

Discarding Dreams and Legends: The Short Fiction of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty

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

by

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ABSTRACT
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This project examines four Southern women writers—Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty—who use the genre of the short story and the setting of the farm or insular living space to critique Southern regional identity. I argue that the social critiques of these southern female short story writers have been overlooked because stereotypes rooted in the fantasy of the idealized southern woman has limited critical perceptions of these authors' engagements with cultural or political issues, when in reality their short fiction helped to influence the shifting expectations of the mid-twentieth century South.

This study provides a new perspective on the women's voices who had been marginalized because of their region, gender and choice of genre. My research acknowledges the contributions of Roberts, O'Connor, Porter, and Welty to the changing norms of the second quarter of the twentieth century South and works to recover Roberts as important voice of southern change. Their work reveals some of the small moments of transition that helped create change in the South, particularly for its women. In the stories I examine, each author presents a flawed model of society and focuses on the factors that make it flawed. For Roberts, it is the false idolization of the past; for O'Connor, the limitations of the ideals of southern womanhood; for Porter, the social constraints of a provincial society; and for Welty, the available roles for blacks. Some of the stories indicate a path for improvement that allows for a more hopeful future. All of the stories can be read as parallel lessons for the South to discard its constricting Old South ideals.

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INTRODUCTION

Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty are accepted as canonical authors, and thus their significance is not often interrogated. Patterns of interpreting these women's writings have fallen into a trap of stereotypes that classifies them by their region, gender, and choice of form. The regional persistence of Old South ideas, particularly in regard to mythologized role of the white woman as the lady on a pedestal, has limited critical perceptions of these authors' engagements with cultural or political issues. Moreover, critical perceptions of the short story as a lesser, "practice" literary form has also led to scholars overlooking the significance of these women's short fiction. Elizabeth Madox Roberts has been neglected for less overt reasons. Although Roberts reached similar levels of critical and popular success during her lifetime as O'Connor, Porter, and Welty, her work today is almost entirely out of print and criticism is limited. I argue that the voices of these four southern female short story writers have been marginalized because stereotypes rooted in the fantasy of the idealized southern woman limit their perceived capacity to influence culture, when in reality their short fiction helped to influence the changing norms of the mid-twentieth century South.

OLD AND NEW SOUTH

All four women wrote in the American South between the 1930s and the 1950s, a tumultuous place with shifting regional identities due to the rise of racial liberalism, increased urbanization and industrialism, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Even though the Great Migration had already begun, the Civil Rights movement

had yet to gain momentum, and conventional agrarian life no longer provided a unifying principle for the South. Although theoretically the nation was unified after the Civil War, Jennifer Greeson argues in *Our South* that the South is actually an “internal other for the nation, an intrinsic part that is nevertheless differentiated and held apart from the whole” (1). Her way of viewing the South demonstrates how it can be both a distinct region, identifiable in its geography, climate, literature, and more, but also part of the United States. Although the South faced enormous upheaval after the Civil War, Carl N. Degler posits “the persistence into the second half of the twentieth century of the social and psychological characteristics that first appeared in the antebellum years” (xii). J.A. Bryant also argues for the continuity of southern history:

Up to and including the years of World War II, however, patterns of allegiance in the South were not greatly different from those that had prevailed since the end of the Civil War. The network of families, religious denominations, and political alliances were much the same. The cuisine had not changed. Pastimes remained the same. Dialectal variations persisted. . . . the homogenization that was to transform southern life in the wake of TVA, with the advent of rural electrification, better roads, better schools, and chain stores, had only begun. For all practical purposes the Old South was recognizable as the Old South through the years of World War II. (4)

Bryant’s list naturally extends to the endurance of the Old South’s social and gender expectations since each of the categories he mentions are deeply entwined with notions of gender and behavior. Greeson’s notion of southern isolationism, augmented by Degler’s and Bryant’s arguments for the continuity of the South, helps explain why writers in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s were still working against the stereotypes held by the Old South. This project examines four women writers who do just that. All four write short fiction that I read as critiques of the attachment to these Old South values and a provocation for change.

The “Old South” turns out to be more of a fantasy than a historical reality. James Cobb explains that “the Civil War and Reconstruction . . . fast-forwarded the antebellum southern order through the process of aging and historical distancing. By the end of Reconstruction, what had simply been the South in 1860 had become the ‘Old South,’ frozen away in some distant corner of time and accessible only through the imagination” (73-74). The Old South is not just the history of the South, but a fictive memory that allows for nostalgia for a time that never really existed. This mythologized Old South made it even harder to abandon its ideals.

