

THE GREAT ENDEAVOR:
NATIONAL REBIRTH AND THE FOLKLORE COMMISSIONS
OF IRELAND AND THE UNITED STATES

Rachel B. J. Richardson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of American Studies (Folklore Program).

Chapel Hill
2010

Approved by:

William R. Ferris

Robert Cantwell

Townsend Ludington

ABSTRACT

RACHEL B. J. RICHARDSON— The Great Endeavor: National Rebirth
and the Folklore Commissions of Ireland and the United States
(Under the direction of William R. Ferris)

The governments of Ireland and the United States established national Folklore Commissions in 1935. These far-reaching cultural programs encouraged a new kind of national pride and awareness, and provided fertile materials for the two nations' writers to use in their art. This thesis focuses on writers William Butler Yeats, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty, exploring their literature as products of this particular time and climate. Through their texts, regional contexts, and involvement with the commissions, we may examine their debt to folklore and place, and the far reach of their art.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many people for support in this project. Foremost, for direction, encouragement, and limitless energy, I owe Bill Ferris my thanks. Bob Cantwell and Towny Ludington were instrumental in helping me to refine ideas and pull together a cohesive argument. I am also particularly grateful for the openness of the Folklore Curriculum at UNC, and to every member of its faculty, for inviting me to explore diffuse musical and literary threads (and beyond), and even funding my research in doing so, by way of the D. K. Wilgus Fellowship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapters:

I. Introduction: The Climate for a Folklore Commission.....	1
II. William Butler Yeats and the Myth of Ireland.....	21
III. Zora Neale Hurston and the Voice of the People.....	36
IV. Eudora Welty and the Photographic Image.....	51
V. Conclusion.....	66
References.....	68

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE CLIMATE FOR A FOLKLORE COMMISSION

Their life was on the lips of men.
—Seamus Delargy

A widely-accessible national art . . .
—Edward Hirsch

Both the Irish Folklore Commission and the Federal Writers' Project (a division within the larger Works Progress Administration) were established by the governments of Ireland and the United States, respectively, in 1935. This fact alone provides an interesting lens through which to look at the politics and people in these two nations, in a particular era. But the fact of their establishment could merely be coincidental—they were not in conversation with each other explicitly, so speculation on the relationship doesn't go far in itself. More interesting is a side-by-side comparison of the two projects in their aims and, ultimately, in the literature that came out of them. Each was a project unimagined before in these nations, and each represented a nationalist effort at forging identity and fostering pride. Further, their artistic products show us how folklore was used in two disparate places to encourage and inspire great literature. Through this comparison, we may decide that perhaps these places are not so disparate after all.

Folklorist Jerrold Hirsch has done extensive research on the Federal Writers' Project of the WPA, and has stated in several publications that the scholarship on the

Project lacks discussion of how the collected materials led to the creation of new artistic endeavors (Hirsch...). Similarly, critics have argued that there has been little scholarship on the effects of the Irish Folklore Commission on literature, though it is widely understood that the link exists (source). My thesis will explore the relationships between the folklore commission work done by three writers—W. B. Yeats, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty—and the literature they produced. In looking closely at their backgrounds, their views of nationality and folklore, their training in collection work, and their writing, I seek to paint a broader portrait of writers who are often viewed only through the narrower lens of their families and their literary training. For all three, the local and national community played a large role in how they wrote and how they were perceived, and may help to explain the canonical statuses they now hold.

The Federal Writers' Project, like the Irish Folklore Commission, aimed to preserve and celebrate what was uniquely of the nation. In both cases there were other, more practical, aims as well. Short-term, tangible results were paramount to the governments funding the projects, and the proof of these results was enumerated on scribbled pages filed, guidebooks published, language preserved, oral histories transcribed, tales recorded, and citizens put to work. But these programs, alike as they were in broad goals, were each catalyzed by a unique set of historical, political, and cultural needs. Therefore, we must look at each in its own framework now to set up the discussion of individual works that will follow.

The Irish Folklore Commission, or *Coimisiún Béaloideasa Éireann*, was established in 1935 by the Irish government to study and collect information on the

folklore and traditions of Ireland. However, the establishment of the Commission was the culmination of many decades of efforts by individuals and smaller groups, and represented a larger governmental approval and organization for the project rather than the inception of an endeavor. A brief cultural history of the nation reveals some startling and transformative changes in the century leading up to this program's implementation, all of which built the momentum, directly and indirectly, that eventually supported its founding.

In 1845, the largest crop failure in Ireland's history caused mass death and emigration from the island. Estimates suggest that 20-25 percent of the Irish population, over two million people, either died or left their home country permanently in these years. The magnitude of this loss had a permanent effect on the Irish psyche, and the story pervaded cultural memory for generations to come, both in the minds of Irish at home and, some have argued, even more in the minds of those who left for America and other shores (MacNeill 348).

A generation later, large changes again washed over the island, this time in the shape of growth and transformation of the cities. Ireland had long been an agricultural economy; but in the late 1800s the Industrial Revolution began to reshape the region, requiring more and more labor to move to industrial centers, diminishing the power and autonomy of small village economies. This transformation was occurring all over the Western world, and very soon strong pockets of resistance—largely led by the educated elite in cities—built against the industrial tide. The Arts and Crafts movement was one of these anti-industrial forces, a movement which defined itself as craft-based, human, and humane. Arts and Crafts followers believed in using solid, sturdy materials, and beautiful

designs made by hand. On the surface it was an aesthetic movement whose product was material goods—from home furnishings (textiles, furniture, hardware) to architecture (houses, schools, offices, public buildings), to media (printing presses and their products: posters, pamphlets, books of poems and tales). But overtly too, it was a conscious response to machines, to the increasing pace of life, to the alienation of labor from workers, to uniformity. London was one of the centers for this movement, and the base for textile-maker William Morris. The architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh acted as one of the central figures in Glasgow, Scotland. Many like-minded Irish people of means and education trained with these figures, including Elizabeth and Susan Yeats (sisters of William Butler) under Morris in the 1890s. Related efforts were gaining force in continental Europe, Japan, and the United States as industrialization changed all of these countries' ways of life.

Meanwhile, in the smaller world of the British Isles, Ireland was straining against England's rule. Having long been dominated by the larger isle, and officially incorporated into the United Kingdom in 1801, the Irish were widely considered not to have an independent culture and heritage, to have been savage before colonization by British forces in the middle ages. By the end of the nineteenth century, figures at the head of political and social life were growing increasingly restless for independent rule, and began to have more and more serious clashes with England. Respect for individuals they saw as intrinsically tied to respect for the state. In addition to this, folklorists and other figures interested in the social world of Ireland became increasingly concerned that, as a result of industrialization and the English-imposed education system, the Irish language

was in irreversible decline, and with it, commonly-known orally-transmitted Irish history and myth.

The Irish language had flourished particularly in rural areas of the country, largely because of their isolation from other cultures and influences. Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill, in 1893, established the Gaelic League to address this impending tragedy. In their initial publication, they listed their central aims as:

1. The preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland, and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue.
2. The study and publication of existing Gaelic literature, and the cultivation of modern literature in Irish. (Hyde and MacNeill 6)

The means for accomplishing these aims were through the promotion of the language in public spheres, especially as a requirement in schools, and in the active seeking out and publication of Irish myths and folktales. They also sought to encourage the composition of Irish-themed and Irish-language songs and new writing. The organization was non-political, but attracted those in favor of Home Rule, the moderate option, and the more radical patriots who wanted nothing less than complete independence from Britain.

The Gaelic League and Douglas Hyde's activism on behalf of Irish language and lore was a major catalyst for other action in the country. Within the decade, William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and George Moore founded the Irish Literary Theatre with the aim of producing and showcasing plays by and about the people of Ireland. By 1904 they were able to acquire land in Dublin and establish the Abbey Theatre, which would become a center for nationalist discussion and artistic expression. In 1902, W. B. and his sister Elizabeth Yeats started a letterpress printing operation (originally called Dun Emer, but soon changed to Cuala Press), following the Arts and Crafts model, specifically to publish writers of the Irish Literary Revival, which was by

this point a well-recognized literary flowering. Yeats, John Millington Synge, Lady Gregory, AE, Padraic Colum, and dozens more were writing daring, important work in this period, spurred by the call to speak for their country.

These writers were not composing in a vacuum, nor were their works uninfluenced by their surroundings and their time—they were heavily and centrally involved in their country’s struggles, and participated in communal ventures both artistically and politically. They also believed that, in addition to writing their own creative work, they should collect and record the commonly-held stories of the people. Yeats, Gregory, Colum, and several others compiled and published books alongside their own of Irish fairy tales and myths in both the Irish language and English. Lady Gregory termed her linguistic choice for her collection of myths to be “Kiltartanese”: English words with Gaelic syntax.

A decade later, in 1916, the tense relationship with England ruptured completely. In the famed Easter Rising of that year, Irish republicans seeking to end British rule of their island mounted an insurrection against the British forces in Dublin. The seven-day battle led eventually to the Irish War of Independence, fought from 1919 until July 1921, creating the Irish Free State in 1922. W. B. Yeats, as a prominent political figure as well as literary icon by this time, was appointed to the first Irish senate and served two terms there.

In the wake of this enormous transformation from colony to nation, the new government had to choose its priorities for its people, just as the people shaped the government they were to have. Seamus Ó Duilearga (or Delargy), a young professor of Folklore at University College Dublin, established the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1926

and edited its new journal *Béaloides*. In 1930 the Society folded into the Irish Folklore Institute, newly set up by the government and given a small grant to collect folk traditions. In 1935, the Institute was replaced by the larger and better-funded Irish Folklore Commission, which was directed by Delargy (O'Sullivan 449). Sean O'Sullivan notes that the Irish Folklore Commission "represented the first serious attempt to cope with the problem of collecting Irish oral tradition" (450). The editors exhorted readers and would-be collectors in a 1932 issue of *Béaloides* that

The collection of our oral literature is a matter of grave and urgent national importance. Our folklore is, in certain aspects, unrivalled; but it will not live for ever, and must be written down as carefully and expeditiously as possible. To our mind, all our energies for at least ten years should be directed towards the recording of our traditions; the arrangement and publication of the material collected should be deferred until a later time. Each month which passes brings to us the news of the death of storytellers and informants who were living repositories of tradition. We cannot replace these old people; their knowledge is *not* passed on to a younger generation, as a rule, but goes with them into the grave. In many districts the Irish language is dying fast, and all the talk in the world will not make it live there much longer. While we have the opportunity, let us take our coats off and get to *work!*
(Murchadha 517)

They perceived the goal to be not only a current value of these tales to the Irish people, but that they would be "providing future generations of our people with an inexhaustible storehouse of national tradition, the value of which will increase with the passing of the years" (517). According to Maire MacNeill, Delargy viewed all Irish literature as "essentially oral, whether composed for the king's court or the peasant's fireside. 'Their life,' he says, 'was on the lips of men and not on the point of a pen scratching on a vellum page'" (344). She adds to his assertion, arguing that for the social historian, folklore "offers information to be found nowhere else about the life of the people" (346). Few

voices at the time discussed the organization of these materials—simply obtaining them was the immediate priority; systems of cataloging, interpreting, and analyzing them could wait (Honti 33).

Thus was created the theory that the Irish Folklore Commission would follow for many years to come. Delargy's interest in collecting had developed years earlier when, during vacations from teaching, he visited the Gaeltacht (Gaelic-speaking districts), particularly in west Kerry, to learn the language. There he befriended "a gifted storyteller and *seanchaidhe* (tradition-transmitter), and this experience inspired him with the determination to record what remained of the old popular culture of Ireland" (MacNeill 340).

His methodology was largely influenced by Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, who "insisted that he must visit the Scandinavian and other north European folklore archives and acquaint himself with their methods" (MacNeill 340). After a year of study there, Delargy returned to Ireland convinced of the need for intensive collection, and persuaded the Irish Government to finance an Irish Folklore Commission to accomplish that goal. The Rockefeller Institute in the U.S. also made an initial contribution to the effort. Their cataloguing system was "an adaptation of one devised by Swedish folklorists for the Folklore Archive of Uppsala University" (MacNeill 348).

