

FILM REVIEWS

Yeats Country. Produced by Aengus Films for the Department of External Affairs of Ireland. Produced by Joe Mendoza and Patrick Carey. Directed and photographed by Patrick Carey. 18 minutes, 16 mm., color. Distributor: International Film Bureau Inc., 332 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60604.

Reviewed by Mary Ellen B. Lewis

"Yeats Country" begins appropriately with words taken from that leader of the Irish Renaissance, William Butler Yeats: "I would have our artists and craftsmen of many kinds master our history and legends, and fix upon their memory the appearance of our mountains and rivers, and make it all visible again in their arts . . . there is no river or mountain that is not associated in the memory with some legend." These words suggest Yeats's own interest in the traditions of Ireland, particularly County Sligo, and the impact of the physical locale and the legends about them on Yeats's artistry. Taking this cue from Yeats himself, the photographer provides scene after scene of Irish landscape as visual backdrop primarily for selected readings from the works of Yeats, as well as for commentary. But the connection of the landscape with Yeats's work is more implicit than explicit. The tone of his selections is romantic, scattered with a few references to the Tain, its central characters; that of the visual image is appropriately misty, green, changeable, and frequently evocative of the paintings of J. M. W. Turner.

Yeats was influenced greatly by Ireland's wealth of oral tradition. Thus, the film might be a springboard for an examination of the concrete ways in which Yeats used tradition--allusion, content, and perhaps other ways yet unexplored. Additionally, the film offers several points for discussion by literary folklorists, such as the sometimes-held notion that the great writer of words far excels the oral material with which he or she works, oral tradition itself having no inherent esthetic value of its own. Though the film is not directly relevant, it might well provide a useful point of departure in a course of folklore and literature.

Ephesus. Produced by Fred Padula. 18 minutes. 16 mm. Black and white. Distributed by Brandon Films, 34 MacQueens Parkway, Mt. Vernon, New York 10550.

Reviewed by Eleanor Wachs

Many of us who are instructors of American folklore frequently attempt to present to our students a multidimensional view of a culture which is often quite different from our own cultural experience. For convenience we all too often resort to narrative text rather than to visual documentation. If we view folkloristic film within the realm of folklore scholarship (instead of as a baby-sitting device), we can then praise Fred Padula for his worthwhile contribution. Ephesus permits us to see behind the closed doors of the Ephesian Church of God of Berkeley, California, and visually investigates Afro-American folk belief and religious practices. Padula guides us into the church on a day in 1965; first, quiet and empty--without participants. Throughout these opening scenes and the remainder of the film, the voiceover of the church's leader, Reverend E. E. Cleveland, provides a sense of coherence for the film by telling us which Biblical passages form the basis of his preaching style. The framework of the church service is presented; the congregants slowly enter; the offering is taken; the testimonies are heard; the sermon begins. Quickly, we become involved in an overpowering religious experience which only visual imagery can provide so powerfully. And we, as audience, lurch forward to be immersed in the movement and sound; the film calls for involvement. Padula quickens and intensifies the pace of the film and then suddenly the church doors close and the quiet Berkeley street is before us.

The inadequacies of Ephesus are minor when compared to the film's total effect. The camera work often seems stilted and one can assume that Padula's field situation was not ideal. The audio lacks clarity at several points during Cleveland's narration which is heard over the singing of the congregants. Nevertheless, Ephesus provides us with a visual context for the teaching of Afro-American folk belief, and folk religion as well as the creative talent of the folk preacher and the fieldwork field experience.