

## “INCREDIBLE ELOQUENCE”: HOW RON RASH’S NOVELS KEEP THE CELTIC LITERARY TRADITION ALIVE

*by Kara Baldwin*

When asked about his major influences, Ron Rash immediately mentions Celtic authors Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh, among others. These authors and their works act as inspirations to Rash as they continue the literary traditions of their Celtic culture. Both Heaney and Kavanagh represent what Rash calls an “incredible eloquence”: a beauty of the language they choose to use to describe elements of place and its sacredness (Rash, Personal Interview). Landscape and the mythology connected to it plays a major role in both the oral and literary Celtic traditions, but also is just as important in the American South, and specifically Ron Rash’s home in southern Appalachia. It is no wonder then, that Rash has followed the paths of Heaney and Kavanagh and continued this tradition of beautiful, poetic language in his own novels about the area in which he has grown up. But the connection between Rash and these Celtic literary traditions goes beyond just his influences. By looking to the past and considering the history and development of southern Appalachia, it becomes quite clear that many literary traditions are shared among these two cultures. While Ron Rash represents the present and future of southern Appalachian literature, it is his backward glance to Celtic traditions of the past that establishes his writing as part of an esteemed group of contemporary authors that keep such strong literary traditions alive.

While Ron Rash is a modern example of how far the Celtic literary tradition has spread, the connection between Ireland and southern Appalachia existed long before the present. A link between Irish oral traditions and contemporary American literature becomes quite obvious when examining both the oral and written literatures of southern Appalachia. An area settled by mostly Irish and other Celtic descendants, southern Appalachia contains physical, economical, and social similarities to Ireland. As a result, not only does the tradition of storytelling thrive in this area, but also many of the same tales and myths of Ireland remain as pieces of local tales. A chance to hear or read Jack tales, as told by Ray Hicks or Donald Davis, reveals a common thread of characters found in the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, as well as in the early tales of western Ireland. Though these tales are now considered part of this area’s folk history, their origins go much farther back to Irish folk culture. Ron Rash turns to these shared traditions in his poetry and novels to describe the people and roots of this area. In his stories of western North and South Carolina, Rash portrays a people and a culture very much like that of western Ireland, particularly in the belief of the spirituality of the place and land they inhabit. Even though displaced, Irish oral traditions remain an important part of both past and present southern Appalachian literature.

Often, the immigration patterns of the Irish to America focus on northern port cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia, and very little attention is paid to the southern states. This is not surprising, considering that by the mid-nineteenth century, only 10 percent of Irish immigrants moved to what was then considered the eleven con-

federate states (Gleeson 2). But those who chose to move south from these cities found an area very similar to Ireland in the western parts of North and South Carolina. As the plantation system took hold in Ulster, over 100,000 people were driven out of the area, and “[m]ost of these Scotch-Irish emigrants eventually ended up in southern Appalachia” (Blethen 18). These immigrants came from Northern Ireland and were labeled Scotch-Irish because their numbers included people from Ulster and the Scottish lowlands. The earliest immigrants to southern Appalachia came in the mid-eighteenth century from these northern port cities through the Shenandoah Valley on what was called the “Great Waggon Road” (Davidson 12).

As this group traveled south, they found land available for farming and a hospitable atmosphere, as “three North Carolina governors actively welcomed them” (Gleeson 13). The ease with which they were able to acquire land was a new concept to a group of people whose history involved so much conflict over land rights. As a result, by the mid-eighteenth century, “the most notable Irish Protestant concentration was found at the Waxhaws, a name designating a creek that flowed across the border from North Carolina into the Catawba River in South Carolina” (Williams 45-46). This area offered a life with which they were already familiar and comfortable, as well as an opportunity to claim a piece of land with little controversy.

As more Scotch-Irish immigrants moved into this area, they set up communities that retained distinction from other cultures in southern Appalachia. Separated from family and friends, “[t]hey combated isolation by forming Irish settlements. Their behavior shows that even the Irish still attracted to the agrarian life longed for contact with their compatriots” (Gleeson 23). This type of community allowed Irish culture to continue, even in a foreign country. The Irish of southern Appalachia found comfort in sharing stories about lands and people with which their new neighbors were familiar. Because of this common bond, “[t]he Irish did not disappear into the Old South. Their retention of Irish connections, in the region and at home, hindered their total assimilation, but not their integration, into southern society” (55). This chosen separation from the cultures around them not only helped retain their old culture and way of life, but it greatly influenced the growth of the area as well. In Ireland, farm life consisted of both growing crops and tending livestock. To do both required a decent amount of land per farm. Groups of these kinds of farms were called *clachans*, which consisted of a few farms clustered together, usually among family relations (Blethen 25). Farmers brought this idea to southern Appalachia, and “[t]his cultural preference overlaid on a mountainous topography partially explains the slow development of towns and urban life in Appalachia” (25). The Scotch-Irish shaped the growth of western North and South Carolina into a region very similar to their home and, in doing so, laid a foundation for a place in which Irish culture prospered.

