate as Incubus

The specter of the expatriate hovers over the artist like an incubus, that imagined monster that sits on our chest, haunts our dreams and disrupts sleep. Is there a universal place to which we creative types might repair that would make all the difference? Like the alleged road less traveled. Is there a Lonely Planet Guide for each generation? What if we miss the boat, the train, the plane? Either way it will be a nagging source of consternation or inspiration. As Joe Strummer of the Clash opined rhetorically in their 1979 hit, "Should I stay or should I go?" That's something we all want to know.

The designation *expatriate* carries a certain romance. The idea of one who comes from elsewhere and dares to abide amongst us yet has never really left that previous place. The further away you get from that abandoned place the more in focus it can become.

Eudora Welty traveled little and lived her life in a house her father built at 1119 Pinehurst Street in Jackson, Mississippi. Her apology was "all serious daring starts from within," a declaration certainly sustained by the quality and body of her writing.

William Faulkner went to Paris after the Great War, as did so many of his peers. He met Gertrude Stein, but failed to enter her salon and is not generally thought of as a member of the Lost Generation. Yet upon his return to Mississippi he invented and peopled Yoknapatawpha County. His "post-

age stamp of native soil” proved fertile enough to grow a lifetimes crop of insightful and meaningful work. The “agony and sweat of the human spirit,” as he said in his Nobel acceptance speech.

These examples suggest that expatriatism might be right for some but disastrous for others. How is one to proceed? As with so much in art and life, it’s not possible to know. A simple leap of faith is required. The search for a magic place is at best a futile one.

So, are we stuck with the myth of the expatriate? Whether it brings comfort or agony, it would appear so, and why not? This is simply one more piece of evidence that place matters, and matters greatly in art and life, as it does in the short story that follows, “Beat It Like It Owes You Money.”