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Bill Lazenbatt

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Eudora Welty and the Irish

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Bill Lazenbatt

## ‘How Might the World be Luckier?’: Eudora Welty and the Irish

When applied to creative writing the term ‘regional’ is usually associated with specifics of place, style and perhaps even a restricted range of reference. While the fiction of Eudora Welty, however, is richly and proudly regional, deeply rooted as it is in the culture and manners of the Mississippi Delta region, it simultaneously transcends any potential restriction by reflecting much wider and more distant literary influences. This essay will examine the correspondences and textual interactions between her work and that of contemporary Irish writers, and will suggest that these play an important role in shaping her fiction.

One noteworthy biographical correspondence with Irishness is that the collection containing the most obviously ‘Celtic’ title story, *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, is dedicated to Welty’s Anglo-Irish friend, Elizabeth Bowen, with whom the Mississippi writer enjoyed a special affinity. Moreover, if it was generally the case that Welty used her dedications to honour family members or close personal friends like John Robinson, then another significant Irish exception to this general rule is the dedication of *A Curtain of Green* to Diarmuid Russell, her literary agent and son of the Irish poet and mystic, George Russell, better known as ‘AE’, visionary friend of the poet, W.B. Yeats. Dedicated to Bowen, the story ‘The Bride of the Innisfallen’ actually owes little overt debt to her literary influence, and will not therefore form part of the comparison that follows. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that Suzanne Marrs notes the ‘affinity’ that the women shared in their critical outlooks, and quotes Bowen’s statement in ‘Notes on Writing a Novel’ that characters ‘reveal themselves slowly to the novelist’s perception—as might fellow travellers seated opposite one in