With their new community, the Scotch-Irish of southern Appalachia offered a familiar place and home to the later emigrants from Ireland. The early eighteenth-century migration of Scotch-Irish to the area “meant that the region already had a certain Irish flavor [...] Many nineteenth-century Ulster migrants, therefore, had cousins or friends who could provide aid and comfort when they arrived in the south” (Gleeson 4). These small, isolated Irish communities were very similar to the villages the emigrants left behind. Southern Appalachia holds many of the same physical qualities of Ireland due to the fact that, geologically, these areas were once part of a continuous mountain chain. The

mountains of both countries formed together, causing comparable environments in both areas. This landscape and soil also afforded both areas an economy based on farming and livestock. Through the combination of all of these shared aspects, the large migration of Irish in the nineteenth century found a comfortable and familiar home in southern Appalachia. To their new home they brought more stories and tales from Ireland to share with the community. Added to the tales already in place from the early Irish settlers, these tales nourished the growth of an Irish culture in western North and South Carolina. In essence, the cultural growth of this area can be attributed to these Irish immigrants, as the counties of Ireland “are the seedbed for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century flowering of the piedmont of the Carolinas” (Davidson 12). Southern Appalachia finds much of its heritage and cultural roots in the Irish people who settled the area.

The oral traditions from the old country acted as a common bond between old and new Irish emigrants. With the timing of their migration, these emigrants left Ireland while storytelling still flourished in its oral form. The transformation of oral literature into the written word in Ireland took place in the early nineteenth century, but those that made their way to America in the mid-nineteenth century were mostly from the poor, agrarian areas of the west. Consequently, their knowledge of Irish folk tales remained embedded in the oral tradition. These Irish oral traditions became the oral traditions of southern Appalachia as well. The most obvious connection comes in the southern Appalachian stories known as “Jack tales.” These folktales relate the adventures of a boy named Jack, and occasionally his brothers, Will and Tom. Jack tales belong to a specifically oral tradition that only recently have been transcribed and collected in print. Their origins lie in the mountains of North Carolina and among the descendents of Scotch-Irish settlers. Today, direct descendents of these immigrants continue the oral tradition as part of the folk culture of southern Appalachia. In doing so, they also represent Irish folk culture.

That Jack tales are in the form of oral stories is not the only connection to their Irish heritage. Many of the tales are based on original Celtic tales or they include allusions to tales of Irish mythology. In his collection of Jack tales entitled *The Jack Tales: Folk Tales from the Southern Appalachians*, Richard Chase includes information on the roots of each tale. Jack tales were widely popular, thus, the “stories would have been common property among folk of English, Scottish, Irish, German or French ancestry all over the new nation” (Davis 12). As the stories spread to other cultures they evolved from their original telling into different versions of the same story. Chase follows the paths of these tales and documents how each group has changed them. Of the eighteen tales included in Chase’s collection, only a small few do not have roots in Celtic tales (Chase 193-214). Those that do come from Ireland reveal their heritage in various ways. For instance, the tale “Hardy Hardhead” is woven around the Irish mythological hero Fionn Mac Cumhail and his adventures described in the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology (Davis 14-15). Other Jack tales have barely changed from their original Irish form, as even the character Jack appears in early Celtic stories. “Jack the Cunning Thief,” a tale taken from J. Jacob’s *More Celtic Fairy Tales*, undergoes very few changes in its Appalachian forms. This story shows up in multiple translations, including Donald Davis’s “Jack Seeks His Fortune” and Richard Chase’s “Jack and the Doctor’s Girl.” As is the case with oral storytelling, the tale is never told the exact same way twice, but the commonalities between “Jack the Cunning Thief” and the two Appalachian versions reveal how closely the Irish-American culture of southern Ap-

palachia mirrors that of Ireland.

