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Economic Enchantment in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*

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Economic Enchantment in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*

By
Elizabeth Moore

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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Approved by

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ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH MARIE MOORE: Economic Enchantment in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green*

(Under the direction of Dr. Annette Trefzer)

This thesis analyzes Eudora Welty's short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*, and the interactions between its characters and the Mississippi economy. The paper takes into account Eudora Welty's work with the WPA during the Great Depression and her experiences photographing Mississippians throughout the state. Additionally, this thesis uses Welty's terminology when describing her experience of shopping as a child, specifically the "enchantment" of goods. This material is used to argue that Eudora Welty does address economic elements in her early short stories. Furthermore, this collection demonstrates a difference between gender participation in the economy, particularly among salesmen and female consumers. The male figures who transport goods across the state become disenchanted by their constant interaction with the economy, whereas female characters use their enchantment with the economy as an opportunity to exploit it. These women fulfill their hopes for economic security and social equality through consumerism. They use goods, entertainment, and travel to satisfy their desires for independence or marital stability. In *A Curtain of Green*, Welty presents a perspective on the Mississippi economy in which gender participation takes divergent routes for men and women.

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Introduction

Famed Mississippian and Pulitzer-Prize winning author Eudora Welty lived in Jackson, Mississippi, throughout her life. Welty, a woman of words and keen observation, chronicled her life in the Southern state through her short stories, novels, and photographs which reveal the beauty of Mississippi and its people. Since her birth in 1909, Jackson served as her canvas for creation. Welty witnessed interactions between children and adults, whites and African Americans, politicians and average people, and consumers and shop owners around her capitol home. Literature had an embedded presence in the Welty home. Eudora's mother, Mary Chestina Welty, was a school teacher who believed that "any room in our house, at any time in the day, was there to read in, or to be read to" (OWB 5). Her father, Christian Webb Welty, introduced her to an early fascination with the technology of the early twentieth century. Consumption of modern mechanics characterized a critical moment in Welty's childhood. Her father, who had purchased a camera, "was part of the Kodak revolution, which democratized photography" (Chouard 115). He then presented Welty with her own Kodak camera for her thirteenth birthday in 1922. Welty's childhood instilled in her the early ability to observe the world through a literary mind and a mechanical lens. Her photography skills served to capture moments magnificently and permanently in her collection of photographs. With these photos, Welty would craft numerous stories about the people of

Mississippi and their presence in the state's ever-changing social and economic landscape.

Before Eudora Welty began her career as an award-winning author, she earned a degree in English from the University of Wisconsin, before beginning to study advertising at Columbia University. Welty graduated in the midst of the Great Depression, with little success of finding work in New York. Upon her return to Mississippi, she worked at a Jackson radio station and wrote for a Memphis newspaper before beginning her career as photographer. In 1936 Eudora Welty was hired to write for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as a publicity agent. She soon began photographing Mississippi's rural poor in the plight of the Depression. In these years before her first literary publications, Welty traveled Mississippi, capturing the survival of its people. Geraldine Chouard writes that Welty's work depicts many people performing professional occupations when "in a time of crisis, such as the Depression, practicing a profession was more a source of respectability than prosperity, giving all the anonymous people a sense of worth" (Chouard 123). Welty photographed tomato-packers, farmers visiting town, children dancing for pennies, and women weaving. Welty's photos illuminated the livelihoods of Mississippians surviving by a sliver of Southern integrity.

Welty also "did take a keen interest in small southern towns" and her photographs of the general stores, barber shops, and clothing stores which line "the downtowns of these places show many signs, placards, and posters advertising consumer goods" (Chouard 125). Welty's photography exposed her to these centers of consumption, and she observed early interactions between Mississippians and a growing economy. Observation was Welty's cherished artistic instrument in her writing and photography.

William Maxwell once observed of Welty's work with the Works Progress Administration that "it obliged [Welty] to go where she would not otherwise have gone and see people and places she might not ever have seen. A writer's material derives nearly always from experience. Because of this job she came to know the state of Mississippi by heart and could never come to the end of what she might want to write about" (Humanities). Her photos were instrumental in formulating her observations of Mississippi lives into a literary legacy. While working for the WPA, Welty published her first story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman", in *Manuscript*, a literary magazine, in 1936. In this story Welty introduces the lonely life of a lost shoe salesman whose failed interactions with Mississippi's rural residents thrust him over the edge of a crippling malady, leaving him unfulfilled by his modern existence. This publication won Welty early recognition as a storyteller and also represents her interest in the modern Mississippi economy by demonstrating the monotony which can emerge in a cycle of commodities and exchanges. She published other stories for well-known publications in the following years, but the small Mississippi towns and the residents Welty encountered during her work were first given a significant literary life in her first published short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*.

Welty's first collection, published in 1941, includes seventeen stories set in Mississippi. This thesis will focus on eight stories from the collection which best represent Welty's characters participating in exchanges of money and goods while illustrating class and gender differences. Katherine Anne Porter, a writer and early mentor to Welty, writes in the introduction to the collection that the "stories offer an extraordinary range of mood, pace, tone, and a variety of material. The scene is limited to

a town the author knows well; the farthest reaches of that scene never go beyond the boundaries of her own state” (COG xvi). Welty’s writing is unique to the settings of Mississippi she came to know well through her work. Her characters are salesmen, farm workers, homemakers and wishful socialites struggling to adapt to a changing society in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, they are all present at a time of substantial change in Mississippi. As the economy transforms from largely agrarian to industrialized, the system struggled to simultaneously support the remaining rural farmers and a growing consumer class. As social and racial relations continued to evolve and alter the arrangements of Southern society, the traditions and values of the state were being challenged by an encroaching world of modernity and industry.

Throughout *A Curtain of Green*, a pattern emerges. In each of these stories, elements of consumption affect the motives of Welty’s characters. For early scholars, Welty’s quirky characters and descriptive settings overshadow the function of consumer culture in the lives of her characters. However, upon further analysis, her characters’ fascination with the consumer elements found throughout these stories reveal Welty’s own interest in economic culture in the daily lives of Mississippians. In her stories, the rural poor are largely unfamiliar with most consumer elements. Farming men and women reject salesmen offering fine goods because they have no use for them or a limited ability to purchase them, yet they still dream of the opportunity consumption allows. Urban dwellers, specifically women, consistently interact and indulge in the conveniences of modernity through transportation and traveling entertainment. *A Curtain of Green*, written soon after Welty’s work with the WPA and her travel throughout the state, demonstrates her most immediate observations of Mississippi residents and the content of

their lives. Written throughout and following the Great Depression, Welty's stories provide an insight into Mississippi's interactions with the early twentieth century economy during a time of extreme challenges and change. *A Curtain of Green* produces the earliest perspective of Welty's observations and commentary on how men and women of varied social status, success, and race interacted in Mississippi's economy.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each introducing a new idea associated with Welty's writings. Chapter 1 will explain the history of Mississippi's Depression economy and compose the context during which Welty's stories were written. Most importantly, it will demonstrate how men and women, both white and African American, participated differently in this economy. Ted Ownby's book, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty & Culture 1830-1998*, provides the basis for information on Mississippi's economy. Ownby includes comments on Welty's writings, and my own extensive interpretation will provide a response to these comments. Next this chapter will explain the ways in which characters may achieve their aspirations through consumption. In his book, Ownby outlines four *Dreams*, illustrating how and why people have acted as consumers throughout American history. I will demonstrate how men and women in Welty's fiction participated, though at times very limitedly, in the culture of consumption at a time of financial uncertainty and depression to achieve these dreams, as well as others. This chapter will also introduce Welty's interpretation of sales and consumption culture just a short distance from her home near the Jackson capital. In her essay, "The Little Store," Welty introduces her earliest interactions and intrigue with shopping. Welty's early experience of shopping is an inspiration for the characters and settings she explores in the collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*.

Chapter 2 will introduce a literary analysis of two short stories from *A Curtain of Green*. These stories, "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitchhikers", each address the culture of salesmen in the early twentieth century. They demonstrate interactions with early consumer culture from the perspective of salesmen, who often came from out of state to distribute items to residents with little consumer access. These stories also provide a distinction between the interactions of genders in the economy. R.J. Bowman and Tom Harris each become disillusioned by their occupation and lifestyles, which include constant travel and few moments of authentic human interaction. Their determination to sell products to Mississippians has devalued their own lives. This chapter will demonstrate Welty's commentary on consumerism, specifically the deprivation within the culture, while introducing male disenchantment with participation in the Mississippi economy.

Chapter 3 will illustrate women's roles as consumers in the collection by demonstrating their enchantment with the goods and experiences. Six stories, "The Whistle," "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "A Piece of News," "Petrified Man," "The Key," and "A Worn Path" will serve as the foundation for the analysis. I will also use photographs and other collected stories to highlight Welty's attitude towards consumption in her early work and life. In these stories Welty shows how women interact with consumer societies in several ways. In "Petrified Man," white women are both consumers and providers of beauty services in urban areas, whereas in "A Worn Path," an African American woman demonstrates her rare opportunities to interact in the economy. However, all of these women have a desire to transcend obstacles and earn independence through their interactions with goods. In "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" and "The

Key,” mentally and physically disabled women use consumption to overcome their handicaps and achieve personal dreams through consumer choice. Most importantly, these women, unlike men, are intrigued by consumer goods promising personal and social satisfaction. This thesis will debate scholars who believe that Eudora Welty’s writings were indifferent to the economy of Mississippi. By examining the history of Mississippi’s economy and the cultural context in which Welty wrote, we can see a consumer society within Welty’s first short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*, which allows characters, especially women, to satisfy desires and ambition through participation in the economy. Their intrigue with the economy will be characterized as “enchantment,” which was utilized by Welty when describing her own shopping experiences. This enchantment differs from other scholarly definitions of consumer intrigue, such as Karl Marx’s critique of consumerism in his essay, “The Fetishisms of Commodities and the Secret Thereof.” Welty critiques the salesman’s inevitable inclination to equate experiences to their monetary value, thus living lives defined by their relationships to the economy, whereas she demonstrates women’s ability to transcend such tendencies. Commodities don’t become a fetish, but rather an instrument which allow both white and African American women to achieve their specific dreams. Through analysis of photos and short stories, the importance of Welty’s early life and work with the WPA emerge as an important influence in her writings. At a time of economic uncertainty, Welty created characters who participate in and profit from Mississippi’s economy.

Chapter 1

Mississippi's unique history is perhaps the most plagued by social oppression, economic stagnation, and misjudgment among the United States. The Southern state and its wealthy planter class suffered a catastrophic collapse following the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction which left its economy and infrastructure devastated. As the age of sharecropping emerged, tenant farming prevented white farmers from achieving economic autonomy, while African American farmers continued to depend on wealthier landowners to earn their livelihood (Wadlington 6). Mississippi's industrial development was slow and economic participation was difficult for the majority of the state's population, particularly for those residing in the most rural areas of the state. Mississippi's economic misfortune was further hindered by the Great Depression of the twentieth century, suppressing Mississippi in its state of economic inferiority. Although this history, along with statistics and accounts illustrating underdevelopment and social inequality, predominantly define Mississippi to outsiders, natives who endeavor to understand their home best succeed at documenting and defining life in Mississippi. William Faulkner crafted stories on the trials of poor Mississippi farmers while also chronicling the fallen reign of the Southern plantation, Dorothy Dickens studied the science of Southern home economics and documented the participation of women in Mississippi's economy throughout its history, and Muddy Waters recorded the rhythm of the Mississippi Delta Blues. Eudora Welty documented her own interpretation of

Mississippi life in four short story collections, six novels, and other autobiographical and various writings. Welty provides readers with varied perspectives and observations of life in Mississippi. Her numerous characters and settings in small towns illustrate a dynamic perspective on Mississippi's history, illustrating the state's complicated progression and presence in American history.

Despite Welty's unique historical perspective, few scholars first acknowledged or interpreted Welty's early writings as documentation and commentary on the state's economy. First, Welty had to overcome "the stereotype of southern fiction fertilized in the 1930s by the popularity of Erskine Caldwell's grotesques" (Kreyling 9). Ideas of early twentieth century southern fiction were solidified by William Faulkner and other writers whose content often focused on the morbid and distorted. Though Welty explores these physical deformities in freak shows, as well as mental and physical handicaps which plague her characters, these afflictions produce a meaning larger than the ailments themselves. Unfortunately, in the introduction to her first short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*, Katherine Anne Porter "fed into this stereotype," by introducing readers to these elements in Welty's stories (Kreyling 9). As more critical interpretations emerged, women became the focus of those attempting to discern a theme or pattern in her works. Michael Kreyling writes that "Welty is a psychological symbolist whose main territory is the inner life of women" (Kreyling 7). Ted Ownby echoes this belief, writing that "Welty tended to write more about the inner lives of her characters than public and political or potentially political issues. Material things do not seem to matter a great deal in themselves or as symbols of broader perspectives" (Ownby 145). Yet in her stories, the inner lives of women only serve to direct their interactions with the outside world. Her

women interact often with material things and search for more opportunities to do so. Though Peter Schmidt better identifies Welty's female characters as "surrogates of the woman writer, expressing anxiety and guilt for sins against social convention," his interpretation is misplaced (Kreyling 11). Female consumers do not express anxiety and guilt, but they express the desire to participate equally in society by defying these conventions using consumption as an outlet through which to do so. Recent scholars, such as Suzanne Marrs and Harriet Pollack, have demonstrated that Welty's writing can be interpreted as "anything but 'apolitical'" (223). Annette Trefzer suggests that Welty has "a pervasive concern with the American economy," and that her fiction "lays bare the political, economic, and psychological implications of a disabling poverty" (Trefzer 98-100). Today, many scholars interpret Welty's writings as commentary on Mississippi's early economy. I will show how Welty's commentary on the modern twentieth century economy, as well as the consumer elements found throughout her stories, not only serve as plot advancements in her writings, but define the characters and their actions. Though Ownby recognizes some monetary issues in a few of Welty's stories, he states that unlike Mississippi's other famed authors, such as Faulkner and Richard Wright, Welty "makes no ultimate judgement" on characters who interact with consumption (Ownby 145). However, when we examine the stories more closely, we can see that Welty crafts characters whose economic dreams decide their fates and fortunes, and these consequences are decidedly different among her male and female characters. Men, specifically salesmen who are couriers of consumerism, become disenchanted dreamers through their constant contact with this culture. However, women, though sometimes equally exposed, exploit enchanting elements of the consumer economy to fulfill their

own versions of the American Dream. Through the study of the accounts of Mississippians, both real and fictional, Welty's judgment on the Mississippi economy and its consumers can be understood.

To understand Welty's stories and her characters, one must understand the economic history of her state. Early in Mississippi history few towns offered economy variety. Residents frequented general stores found throughout the state to shop for their goods. Though the diversity of these stores was limited in the antebellum period, those found near rivers and Gulf ports allowed customers access to a variety of goods, some even offering foreign luxury goods from Europe and Eastern nations (Ownby 7). General store owners attempted to intrigue customers with rare and desirable goods, and "considered it their responsibility to bring comfort, choice, and contact with change to people in rural, isolated areas" (Ownby 8). These early spaces of economic activity demonstrate the earliest gender and racial relations of consumption. Only free people frequented the general stores, and men, the most likely figures to travel to town, were the dominant customers. In the early nineteenth century women infrequently left the farm to visit town, because of both limited access and the often wearisome distance rural residents had to travel. Even women who resided in town "avoided stores when the farming men took over" (Ownby 13).

For those few women who visited general stores, the items they purchased corresponded to their household duties. They purchased cloth and sewing materials with limited money because men controlled spending in this period. Women initially had limited involvement as consumers in the economy of Mississippi. Though general stores attempted to attract female customers with luxurious and fashionable goods, women did

not become frequenters of these spheres, which continued to be dominated largely by men. However, in the late 1800s, millinery shops which sold hats to women emerged throughout the state (Ownby 8). By 1883, Mississippi had eighty-seven millinery shops tailored specifically to the female consumer. More importantly, these shops were the only stores managed by women (Ownby 8). Though their participation was delayed, women soon became active merchants and shoppers in the economy. This change would eventually shift the social and household relations between the sexes.

Before this change occurred, Mississippi's population experienced an important shift. According to the Mississippi State Planning Commission, in the early 1900s, the white tenant population more than doubled, constituting 27.8 percent of the state's white population by 1930 (Ownby 83). Therefore, more whites were becoming dependent on less-profitable tenant farming for income. The percentage of the Mississippi population defined by the U.S. Census as rural also decreased from 97 in 1880 to 86.6 in 1920 and 83.1 in 1930 (Ownby 83). The rural population was decreasing, but the number of poor tenant farmers within this population was increasing due to limited occupational opportunities within the state. Thus, the remaining rural population was becoming poorer as an increasingly large disconnect between rural life and modern urban living emerged. These poor whites, as well as African Americans tenant farmers, faced large obstacles to spending. Though these classes faced impediments to achieving economic independence and participation, these impediments differed. For African Americans, segregation laws prevented entrance into certain stores when prejudice barred blacks as consumers (Ownby 5). As an entire class, African Americans also experienced more widespread poverty than the white farming class. These rural whites were also distinct from modern

consumers. Even as white farm owners started to buy more consumer products, white tenants kept the interiors of their homes sparsely decorated. Even those who abandoned rural living to migrate to urban areas were not immediately affected by the market opportunities in town, because “moving away from the farm did not necessarily turn farm people into active consumers” (Ownby 83). The adjustment from living off self-produced goods to the easily attainable mass-produced goods and specialty markets was not easy for the rural population. Southern farmers carried a certain pride in personal production and sustainability, claiming “that their ability to make some of their own goods was part of what defined them as southerners and free people” (Ownby 85). If the independence of white farmers persisted, so would the strict social and racial order that had existed in the state. However, modern consumer convenience soon interested rural whites. According to the *R.G. Dun Company Mercantile Agency Reference Book*, when poor Mississippians had the ability to spend, sharecroppers paid cash for “the great majority of purchases for basic goods--sausage, coffee, eggs, tobacco, and dry goods like shoes, boots and gloves (Ownby 85). These items were only affordable when men had acquired extra cash from the growing season. Though cash provided farmers more opportunity for spending and limited their dependency on the credit system, these white males were not eager to indulge in the luxuries provided by specialty stores. They chose to use their limited resources to provide their families with necessities as consumption of modern goods remained an unfamiliar practice.

