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Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture

Anthony Wilson

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To early European colonists the swamp was a place linked with sin and impurity; to the plantation elite, it was a practical obstacle to agricultural development. For the many excluded from the white southern aristocracy--African Americans, Native Americans, Acadians, and poor, rural whites--the swamp meant something very different, providing shelter and sustenance and offering separation and protection from the dominant plantation culture.

Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture explores the interplay of contradictory but equally pre-vailing metaphors: first, the swamp as the underside of the myth of pastoral Eden that defined the antebellum South; and second, the swamp as the last pure vestige of undominated southern eco-culture. As the South gives in to strip malls and suburban sprawl, its wooded wetlands have come to embody the last part of the region that will always be beyond cultural domination.

Examining the southern swamp from a perspective informed by ecocriticism, literary studies, and ecological history, *Shadow and Shelter* considers the many repre-sentations of the swamp and its evolving role in an increasingly multicultural South.

Anthony Wilson is assistant professor of English at LaGrange College. His work has been published in the *Southern Literary Journal* and the Chronicle of Higher Education's online edition.

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