ABSTRACT
DISCARDING DREAMS AND LEGENDS: THE SHORT FICTION OF ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS, EUDORA WELTY, FLANNERY O’CONNOR, AND KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

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This project examines four Southern women writers—Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, and Katherine Anne Porter—who use the genre of the short story and the setting of the farm to critique Southern regional identity. My goal in analyzing the work of these authors is to demonstrate that their fiction, when studied collectively, reveals the changing attitudes shaping Southern cultural identity between 1930 and 1950, a time often identified as the Southern Renaissance; it was also a period marked with shifting regional identities due to the rise of racial liberalism, increased urbanization and industrialism, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Here, cultural identity serves as an umbrella term encompassing class, race, and allegiance to region. In creating fictional scenarios that parallel the South of her time, each writer comments on a South that is changing or interrogates possibilities for a future South. The social critique embedded in the work of these writers has been overlooked, in part because of the writers’ gender and choice of genre. This project contributes to the recovery of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, a mostly forgotten writer whose short fiction is entirely out of print. It also contributes to scholarship on these authors by asserting the political nature of their short fiction that has largely not previously been acknowledged.