Although rural residents were not immediate participants in the consumer economy, urban residents welcomed the convenience and opportunities afforded by modern developments. Far from the earlier general stores which were found through the

state, by the 1920s, more markets creating greater selection and availability of goods were available to Mississippians. By 1929 there were 126 variety stores, five and ten stores, and to-a-dollar stores, where items did not exceed the price of a dollar, within the state (Ownby 86). As the modern consumer market entered Mississippi, residents were not immune to the allure of the automobile. According to Ownby, in 1910, forty-three businesses sold automobiles in Mississippi; by 1929, cars and trucks were sold at 455 stores in over a hundred Mississippi towns and cities, including two towns of less than 100 people. Many of the new car dealers were younger men who came from Michigan to Mississippi. Automobiles were “the central objects in the emergence of consumer culture” (Ownby 14). They were visible in a way unlike any other previous consumer item. They lined the streets of town squares, and not only made trips to town easier, but they allowed people to travel beyond their cities and states. The automobile “brought a tremendous change to the pattern of North American tourism, giving people the ability to explore areas never before accessible on foot or by wagon in a convenient amount of time” (Dubinsky 127). Welty experienced the convenience of traveling by car in the early twentieth century. As early as 1917, her family “set out in [their] five-passenger Oakland touring car on our summer trip to Ohio and West Virginia” (OWB 43). Welty recalls her experiences in the automobile, with limited space for legs or luggage. Through her experiences with this new consumer phenomenon, she was able to see more than the common person of the time, observing the countryside of new states while her mother insisted to her father, “I could’ve told you a road that looked like that had little intention of going anywhere” (OWB 43). The characters in her stories encounter similar roads. For rural characters such as Phoenix Jackson in “A Worn Path,” a similar unpaved road is her

path home after one of her rare and tiring trips to town. For the salesman R.J. Bowman, however, side dirt roads such as this lead to his demise. Yet for Welty's family and other consumers at the time, automobiles provided "privacy, speed, excitement, and frequent changes of style" (Ownby 85).

Not only were automobiles an extension of the consumer culture, but they allowed for its expansion by encouraging tourism and allowing more access to commercial centers, which were emerging throughout the state. Modern consumer culture encroached on the quiet town roads once lined with only sparsely-stocked general stores. Urban residents reveled in their new access to luxury items which afforded them the same opportunities as residents of other economic centers. Although the market was expanding, "vital features of Mississippi tradition remained clear in the 1920s and 1930s," because these modern conveniences did not reach the rural residents who remained isolated from the world's technological advances. In these decades, Mississippi still ranked last among states for the percentage of its people with radios and telephones in their homes, last in the proportion of people with motor vehicle registrations, and last in the number of homes wired for electricity. In 1937, less than one percent of the farms in the state had electricity. Moreover, Mississippi was last in the country in per capita retail sales, with a figure 34 percent of the national average (Ownby 95). The divide between urban and rural life in Mississippi continued to expand, and would do so throughout the Great Depression when the rural poor, both white and black, would experience the most detrimental ramifications of the nation's greatest economic disaster.

Mississippi's economy had yet to secure sustainability when the stock market collapsed in 1929, sending ripples of financial ruin from Wall Street to the South.

Historian Connie Lester observes of the state's unfortunate financial condition that, "by any measure, Mississippi entered the Great Depression far behind the rest of the nation" (Lester). The financial destitution created by the Depression affected Mississippi exceptionally severely. Mississippians held 52,000 industrial jobs in 1929, but this number shrank to 28,000 by 1933 while bank deposits decreased from \$101 million to \$49 million over the same three-year period (SRC 8). Additionally, 1,800 retail stores closed as sales shrank from \$413 million to \$140 million. Farm income was reduced by 64 percent and on a single day in 1932, one-fourth of the state's farmland was sold for taxes (Lester). The average annual income, already the worst in the nation at \$287, fell to a devastating \$117 in the same year (SRC 7). The already struggling poor were deserted by a state that had no social agencies to distribute aid nor additional sources for aid. The historically independent state which consistently objected to federal intervention, especially over racial issues, now sought assistance from the federal government to aid their crippling economy. New Deal programs from President Roosevelt's administration were widely welcomed by the desperate residents, who needed immediate economic assistance. Yet even throughout Mississippi's early economic stagnation and decline, the dreams of Mississippians continued to emerge.

Though the economy was suffering, citizens sought to escape these harsh realities through idealizations of entertainment, fashion, cuisine, and sustainability. In his book, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture*, Ted Ownby describes such idealizations as the dreams Americans pursue when they engage in modern consumerism. This exists because, "questions of goods and spending money ultimately concern the American Dream," and each consumer hopes to achieve some

realization of this dream in their different interactions in the economy (Ownby 1). Ownby identifies four dreams in his book, and each serves to better suggest the opportunities people seek as consumers. Though these dreams are not the basis of my analysis, the classification is helpful to interpret how different characters are impacted by different dreams in Welty's stories. Ownby's description of dreams provides a characterization of consumers who use opportunities offered by consumption to achieve different identities. These goods allow characters to assume new roles by achieving equality in social settings, as well as in marriage and the economy. They also use these dreams to achieve independence and personal fulfillment, or perhaps to simply satisfy their desires as an enthusiastic consumer. The first dream is *The Dream of Abundance*, which is the dream "that America can be a place without poverty and hunger" (Ownby 1). Though this dream is the least indulgent, it represents the most basic want for sustainability, and is thus the most common dream unknowingly held by all consumers who have or have not yet achieved this fulfillment. The next dream is *The Dream of Democracy of Goods*, which emerged in the nineteenth century and "could allow people to cut across traditional lines of status by allowing everyone who could afford it to have similar goods, or at least to share the experience of shopping" (Ownby 1). This dream was not yet realized by the working class in Mississippi, who had limited access to cash and thus few opportunities for consumption. The access to this dream was limited for Mississippians in the early twentieth century, but the idea pervaded the minds of urban and farm workers, especially women, who hoped to achieve a social equality through the availability and opportunity to interact with goods. For those who had the opportunity to purchase goods, consumption offered a new experience previously unknown. As the economy grew,

popular stores such as barbershops and beauty parlors served as social centers that provided a sense of community as well as the ability to share in the experience of styled appearance through haircuts and other beauty practices. Traveling entertainment in the form of music and circuses also allowed Mississippians to further pursue this dream as large audiences from different social classes gathered to experience the same shows. This pursuit continues today in a wider and varied form, but the dream of democracy in the early 20th century was extremely localized and central to the simple experiences offered at the period.

The third dream Ownby describes is *The Dream of Freedom of Choice*, which allowed consumers to “take pleasure in the process of selecting goods as part of the meaning of freedom” (Ownby 2). As the selection of goods expanded and products advanced, customers were able to gain an independence previously hindered by poverty, gender, and race. As is the case for many of Welty’s characters, this dream allows consumers to make choices previously unavailable to them, increasing their opportunity and also their feelings of personal satisfaction or professional fulfillment. This choice is then associated with the last dream Ownby describes, *The Dream of Novelty*. This dream, which is “a romantic, necessarily unquenchable thirst for the new experiences promised by consumer goods and the novelty of progressing from one product to the next,” is the most dangerous dream of those sought by consumers (Ownby 2). This dream could create an incessant want to spend for sensation. As products progressed, so did consumers who were willing to sacrifice cost for a fleeting feeling of satisfaction. Ownby cites a term created by Martha Wolfenstein, “fun morality,” which “turns the child’s fascination with new experiences into a social ideal for all ages” (as cited in Ownby 4). Though industries

that produced innovative goods quickly were likely to attract these types of dreamers, consumers could interact with the economy in other ways. Adults were eager to attend musical performances and visit traveling shows that featured “freaks” and fortune tellers. The mobility of these entertainers allowed towns to experience a changing variety of amusements, and thus a consistent opportunity to achieve satisfaction from product novelty. These consumers were intrigued by the new opportunities to engage with products, creating a sense of “pleasure” that would re-occur each time they participated. However, within Mississippi, the existence of widespread poverty, especially throughout the Depression, continued to hinder the achievement of these dreams. Additionally, the small middle class had limited economic access, whereas the lower class had almost none. In a slowly growing economy still largely supported by farm production, difficulties emerged for those wishing to achieve the dreams of consumption.

Welty, who lived through the Great Depression, explores these circumstances and impediments in her short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*. The characters in these stories are restricted by poverty, location, and undesirable circumstances. Most importantly, women, who are the predominant consumers who interact in the economy, manifest their own varying ideas of dreams. Several elements affect female characters’ ability to address consumption and their pursuit of these different dreams within consumer culture. Circumstances such as intelligence, mental stability, personality, gender, and poverty influence women as consumers in her stories. Welty illustrates what goods meant to different individuals in different social and economic circumstances, and the new identities women pursued as consumers. In the short story collection Welty introduces many female characters as housewives participating in the economy from a

consumer perspective and as producers in the economy. In Welty's stories, rural women are often unfamiliar with lifestyles characterized by elements of modernity and early consumerism. They are timid and impoverished, but they still dream. Goods allow women to transcend social limitations, including class, racial, and gendered social orders. Through the four dreams previously described, as well as their want to participate in the transforming society, some of Welty's characters are able to gain in equality. In Welty's stories, this means equality in social opportunity, as well as the ability for women to gain independence from households where men either dominate or don't work, as in "The Petrified Man." Welty also provides perspectives on African Americans' limited, but unique role in the economy as the poorest and most disadvantaged consumers. While wealthier whites had the ability to become both sellers and buyers of commodities, the rural residents, both black and white, remained on the outskirts of economic opportunity. As a child, Eudora Welty belonged to the former group, and was thus afforded such opportunity.

In 1975 Eudora Welty penned an essay entitled *The Little Store*, in which she describes early childhood memories of visiting a general store near her home in downtown Jackson. Welty, born in 1909, provides a personal perspective on consumer society before the 1920s which demonstrates her fascination with consumerism as a child. Welty first describes the contrasting spaces found in the city in the early twentieth century. Though her home was located just blocks from the State Capitol building, her home had a small pasture where they were able to keep a "Jersey cow" from which her mother collected milk. Like other women, both rural and urban, Welty's mother was a homemaker who performed household and farm-related chores, as well as all the cooking

and cleaning in her home. Similarly to other women, especially rural, Welty's mother "never set foot inside a grocery store" as Welty remembers (Eye 326). Welty's own account demonstrates women's early unfamiliarity with active economic participation. Ownby observes that "her mother resembled rural farm women who did not see shopping as a significant responsibility or joy" (Ownby 145). Welty demonstrates this belief in her stories, but though farm women rely largely on their own homemaking and farming skills to provide for their family, for some the opportunity to shop creates a pleasant illusion through which the rural women can escape from their undesirable domestic situations. This desire exists for Welty also; she writes about the Little Store as a place where she is "welcomed into this space and initiated into the land" of opportunity and wonder (Claxton 99). Though the store exists just a short distance from her home, she characterizes her house and the role her mother performs as a rural setting. At this time, Jackson is "still within very near reach of the open country" (Claxton 126). Thus, Welty's family welcomes visits from the blackberry lady, the watermelon man, and farmers calling into town with their harvested produce. Welty's family, like many others, had the opportunity for sustainability without visiting a store. Therefore, Welty's "short trip away from her home allowed new freedoms and took on the air of a pilgrimage to a special site" (Claxton 146). The sphere of shopping and the opportunity outside of the traditional means of self-production became a consumer compulsion for Welty, who would visit the store when something unattainable by traditional needs became a necessity in the household. Welty's mother would send her down to the Little Store with change in her hand to visit the Little Store, which was "standing in a street of family houses" (Eye 329). Though the store was modest in appearance and postured plainly on the street, Welty

describes the euphoric smells which drifted through the store door. Among “ammonia-loaded ice,” there are scents of “licorice recently sucked in a child’s cheek” and “dill-pickle brine” (Eye 329). Welty’s absorbing description of the store’s aromas demonstrates the intrigue and novelty of the smells.

Throughout the essay, Welty describes the dream of novelty which her characters experience as they interact with new consumer elements. In the store, the variety of goods grows as shelves are “set out with not too much of any one thing but a lot of things” (Eye 330). This small store allows the opportunity to indulge in a diversity of goods. As a child, Welty describes the overload of the options. While observing everything from “lard, molasses, and ice cream salt to harmonics to fly-paper...it was up to you to remember what you came for” (Eye 330). The enchantment of the store and its goods because Welty’s memory, making her mission difficult to complete. Her description allows insight into early interactions with a consumer setting. One can imagine the wonder shoppers felt at witnessing the assortment of goods easily obtainable with just an exchange of money and no individual endeavor. Welty summarizes this amazement, writing, “Enchantment is cast upon you by all the things you weren’t supposed to have need for” (Eye 330). She introduces the small toys which captivated her attention, the candy varieties which enticed at eye-level, and the snacks and sodas scattered around the store floor. Ownby observes the significance of Welty’s statement, commenting that it is “almost a maxim of consumer culture” (Ownby 146). Welty demonstrates the excitement aroused by the opportunity to observe such a variety of goods.

Welty endows her characters with similar enchantment, and thus the women in her stories dream of towns where such opportunities exist. Ownby argues that Welty

“respected shopping for the independence inherent in the ability to make choices” because for him Welty’s essay also illustrates her own conception of *The Dream of Freedom of Choice* (Ownby 146). With the change after making a purchase for her mother, she had the opportunity to choose how she would spend her nickel. Welty’s early understanding of this rare and revered opportunity is pertinent to the portrayal of her characters. Welty sympathizes with those who felt similar wonderment at the stock of specialized goods. Welty describes her choices as “murky shapes that would come up as Coca-Colas, Orange Crushes, and various flavors of pop... all swimming around together” (Eye 331). Her perception of the products is a whirlwind of bright advertisements encouraging her to taste. She also notes the goods local to Mississippi: “I favored a locally bottled concoction called Lake’s Celery. It was a popular drink here for years but was not known universally, as I found out when I arrived in New York and ordered one in the Astor bar” (Eye 331).

Welty’s own perception of goods, their existence, and notoriety in different societies is pertinent to her own characters’ depictions and understanding of consumer culture. In “The Petrified Man” consumer elements such as Jax beer, bottled in New Orleans, appear as intriguing imported commodities to characters in Jackson, Mississippi. Welty’s description of her own interactions with consumer culture strengthen the historical significance of her stories and aid the understanding of her characters’ interactions within the economy. Welty’s account inside the store reveals the ease with which one is captivated by the choice and opportunity consumerism allows. For Welty, to enter the Little Store as a child was to enter into a separate sphere, away from her somewhat pastoral home, into a majestic market that offered her the freedom to observe

and spend as an individual. Welty's characters emulate similar fascination with the products and services they are able to access. Yet even for Welty, the opportunity does not end when she exits the Little Store, for just around the corner one day she discovers the "Monkey Man" sitting with his organ and animal friend outside the store (Eye 332). Through Welty's description of earlier traveling culture, she reveals the rarity and anticipation of the spectacle which accompanied entertainment like circuses and freak shows. Though Welty had only witnessed the Monkey Man "five or six times," the Gypsies were "punctual" and arrived in Jackson during the fall (Eye 333). On this particular day, the Monkey Man is not entertaining, but resting on the stoop of the store, and though Welty is transfixed by their now normal appearance as "just...an old man and an old friend" she cannot help her infatuation (Eye 333). Even in this seemingly dull appearance, "their romance for me didn't have it in its power to waver. I simply didn't know how to step around them" (Eye 333). Welty's engrossment with the novel and glamorous does not cease with the store, for it continues as she travels the short walk home, intercepting elements of consumer culture and entertainment along the way. Welty endows her characters with a similar fascination, even as adults, because the charm she experienced as a child is memory too unadulterated and intrinsic to be absent in her writing. In the segregated South, *The Little Store* demonstrates Welty's own amazement entering the consumer world just blocks from her home, emphasizing further the contrasting spaces of the new consumer market from Mississippians, both urban and rural, who have more infrequent interactions than Welty experienced in the Jackson Capitol. Even as a child, Welty experiences the "enchantment" of shopping and the intrigue of the pursuit because, "the Little Store exemplifies consumer culture as part of

the American dream” (Claxton 100). Welty demonstrates the ability for fascination with the simplest products, like lard and soda, and further demonstrates the abilities of dreams surrounding consumption to become an inherent element in one’s life.

In the following stories, Welty characterizes women as similar dreamers in consumer society; they transcend and subvert the confines of society and their homes to seek an often complicated independence. As these stories illustrate, Welty’s descriptions of gender participation in the economy take divergent routes for men and women. In the next chapter, I categorize the salesmen in the short story collection to show a similarity between their disheartening fates. These salesmen who are the couriers of consumption throughout Mississippi have become disenchanted by their existence. These men fail to conquer the prevalent commercialization which is omnipresent in their lives. By contrast, women use consumerism to elevate themselves socially or achieve feelings of personal fulfillment. As we will see, Welty’s male characters often become victims of the economy’s overarching reach, whereas women attempt to best benefit from it. The following chapters will demonstrate the contrast between these gendered dreamers.