Collection was carried out by a team of nine full-time salaried men, some vocational teachers of Irish, some National Teachers who had not yet found employment in schools, one a former fisherman.¹ All were native Irish speakers, "a very necessary qualification as their areas of work were to lie within the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking)

¹ The makeup of the full-time collectors varied slightly over the 36 years of the Commission's existence, but usually made up about the same number. The listing I have provided here is the makeup of the first group of collectors, hired upon the formation of the Commission in 1935 (O'Sullivan 450).

districts. The Gaeltacht was extremely rich in oral tradition, and the danger of its loss, through the possible further decline of the native language, was more acute there than in the Galltacht (English-speaking areas)” (O’Sullivan 450). Collectors were trained in the Dublin office for a week in the scope and methods of the work to be carried out. They were made familiar with the work already done in the district where they would work, which was in many cases their home area. They were given guidebooks written by the Commission on what to collect, how to classify, what questions to ask informants, and examples of types of lore. Each “was supplied with an Ediphone recording machine, boxes of wax cylinders, standard notebooks into which the matter recorded was later transcribed, and smaller notebooks for rough jottings and for diaries.” In the early years of the Commission, collectors used bicycles to transport themselves and their materials to their places of work (O’Sullivan 451).

In addition to these nine central collectors, the Commission enlisted the help of many other part-time collectors to assist in covering more of the country. These collectors were paid on results, and primarily worked with the main office by correspondence, often by a questionnaire system, which had them respond to set questions on particular subjects, such as “festivals, dress, the Famine, emigration, patron saints, holy wells, tinkers” and more (O’Sullivan 452). Many of these participants were National Teachers, members of Ireland’s large and powerful teaching trade union.

The schools had an even more central role in this project, a fact which highlights just how intertwined the Commission was with public life in the country. In 1937, the Commission began to work directly with the Department of Education in Dublin and the National Teachers. Together they planned a program in which “instead of the normal

composition work in Irish and English, the senior pupils [of the Primary Schools], under the guidance of their teachers, collected some traditions of their home district and wrote them down in school.” This material eventually amounted to over 500,000 pages of manuscript material (O’Sullivan 452).

The program as a whole was not exhaustive, nor was its focus evenly spread among counties, but it was quite expansive and ambitious. The system it employed further allowed for additions to be slotted in, and made more apparent which areas could be supplemented. The methodology prevailing over the entire period of collection was to work fast and effectively, leaving until later the questions of use of the material. However, during the course of collection, and as the program became more inclusive (adding school programs, etc.), contemporary customs and tales increasingly got collected and added to the archive, expanding Delargy’s original goal of preserving the culture of the past. Hence, and in line with the broadening definition of folklore within the discipline as a whole, the IFC began to loosen its theory that folklore was the collection of “remainders” only. Over the course of its existence, the Commission’s leaders began to see more continuity in the changing Irish culture, and to place value on these shifting traditions as well.

The tales and other information collected were seen as valuable research material from which not only historians but also artists could draw. But, Maire MacNeill pointed out in 1965, there had been little study of “the mutual influence on each other of folk tradition and Irish literature,” maintaining that there can be little doubt that there was mutual influence, but that the subject had hardly been touched upon in serious studies (344). In the next chapters of this thesis, I will discuss just this mutual influence, focusing

on William Butler Yeats and his connection to Irish folklore. I will also address the same mutual influence in a parallel case in the United States, with American authors Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston.

First, however, I must provide a background for the American folklore program, the Federal Writers' Project. Just as in Ireland, it was a product of many decades of change in the nation. In the mid-1800s, as Ireland was facing the crippling potato famine, and hundreds of thousands of Irish were immigrating to America, the United States faced increasing stress of its own. As the slave economies of the American South prospered, white Southerners increasingly desired separation from the Northern states. Public outcry over the institution of slavery had also become intense. Activists, white and black, Northern and Southern, gave speeches, wrote books, and tried to raise sympathies toward their side. In 1861, the Southern states established the Confederate States of America, with Jefferson Davis as president, just as Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated into office, and the Civil War began.

With this vast reshaping of the country in terms of values, rights, and beliefs, came several decades in which the country, its North and South, its states, and its local communities, had to create and adjust to a new order. During and in the immediate wake of the war, people were already mobilizing for the changes to come. African-Americans began to establish several all-black towns, including Eatonville, Florida, established in 1863, where Zora Neale Hurston would be born twenty-eight years later. The Ku Klux Klan formed in 1865, with its members thinking of it as a guarantee for white supremacy after the slave system was dismantled. Jim Crow laws were also set in place to ensure

separation and the maintenance of a racial hierarchy that remained comfortable for whites.

Much ground was gained toward racial equality and a more perfect union, but many old institutions remained, just in slightly different form. The sharecropping system on Southern farms maintained a system very similar to that of slavery, in which workers were constantly indentured to the landowner. But at the same time, all over the country, individuals tested the new laws with court cases, admission to universities, and formation of clubs. The first black universities were established, such as Tuskegee in 1881. Civil rights organizations also began to form, the largest being the NAACP, officially founded in 1909.

In the early 1900s, John Lomax, the folksong collector from Texas, also began compiling songs from rural areas in the South and West. His first anthology, Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, was published in 1910. Lomax was a prominent folklorist at the University of Texas, Austin, where J. Frank Dobie and Stith Thompson soon arrived to teach English. At UT and other loci around the country, folklorists, writers, and other activists were crossing paths and beginning to see a shared purpose in their work.

As in Ireland, the U.S. was feeling the pressures and geographical changes industrialization brought. Anti-industrialist thinkers such as Frank Lloyd Wright asserted their influence in the Arts and Crafts movement as well as in broader calls for social reform. In the U.S., race was paramount in the discussion of social institutions because it was an issue so deeply and painfully woven into American history, and particularly so in the South. In the 1920s, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and other black

writers, many of them from rural areas in the South, relocated to New York and became part of the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of black literary talent and accomplishment of the period. Several within the group began to publish a literary magazine called *Fire!!* to feature many of the up-and-coming black authors of the day.

The 1929 stock market crash, which set off what would become known as the Great Depression, brought much of this activity to a halt. Unemployment reached 25% over the next four years, and manufacturing output was reduced by one third. With the fall of prices, American currency became devalued, making repayment of debts even harder for those struggling. The mining, lumber, and agriculture industries—largely rural enterprises—were hit especially hard by this drop. It was facing this economic and human crisis that Democratic candidate Franklin Roosevelt introduced the New Deal, exhorting those in power: “Throughout the nation men and women, forgotten in the political philosophy of the Government, look to us here for guidance and for more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of national wealth. . . . I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people. This is more than a political campaign. It is a call to arms.”

Upon winning the Presidency, Roosevelt put his plan into action, with a “First New Deal” that offered short-term relief in 1933 and a larger, comprehensive program (the “Second New Deal”) in 1935. This plan included labor support, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) relief program, the Social Security Act, and programs to aid the agricultural sector, including tenant farmers and migrant workers.

The Works Progress Administration was the largest agency within the program, employing millions of people and affecting almost every locality in the U.S., especially

rural populations. Within the WPA, there were four arts projects—the Federal Writers’ Project, Federal Theater Project, Federal Music Project, and Federal Art Project—with the Writers’ Project comprising the largest and most publicly visible part.

John Lomax was hired to advise in folklore collecting for the Federal Writers’ Project, a post which he passed, a year later, to Benjamin Botkin, a Harvard-educated folklorist whose belief in the ever-evolving state of folklore made him a radical in his time. These two men, and primarily the second, had great effect in shaping the collecting that the Federal Writers’ Project was to do, and the theory by which it did its work. One of Lomax’s most important contributions, which Botkin continued, was the recording of slave narratives. Since the Civil War had ended seventy years before, there were few people left who could remember slavery, and these informants were all quite elderly. Therefore the recording of their stories, like the simultaneous recording of rural Irish speakers’ language and folktales, was considered a last-chance opportunity to salvage an important piece of the American story.

Other central goals of the project were to make informative guides to every state in the Union, partly as a way to provide poverty relief by getting workers from all over the nation on payroll, but also to celebrate the diversity of cultures and traditions across the nation and produce a useful, saleable item for public consumption. Publishing houses clamored for these guides, which provided more research than they could possibly perform themselves (Mangione 15).

As a stimulus project, the FWP employed almost exclusively those who could demonstrate need, most of whom were not trained as writers. They were permitted to hire only a few people at each state office on the basis of ability, so the quality of reporting

varied widely. At its peak, in spring 1936, the Project employed 6,686 men and women across the forty-eight states (Mangione 9). It produced several hundred published volumes—state, city, town, and highway guides, as well as books on ethnic studies, folklore, zoology, and other subjects. Through their publishing endeavors, the Project made a partial return on the investment the country had put into it, which helped to garner support among ardent capitalists who otherwise opposed what they saw as government handouts for “boondogglers” and “pencil leaners” (Taylor 15). But still, from its inception, the WPA as a whole and the arts projects in particular were dogged with charges of being wasteful, inefficient uses of public moneys in a time of crisis. Worse, Congressman Martin Dies had just formed the Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities and charged the Federal Writers’ and Theater Projects as prime targets in his accusations of Communist activity and propaganda (Mangione 4).

Despite widespread public sentiment that the projects were experimental, perhaps even subversive, Botkin’s own approach to the FWP was much more conservative, in the sense that he was following what he saw as a very old model. The romantic nationalist theory dates from Johann Gottfried von Herder, who, in the late eighteenth century, had argued that the soul of a country resides within its common people, and can be learned through their language, poetry, traditions, dances, stories, etc. Botkin embraced the idea of folklore as a way to enhance love of country and unite a people. He had in many ways inherited this view of folklore’s role from the same sources as Delargy had in Ireland: northern European models of folklore collecting such as those in Sweden and Finland. The theory has most often been adopted to idealize pre-industrial, rural, working class culture, which deeply understood its heritage and was therefore ethical and proud. And

because it celebrates the uniqueness of the people of a nation, it is often also associated with ideas of ethnic purity. As it happened, another romantic nationalist theory was being advanced in the 1930s within the National Socialist Party in Germany, with Adolf Hitler at its helm.

Benjamin Botkin's unique twist on romantic nationalism was that, instead of viewing the nation as a single group with a single history, he embraced the cultural pluralism of the United States, and wove this into his theory of what American nationalism was. Simon J. Bronner notes that Botkin "was careful not to equate a national tradition with the kind of presentation that Nazi Germany then was making for a national soul evident from its folklore, so he emphasized that any concept of American folklore should not imply 'racial heritage' or insist that 'a particular folk group or body of tradition is 'superior' or 'pure'" (Bronner 133). Botkin's theory resonated with other program officials, and the FWP became known for its inclusive and left-wing view of American culture. Jerrold Hirsch adds,

The FWP's emphasis on diversity is... often described as Whitmanesque. [...] FWP publications were infused with the idea that a discovery, an acknowledgment, and finally a celebration of the nation's cultural pluralism offered a basis for national integration that was inclusive, not exclusive, and democratic, not coercive. FWP officials thought new guides to America were needed and that members of ethnic groups, ordinary southerners, urban workers, and former slaves deserved an opportunity to speak directly to their fellow citizens. (Hirsch 2003, 6)

It is worth noting that southerners are specifically listed here as a group which had not before the FWP been properly celebrated. Although there had been a wealth of writing and other forms of entertainment that centered on southerners and southern life, most were written by northerners and intended for a northern audience. These renditions of

southern life built on stereotypes and poked fun of southern music, speech, and folkways. Local colorists painted the south with a simplistic and nostalgic tinge, while minstrel shows presented grotesquely exaggerated versions of racial relations. Few southerners had the forum to say what their home was really like.

That a whole region of the country would be regarded as underclass, lesser citizens, is remarkable, but highlights another parallel to Ireland in its relationship to England. White southerners have long told of a felt kinship between themselves and the Irish, which may be due in part to blood kinship, but largely also to a shared sense of atrocities committed upon them by a larger power, to a lost war, to the agrarian economy and rural lifestyle that dominated both places and influenced their people.² More interestingly, perhaps, black southerners often speak of the same kinship with the Irish. The sense of bondage and submission to a foreign power may in this case not be felt geographically, as from the white south to the (white) north, but racially, from black southerners to white southerners. In both cases, however, these ordinary southerners, white and black, gained a chance in the 1930s under the New Deal to be recognized and celebrated—indeed to celebrate themselves.

