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Outings in the Queer South: Representations of Male Homosexuality in the Short Fiction
of Eudora Welty

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Mississippi

Ramona C. Wanlass
May 2012

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates Welty's four short story collections and treats the stories as separate entities that are intimately connected to each other by a theme that evolves over and yet transcends the forty odd years that seem to separate them—namely Welty's theme of male homosexual desire. I will examine Welty's story collections using a theoretical framework that incorporates a history of homosexuality in the South and investigates such themes as travel, identity, reactions to heterosexual coupling, and traces Welty's own experiences through the experiences of her fictional male characters. Welty's work spans several decades but in a discussion of her short fiction the timeline begins in 1941 with the publication of *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* and ends in 1955 with the publication *The Bride of Innisfallen and Other Stories*. This limited timetable allows us to follow, roughly, the evolution of Welty's writing and how the portrayals of male homosexuality change and grow. The development in the representation of these characters is just as significant as the acknowledgement of what remains the same: many tropes and commonalities that will be fleshed out in two short stories from each of Welty's four collections. From *A Curtain of Green, and Other Stories* (1941), "The Hitch-Hikers" and "Death of A Traveling Salesman" will be addressed. From her next collection, published in 1943, *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943), we will be looking at "First Love" and "A Still Moment." *The Golden Apples*, released in 1949 gives us "The Whole World Knows" and "Music from Spain." The

stories, “No Place for You, My Love” and “Going to Naples” from *The Bride of Innisfallen, and Other Stories* (1955) will pull together themes from the other collections to illustrate the changes in Welty’s depictions of male homosexuality.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Although southern writers sometimes uphold southern sex roles, such authors also faithfully test the bounds of women’s and men’s assigned places. Depictions of these mutable roles reflect not only the ever-changing southern literary canon, but also the evolution of southern social norms” (256).

Martha E. Cook & Courtney George from “Sex Roles in Literature”. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Volume 13: Gender.

Eve Sedgwick in *The Epistemology of the Closet* argues, “no one can know in advance where the limits of a gay-centered inquiry are to be drawn, or where a gay American tradition may need or be able to lead” (53). I wish to draw on Sedgwick’s insight to probe the limitations of queer reading and explore how we can lead homosexual inquiry to the center of a study of fiction. Specifically, I wish to add depth to the Southern literary tradition by examining the theme of homosexuality in the short fiction of Eudora Welty. I will show that Welty’s preference for the company of gay men echoes in her fiction’s inclination towards depicting queer masculinities. It is time to usher those inclinations to the center of the Welty canon with an analysis of her short stories. This project seeks to out homosexual representations found in Eudora Welty’s short fiction. I will examine these texts by using a theoretical framework that incorporates a history of homosexuality in the South. John Howard in his book, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* investigates such themes as travel, identity and reactions to normative behavior, which aids in creating a model by which I begin the process of analyzing Welty’s own experiences and the experiences of her fictional male characters.

This thesis investigates Welty's four short story collections and treats the stories as separate entities that are intimately connected to each other by a theme that evolves over and yet transcends the forty odd years that seem to separate them—namely Welty's theme of male homosexual desire.

Welty's work spans several decades but in a discussion of her short fiction the timeline begins in 1941 with the publication of *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* and ends in 1955 with the publication *The Bride of Innisfallen and Other Stories*. This limited timetable allows us to follow, roughly, the evolution of Welty's writing and how the portrayals of male homosexuality change and grow. The development in the representation of these characters is just as significant as the acknowledgement of what remains the same: many tropes and commonalities that will be fleshed out in two short stories from each of Welty's four collections. From *A Curtain of Green, and Other Stories* (1941), "The Hitch-Hikers" and "Death of A Traveling Salesman" will be addressed. From her next collection, published in 1943, *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943), we will be looking at "First Love" and "A Still Moment." *The Golden Apples*, released in 1949 gives us "The Whole World Knows" and "Music from Spain." The stories, "No Place for You, My Love" and "Going to Naples" from *The Bride of Innisfallen, and Other Stories* (1955) will pull together themes from the other collections to illustrate the changes in Welty's depictions of male homosexuality.

Evaluating and interpreting two short stories from each story collection allows me to have not only a temporal reading of Welty's concern with homosexual desire present in her fiction but an evolutionary one as well. In the first three of her short story collections, there exist multiple same sex encounters; they are not however, limited to

male same-sex desire. Among other sexual and gender related issues, her short fiction deals with everything from the homosocial, to instances of lesbianism and—that which this study will unearth—male homosexual desire.

As I am tackling the representation of homosexuality in Southern fiction, I draw on a number of essential studies. In 2005 Gary Richards' *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction 1936-1961* unveiled a similar study. Richards opens his book with Eve Sedgwick and her groundbreaking text, *The Epistemology of the Closet*. He writes, "Eve Sedgwick sets herself the task of scrutinizing the relation of gay/lesbian studies to current debates about literary canons, and, although she ultimately deems the relation tortuous, she argues for the absolute centrality of gay/lesbian inquiry" (1).

Like Richards, I turn to Sedgwick for the authority to acknowledge the importance of homosexual themes and presences in southern fiction. His argument stems from the notion that,

Despite the canonization of this literature by several generations of literary historians either largely unconcerned with or openly hostile to gay/lesbian inquiry, this body of work reveals a dazzling and complex array of representations in which sexuality in general and same-sex desire in particular help to constitute the mid-twentieth-century southern social matrix as understood by writers of this era and region (1-2).

Richards narrows his study to six prominent southern writers: Truman Capote, William Goyen, Richard Wright, Lillian Smith, Harper Lee, and Carson McCullers. These writers represent a multitude of differences, including sexual preference, race, gender and even life span. Though his study focuses on a period of southern writing known as the

Southern Renaissance, and does not mention Welty in any great detail—there is no chapter on her—it is his mode of inquiry that is essential.

Richards’ omission of Welty as a major figure for his study is surprising particularly since he is working within a timeline in which Welty was not only productive but also popular. She is included among the list of Southern Renaissance authors, the short list of which includes, “William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Thomas Wolfe, Caroline Gordon, Cleanth Brooks, and Andrew Lytle” (12). The list leads to an interesting comparison in which Richards notes Welty’s status within his canon, but denies her further study in his work. In his epilogue, Richards writes that Harlan Green’s *What the Dead Remember* particularly parodies texts by Eudora Welty, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, and Harper Lee,” three out of four authors that Richards has already situated within the realms of homosexuality, writing, and the South. He continues as though Welty was studied alongside Capote, Williams and Lee to say that these, “midcentury southern writers [whose] works repeatedly—if also, as I hope I have suggested earlier, momentarily, cryptically, and/or problematically—feature same sex desire and broader sexual difference” (205). Paradoxically, however, even as Richards includes Welty among those he has identified as writers who feature same sex desire, he fails to devote any time in discussion of how she might fit.

Richards clearly recognizes Welty as a writer dealing with the complex topic of homosexuality in the South, yet only in his the statement quoted above from his epilogue. Richards mentions Welty a handful of other times in his work, but only in passing and generally only to define the group of writers that encompass the Southern Renaissance.

The absence of a focused study of Welty in this text speaks loudly—especially when combined with Richards’ concluding words that place Welty alongside the “mid-century southern writers whose works [...] feature same sex desire” (205). This obvious absence provides me with the opportunity to fill in the gaps.

Although Richards’ study falls short of incorporating Welty, it does accomplish a great feat for the study of sexual otherness in southern fiction. His methodology, the ways in which he identifies homosexuality as part of a variety of personal backgrounds and appearances in literature, combined with historical understanding of the South, is the perfect foundation upon which to build a new understanding of Welty’s work as part of this canon.

Richards and I agree on two points that warrant clarification. First, as Richards claims, “while this study periodically draws upon biographical information about these writers, it makes no stronger arguments about these persons’ sexualities than that their fiction consistently displays a keen preoccupation with issues of sexuality and same-sex desire in particular” (6). Like Richards, I focus solely on representations of sexuality within the texts themselves, rather than “any documented or supposed personal experiences or self-proclaimed or imposed identities” of Eudora Welty (7). Secondly, it is not the intention of this study to pigeonhole Welty into a strictly queer theory-based reading nor any other fiction writer of her generation. Rather it my intention to call attention to where “evidence” of potential homosexuality appears, not to manifest it from a place it never was.

Perhaps one of the reasons Welty’s fiction has been omitted in queer interpretations is that her male characters fail to flamboyantly “out” themselves. Though

Welty's language outs them for careful readers this rhetoric is often veiled in such a way as to keep them in their closet, away from the untrained eye. But the question arises: why pen a cast of characters whose same-sex desire is undervalued rather than overt? Perhaps due to a social climate of homophobia in the 1930's and 40's, or an unwillingness to risk shallow stereotyping Welty made a conscious decision not to out her men, instead opting for what Richards' dubs an act of "strategic subversion" (28). Sharon Sharp writes that the South is frequently "portrayed as a subculture obsessed with sexual repression yet charged with undercurrents of sexual tension" (257). Possibly this has less to do with fear of repercussions as it does with the reality of a hidden homosexuality in Mississippi in the 1930's through '50's.

John Howard's landmark text, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, examines the multifarious history of homosexuality in the southern United States. This a powerful work that examines and establishes this history where there was previously a dearth of information. In his introduction, Howard writes,

Throughout the twentieth century, queer sexuality continued to be understood as both acts and identities, behaviors and beings. It was variously comprehended—depending in part on race and place—along multiple axes and continuums as yet unexamined by historians (xviii).

Howard's book provides a basis on which I will build evidence for what he calls "homodesire" in Welty's men. His analysis of how homosexuality survived (and thrived) within the confines of the homophobic American South through travel and the existence of queer sites and routines is especially useful to this study. As Richards lays the

foundation for a queer literary reading of these male characters, Howard delivers a historical framework on which my study will solidify its claims.

Eudora Welty was no stranger to homosexuality in the South. Her fifty-odd year relationship with John Robinson serves as proof of her acceptance and intimate knowledge of the (southern) homosexual community. Axel Nissen, in his article, “Queer Welty, Camp Welty” touches upon something of importance when he writes,

No matter what we think we know, wish we knew, or in future hope to discover about Welty’s own sexual and romantic life, we can be certain of one thing: Eudora Welty spent a substantial amount of time, particularly during her artistically formative years, surrounded by a loving circle of gay men (209).

Though Welty’s social circle incorporated many homosexual friends, most critics focus on the relationship between Welty and her dear friend John Robinson. Welty’s biographer, Suzanne Marris writes that the relationship between Welty and Robinson was often strained and complicated by his love for her and his homosexual desire (166). Marris asserts that, “Robinson had consistently sent Eudora mixed messages, [...] his love for Eudora, but his secret need for a male companion—must have tormented him and prompted his inconsistent behavior with her” (166).

The complicated relationship between Robinson and Welty is manifested in her writing just as are other personal experiences. In her short fiction these particular desires are just as complicated as in real life. Marris writes that Welty was openly accepting of gay friends though her “attitude toward ostentatious public displays of homosexuality, as toward any ostentation, could be dismissive” (202-3).

Clearly, overt displays of homosexuality often caused discomfort for Welty and led her to shy away from her openly homosexual friends like Hubert Creekmore, Frank Lyell, and Lehman Engel (Marrs, 207-8). This is precisely then, how one must approach her representation of homosexuality in her fiction. Homosexual desire is present but understated, arguably hidden by a veil of heterosexuality that causes many readers to miss it. This strategy of veiling homosexual desire might be seen as a reaction to Robinson's personal ambiguity and use of his relationship with Welty as a heterosexual veil or as an effort on Welty's part to ignore his desires and pursue heteronormativity.

Ann Waldron in *Eudora: A Writer's Life*, claims that the years prior to the publication of Welty's first book of short stories was one spent in the company of young men who were homosexuals. In the early 1930's when the Depression laid waste to much of the economy in the United States, Welty returned home to Jackson, Mississippi from Columbia University. Around the same time many of her artistic peers were also unemployed and were returning home to Mississippi (72-4). According to Waldron, many of Welty's companions during the decade prior to the emergence of *A Curtain of Green* (1941) were gay men, even if they may not have been necessarily known as such at the time. In discussion of Welty's inner circle during the 1930's Waldron repeatedly calls attention to the use of the term "sissy" as the dominant moniker of many of Welty's homosexual friends including Frank Lyell. Waldron writes, "Lyell, his friends recall, was the most sociable, most amusing member of Eudora's crowd. Even people who called him 'sissy,' a polite term for the unspeakable 'homosexual,' admitted he was funny, charming, and extraordinarily bright" (72).

During this time, “Eudora and John Robinson became the best of friends, and some people expected Eudora to marry him, though ‘the family never did,’ according to Robinsons’s sister-in-law” (Waldron, 74). Like Lyell, Robinson was also deemed “a little bit ‘sissy’” by his friends and peers. Waldron later concludes that, “[m]ost of her men friends—John Robinson, Hubert Creekmore, Frank Lyell, Leman Engel, Reynolds Price –were gay, as were many of her women friends” (268).

As Welty scholars know, that Eudora surrounded herself with a group of homosexual male friends is nothing entirely new. What is so important for this study about Waldron’s exploration of Welty’s private life is that she managed to narrow down a specific timeline that corresponds directly to a period in Welty’s life that was filled with experiences that would shape and influence the characters in the early stories we seek to shed new light upon. According to Marrs, this period in the early to mid 1930s when her friendships with these men was flourishing was also a time often “spent in solitude as she wrote” (47). This is the period during which Welty honed her craft and established the patterns of writing and composing that would follow her the rest of her career. These two events are wonderfully simultaneous: the frivolous activities of the Night-Blooming Cereus Club—the appellation Welty, Nash Burger, Lehman Engel, Hubert Creekmore, and Frank Lyell attached to their group of friends—and what Marrs calls Welty’s ability to embrace, “the writer’s double vision, the ability to see ‘two pictures at once in his frame, his and the world’s,’” and also the ability to manipulate the reader to see, “only one of the pictures—the author’s—under the pleasing illusion that it is the world’s” (48).

In comparison to other thematic elements throughout Welty’s writing, forms of “homodesire” appear in want of critical analysis. Few scholars have sought to make such

a presence known and all of these will figure prominently in this discussion. Axel Nissen whose work, *Manly Love: Romantic Friendships in American Fiction* deals with passionate friendships between men in the Victorian era, also wrote an article “Queer Welty, Camp Welty” which appeared in *Mississippi Quarterly* in 2003. In the latter Nissen claims, “[T]he legacy of these [gay] men’s lives and experiences only surfaces intermittently in Welty’s works, their spirit and their humor—which Welty shared in and contributed to—is frequently found in her fiction and often in places where one would least expect it” (209). Nissen shares my goal of using Welty’s life and friendships with homosexuals as inspiration for the appearance of homosexual desire in her writing. Nissen’s article focuses on the homodesire found in “The Hitch-Hikers” and his study proves invaluable and something on which we can expand.