Chapter 2

In the short-story collection *A Curtain of Green*, Welty portrays salesmen as characters who have the unique ability to travel speedily to towns and remote locations throughout Mississippi to market their products. Furthermore, they import the *American Dream* and all of its manifestations to these locations. Their professions provide them the fiscal freedom to dine on the road while resting in modern hotels to easily and efficiently distribute their supplies to consumers. According to cultural historian Timothy Spears, the traveling salesman was “a middleman in the commercial landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the key link between traditional folk figures, like the peddler, and twentieth-century advertisers” (Spears xiv). The traveling salesman was also known by occupation as a commercial traveler, and in 1870 the United States Census cited 7,262 commercial travelers working in the U.S. By the beginning of the 20th century, the number of commercial travelers had increased to 90,000 (Spears 10). Citizens of all landscapes and social classes had come into contact with the modern-day salesman. Welty wrote about the unique interactions between these travelers and the Mississippians in her short stories. Anne Masserand writes, “for whether in cars or in boats, on horseback or simply on foot, travelers abound in Miss Welty’s country: temporary or permanent travelers, travelers by choice or by necessity, travelling salesman or musicians on a tour, itinerant preachers or just tramps” (Masserand 39). We will

encounter all of these travelers in the following stories, and each possesses a unique relation to the commercial culture in which they exist. For the salesmen this relationship is complicated. Though they are the most modern consumers and still have the ability to participate in the dreams of consumption, their lives are completely characterized by the commercialization of their occupation. Thus, the salesmen of her stories “Death of a Traveling Salesman” and “Hitchhikers” are fatigued and have become disenchanting dreamers.

“Death of a Traveling Salesman,” published in 1936, was Eudora Welty’s first published story. In this short story R.J. Bowman is introduced as a company shoe salesman who has traveled for fourteen years throughout Mississippi. He is a modern man travelling through an unknown area and is uninterested in the rural landscape’s limited opportunities. On this day, he is traveling through the countryside, incongruous in his surroundings as he rides along the farms of the countryside in his Ford automobile, attempting to reach the town of Beulah before nightfall. Bowman, ill and recovering from a case of influenza, is unfamiliar with his route to his destination. Frustrated, he thinks exasperated, “this desolate hill country!” (Curtain 232). Welty portrays Bowman as a character unfamiliar with her native Mississippi. He travels “as if he were going back, far back” through the rural countryside, and perhaps through time, because as he drives less of the landscape resembles the modern world of hotels and middle class consumers he typically encounters (Curtain 232). Bowman is entering an area defined by sparsely scattered homes, untouched by commercialism or perhaps unacquainted with people of his profession. He is entering the unmarked backwoods of Mississippi, the very areas Welty explored during her work with the WPA. Welty’s description of Bowman’s

unfamiliarity with the Mississippi countryside creates an increasingly evident contrast between the rural lives of many of Mississippi's inhabitants and the modern salesman attempting to reach a new town for his product pitch. He is lost and quizzical of his belonging here. Welty continually crafts the conflicting spaces of poor, rural Mississippi towns and their inhabitants with modern elements of commercialization and consumerism. "Death of a Traveling Salesman" illuminates a contrast between the salesman traveling in an automobile and the equipment-owning farmers of rural Mississippi.

Bowman represents all that the rural residents, including the couple he is soon to meet, are not. Bowman enjoys the luxuries of better hotels in large towns and the on-call doctors available to guests. He even affords an "expensive" bracelet for the attractive nurse who treated his ailment, "just because she was packing up her bag and leaving" (Curtain 232). As he rides down this remote road, he wonders how he strayed from his usual route to Beulah. His unfamiliarity with the road is portrayed as a pretentiousness towards the surrounding land and the people who inhabit it. Bowman does not ask directions, and moreover he believes "these people never knew where the very roads they lived on went anyway" (Curtain 233). Surely Welty encountered such limited knowledge during her journeys throughout Mississippi's backroads: the farmer who had never traveled further than the nearest town for supplies, or the generations of families who settled on lots just adjacent to their kin, never discovering what lay just beyond the furthest plot, or wanting to. Bowman's prejudices hold some truth, but through the visitor's continual critiques, Welty illustrates the differences between the countryside inhabitants and the traveling salesman, creating an insider vs. outsider dynamic. Welty

critiques Bowman's voluntary isolation from the people and landscape around him. The physical distance between these people and Bowman is described as he observes them distantly in their fields. These spatial differences emphasize the differences in lifestyle, class, and familiarization with commercialized elements. As Bowman rides down the dirt path, the sound of his truck is the only noise. By observing the unworn path, Bowman realizes no car had traveled this road ahead of him.

Bowman's many years on the road have caused him to forget the often impoverished realities faced by society's most marginalized characters. He believes, however ignorantly, that consumption is a necessity for all characters. When Bowman's car reached the road's end, he escapes with his sample bags in hand before the Ford gently rolls over the edge and becomes entangled in brush. He walks towards the nearest home, where a woman stands on her porch in shoe-like bundles to brave the winter cold. The narrator comments on her fashion, "If it were summer she would be barefoot" (Curtain 235). Bowman notes that this woman is an unlikely customer from her appearance, or perhaps from his own experience. Throughout the 1930s, Dorothy Dickins studied the incomes and expenditures of Mississippi's textile and garment workers, almost all of whom were female, and compared them to the expenditures of women within farm households. "In 1941, 68 percent of the garment working women had bought at least three pairs of shoes, but only 8 percent of the farming women had done so" (Ownby 85).

Though Welty's observation predated this statistic, we can only assume a more prominent gap in spending existed between industrial and rural women before "Death of a Traveling Salesman" was published during the Depression. Rural women did not have

the same opportunity nor the income to participate in the economy at the same rate as female industry workers. Furthermore, they often did not have the need to purchase these amenities, because “shoes are for people who plan to go somewhere, and Bowman is spending his life, in a sense, selling them to people who show little inclination to move, as with Sonny and his wife, and the other people along these roads” (Mortimer 63). Yet as Bowman approaches the woman, he instinctively greets her with his rehearsed pitch line, “I wonder if you would be interested--“(Curtain 36). Bowman’s ironic error in immediately offering shoes for sale to the farm woman further demonstrates his disconnect from the very customer he is attempting to sell to. It is evident from Welty’s description that Bowman is unfamiliar with the territory he has entered. Although the rural inhabitants may not have been his most frequently visited consumers, this observation illuminates the futility, and thus disconnect between Bowman and his consumers. His modern occupation has no importance in the lives of those who spend their excess on necessities.

Bowman’s life, which has been characterized by his occupation alone for the last fourteen years, is now programmed by his attempts to secure a sale. He has become an automaton who has lost the ability to perform true human interaction. Bowman is a programmed salesman of American consumer culture. His name, R.J. Bowman, is both generic and dehumanizing. With this anonymity of person, Welty further characterizes the salesman as a character detached from those to whom he wishes to make sales. Gail Mortimer observes, “As his name suggests, Bowman has a clear sense of his own trajectory: the selling of shoes and his timely arrival at the next town on his sales agenda” (Mortimer 62). Bowman’s objective is to make a pitch and then a profit. His interactions

with others are otherwise limited and tenacious towards his sales demeanor. Welty's attitude towards the salesman portrays Bowman as a lonely figure, traveling the road and only having interactions with modern hotels, restaurants, and the people he hopes to sell shoes to. His interactions are superficial and rehearsed. Bowman's misspoken greeting to the woman is a significant indication of his limited communications beyond selling items.

Bowman's consumption-characterized life has created a limited ability to interact personally and act empathetically. He acts timidly towards the woman but is also assuming towards her age and intelligence. His superficial judgment of the woman's age and intelligence based on her appearance is a characteristic of his superficial lifestyle as a salesman searching for profit. Bowman wonders why the house is cold and questions the absence of a fire, failing to realize the inability of the woman to keep a fire due to scarce resources. Not even her small lamp is lit. He is insensitive to the basic struggles these rural farmers face. They are not accustomed to the luxury of warm hotel rooms, just a sparse living area heated by fire and lit by lamp light. The stillness of the house and the stir of the wind cause Bowman an uneasiness that startles him to speak. His speech is necessary to disrupt the silence, not a common social cue. He struggles to begin as his programmed brain once again proposes, "I have a nice line of women's low-price shoes" (Curtain 238). Though his pitch is unanswered, by either a refusal or interest, he continues, surprised by his "old voice, chatty, confidential, inflected for selling shoes," which is attempting to ask personal questions (Curtain 238). Bowman's inability to foster casual human communication and his anxiety about engaging in personal questions emphasizes further his artificial existence. His existence is characterized by the mass-produced products of shoes which Bowman proposes to the women he meets traveling.

This personal interaction with the woman provokes Bowman's epiphany about his own solitary life. His recent illness caused him to realize the loneliness he felt. Even his sickness is an interruption of his routine as it has ruined his fourteen years of accident and illness-free work. He wishes to confess to the woman in hope of her offering condolence and companionship. However, he is prevented from offering such a personal admission instead. He dreams of the next day to relieve his anxieties. He will soon be traveling "on a good graveled road, driving his car past things that happened to people, quicker than their happening" (Curtain 242). Bowman wants to escape the strangeness of the interactions with the poor, rural woman that has brought him both the most unfamiliar and the most genuine realizations. The forgotten dirt road he traveled on to this home will soon be replaced by a road familiar to salesmen and other travelers. He wants to escape this place, untouched by the conveniences of modern life. Moreover, he wants to escape the stillness and simplicity of the countryside for more exciting life occurring elsewhere. There is a guilt Bowman discovers in the minimalist human interaction with the woman. He hopes for it to be erased by the bustle and amusement of the artificial world and commercial dialogue from which he has been absent because of his trip and accident. "Bowman's way of life gives him the illusion that he is alive and moving towards something" (Mortimer 63). This, as Welty's story shows, is an illusion, because Bowman has lost the ability to utilize commercialized society to his benefit, and instead befalls victim to its overreaching power. Bowman, in his attempts to perform his occupation successfully, has forgotten the personal interactions of the economy and consequently his humanity. He is not a dreamer, if he ever was, but instead has become a hopeless puppet who is suppressed by the very thing he hoped would bring him success.

Bowman's success has characterized his dehumanization as Bowman equates all personal interactions to monetary exchanges. When Sonny returns home to announce his successful retrieval of Bowman's car from the ditch, Bowman immediately responds, "Of course I'm going to pay you for everything" (Curtain 244). Bowman does not offer gratitude, but a transaction--payment for a service. His life is defined by the exchange of money for commodities and services. However, Sonny sees the task as an act of generosity, refusing to accept any payment, but Bowman insists. His interactions with people occur most often in the market, not as acts of typical human conversation and kindness. Bowman not only wants a monetary exchange, but then he proposes to stay the night. His fatigue and illness have created a longing for comfort, and his unfamiliarity with the region makes him unsure of his route. Bowman's weak uncertainty is contrasted with the pride and independence of Sonny. There is also a physical contrast between Bowman and Sonny. Although Bowman's age is not given, he has been on the road for fourteen years, and is presumably a male in his thirties. Though Sonny is in his early thirties, he has the mental and physical capability to retrieve Bowman's truck, because Bowman is currently suffering from poor health, he does not offer assistance. Bowman is quick to judge and distances himself from these people, but he offers no better solution to his own predicament. Welty personifies Bowman as arrogant and inept. He is a consistent contrast to the self-sustaining couple who lives a farming life, much different from Bowman's modern existence.

In order to comfort their guest, Sonny has to "borry some fire" (Curtain 245). Bowman, confused, offers matches to light the fire in the furnace, but the woman boasts, "We don't have no need for 'em. Sonny's goin' after his own fire" (Curtain 245). Sonny

proudly exits the home to get his own fire from his employer, Mr. Redmond, who resides down the road. Bowman's hosts may not own many things, but the few things they do have they possess with pride. Bowman is both unfamiliar and surprised by this behavior. Sonny even wears "a wide filthy black hat which seemed to insult Bowman's own" (Curtain 239). Welty's story illustrates the characters' differing value systems. Bowman values money, novelty, and the luxury of commodities. Sonny and his wife cherish love, durability, and pride for the few things they are able to own. Bowman, blinded by his confusion and uncertainty throughout the difficult evening, has failed to realize the true value the couple holds within their home. Not only is the couple proud to offer Bowman fire, but Sonny produces some homemade whisky. While his wife prepares dinner and coffee for Bowman and Sonny, Bowman is surprised to discover the woman's youthful age illuminated by the fire. Bowman realizes the value held within this home is not that of a pricey pair of shoes or bracelet, but the value of their marriage. As Masserand argues, at this moment "The house becomes a positive symbol, and may be the aim of a traveler's quest, a traveler who would have forgotten the value of home" (Masserand 47). Bowman, in his incessant travels, has forgotten the satisfaction and comfort of home. Instead his life is characterized by sleeping alone in modern hotels which hold no true value other than the objects inside. Bowman has discovered a comfort he had never longed for in this rural residence, but the value found here is both unfamiliar and overwhelming.

Bowman's epiphany is another indicator of his monotonous life and an impediment to his speech, "the memory of the woman's waiting silently by the cold hearth, of the man's stubborn journey a mile away to get fire, and how they finally

brought out their food and drink and filled the room proudly with all they had to show, was suddenly too clear and too enormous within him for response....” (Curtain 248). The value of the relatively cheap goods and the invaluable love that exist within this household is a revelation that both stuns and saddens Bowman when he thinks, “A marriage...that simple thing. Anyone could have had that,” but Bowman does not (Curtain 248). He has spent the past fourteen years traveling to create an artificial lifestyle characterized by sales, exchanges and interactions with commodities, and a solitary life traveling the roads of Mississippi. Bowman is left disillusioned. His illness and his insight into the simplicity and immeasurable worth of marriage and relationships has caused him both emotional and figurative pain, and commercialization cannot offer him comfort. He resolves to sleep beside the fire, where he automatically recites his sales delivery, “There will be special reduced prices on all footwear during the month of January” (Curtain 249). Bowman has become a sorry, pitied figure. His occupation has programmed him to act solely on his duty to promote and sell while his dreams are plagued by sales attempts. His worthless speech demonstrates his own failed attempt at the American Dream. He does not use consumption as an outlet of hope, and his earliest attempts at financial success through his occupation have resulted in a suffocating disillusionment which characterizes even his sleep. Even after his disheartening realization, his repeated pitch lines are his only solace. Bowman again cannot withstand the silence of the home and he chooses to escape, but not before he places all the money in his wallet underneath the still unlit lamp, “almost ostentatiously” (Curtain 249). Bowman escapes into the night cold, running towards his retrieved Ford. As he reaches his car, his heart aches, exploding. Bowman falls onto the road with pain, covering his

heart with his hand to shield its sound. Bowman's illness has culminated in a heart attack. He has died, though suddenly, with only his bags surrounding him. "That Bowman's life itself is just such a dead end, just such a moving about and changing of direction for apparently no reason, is implicit throughout the story" (Mortimer 64). Welty's attitude towards R.J. Bowman is somewhat empathetic; the fate she creates for Bowman requires him to be pitied. He has died alone in the cold, with no one to help or hear him. Welty has portrayed Bowman as a lonely man committed to his work at all moments.

Bowman represents the ability of consumer culture to enter the most rural and remote areas of society through the modern ability to travel by automobile. Bowman has the unhindered ability to distribute merchandise to even the poorest or uninterested customers. Sonny and his wife provide the perfect contrast between these two spheres. Even the simplest interactions such as communicating and sleeping are characterized by Bowman's consumer-driven lifestyle of travel and sales. Bowman's life is manufactured. "Bowman is, like other salesmen in the twentieth century literature, almost archetypal as a figure whose very sense of direction (reflected in the image implicit in his name, in the objectives of his job, and in the ways he spends his time) prevents his seeing, until far too late, that he has missed the whole point" (Mortimer 64). The sales culture he has committed his life to has stifled his ability to become an indulgent dreamer, as many of Welty's characters will become. Instead he is disillusioned by the repetitiveness of his lifestyle, and thus he only performs mechanical movements which pertain to his occupation. He has not obtained possessions with sustaining value such as relationships or love. Through he is physically ill throughout this story, his heartache is symbolic of his painfully mundane and valueless life. Furthermore, his heartache is symbolic of the dying

profession of sales during the Great Depression, or the inability to persuade consumers to spend beyond their need for basic necessities. Even in death, Bowman's bags containing his sales papers are the only thing surrounding him. *Death of a Traveling Salesman* is Welty's critique of the highly consumer-characterized life that Bowman lived and the inevitable insignificance of a life lived without love, appreciation, and simplicity.

Welty continues her critique of American salesmen and the consumer culture in a story she wrote and published three years later in which she introduces another traveling salesman, Tom Harris. Though Harris is not handed such a deciding fate as Bowman, his salesmen lifestyle have left him similarly disenchanted by the pervasive commercialization in his life and the false attention it earns him. In "The Hitchhikers," (1939), Harris is an office supplies salesman also traveling through Mississippi towns on business. Unlike R.J. Bowman, Harris indulges in occasional pleasures, including entertainment and parties, but like Bowman he symbolizes disenchantment and disconnect. In one day, Harris has traveled to four towns before evening. He hopes to reach Memphis soon because it serves as a "base" and Harris hopes "to do something that night" (119). Memphis serves as both a commercial center and a more likely source of entertainment for Harris. As Harris travels through the Delta, he spots two hitchhikers and stops to pick them up. Harris is more conversational with the common man than R.J. Bowman, and the interaction between Harris and the two men at first involves commentary on the radio and music. However, similar to Bowman's incapacity to overcome the habitues of his salesman persona, Harris speaks to the hitchhikers "almost formally," inquiring, "How do you do?" (120). Though Harris speaks formally, he does create friendly conversation. Harris offers the hitchhikers cigarettes, and although he is

unable to discard his professional demeanor, he is surprised when one man uses the word “rarely” to describe his smoking habits, and his cheek twitches in response (120). As they smoke, Harris realizes the other man, still silent at this point in the trip, is holding “his cigarette in front of him like a piece of money, between his thumb and forefinger” (120). Harris, like Bowman, relates many common gestures and ideas to the material world. Many elements of their lives are shaped by their occupations as salesmen. When Harris asks if they have food, their provisions contrast greatly to the indulgent food Harris can afford. While the hitchhikers eat dewberries and describe their attempts to catch a rabbit in the wild, Harris suggests eating hamburgers for dinner. When Harris, who sleeps in many city hotels due to his occupation, asks the hitchhikers if they are now looking for the next place to sleep, the one with the guitar remarks, “I bet you ain’t got no idea where all I’ve slept” (121). Harris can always afford a hotel to rest in, whereas the hitchhikers are limited to open, free spaces and exposed to cold because they lack the ability to participate in the convenience of modern luxuries. Perhaps then, they have witnessed a disillusioned character such as Harris before. Rather than become a puppet of the consumer culture which Harris tries to push upon the people who find him on their doorstep, the hitchhikers prefer to live a life free from the commercialized forces which oppress the salesmen.