Jerrold Hirsch argues that Botkin was particularly fascinated by the south and the opportunities and challenges it presented to his view of the Project and of cultural pluralism. “In struggling to arrive at an understanding of the dynamics of folklore in a pluralistic society, he gave the South and its folk traditions considerable attention. . . . Botkin understood that the democratic and egalitarian thrust of his view of a diverse American folklore as a cultural asset had political implications, perhaps more for black

² For more views on this felt kinship between the Irish and Southerners, see Irvin Cobb, “The Lost Irish Tribes in the South,” and Kieran Quinlan’s *Strange Kin*, among others.

Americans than for anyone else” (Hirsch 2003, 183). Because many of the largest changes in landscape, from rural to industrial and urban, were happening in the South, Botkin also understood the folklore of this region as particularly dynamic—and he viewed it, unlike many of his contemporaries, as vital and continuing, not threatened by these changes (Hirsch 2003, 183).

The Federal Writers’ Project in particular gave its workers, consultants, and admirers all across the nation, and perhaps most excitingly in the south, a sense of shared purpose in telling their stories, both past and present:

There was a widespread belief that from this exploration of America might come a renewal of American literature, that FWP guides were contributing both to the rediscovery of American culture and to the reintegration of the American artist into the community. Writers, according to this view, would discover in the FWP description of an indigenous American culture... the materials from which they could create a widely accessible national art. (Hirsch 2003, 6)

Further, Hirsch notes, because the project glorified the ordinary, and sought to define what it was to be American in such broad and inclusive proportions, with not only a rich past but a rich present too, the art that could be created from it would have a similarly broad scope. “FWP officials argued that the familiarity with the American scene that project writers gained from guidebook research and that the information guides provided all American writers would stimulate literary creativity. They saw the possibility of a great American epic emerging from the work of the Federal Writers on the oral history projects” (Hirsch 2003, 8-9).

Such writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, Sterling Brown, Lyle Saxon, and dozens more worked within the FWP and did, to differing degrees and in differing manners, write out of their experiences working on and making

use of this national project. Though federal funding for the project ended in 1939 because of increasing fire from Dies, and the tension and expense of the imminent second World War, most of the projects remained in limited form under state control for a few more years. The inherent limitation of state separation changed the nature of the project, however, and most historians mark the true end of the project in its essence as 1939.

Despite its short life, the Federal Writers' Project had a profound impact on how Americans view their country, and in what ways they perceive and value their history. Like the Irish Folklore Commission, the FWP was a documentation of much that was in danger of being lost to the past, as well as a revitalization of tradition. But perhaps more than all of this, these projects were not simply collecting and organizing information; they were also creating new ways of looking at the nation. In so doing, they provided a wealth of material for both the writers who were involved with the projects and those who have been more distantly influenced by them over the past several decades. In the following chapters, I will look closely at three of these writers: W. B. Yeats will serve as a single, highly involved and highly productive case at the inception of the Irish Folklore Commission. In the U.S., because of the cultural plurality inherent to the nation and to the FWP, it is harder to choose one figure to compare. Therefore I will focus on the south as a particular nexus of activity, and look at Zora Neale Hurston as an example of a black southern writer, one who was trained in Anthropology and Folkloristics, and acted as a prominent figure in the field. I will also profile Eudora Welty as an example of a white southern writer who was minimally related to the project in official capacity but

nevertheless made much use of the folklorist's tools and the resources the WPA generated.

Through these three portraits—not complete pictures of the artists or their work, but views from a largely undiscussed angle—I will attempt to make a case for their “broadly accessible national art,” and the grounding they were provided by the connection to their nation's folklore and communities.

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND THE MYTH OF IRELAND

*This land where your fathers lived proudly should be dear
and dear and again dear.*
—W. B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats, the son of an atheist artist father and a formally uneducated mother, was born into a tumultuous Dublin in 1865. He spent his earliest years moving between the major cities of London and Dublin, and the small town of Sligo, where his mother's family lived. By his early twenties, he was publishing poems extensively and becoming known in Dublin as a major political and literary force.

W. B. Yeats has long been considered a modernist writer and a prominent political figure in the nationalist struggle in Ireland, but neither of these portrayals fully addresses his debt to folklore, or his use of the folklorist's tools. To the extent that cultural influence is cited, it is in terms of Irish nationalism or mythology. These facets are certainly at play in his work, but Yeats's sense of folklore as its own discipline makes it deserving of its own focus.

In his work, Yeats fused the contemporary folklore of the Irish countryside with the ancient Gaelic literature that had been revived by translators (Hirsch 1991, 1121). His basic premise, implicit in his writing for many years and eventually articulated publicly, was that the creation of a great national art could unify Ireland. Underpinning that belief,

however, was a more personal truth: that Ireland created the unity and force in his own work.

Though Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats—a “debater and controversialist” who loved the company of urban intellectuals, a religious skeptic who valued logic and sophistication—has been much credited as a seminal influence on the poet, Yeats's mother Susan Pollexfen Yeats asserted an equal, if quieter, power on the young poet. Richard Ellmann describes her as having “few opinions about anything, but liked best of all to exchange ghost and fairy stories with some fisherman's wife in the kitchen” (23). From a Protestant Sligo family, in her quiet pragmatism and confidence in her faith and family “she stood for a different kind of life, where an ignorant peasant had more worth than a knowledgeable artist, and she secured her husband's respect for this point of view as she drew her children's love for her native home” (23). Though the Yeats family lived for many years in the major cities of Dublin and London, Susan never felt at home there because no one in the cities told ghost or fairy stories (Ellmann 23). The young William Butler Yeats, listening raptly to his mother's tales, loved the drama of the stories, and also the directness and sincerity he heard in the voices that told them. Though he couldn't completely feel he was one of these country folk, Yeats admired them fervently, and later wrote to Katherine Tynan that it was in Sligo that he learned to dream (Ellmann 24). He would yearn for this place the rest of his life, and its shadow, perhaps more perfect than the place itself, would inform much of his work.

Yeats's poems from the beginning concerned themselves with magic. An awkward, physically weak boy, he dramatized magicians, sages, knights and

enchantresses, using these characters perhaps, as he later mused, “to find a cure for my own ailment . . . I was humiliated, and wrote always of proud, confident men and women” (in Ellmann 28). As his poetry developed, his mythic worlds enlarged, bringing in the commonly-held figures of Celtic mythology to inhabit the lands of his characters.

“The Wanderings of Oisín,” published in 1889, marks the first overtly Irish theme Yeats had attempted. It was encouraged by John O’Leary, an older nationalist whom Yeats and his young friends, Katherine Tynan, George Russell, Douglas Hyde, and Maud Gonne, admired. O’Leary had participated in an armed rising against the English in 1867, and was imprisoned and later exiled for treason. Known as “the veteran patriot,” young people rallied around the distinguished speaker. Looking back in an essay titled “A General Introduction for my Work,” Yeats describes his influence:

It was through the old Fenian leader John O’Leary I found my theme. His long imprisonment, his longer banishment, his magnificent head, his scholarship, his pride, his integrity, all that aristocratic dream nourished amid little shops and little farms, had drawn around him a group of young men; I was but eighteen or nineteen and had already, under the influence of *The Faerie Queen* and *The Sad Shepherd*, written a pastoral play, and under that of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* two plays, one staged somewhere in the Caucasus, the other in a crater of the moon; and I knew myself to be vague and incoherent. . . . I read nothing but romantic literature; hated that dry eighteenth-century rhetoric; but they had one quality I admired and admire: they were not separated individual men; they spoke or tried to speak out of a people to a people; behind them stretched the generations. (*Essays and Introductions* 510)

O’Leary conceived of his role as that of an educator, and thus, according to Ellmann “devoted himself to the broader issues of nationalism. . . . [He] recommended study of the classics, of English history (‘it is well to learn from an enemy’), of Irish geography, history, poetry, and, what is more remarkable, of Irish folklore, a subject then considered

a little newfangled” (45-46). The exhortation was more outlandish at the time than it now appears. Not only was folklore a new field, not entirely trusted as worthwhile or scientific, but even within the Irish education system, native literature had been much denigrated. Professors of English at Trinity College suggested their students model their writing after English authors to avoid losing potential readers with this odd and inflammatory nationalist subject matter—they conceived of its audience as being inherently limited, confining readership to “a small circle” (Ellmann 47). Therefore Yeats’s choice to embrace the Irish material, and to aggressively promote himself as a literary nationalist, required determination as well as self-assurance. But he relished the fight, and it helped to launch him into his first long work, “The Wanderings of Oisín.”

The epic narrative poem traces Oisín’s journey through three magical lands, thought to be roughly representative of Yeats’s own three homelands: Sligo, London, and Howth, outside of Dublin (Ellmann 51). The hero travels for hundreds of years, describing the voyage to Saint Patrick, who listens throughout and urges him to tell more. By that primary framing—that the speaker tells his story to the patron saint of Ireland—Yeats is nodding to his cultural heritage, and letting his political stance be known. Oisín’s narrative can be seen as an allegory for the wanderings of the Irish people as well, or Yeats’s conception of their search for a national history. He proclaims a collective memory of the epic battles, real and mythical, in Oisín’s experiences:

When one day by the tide I stood,
I found in that forgetfulness
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
From some dead warrior’s broken lance;
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains....

(Collected Poems 365, ln. 364-370)

This work had a great influence on his peers and in many ways shaped the goals and themes of the Irish Literary Revival, which soon gathered enough force to warrant the title, as such. Yeats himself foretold it in 1890, in the preface to a volume of Irish stories: ‘A true literary consciousness—national to the centre—seems gradually to be forming out of all this disguising and prettifying, this penumbra of half-culture. We are preparing likely enough for a new Irish literary movement... that will show itself in the first lull in politics’ (Krans 10).

A central element of the new literary consciousness that was brewing nationally was Douglas Hyde’s Gaelic League. Founded in 1893, the League drew thousands of members almost immediately. Hyde believed it was imperative to revive the Irish language and preserve Irish literature; to do this, he promoted study of the language and collection of traditional literature and folklore. The League also sought to cultivate, from this rich background, a modern literature in Irish. Young Irish patriots joined the League, though it was explicitly non-political, to ground their personal nationalist beliefs and to educate themselves in their history. Patrick Pearse, writing in 1913 of “the coming revolution,” in which he was to take a central role, gives much credit to the Gaelic League for educating the people and preparing “[us] for our complete living as Irish Nationalists”: “our Gaelic League time was to be our tutelage: we had first to learn to know Ireland, to read the lineaments of her face, to understand the accents of her voice; to re-possess ourselves, disinherited as we were, of her spirit and mind, re-enter into our mystical birthright. For this we went to school to the Gaelic League” (186). The League itself was a precursor to the larger, governmentally-funded Irish Folklore Commission. It

began the important work that inspired Yeats and dozens of other Irish writers to their charged subject matter, and it offered them new resources that had previously been unavailable.

Yeats had a particular debt to the Gaelic League and the work of its cultural collectors because, being from the city and trained in largely English schools, he had never learned to speak the Irish language. Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge were fluent in Irish, and thus able to make use of it in their writing. But Yeats depended on others' translations in order to read such works as the *Tain bo Cuailnge*, the classic collection of Irish creation mythology. Perhaps in part because of this impediment, Yeats disagreed with Hyde that language was the central goal of a movement to return Ireland to the Irish. Hyde had delivered a lecture in 1892, titled "The DeAnglicisation of Ireland," in which "he proposed that the Irish language be nourished to the point where it could first rival and then supplant English" (Flanagan 49-50). On a pragmatic level, Yeats simply didn't believe that reversion to Gaelic was still possible for Ireland. In a letter to Hyde, he responded that the language had been maligned for so long by the English educational system that it was stigmatized, barely spoken anywhere but the remotest and most impoverished areas of the island. Further, he emphasized the distinction between language and nationhood—the former does not guarantee the latter, he argued. Rather, it is culture—stories—which ultimately give a nation its sense of self. But he acknowledged Hyde's central thrust, that language is "the most certain instrument for the preservation and transmission of cultural values" (Flanagan 49).