My study shows that the connections Nissen notes between Welty’s life and friendships and her writing appears more than intermittently. The course of her friendship and brief romantic relationship with John Robinson features repeatedly in her male characters’ interactions with heteronormative relationships as does the violence that befell some of her gay friends, not to mention the overwhelming feeling of closetedness and the incommunicable nature of homodesire. The personal relationships Welty had with her homosexual male friends provided some background information for the characters found within her stories.

Rebecca Mark is another Welty scholar who has noticed queer sexuality in her fiction. Her text, *The Dragon’s Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty’s The Golden Apples* (1994), devotes much of its time to controversial feminist readings of Welty’s 1949 collection. Mark spends a great deal of time in the sixth chapter of her

book discussing the homoerotic themes present in one of the stories my study will also tackle, “Music from Spain”. Though Mark is using the scenes of male contact to flesh out a comparison between Welty and James Joyce, she nonetheless uncovers and gives voice to the male homosexual desire present in the text. Mark writes,

“Music from Spain” is much less neurotic and much more erotic than *Ulysses*, primarily because Welty allows the homoerotic subtext to emerge. Welty diminishes obsessive culturally constructed issues—fidelity, faithfulness, sexual obsession—and replaces them with self-discovery, journeying, meeting an/other, and the passion that emerges from this meeting. The simple physical interaction between two human beings, made even more direct by the fact that they do not speak each other’s language, forms the epiphany of this text (183).

Scholars investigating the topic of homosexuality are not limited to searching for its appearance in her fiction. Like Welty’s biographers Ann Waldron and Suzanne Marrs, critics studying her life have an immense interest in the men and women Eudora Welty choose to keep as her intimate friends. Welty’s unique relationship with the homosexual community has led this study to seek out in what ways this relationship is manifested in her writing. In her essay, “Writing and Analyzing a Story,” Welty claims that, “it seems likely that all of one writer’s stories do tend to spring from the same source within him” (Welty, 774). She furthers this assertion when she expresses that exploring a story begins in the world itself and that some unnamed emotion or facet of the outside world birthed the story. Though she acknowledges that, “the outside world and the writer’s response to it, the stories’ quotients, are always different, always

combining; they are always—or so it seems to me—most intimately connected with each other” (774). Welty’s words illustrate that each story springs from some place within her and that place is intimately connected to the outside world and to her personal experiences.

Establishing the notions that Welty was no stranger to the gay community in Jackson, Mississippi and that other critics have seen the theme of homosexuality at work within her fiction necessitates a longer discussion of the South as a gay place. The concept of place is one that frequently appears in Welty’s fiction, though rarely in conversation with homosexuality. Canonically speaking, Welty’s writing is often examined in terms of regionalism and her famous “sense of place.” Barbara Ladd’s essay in *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*, “Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places—Past, Present, Future” addresses a topic many critics are concerned with—Welty’s sense of place. Ladd writes that place ought to be refined in order “to be constructed not as a stable site of tradition and history within a progressive nation but as something more provisional, more fleeting, more subversive, and likewise more creative” that place not necessarily be reliant upon a location grounded in geography (56). Welty’s own essay “Place in Fiction” affirms Ladd’s view on broadening the definition of place. Welty suggests, “place is where he [the author] has his roots, place is where he stands, in his experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point of view” (781).

Welty scholars then are divided into two camps; those, like Ladd, who believe, “it must be imagined more like the way that Eudora Welty imagines it; and literary critics need to develop a vocabulary for the discussion of the way place animates a text, governs

movement, and makes change possible” (51), and those who read Welty against what she states in “Place in Fiction.” This is a reading that moves against the idea of the rootedness of the Southern writer and Welty’s invitation “not to disown any part of our heritage” (796).

A sense of place inspires her writing. Welty claims, “[i]t is by the nature of itself that fiction is all bound up in the local. The internal reason for that is surely that feelings are bound up in place. The human mind is a ‘mass of associations’” (782). Welty’s sense of place and acknowledgement of the rich associations it offers makes my argument for a connection between Welty’s personal life and her writing much more salient. Welty’s own life, as her biographers suggest, situates her in a Southern place and reading her stories closely, we might call it “the queer south.”

As Peggy Whitman Prenshaw asserts in “Welty’s Transformations of the Public, the Private, and the Political,” much of the criticism specific to *A Curtain of Green* deals with the evidence of modernity throughout, the inescapable commercial world and in written response to a “specific historical context” to a particular “time and place” (16). The collection, she writes, reflects a depression-era Mississippi that Welty would have been all too familiar with from her days as a photographer in the WPA. Indeed the snapshots she took as a junior photographer seem often translated into print. Specifically touching on two of the short stories this study will scrutinize, Prenshaw remarks that “The Hitch-Hikers” is a tale of an impoverished wanderer, a lost soul who has “neither physical nor spiritual security” (16). R.J. Bowman, the “lost soul,” dies what Prenshaw calls a “lonely death” with the “nearly silent presence of the backwoods couple mark[ing] the Mississippi hill country as utterly remote from political life” (26). On a closer look

this depression context also reveals the world of lonely traveling salesmen in light of a southern homosexual cruising scene that Welty critics have yet to discover.

Welty's second collection, *The Wide Net* (1943) differs in both tone and subject matter from her first publication. Critics address this collection in a much more expansive and varied manner as well. Though stories in *A Curtain of Green* deal with aspects of the Mississippi landscape, in both a geographic and perspective sense, it really is not until *The Wide Net* that Welty begins to truly describe of landscape of Mississippi's people, history and geography. Using the recurrent backdrop of the Natchez Trace she places Mississippi history and Native American history in the forefront of her readers' imaginations. But in this collection as well, homodesire has eluded critical scrutiny.

Annette Trefzer reads *The Wide Net* in her article, "Tracing the Natchez Trace: Native Americans and National Anxieties in Eudora Welty's 'First Love'" to reveal the incredibly complex levels of history and geography. Trefzer writes, "the understated nature of Welty's historical and political commentary does not make it less important, or 'present,' but [...] the 'presence' history assumes in her writing is precisely over things that are left out" (421). For Trefzer then "First Love" becomes a tale about navigating the territory between history and story. What is significant about Trefzer's work is the bridging of the gap between history and story and how Welty's reorienting of a historical account shrouds the behaviors of her male characters. Study of Welty's historical figures has a tendency to overshadow the presence of homodesire in favor of historical veracity.

Another of the more prevalent interpretation comes from Rebecca Chalmers in "Untangling the Wide Net: Welty and Readership" in which she writes that the anthology

is a veritable collection of mysteries. The first of these mysteries comes from the lead story, “First Love”. Chalmers writes,

While it is true that story does mention love once in connection with Joel Mayes, the protagonist and the eyes through which we read the story, it does so in terms of Joel’s love for the characters (Burr, Blennerhassett, and Blennerhassett’s wife) to whom he feels connected, but this connection does not seem to satisfy the promise of the title (92).

Chalmers’ finds Mayes’ affection too insignificant for study, choosing instead to provide a reading of the text as fundamentally, “ a metaphor for Welty’s first love: reading” (92). For Chalmers this creates a reading that uses Mayes as the medium through which readers understand the story (93). In her passionate discussion of *The Wide Net* and Welty’s large readership, Chalmers remarks only that “A Still Moment” is a tale “in which three historical character share a moment, but nothing more” (98). In this story collection, two critics have pointed out hidden signifiers and spoken of love, but they have not discovered the secret in plain sight: a young man’s attraction to another man and Welty’s erection of a space in the historical South that allows for such an encounter.

The secret of honodesire also remains hidden in evaluation of Welty’s third story collection. Critical evaluations of *The Golden Apples* (1949) are diverse. This collection is ripe with a variety of sexual and gender related themes. Patricia Yaeger notes that the collection easily lends itself to “strange evocations of gender and racial injustice” that should have “changed the South’s universe” (73). Even though Yaeger explores sexuality, women’s writing, and race in Welty’s text much of what Yaeger writes does not deal with sexuality and male same sex desire. Instead Yaeger examines Welty’s work

through depictions of white femininity or race issues and she is interested in characters like the young Easter in “Moon Lake” or Ellen Fairchild of *Delta Wedding*. Yaeger’s analysis of Welty explores female sexuality in white southern culture. Though my study deals with sexuality it focuses more so on masculine desire, with little use for the feminine except in distinct cases of heterosexual coupling.

Welty’s final book of short stories, *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, was published in 1955—14 years after her first collection. Suzanne Marrs, in “Place and the Displaced in Eudora Welty’s *The Bride of the Innisfallen*” directs attention to this story compilation using the familiar topic of place in fiction. She writes that, “Welty does not suggest, as she had so often before, that place is essential to identity. Instead she deals with the way individuals can live and create meaning for themselves without being rooted in place and time” (1).

Welty sets “No Place for You, My Love” in New Orleans, one of the most openly gay centers in the South, yet critics continue to persist reading for heterosexual plots. Marrs, for example, finds that the story can be filed away in the ranks of the magical realism genre saying, “the mysterious and little known world [...] seems very contemporary, and so too does the story’s conclusion. Driving out of the primitive landscape, the woman from Toledo and the man from Syracuse return to the confines of New Orleans [...] this return dooms their relationship, but the relationship itself is reluctant to die” (13). Welty addresses this particular story in her essay, “Writing and Analyzing a Story” where she claims that she “had no wish to sound mystical” but, she adds “I admit that I did expect to sound mysterious now and then, if I could: this was a circumstantial, realistic story in which the reality *was* a mystery” (779). In her

biography of Welty, Marris writes that the story revolves around two individuals who are involved in violent or loveless relationships and that it is the “suffering that love has brought to both these individuals [that] leaves them in quest of ‘imperviousness’; they want to avoid thinking about their situations, and they want to avoid exposing their situations to others” (219).

The final story in this collection, “Going to Naples” is often considered in terms of travel and how Welty’s personal journeys are reflected in it. Marris explains that Welty’s trip to Italy in 1949 was used a model for the story itself (175). She also remarks that the collection is marked by female protagonists finding fulfillment outside of romantic entanglements but in their own “independence and self-sufficiency” as Gabriella, the young protagonist, learns that unmarried women have a power unto themselves (210).

For all of these great and varied places whether Italy, New Orleans, or Natchez, Welty’s work inhabits, a queer South has not yet been discovered. Mark only reads the homosexuality latent within *The Golden Apples* and Nissen only hints at the notion that Welty’s position in the Night Blooming Cereus Club places her in the center of the gay community of Jackson, MS. Critics, like Mark and Marris have not yet addressed the broader gay community who struggled against preconceived notions of behavior and this depiction in Welty’s fiction.

John Howard’s book, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* and his essay “Gays” found in *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume 13: Gender* can address some these occurrences. In “Gays” Howard writes that all people who outwardly express

desires considered sexually other often have more difficulties in the South than in other regions (122). What is interesting about this however, Howard continues, is that,

The nominally conservative institutions of small-town and rural life—home, church, school, and workplace—have been the very sites where queer sexuality has flourished. [...] Though usually clandestine, same-sex relations have been enabled by the distinctive qualities of rural landscapes and social structures. Though they may publicly denounce homosexuality, many southerners practice a day-to-day, quiet accommodation of difference. (123)

In other words, same-sex relationships flourished in the very place where they were most reviled. Rural queers developed their own system of survival in places like Mississippi by devising “acceptable roles within their families of origin as spinster aunts or confirmed old bachelor uncles” (123). Those familiar with Welty’s breadth of work will recognize quite a number of spinsters in her fiction and perhaps some confirmed old bachelors as well.

Southern queers had to establish their own rules, their own ways of maintaining their lifestyle out of the watchful, and wary, public eye. Howard works in great detail with “distinctive features of Mississippi’s social and physical landscape” using it to create a more complete historical diagram for how individuals manipulated their surroundings to create a “whole unique queer Mississippi” (xix). For this study, which traces the chronological development of Welty’s stories and the male homosexual characters, Howard’s history is an essential text that draws together all aspects of southern homosexuality. Welty was not overlooked by Howard’s history. He notes on

several occasions Welty's friendship with several gay men including Hubert Creekmore and Frank Hains (192, 227).

Howard writes that when dealing with the historical lineage of homosexuality in the South, one must be able to read the silence and understand that this silence does not necessarily indicate absence. He says that such a reading, "in order to offset the multitiered biases against queer historical inquiry, must assume from the beginning the *presence* of queer desire" (28). This concept of silence (not absence) and the assumption of queer desire prove essential in constructing a reading of the homosexual silence (but presence) found in Welty's short fiction. The silence in Welty's fiction does not necessarily acknowledge or offer proof of homosexual desire in her work, yet it is precisely what we read in these silences that illustrates that homosexual desire is as present and restrained as it was in her personal experience of the South. Following this silence as well as Welty's depictions, deviations, and repercussions of sexual desire, including homosexuality, in these stories, we will read a deeper level of understanding of Eudora Welty's place in fiction.

It is a daunting task to stand in the face of these incredible, comprehensive, and rooted insights that span the breadth of Welty's work and decide instead to queer it. Rather than submit a study that is perceived as controversial for the sake of scandal, I will step back before delving into the texts themselves and construct a foundation based upon such celebrated texts as *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick writes that in our society "the issues of homo/heterosexual definition show over and over again how preposterous is anybody's urbane pretense at having a clear, simple story to tell about the outlines and meaning of what and who are homosexual and heterosexual" (54). Sedgwick

gives us the leverage we need in order to understand Welty's work in this stimulating new light. Looking at the short stories for the silent presence of male homosexuality will not only add a new and deeper level to the canon of Welty scholarship, but will, I hope, make a lasting contribution to the queer south. This contribution will increase the amount of literature thought to contain male homosexuality and will afford students and scholars the opportunity to increase the body of literature from a particular period and place to include an entirely new sub-genre.