Welty characterizes Tom Harris as a spender whose interactions once offered a distraction from his tedious lifestyle, but have now become mechanical. Harris sees lights from a little town shining at a twenty mile radius in the flat, Delta land, inquiring, “Is that Dulcie?” (121). His familiarity with the roads and cities is met with silence. When they arrive in town, Harris drives “out of the road under the sign in some automatic gesture of

evasion” (121). He pulls into the familiar juke joint and the waitress knows his order, a hamburger and a beer, three orders this time. A flirtatious waitress greets him. Harris has several female friends in the many towns he travels to. Women are entertainment for him, much like Bowman’s nurse. A man steps outside and calls from the joint, “come on in boys, we got girls” (122). Girls are an attraction to be advertised and Harris is consumer in this market. The waitress knows Harris is a spender, so she implores him to come back soon. Although he does not partake in the party inside the joint, he leaves his waitress a courtesy tip, which she gladly accepts. Harris prefers monetary exchange to personal interaction, just as Bowman leaves his nurse an expensive bracelet. Though each salesman uses consumer items, these goods are simply substitutions for emotional and meaningful interactions. Their constant interaction with consumer culture has disenchanted what little ability they have left to enjoy it. They have become men of limited interaction and substance who only know how to function in consumer spheres while using consumer elements to do so.

Harris is lonely and looks for opportunities to be entertained, though he fails to appreciate this entertainment for its authenticity. Throughout the trip, music serves as a medium about which the characters can make observation and create conversation. However, each character has his own interaction with music. As a song plays on the radio, one man remarks, “I `preciate them big `lectric gittars some have” (120). This man holds in his lap his own guitar, a bright yellow piece which attracted Harris’s attention as he drove down the road. The man with the guitar remarks, “Same songs ever’where” (122). This hints at the conformism that exists in commercial culture. Even the hitchhiker, the figure most likely to be unfamiliar with the radio’s variety of music,

recognizes the duplication of elements in the commercial industry, even in the artistic industry of music. He continues, "Come down from the hills.... We has us owls for chickens and fox for yard dogs but we sung true" (122). He begins with a qualifier, he knows being raised as a farming boy may be unfamiliar to Harris or criticized, but he believes his songs are more authentic than all on the radio. As they sit at the juke joint, the men listen to the nickelodeon playing from within as the blue, red, and green colors shine through the window. Harris is also extremely intrigued by the yellow guitar the hitchhikers holds, thinking as he drives, "I'll hear him play his guitar yet" (122). This moment provides a brief insight into Harris's desire as a dreamer. Though he once may have possessed fascination in, his interest has been stifled by his career.

Welty makes another comparison between the mannerisms of Harris and Bowman and their relation to the capitalist world. Both of the salesmen's habits are characterized gestures related to consumer culture. Harris's listening "had got to be a pattern in his days and nights, it was almost automatic, like the way his hand went to his pocket for money" (122). Harris's hand reaches to his pocket to tip women, pay for hotels, and feed himself with fast, convenient food. Just as Bowman reaches automatically to his pocket to pay Sonny for retrieving his car, Harris's tips are a substitute for the more genial and common gesture of "thank you." Bowman cannot leave Sonny's home without leaving all his cash by the fire, and although Harris generously carries the hitchhikers and pays for their meals, he expected to hear the yellow guitar in exchange. The activities of Bowman and Harris are characterized by the interchanges and deals of the consumer world. Furthermore, Harris sees an opportunity to market the man's skills when he suggests the man should stop along the road and play his guitar for money. The man replies, "This

box? Just play it for myself” (123). Harris discovers opportunities for money-making where others see pleasure without monetary profit. He continues to implore the man to think about his opportunity, “You wouldn’t stop and play somewhere like this? For them to dance? When you know all the songs?” (123). The man laughs in response. These men are committed to the tramp lifestyle, and his partner wants to move on quickly. There is no time to stop and entertain. Harris believes that playing music would be an easy and profitable job, but the hitchhiker is not interested. Similarly, Sonny refused Bowman’s offer of matches, resolving to get his “own” fire. The hitchhiker refuses to depend on others’ interest in his entertainment. Both are independent and uninterested in the conveniences a modern economy can provide them with. Harris and Bowman are contemporary men, observing life as a series of exchanges and commercial opportunity. Harris and Bowman believe this modernity allows them understanding over the seemingly less educated and accomplished. When the man with the guitar asks Harris to drive back to the joint to return a bottle, Harris resolutely says, “Too late” and thinks “I was about to take directions from him” (124). Similar to Bowman’s assumption that Sonny’s wife is old and underestimating the value within their home, Harris feels a superiority over the hitchhikers, refusing to take instruction from them. He scoffs at his almost submissiveness. The modern consumer world has created an arrogance among these salesmen. They fear loneliness but wield power with their marketing skills and wealth.

Tom Harris’s next interaction demonstrates both the fascination and novelty of his occupation to other characters. As he arrives at the Dulcie Hotel on the Dulcie square, Mr. Gene, the hotel proprietor, remarks “If he ain’t back...been about a month to the day-

-I was just remarking” (124). Tom Harris is a type of celebrity in this small town. He is a traveling man who graces Mr. Gene and Dulcie occasionally throughout the year on his various sales trips. He is a memorable figure because he is a modern man. He drives a blue car, he lives from hotel to hotel, and unlike other hotel guests, who were otherwise travelers on the railroad, he returns more frequently than most to the same hotels. Even Mr. Gene’s old dog is familiar with Mr. Harris, when the proprietor calls, “Come here, Mike, it’s just old Harris passin’ through” (125). There is an attraction to his lifestyle that illuminates a monotony. Harris is passing through again, just like he will the next month. Though he sees new towns, meets new proprietors, and stays in different hotels, his lifestyle inhibits him from forming interpersonal interactions and meaningful occurrences. Just as Bowman’s realization of a meaningful life comes too late just before his lonely death, Harris possesses an aura of loneliness on the road. Even his interaction with the dog is hesitant and limited.

A tragedy revealing the demoralization of consumers soon takes place: the silent man has hit the guitarist on the head, leaving him severely injured and bleeding in Harris’s car. Harris’s local celebrity status sends him into the center of crime. A young boy runs into the hotel, and the excitement of the violence escapes him, “I knew that was your car, Mr. Harris...everybody’s out there. I said, ‘That’s Mr. Tom Harris’s car, look at the out-of-town license and look at all the stuff he all time carries around with him, all bloody’” (125). Tom Harris’s car is a well-known automobile that the town boys admire. He also notices the out-of-town license plate as a unique and interesting aspect of Harris’s lifestyle. Even the supplies Harris carries with him are noted, perhaps oddly. Harris is viewed as an “other,” a well-known yet mysterious figure with the capability to

travel and use his vehicle as his instrument to do so. As an onlooker is describing the crime, she says: “And so dumb--right where the movie was letting out” (126). Why would the hitchhiker know that patterns of cinema showings? Though the attempted murder occurring at any time would be a catastrophe, the onlookers’ disconnect between the lifestyle of the hitchhikers and their own is notable. The different levels of modern consumer culture that each class of citizens participates in creates a social landscape with notable gaps in consumer knowledge and participation. Harris and his car are a spectacle for the townsfolk, while the townsfolk are aloof to the hitchhikers’ desolate condition of surviving on wild berries.

Amid the chaos, two concerns of the characters further communicate the detachment of the consumers from reality. While the hitchhikers are central subjects in the murder scene, Harris cannot help but create concern for himself. He repeatedly shouts, “Who’s got my car keys!” (126). As the fascinated children gather in excitement, one inquires as to who will get the yellow guitar if the man is dead. Consumption and fascination with the luxuries of automobiles and instruments impedes the characters’ abilities to understand the gravity and gruesomeness of the situation. Their obsession with objects overshadows their concern for the attempted murder that has taken place in front of them. Although Harris soon aids the hitchhiker and helps him reach the hospital, the insensitive antics continue. As Harris washes away the blood and changes in the Dulcie Hotel, the proprietor comments that the Christmas tie Harris was wearing is ruined from the blood. Though Harris’s thoughts drift often to the hitchhiker in critical condition, those around him are interested in the superficial concerns and troubling excitement of the assault. When the phone rings, the proprietor assumes someone is

calling for Harris, commenting, "See, everybody knows you're here" (127). Harris's local celebrity status has amplified as people learn of his association in the crime. The characters now revere Harris for his modern lifestyle as well as his exciting involvement in the crime. Even before his newfound fame, Harris was treated as salesman royalty. The proprietor offers Harris a brown package of Memphis whiskey that the hotel's help had been sent for, though the proprietor refuses it himself. The proprietor offers his condolences, "I'm real sorry they did it in your car if they were goin' to do it" (128). Again, Harris and his car are the center of concern. The citizens prize Harris's car because it a unique item, rarely seen unless Tom Harris has come to town for the night, but Harris cherishes the car because his occupation has catapulted him into the consumer world characterized by an affinity for a luxurious lifestyle, a lifestyle he has now been consumed by himself.

Even in Harris's attempted human interactions, he cannot escape the salesman lifestyle that has become synonymous with his name. Later in the evening, Tom phones one of his many girlfriends for some entertainment for the evening. His celebrity status grows among the crowd at a local party. His friend Ruth exclaims, "Tom Harris! Sent by Heaven!" (128). Harris brings an element of excitement and novelty to the town and all those he encounters. Other party attendees insist on speaking to Harris via telephone. He waits patiently to hear the greetings before he starts towards the party. Harris, in his role as the salesman, is a spectacle. Even those who have not met him are interested in the mystery-like narrative of the man who travels from town to town throughout the state in his automobile. They are infatuated with his lifestyle and adventure, but he will not give them the satisfaction of his full persona. He walks over to the party "so as not to use his

car” and during this walk almost forgets his destination (129). He finds precisely his true moment of exaltation and happiness when going on foot to the party, alone in the deserted streets, in a town so similar to other towns that it has lost all individual character. It is not a home he wishes to find, but a “base” (Masserand 46). In his disillusionment, Harris is willing to accept hotel rooms as a substitution for a real home. Consumption has suffocated and hardened him until, finally free from his automobile, he discovers a freedom in his lonely walk. The automobile and road are commonly portrayed as symbols of freedom, but they have confined Harris to a rigid and lonely life. Bowman and Harris travel many roads to many houses, but neither has a home.

Following his walk we meet Ruth, an old friend of Harris’s, who is hosting the party and demonstrates a heightened infatuation with the spectacle of the salesman. When she opens the door, she is surprised to find Harris soaking wet from walking through the rain, immediately inquiring, “What’s the matter with your little blue car?” (129). Ruth reveals some of the allure of Harris. He is not an inconspicuous salesman. He travels in his distinguished blue car throughout the state. Ruth continues, “I hope you brought us a present” (129). Harris sets the bottle of Memphis whisky on the table for the partygoers. Ruth excitedly announces, “He never forgets!” as the party cheers to the whisky (129). Tom is simultaneously the focus of the party, and a shadow. He is Tom Harris, the salesman and gift-giver, but he is also “nothing but a vagabond” according to Ruth (130). A woman inquires, “So this is the famous ‘he’ that everybody talks about all the time?” (129). To the onlookers of his life, Harris lives an exciting life full of adventure few others experience. He travels Mississippi, stays frequently in Memphis, and can afford gifts for those he visits. Although he is admired, a loneliness emerges around Harris. He

thinks, “I wish they’d call me ‘you’ when I’ve got here,” but Harris is a myth-like character (130). He does not live a mundane life, but the exciting lifestyle of salesman also offers few companions.

In his conversation, Harris expresses his disenchantment with his constant travel. Harris reveals to Ruth that he was sunburned last week when he visited the Coast to do the “same old thing” (130). Harris exposes the monotony in his work. He finds no pleasure in his busy life of traveling, and seems to find little pleasure in his interactions with Ruth and the other partygoers. His actions seem to be mechanical. Harris goes to the party because it is habit, as is stopping at the juke joint, at the Dulcie hotel, and bringing gifts to those who wait for him in town. As he describes his trip to the Coast, Harris makes an interesting note, “he remembered how Ruth looked when he mentioned other places where he stopped on trips,” so the conversation ends (130). Ruth is jealous of either the other friends he makes across the state or the adventure he experiences. Harris is displeased by his busy and consumption-driven lifestyle, but he is also addicted to it. As a phone continuously rings in the house and no one answers it, Harris’s anxiety grows, making him jumpy and unsettled as the attention for him continues. A woman designated by Ruth as his date asks, “Are you the one everybody’s ‘miratin and gyatin’ over?” (131). Playing into the spectacle of his curiousness he replies, “Yes. I come from afar” (131). Though distant towns in the state may be considered as afar for those unfamiliar with travel, Harris is not an outlier by being an experienced traveler. He holds an occupation similar to many, traveling throughout states and across state lines. His distinction as a seasoned and enigmatic salesman further emphasizes the inexperience and candor of those around him. Everyone wants to know Harris and indulge in his tales.

They even argue over their associations with Harris, as Ruth becomes upset when she learns Harris's car is a murder scene from someone else at the party. Ruth insists, "He told me all about it. It practically ruined his car, didn't it!" (132). Ruth wants to be in-the-know with Harris, her party trick. The party attendees insist on hearing the story, but soon leave to drive to get a coke in Greenville. Harris returns to the hotel to rest finally, thinking of the evening, "It was too like other evenings, this town was too like other towns, for him to move out of this lying still clothed on the bed, even into comfort or despair... He himself had no time. He was free; helpless" (135).

This lifestyle of promoting consumption is now consuming Harris. He is fatigued and disheartened by the tedium of traveling and the similar towns with people who admire him for his possessions and adventures while not recognizing Harris himself. He even confuses the women he often visits around the state as he falls asleep. Later in the night as his date from the party visits him at the hotel, she reveals Harris had met her years ago on one of his visits to the Coast. Harris's memory is overwhelmed by so many faces and towns; he cannot recall this woman's face. She reveals a demoralizing truth to Harris about their time together many years ago, "You talked about yourself" (137). The next morning, Harris starts to leave Dulcie. Before he leaves, young townboys inquire whether Harris's car was salvaged following the bloody fight. They are pleased to learn the car was restored to its admirable condition. One boy wonders about the yellow guitar's fate. Harris offers it to him. One hitchhiker is dead and the other jailed, and the anxieties of the townsfolk are ameliorated: Harris's car is saved and the yellow guitar has a new owner. Afterwards, Harris leaves Dulcie with his prized possession, but no companions and no fond memories of the night before are passengers in the blue

automobile; only his office supplies fill his backseat. It is uncertain when Harris will return to Dulcie, but it is certain he will be met with eagerness. Though the events of the previous evening did not trouble the consciences of Dulcie, they certainly improved Harris's celebrity status. They will be waiting to hear the new adventures and receive more presents from the salesman.

In *A Curtain of Green*, Welty presents us with two salesmen, one forgotten and one celebrated, but both disenchanted by their incessant interactions with consumer culture. R.J. Bowman is lost and lonely, dying in a place so different from his modern lifestyle. Tom Harris appears renowned for his blue car and his adventurous lifestyle, but the disillusionment of his celebrity is soon revealed. The opportunities offered by the commercialization which characterizes their lives is overshadowed by the disconnectedness from a valued stable life. The traveling lifestyle has culminated in a harrowing realization for Bowman and Harris because "there is also a negative side to the journey as permanent state, for it may become a flight away from reality, or, as it is for Bowman, only a facile situation tainted with commercialism and selfishness, for which there is a price to pay" (Mortimer 7). These men have been exhausted by their journeys, and at last they, particularly Bowman, succumb to the monotony of their monetized lives. They reject personal relationships and instead seek meaningless replacements in their lives. Bowman's realization of his lonely reality causes him a deadly anguish, which is a symbolic death of his *American Dream* as a salesman. Tom Harris continues his journey, but his life is a confusion of women, empty praise, and now a violent death from which he seeks distraction. In both "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "The Hitchhikers", Welty illustrates the isolation of the salesman lifestyle and the absence of value which

emerges from a life characterized by sales promotion. Modernity can be admired, but becoming a servant to the culture of consumerism has detrimental effects. The salesmen have become indifferent to the enchantment of the economy, culminating in the disenchantment and disillusionment of the *American Dream*, and even death. The salesman is educated and experienced, but his life concludes in an isolated moment, surrounded only by the comfort of his possessions and supplies.

Chapter 3

During the Depression, for many Mississippians, the opportunity to shop was limited to looking through a window. Economic advancement furthered social divides among Mississippians. When poor farming whites were marginalized into a lower class, they feared the ability of African Americans to gain economic and social equality through their increased independence. Thus, barriers of racial oppression were erected to prevent this racial equality. These barriers were as physical as Jim Crow Laws, or as psychological as common beliefs that “African Americans were at heart the most indulgent of people who could not have money without spending it” (Ownby 5). Either of these attempts perpetuated ideas that prevented the large African American population of Mississippians from similar shopping experiences, and in consequence, equality. In a photo entitled “Window Shopping,” taken by Welty in 1930, she captures the image of a woman who “dressed in her Saturday go-to-town best, stands outside a store window... contemplating the contents in the window” (Claxton 95). Welty captured similar photos throughout her photography career, but the woman in this photo, like many others she witnessed dressed well for traveling to town and church. She represents the class of African Americans slowly encroaching on white control.