In the English of the Irish people, however, Yeats found hope. He did not see the adoption of the colonist's tongue as a total loss—in the curious and particular Irish

syntax, vocabulary, and lilt, he found uniqueness and a sense of Irish life cultivated out of the master's tools. Further, Thomas Flanagan argues, "In their journey from the old tongue to the new, they had carried with them more than syntax: they had carried into English, in however attenuated a form, the habits and beliefs of a traditional culture which had once expressed itself in Irish" (49). Through idioms and imagery, the English of the Irish transported lore and ways of being from the Irish language into their new tongue. Yeats therefore questioned Hyde's thesis, arguing not for the de-Anglicization of Ireland, but of her people: they needed to reclaim not the Irish language, but their Irishness. In articulating this distinction, Yeats was formulating a challenge for himself in his own work and for the Literary Revivalists around him as well:

Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? Can we not keep the continuity of the nation's life . . . by translating or re-telling in English, which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm [*sic*] and style, all that is best of the ancient literature?

America, with no past to speak of . . . is creating a national literature which in its most characteristic products differs almost as much from English literature as does the literature of France. [. . .] It should be more easy for us, who have in us that wild Celtic blood, the most un-English of all things under heaven, to make such a literature. If we fail it shall not be because we lack the materials, but because we lack the power to use them. But we are not failing. [. . .] Let us by all means prevent the decay of that tongue where we can, and preserve it always among us as a learned language to be a fountain of nationality in our midst, but do not let us base upon it our hopes of nationhood. When we remember the majesty of Cuchullin and the beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and that beauty which are immortal, and not the perishing tongue that first told of them. (*Uncollected Prose 1*, 255-6)

In such a proposal, Yeats displayed a conception of folklore different from many of his peers in that he did not condemn contemporary Irish culture as watered down or

corrupted by the English influence. His Anglo-Irish heritage had bestowed upon him an aristocratic view of cultural politics and so, like his peers, he believed in folklore as largely made up of “survivals,” items that had passed down to the current day from an earlier (and, by implication, culturally purer) time. Simultaneously, however, he also saw value in the materials of the cultural present. If perhaps he didn’t find them as desirable as the earlier mythology and language, he was realistic that they were available and in use in the country at the moment. And being politically engaged as he was, he recognized the great potential for that tool.

Beginning in 1888, Yeats compiled three books of folk and fairy tales, primarily from consultants in his mother’s home of Sligo. Though Yeats’s own speaking language was cosmopolitan, his ear for the rhythms of speech around the country was carefully attuned, and he recorded them faithfully. Lady Augusta Gregory, whom Yeats met in 1896 (though she had been influenced by his political and literary presence for many years before), had the ability to translate from the Irish, but not Yeats’s particular gift of making the spoken language sound natural. Yet Yeats recognized in her the ability to bring to English the great legends of Ireland, and unify the diverse myths into a singular and powerful cosmology. When she completed her first book, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, in 1902, Yeats wrote a glowing preface, lauding the publication for reminding the Irish people that they are noble and strong. He gushed that the existence of these stories was anti-aristocratic, anti-English, at the core—he used the word “fine” and “finely” to describe the way of living that these works inspired, suggesting that they should help the Irish to rebuild “a great community” by reinstating the “old foundations of life.” The

book, in his mind, provided a way to allow Irish children to re-inherit their native land.³

He argued:

It is the owners of the land whose children might never have known what would give them so much happiness. But now they can read this book to their children . . . and after awhile somebody may even take them to some famous place and say, ‘This land where your fathers lived proudly and finely should be dear and dear and again dear’; and perhaps when many names have grown musical to their ears, a more imaginative love will have taught them a better service. (Gregory, *Irish Myths and Legends* 22)

Similarly, Lady Gregory noted her own nationalist purpose for compiling the book and translating many of these stories from the Irish, which was to refute the English literary tradition which looked down upon Irish writers and Irish legend. In *Irish Myths and Legends*, a later edition combining *Cuchulain* with her second volume, *Gods and Fighting Men*, she dedicated the book specifically to the newly-created Irish Literary Society of New York, suggesting to them that she hoped “one day the steamers across the Atlantic will not go out full, but come back full, until some of you find your real home is here . . .” (xi). The sense of connection to Irish Americans was strongly felt, and particularly in contrast to the English who were among them and controlling their nation. The simple act of making reference to the existence of Irish Americans conjured the tragic history of the Irish Famine which had, only fifty years before, so devastated their population. Though the kinship with these lost relations was no doubt sincerely felt, it also provided a convenient frame in which to place the book, one of which members of the Literary Revival were all well aware.

³ This may have been an overly optimistic goal for the work. Thomas Flanagan notes, “Her intention, and Yeats’s, was that she should make the *Tain* available to her countrymen, and she at least succeeded in making it available to Yeats” (54). However, to have made it available to Yeats was no small act, since he was able to then use this material in his own work, which more completely fulfilled his own prophecy than Gregory’s did.

Much of their project was not simply the writing of work inspired by their own land, but also writing for their people. This was a distinct shift from previous generations' views. There had been an earlier literary revival in Ireland, in the 1840s, mostly depicting the Irish as humorous, oafish, slapstick figures. At best these figures were benign and lovable, the jolly "Paddy" image; at worst they were apish and "savage," instinctual, unreliable, and potentially violent figures. The Irish writers who expressed this newfound desire to depict Irish folk and landscapes understood that they were writing for an English audience; in many ways their work mirrored the stereotypes created of them by the English, and performed the song and dance expected of them. Thomas Flanagan notes that transcription of the Irish language and Irish people's English had been, until Yeats, almost exclusively "employed [inaccurately] for comic effect, and their traditional beliefs had not fared much better" (49). The most ambitious political act of the time was to write these caricatures as lovable simpletons; these "local color" sketches were published and distributed in England and thus catered to English desires and ideas.

Yeats's true radicalism can be seen in his refusal of these characterizations as well as his refusal to turn away from Irish material entirely. It would have been easier simply to choose another subject matter, to turn inward and write a placeless poetry informed by his formal education, his travels, or a more commonly known mythology, such as the one Shelley called upon⁴. Instead he cast his lot with his countrymen, and particularly with

⁴ Yeats argued that "The greatest poets of every nation have drawn from stories like this, symbols and events to express the most lyrical, the most subjective moods. In modern days there has been one great poet who tried to express such moods without adequate folk-lore. Most of us feel, I think, no matter how greatly we admire him, that there is something of over-much cloud and rainbow in the poetry of Shelley, and is this not simply because he lacked the true symbols and types and stories to express his intense subjective inspiration? . . . Shakespeare and Keats had the folk-lore of their own day, while Shelley had but mythology; and a mythology which had been passing for long through literary minds without any new inflow from living tradition loses all the incalculable instructive and convincing quality of the popular traditions. No conscious invention can take the place of tradition, for he who could write a folk tale, and

those most disenfranchised of them, and argued through his portrayals for their deservingness of respect. His conception of his audience was a central facet of this view: Yeats classified himself staunchly as an *Irish* writer (not simply a writer, and not a writer belonging to any limiting school or movement), and intended his work to be for an Irish audience. Though it is clear through his introductions to his collections of folk and fairy tales that he imagined much of his audience not to be familiar with these tales, this was not primarily because he imagined that audience not to be Irish. He saw them as perhaps removed from their Irish roots in language, as he was, and in location, because so many Irish people, like his own friends in Dublin and London, had moved to cities in the past generation and they, as the first in their families not to be raised in rural landscapes and not to perform traditional labor, had lost much of the connection to those beliefs and ways. He also wrote for coming generations, having a very clear sense of his work as increasingly valuable in years to come, largely because he could see the landscape changing rapidly and collective memory of earlier ways of life diminishing.

In his poems as well as in his plays, his portrayals of Irish people are not only striking because of their clear love and respect for the folkways of the Irish countryside, but also because Yeats, cosmopolitan thinker and son of a renowned skeptic, did not renounce or seek to explain the beliefs of the people he portrayed. Neither did he present those beliefs as simply charming lore. In collecting folktales of banshees, fairies, and other spirits, he maintained a respectful openness to belief, noting in the introduction to

thereby bring a new life into literature, must have the fatigue of the spade in his hands and the stupor of the fields in his heart.” (“The Message of the Folk-Lorist,” *Uncollected Prose 1* 287-8)

one his collection, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*⁵, “The reader will perhaps wonder that in all my notes I have not rationalized a single hobgoblin” (xvi).

In the same collection, Yeats asserted with deeply aristocratic feeling:

These folk-tales are full of simplicity and musical occurrences, for they are the literature of a class for whom every incident in the old rut of birth, love, pain, and death has cropped up unchanged for centuries: who have steeped everything in the heart: to whom everything is a symbol. They have the spade over which man has leant from the beginning. The people of the city have the machine, which is prose and a *parvenu*. (xii)

The distinction between city and country for Yeats was the central divide, and bridging it—bringing the city folk back to an understanding of country ways—he saw as the path to uniting Ireland. It was certainly an anti-industrialist, anti-materialistic vision, and the peasant throughout was romanticized as the purer Irishman, in touch with his roots. In another collection, Yeats stated outright that Irish peasants, because of their distance from centers of the Industrial revolution, had preserved a rapport with the spiritual world and its fairy denizens which had elsewhere disappeared (*Fairy and Folk...* 116). But, critically, even if Yeats’s peasant was a romanticized creation, he never condescended to that creation. Since his earliest years Yeats had been interested in spiritual worlds and, though his curiosity demanded him to question and explore, his inclination was always toward belief and acceptance, not refutation.⁶

⁵ Here we can see that he clearly speaks to city folk, or others not familiar with Irish folk and fairy tales.

⁶ For example, with regard to the occult, Ellmann describes Yeats’s process of consideration: “Yeats was never completely convinced of MB’s occult powers, but in 1888, eager to prove that occult phenomena were possible, he joined the newly formed ‘Esoteric Section’ of MB’s group which was conducting experiments in magic and the occult” (33). Lady Gregory, on the other hand, retained a skeptic distance from such beliefs, though she enjoyed hearing about them: “*The Celtic Twilight* was the first book of Mr. Yeats’s that I read, and even before I met him, a little time later, I had begun looking for news of the invisible world; for his stories were of Sligo and I felt jealous for Galway. This beginning of knowledge was a great excitement to me, for though I had heard all my life some talk of fairies and the banshee (have

Yeats's early involvement in occult studies had ended without his complete conversion, but had only begun his quest for a comprehensive worldview that could accommodate the supernatural. As it turned out, his experience with Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical beliefs opened Yeats to the desire for the mystical, which he was finally able to satisfy fully in fusing his study of present day Irish folk belief with that of the ancient, mythic world. He invited others to join him in reveling in this conception of Irish culture: "Here at last is a universe where all is large and intense enough to almost satisfy the emotions of man. Certainly such stories are not a criticism of life but rather an extension . . ." ("Irish Folk Tales," *Uncollected Prose I*, 187). Further, he argued, folklore could answer the troubles of the Irish writer, offering this broad and intense world to which the writer alone had complete access. He exhorted his fellow writers to get on board and create in the way that he found so fruitful: "There is no passion, no vague desire, no tender longing that cannot find fit type or symbol in the legends of the peasantry or in the traditions of the scalds and the gleemen. And these traditions are now being gathered up or translated by a multitude of writers" ("The Message of the Folk-Lorist," *Uncollected Prose I* 285).

For Yeats, folklore was the sturdy bridge between his nationalist and occult interests—it was expansive enough to encompass all he loved and questioned about his country, and provided a forum for constant exploration. Further, he found it a flexible form. He saw no need to restrict his methods to those condoned by the academic folklore scholars who were at that time asserting more uniform standards for their discipline:

indeed reason to believe in this last), I had never thought of giving heed to what I, in common with my class, looked on as fancy or superstition . . ." (*Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, Gerrard's Cross 1970, 15).