What is so fascinating about the homosexual entanglements present in Welty's fiction is that they so frequently stem from or are accompanied by an underlying dissatisfaction with or failed attempt at heterosexuality. This dissatisfaction seems to refocus the characters at hand and trigger some sort of release from the confines of heteronormativity. Now I don't mean to argue that homosexuality is failed heterosexuality but that these male characters experience their own homosexuality after discovering their incompatibility with heterosexuality. Patterns and evolutions, like the recognition of homosexuality independently of or as a reaction to a disenchanting exposure to heterosexuality or the pursuit of homodesire in the South, emerge when undertaking a study of Welty in this fashion. The following chapters trace the development of these themes through four of her story collections, beginning with *A Curtain of Green*.

I. DRIVING DESIRE TO DEATH: EUDORA WELTY'S TRAVELING SALESMEN IN *A CURTAIN OF GREEN*

Welty's collection, *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*, that contains both "The Hitch-Hikers" and "Death of a Traveling Salesman" appeared on the literary scene in 1941. Both stories were among the first of Welty's works to achieve publication and each story appeared separately. "Death of a Traveling Salesman," though it emerges toward the end of the story collection, debuted in *Manuscript* in 1936, three years before "The Hitch-Hikers" was published in *Southern Review* in 1939.

One of striking similarities between the two texts is that both of Welty's protagonists are traveling salesmen. Although both Tom Harris of "The Hitch-Hikers" and R.J. Bowman of "Death of a Traveling Salesman" have minor interactions with women, Welty emphasizes the male encounters and the possibility of homosexuality through travel. In an era of transience, spurred on by a marked increase in the availability of the automobile, "homosex" was becoming just as transient. As Howard writes, the rise in popularity of the automobile in Mississippi provided a special and secret queer meeting space. He states, "cars were sites for queer sex in Mississippi [...] cars drew hitchhikers aiming to get sex; and [...] helped bring large numbers of men-desiring-men together often in one queer space" (100). In fact, Howard asserts, "sometimes it seemed that being in the car and being on the road epitomized queer travel in Mississippi" (103).

While the cult of obsession with the automobile was growing so was the amount of men hitting the open roads looking for sex (113).

During a time in United States history marked by general economic struggle, the queer community in Mississippi, much like the African-American community, felt the enormous effects of this economic downturn. Jobs were scarce regardless of sexual persuasion but more often than not, “homosexuals and transsexuals were not welcome in the workplace” (Howard, 71). Thinking about Welty’s stories in this context, a traveling sales position would offer an opportunity for the secreted or generally silent homosexual encounter.

Harris and Bowman possess several characteristics of the mobile and working gay man from Mississippi in the 1930’s and 1940’s. The protagonists’ mobile vocation lent itself quite easily to homosexual relations. Thus we can place Bowman and Harris, traveling men whose occupation in more ways than one enabled and embodied a homosexual lifestyle, in a prime space for seeking and receiving homosex. Working fairly flexible hours Harris and Bowman would have been in control of their own stock and customer base and possess a relative lack of supervision. This absence of supervision allows for not only tolerance of sexual behavior but also a freedom from the risks that accompany the relative job insecurity that encompassed the economic market where queer Mississippians were concerned.

Though critics have yet to read Bowman in any queer light, Axel Nissen begins to see evidence of homodesire in “The Hitch-Hikers” in his analysis of Tom Harris’s relations with the two male hitchers. Before delving into his textual investigation, Nissen keys on an important feature of the text as a whole, what he calls Welty’s almost

“Hemingwayan focus on men without women” which he remarks—and this study agrees—is no coincidence (211). Nissen also prefaces his work with notes on how the story was received by its reviewers: namely, that it was almost universally agreed upon that “something is apparently very wrong with the protagonist of the story.” Nissen writes that a number of male critics like Peter Schmidt, James Walter and Alfred Appel, “felt uncomfortable with and disapproving of Tom Harris” (211-12).

The plot of Welty’s tale is simple enough; Harris is a solitary traveling salesman and as he navigates through the Mississippi Delta he spots two tramps. Harris stops and offers them a ride. Sobby takes a seat in the back, and Sanford, with his yellow guitar, takes the seat next to Harris. Their drive is relatively uneventful. They pause only for food before entering a town familiar to Harris for the evening. But things take a dramatic turn while Harris checks in to the hotel. Sobby—still in Harris’ car—strikes Sanford over the head with an empty beer bottle and injures him severely. Between the commotion this event brings to the small town and inquiring as to whether Sanford will live or die, Harris finds his way to a party thrown by Ruth, a woman he knows. There he meets another young woman, Carol who claims to have met him years before. Sanford dies during the night and Sobby confesses to what has become a murder and not long after Tom Harris drives on.

Nissen’s two main topics of analysis are “scientific discourses on the homeless man and on homosexuality in the period” and how they intersect. Nissen uses several studies on the sociology of tramps in the 1930’s to relate the behaviors of Sobby and Sanford, even at times Harris. A significant portion of his scientific approach revolves around the transient man and his interactions with women. Nissen claims that the loss of

Sobby's mother and a tendency to speak of her in reverent language and the notion that the men typically treat woman as extemporaneous speaks not only to Sobby and Sanford but to Harris as well. When his friend Ruth arranges for him to meet young Carol, Harris acts with distinct indifference. Nissen writes that this lack of interest "in a woman who makes herself available to him is sufficient to mark him as neurotic, unnatural, and emotionally underdeveloped, the exact same terms in which homosexual men have been described during most of the twentieth century" (215).

Though Harris is clearly not attracted to Carol, there is distinct evidence of his attraction to Sanford. Nissen argues this as well and notes that, "despite what may be described as vivid opportunities, all three men fail to act on their heterosexual male prerogative to pursue and have sexual relations with women" (215). But Nissen does not explore how deep the connection is between the three men and he draws attention only to two specific scenes. These scenes are important in creating Nissen's argument, though there are numerous others that could support the argument we both put forth of homodesire. The first scene occurs when the men stop for burgers and the proprietor shouts, "Come on in boys, we got girls" but the men pay little attention to this invitation, even barely noticing the waitress with Sanford only noticing her "red sailor-boy britches" but he acknowledges that she is, "not purty" (Nissen, 78). Not only do the men fail to engage the owner in his offer of what can only be solicitation, they are refusing heterosexual temptations. The second instance Nissen draws attention to actually occurs before the first and is thick with sexual innuendo and an almost taunting hopefulness. Sanford tells Harris, "I bet you ain't got no idea where all I've slep', ' the man said,

turning around in his seat and speaking directly to Harris, with laughter in his face that in the light of a road sign appeared strangely teasing” (Welty, 77).

In addition to these two important scenes, there are several more indicators like the above that speak to Harris’s attraction to Sanford. Each time Sanford speaks he provokes a unique, almost giddy reaction in Harris. During their first conversation, Harris’s “cheek twitched” and later as Welty makes it plain, “nearly every time the man spoke Harris’s cheek twitched. He was easily amused” (77-8). Harris’s attention to Sanford increases after the guitar player is placed in the hospital. Harris feels an almost constant urge to check on Sanford. Harris “was free; helpless. He wished he knew how the guitar player was, if he was still unconscious, if he felt pain” (88). Nissen acknowledges that the only other character other than the men who picks up on Harris’s heart-felt concern for Sanford is Carol. Carol, who has been trying all evening to win the affections of Harris, is constantly overshadowed by Harris’s concern for the hitchhikers. Nissen writes, “If there is a human plight being revealed here, it is that of Harris, who has experienced a moment of human connection and then lost it again. The only witness to this moment is Carol, who seems to have an intuitive understanding of the whole situation when she remarks tearfully in parting, ‘I hope your friend doesn’t die...All I hope is your friend gets well’” (217).

The silent but existent expression of homodesire begins when Harris sees the two men standing on the side of the road. It is the man “playing a yellow guitar which caught the late sun as it came in a long straight bar across the fields” that triggers his immediate reaction to pick them up (Welty, 76). In the following paragraph Welty emphasizes the impact the men make on Harris,

The recurring sight of the hitch-hikers waiting against the sky gave him the flash of a sensation he had known as a child: standing still, with nothing to touch him, feeling tall and having the world come all at once into its round shape underfoot and rush and turn though space and make his stand very precarious and lonely (76).

Harris experiences a rush of emotion upon seeing these men, a rush that brings him at once back to childhood, an arguably naked, pre-pubescent, pre-sexual past. But the image of these men is charged with another realization that lies just past the innocence of childhood, when the world reveals itself to him in one broad stroke leaving him feeling, “very precarious and lonely”. These words can very aptly be applied to the condition of a traveling salesman, but also to the emotional condition of a man longing for connection with other men.

There are some important images and references in the early interactions of these male characters, like the above sensation, that require attention. The first of these is the image that draws Harris’s attention to the men at the start, Sanford’s yellow guitar. From the way the guitar catches the sunlight on the side of the road, to the way Sanford sits with the guitar resting between his legs, to its almost constant reference each time Sanford speaks, the guitar is an emblem of something greater. At one point, Harris thinks,

I’ll hear him play his guitar yet [...] it was by the guitar that he had known at once they were not mere hitch-hikers. They were tramps. They were full blown, abandoned to this. Both of them were. But when he touched it he knew obscurely that it was the yellow guitar, that bold and

gay burden in the tramp's arms, that had caused him to stop and pick them up (78-9). Welty's language is rife with interpretations. Harris's longing to hear the tramp play his *bold, gay instrument* as the impetus for picking them up is far from being obscure. Moreover, this bold, gay instrument undergoes a metaphysical shift. We see Welty use the guitar as a sort of "gay" signifier early in the story and the device is plainly referred to as a guitar by each man. Only once does its later moniker, "the box," appear in these early scenes. When Harris touches one of the keys on guitar and inquires why Sanford doesn't earn money strumming his guitar for the public, Sanford slaps the guitar with the palm of his hand and replies, "'this box? Just play it for myself'" (79). This declaration sparks delight in Harris who "had a desire to tease him, to make him swear his freedom" (79). When Sanford is declared dead, the references to "the box" appear with more frequency, especially in terms of what will become of it. The final scene reads,

'Mr Harris,' said a little colored boy who stayed. 'Does you want the box?'

'The what?'

He pointed, to where it lay in the back seat with the sample cases.

'The po' kilt man's gittar. Even the policemen didn't want it.'

'No,' said Harris, and handed it over (91).

No longer is the guitar Sanford's bold, gay instrument that lead Harris to pick up the hitch-hikers; now it has become simply a box, a useless thing Harris no longer wants.

This instrument, rather the guitar, is important in the relationship between Sobby and Sanford as well. The traveling tramps have an interesting partnership. Sanford, loquacious and friendly and Sobby, somber and meditative have been together for quite a

while it seems. Sanford tells Harris, “‘Well, we been there a whole day in that one spot,’ he said softly. ‘Seen the sun go clear over. Course, part of the time we laid down under that one tree and taken our ease’” (76). Welty’s language leaves room for interpretation as readers struggle to make sense of what two men beneath a tree taking a rest could entail.

The homosexuality of Sobby and Sanford might not be explicit but we can argue homodesire in the case of both men as we did with Harris, or, as Howard might say, not necessarily men *like* that but perhaps men *who like* that. In the case that Sobby and Sanford are men who like that, Sanford is the more assertive and, one could say, the more “out” of the two. Sobby fails to engage Harris in the car, uttering no more than solitary grunts or single word answers in a “slow and pondering voice” (77). When Sanford is found bleeding in Harris’s car, onlookers speculate that Sonny wanted to “make off with car—he’s the bad one. So the good one says, ‘Naw, that ain’t right.’ [...] ‘So the other one says bam! Bam! He whacked him over the head.’” Only Harris is left thinking the situation may have been the other way around (81).

There is evidence, however, that the situation leading up to the beating may have been about something other than stealing the car. Before Harris learns of Sanford’s death he recalls something Sobby said, “standing handcuffed in front of the hospital, with nobody listening to him. ‘I was jist tired of him always upp’in’ an’ making a noise about ever’thing’” (87). Sobby refuses to shirk the opportunity to confess in the end claiming,

‘But he didn’t have nothing and he didn’t have no folks. No more ‘n me. He and me, we took up together two weeks back.’ He looked up at their faces as if for support. ‘He was uppity, though. He bragged. He

carried a gittar around.’ He whimpered. ‘It was his notion to run off with the car.’ (90)

Several things are curious about this situation: why it is that Sobby struck Sanford if it was not his idea to steal the car? How it is that Harris knew from the start that it was Sanford who wanted to take the car? Given the situation, I propose that the fight was not truly about the car at all. Sobby fails to immediately identify Sanford as the thief and thus identifying the beating as a direct reaction to Sanford’s wild idea. Because this statement comes at the end of his confession, after a whimper, it seems he is confessing to a different set of conditions. He describes Sanford as an uppity braggart and cites as evidence the guitar. If we think of a sort of homosex identifier, then Sanford was quite literally waving it about for the world to see. From the start, Sobby is uncomfortable with the situation in which he finds himself, obviously not in his affiliation with Sanford, but with the new addition of Harris. Clubbing Sanford, if as I believe was a reaction to a threat, may not have been a reaction to the threat of theft but to a possible sexual threat instead. Sanford once remarked in reference to Sobby, “He don’t like foolin’ around. He wants to git on. You always git a partner got notions” (79). It seems Sanford’s more flamboyant displays of homosexuality were the ones that got the pair in trouble. Onlookers, Welty writes, would not call this trouble “an affair of honor.” Indeed, if this an affair is a lover’s spat, no one in that small, Mississippi town would call it honorable (90).

Sobby and Sanford’s troubled and queer—in both popular senses—partnership, Tom Harris’s attraction to them, and his clear rejection of his young date Carol and her friend Ruth point to the larger theme of homodesire. This coupled with Harris’ occupation, and the death of a man for whom he develops a queer affection bears a

strikingly resemblance to another of Welty's short stories, "Death of a Traveling Salesman."

In this story, a traveling shoe salesman cruises along a desolate Mississippi back road. He remembers his recent illness with specific regard for a nurse and the memory of how safe his grandmother and her feather bed were for him in his youth. Women—he recalls as he drives the remote, solitary lanes—remind him of "the worn loneliness that the furniture of that room [his grandmother's] seemed built of" (145). The road comes abruptly to an end and the hapless shoe salesman, R.J. Bowman, watches passively as his automobile runs almost of its own accord down a bleak embankment. He does, however, remember to remove his bag and sample case from the car before it lands in a ditch. Clutching the luggage to his chest and swaying slightly, Bowman watches his car complete its decent.

Welty characterizes Bowman's interactions with women in the opening scene of the story as inexperienced. He gives an expensive bracelet to his attractive nurse for seemingly no other reason than she was packing her bags to leave. This gift giving is a sign that Bowman has no intimate knowledge of how to interact with the opposite sex. Paying the nurse for services rendered would have been appropriate for Bowman may understand that men frequently bestow gifts upon women, but his token is one of affection where only a professional relationship existed.