This example can be found throughout the state, but as Mae Miller Claxton writes, “African Americans in Indianola who paid hard-earned cash to wear nice clothes to church represented a growing middle class that threatened the status quo of white

society with its desire for, and growing access to, better education, jobs, and new consumer goods” (Claxton 107). Similar to the woman’s desire in “Window Shopping,” fulfillment for consumer cravings was growing among African Americans. However, poverty and limited economic access often hindered their ability to participate. As the narrative on shopping continued, “different groups of white Mississippians repeatedly claimed that black Mississippians were the true consumers--impulsive, fun-loving, indulgent, and wasteful” (Ownby 4-5). African Americans’ opportunities as consumers were not only limited by economic elements, but by the racism that persisted in the South. However, in the following stories, Welty illustrates her female characters as indulgent consumers. White women, which constitute the majority of her characters in this story collection, do not hesitate to participate in consumer culture, even at the risk of criticism and retribution from husbands and society. African Americans were not the only indulgent consumers, but all women who used consumption to gain independence, feel self-fulfillment, and indulge in the enchantments and opportunities presented to them by a growing economy.

In *A Curtain of Green*, Welty uses the circumstances of less prosperous Mississippians to illustrate their unique interactions in social and economic settings. Annette Trefzer writes that “all of the narratives in her first short story collection, *A Curtain of Green*, bear witness to the marginalization of socially weak members of American society in the 1930s” (Trefzer 99). In the short story, “The Whistle,” Welty introduces Jason and Sara Morton, poor tenant farmers, who are enduring a cold winter in their Mississippi farmhouse. The Mortons are further marginalized by the Great Depression and a severe freeze threatening to destroy their crops. Welty explores the

dynamic of the rural farmer's relationship with commerce and self-sustainment. She shapes the socioeconomic realities and fictions of rural Mississippi society based on her personal encounter with poverty she witnessed in Utica, Mississippi, while farm tenants encountered a threatening winter freeze (Marrs 20). Outside, their tomato plants sit next to the house "in their exposed fragility" (Curtain 107). The Mortons shiver with cold inside their sparse home, frail like the tomatoes in the Depression-era freeze, "with poverty which may have bound them like a disaster" (Curtain 108). The theme of natural disaster is implicit in this story as "both the economic system of the thirties and the power of the natural world hold [the Mortons] prisoner" (Marrs 2). The Depression has affected the Mortons in devastating ways. They struggle to cultivate their plants, and the fear of freeze and failure plagues the thoughts of Sara as she attempts to sleep, "When was the last time they had grown tall and full, that the cold had held off and there was a crop?" (Curtain 109). Their desperation illustrates more than a dream of fulfillment but *A Dream of Abundance* through which they hope to have food to eat and sell for their survival. To escape the nightmare of her economic and physical reality, Sara must dream of another space. Her thoughts soon drift to the town of Dexter.

Dexter provides Sara with the comfort of consumption as she attempts to ignore the cold. She dreams of the distant town like a "vain dream" which only exists in her memory (Curtain 109). This comment highlights the desire and indulgence of Sara as she attempts to escape from her poor agrarian life. Dexter at shipping season is "a theater for almost legendary festivity, a place of pleasure" (Curtain 109). Smiling farmers wheel in loads of gorgeous tomatoes to the Dexter Station, which Sara imagined was decorated, but "--no, it was simply that the May sun was shining" (Curtain 109). She listens to the

music boxes and admires the busy train station, elements of the economy she associates with beauty and intrigue. Sara dreams about the center of market and trade as a paradise through which she can be liberated from her reality. For Welty, her Little Store plays a similar role as “the short trip away from home allowed new freedoms and took on the air of a pilgrimage to a special site” (Ownby 145). Even in Welty’s fortunate circumstance, she longed for this opportunity to escape. Thus, for a poor farmer like Sara Morton, the enchantment of town is an important opportunity to overcome her suffering and destitution.

Welty sympathizes with her agrarian characters who attempt to survive in poor economic circumstances. Sara’s hopeful nostalgia for Dexter further contrasts the reality of her farming culture and her attempt to overcome it. A great freeze occurs in the middle of the night. Sara’s dreams are interrupted by a whistle warning farmers to cover their crops. Jason and Sara must gather their clothes and linens to shelter their crops, and thus livelihood, from the coming freeze, but the luxuries of music boxes and entertainment that entrance her overshadow the immediate need for action. After covering the crops, the Mortons return inside to rest in front of their hearth, burning even the kitchen table to keep warm. Sara only has the dreams of town and enchantment to comfort her. To escape their harrowing realities, the Mortons dream of town life where the wealthier citizens reside and enjoy material indulgences. Each character holds their desire as a symbol of solace, because these indulgences allow them to experience freedom from their reality through choice. These characters long for freedom from their unfortunate circumstance, but these very desires emphasize and perpetuate their oppressive positions in society. Sara Morton’s town fantasy is starkly contrasting to her life as an impoverished farmer.

Welty crafts a disheartening characterization of the farmer in the rural South. Mississippi farmers hope for consumption as an economic opportunity that will allow them to participate in industrialized society and offer emotional or mental security. Sara's dream remains unfulfilled, and she can only hope this season's crops provide her with food and allow her to visit Dexter, where she will be welcomed once again by the enchantment and opportunity that exists there.

This story depicts the most desperate dreamers in *A Curtain of Green*. The Mortons are struggling to survive while wishing that their crops survive the severe oncoming freeze. Though Sara's dream is first fixed in the reality of her plight as a poor rural farmer, a new dream emerges. To escape the depressing cold, she dreams about the enchantment of Dexter. In this economic center, the activity and opportunity entertain Sara's imagination. In Dexter, Sara can interact with a consumer culture that elevates her from her reality as a tenant farmer. The music and charms of the town entice Sara, causing her to disregard her realities for the possibilities of indulgence. Though Sara is far from Dexter, and may not have the opportunity to visit soon, her role as woman enchanted by ideas of economic prosperity perpetuates the hope she finds there.

Other female characters throughout *A Curtain of Green* demonstrate similar hopes of both fiscal and even social prosperity. In the first story in the collection, "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," Welty introduces Lily Daw who uses consumer entertainment to secure her hope of marriage and afterwards relishes in the commercialized opportunities of the ceremonious union. Lily Daw and three women, all reside in Victory, Mississippi. Lily Daw is a young woman in the community who has a reputation for being slower-minded and incapable of caring for herself. Now that she has reached an age of maturity,

some of the townswomen have increased worries about her sexual and social safe-keeping in Victory. Mrs. Carson, Mrs. Watts, and Aimee Slocum have thus taken the initiative to send Lily to Ellisville to be institutionalized at the Ellisville Institute for the Feeble-Minded of Mississippi. When Lily's letter of acceptance arrives in Victory, the women are ecstatic to find Lily and tell her the news, but first they recollect the previous night's activities. A tent show passed through Victory last night and Lily was in attendance. The women admire Lily's behavior, complimenting her lady-like conduct by saying, "she kept her eyes on--what's that thing makes all the commotion?-the xylophone...Didn't turn her head to the right or to the left the whole time. Set in front of me" (Curtain 4). The women admire her calm and attentive demeanor, but fail to realize the source of Lily's enchantment. She was mesmerized by both the instrument and its player. The women demonstrate concern for Lily's whereabouts after the show, causing their further insistence that Lily be sent to Ellisville for supervision.

As the women parade town in search of Lily, she is off experiencing the indulgences she equates to her new opportunity. However, the women are shocked to hear from a fellow townsman that her new opportunity is not Ellisville, but marriage. She has "picked out a two-ninety-eight hat and wore it off" into town (Curtain 6). The specified price of the hat symbolizes the exchanges equated to marriage. Marriage has an expensive cost to Lily because to her it signifies the ability to solidify her place in society. The price of the hat and Lily's willingness to indulge in it demonstrates her excitement at this opportunity to participate in the tradition of marriage. Furthermore, her quick purchase demonstrates her eagerness to satisfy the spending she believes accompanies marriage. The women are dismayed and begin to search the town for her.

Meanwhile the women recall Lily's motherless childhood as a victim of her father's abuse. The women and Victory have raised her and it is now time for the people in Ellisville to take on the duty. The women believe that Lily's proposal is certainly fabricated, not even questioning the possibility of the proposal. They find Lily in her house, packing a trunk with two cakes of soap and a wash rag. When the ladies inquire as to what she is doing, she replies that she is packing and going to get married, insultingly adding, "I bet you wish you was me now," as she revels in the opportunity (Curtain 8). They insist upon hearing Lily's reasoning while questioning her aspirations for marriage. They do not believe she is capable of rationalizing her decision, or making it initially.

Lily's interest in marriage becomes more infuriating when she reveals her potential suitor is a product of entertainment culture. When Lily reveals that she is going to marry a man she met at the tent show, Mrs. Watts exclaims in shock, "One of those show fellows! A musician!" (Curtain 9). They are disturbed by Lily's choice in suitor. The traveling musician show represents a lower element of society, and the corruption of Lily at the hands of an entertainer sends the women into panic. Carol Marion writes that the "marriage turns out to be real and is proffered by an outsider—the xylophone player from the tent show—a device that Welty frequently utilizes to demonstrate how the external modern world transgresses the boundaries of the more agrarian, hierarchical, and traditional South" (Marion 67). Not only has this external element produced chaos among the women who insist the man "was after Lily's body alone," but he has potentially violated the small community of Victory and the traditional moral standards they have instilled in young Lily (Curtain 10). This modern consumer element has become a point of conflict among the ladies and the community, but will allow Lily to transcend the

societal restrictions they have placed on her. While the ladies believed Lily was behaving at the tent show, she was really consuming the entertainment and the image of the man on stage. She tells the women of his admirable red coat and the way “He took little sticks and went *ping-pong! ding-dong!*” (Curtain 10).

Lily’s attendance at the traveling show has illuminated alternate opportunities to her. The boundaries between the outside modern world and Lily Daw’s fragile mind have been distorted by this xylophone player, and she has the ability to live a life of choice. Consumer culture, specifically entertainment culture, has allowed her to realize this capability. Lily only remembers the appearance of his bright coat and the ability of his instruments. She has discovered more entertainment in the form of love and marriage, and the women are determined to remedy the situation. They recall the tent show’s advertisement, announcing the band will be performing in Victory on the ninth, and Como on the tenth. The ladies conclude that the xylophonist is in Como, and although he should return to salvage Lily’s dignity through marriage, it is best to let him continue on in his travels. Although Lily’s morality has been corrupted by the traveling musician, the women conclude it is best to convince her to go to Ellisville because they do not trust her with the opportunity of choice.

For Lily, marriage is a chance to indulge in consumer items representative of her new love and this welcomed transition in her life. As the women continue to persuade Lily, she demonstrates the items she has collected. She first bought a new hat and is now packing things in her hope chest. She shows off the chest to the women and tells them about her collection of things. With her hat on her head, she shows that the hope chest is filled with soap and a washrag. Next, she demands of the women, “What are you all

going to give me?” (Curtain 10). The women will have their own opportunity to persuade Lily with treasures in attempt to convince her to go to Ellisville. Carol Marion characterizes this situation as a unique opportunity for Lily, stating that “although the women do not believe that Lily can make competent choices, the ladies do not simply dictate the girl’s actions, but rather try to persuade her to create at least a semblance of Lily’s participation in free choice” (Marion 66). Lily wants the opportunity to choose, as she has chosen marriage at the first moment of opportunity. Thus, she is participating in one of the four dreams outlined by Ted Ownby, the dream of freedom of choice. This is the ability to take pleasure in the process of selecting goods as part of the meaning of freedom. Just as Lily chose to attend the tent show, she has also chosen marriage to the mysterious xylophonist. Additionally, she believes this act is synonymous with gathering items for her hope chest, a symbolic item of the new opportunity presented to Lily.

Marriage is a chance for Lily to collect, and she does not hesitate to demand compensation from the three women who insist on sheltering and directing her to Ellisville. The women see this as an opportunity for bribing her, and through this bribing they want her to choose Ellisville. Mrs. Watts tells Lily they will offer her many gorgeous things if she forgoes marriage. Lily does not listen to the enticement, insisting again, “What will you give me?” (11). Lily is an insistent customer, and she recognizes this unique opportunity to gain valuable items. The women play along, offering a pair of hemstitched pillowcases, a big caramel cake, and a souvenir bank from Jackson. Lily is intrigued, but the items have not persuaded her. She refuses to go to Ellisville. Again, the women offer gifts such as “a pretty little Bible with your name on it in real gold” and a “pink crepe de Chine brassiere with adjustable shoulder straps” (Curtain 11). Lily is

intrigued by the items, but the efforts to persuade her to go to Ellisville are futile, though their intentions are honorable. Marion writes of these persuasions, “Still, all of these good intentions do threaten to interfere with Lily’s own choices” (Marion 66). The women are limiting her choices by offering the opportunity at Ellisville. Lily hesitates to accept these limited choices. She wants to indulge freely in the opportunity that most enchants her, even if it may only last a moment.

The modern world of traveling shows has led Lily to a marriage proposal, and she first equates this marriage with the opportunity to participate in consumption by purchasing a hat and collecting items. Now, the women hope to equate Ellisville with the same sense of opportunity, promising Lily precious treasures if she follows their command. Lily is intrigued by this new opportunity, inquiring, “What will they have for me down there?” (Curtain 11). The women continue to play a convincing game, offering her opportunity in the form of weaving baskets, “all sorts of baskets” (Curtain 11). Even with the “lots of things” the women offer, Lily again refuses (Curtain 11). She would rather get married. The women have lost the battle. They idle in desperation and desolation, when Lily makes a proposal. If she can take her hope chest, she will go to Ellisville. She repeats, “Oh, if I could just take my hope chest!” (Curtain 12). Her hope chest, the trunk she filled with all her items, is symbolic of her hope to achieve a new social and consumer status through marriage. The hope chest is her dowry and it further signifies the maturity her disabled life would have most likely never afforded her. Thus, it is the one item she fears separating. She does not want to relinquish the freedom of her collected choices. Marriage had provided Lily with hope for a different life, but now Ellisville presents opportunities. The women are pleased and Aimee sighs with relief,

“All the time it was just her hope chest” (Curtain 12). After a life deprived of choice, Lily is insistent on possessing the freedom to experience choosing, a freedom that first emerged with choosing to attend the tent show.

Now that Lily has chosen Ellisville, she marches triumphantly with her towards the train. As they escort her into her seat, the Victory Civic Band plays on the platform. The entire town is present to send Lily off. Not only will she find new opportunity in Ellisville, but she will be preserved. Lily positions herself proudly in her seat with “her hair under a small blue hat” (Curtain 13). She has exchanged her new hat for that of another young woman. Lily participates in her new possibility of consumption and collection until her final moments in Victory. She also wears “a traveling dress made out of part of Mrs. Watts’s last summer’s mourning... She had a purse and a Bible and a warm cake in a box, all in her lap” (Curtain 13). Lily’s admission into the world of entertainment has opened a new market filled with fashion and delicacies. She believes she will find more of these goods in Ellisville. Though the decision is made and the women are secure with Lily on the train, a disruption occurs. The xylophonist has appeared on the platform. Aimee intercepts him, noting that he “seemed to have on perfume, if such a thing could be” (Curtain 14). This increases the allure that Lily must have been deceived by a modern man adorned in a red coat and cosmetics. Lily’s choice will again be hindered.

As Aimee encounters the small, red-headed musician, the deceptive illusion of the women’s character construction is demystified. The xylophonist is feeble-minded like Lily. He is partially deaf and records Lily’s future whereabouts in Ellisville in a notebook entitled, “Permanent Facts & Data” (Curtain 15). This man had presented Lily with a

valid hand in marriage, but the women did not believe Lily was capable of being presented or selecting this choice. As Aimee speaks to him, he confesses, “We was only going to get married, that’s all” (Curtain 15). At the appearance of the musician’s innocence, the women are convinced that he is a suitable match. They are both intellectually disabled and only seek the opportunity to participate in traditional social conventions. As Aimee calls after the women on the train, insisting on the validity of this new opportunity, the xylophonist learns his marriage is promising. The women gather Lily’s things, dragging her off the train in hurried excitement. Marion criticizes this action as a limitation of choice because, “Nevertheless, by the time the ladies remove Lily from the train, she no longer wants to get married, so once again, they are in the position of forcing their own expectations on her rather than accommodating the girl’s desire” (Marion 68). Lily had chosen Ellisville, and she objects to marriage as she exits the train. Though Lily has demonstrated fleeting decisions on monumental moments in her life, her desires, once chosen, are adamant. The ladies are disturbing the freedom of choice Lily had newly discovered. They again resort to bribing her, directing her to “Hush, and we’ll all have some ice-cream cones later” (Curtain 16). In the brief moment of the xylophonist’s appearance, the possibility of Lily’s choice has been suppressed. Chaos ensues on the train platform as the women attempt to call a preacher to perform the marriage ceremony. The band plays and the townsfolk chatter in excitement over Lily’s new marriage. The women, content with their decision, bustle with excitement and prepare Lily to become a wife. As the train leaves the station, Aimee cries, “Oh, the hope chest!” which has been forgotten on the train (Curtain 16). The item of which Lily was so insistent, has been forgotten in the intentions of all those around her. The hope chest

symbolizes Lily's hope for opportunity, and thus choice, disappearing towards Ellisville as the women once again limit Lily's freedom of choice.

In this short story, Welty has presented us with the perspective of a woman of

Inferior intelligence who is just as interested in the entertainment and opportunities presented by the modern world of consumer entertainment. Though marriage, a traditional role, is the opportunity Lily first seeks, the opportunity is not presented until an external force intrudes upon the community. Immediately, Lily is enamored by the opportunity to control her own life after many years under the direction and protection of the three women and now seeks independence and social equality. Lily sees marriage as an opportunity of hope, symbolized by the chest she's filled with soap, a wash rag, and other gifts from the women. Her dowry is filled with items gathered and gifted to her as representatives of this transitional moment. Lily's experience of the freedom of choice is limited by the women who ask her to choose between marriage and life in Ellisville. However, through this story, Welty demonstrates the enchantment with material objects that promise happiness. This story shows the abilities of even the most simple-minded Mississippians to be intrigued by both the opportunity of individual choice, in situations characterized by traditional and modern experiences, as well as by the fascinations and goods that accompany such experiences.