From these shared oral traditions, Appalachian literature developed along a parallel path to Irish literature. Much of the literature from southern Appalachia today depends on the same ideas of Irish literature, as it portrays an isolated area that nourishes a storytelling tradition rich in spiritual tales and respect for the land. Irish literature of the 1990s has been described as “fixated on naturalistic representations of rural Ireland of an earlier generation” (Cleary 114). Appalachian literature could be defined in the same way, as authors like Ron Rash, Fred Chappell, and James Still continue to set contemporary stories in rural regions, far from the “urban” and suburban settings of present-day Asheville or Charlotte, NC. Following in the footsteps of Patrick Kavanagh and his ideas of parochialism, these particular southern authors emphasize the agrarian, local life over the wider contemporary culture. Rash even admits to looking to Kavanagh’s poem “Epic” as a model of how truly important region and place are over the larger scheme (Rash, Personal Interview). Just as Irish writing “does not define itself through its situation in relation to a supposed English ‘centre,’” southern Appalachian writing does not characterize itself according to a wider American literature (Norquay and Smyth 164). It is very distinct in its place and is sure to portray as much through the stories this literature shares.

Ron Rash, an award-winning author of both poetry and prose, helps define southern Appalachian literature. A native of western North Carolina, Rash describes in his works a region of America not yet completely developed or over-populated. By setting his stories in western North and South Carolina, Rash reveals a place where the agrarian lifestyle still plays a very big role in contemporary society, both economically and socially. He reveals an influence on his writing by the Irish storytelling tradition, as passed on in Jack tales and other oral stories, through the value he places on the art of storytelling and the tales of his cultural heritage. Rash’s ancestors have lived in this area since the mid-1700s, and Rash has said “[a]ctually, this is a cliché, but it’s true, I grew up listening to people tell stories on the front porch” (Rash, interview 13). Within these stories, Rash learned of the ties between the culture and the land. Even as the agrarian lifestyle diminishes, Rash believes the ties between culture and place will continue: “We’re at a time where you’re seeing what made the South distinctive disappear, though, I think, there’s something about the South that will continue. I think it will continue to be a different region, partly because, in a way, ironically, literature is going to do that” (13). Rash’s novels aid in the survival of this culture through their respect and awe of the places and land they describe. *One Foot in Eden* and *Saints at the River* portray an area defined by its spirituality and permanent in its influence on those who live there. Like the culture that reared him, Rash stresses the importance of place among his stories and the literature of his culture.

Rash’s first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, reveals the importance of place on the characters’ lives by placing the action of the novel within a great upheaval of the land. The Jocassee Valley is on the verge of being lost forever as the power company moves forward in its plan to flood the valley to build a hydroelectric dam. From this threat to their livelihoods, the characters of the novel take notice of how much the land affects their lives and identities. This connection is different for each character, and Rash reveals this by writing the novel from the viewpoints of four different characters. This technique also works as a continuance of the tradition of oral storytelling by highlighting how a story can change with the notions of each teller. *One Foot in Eden*’s portrayal of southern Appalachian culture and

the forces at work on it received wide acclaim, including being awarded the Novello Festival Press Literary Award in 2002.

Like the Jack tales, Rash perpetuates the importance of oral storytelling as part of this Irish/southern culture in contemporary times. Though both the Jack tales and Rash's stories are now set in print, the act of storytelling still plays a very significant role within the culture they depict. In his short story, "The Corpse Bird," Rash describes how distinct this culture is from other parts of America, even from other parts of the same state. He portrays eastern North Carolina as "[a] world irrelevant and mute," where the land "was seen, if seen at all, through the glass windows of buildings and cars and planes" (Rash, "The Corpse Bird" 29). Disconnected from the land, the world he describes has no story and thus stands quiet and insignificant. This is not the culture Rash grew up in, nor is it indicative of a culture he admires. Rash's first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, strengthens the idea of a connection between a place and its stories as he describes a scene of storytelling that represents any time or era in his shared culture. Much like Rash listening to stories on the front porch as a child is the character Amy Holcombe. Thinking back to her childhood, Amy says: "I'd heard all such tales from Grandma, on a winter night when me and the other young ones huddled up near the fireplace. Wind had been whipping through the gorge and the limbs of the big beech scratching the tin roof like something trying to get in" (Rash, *One Foot* 68). The atmosphere surrounding Amy and the other children is very much a part of the stories she hears. In this way, she understands the connection between the tales her grandmother tells and the place of her family and heritage. As the stories pass down through generations, the land remains as a sense of the familiar. The stories and the place stay constant throughout Amy's cultural history.