In the same opening passage there is also a brief reference to Bowman's grandmother. As he recalls his debilitating bout of influenza, he thinks, "all afternoon, in the midst of anger, and for no reason, he had thought of his dead grandmother. She had been a comfortable soul. Once more Bowman wished he could fall into the big feather

bed that had been in her room...Then he forgot her again” (145). Could this brief recollection be of a time in prepubescent youth when sexual desire was not yet present? This memory of the love and comfort of his grandmother foreshadows his transition from presumed heterosexuality to desiring homosexuality.

There are echoes of this limited number of male-female interactions here from “The Hitch-Hikers”. Nissen’s interpretation shows a strikingly similar relationship between the protagonist Tom Harris (also a traveling salesman) and Bowman. Nissen claims, “Harris’s chief emotional investment is in another man and this same-sex love is in itself sufficient to make him queer in our eyes, though not necessarily in the eyes of the Mississippi of the 1930’s” (217). Tom Harris appears queer to twenty-first century eyes, but Bowman, too, exhibits these queer characteristics. First, he too is a traveling salesman. Second, Bowman’s interactions with woman are formal and discreet at best. And finally, any affection exhibited by Bowman after his accident is directed toward members of the same sex, not the opposite sex.

Upon watching his car careen over the edge of the embankment, Bowman begins the search for shelter and help. He finds a shotgun house he’d seen along the way and begins to feel a strange pounding within his chest: “all of a sudden his heart began to behave strangely. Like a rocket set off, it began to leap and expand into uneven beats patterns of beats which showered into his brain, and he could not think” (146). These rapid heart palpitations are an occurrence that will be repeated in only one other context at which time the poignant significance of this aberration will be revealed. As he approaches the house, he sees that a woman occupies it. Welty writes of their first encounter, “as for the woman standing there, he saw at once that she was old. Since she

could not possibly hear his heart, he ignored the pounding and now looked at her carefully, and yet in his distraction dreamily, with his mouth open” (147).

Bowman neither sees nor “reads” the woman in the cabin very well. During his introductory moments with this woman, he notices her “weather-beaten but un wrinkled face” and promptly judges her to be at least fifty years of age (147). He also judges the woman to be stupid. She offers the aid of a man Bowman presumes to be “her son—a fellow able to bring my car up, he decided in blurred relief,” and she invites Bowman inside to rest and wait (147-8). Bowman notices upon entering the home that the room “was cold. He stared at the hearth with dead coals lying on it and iron pots in the corners” and wonders why there is no fire (148). But his conversation with the woman is limited, as she repeats that “Sonny’ll be here. He’s strong. Sonny’ll move your car” by way of small talk. The entrance of Sonny soon eclipses this interaction.

Sonny, a “big enough man, with his belt slung low about his hips [...] looked at least thirty. He had a hot, red face that was yet full of silence” (149). He agrees to hoist the car from the ditch and get Bowman back on the road. When he leaves to retrieve the car, Bowman hears his step, “his powerful way of walking—almost a stagger” which causes Bowman’s heart to “mischievously” resume its frantic beating so that “it seemed to walk about inside him” (150). This frantic beating, for which Bowman seems to know no medical or biological origin, is a symptom of his loneliness and desire for the company of men. This is the reason the woman could not hear his loud heart beat.

Bowman’s bizarre heart palpitations are caused by walking along a deserted road and the strong footsteps of Sonny. This lonely heart that responds to the presence of a man seems to indicate homosexual desire. Recall the mobility discussion with regard to

homosexuality of which Howard writes, “car culture reigned. Increasingly, men looking for [homo]sex had to hit the road” (113). Howard argues,

Rural and small town analogues of the city park and downtown tearoom [known sites for homosex] included roadside and beachfront areas, county and state parks, forests and lakes, riversides and other gathering places. Homosexual meanings and readings, desires and actions could surface at most any roadside get-together (114).

I argue that Bowman’s accident is a misplaced “roadside get-together”. Bowman’s rapidly palpitating heart was triggered by the possibility of a homosexual encounter. His loneliness and desire for a human connection support this idea. As does his misjudgment of women, the misreading of the woman of the house leads to his peaked interest in Sonny. Sonny’s ability to touch Bowman’s heart in a powerful way solidifies this argument of Bowman’s hope of a same-sex roadside encounter.

Though Bowman is aware of the cause of the frenetic pulsing of his heart, he does try and deny its origins. After Sonny’s footsteps are long out of earshot, Bowman attempts to let the old woman into his heart. “He could not move; there was nothing he could do, unless perhaps he might embrace this woman who sat there growing old and shapeless before him” (151). Grappling with his feelings and what he hopes may be Sonny’s desire as well (evidenced by the silence Welty writes onto his face) Bowman thinks toward the woman that he,

Wanted to leap up, to say to her, I have been sick and I found out then, only then, how lonely I am. Is it too late? My heart puts up a struggle inside me, and you may have heard it, protesting against emptiness...It

should be full, he would rush on to tell her, thinking of his heart now as a deep lake, it should be holding love like other hearts. It should be flooded with love (151).

Instead of vocalizing his desire for love and even reaching out for the love of the “old” woman across from him, he feels ashamed. He is “ashamed and exhausted by the thought that he might, in one more moment, have tried by simple words and embraces to communicate some strange thing—something which seemed always to have just escaped him” (151). Welty clearly represents the emotional conflict: his inability to embrace women or men or to act on any desire.

During Sonny’s absence, when he attempts to pull Bowman’s car out of the ditch, the woman, “had shown something secret, part of her life, but had offered no explanation” (152). This secret has multiple interpretations. When she draws attention to the figure of Sonny perhaps she is attempting to point to their heterosexual partnership or she is pointing to the mule Sonny is leading. Either way, this secret moves Bowman to the brink of tears and he awaits Sonny’s entrance with his hand upon his chest in an attempt to still his pounding heart (152).

The reemergence of the car should bring about the ability to leave; yet it instead triggers Bowman’s desire to stay. Bowman offers to pay Sonny for his services, but Sonny refuses the offer and declares belligerently that he refuses to take money for such (153). Bowman, “felt strangely helpless and resentful. Now that he could go, he longed to stay. From what was he being deprived? His chest was rudely shaken by the violence of his heart” (152).

On the brink of tears, Bowman requests to stay for the evening. Sonny sweeps his hands across Bowman's chest and hips when he expresses his desire to spend the night. Even in the dimly lit shack Bowman thinks he can feel Sonny's piercing eyes upon him. Albeit the touch may have been professional in nature, designed to discern whether Bowman was concealing a weapon he thinks, "To this end of nowhere! And yet *he* had come" (153). This brief exchange of one man touching another, veiled by the inquiry into whether or not Bowman was in possession of a gun, lends itself to an understated and muted gesture of homodesire. After the touch and the visual exchange in the darkness Bowman realizes that he'd found what his heart was searching for in the middle of nowhere, and Sonny agrees to allow Bowman to stay.

Now noticing that her home is gathering cold without the coals lit, the woman asks Sonny to venture to Redmond's farm to borrow some fire. Like the original offer of payment for retrieval of the car, Bowman's offer of his own matches to light the dead fire is denied. Sonny rejects Bowman once again. This time, opting for a journey to a neighboring farm rather than to accept the easy offer of Bowman's matches. Interestingly, we can read this as a veiled suggestion for sex. The woman's declaration that "'we don't have no need for 'em', [Bowman's matches] she said proudly. 'Sonny's going' after his own fire,'" shows that like Bowman she understands her husband's potential desire for homosex but that she is happy Sonny has chosen their heterosexual relationship over an encounter with Bowman (154). Her reaction upon Sonny's return with the fire is paramount, "*We'll* make a fire now" [italics mine] and proves that she and Sonny have all they need to get their own actual and proverbial fire started.

Sonny's brief brush of hands on Bowman's body is not the male pair's only interaction in the dark. After procuring fire and while settling in for the evening, Sonny invites Bowman into his private, wooded thicket of a distillery, a distinctly male space. On their way to the secreted location Sonny commands Bowman to get down on his knees, "What? [replied Bowman]" as the nerves from a potential homosexual encounter caused "Sweat [to break out] on his forehead" only to understand a moment later that Sonny meant to crawl onward from there (154). For a hopeful Bowman, Sonny's "hot, red face that was yet full of silence" (149) and his request to leave together into the seclusion of the wooded yard was a veiled invitation for intimacy. But the encounter remains fruitless and this thwarted opportunity for homosexual contact is directly responsible for the realization that occurs once the men return to the shack.

The men pass the taboo alcohol between them as the woman prepares their meal. When she calls the men to the table Bowman is hit by a realization that will cripple him for the rest of the evening. Looking at her closely for the first time,

He set his cup back down on the table in unbelieving protest. A pain pressed at his eyes. He saw that she was not an old woman. She was young, still young. He could think of no number of years for her. She was the same age as Sonny, and she belonged to him. [...] 'She's goin' to have a baby', said Sonny, popping a bite into his mouth. [...] Bowman could not speak. He was shocked with knowing what was really in this house. A marriage, a fruitful marriage. That simple thing. Anyone could have that (155).

Bowman is aghast at the discovered heterosexuality and pregnancy, and he feels some great joke has been played against him; certainly he could not have so greatly misread the signs (155). But the reality cannot be ignored and the realization is devastating; “the memory of the woman’s waiting silently by the cold hearth, of the man’s stubborn journey a mile away to get fire” causes Bowman to lose his appetite (156). He feels cheated. There was no place for his own silent homodesire in this house. There existed no allure and no resolve for Bowman’s empty heart and homosexual desire (156). Curiously, after this epiphany while the wife sits down to eat her own supper, “her husband stared peacefully into the fire” perhaps at ease with his decision to spurn Bowman’s offer of male companionship (156).

Before this realization, Bowman had flushed at the thought of paying for Sonny’s services. When he asks to be allowed to stay the evening he thinks, “If they could only see him, they would know his sincerity, his real need! [...] He stopped. He felt as if he might burst into tears. What would they think of him” (153). This embarrassment seems to stem from both expressing homosexual desire and the notion of the taboo of paying for it.

That night, on the floor in front of the fire that a man and woman share, Bowman can stand it no longer. He had refused to embrace the woman and had been (silently) refused by Sonny. Any and all options for love are gone. He listens to sounds of the couple in the other room breathing the deep resonating breaths of sleep, “of a man and his wife. [...] And that was all. But emotion swelled patiently within him, and he wished that the child were his” (156). The child is symbolic of the heterosexuality within that house. His desire to be the father of that child is as brief as his desire to embrace and

love a woman he thought to be old. It is not necessarily a desire for heterosexual normativity, but rather a representation of a desire to have the closeness love brings with it. Nissen writes about Welty's "The Hitch-Hikers," "What Harris discovers is what J.R. [R.J.] Bowman discovers in that more famous story of a traveling salesman: a human relationship based on love. The mystery at the heart of this story is no real mystery at all. It's really the oldest story in the world" (219). Bowman's homosexuality further isolates him from societal norms and the heterosexuality found within that house.

Bowman stares into the fire, which dwindles and dies before his eyes, a projection that his own time for love has passed. When the fire has burned completely out, Bowman realizes that he must "get back to where he had been before" (156) whether that be in the state of mind before his illness or back on the road where any number of potential homosexual encounters awaits is unclear. In either case, he places all the money he possesses under the dirty lamp on the table and

Ashamed, shrugging a little, and then shivering he took his bags and went out. The cold of the air seemed to lift him bodily. The moon was in the sky. [...] On the slope he began to run, he could not help it. Just as he reached the road, where his car seemed to sit in the moonlight like a boat, his heart began to give off tremendous explosions like a rifle, bang bang bang. [...] He sank in fright onto the road, his bags falling about him. He felt as if all this had happened before. He covered his heart with both hands to keep anyone from hearing the noise it made. [...] But nobody heard it (157).

Bowman's realization, his confrontation with heterosexual household not only crippled him, it was his undoing and his death. His heart, one that pounded loudly with the possibilities of homosexual fulfillment could take no more when those possibilities were ultimately removed. His illness awakened a part of him that hungered for love and companionship. He could no longer live in a world where those things were denied. Perhaps saddest of all is that neither man, woman, nor unborn child could hear the cries of his heart and his desire. Mainstream society in Mississippi of the 1930s cannot and does not want to hear the pounding of other desires.

Welty titled this story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman" for readers may not have assumed Bowman's death upon initial reading had the story had a different title. The death of Bowman recalls the endings of other gay fiction. Howard traces the history of pulp fiction with special attention to gay male plots and narrative structures that take a turn toward the negative (205). A gay male pulp novel may have been full of homosexual affection until its conclusion whereupon the author tacks on an unattractive and often deadly ending. Howard's reading of this that these pulp publishers, "skirted moral objections to queer content by packaging the narratives as socially responsible, cautionary tales. Homosexuality, they [publishers] warned [...] led to ruin" (206).

This certainly is not to argue that Welty was writing gay male pulp fiction, or that she tacked on an ending that was incongruent with the rest of her story. And yet, Bowman's ending resonates with the popular occurrence of killing the homosexual protagonist. Welty's ending is in keeping with the homosexual veil; "Death of a Traveling Salesman" possesses a silence (not absence) of homosexuality and all of the difficulty that that it entails in 1930's rural Mississippi.

Eudora Welty places a certain amount of emphasis on R.J. Bowman and his hat. Likewise, in “The Hitch-Hikers” Welty draws attention to Sanford’s guitar. These are seemingly innocuous details, as proper presentation of a man in public, are loaded with meaning. Similar to the way in which a hat obscures the face and eyes, Bowman’s sexual ambiguity benefited him by shielding him from “accusations of a more explicitly sexual—and thus menacing—nature” (Howard, xi). By contrast Sanford’s guitar has the opposite effect; rather than provide shelter from accusations it serves as a sort of beacon toward his homoerotic inclinations. Bowman stoops to place his big black hat on his suitcase when he enters the home of Sonny and his wife (148) but when he gathers his belongings to leave he takes his heavy overcoat, but the hat is curiously not mentioned (156). When this *man like that* lost his hat in the home of Sonny and his wife he simultaneously lost his façade of heterosexuality. Faced with heterosexuality, Bowman could no longer hope for a same-sex encounter in that home. Moreover, when Sanford’s guitar ceases to be a guitar and becomes rather a “box”—slang for female genitalia—its appeal to Harris is lost. Thus the hat becomes more than simply a hat and the guitar more than a musical instrument. These accessories are symbols of Harris and Bowman’s sexually coded identity and what they have lost.