One early effort to unite and modernize the South coalesced under the term New South. The “New South” was first a movement led by politician and journalist Henry Grady in the 1880s. Grady’s hope was for a South that had achieved a “harmonious reconciliation of sectional differences, racial peace, and a new economic and social order based on industry and scientific, diversified agriculture—all of which would lead, eventually, to the South’s dominance in the reunited nation” (Gaston 7). This promise of a better future attracted politicians and the public to the cause. Some saw these plans as a break from the Old South, while others, such as Grady, claimed the New South was “simply the Old South under new conditions” (qtd. in Gaston 165). Cobb asserts that “the original New South was conceived . . . to use industrial development to northernize their region’s economy while doing their best to restore and then to uphold the most definitively ‘southern’ ideals of the Old South, especially its racial, political, and class hierarchies” (Cobb 68). Paul Gaston argues that this is precisely why this first New South movement failed; instead of the great successes planned, “the South remained the poorest

and economically least progressive section of the nation” (189).¹ Despite this failure, the mythology of the New South persisted. As Edgar T. Thompson observes, both “before and since Henry W. Grady used the expression in 1886, every generation of Americans has been told that the South of its day was a ‘new South’ (qtd. in Gaston 11). Thus, I don’t refer to a particular “New South” movement, but to the principle of an improved and modernized society.

WOMEN IN THE NEW SOUTH

Fundamental to all versions of the South were traditional gender roles, particularly the image of white southern womanhood. Anne Goodwyn Jones notes that it was “especially but not exclusively in the culturally dominant form of the ‘southern lady’” that was “central to hegemonic southern ideology since well before the Civil War” (“Women Writers” 279). White women were expected to uphold the tenets of what Barbara Welter has defined as a “Cult of True Womanhood” of the 1800s: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152). This “particular construction of femininity” crafted an image of a woman on a pedestal, which served not only to suppress women, but also “served to legitimate and perpetuate antebellum class, race, and gender hierarchies” (Wright 133). Along with this exacting standard of “true womanhood,” “the grace, charm, and leisure of the southern lady were held up as sign and proof of the superiority of southern

¹ Gaston writes that the first New South movement failed because “loyalty to an agrarian past and determination to preserve the value system produced by it as well as well as an essentially romantic and static conception of history, class, and race were not compatible with swift industrialization and urbanization” (206).

civilization” (Wright 133). This was a large burden for southern women and an unsustainable standard.

Women’s submissiveness did not always extend beyond appearances, though. Some of the first and most well-known women to publicly resist the restrictive ideals were Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who were “among the few open southern abolitionists” in the 1830s (Scott, *Southern Lady* 63). Other women began breaking out of the traditional roles through women’s church societies. Although a few of these church societies existed before the Civil War, Anne Firor Scott observes that “what came to pass in the 1870s was of a different order of magnitude. Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian women all over the South were seized with a simultaneous impulse” (*Southern Lady* 136-7). The societies concerned themselves with their church’s mission work, but also various social causes, including, most prominently, temperance. Emboldened by participation in their “benevolent causes,” women began demanding more power in the church, and then in society at large (Scott, *Southern Lady* 138). After church societies, women’s clubs began rapidly appearing. Their “initial impulse was often a hunger for education” for the women themselves, but the interests of these clubs quickly branched out to education for children, prison reform, and any other cause they brought their minds to (Scott, *Southern Lady* 158). The power and responsibility women experienced as part of these groups led them to begin exerting political influence, leading to the women’s suffrage movement and the eventual passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Writing was a potent tool for this empowerment. Mary Louise Weaks asserts that “writing was probably one of the first occupations open to women because it allowed women to remain in their homes, but it also gave them a voice on matters of gender” (38-

9). Many, if not most, southern women retained the image of the southern lady while they pursued these new vocations. Scott observes that some did not mind the dual role, while “others impatiently called for an end to pedestals, but even they found it more effective to operate within the ladylike tradition” (*Making* 238). Acting as the southern lady while advocating for their various causes was the only way for women to be heard in the time. This work meant that “the knowledge, attitudes, and values shared by southerners, and the ideal patterns—the generally accepted view of how people *should* behave in certain situations were, bit by bit, being altered” (Scott, *Southern Lady* 100). However, by 1930, these ideal patterns still hadn’t significantly changed. As Emily Wright observes, although some women were involved in activism, the “New Woman” did not “exert a major influence on the New South. . . . the average southern woman professed herself satisfied with her condition” (136). Because of the hold of the ideals for Southern women, suffrage was slower to gain traction in the South than in the North.