*One Foot in Eden* is representative of the role of place in Irish oral traditions and continued Irish culture. Not only does the land act as a constant behind the actions of the story, but it also acts on the characters of the novel, as well. The ties the characters feel to the land signify a connection to their heritage. The people of southern Appalachia were much like the Irish in their need to feel a sense of belonging to the land. Such a connection meant that their claims to belong, and those of past and future generations, are justified. Will Alexander understands this as the reason his father continues to farm:

He'd held onto this land too, land that had been in his family for one hundred and eighty years. He had held onto it not only for those who'd come before him but for his children and grandchildren. I knew his greatest satisfaction was being able to look in the fields and see his son and grandsons working the same land he'd worked all his life. (39)

Mr. Alexander depends on his land to sustain the lives of his family, the respect for his heritage, and the promise of sustenance for those to come. He represents an older generation that believes in this union between life and land.

Isaac Holcombe, on the other hand, symbolizes the younger generation that is threatened by a sense of place that no longer stays constant. As the power company prepares to flood his family's farm, he realizes how much the land around him influences his life. Even though there is a part of Isaac that is ready to move on, he understands that the land has shaped him into who he is. Isaac explains this, saying "I was learning that leaving a place

wasn't as easy as packing up and getting out. You carried part of it with you, whether you wanted to or not" (170). Throughout all generations, this sense of place pervades the life and identity of those who inhabit it.

When the land in *One Foot in Eden* is endangered by the sprawl of the contemporary world, the characters' sense of belonging loses their foundation. With the plan to flood the area to make a dam for hydroelectric power, the contemporary world threatens not only the identity of the people of the area, but their entire culture. Will realizes the impact of such a thing, saying "I thought of how the descendants of settlers from Scotland and Wales and Ireland and England – people poor and desperate enough to risk their lives to take that land, as the Cherokees had once taken it from other tribes – would soon vanish from Jocassee as well. [...] Reservoir, reservation, the two words sounded so alike" (23). The culture of Will's family and heritage can no longer exist without the land to which they belong. In essence, his culture will lose its identity as it is forced off the land, much like the Native Americans. The land, too, suffers from this break between place and culture. Rash describes Jocassee as "the valley of the lost" (10). He also describes scenes of decay and dying in the landscape to reflect this idea of loss. Rash writes, "I looked out the window and the world seemed dead. The mountains was bald-looking and brown, the trees shucked of their leaves, nothing more than skeletons of what they'd been in summer" (63). He continues, saying, "The stumps of the big hardwoods jutted out like tombstones" (180). No longer a place to sustain life and culture, the land of Jocassee takes on the image of death. It has become a graveyard for a dying way of life.

The role of water in *One Foot in Eden* represents a passage between life and an after-life. Though the flooding of Jocassee means the death of the culture in its own place, it also allows this culture to reach a spiritual level it never could in life. In this way, *One Foot in Eden* alludes to Irish myths of creation and truth. Early Irish mythology often explained the creation of the world, such as the formation of Lough Neagh. The myth explains the creation of Lough Neagh as an act of God:

There was a city there once, oh far bigger than Dublin and maybe as big as London, but the people were not good. They didn't know what to do to be bad enough. But God is not to be mocked and one day He sent the rain and it rained and it rained and it poured and it poured. For forty days and nights it rained and every single person was drowned. But if you listen on a clear day when the wind is blowing gently, you'll hear the sound of church bells. (Todd 62)

Rash describes Jocassee similarly to the city under Lough Neagh. With the flooding of the area, the murder of Holland Winchester receives due punishment. The Deputy describes an image like that of Lough Neagh as he thinks of the future of Jocassee: "Of a sudden I had a thought of months more passing, that church underwater and divers still hunting for Billy and Amy Holcombe. I imagined divers swimming around inside, moving above the pews and pulpit like angels" (Rash, *One Foot* 209). Here, the title of the novel relates, as the drowning of the town returns its people back to Eden. Only when it has experienced death can the culture know heaven.