Axel Nissen writes, “It is not only words that contribute to the mystery of human relationships in fiction. It is also the silence. It is the unique quality of fictional narrative as a mode of discourse that it does not need to label, identify, or diagnose [...] ‘The Hitch-Hikers’ is about absence, loss, misidentification, misrepresentation, misreading” (216). As I argue, the same is true for Bowman’s story. Just as John Howard says one must be able to read what lies within these silences, it is in bridging the gaps between the

silences of Welty's stories where revelations flourish and her characters and their queer desires are unearthed.

Finally, there is another object in "Death of a Traveling Salesman" that acts as a dual signifier, the oft-mentioned lamp. Indeed the first person R.J. Bowman happens upon, the woman, is cleaning a lamp. She "held it, half blackened, half clear, in front of her" (147). Curiously, this lamp, Bowman notices, is set down half cleaned not to be touched again while Bowman resides in their household. Welty emphasizes Bowman's attention to the lamp and seems to ask readers why it remains only partially cleaned. The woman polishing only half the lamp is much like Eudora Welty. For all her years of friendship with John Robinson she always kept her half of their lamp maintained and kept herself open to the possibility of love. Yet, for all her attempts to court Robinson he could never maintain his half of the lamp as he lived the majority of his life with her in the shadow of his homosexuality, much like Bowman, Harris, Sobby and Sanford experience and engineer their own homodesire, in shadow.

II. CATCH AND RELEASE: CONSTELLATIONS OF THREE MEN AND LIBERATION THROUGH TRAVEL IN EUDORA WELTY'S *THE WIDE NET*

Welty's second published collection, *The Wide Net and Other Stories*, appeared two years after *A Curtain of Green* in the fall of 1943. Suzanne Marris writes that, "the rather limited descriptions of setting in *A Curtain of Green* had given way to more expansive and emblematic accounts of the Natchez Trace when she wrote *The Robber Bridegroom* and *The Wide Net*" (238-9). *The Wide Net*, often referred to as her Mississippi book, delves deeply into some previously uncharted territory, as she begins to write about historical figures in fictional situations. Marris claims that Welty began the idea for a Mississippi book in November of 1940 when she wrote to her agent Diarmuid Russell,

'Do you think I dare to have honest-to-God people walking around in the stories? The thing about this part of the country in the great days is that people like Aaron Burr, J.J. Audubon, [the fanatical nineteenth-century evangelist] Lorenzo Dow, and goodness knows who, were thick as black-birds in the pie, and once the pie is opened, they are going to begin to sing' (70-1).

So Welty dared to give us stories like “First Love” and “A Still Moment,” each of which prominently features an “honest to God” historical figure. One of the most significant implications of such a well-known cast of characters is that Welty’s use of famous historical persons pulls the reader’s attention away from questions of sexuality and effectively hides the homodesire present in the private spaces in which we find the male characters of these two stories.

Unlike in *A Curtain of Green*, which confronts the readers with two traveling salesmen whose loneliness and desire for male companionship resulted in untimely death, *The Wide Net* differs in its representation of homosexual desire. The similarities between the two stories, however, show us an evolution of themes of homosexuality with which Welty was working. Both stories center on a constellation of three men, one or more of whom are working through the complex dynamic of homosexual desire within the confines of heterosexual normativity. “First Love” and “A Still Moment” both engage themes of remote and secret meeting places, much like the roadside stops found in the previous collection. Finally, these stories wrestle with the notion of vocalized versus silent affection.

“First Love” is the story of a young orphan, Joel Mayes, on the cusp of manhood. Joel, a deaf-mute, works in an inn off the Natchez Trace as a shoeshine—a position neither, “slave’s work, or a child’s” (Welty, 188). Though he neither speaks nor hears, he polishes and returns the boots of the travelers passing the night in the inn. The work is perilous but, “it had dignity: it was dangerous to walk about among sleeping men” (188). The night is fraught with potential sleep addled or drunken encounters. One winter night the danger comes not from the rooms where other men sleep but from his own. Joel’s

simple routine is shattered by the appearance of two cloaked men (later revealed to be Aaron Burr and Harman Blennerhassett) in deep discussion in his bedchamber. They return night after night, and when the encounters grow more frequent, Burr becomes an obsession for Joel and the beginning of a new adventure of fascination, awakening sexuality, jealousy and finally freedom (189).

Before the arrival of Burr and Blennerhassett, Joel's role at the inn is simple; his job is to service the traveling men. Though Joel's sexual awakening is still forthcoming, in the early pages of the story Welty announces the presence of homodesire with two important symbols: the boots Joel nightly polishes for others and the candlestick he polishes for himself. Through his nightly rounds Joel's awareness of the presence of homodesire increases; he knows that wandering the halls of the inn and offering his services to drunken or sleeping men will bring one of two outcomes: either he will be welcome or "seized and the life half shaken out of him by a man" (188). Some men will accept Joel's offer and some men will lash out violently against it.

Perhaps as an effort to guard against the potentially violent outburst of men who do not welcome his help, Joel takes great care in polishing his lone candlestick on the table in his room. This phallic object, Joel's sole possession, becomes the object of his affections before the arrival of Burr and Blennerhassett. Like the act of masturbation, Joel keeps his candlestick carefully polished and secret.

One night Joel is awakened with the preternatural sense that he is not alone. Burr and Blennerhassett, obviously meeting in secret inhabit Joel's "small private room [...] on the ground floor behind the saloon" instead of the more public rooms available to other travelers in the inn (188). Though he surely could not hear it, Joel is positive the

men did not knock to enter his chamber, but he “did not at once betray the violation that he felt.” Instead he gazes at the men with curiosity and longing and all the fervor and hunger “the eyes do in secret” (189).

Burr and Blennerhassett begin to come to Joel’s room nightly and Joel becomes obsessed by this mystery (and Burr). He anxiously awaits nightfall, no longer for his work to begin but for the men to appear. The arrival of the men seems to awaken something in Joel: “he wondered for how long a time the men had been meeting in his room while he was asleep, and whether they had ever seen him, and what they might be going to do to him, whether they would take him each by the arm and drag him on further through the leaves” (190).

Burr becomes the object of Joel’s immediate attention “the gesture of one of the men made in the air transfixed him [...] One of the two men lifted his right arm—a tense, yet gentle and easy motion—and made the dark wet cloak fall back. To Joel it was like the first movement he had ever seen” (189-90). Joel is somehow aware that it was Burr who had made the gesture. This simple gesture changes Joel, and he realizes that which he has just witnessed, opened up “some heavy gate or padlock [...] about which he knew first of all they would never be able to speak” (190). From this moment onward everything is changed, “ he divined every change in the house, in the angles of the doors, in the height of the fires” his senses are heightened by some new knowledge or awareness (190).

Burr and Blennerhassett’s presence in Joel’s bedroom is not a romantic liaison. Their tryst however does bespeak intimacy. This intimate act of meeting in secret is what spurs Joel’s fascination with the men. Blennerhassett is the object of Burr’s focused

attention and non-sexual affection and though Joel becomes entranced by Burr; he desires to become the object upon which Burr lavishes his attentions.

Marrs touches on a common interpretation for Joel's excitement over the nightly encounters with Burr. She claims their relationship can be seen as one "between a charismatic leader and a devotee" (78). This interpretation, however, shrouds the overt attraction of a young man to an older one. What is found within the text is a relationship that far surpasses mere hero worship. Welty's use of the historical character Burr, detracts from the evidence of the language of romantic—not platonic—desire found within the text. Marrs argues that, "Joel feels committed to Burr not because Burr has proven himself to be a worthy guide, but because Burr provides some sense of direction or purpose for him" (78). This is absolutely the case. I believe Burr becomes a symbol of the sexual desire awakened in Joel who wants Burr to take him by the arm, "and drag him on further" (Welty, 190). Joel desires to be led, to understand what these new feelings and emotions mean.

The evidence for the sexual attraction Joel feels for Burr is staggering, and can be found most clearly in the language of desire and secrecy, his peculiar interactions with women, and again the notion of sexual liberation through travel. Between what we've noticed as Joel's sensual/sexual awakening and his obsession with Burr, the basis for a homosexual appeal has been set. But the language of romantic desire furthers the notion that Joel's gaze "caressing" Burr harbors deeper feelings than that of protégé toward mentor.

If we look closely at Joel's private space, something interesting appears. Joel's room is not a part of the inn's rentals, but separate from the inn, a small room tucked

behind the bar. The chamber has none of the trappings of a boarder's room, the only furnishings include a fireplace, a window, a table, a candlestick and a "highbacked bench" to serve as a bed (188). One can imagine it an intimate and private space, one that was not given to Joel but almost fashioned around him. Before the arrival of Burr and Blennerhassett the room is empty, cold, dark and the perfect space for a boy with no real place in the world. It is not larger than a closet.

Gary Richards reads the reclusive Boo Radley in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* as a closeted character:

Because Lee surrounds Boo with so many of silences and absences that structure the frequent closetedness of same-sex desire, she invites readers to speculate that Boo's reclusiveness is comparable to closeted sexuality and thus explore what bearing this literal representation of closetedness might have on an understanding of the figurative (146).

This discussion of reclusiveness and closetedness is of particular importance to my discussion of Joel and his bedchamber. Welty, like Harper Lee, has drawn a character whose silences, (in the case of Joel –a deaf mute) both literal and figurative, and absences mirror closeted sexuality. Leaning on Gary Richards argument, in Welty's story, we can take this closetedness a step further, as we can plainly see that Joel literally occupies a space not much greater than an actual closet. Welty has situated Joel inside of a literal and proverbial closet.

Speaking now to the arrival of the men into his chamber, however, the atmosphere shifts from one of a "dark little room paved with stones" and only the distinct tremor of nearby horses for comfort to a room, "shining brightly, like a brimming lake in

the sun” (188-9). While it is still a private and personal space, Joel—no longer alone—feels, “everything in the room was conquest, all was a dream of delights and powers beyond its walls” (191-2). Like the emotions Burr evokes in Joel, the room, too, seems to light up with his presence.

Joel watches the faces and hands of Burr and Blennerhassett often, and remarks on such things as, “the light-filled hair [that] fell over Burr’s sharp forehead, his cheek grew taut, his smile was sudden, his lips drove the breath through. The other man’s face, with its quiet mouth, for he was the listener, changed from ardor to gloom and back to ardor... Joel sat still and looked from one man to the other” (192). Joel also notices a radiant light that seems to stem from Burr himself: “it was from Aaron Burr that the flame was springing, and it seemed to pass across the table [...] and touch Blennerhassett [...] the ring Burr wore caught the firelight repeatedly and started it up again in the intricate whirlpool of a signet” (191). The light in the room no longer stems from Joel’s carefully polished candlestick, but from Burr himself, signaling a change in Joel’s affections and emotions from inward to outward.

Joel’s focus on faces, eyes, mouths, and hands is a sign of not only a deaf mute’s reading of language but of the expression of desire and physical emotion. Joel’s instinctive focus on the mouth and face is perhaps even more of a sexual gaze than one of communication. One evening Burr falls asleep on Joel’s makeshift bed. It proves to be a fitful sleep full of nightmares and, “Joel put out his hand. He could never in his life have laid it across the mouth of Aaron Burr, but thrust it into Burr’s spread-out fingers. The fingers closed and did not yield; the clasp grew so fierce that it hurt his hand” (200). The feverish nightmares stop as Joel clasps Burr’s hand and Joel feels, “as if a silent love

had shown him whatever new thing he would ever be able to learn, Joel had some wisdom in his fingers now which only this long month could have brought” (200). Joel’s physical desire to touch clasp, and embrace Burr evokes an attraction beyond the platonically appreciative and into the sexual realm.

Welty’s tale then revolves around the interactions of three men, Joel, Burr, and Blennerhassett to the exclusion of any women present physically or emotionally. In fact, there are only three women mentioned in the story: Joel’s dead mother, Blennerhassett’s strange fiddle-playing wife, and the unknown woman who dances with Burr. Of the three, only one crosses the threshold into Joel’s closet-room and Joel’s reaction to this first intimate encounter with a member of the opposite sex is striking in its portrayal.

Blennerhassett’s wife comes to the men late one evening and though it appears her arrival is to retire Blennerhassett, she instead moves into the chamber and begins to play her fiddle. Joel gazes in astonishment, not in the wonder and mystery he watched the men when they first appeared. Her arrival in this space is not welcome as, “she frightened and dismayed” Joel with her “insect-like motions”. Joel had “never examined a fiddle at all,” but what readers are confronted with here is not an examination of the fiddle, but an examination of a woman not much older than himself. Joel watches the swaying of her hips, the weaving of her body, and her legs. The fiddle is forgotten; the woman is what is under scrutiny. Though he cannot hear the song she plays he feels it, “to be about many hills and valleys, and chains of lakes. She, like the men, know of a place....All of them spoke of a country” (197).

These hills and valleys he feels through her music mirror the gaze that watches the swell of her breasts, legs, and hips only thinly covered by night clothes. Joel knows

her act is sensual and sexual, her fiddle playing and dress provocative. He acknowledges that she, like the men, knows a place, knows sex—a place he is only beginning to understand. But the woman provokes no sexual reaction in Joel. He looks upon her as an insect, her arms are described as antennae; she is a pest (197). Joel experiences no emotional or physical attraction to Blennerhassett's wife, feeling that "there was no compassion in what this woman was doing, he knew that—there was only a frightening thing, a stern allurements" (198).

Joel is clearly repulsed by the woman; Welty uses the word "frightened" twice as Joel watches. This distress is caused by the woman's sexuality and the freedom and openness of it. Not only is it clear that Joel is not sexually attracted to the bug-like woman, he is distressed by the role the woman represents and her ability to stimulate the other men sexually. Joel desires the place the woman inhabits as the object of sexual attraction but has yet to realize why in this situation he cannot have it. Only Blennerhassett withdraws from the chamber after his wife's performance leaving Burr and Joel alone.