The various collectors of Irish folk-lore have, from our point of view, one great merit, and from the point of view of others, one great fault. They have made their work literature rather than science, and told us of the Irish peasantry rather than of the primitive religion of mankind, or whatever else the folk-lorists are on the gad after. To be considered scientists they should have tabulated all their tales in forms like grocers' bills—item the fairy king, item the queen. Instead of this they have caught the very voice of the people, the very pulse of life, each giving what was most noticed in his day. (*Fairy and Folk...* xiv)

In this literature made from folklore, Yeats found “the chief work of [his] life”: as he described it to the poet Robert Bridges in a 1901 letter, “The giving life not to a single story but to a whole world of little stories, some not ended [sic] very little, to a romantic region, a sort of enchanted wood. The old Irish poets wove life into life thereby giving to the wildest & strangest romance solidity & vitality . . .” (Kelly and Schuchard, *Collected Letters III* 91). Later, to the Editor of the *Daily News*, he added, “All is personal preference in the end, and Mr. Shorter, who is very modern in his interests, naturally prefers Swift, Burke, and Goldsmith, who hardly seems to me to have come out of Ireland at all. I, on the other hand, having found but one thing in Ireland that has stirred me to the roots—a conception of the heroic life come down from the dawn of the world and not even yet utterly extinguished—would give all those great geniuses for the first book that has retold the old epic fragments in a style so full at once of dignity and simplicity and lyric ecstasy, that I can read them with entire delight.” (Kelly and Schuchard, *Collected Letters III*, 593)

Yeats found his deep well of inspiration in the voices of the people, and understood instinctively that through celebrating their stories and ways he would forever have a subject that would intrigue him. Moreover, through providing that story to the

people of his young country, he was helping to stake a claim for Ireland, to carve a creation story and make proud the spirits of her citizens. The story may not have always been true, may have conflated myth with present day, may have idealized peasant life to an impossible purity; yet Yeats understood that in the end these facts mattered less than the spirit with which they were presented. Loyal to his own authorial license to create, and to his ego as well, he argued, “Even what I alter must seem traditional.” Ultimately, his work, and that of his fellow writers in the Irish Literary Revival, allowed Irish audiences to imagine a new story for themselves, one in which their ancestors were the heroes, and in which they themselves were the inheritors of a rich and important story.

CHAPTER III

ZORA NEALE HURSTON AND THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Change the joke and slip the yoke.

—Zora Neale Hurston

In many ways the life and work, folkloric and literary, of Zora Neale Hurston parallels that of William Butler Yeats, though their different national and social backgrounds make them an unlikely pair for comparison. Yeats preceded Hurston chronologically and in relation to his nation's folklore project: our charting of his life shows his work leading to the Irish Folklore Commission's founding, through his mobilization of support for nationalist writing and political engagement. Hurston, in contrast, was born in 1891 (though she often claimed that year to be 1901) and only completed her schooling in 1927, just before the Great Depression began. Hurston was not instrumental in the creation of her nation's folklore collecting effort, the Federal Writers' Project itself, but she did shape some of its work, particularly in the Florida offices. Her participation in the FWP and her related folklore fieldwork also rippled extensively into her later literary achievements and inspired and aided many younger writers in her wake.

Hurston had an inherent understanding of the power of storytelling and myth long before she ever studied literature or anthropology. As a child she was fascinated with the oral tradition around her, and loved the tales of powerful black characters related by her

family and neighbors in Eatonville, Florida. She also put such storytelling to work in her personal life from an early age, telling any who asked that she was ten years younger than she was, and that she had been born in Eatonville, an all-black town, instead of in Notasulga, Alabama, a tiny sharecropping town in which blacks held no power or position, and in which she had actually lived the first two years of her life (Bordelon 3). Further, she often described her childhood as being impoverished, even though “she was raised with the trappings of a substantial middle-class life and the prestige of being the minister’s daughter” (Bordelon 5).

From early adulthood, Hurston understood her personal story as a public image that would be seen in relation to her work, and sought to cultivate one that would be both palatable and enticing to her potential readership and patrons. She also recognized that, in relation to the folklore work she wanted to do, it would be useful to be seen as “of the folk,” rather than as a New York-educated woman who had had some access to privilege. This partial self-invention seems consistent with Yeats’s desire to align himself with his fairy-tale-telling Sligo mother rather than his atheist urban father, but highlights a particular difference as well: Hurston understood that she was framing her image, and indeed much of her writing, for a primarily white audience. Whereas Yeats wrote for his countrymen and their children, Hurston in some sense understood her work to be translation for a race not her own—and therefore, in the days of segregation, for those outside of her culture. Especially in the early stages of her career, when she had to seek financial support from white patrons, she framed herself and her work to appeal to them.⁷

⁷ Hurston famously referred to herself as the “pet darkey” of the Florida FWP director, Carita Doggett Corse, in a letter she wrote to Corse in 1938. She added, “Yes, I know that I belong to you... and that Sterling belongs to [Henry] Alsberg.” Alsberg directed the Federal Writers’ Project from the central office.

Though Hurston often claimed not to feel racism or be concerned with race issues, she could not control the public. The reception of her work was heavily informed by race and its attending complications, forcing Hurston to be regarded not as a nationalist writer but as a regional and black writer. This is perhaps the most primary distinction between her and Yeats, and one that has shaped our reading of her work up to the present.

No one today would say Hurston simply “cut de monkey for white folks,” as some black critics of her time did, or even that she was a local colorist, writing diminished sketches of her people for an outsider audience to find amusing and quaint. Her work both in folklore collection and in her novels and plays shows a complex and subtle navigation of the line between excluding the foreign audience completely and letting them in on all of the local secrets. If we read Hurston as a nationalist writer with a particular agenda for her people and her country, we can better understand her complex use of folklore in her writing, as well as the message she had for her country.

Hurston began folklore research in the 1920s as a student of Franz Boas, the famed anthropologist at Columbia University. Boas gave Hurston rigorous training in field research and grounded her anthropological thinking in his ideas about cultural relativism, a principle of culture that rejected Western ethnocentrism and acknowledged the limited view inherent in any person’s experience. Cultural relativism further debunked the nineteenth century idea of evolution theory, which presented culture as coming from a single root, with some groups remaining in “primitive” states while others had advanced out of them. Boas’s cultural relativism aligned well with the pluralistic

Sterling Brown, an accomplished poet, was the Negro Affairs Editor for the Project, under Alsberg (Bordelon 19).

view Benjamin Botkin was simultaneously developing, and would use to lead the WPA's collection efforts, and stemmed, in fact, out of the same set of views: those of the seminal romantic nationalist, Johann Gottfried von Herder.

After directing Hurston's academic study, Boas encouraged her to return to Eatonville in 1927 to formally collect folklore. It was this redirection—to go home with new ways of seeing and telling what she saw, to use the “spy-glass of Anthropology,” as she put it—that shaped the career Hurston was to make as a folklorist and writer.

Her first years of folklore collecting were sponsored by a white patron, Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason, who while she recognized Hurston's genius, also enforced a crushing servility on her. Hurston began in these years to explore railroad, turpentine, and lumber camps, collecting stories from workers in these largely ignored places. By 1932, however, the Depression set in and Mrs. Mason's largesse, along with all other private sources of funding, dried up. Hurston subsisted doing folklore work for another three years, but by 1935 had exhausted her options. She briefly joined the Harlem unit of the Federal Theatre Projects before receiving two successive Guggenheim grants which supported her study of hoodoo in Louisiana and its roots in the Caribbean (Bordelon 13).

During this time Hurston completed two folklore books, *Tell My Horse* and *Mules and Men*, but again found herself back in Florida in 1937, awaiting publication of the second volume, in financial straits that finally sent her to the relief offices of the WPA. Hurston had long been known among the Federal Writers' Project staff, and had likely been contacted by the Florida office to offer consultant services on previous occasions, which she had turned down (Bordelon 14). Yet, despite her wide acclaim as a trained folklorist and published writer (more published than any other member of the Florida

FWP, in fact), to work on the FWP in the Jim Crow south was to take a lowly position, as blacks were only eligible for relief jobs, for which they had to prove their indigence, and not the editorial, supervisory positions which were determined by literary and professional qualifications (Bordelon 16). Hurston felt the humiliation deeply. She tried to conceal her involvement with the Project to all she knew, letting friends and relations believe she was still writing independently. Still, Hurston's philosophy of folklore was closely aligned to that of the central office of the Federal Writers' Project, and she was almost immediately recommended to an editorial position by Henry Alsberg, the national director. The compromise reached by the Florida offices was to increase Hurston's salary for travel expenses while not changing the name of her position, so as not to violate "the unwritten code of the Jim Crow South and [rankle] whites on the WPA and its arts projects" (Bordelon 16). Thus, despite the best intentions of the Federal Writers' Project at the national level, with its ideals of celebration of America's diversity, and Benjamin Botkin's urging to seek out the ignored voices of the country, Hurston was limited by a racially entrenched system of segregation in the local office.

Again, in her FWP employment, Hurston was forced to call upon her understanding of the "pet darkey" relationship with whites to help her get what she wanted. She befriended the Florida director, Carita Doggett Corse, who was able to procure for Hurston a recording machine and who gave her much freedom in how she spent her time and what kind of writing she produced.

But by understanding the ironies and limitations of the Project and how it was carried out, Hurston deepened her personal commitment to folklore and found a particularly effective way to approach it.

Her collection, *Mules and Men*, based on material she had collected in Florida and Louisiana, appeared at the beginning of her time at the FWP. The book reinvented the idea of a folklore collection because, instead of itemizing tales and presenting them dryly in sections, Hurston introduced readers “to the whole world of jook joints, lying contests, and tall-tale sessions that make up the drama of the folk life of black people in the rural South” (Bordelon 18). Hurston is herself a character in the book, and chronicles her search for stories and good times through that lens. The book reads as entertainment, as literature, more than as an enumeration of data and conclusions. Hurston, like Yeats, believed in the closeness of folklore to literature and that its interest and potential lay in the artistic, living rendering.

Writing out of her anthropological training, and so to at least some extent for an academic, and primarily white, audience, Hurston recognized her task as offering a representation of her people and an argument for her view of black culture. During the Harlem Renaissance there was a great flowering of black literature and art, but the defining of that identity, even within the black community, was a contested area. As writer Mary Helen Washington explains,

Militant organizations, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, expected them to be ‘race’ people, defending black people, protesting against racism and oppression; while the advocates of the genteel school of literature wanted black writers to create respectable characters that would be “a credit to the race.” (17)

Hurston wanted to do neither. She “chose to write about the positive side of the black experience and to ignore the brutal side,” Washington notes (17). Further, she had great interest in the common folk who she thought were being largely ignored—they were

neither the lowest, most brutalized denominator, nor the most privileged and accomplished “talented tenth.” She argued that a literature of the common people needed to exist because “Literature and other arts are supposed to hold up the mirror to nature. With only the fractional ‘exceptional’ and the ‘quaint’ portrayed, a true picture of Negro life in America cannot be. A great principle of national art has been violated” (*I Love Myself...* 173).

Other black authors chafed under these limiting expectations as well. For these authors to recognize that they were defining that identity not only for themselves but for the larger, multiethnic nation, and often by way of the funding of white patrons, made the process of portraying a collective identity even more complex. Writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison gravitated toward individual characters as alienated figures in northern cities, such as *Bigger Thomas* and *Invisible Man*. In their novels, the south served as the backdrop—literally left in the characters’ past—symbolizing the race’s and the individual’s brutal history. Hurston, however, could not see the rural experience as belonging to the past, and did not want to—in essence she was staking an anti-modern claim for the roots of culture and against mechanized city life. She therefore chose to portray communities in the rural south, and to present her characters as psychologically whole, not defeated, degraded, or stunted.

Her aim, in both *Mules and Men* and the later novels and plays, was to resist the simplistic theory of “reversion to type,” which she described as a “curious doctrine [with] such a wide acceptance that it is tragic” (*I Love Myself...* 172). She argued that “the public willingly accepts the untypical in Nordics, but feels cheated if the untypical is portrayed in others” (*I Love Myself...* 171). Instead, she wanted to celebrate the diversity

and uniqueness of these average folk who she admired, with strong and ongoing folk traditions. She pointed out the radicalism of her perspective thus, with her signature humor to lighten the blow to the establishment:

It is inevitable that this knowledge [of “the average, struggling, non-morbid Negro,” as she called them] will destroy many illusions and romantic traditions which America probably likes to have around. But then, we have no record of anybody sinking into a lingering death on finding out that there was no Santa Claus (*I Love Myself...* 173).

Interestingly, however, Hurston had her own romantic sense of her homeland and the people there, from whom she learned stories and traditions, not to mention resistance and pride. While she claimed simply to be presenting life as it was, and “had no problem in using the term ‘the people’ to register that she knew just who they were” (Carby 75), Hurston was also shaping the story.

