



# Self and Community in the Fiction of Elizabeth Spencer (Southern Literary Studies)

*Robert Jackson*

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Regionalism often evokes provinciality and an affiliation with minor literary genres, but Robert Jackson shows that region is an integral part of American identity, providing grounding for major independent voices. Jackson offers a new critical model of region that contributes to literary and cultural study across a wide range of topics. He addresses American literature since the Civil War with particular attention to Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Toni Morrison. In advancing their own diverse aesthetic and social agendas -- reactionary and progressive, theological and secular, gender-based, race-based, and above all, dissident -- these writers, Jackson argues, articulate some of the most perceptive and innovative expressions of the American region in the literary history of the United States.

According to Jackson, the region transcends both rigidly defined spatial categories -- the South of slavery, the North of freedom, the West of unlimited possibility -- and derivative cultural connotations of local color to reveal subtle and powerful insights. He provides a regional reading of Twain's greatest novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and a meaningful new interpretation of the work and its place in the American canon. He explores Faulkner's obsession with regional identity and places the Mississippian's work in problematic relation to the Depression-era Nashville Agrarian movement. O'Connor, searching for a critical vocabulary to confront mainstream American literature, religion, and gender, transforms the region from a hothouse of sentimentality into a sharp, deadly weapon in her short fiction. Morrison's brilliant appropriation of region enables her to fashion an aesthetic that is both race-conscious and endowed with revisionist agency; through the region she imagines a new grounding for American identity.

Jackson illuminates the importance of rethinking long-established assumptions and demonstrates the vast potential of the region in critical considerations of American literature and culture. Even as he devotes significant attention to realism, modernism, southern literature, and African American literature, he speaks to a wide range of fields in American Cultural studies.

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