Although they gained new momentum following the Civil War, women as participants in social change in the South was not a new phenomenon. Anne Goodwyn Jones examines seven women novelists in her study, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*, which offers an important foundation for my work. Jones finds in these mostly nineteenth century writers similar themes to those I reveal: she writes that hallmarks of southern women’s writings “include the critique, implicit or direct, of racial and sexual oppression, of the hierarchical caste and class structures that pervade cultural institutions, and of the evasive idealism that pushes reality aside” (*Tomorrow* 45). However, the writers she examines capitulate to patriarchal gender norms. Jones notes in regard to Grace King and Augusta Jane Evans that their

failure to sustain a rejection of societal norms “is, if unhappy, understandable: that vision rejects the dominant social pressures of the nineteenth century that defined woman, man, and the community in ways that would prevent each author’s ideal from becoming actual—and perhaps her book from being published” (*Tomorrow* 108). This opens up the possibility that these seven writers wanted a greater rejection of Old South values but chose a less disruptive message in order to be able to write at all.

My work picks up when Jones leaves off. She explains that she stopped before she came to writers like O’Connor, Porter, and Welty because she “wanted, in this book, to search out their roots” (*Tomorrow* 46). Their roots allow my authors to offer greater progress that promises a more hopeful future. Jones describes the themes of the nineteenth-century writers as “evasion, hope, despair” (*Tomorrow* 352), and the hope is mitigated by the implications of the worlds the authors create, making despair the most prevalent implication. By contrast, the twentieth-century writers I examine are willing to be more overtly political and thus are better able to challenge patriarchal expectations. O’Connor challenges those expectations most overtly; Roberts and Welty are able to offer more positive images for a future of change; Porter offers both stories that identify the need for change and identifies that change beginning.

Southern womanhood was not the only old ideal to be challenged. The Old South’s hierarchies of class and race were also questioned in the modernization of the South. The problematic nature of these models was revealed in the transitional period. Cobb relates that citizens were “bombarded with the New South’s mythology of progress, but confronted everywhere with overwhelming contemporary evidence of their region’s backwardness and decline,” and, as a result, “in the 1920s the South appeared to reach a

point at which, as Dewey Grantham put it, ‘the earlier equilibrium between the forces of modernization and those of cultural tradition could no longer be sustained’” (Cobb 114).

The old hierarchies could not remain forever.

Creating a sustainable southern culture in the early twentieth century was determined in part through the literature of the time. Authors like Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty used their short fiction to critique and direct the changing South. They use the setting of an insular living space, which in some stories takes the form of a farm, and in others a simple household. These confined spaces mirror the South itself with its enclosed space and internal authority, similar to the imagined community Benedict Anderson describes, albeit on a smaller scale. Each has its own political system, governed by those within it. The inhabitants share the same geographic space and economic goals. The culture of a farm or rural household can be viewed in parallel to the culture of the South. The farm also does not carry the same automatic indications of aristocracy that the plantation does. Thus, these spaces allow the authors to investigate the South’s transition from Old to New South.

THE SHORT STORY IN THE NEW SOUTH

These women used the genre of the short story to write their critiques, and it is in part this choice that has also limited recognition of their political work. Debates about the definition of the form and its significance are longstanding. The first attempt at defining the short story is generally credited to Edgar Allan Poe in his 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*. Poe identifies a “unity of effect or impression” (60) as

the most important trait of any composition (60). Part of achieving this, he states, is a sense of totality, which makes a short story superior to a novel, since a novel cannot be read in one sitting (61). That single effect means “in the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be the one preestablished design” (61). He argues this is not attainable by either the novel (too long) or the poem (too short). Little about Poe’s definition of the short story remains uncontested, but that does not mean his ideas don’t ring true. Flannery O’Connor echoes Poe when she says that, in the short story, “detail has to be controlled by some overall purpose, and every detail has to be put to work for you” (“Writing” 93). These two assessments are representative of the larger discussion surrounding the way the short story works and the genre’s significance.

Although Poe clearly had high esteem for the short story, many see it as a lesser genre than the novel because of its brevity. Its brevity leads to its use in classrooms, both for writers and readers, which also leads to its stigma of being less significant. When Charles May wrote the introduction to *Short Story Theories* in 1976, he pointed to evidence of the neglect of the short story: “there is only one scholarly journal devoted to the short story as compared to at least a half-dozen devoted to the novel, . . . [and] the standard bibliographies of critical work in literature include separate subject listings for drama, poetry, and the novel; there is not even a category for the short story” (4). The situation has changed some with at least three journals, a biennial conference and more scholars devoted to studying the genre today, but it remains a stigmatized form.² Mary Louise Pratt explains that “the relation between the novel and the short story is . . . a