By focusing on Eatonville, the all-black town, Hurston chose to represent only the experience of a tiny fraction of black Americans—most lived in towns controlled by whites, and had never seen a mayor of their own color or had the privilege, as young Zora did, of not noticing race at all as a child. Eatonville was, of course, Hurston’s hometown, so in many ways it seems natural for her to portray it, but her focus remained almost exclusively there throughout her folklore books and her novels, though she had spent many years living in other less idyllic settings. Therefore, we should see Eatonville not simply as what Hurston knew best but what she most wanted to present to her audience—a well of heritage, similar to Yeats’s Irish mythology, to which she could return and return for literary sustenance. In it she found a living tradition which she celebrated, saying she had found “folklore in the making”—but at the same time she was also drawn here as an act of resistance, of preservation. She understood simultaneously that, while

Eatonville might thrive, other such towns were not, and the memory of their folklore was being lost. She never admitted in writing to the northern and urban migration among black southerners and how this might be affecting their culture or folkways, but she surely saw it. As Hazel Carby points out,

[Hurston] recognized that the people whose culture she rewrote were not the majority of the population, and that the cultural forms she was most interested in reproducing were not being maintained. She complained bitterly about how “the bulk of the population now spends its leisure time in the motion picture theatres or with the phonograph and its blues.” (75)

Hurston chose to portray and celebrate a collective culture at a time when the individual was most heralded in fiction, and a southern rural culture at a time when these areas were being abandoned for northern, urban ones. Further, she placed women at the center of many of her stories, most notably in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, when all of her contemporaries were privileging male views. Mary Helen Washington notes acerbically that this may be another reason people dismissed her work as missing the mark:

“Although Darwin Turner [a critic] blames Zora Hurston’s obscurity on the fact that she got sandwiched in between the exotic primitivism of the Harlem Renaissance and the protest mood of the forties, another possibility suggests itself: she was a black woman whose entire career output was subjected to the judgment of critics, both white and black, who were all men” (11).

Hurston, also, was a fearless writer: her representations of black communities did not confirm the views of the majority of the population, black and white, that expected to see black people portrayed as diminished by years of injustice. Instead Hurston, through her portrayals, made the case for her particular experience and way of seeing as being a celebratory view of black culture. Further, she offered a lineage for the culture she portrayed: it did not simply spring up suddenly from southern slavery, nor from Africa.

Hurston focused on the cultural connection to the Caribbean, outside of the typical slave lineage, to explain the heritage and inheritance of her characters and consultants. In her dramatic performances, such as *The Great Day*, she explicitly staged scenes of railroad camps and other contemporary rural southern folklife back-to-back with dances she claimed came straight from the Caribbean. “Up to thirty thousand Bahamians, she explained, resided in a city like Miami, their ‘African songs, dances, and instrumentation’ transforming the place into ‘a pure African colony’” (Kraut 135).

Similarly, in *Their Eyes*, Carby adds, Hurston was searching “for the appropriate forms in which to represent the folk and a decision to rewrite the geographical boundaries of representation by situating the southern, rural folk and patterns of migration in relation to the Caribbean rather than the northern states” (Carby 81). In all of her anthropological writing and performances, and even in the reportage style of her fiction, Hurston appears to have brought an unmediated set of facts to the audience, simply offering the truth of what she saw. Yet she was well aware that she was constructing a particular representation of the black rural consciousness, and that she addressed this through a “clear framework of interpretation” (Carby 76). By choosing the Caribbean instead of the northern U.S. or Africa as the counterpart to the black southern experience, Hurston detached that experience from associations with slavery and segregation and placed it instead in relation to independent, all-black cultures. This was the heritage she chose to inhabit, and hoped to convince to her audience to share her preference.

Hazel Carby argues that this recontextualizing was part of a larger aesthetic position Hurston held toward blackness: that what is now “generally agreed to be her positive, holistic celebration of black life, also needs to be seen as a representation of

‘Negroness’ as an unchanging, essential entity” (77). Carby sees this as a limitation in Hurston’s work and view—she finds fault with this representation because it is nostalgic, even utopian, she says, and does not recognize “the social contradictions and disruption of her contemporary moment” (77). Yet if we view Hurston as a romantic nationalist, what was she attempting but to renegotiate the context within which black people were viewed, to give them back their history and offer to future generations a more holistic and celebratory way of looking at their heritage? If the folk served in Hurston’s work “principally as an aesthetic device, a means for creating an essential concept of blackness” (Carby 87), this is much like the portrayal Yeats created with his idealized peasant in rural Ireland.

But because Hurston understood her audience differently than Yeats did, and because a different and more complex set of expectations were placed upon her as a writer speaking for and about her nation, the folklore she employed in her books operated in more subtle ways. In Hurston’s tour de force, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, her training in anthropology and FWP work certainly came into play; many critics have cited the information she gathered doing folklore research on the Project as a major source for her fiction. What is less apparent is the particular type of relationship between this data and the fictional world she created for the novel.

Because Hurston had a complex relationship with her audience, and because the community she portrayed was a close-knit and private one, she presented their lives through a series of lenses—primarily in third person narration and first person conversation. This seems a strategy borrowed and expanded upon from *Mules and Men*: Hurston is offering translation by the omniscient educated viewer at times, and at other

times simply allows the characters to speak for themselves. Her choices of how and when to shift voice in *Their Eyes* suggest a theory of her authorship: that she was allowing readers some access to the world of Eatonville and of her characters, but would also choose not to bring outsiders too far in.

The system of partial translation of community events and conversations appears as a kind of coding in the novel, a way to offer access to friends and deny full transparency to those who would not or could not appreciate the culture. Thus, Hurston presents the full reality of the context in the novel, making it as “authentic” as possible; authenticity of black folklife, of course, was a hotly contested notion among the writers of her day, and her particular representation of it was quite divergent from that of her contemporaries. And yet she does not translate all parts of it. Rosemary Hathaway argues that when people read about a culture not their own, they have a tendency to read “touristically”—meaning that, like tourists, they are offered a wealth of opportunities to be introduced “to cultures outside—and even within—their own, but [this benefit comes] with the accompanying danger that those cultures will merely be subsumed under previous ways of understanding” (Hathaway 170). Hurston seemed to anticipate this potential appropriation and misreading, perhaps due to her familiarity with earlier writers’ and folklorists’ efforts, and subverted it again and again. Hathaway notes that Hurston “‘signifies’ on a wealth of folkloric material, giving the reader an exotic sample of the culture while protectively withholding the whole story” (173). She has Sam Watson remark, for example, that Joe and Janie are “playin’ de dozens” once, when they are arguing (*Their Eyes*... 238), but on other occasions, such as in the long mule sequence in chapter 6 or in reference to “Big John de Conquer” (*Their Eyes*... 228), Hurston does

not explain the context of folk beliefs and characters that inform these references. In this way she lets the folklore stand *with* the fiction, not as a tool—a lesser element—within it.

As Hathaway notes,

Considering that Hurston could have used the novel—and her authoritative omniscient narration, more specifically—as an explicitly didactic tool for educating her largely white readership about African American folklore, her insistence on integrating the material into the rest of the text without comment seems deliberate and significant. (176)

Indeed, it seems in many ways a welcoming in of her audience—the inclusion without translation of this lore allows readers to inhabit the place with Hurston and her characters, as if we were actually sitting on the porch overhearing, rather than having it explained to us, which would set us at a distance from the action. Simultaneously, however, it limits full understanding of the action to those with prior knowledge of the culture, providing a bit of a protective wall from those who would read it in simplistic and reductive ways. Hathaway argues further that “the fluidity of Hurston's writings and their ability to ‘change the joke and slip the yoke’ [considering all of the complex expectations of representation that she faced from black and white, literary and ethnographer contemporaries] are all the more remarkable, calling on us to attend even more closely to their complexity” (173).

While Hurston’s uses of folklore materials—in particular, of vernacular speech—make the novel feel more “authentic” (and indeed this is how many critics responded to it upon its release, either in celebration or condemnation based on how they felt about this “truth” being revealed), she is also clearly playing with her audience, “both catering to expectations and subverting them at every turn” (Hathaway 175).

In writing novels and plays, Hurston expanded upon what she was able to accomplish in her ethnographic writing: she could refer to the past, and embed her stories in it, but she was also free to reinvent traditions and rewrite the story in a way that changed its context and could offer new interpretations of its meaning. As Alice Walker comments in the introduction to a selection of essays within *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*,

One wonders, though, if white people's stereotypes of the 'happy darky' and the 'civilized heathen' did not exist—and had not caused black people enormous suffering—would we see these self-descriptions Hurston gives us differently? Would we see, instead, what she was undoubtedly endeavoring to project: a cheerful, supremely confident and extroverted little girl who assumed anyone and everyone would be delighted with her; and a passionate, nationalistic adult who exulted in her color, her 'Africanism,' and her ability to *feel*? (151)

Walker is suggesting that we *cannot* view her this way, even if we would like to; perhaps if we look at her in the context of other nationalist writers and not solely in the context of her own contemporaries, this view is more easily supported. Comparing Hurston to Yeats, for example, seems to shed light on Hurston's work as similar to that of other nationalists: she strove to revitalize the communities of her people that she loved, and from which she found the most vibrant life. Her country set her in a racialized context, not one she would have chosen, and though she subverted it at every turn, it would not let her go. In a rare moment where her bitterness seems to poke through, Hurston argues in "Crazy About This Democracy" that American Democracy is really a sham. She loves the idea of it, but says she has not yet experienced it: "I want to see how it feels. Therefore, I am all for the repeal of every Jim Crow law in the nation here and now. Not in another generation or so" (*I Love Myself*... 167).

Hurston's ideals for her country were higher than it could reach. But she never wavered in her commitment to writing the stories she thought would revive the people and restore her homeland to its promise.

CHAPTER IV

EUDORA WELTY AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

I like to write with a window that looks out on to the street

I like to be a part of my world.

—Eudora Welty (*More Conversations*... 153)

Eudora Welty, in stark contrast to both W. B. Yeats and Zora Neale Hurston, made no claims to be a political writer, or even to speak for her little corner of the country. And yet, despite her demurrals, she painted a vivid picture of Mississippi that has made her an iconic figure of that state and of the south as a whole. She claimed that her deep well of material sprang from the richness of human relationships—of “you and me,” the intimate interactions between people (“Place in Fiction” 782). And yet, even in this physically constrained, often domestic space of her chosen subject, the wider effect of place is deeply present in all her stories, and in the life that informed them.

Eudora Welty grew up in Jackson, Mississippi. Though the small town was undergoing major growth during her childhood, Welty described it later in her memoir, *One Writer's Beginnings*, as a sleepy place, full of “unhurried days” (862). Though she is thought of as a quintessentially Deep South writer, her father and mother had chosen to move there as adults, without roots or connections to the place—they were drawn there by her father’s belief in progress and the opportunities of the future. They had been raised in Ohio and West Virginia, respectively, and perhaps being brought up with their

outsiders' view allowed Welty to see her homeland with a greater sense of perspective. Like Yeats, she felt a part of the place, and yet was reminded at times that she did not belong to it as others did.

Still, the Welty family was well-accepted in their adopted hometown, and the young Eudora took to the local ways and lore with gusto. As a child, she loved listening to her mother's friends tell stories about local gossip and goings-on. In *One Writer's Beginnings*, she recounted, "When we at length bought our first automobile... my mother sat in the back with her friend, and I'm told that as a small child I would ask to sit in the middle, and say as we started off, 'Now *talk*'" (852). She often did not understand all of the details of the story or its import, but loved the way it was told in scenes, and the drama that unfolded through the telling. Of one of her mother's friends in particular, she said, "I might not catch on to what the root of the trouble was in all that happened, but my ear told me it was dramatic. Often she said, 'The crisis had come!'" (852).