The next character seeks similar experiences, but uses them to achieve a different purpose. In Welty's story, "A Pieces of News", Ruby Fisher lives a seemingly reclusive life as the wife of Clyde, who often spends his days in the woods at his whiskey still. Ruby experiences limited opportunities in her lonely life, but nonetheless seeks excuses for excitement when she ventures to the road to hitchhike. These experiences are

indulgent, but they also provide her with the opportunity to persuade her domineering husband, from whom she truly seeks love and attention. Ruby has just returned from one of her excursions on the highway back to her secluded home in the Mississippi woods. She carries a bundle inside with her, out of the rain. After unwrapping the rain-soaked newspaper from the bundle, she reveals a sack of coffee marked “sample” in red letters (Curtain 21). Ruby has encountered a coffee salesman on today’s hike. Ruby handles the coffee gently, exclaiming as she reveals her new prized possession, “Why, how come he wrapped it in a newspaper!” (Curtain 21). The salesman has packaged Ruby’s coffee carefully, though he has only provided her with a sample because of her limited purchasing power. Though her husband has expressed disapproval of her hitchhiking in the past, she resolves to place the coffee neatly in the center of their dining room table to ensure that he sees it.

Not only is Ruby intrigued by her new coffee sample, but the newspaper offers her a unique interaction with print media that she rarely has. She warms herself by the fire, “touching the printed page as if it were fragile,” and watching “it as if it were unpredictable” (Curtain 22). Ruby is entranced by the pages which provide her with information from a world rarely interacted with, if ever, until the cherished item brings her serious concern as she peruses a line of the paper reading, “Mrs. Ruby Fisher had the misfortune to be shot in the leg by her husband this week” (Curtain 23). The news is shocking and confusing, and she becomes angry with her husband, screaming his name. Though she is in her home and perfectly healthy, she has imagined that her husband has harmed her. As she waits for her husband to return from tending his whiskey still in the rain, she paces nervously in the cabin, “neatly avoiding the table where the bag of coffee

stood” (Curtain 23). The newspaper and coffee are mysterious to Ruby, and she handles them with delicate pride, yet they bring her discomfort and worry. She cannot discern whether she is the victim of her husband’s crime, and she thinks about the previous consequences of her hitchhiking to find a solution. Ruby provides an image of the salesman, thinking that even if Clyde “heard about the coffee man, with a Pontiac car, she did not think he would shoot her” (Curtain 24). In Ruby’s contemplation she reveals her intrigue with the coffee salesman. She calls him the “coffee man” and notes the make of his automobile (Curtain 24). Similar to the infatuation with Tom Harris’s blue car in “The Hitchhikers”, Ruby demonstrates knowledge and interest even as a rural woman who hitchhikes alone. The excitement provided to her by hitchhiking is not an admired habit of her husband’s. Yet Ruby reveals that, in her past, when she is a victim of her husband’s anger and he “makes her blue,” she travels to the road to hitchhike, waiting for a car to stop and pick her up (Curtain 24).

Ruby is stuck in a cycle of consumption as she uses her interaction with these outside products to attract the attention of her husband. Though she has not yet secured her husband’s full affection, even his abusive moments provide her with some satisfaction. As she continues to contemplate the possibility of her predicament, she reveals that a car with a Tennessee license is “the lucky kind” (Curtain 24). Ruby is an experienced hitchhiker with preferred tastes. She knows that salesmen, like Tom Harris, will likely have a base in nearby Memphis, Tennessee, and will therefore offer excitement, experience from traveling the road, and perhaps free samples. Unlike the male hitchhikers encountered in “The Hitchhikers”, Ruby is intrigued by the life of consumption and opportunity. Whereas the hitchhiker with the yellow guitar was

disinterested in playing his music for profit, Ruby is intrigued by products and the experience they offer. She has gained expertise in her habit, seeking cars with specific license plates because they offer more excitement. Her husband knows of her adventure, therefore he sometimes becomes abusive. The abuse does not impede her interests in the opportunities provided by hitchhiking, so she continues the momentary escape from her life of solitude. Yet, even with Clyde's abusive history she cannot believe that her husband would shoot her.

Ruby's possible murder becomes an opportunity for her to dream of the romantic and economic effects of her death. As she waits for Clyde's return, she imagines the consequences of her death by gunshot. She fantasizes about her death and Clyde's reaction while she remembers his youthful strength and good looks. In this dream she reveals a passion for her abusive husband, and she imagines his own passion which may emerge for her as she lies there "beautiful, desirable, and dead" (Curtain 25). Ruby dreams that Clyde would have to buy her a dress for the funeral, after which he would go through the gestures of burial and grief. Even in her death, Ruby romanticizes her image as a beautiful young woman in a new dress. She has revealed a want for attention and desire from her husband, the same excitement she experiences each time a new car offers her a ride on the highway, or she returns home with a new item from a salesman. Only in her death will Clyde hopefully provide her with the affections of love and marriage, so she will no longer search for it on the road.

As Ruby daydreams, Clyde returns from the rain, immediately demanding as he enters the house, "What's keepin' supper?" (Curtain 26). She quickly hides the newspaper that has sent her mind into passionate confusion. Ruby begins to prepare

supper for her husband as he sits watching her from the table. She wanders about with nervousness when Clyde questions her about her whereabouts throughout the day. When Ruby replies that she has been “Nowheres special,” Clyde replies sharply, “Don’t you talk back to me. You been hitchhikin’ again, ain’t you?” (Curtain 27). His suspicions entertain his amusement, and she continues to silently prepare the meal. Internally, though, she is elated by his concern. Even though he offers a mild reaction to her most coveted hobby, he has given her attention. To further initiate his interest in her activities, she serves her coffee sample at dinner while her hand trembles. When she accidentally spills coffee on Clyde’s wrist, he reacts angrily, asserting that “Some day I’m goin’ to smack the livin’ devil outa you” (Curtain 27). Ruby has intentionally displayed her coffee sample at dinner to create concern from her husband. His anger towards her hitchhiking is one of the rare reactions she receives from the man she loves, and her desire for more affection is pursued by using elements from the modern world to entice him. Only by hitchhiking and sharing the possessions she acquires on her journeys is she able to elicit her husband’s attention. Yet, the spilling of the coffee produces more than just attention, but also anger. Her efforts are successful but Clyde’s temper causes Ruby pain. She continues and serves him dinner, but this episode is different than others.

She demands to know the legitimacy of the account in the newspaper, and sets it in front of him on the table. This opportunity for interaction with Clyde elates Ruby. The presence of the paper may help her infiltrate the rigid affection plagued by her husband’s anger. When she displays her discovery proudly to Clyde he reacts surprised, exclaiming, “A newspaper!” (Curtain 27). He grabs it from her aggressively and demands, “Where’d you git that? Hussy” (Curtain 28). Although he ignored the presence of the coffee,

Ruby's blatant presentation of the newspaper infuriates him, confirming further her activities hitchhiking. As Clyde reads the newspaper, he is shocked, questioning his own ability to harm Ruby. Ruby is pleased at his disbelief, believing that she has finally found a source of interest great enough to change Clyde's stern character. She proudly boasts, "That's what in the newspaper about me" (Curtain 28). Clyde reacts confusedly, exclaiming that he wants to see where Ruby has been shot. The realization at the possibility of Clyde's violence and Ruby's victimization creates a silence in the house. A husband and wife stand "with a double shame and a double pleasure," plagued by the recent failures in their marriage and excited by the possible passions of a deadly lovers' quarrel (Curtain 28). As the tension diminishes, Clyde goes towards the fire and places the paper in its light, revealing information about the story's source. Clyde is relieved to reveal to Ruby, "It's a Tennessee paper. See 'Tennessee?'" (Curtain 28). He laughs at his relief and his ability to prove Ruby wrong, but she insists. She becomes frustrated, crying that "It was Ruby Fisher! My name is Ruby Fisher!" (Curtain 29). Her treasured discovery and its subsequent insignificance trouble Ruby, leaving her trembling by the window as Clyde boasts about foiling her plot. He questions the paper's source, but Ruby stands silently at the window, watching the rain from the storm as it "rolled away to faintness like a wagon crossing a bridge," just as the possibility for reawakened tenderness and love disappeared in the flames of the fire with the newspaper (Curtain 29).

Ruby Fisher demonstrates the ability of women to fulfil both marital and personal desire through real and fantasized economic interactions. Ruby lives a life isolated from frequent interactions with the modern world and even from her own husband's affections, yet she uses these limited time to both indulge in independence and attempt a resurrection

of her marriage. She seeks pleasure in the habit of hitchhiking, which allows her opportunity to experience luxuries and enchantment offered by the world of salesmen who allow her to experience free samples in return for her company. This pleasure results in scolding and violence from her husband, but through this adventure she receives a slight fulfillment of the romantic desire she feels from Clyde's attention. This newly encountered newspaper allows Ruby to experience a dramatic fantasy which may be her greatest chance to capture the attention of her strict and abusive husband. The previous presentations of consumer products have not elicited a change of love, but Ruby believes the shock of Clyde's shooting her will be the ultimate persuasion. When the account is dejected, Ruby is left confused and saddened by the lost opportunity another item from the outside world has failed to win her. Ruby will surely resort to satisfying her desire for attention and excitement by hitchhiking on the road for another salesman. Though Ruby is not considered a true consumer because goods are not purchased, only given, she demonstrates women's ability to utilize elements of consumption to achieve different dreams of happiness. For Ruby, her dream is one of distraction from her boredom through new experiences, but also a dream of a recurring hope. She hopes to encounter an item that is enchanting enough to both intrigue her and captivate the attention of Clyde.

Though some women use consumption to indulge in and solicit the attention of men, other women use consumption for personal pleasure. As setting shifts from the lonely countryside to the commercial life of town, women have more opportunity to utilize the economy for their own independence in marriage and society. In the short story, "The Petrified Man", Welty introduces such a commercial setting. The story occurs in downtown Jackson, Mississippi, inside the beauty parlor of chatty beautician Leota.

Unlike the women in the previous stories, Leota is a working woman who is involved in the modern world of service and consumption, particularly through the beauty services she provides and the extravagance of appearance she adores. The beauty parlor is a center of both conversation and freedom for women who have the ability to spend money on their appearance. This area of consumption further perpetuates consumer indulgences and tendencies, specifically for Leota. One day, as she is servicing a regular customer, Mrs. Fletcher, she directs her to “Reach in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder in it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher, honey” (33). Within the clasp of the patent-leather bag, Mrs. Leota has cosmetics which may threaten the purity of her tobacco. Leota indulges in the world of physical beauty, and no product was as revolutionized to glamour in the 1930’s as were cigarettes, which were “a highly prized commodity for one out of two Americans” (Markel). Leota smokes these cigarettes with her red-nailed fingers and flicks the ash into the bins of dirty towels. Leota’s first action in the story introduces her as a woman interested in consumer trends. Though cigarettes were widely popularized and belonged to the largest product market, Welty demonstrates that Leota will become an even more extravagant consumer throughout the story.

Leota surrounds herself with beauty and indulgence. Within Leota’s salon, the walls are decorated with lavender shelves and lavender-framed mirrors. A lavender swinging door separates Leota’s station from the other customers and beauticians. Even the washcloths are lavender. This lavender color is reminiscent of a particular purple found in another of Welty’s short stories. The story “Livvie,” found in *The Wide Net and Other Stories*, reveals the difficulties of marriage between a young woman, Livvie, and her much older husband. Livvie, who “is a commodity herself, metaphorically

‘purchased’ in an arranged marriage” is comforting her husband as he nears death when a woman suddenly arrives by car at their rural doorstep (Claxton 103). This woman, “Miss Baby Marie,” sells cosmetics and introduces Livvie to a large supply of cosmetics (Collected 233). Livvie, who is unfamiliar with not only the cosmetics and who also does not control the household money, has no purchasing power to buy the products. However, Livvie is interested in one particular item, a lipstick with the scent of chinaberry flowers. As the young woman observes the lipstick, Livvie breathes sensually: “it’s purple” (Collected 234). The scent of the lipstick elicits a passionate memory from Livvie’s memory. The saleswoman encourages her to sample the lipstick, but the lipsticks costs \$2, and though Livvie offers chicken eggs as an exchange, Miss Baby Marie cannot accept them as payment. Livvie cannot indulge in the beautiful and intriguing lipstick because her economic status gives her a submissive role in marriage. However, Leota, who resides in Mississippi’s economic center, can enjoy the pleasures of sensual color and cosmetics, as her salon and profession continue to demonstrate.

But first, an investigation into Welty’s own interactions with cosmetics provides further commentary on beauty product culture. In Welty’s earliest interactions with the camera, she impersonates people of the beautician profession, as well as others who indulge in beauty products and cosmetics. The setting of “Petrified Man” emulates early photographs Welty took following her advertising studies at Columbia. These photos taken in the 1930s, titled her “funny pictures,” display a variety of household goods such as cleaners, shiners, and even a Campbell Soup can (Chouard 118). Welty, with a toothbrush against her face, appears to be applying these products to her face. She entitled this photo “Helena Arden,” mocking two popular cosmetic companies of the

time, Helena Rubenstein and Elizabeth Arden. In the photo Welty equates her expensive cosmetics to products found on various shelves throughout her home. Though the funny photos were meant as comical distractions during the onset of the Depression, Geraldine Chouard writes that “they did far more than that, establishing a critical distance with the consumer society of the time” (Chouard 118). This photo, taken perhaps a decade before the publication of “The Petrified Man,” shows a Welty who is skeptical of the consumer culture, specifically beauty products. Yet, in her critique, she has still recognized its major role in the consumer culture surrounding women. Therefore, Leota can be viewed as comical, yet overindulgent in a narcissistic and unnecessary way. Welty mocks the economy of beauty and portrays the women in the parlor, especially Leota, as overindulgent consumers and saleswomen of the same lifestyle.

This overindulgence is a manifestation of Leota’s own consumer desires, which emulates the *Dream of Novelty*. However, for Leota, this dream is more excessive and incessant. Her consumer desires provide her with income, and thus the ability to indulge further in consumption. For Leota, these beauty products also offer the ability to earn independence from her husband, of whom Leota remarks, “All Fred does is lay around the house like a rug” because “money don’t mean a thing to him” (Curtain 41). Leota’s occupation provides her with economic independence she otherwise would not find in the limited occupations offered to women during this time. Mrs. Pike, another character introduced in the story, is also a trained beautician, but she instead works at a millinery shop, which were the earliest shops managed by women. These hat shops, as well as the beauty parlor, provided female customers, who were already limited in their economic ability, with more opportunity for consumer participation. Like Leota, Mrs. Pike’s

husband doesn't work, and instead often fishes with Fred, though they frequently return unsuccessful, only adding to the women's contempt "bein' as neither one of 'em has got a job to his name" (Curtain 48). Leota and Mrs. Pike represent the changing social and gender relations that industry and a growing economy allowed. Welty photographed professional women and these photos displayed the dignity of female workers throughout the Depression. These "working women in the 1930s were defined by their commitment to their social role, made visible by a number of accessories," which for Leota and her coworkers included elements of cosmetology such as well-done hairdos and "blood-red lips" (Chouard 123; Curtain 36). Chouard writes that for other women of this time, accessories were things such as a "service award as a midwife" and a "professional sign, a simple piece of wood with the handwritten words: 'Clara Humes, Obstetric Nurse and Nursing'" (Chouard 124). Similarly, Leota and Mrs. Pike demonstrate their pride in their own roles as vendors of cosmetology. Furthermore, they can elevate themselves over husbands who were either domineering, as Ruby attempts to overcome Clyde's abuse and refused love in "A Piece of News," or husbands who were lazy, as Leota does. Even though Leota and her customers are "hidden in this den of curling fluid and henna packs," this money and opportunity allow them independence (Curtain 33).

For Leota's customers, who indulge in the market of beauty products, though they are not provided with financial stability, the parlor is used as a space where they gain a sense of independence and fulfillment. Mrs. Fletcher, who gets frequent "perm'nents," uses the salon as a space to socialize with women while indulging in beauty services which contribute to her happiness (Curtain 34). She also uses the space to assert her sovereignty from her husband. When she reveals a recent pregnancy and her skepticism

at keeping the child, she asserts to Leota that “Mr. Fletcher can’t do a thing with me” (Curtain 37). Mrs. Fletcher’s ability to visit the salon frequently demonstrates her freedom of choice in marriage, and she further uses this space which separates the genders to declare her independence of choice, in both consumer and non-consumer matters. Another character in this story, Mrs. Montjoy, demonstrates the extreme of this idea. When she was also pregnant, Mrs. Montjoy visited Leota for a full “shampoo an’ set” even after “havin’ one pain right after another” (Curtain 45). Mrs. Montjoy, in her determination to indulge in beauty service, visited Leota just minutes before giving birth “to look pretty while she was havin’ her baby, is all” (Curtain 46). Though her husband, as well as everyone else, displayed concern that she would give birth in the salon, he “couldn’t do nothin’ with her a course” even though Mrs. Montjoy “yelled bloody murder, too, but she always yelled her head off when I give her a perm’nent” (Curtain 46). Mrs. Montjoy’s visits to the salon, even those when she is not in labor, cause her pain, but her appointments provides her a personal satisfaction. In this indulgence, she asserts her authority over her husband and the others in the salon because consumption allows her to do so. In these spheres, women could achieve personal satisfaction with a new hairstyle or wardrobe while achieving similar consumer and social status to men.