This idea of finding a spiritual end also comes up in the Widow Glendower, a character who symbolizes the Irish myth of "The Salmon of Knowledge." The widow is both

feared and respected by the people of Jocassee because of her knowledge of life and what can be defined as the supernatural. Amy relates a story about Widow Glendower that her grandmother tells her: "There had been many another story about her I'd heard growing up. How once Lindsey Kilgore saw her rise out of a trout pool he'd been fishing, her body forming itself out of the water" (68). By describing her in this way, Rash refers to the "glittering girl" who transforms as the salmon of knowledge in W. B. Yeats's "The Song of Wandering Aengus." Widow Glendower resembles the salmon of knowledge in both her formation in the river and in her knowledge of life and death or, as described by Dermot Healy, "the eternal going away and the eternal return" (Healy 194). The use of Irish mythology by Rash is not surprising considering that "[o]ne of his favorite themes [...] is the meeting of paganism and Christianity, such as when an Appalachian Christian farmer kills 'black snakes ... to make it rain'" ("Ron Rash"). His appreciation for such a theme fits with the Irish culture that settled the area in which he grew up, as many of the tales from Irish mythology were changed and used by Roman Catholic missionaries to sway the pagan Irish people to Christianity. In Irish culture and, as a result, southern Appalachian culture, the relationship between pagan and Christian beliefs is integral to the development of an identity.

In *One Foot in Eden*, Ron Rash portrays the connection of the people of southern Appalachia to the land they inhabit. This novel continues Irish oral traditions by telling a story that reveals a spiritual sense of place as an integral force upon the culture. The Jocassee valley represents a sacred place, both before the flood when it offered life and sustenance and after the flood when it symbolizes the baptized beginning of life after death. The contemporary culture of Jocassee and southern Appalachia can find its salvation through the same tales of creation and spirituality that make up its cultural legacy. In doing so, the cultural identity survives life and death, floods and droughts, and the continuing passage of time. Even though the land no longer exists, the stories of this sacred place comfort a contemporary culture faced with diversity and dissimulation. By driving the early folk traditions onward, the southern Appalachian culture withstands the tests of modernity.

Rash's second novel, *Saints at the River*, also deals with the conflict between a strong cultural history and the changing landscape of contemporary times. Again, place is emphasized as its very existence is threatened. Set in Oconee County, South Carolina, this novel portrays the southern Appalachian culture in its traditional form, with stories from the area reflecting a pride in place and a belief in the landscape's holiness. With the death of a young girl in the rapids of the Tamassee River, the land comes under attack by those who want to destroy the river to retrieve the girl's body. But by allowing the girl's family to change the course of the river in their attempts at retrieval, opportunities also arise for land developers to make a push to develop the protected land around the Tamassee. Unlike in *One Foot in Eden*, when the land in *Saints at the River* is threatened by these outside forces of modernity, the people of Oconee County have the power to preserve this place as it is, or let it change with the times and succumb to pressures of the broader, present-day culture. In the battle over the Tamassee River, the traditional identity of southern Appalachia defends itself against contemporary concerns as it tries to save the place and culture on which this identity is based.

The novel, itself, represents a part of the traditional Irish culture, by way of southern Appalachia, in its depiction of life in Tamassee as barely changed by time. In describing

her birthplace to co-workers in Columbia, South Carolina, Maggie Glenn paints an image of a community steeped in traditional values and activities. First, she explains bonding fires—fires whose embers are used to light the fires of family members for generations—as part of her cultural heritage (Rash, *Saints* 111). She then connects her home's customs to this idea, saying, "The closest thing to a bonding fire in Tamassee was Saturday night at Billy's store. It was not unusual to see four generations of the same family seated in lawn chairs together, not fire but song passed from parent to child" (111). Music, like the oral storytelling tradition, acts as a common bond between the present culture of Tamassee and its past. To her co-workers who are unaware of the traditions of her community, Maggie feels the need to defend the old ways: "Contrary to what you may have heard, Lee, Oconee County's not the heart of darkness. It's four hours away, not four centuries" (9). Yet even as she attempts to place Tamassee's traditions into contemporary terms, Maggie knows they are steeped in the folk culture of the past. In discussing the songs played at Billy's store, Maggie acknowledges that "[s]ome of the old words and ways have held on" (115). Conflicted by the pull between her upbringing in this traditional, rural culture and her life in the developed, urban city of Columbia, Maggie begins to understand the distinct differences between the place she grew up and the place she chooses to live. She is in exile from her true culture, and begins to see the sanctity of the place she left behind.