Simultaneously, Welty was influenced by books. She was an avid reader, a trait less central for (or less acknowledged by) Yeats and Hurston, who claimed their greatest inspiration came from the oral tales they grew up hearing. Welty's parents loved books and imbued in her that same love: she credited their influence and generosity time and again in her memoir, saying "I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me—and as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting—into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 846-7). Further, she spoke with enchantment about reading in the house: "In 'the library,' inside the mission-style bookcase with its three diamond-latticed glass doors with my father's Morris chair and the glass-shaded lamp on its table beside it, were books I could soon

begin on..." (*One Writer's Beginnings* 842).⁸ Welty's parents fostered her love of Mark Twain, but also of a much broader range of works. Katherine Anne Porter, in the introduction to Welty's first book of stories, describes her literary upbringing in depth:

Nearly all the Southern writers I know were early, omnivorous, insatiable readers, and Miss Welty runs reassuringly true to this pattern. She had at arm's reach the typical collection of books which existed as a matter of course in a certain kind of Southern family, so that she had read the ancient Greek and Roman poetry, history and fable, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, the eighteenth-century English and the nineteenth-century French novelists, with a dash of Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, before she realized what she was reading. When she first discovered contemporary literature, she was just the right age to find first W. B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf in the air around her; but always, from the beginning until now, she loved folk tales, fairy tales, old legends, and she likes to listen to the songs and stories of people who live in old communities whose culture is recollected and bequeathed orally. (*Stories...* 966)

Interestingly, Porter seemed intent upon framing Welty firmly within the canon of *southern* writers, and of explaining her experience as typical of this breed, a claim Welty was much less inclined to make. Porter also made note of Welty's early exposure to "folk tales, fairy tales, old legends, and... the songs and stories of people who live in old communities...", which Welty never foregrounded in her own self-description. Welty has noted that her mother delighted in hearing fairy tales, and that from her mother's friends in particular she was exposed to these elements of oral tradition, which she too loved. But she says that her mother "could never have told me her stories, and I think I knew why even then; my mother didn't believe them. But I could listen to this murmuring lady [her

⁸ We should also note in this passage the romantic and detailed description Welty devotes to the furniture of the room, all classic Arts and Crafts pieces. Though the influence is perhaps unconscious, Welty here offers a further glimpse of her parents' and her own aesthetics and even politics, in their furnishing the house with carefully hand-crafted furniture from an anti-industrial movement. That these items are her father's complicates his stance as a lover of progress, perhaps.

mother's friend] all day. She believed everything she heard..." (*One Writer's Beginnings* 853).

For Welty, this disbelief, which she inherited from her mother, was part of her sense of perspective—she understood the writer's task as stepping back from the scene in order to have the distance from which to fully see it in all its dimensions. She noted later, "I had to grow up and learn to listen for the unspoken as well as the spoken—and to know a truth, I also had to recognize a lie" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 854).

Whereas Yeats and Hurston withheld opinion on questions of fact in their research on the occult, voodoo, and folk beliefs, Welty found this factual determination to be a central issue in painting the interactions between her characters more accurately. This is not to say, however, that Welty did not entertain ideas of magic and lore in her created worlds. To the contrary: she felt keenly those senses, as evidenced even in her view of the physical act of writing itself: "When the day came, years later, for me to see the Book of Kells, all the wizardry of letter, initial, and word swept over me a thousand times over, and the illumination, the gold, seemed a part of the word's beauty and holiness that had been there from the start" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 847).

It is perhaps not surprising that Welty, as a more private figure in the world of literature, would find imaginative worlds opening to her in printed pages instead of in the wider outdoor world, and yet this also may mark a distinction in how she viewed her role as a public figure—she always shirked titles of "nationalist" or even "regional" writer, claiming that these terms were used only by outsiders "because what it does is fail to differentiate between the localized raw material of life and its outcome as art" ("Place in Fiction" 796). The insider who understood fiction's purpose understood that writing was

about human relationships, a subject at once more intimate and more universal than a nation or region could encompass. And yet, despite the nomenclature, her means and ends largely overlapped with Yeats and Hurston, those more comfortable with the nationalist label.

Further, Welty's focus on the written word as a great influence in no way meant that the art of storytelling was, for her, without enactment. "Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself," she recounted in her memoir, "there has never been a line read that I didn't *hear*. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 851). The orality of stories was present for her in every form in which she received them, whether listening quietly on the couch to her parents discussing their day while they thought she was asleep, or reading curled up in her room. She not only listened to stories, she listened for them. "Listening *for* them is something more acute than listening *to* them. I suppose it's an early form of participation in what goes on. Listening children know stories are there. When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 854).

Welty credited her exposure and attention to this listening with her ability to reproduce oral speech accurately and believably. But even more often she cited the visual as her inspiration for stories. She was fond of claiming that painting is the closest art to writing, and she often used painterly and photographic terms to describe her stories. Her early work as a junior publicity agent for the WPA expanded and helped develop this sense and, though she would not say that this work directly affected her later writing, it certainly informed her way of seeing the world around her.

In 1936, Welty took her first full-time job, at the state office of the WPA. The position sent her traveling all over the state of Mississippi, to virtually every one of its counties, during which time she wrote news stories for the county papers on her own and began taking pictures on a small Kodak Eastman camera. “I saw my home state at close hand, really for the first time,” she said later of this period (*One Writer’s Beginnings* 928). In her job she worked under another publicity agent, a professional newsman who covered the major news of the areas they visited. Welty, as a junior publicity agent, “which also indicated I was a *girl*,”⁹ she quipped to interviewers years later, “did feature stories, interviews, and took some pictures” (*Photographs* xxv). She visited construction of farm-to-market roads, interviewing the road workers and people living along the road about how it affected their lives. She went to new air field openings, interviewed local businesspeople, photographed Tupelo the day after it had been struck by a tornado—the work was varied and unpredictable, providing the shy young Welty with an education in the people and landscapes of her state (*Photographs* xxv).

Welty realized in these travels that Mississippi “was a rural world,” not made up of bustling towns like Jackson throughout, and that the majority of the people of the state lived in circumstances she had never before imagined:

“What I discovered was the people in the rural setting. Their lives didn't change with the times. They were poor. Their conditions didn't change and were really terrible. It was all so much worse than I could have imagined. They had no radios, no TV's. They were living in small shacks and cabins and were cut off from

⁹ The southern branches of the WPA, again, despite their pluralistic and egalitarian aims, segregated and restricted workers—including many of their most brilliant—by their gender and race. Welty took this more lightly than Hurston did, perhaps because she was not highly trained in the field of her WPA job, as Hurston was. Also, the slight seems more minor in her case, not something as obviously unequal as denying the most qualified writer of the Florida WPA an editorial position. Yet the note of it still highlights the limitations of the WPA in action, despite its high-minded and boundless ideals.

things. These people were the opposite of what they easily might be: pinched and bitter” (Wolff 20).

Welty liked to characterize her snapshots (she always preferred to call them “snapshots” instead of photographs, emphasizing the fleetingness of the moment captured in them) as simply a record—a way to tell about a time and place (*Photographs* xiv). She was not hired specifically to take photographs for the WPA, but some of her photos ended up being printed in their publications. But she continued to snap them with dedication as she worked. She thought of them as a way to note where she was and what she saw there, as the lives she encountered surprised her and opened her world. She said that her method, once she noticed a scene she wanted to photograph, was to simply ask the person if she could take the picture, and that they always said yes: “I was never questioned, or avoided. There was no self-consciousness on either side.... I don’t think [a sense of violation] existed; I know it didn’t in my attitude, or in theirs” (*Photographs* xiv). Welty attributed this frankness and openness to the time period, saying you could not recreate that relationship anymore. Her goal, as she described it repeatedly, was to simply document what was. There were, however, elements of composition in her photographs which make them artful, and let them stand as a testing ground for her later fiction.

Unlike the more famous photographers of the rural south during the Depression, Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Welty did not pose her subjects, and did not otherwise alter their surroundings for her shots. She felt critical of Evans, arguing that he had an agenda in his work and that this came through more than the people themselves. In contrast, she said, “I was taking photographs of human beings because they were real life and they were there in front of me and that was the reality. I was the recorder of it. I

wasn't trying to exhort the public [as Evans and Agee did in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*]” (*Photographs* xvi). The camera's frame for her was a commitment to tell the truth—the shaping of the story was all in the way she framed the shot. But in this regard she was careful and exact.

Eudora Welty's photographic composition was an art of contextualizing. She chose the picture's frame, and in this provided the information the viewer receives for understanding the facts in the photograph. Daniele Pitavy-Souques describes Welty's picture-taking as a way of “retranslating” the south: in photographing those who were rarely noticed (Welty herself said many of her subjects had never had their pictures taken before), she made “the invisible visible, [brought] front stage those who had been taken for granted as part of the Southern background for a century, and thus [gave] the African American community its rightful identity on the Southern scene” (99). Pitavy-Souques here makes reference to the fact that Welty chose black subjects for the majority of her snapshots; it is also worth noting that a large portion of her subjects, black and white, were women. In addition to the fact that these subjects were mostly impoverished rural-dwellers, Welty was choosing to cast particular light on those most overlooked by greater American society, and, by making art of their images, to hold them up as beautiful.

Further, in her frequent use of soft focus, Welty achieved a sense of sympathy with her subjects. This is a quality that has often been used to explain why her photographs are not as technically proficient as those of Evans and Lange, and is likely the result of her learning as she snapped, in addition to having less professional cameras. But it also helps to create an effect that Welty clearly sought, of making the foreground and background come together. Pitavy-Souques describes this as depicting “things as

inter-related and often indistinguishable as figure or ground,” arguing that this aids Welty in her re-composition of the “story of the South as dramatic, inclusive, and as yet unfinished human battleground where the struggles of ordinary people matter greatly” (112).

In Welty’s photographs, the individual is always portrayed as such, not as a role or type, and she is also inextricably part of her *place*. Further, individuals are also highly specific, not only in character but in feeling—Welty’s other editorial ability, beyond choosing the frame, was in choosing the moment, and she tried to find those charged with emotional intensity. “On her photographs, all gestures are true, and therefore charged with a high iterative value, because they are signifying; they never are indifferent or commonplace, as on postcards” (Pitavy-Souques 101-2). Through her photographs, Welty showed her belief that everyone had a story worth telling—the key was to find its moment of enactment.

For example, in her photograph “Too far to walk it,” labeled as taken in Star, Mississippi in the 1930s (*Photographs* #41), Welty portrays a young black family—two children and a mother or older sister—on the right side of the frame. Their shadows stretch to the left, along an uphill stretch of farm road where a chicken wanders by undisturbed. Their stances, paused, considering the journey, as if looking toward the photographer but then distracted by the expanse they have already traveled, suggest a deep familiarity with the route. The woman has her hands on her hips and stands straight, defiant, looking tired but unwavering. Around them is dry grass, a barren tree, a bright blankness all across the top half of the frame suggesting the heat and length of the afternoon. These people and their moment are all absolutely particular, never abstracted,

and the sense of place saturates the exposure.

In another photo, one of many titled “Home” in which she photographed people on their front porches, Welty shows an older white woman half in shadow sitting in a rocking chair on her porch. In the foreground, in full light, are a spotted cat and two kittens, their bright coats drawing the eye. This photo, taken in Claiborne County in the 1930s (*Photographs* #11), first directs attention toward the mundane: the cats, the rotting porch boards. It is only after absorbing these locating and humanizing details of the life here that our gaze moves upward in the frame towards the dark, where we see the woman seated, hands folded in her lap, her feet drawn neatly together in their worn boots. She has a penetrating but benign look on her face, and behind her, the door to her house stands open, a long stretch of darkness opening out, as if to suggest the far greater depth of the life portrayed here.

In both of these examples, the details that Welty chooses to foreground often do not add up to clear “meaning” in the way that modern viewers are taught to expect. They subvert our assumptions and desires to categorize by accumulating details, by their attention to the place that makes the life, and by the suggestion that there is always more depth that we can only access through empathy with the subjects.

As Zora Neale Hurston chose to present the folklore of the people as equal to the art she made of them, so too did Welty privilege the fullness of living over any desire to editorialize. And, also like Hurston, Welty only sometimes provided the key to these signifiers. Often she let them stand as they were, simply as facts, valuable for the act of recording the way things were in a certain place, at a certain time—and available as deeper information for those who had some knowledge of the place.

In this photographic work we see her documentary impulse, her folklore tools. Welty always said there was no direct connection between photographs she took and stories she ended up writing, though occasionally the photos provided ideas for imagery in a story, as in the bottle-trees she encountered in Simpson County, which provided one of the most poignant images in the later story “Livvie,” and the woman she saw ironing in the back of a rural post office, who sparked the idea for her main character in “Why I Live at the P.O.” Some critics have been tempted to try to match up photos with stories, looking for direct inspiration or transcription of images into text. But for Welty the connection was usually more tangential. When asked if she had ever relied upon a photograph for a scene or element in a story, she answered no, “The memory is far better. Personal experience casts its essential light upon it. . . . My fiction’s source is living life” (*Photographs* xvi). Yet photography trained her in the many ways of seeing, how to frame an image, as well as timing, gesture, and the importance of visual attention. Throughout her career, in describing her writing she used photographic terms, making clear how this activity shaped her thinking: “I wished to be, not effaced, but invisible—actually a powerful position. Perspective, the line of vision, the frame of vision—these set a distance” (“Place in Fiction” 931). Further, she described the process of shooting as an education: “I could see a picture composing itself without too much trouble when I started taking landscapes and groups and catching people in action. Practice did make me see what to bring out and define what I was after, I think” (*Photographs* xiv).