Joel is somehow aware that this is to be Burr's last night with him and all of the emotional and sexual realizations that Burr and Blennerhassett's wife have revealed come together. Any sign that this could have once been platonic love are wiped swiftly away by Welty in what transpires next. Burr climbs onto the bench Joel adopted for a bed and falls asleep. Joel watches Burr as he sleeps and "knew nothing in the world except the sleeping face. It was quiet. The eyes were almost closed [...] the lips were parted [...] Burr was silent; he demanded nothing, nothing...A boy or a man could be so alone in his heart that he could not even ask a question" (199). In that sleepy moment Joel knows

Burr will leave forever, and Welty writes, “why would the heart break so at absence? Joel knew it was because nothing had been told. The heart is secret even when the moment it dreamed of has come, a moment when there might have been a revelation” (199). The unasked question, the secret never to be revealed is that Joel’s first love for Burr—a man—never will and cannot be revealed.

This realization is heartbreaking, even to the reader. In Joel, Welty delivers a protagonist with such express desire for another man, but makes it abundantly clear that this taboo is incredibly difficult to voice. In constructing Joel as a deaf mute Welty has magnified the difficulties that accompany the expression of male homosexual desire. It is physically impossible for Joel to out himself, and he knows it. When Burr leaves the inn for the final time, Joel follows. He watches as Burr meets with a strange woman, one “Burr had often danced with under the rings of tapers when she came out in a cloak across the shadows” and he feels a pang of jealousy when she first makes herself known. He watches her, “with a curious feeling of revenge” for she is the object of, if nothing else, a secret affection from Burr—a part of Burr Joel will never have. Joel follows on foot as Burr rides away “toward the Liberty Road” and is overcome by the knowledge that he can never “go back and still be the boot-boy at the Inn” (201-2).

Joel has witnessed two men take their leave upon the arrival of women in the night. He has realized that his sexual identity and that of Burr are starkly different, and he takes to the sexually liberating world of travel, through none other than Liberty Road. His month long sexual awakening with Aaron Burr has changed his life forever. He is unable return to his closet at the inn or to the confining life he once led. There is no need to keep his lone candlestick carefully polished and so he leaves it behind. Joel desires the

intimacy present between men and can no longer suffer the loneliness that embodies his former life.

The Wide Net contains another story that centers on the peculiar interactions of three traveling men. Marrs explains that “A Still Moment” is, “Eudora’s account of an imagined meeting between John James Audubon, Lorenzo Dow, and John Murrell, of their awe when a snowy heron lands in front of them and seems to hold time suspended, and of their dispersal when Audubon shoots the bird” (362). Like Burr, Joel, and Blennerhassett, the three men of “A Still Moment” are briefly caught in a fictional, almost dream-like sabbatical from their historical errands.

We also see, once again, the use of historical characters has a tendency to blur the lines between historical fact and ahistorical fiction, coloring the reader’s interpretation of the goings on in the text. Richards aptly admits that, “homosexuality is by no means overtly identified, and yet the situation is one that readers can meaningfully associate with such an identity” something readers of “A Still Moment” and queer Welty more broadly must bear in mind (163). My argument is not to queer the historical personas of Burr, Audubon, or any of the others but rather to draw the eye away from the historical figure and toward the situation in which Welty is placing these men with metaphysical and situational cues. Looking at Dow, Audubon and Murrell with John Howard’s eyes, Howard claims “male-male desire functioned beside and along with many other forms of desire—all at some times, in some places, privileged, oppressed, ignored, overlooked, spoken, silenced, written, thought, frustrated, and acted upon” (123).

“A Still Moment” opens on Lorenzo Dow, self-proclaimed Man of God and traveling saver of souls. He cries out as he rides, “I must have souls! And souls I must

have!' [...] He rode as if to never stop, toward his night's appointment" (228). As a missionary and minister Dow spends a great deal of time traveling the roads that bring him to his fellow man, further and further away from his wife Peggy in Massachusetts. Though preoccupied with saving souls, Dow takes a moment to reflect on his wife and sends her thoughts of love, but he also notes how effortless and uncomplicated it was to love at a distance (228). His wife, "with whom he had spent a few hours of time, showing of herself a small round handwriting, declared all in one letter, her first, that she felt the same as he, and that the fear was never of separation, but only of death" (229). This marriage, still in its infancy, born of letters not physical expression thrives on the separateness of the husband and wife. Though it does not fear separation, by its own nature it does not live in togetherness. Even after revealing the existence of Dow's wife, Welty remarks, that he was, "homeless by his own choice, he must be everywhere at some time, and somewhere soon" (230). His wife in Massachusetts is not his home; his home is road and no home at all. A wife of course, does not exclude homosexual desire.

It seems Dow's obsession for saving the souls of men comes from a deep desire to cleanse his own. Welty writes,

But was it to be always by some metamorphosis of himself that he escaped, some humiliation of his faith, some admission to strength and argumentation and not frailty? Each time when he acted so it was at the command of an instinct that he took at once to be the word of an angel, until too late, when he knew it was the word of the devil (229).

Consider this admission in tandem with the wife at home, a marriage of separateness.

Dow admits when he acts out of instinct, say acts upon his homosexual urges, it feels as

right and good but once the act is complete his religious fervor and internal turmoil convince him the act was brought about by evil.

Along his journey, Dow falls in step with John Murrell, the outlaw. Like Dow's, Murrell's occupation lends itself easily to this discussion. Murrell is a murderer, a serial killer with a simple system. He chooses his victim along the Trace, rides beside him for a spell and tells the man a tale, "all centered around a silent man. In each the silent man would have done a piece of evil, a robbery or a murder" and it was his habit, at the end of the tale, to murder the man (231). The nature of this narrative of evil invites readers to consider an alternate interpretation, a piece of evil that seems to weigh heavy on the soul of Dow as well—(homo)sexual desire. Dow and Murrell reach a great oak tree just as the sun begins to hang low in the sky, "like a head lowered on folded arms" as if either in repose or shame (232). Dow is familiar with the space and readily and willingly dismounts. Unsurprised by Murrell's physical closeness when he too dismounts, they notice, "in that moment instead of two men coming to stop by the great forked tree, there were three" (233).

Audubon, "appeared under the tree, a sure man, very sure and tender, as if the touch of all the earth rubbed upon him and the stains of the flowery swamp made him so" (234). Audubon is among the wilderness of the Trace observing and drawing the wildlife when the two riders happen upon him. Dow welcomes him to their small, strange party and "turned fond eyes upon him" (324).

Welty delivers an array of characters, an over zealous preacher with an absent, ornamental wife, a traveling ostracized outlaw, and a tender artist into the woods, alone. Though Audubon relates, non-verbally and through the narrator, that "all things were

speech” the moment in which the men find themselves together passes in “the deepest silence” (234). The only words spoken aloud in the text come from Dow in the form of phrases of religious conversion and redemption. Silence versus communication and good versus evil are running themes throughout this text, with everything we have gathered thus far in this study it is plain that Welty is wrestling with the difficult territory of men experiencing and acting upon a silence and togetherness that hints of their homodesire.

Jumping now to the conclusion of the story, as Dow rides away from the forked tree and the men, “the sweat of rapture poured down from his forehead, and then he shouted into the marshes. ‘Tempter!’”(240). They are each the tempters and the tempted. Tempters of each other yet simultaneously tempted by the others’ homodesire. With the sweat of exertion beading on his brow, and Audubon, “splattered and wet” there still remains an inability to speak of the act that transpired between the three men. It is obviously an act and not just temptation that occurred, as Murrell thinks,

As if he had always known that three men in simply being together and doing a thing can, by their obstinacy, take the pride out of one another. Each must go away alone, each send the others away alone. He himself had purposely kept to the wildest country in the world, and would have sought it out, the loneliest road. [...] Travelers were forever innocent, he believed: that was his faith (238).

Three men alone in the woods in being together and doing some thing are experiencing each other and expressing their homodesire. In traveling there is innocence and also anonymity. Welty writes that, “what each of them had wanted was simply *all*” (230).

Perhaps by all, Welty means acceptance of their homodesire and the ability to act on it, unburdened.

Serpents are timeless representations of evil and temptation and both stories in *The Wide Net* have them. Joel Mayes, making his nightly rounds collecting boots found that, “once a rattlesnake had showed its head form a boot as he stretched out his hand; but that was not likely to happen again in a thousand years” (189). Lorenzo Dow, “saw a serpent crossing the Trace, giving out knowing glances” (229). Welty’s use of the phallic, tempting snake can be read as a symbol for their impending homosexual temptation. Interesting however, is that Joel believes it be an occurrence not likely to happen again but Dow, perhaps in the wisdom of his years and travels, knows that to be untrue and finds that the small, beady eyes of a snake hold wisdom and knowledge.

“First Love” and “A Still Moment” feature several similarities including Welty’s unveiling of the silence of homosexual desire. Whether this emphasis comes in the form of physical handicap or the anonymity of travel, it is clear that Welty was working out the difficulties of overt homosexual desire. In *A Curtain of Green*, we examined how homosexuality was accompanied by violence and jealousy, but in *The Wide Net* Welty seems to want to address the more psychological complications of secrecy and outward expression.

III. WANDERING IN PURSUIT OF LOVE: MALE HOMOSEXUALITY IN EUDORA WELTY'S *THE GOLDEN APPLES*

In *The Golden Apples* Welty relates the activities of Morgana, a small Mississippi town, through its various eccentric inhabitants. Each story is so enmeshed within the others of the collection that a discussion of male homodesire in “The Whole World Knows” and “Music from Spain” cannot be undertaken separately as I have done with Welty’s previous collections. My analysis of “The Whole World Knows” necessitates a simultaneous examination of “Music from Spain” as the protagonist, Ran, continuously refers to the experiences of his brother Eugene whom Welty explores in the latter story.

Ran and Eugene are twins whose complex childhood is explained in yet another story from the collection. In “Shower of Gold” we meet Snowdie MacLain, an albino woman married to and unwillingly separated from King MacLain. According to the townswoman who narrates “Shower of Gold” Snowdie’s husband, “walked out of the house one day and left his hat on banks of the Big Black River,” in an act not entirely dissimilar to another Welty character, R.J. Bowman, who likewise abandoned his hat at the scene of a heterosexual domestic partnership (319). Described by his neighbors as willful and outrageous, MacLain and his marriage sparked controversy from the start “marrying must have been some of his showing off—like man never married at all till *he* flung in, then had to show the others how he could go right on acting” (319). Like

Lorenzo Dow's abandoned but still legal marriage, MacLain's union is a sham. It is a façade used to keep up appearances back home so he may travel elsewhere without the prying eyes of Morgana, Mississippi.

MacLain returns to Snowdie occasionally but always leaves, sometimes for years at a time. Snowdie and all of Morgana are accustomed to MacLain's lifestyle, "him leaving and him being welcomed home, him leaving and sending word 'Meet me in the woods,' and him gone again, at last leaving the hat" (322). Each time MacLain returns to Morgana it is not to his home with Snowdie but to the woods where she must go to meet him, the woods where his twin sons are conceived. For MacLain the sexual union of man and wife is not something that takes place within the domicile they share but in an occasional tryst in the woods where he can pick up and leave after the sexual act is done.

King MacLain's wanderlust and troublesome lifestyle is the subject of another study, here the importance of his sexual practices lies in the stage they set for understanding the related nature of *The Golden Apples* and the background information they provide for the stories of his children. The twins, Ran and Eugene, were raised by Snowdie with a mostly absent, wandering father figure. It is a small wonder Eugene ventures off to San Francisco and Ran is left in Morgana plagued by what it was that his father and brother escaped to find.

Though "The Whole World Knows" is the story of Ran and Jinny MacLain's failed marriage, the subtle but continuous asides Ran engages in with his nuclear family prove that Welty was working with the failure of heterosexual partnership on a level beyond Jinny's infidelity. The story opens with Ran pleading to speak with his father saying, "I wish I could talk to you, wherever you are right now" (451). Because Ran is

denied the ability to converse with his father, he often speaks with his mother. Snowdie, however, is not much help to Ran in figuring out the state of his life and marriage. Rather she is concerned primarily with the notion that both her boys have deserted her. She relates to Ran over the telephone, “I can tell you’re all peaked. And you keep things from me, I don’t understand. You’re as bad as Eugene Hudson. Now I have two sons keeping things from me” (451). Ran denies an agenda hidden from his mother and says that he hasn’t been anywhere, as he has nowhere to go. Though the family believes that “Eugene’s safe in California” it seems the secret Snowdie knows her children are keeping from her stems from travel or escape (415).

Although Ran denies it, what Snowdie feels is accurate. She sees the desire for a life that cannot be lived in Morgana in her sons, the same as she found in their father. Even the townspeople seem to understand that which Ran refuses to openly admit. They repeatedly tell him that his troubles are only a thing of the flesh and that he “won’t get away from that in Morgana” (458). To get away, or maybe even to pursue the flesh of another man, Ran must leave Morgana like his father and Eugene did before him.

Ran is dealing with difficult and potentially life changing decisions. He must decide, with the pressure of the town weighing upon him, whether to finalize the separation with his wife and act on the desire he has kept bottled inside. The vast majority of Ran’s interactions within the story take place introspectively; one of such scenes reveals not only his anger at his wife and her infidelity but also his concealed desire for men. At the home of his mother-in-law, he meets the man with whom his wife was having an affair, the same man the town believes Jinny will marry when Ran decides to leave. At first Ran examines Woody Spights, remarking in overtly sexual terms, that

Woody was “too young for me—I’d never really looked at him before this year; he was coming up in the world” (457). A man too young to garner attention from Ran before this juncture and one that has openly proven his heterosexuality with Ran’s own wife sparks something within Ran.

As Ran looks through the yard he notices, “the usual crowd seemed to have dwindled a little” and remarks “I could not think who was out...It was myself” (457). This moment, when Ran obviously mentally outs himself and admits to his physical, sexual gaze on Woody triggers an imagined violent reaction. Ran, though at first he believes his actions to be material, proceeds to attack Woody. He mauls Woody with a croquet mallet, going over his entire body, cracking his head apart with, “that soft girl’s hair and all the ideas” beating on him “without stopping till every bone, all the way down to the numerous little bones in the foot, was cracked in two” (459). His beating, Ran thinks, proves that the male body with its “too positive, too special shape” could be hurt and in doing so attempts revenge for both the physical temptation of himself and his wife. The beating however, is revealed to be a figment of Ran’s imagination. All the anger released by the pummeling of Woody Spights was a dream, not something that actually happened

Reading homodesire in Ran however, becomes clearer when one considers what is happening to Eugene in San Francisco around the same time. In order to fully understand why Ran’s story concludes with his plea, “Father, Eugene! What you went and found, was it better than this?” we first must investigate the story of Eugene and then return to Ran to see how Ran is wrestling with the same desire only within the sexual confines of the deep south.

