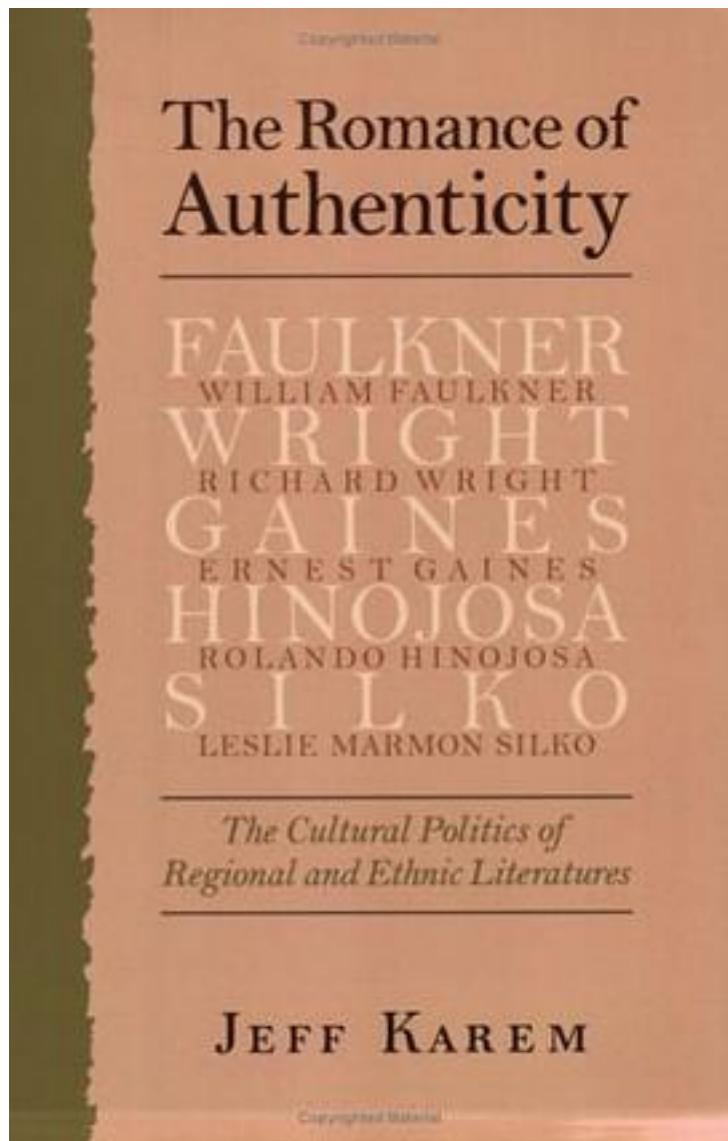


The Romance of Authenticity



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著者:Karem, Jeff

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To what extent has the growing popular demand for a vicarious experience of other cultures fueled the expectation that the most important task for regional and ethnic writers is to capture and convey authentic cultural material to their readers? In *The Romance of Authenticity*, Jeff Karem argues that, in contrast to prevailing assumptions that authenticity should be prized as a goal of regional and ethnic literatures, it is in fact a dangerously restrictive category of literary judgment. He draws on a large body of archival evidence to show how intense political and economic interests have determined what literary representations are deemed authentic, not only constraining what such writers can publish but also limiting the ways in which their works are interpreted. The author specifically discusses the work of William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Ernest Gaines, Rolando Hinojosa, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Exploring these writers' different responses to the expectation that they act as cultural representatives of the Southern, Southwestern, African American, Latino, or Native American experience, Karem finds that some refuse that role and others embrace it. The *Romance of Authenticity* concludes that despite the celebration of hybridity in contemporary theories of identity, the politics of cultural authenticity in publishing and criticism produce precisely the opposite effect, reducing regional and ethnic writers to exotic objects of desire.

作者介绍:

目录:

[The Romance of Authenticity](#) [下载链接1](#)

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[The Romance of Authenticity](#) [下载链接1](#)

书评

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