



Precious Perversions: Humor, Homosexuality, and the Southern Literary Canon (Southern Literary Studies)

Tison Pugh

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Southern literature has long been heralded for its tragic sentiments, in its somber and necessary acknowledgments of the region's tormented past, as it has concomitantly asserted an overwhelmingly heteronormative vision of Southern life. Yet a pantheon of great authors, ranging from Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote to the present-day voices of Florence King, Dorothy Allison, and David Sedaris, collectively attest both to the vibrancy of queer experience and to the prevalence of humor found in this rich regional canon. In *Precious Perversions: Humor, Homosexuality, and the Southern Literary Canon*, Tison Pugh challenges the premises that elevate William Faulkner and diminish Rita Mae Brown, that esteem Walker Percy yet marginalize David Sedaris, by arguing for the inclusion of gay comic authors as defining voices in the field.

By redefining the tenets of Southern literature, Pugh reveals its long-overlooked or discounted aspects of gay humor. Noting, for example, that Tennessee Williams is revered as a dramatist who probes the heart of the human condition rather than for his submerged camp humor, and that Truman Capote's comic cinema and literature never eclipsed his more serious works, Pugh establishes a history of mainstream and academic critique that has consistently ignored queer humor. Likewise, Florence King and Rita Mae Brown wrote defining narratives of Southern lesbian experience in, respectively, *Confessions of a Failed Southern Lady* and *Rubyfruit Jungle*, yet they are almost entirely neglected in accounts of the literary South. More recently, the author shows, the critical reception of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* testifies to an overarching interest in the traumatic aspects of her poetry and fiction rather than in her humor and its cathartic power. Pugh also asserts that David Sedaris, as a writer of the post-Southern South, who appears to fall beyond the parameters of regional literature for many readers, creates a new, humorous vision of the South that recognizes both its pained history and its grudging accession to modernity.

Drawing from works of key queer, Southern writers, Pugh sets forth a new vision of Southern literature-- one illuminated by the humor of gay voices no longer at the margins.

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