In “Music From Spain” a man broken and disturbed by the untimely death of his young daughter lashes out at his wife one morning over breakfast. Unprovoked, this slap signals in Eugene MacLain a violent reaction to the domestic life of marriage. After leaning across the table and slapping his wife for saying “some innocent thing to him— ‘Crumb on your chin’ or the like” Eugene exits his domicile and promptly decides that this day will be better served at his own leisure and not at work (473). While meandering in downtown San Francisco, the native Mississippian rescues a Spanish guitar player and they proceed to spend the greater portion of the day in each other’s company.

Before analyzing Eugene’s romp in the city, let us discuss this complex family setting. As stated earlier (and evidenced briefly by “Death of a Traveling Salesman” and by Ran’s wanderings after the separation with his wife) often in Welty’s short fiction homosexual desire manifests itself after some abrupt or violent exposure to heterosexual normativity. In the case of Bowman the impetus is marked by both his early illness and his car crash. In the case of Ran, the realization is sparked by his wife’s infidelity and his imagined wrath on her partner. Like Bowman and Ran, Eugene experiences two catalysts. The first, akin to Bowman’s initial illness, is the death of his young daughter Fan. The second, paralleling the immediate stimulus to Ran’s fancied physical violence, is Eugene’s unwarranted slap of his wife. The traumatic breakfast with his wife Emma reveals the absence of a large portion of this family’s dynamic, Fan. The missing daughter proves the family to be a broken family unit.

As Eugene begins what will be a long and varied day filled with the companionship of another man he is plagued by several recurring images. The first image locates itself in Eugene’s imagination as the watchful gaze of Mr. Bertsinger

Senior. Bertsinger is a chatty shop owner with whom Eugene has cordial visits on a typical day on his route to work. However, today, Bertsinger serves as an imaginary set of eyes and ears that allows Eugene to replay the morning's events as he tries to understand the motivation of his slap. Bertsinger likes to press for information, and throughout the morning Eugene will take note of such things as the day's temperature and fog conditions because "all of which would be asked him by Mr. Bertsinger Senior who would then tell him he was right" (474). But as he thinks of the things he will have to take note of in order to speak with Bertsinger, he continually returns to the scene in the kitchen.

Eugene carries the image of the slap with him throughout the day and through repeated imagery of the violent encounter, he is replaying the dynamic of his household. "Why, in the name of all reason, had he struck Emma?" Eugene considers after thinking of topics to cover with Bertsinger. As he walks along, probing his conscience he comes to the realization that "he struck her because she was a fat thing. Absurd, she always been fat, at least plump [...] *He struck her because he wanted another love. The forties. Psychology*" (476). Yet all the while concerned with what "Mr. Bertsinger Senior, down at the shop, [would] have to say about this," since "things were a great deal more serious than he [Eugene] had thought" and "the world was the old man's [Bertsinger's] subject, but he knew yours" (477).

Many memories work their way into MacLain's day for seemingly no reason at all. Interestingly, they shift as the day draws on from the slap to memories of their youth and love for one another. The third image that plagues Eugene, it is the recollection of his daughter, Fan. Theses images about Fan herself or more commonly, about Emma

and Eugene and their life without Fan they illustrate the day's events as a reaction to a broken family.

In his history Howard deals a bit with the gay man and the home, saying, "the home was the premier queer site" (41). But for Eugene, we can plainly see this is not the case. Something else is at work. Howard acknowledges that many young Mississippi gay men of the period would in fact marry. He writes that many homosexual men would engage in the heteronormative lifestyle and become patriarchal heads of households as husbands and fathers (46). Often, however, the home place was not ideal. Howard writes,

Home wasn't always an exemplar of heteronormativity. Rather, it was most commonly a site of contestation, a place for fluid and shifting conceptions of sexuality and a stage for varied, fortuitous, and opportune sexual encounters. In myriad configurations inflected by race, class, and religion, desires of all kinds found their home in the home (48).

Eugene's acknowledgment of Bertsinger's uncanny ability to know everyone else so well is mirrored by his own searching for compatible companionship. Matt Huculak in his article "Song from San Francisco: Space, Time and Character in Eudora Welty's 'Music from Spain'" writes that "Eugene as a character is moving through the dark, previously unexplored pathways of his soul, a movement precipitated by his reaction against Emma that morning, which is mirrored in his actual movement down the street" (317). Interesting language from Huculak suggests that Eugene is prompted by a reaction *against* Emma, importantly not a reaction *to* her. This reaction suggests that Eugene's search for a companion is a direct response to his discontent with his current situation.

In light of this reaction we can address the rest of Eugene's experiences that day, specifically his time spent in the city with the Spaniard. As Eugene walks along, he spots from behind a familiar figure: "Eugene had no doubts about that identity. Last night—though it seemed long enough ago now to make the recognition clever—Emma had come out with Eugene to a music hall, and it had turned out that this Spaniard performed, in solo recital (482). But just as the recognition is passing through Eugene, a near horror unfolds. As he watches, the guitarist takes a step off the curb toward death by automobile. Eugene reaches out to save the Spaniard and in doing so is out of breath as he "pulled in the big Spaniard—who for all his majestic weight proved light on his feet, like a big woman who turns graceful once she's on the dance floor" (483). Seconds after glimpsing the Spaniard and moments after saving his life, Eugene feminizes him. This phenomena has not been unnoticed by previous critics, Huculak for instance writes,

Welty immediately feminizes the Spaniard with this metaphor—a crucial fact as Eugene begins to question his own sexuality [...] the Spaniard is not only feminized, but also conflated with Eugene's special moment, this vast present time, when all rules break down and consciousness enters an alternate space beyond the boundaries of heterosexual marriage (320).

Indeed Rebecca Mark, author of *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples*, discusses the breakdown of the barrier of heterosexuality present in this story as well as in "Death of a Traveling Salesman". She writes that the slap is reaction *against* not just Emma but the "social construction called wife" (187).

This violent reaction, Axel Nissen finds, occurs often in Welty's fiction, "the characters' reactions to a violent event show us how to react and not to react to the event

and the story as a whole” (216). With such a violent reaction toward heterosexuality, Eugene is now free to embrace the reality of his homosexuality when he decides that “the order of things seemed to be that the two men should stroll on together down the street [...] as he walked, Eugene sent out shy, still respectful glances, those of a man not quite sure his new pet knows who has just come into possession” (484). These glances are the excited and shy looks of a man who is curious to know if the Spaniard shares his homodesire.

The memories of Emma that plagued Eugene before this meeting with the Spaniard now take on a different air, as he suddenly feels forgetful of,

All knowledge of Emma as his wife, and of comprehending the future, in some visit to a vast and present-time. The lapse must have endured for a solid minute or two, and afterwards he could not recollect it. It was as positively there and as defined at the edges as a spot or stain, and it affected him like a secret (485).

He feels a secret in this day, out here in the open downtown realm of San Francisco, a secret he finds in the dark face of the Spaniard, quite possibly the secret of homosexuality (486).

Several instances with outsiders watching the pair stroll about town remind us of their queer (in both popular senses of the word) companionship. The first happens shortly after beginning the tour of the town with the Spaniard, where Eugene spots a woman in the San Francisco crowd. He acknowledges this woman to be strikingly beautiful and is immediately struck by the desire to keep the Spaniard from noticing her, “for he might pounce upon her; something made him afraid of the Spaniard at that

moment” (486). This fear manifests itself as jealousy of the Spaniard but can more accurately be interpreted as a fear of the Spaniard’s heterosexuality. It is far too soon after having his own epiphany and realization of sexual freedom to lose a man continually referred to as “his Spaniard” to a woman (487).

Eugene’s unique relationship with the Spaniard seems so natural that it is “as if he had known by that morning he himself would have struck his wife that blow and found out something new, something entirely different about life” (489). The pair lunches together and Eugene remarks that their time together is too precious to waste. They must take full advantage of their time together for the Spaniard just might prove to be—veiled in terms of visiting a gambling house—Eugene’s lucky charm (490).

As mentioned earlier, Eugene’s sense of normal time and space is lost on this day and he occupies his time not based on any sense of normal timekeeping. But the natural geography and the setting sun end the day and hem in this sense of space and time. The pair continues their walk and approach the end of the beach, “Land’s End,” just as the sun begins its descent. As the journey draws to a close, Eugene thrusts out his hands and takes hold of the Spaniard. He,

Clung to the Spaniard now, almost as if he had waited for him a long time with longing, almost as if he loved him, and had found a lasting refuge. He could have caressed the side of the massive face with the great pores in the loose, hanging cheek. The Spaniard closed his eyes. [...] Then a bullish roar opened out of him. He wagged his enormous head. What seemed to be utterances of the wildest order came from the wide mouth, together with the dinner’s old reek. [...] Eugene suddenly lost his

balance and nearly fell, so that he had to pull himself back by helplessly seizing hold of the big man. He listened on, perforce, to the voice that did not stop. [...] What was he digging up to confess to, making such a spectacle? To whom did he think he prayed for relief (507-8)?

This curious encounter does not stop here. As this veiled embrace continues there are obvious hints to oral sex. Eugene feels, “as if he were trying to swallow a cherry [...] his mouth received and was explored by some immensity. It became more and more immense while he waited. [...] He seemed to have the world on his tongue” (509).

The hints of oral sex become more overt as he tries to release himself from the embrace of the Spaniard but is instead lifted by him and becomes “without a burden in the world” (509). While the Spaniard remains in control of his body, Eugene assumes the freeing posture of a bird in flight and “he was upborne, open-armed. He was only thinking, My dear love comes” (510). This thought is followed immediately by a guttural, emotional cry from the lips of “his Spaniard” and Eugene notices that the Spaniard’s face “exuded sweat” (510).

Mark writes that this scene is Eugene’s discovery of his own body and homosexuality and “his release from social convention”. The open armed position is reminiscent of a Christ figure, free, released and “all-forgiving, the body in the moment of sexual orgasm” (225-6). Huculak remarks that here at the very edge of San Francisco “with the great vastness of the ocean before him, Eugene undergoes his transformation” (324).

But, as Huculak agrees, “like most good things, this experience must end” (324). When the men visit the coffee shop, they leave the dark, secluded spot by the beach

behind. After their coffee Eugene leaves the Spaniard waiting, “for what one never would know, alone in the night on a dark corner at the edge of the city” (513). Though arguably he is waiting for another encounter or for Eugene’s realization to return to him. However, Eugene returns home to the scene of the slap and to his wife. During dinner conversation, “Eugene felt called on to make one remark” simply to ask his wife the name of the guitar playing Spaniard which of course the wife knows, Bartolome Montalbano (513). Now Eugene is able to put a name to the face and the encounter he will remember for the rest of his days.

Eugene MacLain is a prime example of what Howard would deem a man *who* likes that but does not necessarily identify as a man like that (xix). His clandestine and queer interaction with the Spaniard can be seen as a viable alternative to the marriage paradigm (21). Howard argues that, “queer sex in Mississippi was not rare. Men-desiring-men were neither wholly isolated nor invisible” and Eugene’s transition from confining closet of Mississippi to the more openly gay San Francisco is his personal attempt to enter a more accepting world (xiii). Indeed, though he returns to his wife, he has now proven that he can escape both the oppressive environment of Mississippi and his heterosexual marriage.

We have no direct knowledge as to whether Ran was aware of his brother’s sexual encounter or that his brother was wandering the streets of San Francisco pursuing a homosexual encounter. But we do know Ran suspects as much; his constant references to Eugene and his father and his troubled inner thoughts allow us to piece that much together. Jinny’s mother sees something out of the ordinary in Ran as well when she tells him, “We’d know you through and through except we never know what ails you. Don’t

you look at me like that. Of course I see what Jinny's doing, the fool, but you ailed first" (462). Ran is at a crossroads of sorts, a physical and emotional turning point, where he is attempting to figure out what ails him. Once again he turns to his father, "And what ails me I don't know, Father, unless maybe you know" (463). Coupled with Ran's other appeals to his biological father and brother, this question can be a reference to King MacLain, but there is also a corollary to be drawn to a celestial father, one who would instinctively know the inner workings of Ran's heart and mind. The above statement then could be a solicitation of King MacLain or a prayer to a heavenly father as the one Ran cries later, "Father! Dear God wipe it clean. Wipe it clean, wipe it out. Don't let it be" (464). The desire to wipe away Jinny's misdeed with this prayer is a false conclusion as there is no evidence to support the notion that Ran desires reconciliation with Jinny. There is something else burdening his soul arguably that same something that led his father and brother away from Morgana and, one could say, into the arms of men. The weight of this burden pushes Ran to take drastic action.

Ran understands that in order to act on his latent homodesire he must be away from Morgana but something keeps him there. Thus, while in Morgana Ran opts to forgo human contact especially the physical sensation of touch. His only brushes with human skin come by accident and when he is confronted with a potential sexual situation with a young girl he repeatedly demands she not come close to him (470-1). In the hotel room with the young, underwear clad Maideen, Ran suddenly brandishes his pistol and points it at her and then at himself with more conviction. Though she begs him not to do it, Ran puts the mouth of the pistol to his own and pulls the trigger. The pistol misfires and Maideen removes it from his hand. His suicide attempt failed.

With suicide no longer a viable option and facing defeat, humiliation and grief Ran copulates with the young girl. A quick and lackluster affair, this act seems to trigger no emotional or physical response from Ran except to wonder to himself, “Father, Eugene! What you went and found, was it better than this?” (472). At the end of his proverbial rope Ran attempts suicide only to fail and give heterosexuality another chance. His final declaration leads readers to believe he hopes his father and brother found a life more open and unburdened than the one he leads in Morgana.

Eugene and Ran embody two sides of the same coin, both men desiring men, both surrounded disappointing heterosexual relationships though the manner in which they each respond could not be more different. Perhaps this split reaction, Eugene’s ability to actively pursue another man in the very heart of the town in which he lives and Ran’s inability to even come to terms with his own desire comes from the space in which they inhabit. John Howard argues that if Mississippi is part of the rural South which “functions as gay America’s closet” (63) then arguably the west coast, San Francisco in particular, functions as Mississippi’s foil. Howard does not address the gay community in San Francisco, but he does relate an interview with a man about his journey with another gay man to “all these gay bars in different cities” of which San Francisco is an important part, where the interviewee claims to have had the time of his life (106-7). Howard also notes that the histories of homosexuality that preceded his own work came from “New York. San Francisco. Los Angeles. Philadelphia. [...] Early works of American lesbian and gay history read like a roster of the United States’ most populous cities” (11-2). This brief note and interview show us that San Francisco was no stranger to homosexual culture and was obviously more open to the gay community than

Mississippi. Thus Eugene's flight to San Francisco meant that he had a better chance of pursuing homosexual desire than Ran left in Morgana, Mississippi.

