The representation of the South in literature raises vexing questions related to the issues of authenticity and performativity. Although more than 150 years have passed since the Civil War effectively transformed the United States from a plural noun to a singular one, making “us an ‘is’” in Shelby Foote’s words,1 the South remains in popular consciousness a region set apart from the rest of the country. From an overt fascination with the “moonlight and magnolias” construction of a Southern “aristocracy” to hesitant glances at the racial history of the region, consumers of Southern literature and culture (whether those consumers are themselves Southerners or not) regard the states south of the Mason-Dixon line as notably distinctive from the rest of the country. However, given the extent of the commodity culture that accompanies late capitalism as well as the seeming homogenization of the country as a result of television, film, and social networking, several important questions arise vis-à-vis the portrayal of the South in fiction and other forms of art. At what point are these portrayals modeling on previous representations, evolving what Jean Baudrillard calls a “simulacrum”? At what point do these portrayals generate behavior, resulting in acts of performativity on the part of Southerners?

Such questions do, of course, reverberate throughout Southern studies. As Tara McPherson astutely points out, “an originary and pure southerness” has never existed. Additionally, she reminds us of the impossibility of a “simple ‘correct’ representation of the South, a single South.” Furthermore, as Richard Gray argues, “inventing or imagining – or simply assuming the existence of – the South occurs within an environment where the sheer diversity of information available and the multiplicity of systems supplying that information make cultural insularity close to impossible.” Scott Romine adds,