

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Southern Renaissance: A Scholarly Journey Across World Literature

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## Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of the "Southern Renaissance" in U.S. literature as a unique object for a scholarly journey that unites historical, cultural, and aesthetic analysis. Drawing on the IMRAD methodology, the author investigates the Southern Renaissance as a complex cultural landscape shaped by the trauma of defeat, the burden of the past, and the racial dilemma. The focus is on the work of W. Faulkner, T. Williams, Z. N. Hurston, C. McCullers, and others, through which it is shown how a local literary tradition was able to express themes universal to the world literature of the 20th century: the crisis of identity, alienation, and the clash between tradition and modernity.

## KEY WORDS

Southern Renaissance, the American South, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Zora Neale Hurston, Harlem Renaissance, "Southern School", grotesque, burden of history, literary tradition.

## INTRODUCTION

The "Southern Renaissance" (1920s-1950s) is one of the most striking paradoxes in literary history. In an economically backward, socially conservative region of the USA that had experienced a crushing military defeat, an unprecedented surge of artistic creativity occurred. This sudden flowering of literature turns its study into a genuine "scholarly journey", where the researcher, like a cartographer, maps out a complex landscape of meanings, traumas, and artistic discoveries. As noted in one study, "after World War I, white writers such as Ellen Glasgow, William Faulkner, and other key figures of the "Southern Renaissance", along with their African American counterparts in the "Harlem Renaissance", challenged the creed of the New South by asking how the grand vision of the South's past could be reconciled with the grim reality of its present(1, 156)".

The relevance of this work lies in the need for a holistic view of the Southern Renaissance not as an isolated regional phenomenon, but as an integral part of world modernist literature. The novelty of the research consists in approaching the topic as a "scholarly journey" that traces the key routes of the Southern writers' artistic quest: from the revision of the historical past to the formal experiments that influenced the global literary process.

The aim of the article is to present the Southern Renaissance as a multidimensional phenomenon in which regional identity and universal problematics merged into a unique synthesis. The objectives include: 1) defining the historical and cultural prerequisites of the movement; 2) analyzing the key themes and motifs in the works of its representatives; 3) identifying connections with the Harlem Renaissance and European

modernism.

Materials and Methods. The research methodology is based on the principles of cultural-historical and comparative-typological analysis. The source base consisted of the works of leading historians and literary scholars, in particular James C. Cobb, who demonstrated the deep connection between the Southern and Harlem Renaissances (2, 204), and Richard H. King, who explored the cultural awakening of the South through the prism of the "family romance" and historical memory (6, 15).

The material for analysis comprises the landmark works of the

era: the novels and stories of William Faulkner (*The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*), the plays of Tennessee Williams (*The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*), the stories of Carson McCullers (*The Ballad of the Sad Café*), and the essays of Zora Neale Hurston. The choice of these texts is dictated by their representativeness for demonstrating the key artistic routes of the epoch (4, 5).

Results. The analysis made it possible to identify four key routes of the "scholarly journey" that structure the artistic world of the Southern Renaissance.

**Table 1. Routes of the Scholarly Journey through the Southern Renaissance**

<b>Route of the Journey</b>	<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Representative Author and Work</b>
<b>Into the Depths of History</b>	The burden of the past, guilt, the collapse of the "aristocratic myth"	W. Faulkner, <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
<b>Into the Human Soul</b>	Loneliness, alienation, the fragility of beauty	T. Williams, <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
<b>To the Borders of "Normality"</b>	The grotesque, racial and gender boundaries	C. McCullers, <i>The Ballad of the Sad Café</i>
<b>To Cultural Crossroads</b>	Connection with the Harlem Renaissance, Black identity	Z. N. Hurston, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>

The central route for Southern writers was an agonizing journey into the past. The "Southern School", as noted by P.A. Iglíkova, is characterized by "the dependence of the individual on the past, the active intrusion of events of bygone days into the present life of the characters" (5, 42). The number one theme becomes "the impossible load of the past", which manifests itself in the constant rethinking of the defeat in the Civil War, the collapse of the plantation system, and the legacy of slavery (1). William Faulkner, in the novel "Absalom, Absalom!", transforms the story of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen into a tragic parable of unatonable guilt, where the past does not recede but continues to poison the present.

Parallel to the historical analysis, writers undertook a journey into the depths of the human psyche. As the same author writes, "the majority of writers of the Southern school are trying to find their place not in the legendary past, but in the chaotic contemporary world, from which God and the order of things have long since been banished" (5, 44). Tennessee

Williams, in the play "The Glass Menagerie", creates a piercing image of the fragile, vulnerable world of the human soul, which is inevitably destroyed under the onslaught of cruel reality. The motifs of loneliness, the collapse of family values, and alienation from society become central to his entire oeuvre (4, 88).

A special route was the exploration of borderline states – social, psychological, and corporeal. To depict a disintegrating, "chaotic" world, writers often resorted to the grotesque (5, 47). Carson McCullers, in the novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, through the story of a love triangle involving the hunchback Cousin Lymon and the mannish Miss Amelia, explores the nature of love and alienation, blurring the boundaries between the normal and the pathological, the masculine and the feminine. This route opened up the themes of existential human lostness, which are universal to modernism.

A most important, though often underestimated, route is the

one linking the Southern Renaissance with the Harlem Renaissance. James C. Cobb was one of the first to convincingly demonstrate "the strong ties between the two movements" (2, 210). Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston moved between the two worlds, exploring African American identity in the South in isolation from the dominant narrative of white guilt. If Faulkner explored the tragedy of racial hatred, Hurston, in the novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God", showed the inner world of a Black woman, not defined solely by trauma. These two Renaissances, taken together, created a stereoscopic portrait of the American South (2, 212).

Discussion. The results of the "scholarly journey" allow us to assert that the phenomenon of the "Southern Renaissance" was caused by a unique combination of factors. As P.A. Iglíkova points out, "the phenomenon of the "Southern renaissance" was caused by an acute desire to critically comprehend the past of the South, in particular its defeat in the Civil War, to correlate the past with the present, as well as by a negative attitude towards capitalist society" (5, 39). The writers rebelled against the rationalism, the dominance of business, and the dehumanization characteristic of modern America.

This also explains the formal innovation. To make tangible a chaotic world devoid of God, writers were forced to resort to experimental techniques: the stream of consciousness in Faulkner, complex symbolism in Williams, the grotesque in McCullers (5, 49). Thus, the regional material proved to be an ideal soil for the growth of all-American and global modernist themes.

A limitation of the traditional view of the "Southern Renaissance" was considering it as an exclusively "white" phenomenon. Research of recent decades, on the contrary, emphasizes its inextricable connection with African American literature. As shown in the work dedicated to Faulkner's legacy, many writers – from Zora Hurston to Toni Morrison – used the same tropes and archetypes, but to a different effect, complementing and even correcting the portrait of the South he created (3, 134).

### Conclusion

The "Southern Renaissance" is not just a page in the history of regional U.S. literature. It is a unique "scholarly journey" that led to the creation of an artistic cosmos where the local traumas and myths of the South were transformed into universal parables about guilt, redemption, human dignity,

and resilience. The work of W. Faulkner, T. Williams, C. McCullers, Z. N. Hurston, and their contemporaries, studied along the routes from history to psychology and from the grotesque to intercultural dialogue, has forever inscribed the American South on the map of 20th-century world literature.

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