The landscape of Tamassee and Oconee County is very influential on the lives of the characters, as it plays a major role in shaping the culture they know. The natural powers of this place shape the characters into who they are, just as they guide the events and experiences in their lives. They are acted upon by the place in which they live, both physically and inherently. Maggie understands how much the land controls life in Tamassee, describing how the powers loom over anyone nearing there: "You turn right at the stop sign, and suddenly mountains leap up as though they'd been crouching along the four-lane waiting for the car to turn" (17). The physical presence of the landscape dominates the entire area, as the mountains are described as a predator of anything that enters the region. The strength of this place acts on the minds of the people who live there, as well. The people of Tamassee are hardened by the life afforded them by this landscape. As a result, they decide that they must withstand the forces of the land without complaint: "Maybe that was what happened when people grew up in a place where mountains shut them in, kept everything turned inward, buffered them from everything else. How long did it take before that landscape became internalized, was passed down generation to generation like blood type or eye color?" (149). As is the case of any community that depends on the land to make a living, the people of Tamassee understand the domination of the landscape. It controls their lives and demands respect in its sheer existence. As Maggie explains, "Wolf Cliff is a place where nature has gone out of its way to make humans feel insignificant" (81). Through these descriptions, Rash makes the landscape of Tamassee a towering figure in *Saints at the River*.

The power of the landscape in this novel comes from Rash's belief that a place—specifically southern Appalachia—can be sacred and spiritual in its own right. While the culture that inhabits this place gives it some spirituality, Rash shows that much of its holiness is natural. These ideas are embodied in Luke, who wants to preserve the land in its purest form. While trying to save the Tamassee River from the explosions involved in a search and rescue effort, Luke portrays the waters of the Tamassee as holy. He pushes for

this stance, explaining that if he had a daughter, “[he]’d want her where she’d be part of something pure and good and unchanging, the closest thing to Eden we’ve got left. You tell me where there’s a more serene and beautiful place on this planet. You tell me a more holy place, Mr. Brennon, because I don’t know one” (53). Luke believes the river is not only a proper resting place for her body, but that the river symbolizes the closest thing to heaven on earth. He feels he is closest to this spiritual power when on the river. Describing a time when he was swept under the river, Luke says: “‘Part of me wanted to stay. That hydraulic was like the still center of the universe.’ [...] ‘It was like entering eternity,’ [...] ‘That’s what the Celts believed—that water was a conduit to the next world’” (64). Much like the water in *One Foot in Eden*, the Tamasee River in this novel represents a physical symbol of the spiritual world. It supersedes ideas of life and death and acts as a bridge between the two. Maggie finally understands the sacredness of the place she left behind when she enters the water: “On that September morning I understood his seriousness, that what we were trying to save *was* holy, for I was not just in the presence of something sacred and eternal but for a few seconds inside it” (165). Maggie has undergone a baptism by stepping into the holy waters of the river. Returned from her life away from this place, Maggie is reborn into a place that acts as a conduit between life and eternity.

That Ron Rash portrays the land of southern Appalachia as sacred reflects the culture in which he grew up. The stories he tells depend on the stories he heard from ancestors, who heard them from earlier generations. The foundation for all of this remains the oral and written traditions of his culture. Rash continues to spread the use of early Irish literary traditions by his respect for the role of storytelling and his depictions of a place sacred to those who choose to be a part of it. The wider American culture shows its respect for Rash’s abilities as a storyteller, as both novels have been read on National Public Radio’s *Radio Reader*. *One Foot in Eden* and *Saints at the River* represent contemporary portrayals of ancient ideas. As modern times reflect a massive diversity and combination of cultures, Rash’s novels embody a culture that is disappearing with the mass consumption of the land on which it thrives. By continuing the traditions of the culture, Rash honors the land and traditions of the folk culture that is being lost. In his representations of the poetry and beauty of southern Appalachian life and language, Ron Rash has matched the merit of his mentors, Seamus Heaney and Patrick Kavanagh, and portrays a place and its sacredness with that “incredible eloquence.”

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## RON RASH BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The following is a listing of Ron Rash's primary works and secondary materials related to his works. The first section includes Rash's primary writings, listed chronologically by category—books, short stories, poems, and reviews.

The second section lists selected secondary sources—articles about Rash (alphabetically by author) and reviews of Rash's work (alphabetically by author).

### Primary Sources

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