Suzanne Marris identifies a similar occurrence in Welty's personal life surrounding the composition of these stories. She writes that the anguish found in "The Whole World Knows" was "surely a more dramatic version of Eudora's own...Eudora's sense of the constricted nature of Mississippi life and her fear that an alternating warm and distant relationship with Robinson might never break from that cycle are implicit in the narrative" (146). Welty began work on "The Whole World Knows" in September of 1946 (Marris, 146). Just under a year later, John Robinson asked Welty to join him in San Francisco, and in January of 1947 Eudora Welty found an apartment there and settled in (Marris, 151). At the end of March, when Welty "decided it was time to leave California and return home" she mailed a draft of "Music from Spain" to her agent Diarmuid Russell (154). Later that same year and now back home in Jackson, Welty began to have some inkling about Robinson's true sexual persuasion. Marris writes that during this time Welty understood on some level that Robinson was deeply conflicted, "which he would eventually resolve by entering into a long-term relationship with a man" (156).

Perhaps this confusion on both their parts leads directly to the confused natures of the protagonists of "The Whole World Knows" and "Music from Spain." While in Jackson, Mississippi and then again San Francisco it must have been difficult to watch John Robinson wrestle with being a homosexual man in the 1940's. Robinson's life in Mississippi and California must have had some profound effect on Welty that enabled her

to capture the closeted life of male homosexuals in Mississippi and out yet complex life afforded to those in a more gay-friendly region of the country.

The disintegration of a romantic partnership with John Robinson changed the tone of Welty's fiction. The lack of a true connection between a man and a woman became a popular theme in her stories. In 1952 Welty learned that Robinson would be leaving for Italy to work and live with his partner Enzo, Marrs writes that it was at this juncture that, "they had relinquished any lingering hopes for a life together" (219). This resignation resonates in Welty's final collection, *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, where themes surrounding the search for queer desire or male contact transform into heterosexual couplings that ultimately resulted in failure or lack of emotional or sexual connection.

IV. FINAL THOUGHTS: EUDORA WELTY AND *THE BRIDE OF THE INNISFALLEN*

The Bride of the Innisfallen (1955) contains two “queer” stories. Each story, “No Place for You, My Love” and “Going to Naples” focuses upon a pair, specifically a man and a woman who travel together. Though they flirt and kiss each story concludes without the satisfaction of a heterosexual coupling. Welty’s depiction of this failure reflects the changes in her personal life. Marrs writes that through the process of writing “No Place for You, My Love” Welty was beginning to let go of the past like the woman in the story Welty “had sought imperviousness in the face of a failing relationship,” but ultimately each had to part ways with the object of their unrealized affections (220).

In “Death of a Traveling Salesman,” “First Love,” “The Whole World Knows,” and “Music from Spain” Welty’s protagonists experience a violent or at least emotionally jarring dissatisfaction with heterosexual coupling. The phenomenon of this discontent with heterosexuality triggers an inquiry into homosexuality. But this takes on a different appearance in “No Place for You, My Love.” Two Northern strangers, one man and one woman, meet in New Orleans and decide to travel south of New Orleans to the “end of the road” though the result is quite unlike Eugene and the Spaniard (570). When Eugene

and the guitarist travel to the end of the road it results in sexual fulfillment, however in the case of two Notherners no sexual coupling occurs and they return to New Orleans.

Though the woman clearly pegs her companion for a married man and he finds her to be a woman prone to affairs with married men, the pair trudge onward (561). That they each remark on the other's heterosexual partners demonstrates that there is some expectation of this car ride together to result in a sensual or sexual engagement. The pair never reaches sexual satisfaction and most of their trip remains formal with only the most accidental of physical contact. They never even reveal their names, making a case for what Howard would call the assumed anonymity of travel. The pair drives mostly in silence, beset by the wet summer heat of the coast that seems to trap them together and hold them tight. The excitement of travel and adventure keeps the pair together. They both acknowledge that their outing is something neither of them could do in their home places of New York and Ohio (568).

In a beer shack along the way the two begin to dance and as they danced they “were like a matched team—like professional, Spanish dancers wearing masks—while the slow piece was playing” (576). They moved so well together on the floor, the narrator says they were “like people in love” though people in love are not acting being in love, they simply are (576). After the dance, the pair begins the return to New Orleans. The man stops the car along the way and kisses his companion, “not knowing whether gently or harshly” (578). The kiss, though it lasts for several minutes, leaves the pair unable to speak; where there was silence in the departure there is so little communication in the return that “they might have been speaking in tongues” (578). Safely in New Orleans, armed with a secret neither will share, whatever excitement was with them at the

start is now gone: “something that must have been with them all along suddenly then, was not. In a moment, tall as panic, it rose, cried like a human, and dropped back” (579).

Marrs writes that Welty had a similar experience in New Orleans with a young Harvard English professor, Carvel Collins. Marrs writes, “on the return journey to New Orleans he stopped the car and kissed Eudora” (204-5). This kiss, Marrs continues, is the source for the wanton kiss in “No Place for You, My Love” (205-6). I would, however, offer an alternate theory for the motivations behind this confounding story. Marrs admits that with John Robinson, “Eudora longed to give herself in spirit and in flesh, not to escape physical intimacy but to embrace it” but John, who could have pursued a relationship with Eudora, did not want to enter into a relationship in which “he was not sexually committed [...] he loved Eudora too much for that” (208). Instead he chooses to embark on a lifelong companionship with Enzo Rocchigiani, a man “twenty years his junior” (208). Though Eudora may have hoped “John would also let Enzo go and would resolve his sexual ambivalence in favor of heterosexuality” in the summer of 1951 Welty finally gave in to the reality of Robinson’s homosexuality (203-7). In August of that same year, Welty embarked on the journey to New Orleans that would lead to the kiss with Collins. It is no small coincidence that the first drafts of “No Place for You, My Love” came only months after realizing John Robinson was gay.

When taken within this new context, the story and its failed heterosexual coupling reads a little differently. The pair, somehow so perfectly matched, becomes an analogy for Robinson and Welty who were commonly held to be so ideal for one another; yet, a heterosexual partnership was never to be had. They, like the pair in the story, could try for a sexual relationship, willing even to go as far away as possible, but in the end it was

never to be. Each must go their own way, like the man in the story who back to his wife, Robinson would return to his life with Enzo and Welty, as the woman, to whatever lay in store for her.

“Going to Naples” can be read in a similar manner against the backdrop of Welty’s biography. It is the story of a young, marriageable girl on a ship among a “half dozen pairs of mothers and daughters” all headed for Naples in search of husbands (682). Aboard the ship Gabriella is pressured by her mother and strangers alike to find a husband. She is constantly reminded that she is the youngest of six daughters, all married and five with children to show for it (683). The purpose of her excursion with her mother is clear, to travel to Naples in search of a husband. This search for a suitable husband may have mirrored the pressure Welty received from friends and confidants to pursue John Robinson or maybe even just to marry.

Aboard the vessel, Gabriella Serto, a brash eighteen-year-old American girl violently pursues one of the available young men, Aldo Scampo. At first glance it appears Aldo returns the affection but in choosing to not pursue the young woman after arrival in Italy it comes to light that the young musician is only returning juvenile flirtations and is not emotionally invested in Gabriella. Gabriella confronts Aldo upon his departure when she joyfully explains to him that her grandmother believes him to be her star-crossed lover, Romeo to which Aldo replies, “and what did *you* ever think I was?” (720). Their parting reveals that Aldo has not come to Italy to find or claim a bride but rather to study the cello. Aldo’s cello and its importance to his future is reminiscent of both the Spaniard and Sanford, whose bold, gay instruments serve as signifiers of a desire for a life outside the realm of heterosexuality or marriage. Upon this

revelation, the relationship between Gabriella and Aldo changes, and they leave each other with the understanding they were each someone they never expected to see again (721).

In “Going to Naples” then, we may assume that Gabriella’s youthful, amorous, and unfulfilled pursuit of Aldo is one way in which Welty was working through her relationship with Robinson. “Going to Naples” is a story like “No Place for You, My Love” of attraction and adventure but also one of making new acquaintances and saying goodbye. In this case, the attraction and heterosexual adventures are almost misguided. In these stories Welty focuses on the act of parting with the hope and expectation of heterosexual love.

Being a friend to the southern, male homosexual community must have influenced Welty. Her gay friends surrounded her during her particularly active writing period and she watched them struggle for acceptance in a distinctly closeted south. It is unsurprising that their trials and tribulations appeared in her fiction even in as shrouded a manner as they are. Heartbreak, loss, constraint, temptation, pursuit and death are all themes that follow the men that experience homosexual desire and it should come by now as no surprise that Welty was writing from her observation of the experiences of her peers and friends. The stories have one more thing in common: Welty was still on the proverbial fence about the sexuality of a man in whom she was emotionally invested, John Robinson. What my study aimed to show in its conclusion is that that in the early 1950’s, when *The Bride of the Innisfallen* was drafted, the hopes Welty held about Robinson were gone and she was left with how to confront the reality of her loss of Robinson.

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- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2008. Print.
- Trefzer, Annette. "Tracing The Natchez Trace: Native Americans And National Anxieties In Eudora Welty's "First Love.."
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VITA

EDUCATION

Master of Arts, English: Literature (*Expected: May, 2012*)

University of Mississippi (Oxford, MS.)

· Master's Thesis: "Outings in the Queer South: Representations of Male Homosexuality in the Short Fiction of Eudora Welty" Brief Summary: This project seeks to enlighten some of the male homosexual representations in Eudora Welty's short fiction. In each of her short story collections, there exist multiple examples of same sex encounters. The encounters in her short fiction range from the instances of the homosocial, to instances of lesbianism and—that which this study will unearth—male homosexual desire. What is so intriguing about these entanglements is that they so frequently stem from or are accompanied by violence or a failed heterosexual relationship. These failed heterosexual relations seem to refocus the characters at hand and trigger some sort of release from the confines of heteronormativity into homosexuality. This study will uncover these representations of male homosexuality and flesh out the themes that tie them together.

· 3.4 GPA

Bachelor of Arts, English and American Language and Literature and Philosophy with an Emphasis in Religion (*Completed: August, 2008*)

University of Mississippi (Oxford, MS.)

- Major – English: Literature
- Double Major – Philosophy with an Emphasis in Religion
- 3.09 GPA

· Undergraduate Thesis: "The Goddess, Syncretism, and Patriarchy: Evolution and Extinction of the Goddess during the Creation of Patriarchy in Ancient Israel." Brief Summary: Archaeological evidence has established that an alternative religious culture existed before the establishment of Yahwism and that this culture was indeed polytheistic. In this paper it is argued that a goddess culture reigned from the period of pre-Israelite culture until the early years of the postexilic period (early Judaism). This study queries the existence and the ramifications of this religious culture on the foundations of ancient Israelite religion and ultimately Judaism. Finally, this project seeks to shed light upon what caused the demise of the goddess tradition.

PUBLISHED ESSAYS

“The Goddess, Syncretism, and Patriarchy: Evolution and Extinction of the Goddess during the Creation of Patriarchy in Ancient Israel.” Volume 8. Number 2 of *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal*.

<http://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/issue/current>

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Sexism and Sisterhood: A Feminist Interpretation of *The Help*” Presented at the 11th Annual Isom Student Gender Conference, The University of Mississippi. February, 2011.

“When Help Becomes a Hindrance: How The Help Obstructs the Construction of an Interracial Sisterhood.” Presented at the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association National Conference, San Antonio TX. April, 2011

“Some Southern Mirrors: Confrontations with Heterosexuality Reflecting Male Homosexuality.” Presented at the Southern Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference, Atlanta GA. November, 2011.

“‘So Many Kids These Days are Doing It’: Mass Culture’s Influence on Gender Identity in Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* and Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*.” Presented at the Popular Culture Association/ American Culture Association National Conference April, 2012.

“Unpacking History and Uncovering Homodesire: How Welty's Use of Historical Characters Shrouds the Appearance of Male Homosexuality in ‘The Wide Net.’” To Be Presented at the Southern Writers, Southern Writing Conference. July12-14 2012

CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Organization Committee Member for the Ole Miss Graduate Student Colloquium, Spring 2012

Secretary of the Flannery O’Connor Panel at the 2012 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention, Durham North Carolina, November 9-11.

Chair of Panel “New Places, Old Spaces: Examining Themes of Place as Space and Time in the Fiction of Eudora Welty”
at the Southern Writers, Southern Writing Conference. July12-14 2012

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Graduate English Feminist Theory Reading Circle. Co-Founder
and Treasurer for the 2010-2011 academic year.

Southern Gothic Reading Circle, 2011

EXTRA-DEPARTMENTAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Square Books, Junior. Oxford, MS. 38655

January 2007 to Present (Full-time work from May 2008 to August 2010)

Contact: Lyn Roberts (662) 236-2207

Responsibilities include:

- Bookselling
- Daily bookkeeping duties
- Editor of children's section of bi-monthly newsletter: *The Dear Reader*
- Editor of weekly, on-line newsletter: *The Rabbit Reader*

RELEVANT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Board Member, Lafayette County Literacy Council

Director of Yoknapatawpha Youth Literacy Council

Duties Include:

- Fundraising Supervision
- Book Drive Organization

TEACHING INTERESTS

- Contemporary Southern Literature
- American Literature
- Sexuality and Gender in Southern Literature
- Religion and Southern Literature
- Influence of the Female Author in American Literature
- Young Adult Literature
- Children's Literature
- Apocalyptic Literature

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Modern Language Association
- South Atlantic Modern Language Association
- American Culture Association
- Eudora Welty Society

REFERENCES

Dr. Annette Trefzer

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Relationship: Dr. Trefzer is DGS at my current university, my academic advisor, thesis director and has taught two of the seminars that have thus far made up my coursework.

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Dr. Robert Cummings

Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Center for Writing and Rhetoric, The University of Mississippi
662-915-1989
cummings@olemiss.edu

Relationship: Dr. Cummings taught my course of teaching college writing. He helped me mold my teaching philosophy as well as put together a portfolio of potential writing assignments to prepare me for the classroom setting.

Dr. Willa Johnson

Assistant Professor of Sociology, The University of Mississippi
662-915-1495

Relationship: I worked closely with Dr. Johnson as an undergraduate on my undergraduate thesis and she was an integral part in my decision to attend graduate school.