



Personal Souths: Interviews from the Southern Quarterly

Douglas B. Chambers

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Personal Souths, a collection of 20 interviews with famous southern writers, will mark the 50th anniversary of *The Southern Quarterly*, one of the oldest scholarly journals (founded in 1962) dedicated to southern studies. The figures interviewed range from Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty and Tennessee Williams (all from the 1970s), to a virtual Who's-Who of southern literature in the second half of the twentieth century. All of these interviews were originally published in the journal in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, and are collected here for the first time. The South is represented broadly, with writers from eight states; at least four represent the "mountain South" (Donald Harrington, Bobbie Ann Mason, Robert Morgan, Lee Smith), while another four typify a "cosmopolitan South" (Reynolds Price, Mary Lee Settle, Elizabeth Spencer, Tennessee Williams). The greatest number of voices, at least eight of the authors, speak for or from the "poor white South" (Larry Brown, Erskine Caldwell, Harry Crews, Donald Harrington, Bobbie Ann Mason, Robert Morgan, Del Shores, Lee Smith). Though there is only one African American writer, Ernest J. Gaines, another interview (William Styron, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*) also focuses on a conversation about African American literature.

The interviews are all fascinating. Not only do they reveal the personalities of these southern literary stars, they also represent a self-conscious community of writers. It is a testament to the quality of *The Southern Quarterly* that many of these writers, when discussing their most important contemporaries, often refer to other writers whose interviews are also in this collection. These first-hand discussions will continue to illuminate and inform our understanding of their creative work.

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