Both her travels through the state with the WPA and her practice of photography had indirect effects on her stories, not only in style but in substance. Her first collection, *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*, was published in 1941, just three years after she

completed her work for the WPA. The stories are located along the Natchez Trace, the old trade route between Natchez, Mississippi and Nashville, Tennessee. Welty was fascinated by the history and lore of this area, and, after visiting so much of the state, wanted her stories to reflect the diversity of life and persistent spirit she found in the region. It is probably not coincidental, also, that she chose a travelers' route: Welty had sharpened her eye and her understanding of her home state by leaving her familiar circumstances (both to travel the state and in frequent trips to New York, which she made throughout the 1930s)¹⁰. Reynolds Price describes the act of taking pictures as a process through which Welty developed her need to write: that it was “among the forces that brought her to the realization that her prime compulsion was to push beyond the silent voice of image into the stronger but slower voice of words. . . . Some steady mystery in the world before her, some gulf that deepened in the early years of silent watching, was moving her toward another angle of vision as her ultimate foothold” (viii).

One of her iconic stories from this first collection provides us with a glimpse of Welty's debt to photography, as well as to travel and oral stories: “A Worn Path” tells the seemingly simple story of Phoenix Jackson, an old woman walking along the Trace into town to get medicine for her grandson. But throughout its telling, the typical plot structure is subverted, with details accruing more for a greater sense of the pictorial frame—to build a real place and a real person within it—than for dramatic purposes. In the second paragraph, for example, Welty spends a dozen lines on Phoenix's physical description for no purpose other than to let us see her clearly. In so doing, and in making

¹⁰ Welty notes in *One Writer's Beginnings* that it was not “surprising to me that when I made my first attempt at a novel, I entered its world—that of the mysterious Yazoo-Mississippi Delta—as a child riding there on a train” (914). Travel was another of the practices to which Welty aligned the act of story-writing—its linear movement and the possibilities for constant discovery opened worlds to her in the same way that writing did.

a habit of this type of description, Welty makes clear that she doesn't think such a purpose—seeing clearly—is minor at all. For her, it may be the most important way to spend a life. She describes Phoenix thus:

She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her show tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket: all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoelaces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illuminated by a yellow burning under the dark (*A Curtain...* 171)

As Harriet Pollack explains,

The building accumulation of this detailed description affects a reader's anticipation. Phoenix's monologue intermittently interrupts the story's narrative description, but does not deliver dramatic change; instead Phoenix speaks to herself about the details of the landscape and her progress. An oral quality develops: "On she went . . ." As if in a folk tale, we are invited to enter a ritual of repetition as Phoenix surmounts the small obstacles on the worn path. (21)

For Welty, the path was the thing that mattered. Critics have tried to read the story as Christian or other religious allegory, or to invent a dramatic backstory to inform the character's action, such as Phoenix's grandson being dead all along (Pollack 21). But Welty resolutely and somewhat perplexedly answered these charges by saying this issue was beside the point: "It is the journey, the going of the errand, that is the story, and the question is not whether the grandchild is in reality alive or dead" ("Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?" 816). Further on in the essay, she honed her answer: "I could reply that it doesn't make any difference. I could also say that I did not make him up in

order to let him play a trick on Phoenix. But my best answer would be: ‘*Phoenix is alive*’” (“Is Phoenix...?” 816). Welty subtly redirects readers’ focus here back to the story she has given us: the woman herself is the focus, and Welty aimed to capture her life in all its complexity and uniqueness rather than make her a pawn for some dramatic game. Harriet Pollack expands upon this goal:

The figure moving on the Trace is observant, clever, playful, and something of a trickster. Above all, she eludes the too-easy, reductive, dismissive, conventional interpretations imposed first by the white hunter who says, "I know you old colored people," and then by the white clinic nurse who marks her down as "charity." Both think they know her story without knowing her. Their automatic categorizing mirrors readings which too automatically categorize the story itself. (22)

In so subverting reductive readings, Welty managed to carry out in her stories what she had begun to discern in her photographs: an empathetic, full look at the lives of individuals who are usually unseen or dismissed. Reynolds Price uses the term “merciful” to describe Welty’s unflinching gaze at both her photographic and fictional subjects: he cites how many of her subjects “face her, her eye and the lens, with patent trust.” He adds that “behind a camera”—and I would add that as the author of stories and novels as well—“her eye chose images of courage, persistence and the unslaked thirst for more of life” (viii-ix). She often used comedy, but never to belittle her characters—laughter was a way to honor the liveliness, the life, in the people she portrayed. And ultimately her goal was to expose and celebrate this life among the people and in the place she knew best. As Welty herself said, looking back on her photography and writing,

The frame through which I viewed the world changed too, with time. Greater than scene, I came to see, is situation. Greater than situation is implication. Greater than all of these is a single, entire human being, who will never be confined in any frame. (*One*

Writer's Beginnings 933)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

During the brief tenures of the folklore commissions early in the last century, folklore experienced a rare moment in the cultural spotlight, and played a central role in helping two nations define themselves. Folklore's moment came in Ireland and the United States for economic and industrial reasons as well as for political and cultural ones, and was, in many ways, asked to solve cultural dilemmas beyond its reach. In the United States, the project ended abruptly as World War Two demanded all national attention and resources and caused shifts in public sympathies. In Ireland, the commission was able to continue its work over several decades, but even so, the major thrust of energy came at its inception. In that short period in the early twentieth century, however, both projects struck a chord with the people and were able to ask and begin to answer the question of national identity, to shape a democratic story about which their people could be proud.

For writers working within these projects and in proximity to them, a vast well of material opened. Based in place and communal experience, these artists found imagery, language, and tales from which they could build fictional, dramatic, and poetic worlds. W. B. Yeats, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty took this material in different

directions, but all found it endlessly stimulating as a source. In their own ways, each fulfilled Benjamin Botkin's exhortation at the 1939 Writers' Congress, in which he asked writers to utilize folklore in order to "make the inarticulate articulate and above all, to let the people speak in their own voice and tell their own story" (Lieberman 34). Yeats, Hurston, and Welty might easily have said the same thing themselves.

REFERENCES

- Bordelon, Pamela. "Zora Neale Hurston: A Biographical Essay." Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers' Project. Ed. Pamela Bordelon. New York: Norton, 1998, 1-49.
- Bronner, Simon J. Folk Nation. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002.
- Carby, Hazel. "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston." New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God. Ed. Michael Awkward. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.
- Ellmann, Richard. Yeats: The Man and the Masks. New York: Dutton & Co., 1948.
- Flanagan, Thomas. "Yeats, Joyce, and the Matter of Ireland." Critical Inquiry 2:1 (1975), 43-67.
- Frayne, John P., ed. Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, vol 1: First Reviews and Articles 1886-1896. New York: Columbia UP, 1970.
- Frayne, John P., and Colton Johnson, eds. Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, vol 2: Reviews, Articles and Other Miscellaneous Prose 1897-1939. New York: Columbia UP, 1976.
- Gregory, Lady. Irish Myths and Legends. Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1998 [1910].
- Hathaway, Rosemary. "The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston's 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' and a Theory of 'Touristic Reading.'" Journal of American Folklore 117:464 (2004), 168-190.
- Hirsch, Edward. "The Imaginary Irish Peasant." PMLA 106:5 (1991), 1116-1133.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. "Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin." Journal of American Folklore 100: 395 (1987), 3-38.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. "Modernity, Nostalgia, and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax." Journal of American Folklore 105: 416 (1992), 183-207.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. "'My Harvard Accent and 'Indifference' ': Notes toward the Biography of B. A. Botkin." Journal of American Folklore 109:433 (1996), 308-319.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003.

Honti, John Thomas. "Celtic Studies and European Folk-tale Research." Béaloideas 6 (1936), 33-39.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Crazy for this Democracy." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mena and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 165-168.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers' Project. Ed. Pamela Bordelon. New York: Norton, 1998.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mena and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 152-155.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Mules and Men. New York: Perennial Library, 1990.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "The 'Pet' Negro System." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mena and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 156-162.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Their Eyes Were Watching God." Zora Neale Hurston: Novels and Stories. New York: Library of America, 1995, 173-333.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "What White Publishers Won't Print." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 169-173.

Hyde, Douglas and Eoin MacNeill. "The Gaelic League" (1893). National Library of Ireland, "The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives, an online exhibition," section 3.4.2, p. 6. <http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.4.2.pdf> (accessed Mar 10, 2010)

Kelly, John and Ronald Schuchard, eds. Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats Vol II (1896-1900). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Kelly, John and Ronald Schuchard, eds. Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats Vol III (1901-1904). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Krans, Horatio Sheafe. William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival. London: Heinemann, 1905.

Kraut, Anthea. Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

Lieberman, Robbie. My Song Is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950, Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1989.

Lloyd, Timothy. "Whole Work, Whole Play, Whole People: Folklore and Social Therapeutics in 1920s and 1930s America." Journal of American Folklore 110: 437 (1997), 239-259.

MacDonagh, Thomas. "From 'Literature in Ireland'" (1916). Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Literature in English 1789-1939. Ed. Stephen Regan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004, 212-219.

MacNeill, Máire. "Irish Folklore as a Source for Research." Journal of the Folklore Institute 2:3 (1965), 340-354.

Mangione, Jerre. The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943. Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1972.

Marrs, Suzanne. Eudora Welty: A Biography. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2005.

Ó Murchadha, Tadhg. Béaloides 3 (1932), 502-516.

O'Sullivan, Sean. "The Collection and Classification of Folklore in Ireland and the Isle of Man." Folklore 68:4 (1957), 449-457.

O'Sullivan, Sheila. "W. B. Yeats's Use of Irish Oral and Literary Tradition." Hereditas: Essays and studies presented to Professor Séamus Ó Duilearga. Dublin: Folklore of Ireland Society, 1975, 266-279.

Pearse, Patrick. "The Coming Revolution" (1913). Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Literature in English 1789-1939. Ed. Stephen Regan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004, 185-189.

Pitavy-Souques, Daniele. "'The Fictional Eye': Eudora Welty's Retranslation of the South." South Atlantic Review 65:4 (2000), 90-113.

Pollack, Harriet. "Photographic Convention and Story Composition: Eudora Welty's Uses of Detail, Plot, Genre, and Expection from 'A Worn Path' through 'The Bride of the Innisfallen.'" South Central Review 14:2 (1997), 15-34.

Prenshaw, Peggy Whitman, Ed. More Conversations with Eudora Welty. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996.

Price, Reynolds. "The Only News." Photographs. Fwd. Reynolds Price. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989, vii-xii.

Quinlan, Kieran. Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005.

Quinn, Susan. Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art out of Desperate Times. New York: Walker & Co., 2008.

Taylor, David A. Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

Thuente, Mary Helen. W. B. Yeats and Irish Folklore. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980.

Walker, Alice. "On Refusing to Be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design: A Tradition by Now." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 1-6.

Washington, Mary Helen. "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow." I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive. Ed. Alice Walker. New York: The Feminist Press, 1979, 7-25.

Welty, Eudora. Photographs. Fwd. Reynolds Price. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989.

Welty, Eudora. "A Curtain of Green, and Other Stories." Stories, Essays, & Memoir. New York: Library of America, 1998, 1-179.

Welty, Eudora. "Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?" Stories, Essays, & Memoir. New York: Library of America, 1998, 815-818.

Welty, Eudora. "One Writer's Beginnings." Stories, Essays, & Memoir. New York: Library of America, 1998, 836-933.

Welty, Eudora. "Place in Fiction." Stories, Essays, & Memoir. New York: Library of America, 1998, 781-796.

Wolff, Sally and Eudora Welty. "The Domestic Thread of Revelation: An Interview with Eudora Welty." Southern Literary Journal 27:1 (1994), 18-24.

Yeats, W. B. The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. 2nd Ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Yeats, W. B. Essays and Introductions. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961.

Yeats, W. B., ed. Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry. London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1890.