Mrs. Pike, of all the women in the story, represents knowledge of consumption and thus causes characters to have both an envy and infatuation with her lifestyle. Mrs. Pike is a new woman in town who has moved from New Orleans and rents a room in Leota’s home. As Mrs. Fletcher searches Leota’s purse for an “unperfumed” cigarette, she remarks, “Why, look at the peanuts, Leota!” (Curtain 33). Mrs. Fletcher is fascinated, but Leota is indifferent, remarking that “them goobers has been in my purse a week if

they's been in it a day. Mrs. Pike bought them peanuts" (Curtain 33). Mrs. Fletcher is astonished as Leota asserts that Mrs. Pike is an attractive blonde who "has her a good time," and predicted Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy before she has the chance to tell her husband (Curtain 34). Leota reveals that when "we was settin' in Mrs. Pike's car" (Curtain 38-39). First Leota, just like many of Welty's characters who are fascinated by automobiles, remarks that "it's a 1939 Dodge" (Curtain 38). Because "Petrified Man" was first published in 1941, Welty portrayed the Dodge as a recently purchased item, to which Mrs. Fletcher replies with skeptical envy, "1939, eh" (Curtain 38). Mrs. Fletcher attempts to be uninterested by the novelty of the car. Inside Mrs. Pike's possibly new Dodge, the women are "gettin' a Jax beer apiece" of which Leota remarks, "that's the beer that Mrs. Pike says is made right in N.O., so she won't drink no other kind" (Curtain 38). Mrs. Pike is bringing this element from the urban New Orleans and introducing it to the unfamiliar consumers of Mississippi. Moreover, this statement shows Mrs. Pike's experience as a consumer, as she resolutely refuses to drink another type of beer. Leota admires Mrs. Pike's attitude and experience, but Mrs. Fletcher is less welcoming to the outsider. When Leota reveals that Mrs. Pike remarked, "I bet you another Jax that lady's three months on the way," Mrs. Fletcher's frustration intensifies (Curtain 39). Leota, in her new infatuation with Mrs. Pike and the worldly life she leads, defends Mrs. Pike, and tells Mrs. Fletcher she just "needs to get one of those Stork-a-Lure dresses and stop worryin'" (Curtain 38). Mrs. Fletcher, infuriated by Mrs. Pike's presumptuous accusations and pride, is the less indulgent character in this story. She is more reserved than Leota and Mrs. Pike, who both work and enjoy drinking beer while they gossip.

Welty emphasizes this contrast between female consumers even further when another commercialized infatuation of the early twentieth century is introduced in the story.

Traveling entertainment culture in the forms of circuses and freak shows emerged as one of the earliest types of public spectacle. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “gawking at people who were born with deformities was not only socially acceptable -- it was considered family entertainment” (Crockett). These people with such deformities were put on display in “freak shows,” and were early forms of traveling entertainment. Alongside musicians such as Lily Daw’s xylophone player and other entertainers like Welty’s monkey man, this traveling culture allowed easy access to the enchantment of entertainment for residents in urban, and sometimes rural, areas. The shows were enjoyed among adults and children alike when spare change was available for spending. Welty witnessed this entertainment as a child and late in her photography career, “she loved to capture the humorous sensationalism of signs for sideshow acts” (Chouard 126). Several of these photos were taken at the Mississippi State Fair in Jackson. Though the photos are only entitled “Sideshow, State Fair” the images and wording on the signs are descriptive and sometimes disturbing (Photographs 130-138). There are tarps hung on tents enticing fairgoers to witness a “Cow with a Human Face,” a “Headless Girl” standing scantily dressed, a “Twisto Rubber Man” with his body distorted, yet smiling, and a “Mule Face Woman” (Photographs 130-138). All of these signs ensure possible onlookers that the acts are “alive,” even offering “1.000 if not alive” (Photographs 134). It is even recorded that “Welty mentioned that she ‘dreaded the real mule-faced woman,’ but was interested in the way she and other sideshow acts were represented because “they were somebody’s dream” (Chouard 126). Thus, even in the depiction of these often grotesque

advertisements, Welty understood the audience's infatuation with the unique entertainment. Freak shows, side shows, and fairs allowed residents the opportunity to indulge whereas entertainment may have otherwise been inaccessible. With equal access to this traveling culture, residents could share experiences by witnessing new "freaks" with distorted bodies and shocking talents. In "Petrified Man" Leota experiences such novelty when Mrs. Pike exposes her yet again to another new consumer element.

As Leota continues to describe Mrs. Pike's unique character to Mrs. Fletcher, she tells her of their recent visit to the new show in town, bragging, "We went to the travellin' freak show yestiddy after work. In the vacant store next door. What, you ain't been?" (Curtain 39). Leota acts accustomed to this form of entertainment, shocked at Mrs. Fletcher's unfamiliarity with the show. However, Mrs. Fletcher is resolute in her refusal to indulge in Mrs. Pike's excessiveness, "no, I despise freaks" (Curtain 39). Mrs. Fletcher, as a less exposed consumer, detests the sight of the horrifically disabled, but this serves to only increase the infatuation Mrs. Pike and Leota have with this peculiar culture. Leota, fascinated by the acts she witnessed, describes twins in a bottle, while attempting to demonstrate their appearance with hand motions. Leota insists that Mrs. Fletcher should visit the twins, because "you really owe it to yourself" (Curtain 39). Mrs. Fletcher is unamused by the Leota's fascination. Next, she describes the pygmies, who were Mrs. Pike's preferred "freaks," that "can just rest back on their little bohunkus an' roll around an' you can't hardly tell if they're sittin' or standin'" (Curtain 40). While Mrs. Fletcher critiques their interest in the show, Leota defends the entertainment and Mrs. Pike's penchant for it.

Leota's humorous indulgence is further increased by an opportunity presented at the show. She is willing to spend to secure her future when she is most entertained by the "freak" from whom she seeks information. "Lady Evangeline" is a mind reader who helps Leota discover truths from her past love life (Curtain 42). For Leota, this woman is most worthy of her money when she insists, "If I had another dollar I wouldn't do a thing but have my other palm read" (Curtain 42). Leota is willing to spend her money on the perceived abilities of this woman. Each dollar earns Leota a new insight into her past or future, and she is captivated by this ability. Although Leota is impressed with the skills that tell her about her future, she is still able to observe that the mind reader, "had the worst manicure I ever saw on a living person" (Curtain 42). Throughout other moments in life, Leota remains a true beautician with an incessant interest in appearance and personal upkeep. Leota is an optimistic consumer who seizes opportunities for her benefit. Though Leota visits Lady Evangeline again for a reading, her feedback is not as fortunate. Leota is not pleased for long because Mrs. Pike seizes an opportunity presented by the freak show. Lady Evangeline has revealed that Mrs. Pike "would come into some money" (Curtain 42). For all the women in this story, money allows the opportunity for consumer engagement, and thus individual achievement through financial independence or securing social position. Unfortunately, Leota loses this next opportunity to Mrs. Pike.

Mrs. Pike's captivation by consumer culture does not end with entertainment, appearance, and indulgence in locally brewed beer. She also looks for and exploits moments of financial gain. In addition to the joined twins and miniature men at the show, Leota describes a "Petrified Man" whose food "since he was nine, when it goes through his digestion, it goes to his joints and he has been turning to stone" (Curtain 40-41). The

idea of such a man, which is not far-fetched to Leota or Mrs. Fletcher, convinces them his disease is awful and true. However, several days after attending the freak show, his true identity is revealed. In Leota's home, where Mr. and Mrs. Pike rent a room, she set some "old magazines" on her living room table (Curtain 48). Mrs. Pike's infatuation with even print culture causes her to curiously search through an "old *Startling G-Man Tales*" (Curtain 48). To Leota's misfortune, Mrs. Pike finds a photo of a wanted criminal inside posted with a reward. Leota then describes the scene that followed: Suddenly, Mrs. Pike, startled by her discovery, exclaims to her husband, "Honey, we're rich, and you won't have to work," though he didn't already (Curtain 48). The wanted man is "Mr. Petrie," a former neighbor of Mr. and Mrs. Pike in New Orleans, who is posing at the very freak show Leota and Mrs. Pike attended the other day as the Petrified Man (Curtain 49). He is "wanted for five hundred dollars cash, for rapin' four women in California" (Curtain 49). Thus, as Lady Evangeline predicted, Mrs. Pike does find a fortune.

Leota is infuriated by her missed opportunity. She defends her jealousy by insisting to Mrs. Fletcher that the magazine "was mine, mind you, I'd bought it myself" (Curtain 48). She continues her rant, complaining that Mrs. Pike found the ad "in my copy" and now "Mrs. Pike goes around actin' like she thinks she was Mrs. God" (Curtain 50). Leota, who was once so infatuated with Mrs. Pike's worldly lifestyle, is now exasperated by the missed opportunity for financial gain. Leota, who "cried all night," even overlooks the alarming realization that she was sympathizing with the "Petrified" rapist just a few days earlier (Curtain 50). Instead, she equates his crime to its monetary benefit, stating, and "I guess those women didn't have the faintest notion at the time they'd be worth a hundred an' twenty-five bucks apiece some day to Mrs. Pike" (Curtain

51). The violated women are not victims, but money out of which Leota has been cheated. This is Leota's culmination of consumption. She, like Mrs. Pike, is not sympathetic towards the women, but instead wants to exploit them for financial gain. Leota's tantrum and jealousy change her enchantment with the opportunities offered by consumption into an obsession for gain, both financial and social, over others. While Mrs. Pike is off receiving her reward, her son "Billy Boy" stays at the parlor with Leota, who has a short temper with the boy (Curtain 52). In a snappy conversation between the two he turns to Leota, questioning brazenly, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" (Curtain 52). Even the child understands the importance of Mrs. Pike's clever observation. Leota is left bitter at the end of the story.

From the beginning of "Petrified Man," Leota is portrayed as a beautician whose incessant consumer dreams are directly related to her occupation. Through this occupation she not only provides herself the opportunity to indulge in her consumers, but she achieves economic and social independence as a working woman. Cosmetics enchant Leota in every aspect of her life, and like the dream of novelty, Leota and Mrs. Pike are easily enchanted by the next opportunity to act as consumers. Whether they are drinking locally brewed beer or witnessing the deformed at the freak show, Leota and Mrs. Pike, like the other women in this story, seek opportunities of self-fulfillment through beauty regimes as well as entertainment. Though Leota loses her economic advantage to the clever Mrs. Pike, she still retains her identity as a constant consumer throughout the ordeal, insisting on her right to the prize. Leota's monetizing of objects and people, including the rape victims, illustrate her as the most excessive and truly indulgent consumer in the collection. Though she is dehumanized like the salesmen in this moment,

she is never disenchanting. Leota uses her constant interaction with consumer culture to seize opportunities characterized by her personal fulfillment of independence and beauty.

Although Leota represents the excess of consumer culture, elements of consumption offer opportunities for people of all classes and abilities. In “The Whistle,” Sara Morton uses the dream of Dexter to escape the harrowing destitution of life as a farmer in the Depression. By imagining this center of consumption, she is hopeful to experience the freedom of shopping soon. Leota’s excessive indulgence in beauty and entertainment allow her the ability to gain fiscal independence and social satisfaction. Just as Lily Daw used marriage to achieve her dream, gather luxury goods, and better her position as a member and consumer in society, Welty introduces two other afflicted characters who use tourism as a tool to feel inclusive in society and marriage. Travel culture will allow this couple to achieve their own consumer dreams. In “The Key,” Albert and Ellie Morgan, a married couple, are leaving a train station for their long-awaited honeymoon. Ellie has spent her life saving enough money to fulfill this dream. The couple also uses this rare opportunity for travel afar to fulfill their own idea of societal and marital fulfillment as Ellie finally satisfies her lifelong desire to visit Niagara Falls, a place she has seen only in a photo.

Niagara Falls has long been a tourist destination for those wishing to view the magnificence of its three waterfalls, one of which is named “Bridal Veil Falls.” This fall, named for its appearance, along with the other natural falls, became a destination for newlywed brides and grooms as observed in 1926 when the place was “flooded with honeymooners” (Dubinsky 6). By this time, Niagara Falls had become more commercialized to offer visitors airplane tours, access to museums and factories, and

even entertainment at bowling alleys. This newly industrialized Niagara, which was “quickly absorbed into the general air of spectacle, provided a fitting tribute to the majesty of science and capitalism” (122). This exhibition became a common consumer capital for tourists and honeymooners alike. In “The Key,” Albert and Ellie hope to be such honeymooners who can participate in the popularized dream. The relationship between Niagara Falls and honeymoons “was not a tourist industry invention,” but instead the idea formed from “the way in which countless people imagined the place” (Dubinsky 19). The enchantment of the falls inspired newlywed onlookers to inaugurate their happy marriage at this honeymoon destination. However, this popular trip was not initially widely publicized, and even fewer people had monetary or transportation access to visit the falls. Dubinsky writes that, “The honeymoon, like travel itself, was long a luxury, not an item of mass consumption, and so it was not really advertised or promoted in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries” (Dubinsky 29). Thus, it was a rare commodity enjoyed by the few who could access and afford it, which were usually “the rich and famous.” Ellie and Albert Morgan are not members of this social class. Instead, they are a working-class couple from Yellowleaf, Mississippi. Furthermore, they are both deaf and mute. For the Morgans, the opportunity to witness the grandeur of the falls is the ability to transcend their social rank and disability. Additionally, they hope the brilliance of the falls will at last validate their marriage.

Ellie and Albert sit in a train station waiting to depart for Niagara Falls. They are unable to travel by automobile like other characters in Welty’s fiction who had such access. They sit next to luggage with “their names were ever so neatly and rather largely printed on a big reddish-tan suitcase strapped crookedly shut, because of a missing

buckle” (Curtain 55-56). Though they once invested in this special luggage, they do not have the means to repair the broken buckle. The Morgans also reside in a rural area because, “they must have been driven into town in a wagon, for they and the suitcase were all touched here and there with a fine yellow dust, like finger marks” (Curtain 56). The space of the train station is new to this sheltered couple, but they have prepared for their trip by purchasing new clothes and accessories. In their attempt to travel to Niagara Falls, they carefully make an effort to assume the identity of traveling tourists. Albert sits with a hat in his lap, “a hat you were sure he had never worn,” and Ellie is wearing a “new Mary Jane slipper with the hard toe” (Curtain 56, 67). The couple is not sparing any expense or indulgence for their delayed honeymoon. They want to fully participate in the trip to the Falls, and must be properly dressed to do so, a small price for the self-fulfillment they will achieve by sharing in the experience typically enjoyed by the upper classes of society.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tourism did grow in Niagara Falls, causing question and concern for the increasingly popularized site. The tourist industry resolved quickly that “the culprit, it seemed, was the free public park” (Dubinsky 117). The park allowed those without the ability to purchase access to view the Falls. As a free opportunity the park permitted “the masses of people who could not afford extravagant prices for seeing Niagara Falls” to do so (Dubinsky 117). This statement presents the belief that commercialized elements of society, including land itself, should only be accessed by certain groups. As had been demonstrated in each of Welty’s stories, goods allow characters of all classes, especially women, to achieve some equality through personal and social satisfaction. Yet early in the tourism of Niagara

Falls, wealthier social classes condemned allowing poorer citizens this opportunity. Even though this critical belief existed, the park at the Falls was not the cause of increased tourism because “working-class people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still spent most of their time working” (Dubinsky 117). Thus, the very class that was criticized did not even have such access because they were too busy working for such an opportunity. Albert and Ellie are among this working class, as “it must have been her savings which were making possible this trip” (Curtain 56). This trip is a rare opportunity for people of their social rank, and furthermore their ability, because as they sit in the station, people who discover their handicaps look upon them with pity. Ellie has demonstrated her determination to participate in this exclusive opportunity, because “vacations with pay were a symbol of white collar status,” and Ellie has saved for many years and is now taking time off from work (Dubinsky 118). Furthermore, Ellie alone has made this trip possible because “she worked harder than he did, you could observe, comparing their hands” (Curtain 56). Ellie’s hard work allows us to compare her to Leota and Mrs. Pike. They carry the burden of breadwinner but work predominantly for the purpose of fulfilling their own hopes and desires. Ellie recognizes her sacrifice because when they don’t hear the call for their tickets, she signals her sorrow to Albert: “To work so many years, and then to miss the train” (Curtain 67). She represents the determination and will to participate that women have demonstrated throughout Welty’s stories.

Albert and Ellie, like the previous characters in the collection, are unfamiliar with novel things. They embrace opportunities, whether large or small, to fulfill personal desires and legitimize their love for one another. Niagara is a dream for them both, and Ellie first became enchanted with Niagara Falls at a young age. She remembers early

stories of marriage and honeymoons and the necessity to make such a trip to Niagara Falls because this allowed newlyweds “to start their happiness,” and this idea “came to be where she put her hope, all of it” (Curtain 68). Ellie and Albert’s afflictions have not helped the often difficult barrier of communication between man and woman or husband and wife, and she believes that their prolonged honeymoon will provide the marital satisfaction felt by other couples capable of visiting the Falls. Ellie keeps a postcard of Niagara Falls in her purse, and upon revealing the card, Albert begins to describe the scene to Ellie. He points to the railing along the Falls, which “is what the teacher pointed to with her wand on the magic-lantern slide” (Curtain 66). Even for Albert, Niagara Falls was a fascinating dream at a young age. Although “he must have told her hundreds of times in his obedience,” she listens intently and imagines how the water will sound, because she will “hear it with [her] whole self” (Curtain 67). Though Albert is excited like Ellie, he never believed their dream would come to fruition, because “he was never looking so far and so deep as Ellie,” who is the truly enchanted dreamer (Curtain 68). In fact, Albert’s fantasies are less momentous.

