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Book Review - Queering the South on Screen

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Off the SHELF

Queering the South on Screen edited by Tison Pugh (University of Georgia Press, 2020: ISBN 9780820356723, paperback, \$34.95; ISBN 9780820356532, hardcover, \$99.95)

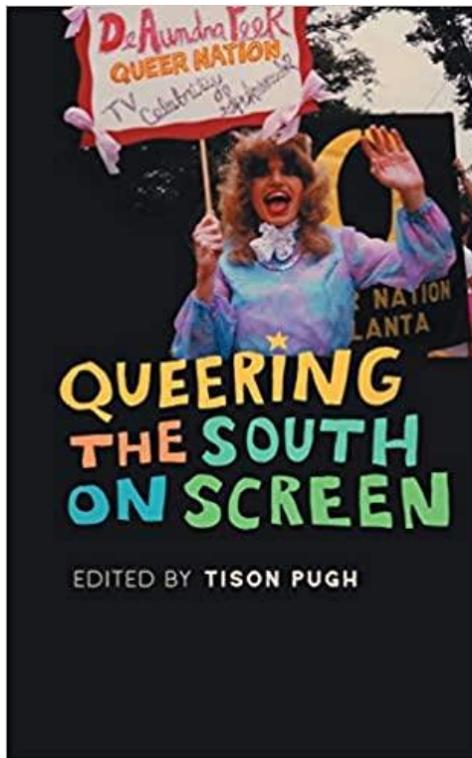
An engaging and substantive collection of essays, *Queering the South on Screen* takes a deep dive into the role of visual media in queer identity development throughout the American South. Here, readers take a tour of the reflexive nature of relationships between queer southerners and the portrayal of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality in films, plays, and other visual media in southern settings. This book is a crucial conversation in queer film theory, engaging in an inquiry into “five narrative and thematic modes of queerness - adaptation, gothic, homosocial anxiety, kinship, and camp.”

The authors dissect individual films to show the juxtaposition of queer characters’ presumed personalities, desires, and fantasies to the realities of life in the South as a queer person. These five narrative tropes point to intersections of queerness, regionalism, and identity. *Queering the South on Screen* proposes that homosocial relationships, fluid masculinity, and emboldened femininity are all explorative representations of what queer culture represents for the American South.

As the contributors to *Queering the South on Screen* clarify, the American South has a deeply

layered relationship with heteronormative values and expectations. Part one, titled “Queer Adaptations of Southern Authors,” follows early adaptations of southern authors on screen. The evolving dynamics between men and women during that time are highlighted through displays of multifaceted masculine identities alongside women who step into their own sexual power. One author even posits, “queered southern masculinities... give rise to female agency.” This text gives a riveting review of how empowered women brought validation to queer identities.

The rise of southern Gothicism illustrates social perceptions of depravity through sexual salaciousness, pervasive alcoholism, and general degeneracy. In the eyes of the public, queerness evoked assumptions of degeneracy, coinciding with later tropes of queer antisociality. However, further scrutiny of queer Gothicism in southern horror delineates the true monstrosity of the heteronormative, while establishing the fundamental normativity of homosexuality.



In the book’s final chapters, more modern examples of queer media are explored. The iconic drag queens of Atlanta on public access television are lauded as examples of using queerness as a means of challenging the traditional southern ideologies of conservatism, whiteness, elitism, and heteronormativity. Contributors to the book go on to explain how drag performers like DeAundra Peek used their

platforms in media to revolutionize what it means to enjoy being gay in your community, no matter where that community may be.

The analysis of films in this text provides a patchwork portrait of the evolution of queer acceptance and celebration. *Queering the South on Screen* reads as an introduction into queer

film studies, a vital segment of LGBTQIA+ history. This book is highly recommended for academic and public libraries, especially those with a focus on diverse and inclusive collections.

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