

# Editor's Note

Over the past few decades the South has changed dramatically in terms of its day-to-day social and economic life, and its mental and moral habits have, at the very least, been challenged. Today a favorite part of university curricula all over Europe is the study of the South. Southern authors tell us how history is being altered but also recovered. And I am convinced that although the South has changed, it has also sustained its distinct character, and cultural traits have remained recognizable. I believe that this issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia*, focused on the current state of Southern letters, demonstrates that while doing justice to the individual existential experience of living in the South, some writers have succeeded in marrying the best of a tradition with the exigencies of modern living. The diversity of interests of recent Southern writers, critics, and historians is pronounced, but, as I see it, there is more continuity than discontinuity in Southern letters.

If any group is likely to help us understand the exact forms that change has engendered in the contemporary South and the conflicting forces at work there, it must be the Southern writers. This is mainly due to the chance their writings give them to live both in and out of history and their urge to communicate their perspective. The stories by Mary Hood, Ruth Moose, and Dorothy Shawhan make it clear that the function of a contemporary literature is among others to express the meaning of contemporary culture in representations of actuality, i. e. to show what we are doing right now. The poetry of Carolyn Elkins, Tibby Steedly, Marion Montgomery, Theresa Ib, and James Applewhite, all faithful to the reality of life as they know it, stops us in our tracks for a minute and helps arrest the dehumanization inherent in our technological everyday. Through compelling regional inspiration expressed in poetic metaphor and humorous narrative, the writers offer messages of universal concern. Whether we read in the South or in Scandinavia we are, as readers, looking to literature for ways to recover, restore, or reconstruct our selves.

As the "present state" is always by definition a state of flux, it is difficult to say something profound about the state of the South's multilayered culture, it is forever still in the making. But to avoid misinformation, fantasies, and delusions about the South, the opinions of historians and literary historians should be among the sources for the notions the public entertains about the present. To be situated in the South is very much to be a part of contemporary America, but that does not mean that Southern tradition is forgotten today and without impact. The Southern studies essays by Martyn Bone, David Harding, Clara Juncker, Henrik Lassen, Marko Modiano, Hans Skei, and Karl-Heinz Westarp attempt to gage the situation in the region. By implication the South is seen as a Rorschach test for the state of American identity in general. The process of ideological self-identification has enormous potential in the shaping of national and international attitudes, as the 1990's proved, and this is what makes the present essays, fiction, and poetry relevant beyond their immediate subject.

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