As the couple waits at the train station following their missed train, a red-headed stranger stands in the corner juggling a key. Immediately, the passengers in the station “guessed that he was a stranger, a criminal or a gambler” though he was “dressed like a young doctor but did not seem of the town” (Curtain 57-62). This outsider represents otherness, and the object he carries, though common, is rare to Albert. When the key suddenly slips out the stranger’s hand, it lands at Albert’s feet. Though, unlike everyone else in the station, Ellie and Albert do not hear the noise of the drop, he picks up the key “with an almost incandescent delight that he felt the unguessed temperature and weight of

the key” (Curtain 59). For Albert, the key is a symbol, just as Niagara Falls is for Ellie. The key represents “something important,” and opportunity that may have otherwise not been presented (Curtain 60). As “his lips were trembling,” he insists on its importance (Curtain 60). He explains to her that, “From now on we will get along better, have more understanding....Maybe when we reach Niagara Falls we will even fall in love, the way other people have done. Maybe our marriage was really for love, after all, not for the other reason--both of us being afflicted in the same way, unable to speak, lonely because of that” (Curtain 60). This simple mistake by the stranger has a monumental effect on Albert. Though he was less convinced of the possibilities Niagara Falls held as a commercial destination, he now believes the key is a sign that this trip will produce the inclusivity they have searched for all their lives. He insists to his wife that “it is a symbol of something, something that we deserve, and that is happiness. We will find happiness in Niagara Falls” (Curtain 61). Albert’s innocent interpretation of the key’s presence represents the ability for different objects to represent something more significant that may only be understood by the interpreter himself. The stranger’s act has elevated Albert’s enchantment with the Falls and his marriage to a level that Ellie had wished for throughout her life. Though their train has passed and they still sit in Mississippi, dreaming of the opportunity they will have once they are alongside the Falls, the couple is closer to the fulfillment of their dreams than they ever believed possible. As they wait in anticipation, the young man finally approaches the couple, offering a key engraved with a hotel room number.

Albert and Ellie Morgan represent cautious consumers who finally have the opportunity to fulfill lifelong dreams. By visiting Niagara Falls, they hope to defy

boundaries, such as low income and lack of transportation, which prevent the majority of the working class from similar experience. Additionally, they attempt to overcome their physical handicaps which have plagued their relationship with each other and the outside world. Most significantly, however, is the chance the couple will finally have to authenticate their marriage with a honeymoon. Ellie, who has been a determined saver throughout her life, will finally fulfill the dream she has been enchanted by since her childhood. Though Ellie is the one truly satisfying her dream to visit Niagara Falls, Albert also discovers his own intrigue along the way. As Niagara has been a symbol for Ellie, in his innocence, Albert allows a key to become such a symbol for him. The consumer elements of tourism and hotel access represent greater objectives of happiness and love. The Morgans, and specifically Ellie, are eager to accept consumer dreams as ideas in which they place both hope and significant meaning.

Welty's most impoverished characters are the most hopeful. They seek humble satisfaction in different ways and dream of opportunities which allow them to do so. In "A Worn Path," the last short story in *A Curtain of Green*, Welty introduces Phoenix Jackson, an elderly African American woman who is walking a great distance from her rural residence off the Old Natchez Trace into Natchez. Phoenix, though she is very poor, represents the African American consumer, who participates in the economy in a different way. She only makes the long trek when she is "bound to go to town" and "the time come around" for her to gather medicine for her ill grandson (Curtain 279). Though elderly, Phoenix must use youthful strength to overcome the banks and hills that create this "worn path," which Phoenix travels for necessity. In her description of Phoenix's journey, "Welty sharply contrasts this rural landscape and Phoenix's more metropolitan

and commercialized destination, Natchez” (Claxton 102). Like in many of Welty’s stories the differing spaces between rural residences and centers of commerce illustrate the inequality, but also the opportunity these rural Mississippians experience in these landscapes. As Phoenix walks the often wooded path, she uses an umbrella as “a thin, small cane,” and her dress is made of sugar sacks. Ownby reports that white society imposed upon the African American community the ideas of saving money. White women and agents of Negro Extension offices encouraged “African American women should economize, avoid extravagance, and be content with few goods” (Ownby 104). One element of this economization was using “sugar, flour, and feed sacks” to make clothing. Phoenix demonstrates this thriftiness by her wardrobe. She is not indulgent in her dress or appearance. More importantly, she is careful to protect her possessions.

As she traverses the hill path to town, she reminds herself that “it was not possible to allow the dress to tear” (Curtain 275). Her limited resources would make replacing the dress a difficult task. She insists further, when going through a barbed-wire fence that “she could not let her dress be torn now, so late in the day, and she could not pay for having her arm or her leg sawed off if she got caught fast where she was” (Curtain 276). Phoenix understands her destitute situation and is careful to economize her necessities. Ownby writes that Welty, in this description, is “dramatizing key elements of the rural non consumer,” because Phoenix “concentrates her energies on her family and makes do with what she has” (Claxton 148). This situation exposes the ironic circumstance of the African American consumer. Though Phoenix is willing to compromise her personal appearance and comfort, her immediate action of spending on any item other than a necessity is characterized as an extravagant indulgence. Whites

believed any excess money should be spent on essential items. In the case of Phoenix, her money should be spent on a new dress or a real cane, but instead, when given the opportunity, Phoenix indulges in the enchantment of the economy. However, this is not unique to the circumstance of this African American woman. In "Petrified Man," Leota, who is eager to find a new renter for the spare room in her home, is still willing to spend her last dollar to hear her fortune told by Lady Evangeline. White society was not as hastily condemning of such indulgence among white consumers who committed similar crimes against economizing. In Welty's stories, it is not African Americans, but women who are represented as the true consumers. Throughout the rest of her journey, Phoenix will encounter more indulgence from several characters.

As Phoenix gets closer to town, "a white man finally came along and found her" (Curtain 278). This description elicits the anticipation of white man confronting a black woman at a time of heightened racial relations. He cannot let her pass without inquiring of her destination. When she reveals that she is not headed towards her home, but going into town, he first reveals the difference, exclaiming, "Why, that's too far. That's as far as I walk when I come out myself" (Curtain 279). Not only is Natchez far from Phoenix's home, but is still a place rarely frequented by rural black residents, because even the white man says that when he visits town, "I get something for my trouble" as "he patted the stuffed bag he carried and there hung down a little closed claw" (Curtain 279). The white man's purchase represents the reward sought by those who journeyed into town. Moreover, Phoenix's trip into town is a different rarity: African Americans were limited by spending ability, and thus the town is a sphere infrequently visited by these citizens. Mae Miller Claxton observes the historical relationship between blacks and consumption,

stating that “In Natchez during the time of slavery, African Americans were the commodities bought and sold” (Claxton 105). Phoenix is not an expected consumer. She “was too old at the Surrender” to attend school, a fact which further contrasts Phoenix’s presence in town (Curtain 283). The white man doubts Phoenix’s ability and also criticizes her presumed indulgence, when he asserts that “I know you old colored people! Wouldn’t miss going to town to see Santa Clause!” (Curtain 279). His discriminatory statement accuses her of wanting a handout and a meaningless moment of entertainment. He believes her trip is not one of necessity, but only indulgence. Perhaps this is because “for generations, the Christmas season had been a central holiday in both the material and ritual lives of African Americans” (Ownby 81). This history began on the plantations when Christmas allowed a break from field work, and moreover, plantation owners would also provide their workers with new clothes and sometimes small sums of cash (Ownby 81). Though Phoenix is not going to town to experience the Christmas season, she like other African Americans, had “come to view Christmas as a time for a combination of material accumulation, sensual gratification, and holiday from labor” (Ownby 81). Once opportunity to participate presents itself to Phoenix, she will take advantage.

During her encounter with the man, Phoenix notices “a flashing nickel fall out of the man’s pocket onto the ground” (Curtain 279). As the man’s attention is elsewhere, Phoenix slyly takes the nickel from the ground and slips it into her sack pocket. The man does not notice, but as he turns to complete his journey home, he mockingly tells Phoenix, “I’d give you a dime if I had any money with me. But you take my advice and stay home, and nothing will happen to you” (Curtain 280). In this statement the white

man has offered a false gesture of gratitude and simultaneously a warning. He demeans Phoenix by offering false assistance, and his further caution criticizes her right to enter town and participate in the Christmas festivities. Though Phoenix has essentially stolen from the man, and she recognizes her sin, she will disobey his prejudiced commands and continue on her journey. As the path ends, she looks ahead and sees “Natchez shining” (Curtain 281). Once Phoenix enters the “paved city” where “it was Christmas time” she is met by the enchanting season and its decorations. This description represents the different seasons experienced by the different societies in Mississippi. Only in the “paved city” was it Christmas time. Here, only whites can afford to indulge in presents without criticism. As Phoenix walks under the “lights strung and crisscrossed everywhere, and all turned on in the daytime,” (Curtain 281) “Natchez is portrayed as a kind of wonderland, a fantasy world with its red and green electric Christmas lights crisscrossing overhead” (Claxton 102). The city is a transformed space made even more commercialized by the Christmas season. The city is so changed that “Old Phoenix would have been lost if she had not distrusted her eyesight and depended on her feet to know where to take her” (Curtain 281). As Phoenix walks through the square, “a lady came along in the crowd, carrying an armful of red-, green- and silver-wrapped presents; she gave off perfume like the red roses in hot summer, and Phoenix stopped her” (Curtain 281). Phoenix needs assistance tying her shoelace, because though the undone shoe “Do all right for out in the country,” it “wouldn’t look right going in a big building” (Curtain 281). Just like the window shopper dressed in her Sunday best, Phoenix understands the necessity to be presentable in town to earn both respect and attempt to solidify her right to be there. Surprisingly, “this perfumed woman” who “represents the white consumer culture of the

city as she participates in the Christmas buying season” agrees to help Phoenix (Claxton 102). The perfumed woman is portrayed differently from the perfumed xylophonist in “Lily Daw and the Three Ladies.” The musician is an outsider who intrudes on the social decency of the small town, whereas the perfumed woman is an insider in the economic culture from which Phoenix is forbidden to participate by both her financial, social, and racial status. Phoenix is unable to participate like either perfumed character. Phoenix prepares herself to properly engage in this space that is strictly limited to affluent whites. However, another generous, yet belittling act will soon allow her to participate in the Natchez economy.

As Phoenix climbs the long staircase into the doctor’s office, she enters a space that signifies intellectual success and high social status. She enters the room, and “she saw nailed up on the wall the document that had been stamped with the gold seal and framed in the gold frame” (Curtain 282). Perhaps it is a diploma, or possibly a certificate of doctoral authority; whatever the piece of paper is, it “matched the dream that was hung up in her head” (Curtain 282). Phoenix dreams of this place not only as a source of healthy and continued life for her grandson, but a place where the socially and intellectually elite can aid her. This healing space is a dream to her, one where she can fulfill both her necessary and imaginative dreams. To others, this space is just an office, and the attendant at the desk immediately designates Phoenix “a charity case, I suppose” (Curtain 282). Phoenix is ready to present herself in a “ceremonial stiffness” that illustrates the importance of her journey (Curtain 282). After receiving more rude remarks from the secretary, a nurse appears to defend Phoenix, asserting that “She doesn’t come for herself--she has a little grandson. She makes these trips just as regular

as clockwork” (Curtain 282). Contrary to the beliefs of the critical secretary, Phoenix is performing a selfless act. Though medicine is not an indulgence, Phoenix performs the long trek for the benefit of someone else, who happens to be her grandson who only “wears a little patch quilt” and lies in bed with an afflicted throat (Curtain 284). The doctor and his staff are willing to aid Phoenix, telling her that “as long as you came to get it, you could have it” because “it’s an obstinate case” (Curtain 284). The kind act is not without its benefits for the doctor, who checks the exchange off as “charity” for their records, and he will likely receive some advantage for the act. Now, the secretary becomes more sympathetic, enticingly asking Phoenix, “It’s Christmas time, Grandma. Could I give you a few pennies out of my purse?” (Curtain 284). Phoenix does not hesitate to seize the opportunity, insisting that “five pennies is a nickel” (Curtain 284). As the woman obliges, Phoenix retrieves the other nickel from her pocket, and “she stared at her palm closely, with her head on one side” (Curtain 285). Given this rare opportunity, Phoenix, whose “economic power is severely limited by her race,” decides to participate in the “white-controlled consumer culture strained across the color line” (Claxton 103). She decides, like the women in Welty’s previous stories, to indulge in the enchantment of the consumer culture. Yet, contrary to their actions, Phoenix again makes the selfless decision to surprise her grandson. She declares proudly to the women, “I going to the store and buy my child a little windmill they sells, made out of paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world. I’ll march myself back where he waiting, holding it straight up in this hand” (Curtain 284-285). Phoenix, though she decides to spend her little money on an unessential and amusing item, defies the common white belief that African American consumers acted selfishly to fulfill their indulgent desires.

Phoenix's purchase demonstrates her own interest in the item, but she is committed to pleasing her ill grandson. Phoenix's long journey into town, while demonstrating her want for involvement in the economy, "defies traditions and expectations," because she acts selflessly to aid and please her grandson (Ownby 148). However, immediately when the opportunity to spend presents itself, Phoenix does so. She uses her new nickels to participate in the economy and purchase the alluring windmill. Welty confirms her role as an African American consumer while simultaneously categorizing her as an enchanted consumer similar to the other white women in her stories

"A Worn Path" provides an often rare perspective on consumption using the interaction of an elderly African American woman and a changing economic and social landscape. Phoenix represents perhaps the most rural of Welty's characters. She must not only travel a lengthy distance into town, but she only does so for necessity. Furthermore, her poor dress and lack of accessories illustrate her position as one of Mississippi's most detrimentally poor. Phoenix is more unfamiliar with the growing enchantment of the economy because of her financial position, but because of her race as well. Her race defines her journey, during which she becomes both an intruder and a charity case. Phoenix defies common beliefs about African American consumers while simultaneously affirming them. Though she only enters town to selflessly secure medicine for her grandson, an opportunity presents itself that Phoenix cannot ignore. When Phoenix realizes that she possesses two nickels, she once again acts selflessly, but indulges in the purchase of a paper windmill she witnessed in a store window. Unlike the well-dressed woman in "Window Shopping" who can only dream through a store window front, Phoenix has encountered this rare opportunity and must take advantage. Though she

spends her excess change on a toy, instead of a more practical item such as a new dress or other necessity, the windmill signifies the rare occasion of consumer fulfillment she must seize. The windmill represents her hope for her grandson's health as well as her own ability to participate like other consumers. Phoenix, like all the women characters throughout Welty's stories, has affirmed her own economic power through this purchase while demonstrating her own dream to act among the other consumers at Christmas time.

Conclusion

Eudora Welty is unique among Mississippi's writers. Not only does she provide commentary on the state's economy through her short stories, but her years working for the Works Progress Administration have produced countless photographs and accounts that illustrate Mississippians' economic interactions during the Great Depression. Such images and accounts became the basis of many of her stories and characters. The impoverished farmers she photographed became Sara and Jason Morton, while the "Window Shopper" inspired Phoenix Jackson's ability to participate in the economy from inside the store. Welty's experiences at state fairs produced stories of captivating entertainment culture which intrigues her characters. Contrary to early criticisms on Welty's writing, her stories illustrate how residents in her native state interacted with a changing economy, and her own early interactions in *The Little Store* provide personal observations. This early "enchantment" Welty experienced is instilled in the female characters throughout her stories. Similar to Welty's own intrigue in this general store just moments from her home, characters experience their own temptations which manifest into differing ideals of the American Dream. Ted Ownby's description of these four dreams, though they are not the only criteria for consumer motivations, provide insightful structure on the function of dreams in the economy and in Welty's stories. Early critics were quick to discredit Welty's role as a commentator on early twentieth-

century consumerism, but the time in which she wrote and the observations she experienced cannot be ignored. At a time of extreme social change in Mississippi, consumer items are not only important in themselves, but they allow Welty's characters to transcend boundaries created by social ideals, gender constructs, and racial relations.

Although commercialized culture elevates many of Welty's characters to a position of higher external and internal fulfillment, some of her characters are less fortunately affected by consumer society. Salesmen in *A Curtain of Green* provide a unique perspective on the overwhelming excess which can accompany consumption. Though R.J. Bowman and Tom Harris are sellers of the American Dream, not buyers, they have become desensitized by their constant contact with capitalism and their many days and years spent traveling the road. Not only are these men still somewhat unfamiliar with Mississippi, the very state they try to target with their products, but their few personal interactions and relationships they have become obscured by the monotony of their occupations. The salesmen are disenchanted dreamers who do not use the economy for anything but financial fulfillment. However, this achievement itself becomes unprofitable as Bowman dies a lonely death far away from the cultured civilization he prefers and Harris continues his tedious travel from town to town, forgetting the women he's met throughout the state as only his automobile accompanies him. The disillusioned salesmen serve to contrast Welty's female characters, who possess a more profitable relationship with consumer culture.

Throughout the trials and successes of these characters, consumption serves as the avenue through which her characters achieve their own identity in the Mississippi society and its economy. The women in Welty's stories most effectively seize these

opportunities. Their dreams are not always established in the social sense of equality because their desires manifest in many ways. For Ruby Fisher in “A Piece of News,” consumer goods and her interactions with the sales market substitute for the desire of husbandly affection. In “The Key,” a physically impaired couple seeks marital validation as well as social ability through their prolonged honeymoon. Ellie Morgan possesses a fascinating dream of visiting Niagara Falls, and there she hopes to achieve a happiness she’s sought throughout her life. Just as the Little Store is enchanting to Welty, the consumer elements which allow these women to achieve their differing dreams enchant them as well. These dreams involve cosmetic indulgence for Leota and defying strict mental inferiority and strict social construct for Lily Daw. Sara Morton's nighttime dreams serve as her solace from the harrowing realities of her poverty. Welty even includes African American participation in the economy. The story of Phoenix Jackson is representative of historical conventions which criticized blacks as consumers, but Phoenix uses this opportunity for spending to indulge not for herself, but for her grandson. Each of Welty's women experiences the enchantment of the economy and exploit their opportunities for a variety of social and personal gains. These women define how consumers participate in and are motivated by the economy.

As we have seen, this thesis challenge scholarly arguments which overlook Welty's critical observations and writings on Mississippi's economy in the first half of the twentieth century. Welty not only provides this insight, but does so exceptionally through her photographs and short stories. Her commentary is neither a critique nor an endorsement of modern consumer culture, but instead her short stories illustrate how consumer desire manifests into different dreams which can be solved by their

participation in the economy. In Welty the capitalist economy is split along gender lines: Welty's male characters show the failure of the American Dream and women experience and exploit the economy in different ways. However, each of their personal interactions serves to alter their position in the economy, as either a disenchanting or enchanting consumer, and thus a sufferer or conqueror, of Mississippi's changing economic and social landscape in the twentieth century.

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