² The journals are *Studies in Short Fiction*, *Journal of the Short Story in English*, and *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*; the society is The Society for the Study of the Short Story in English.

hierarchical one with the novel on top and the short story dependent. . . .The short story has a reputation as a training or practice genre, for both apprentice writers and apprentice readers” (96-97). As recently as 2012, *Narrative* dedicated an issue of its journal to short story theory. Susan Lohafer summed up the focus in her preface to the issue: “the questions these papers address have to do with short fiction as a narrative genre, but also with the very idea of genre itself, and the very act of narration” (134). The issue raises questions of whether narrative theory can be applied to the short story. It is most typically used to explicate novels, and Lohafer argues that the different genres require different theories. In response to narrative theorist James Phelan, she writes that he neglects certain perspectives when he uses narrative theory to examine a short story, but she acknowledges, “obviously, Phelan could list scores of theorists whose work *I* ignore. We steer our boats by different constellations” (Winther et al. 161). Lohafer’s metaphor indicates that she sees a different driving principle for the genres. These debates are evidence of the marginalization of the short story and of the writers I study here.

Even while considering these debates, I maintain that it is the qualities of the genre that allow the short story to depict the moment of cultural crisis in the mid-twentieth century South so clearly, particularly its tendency to deal with marginalized groups and its ability to raise questions for its readers. Frank O’Connor discusses the short story’s focus in *The Lonely Voice*, arguing that “the short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged population group,” which can be “submerged entirely by material considerations” or “submerged by the absence of spiritual ones” (18). This means people who are held back by their economic status or by a more intangible quality, such as a lack of spiritual guidance. O’Connor’s quality of being submerged

translates to those in the Old South who are oppressed by the confining expectations, maintained by the patriarchal power structure, of their race and gender. Because of the aptitude O'Connor details of the short story to represent submerged population groups, the genre has a particular capability to explore the issues inherent in this moment of crisis in the South. O'Connor adds that "always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society" (19), allowing for an imagining of characters just outside these power structures—imagining the society just beyond the restrictive one of the author's present. Short stories are also an ideal form to examine culture and prompt change in moments of cultural crisis because their brevity leads to raising questions without necessarily resolving them—leaving the resolution to the reader's imagination. Thomas Leitch investigates this quality of short fiction and claims, "it is quite possible to challenge the character's, and the audience's, assumptions about the world without substituting any more-authoritative knowledge, so that such stories constitute not a form of knowledge but a challenge to knowledge, that is, a way of debunking assumptions which are not really true" (133). "Assumptions which are not really true" describes the hierarchies of the Old South that are challenged in the short stories I will be examining.

Despite these assertions about the short story's felicity in moments of crisis and change, I, along with other critics, cannot demonstrate with certainty why the genre is so powerful. I can point to its uprising in Irish culture during their political upheaval, and that it is a predominant genre of postcolonial cultures, but this does not offer a reason

why it is so prevalent and influential.³ Lorrie Moore proposes a reason for this shortcoming: “the abundant, crazily disparate imagery that comes to mind when considering and generalizing about the genre demonstrates what story writers all know: the short story is pretty much theory-proof. One pronounces upon it with spluttering difficulty. An energetic effort may send one into a teeming theme park of argument, mixed metaphor, tendentious assertion” (Moore xi). Although critics cannot agree about why it so effectively does so, I examine short fiction in this project that influences its culture in the period of transition from Old South to New in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

The role of women in the South and the genre of the short story come together in the chapters that follow. This study provides a new perspective on the contribution of women’s voices who had been marginalized because of their region, gender and choice of genre. My research acknowledges the contributions of Roberts, O’Connor, Porter, and Welty to the changing norms of the mid-twentieth century. Their work reveals some of the small moments of transition that helped create change in the South, particularly for its women.

Before Elizabeth Madox Roberts can be acknowledged as an important voice of southern change, she needs to be recognized as a significant contributor to southern writing. Most of her novels and poetry, and all of her short fiction, is out of print and has relatively little criticism. Her short fiction was mostly neglected even as her novels and poetry were acclaimed. Her work is worthy of a much greater audience, particularly for

³ Adrian Hunter argues, “the short story is, and always has been, disproportionately represented in colonial and postcolonial cultures. The reasons for this are numerous and difficult to determine and they change from culture to culture (138). Another example is W. H. New’s 1987 book, *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand*.

its messages of progress as she presents characters leaving behind the ways of the past in order to have more prosperous futures.

In my chapter on Flannery O'Connor, I argue that she takes up issues of women's roles in the traditional South. She portrays characters who seem to hold power as managers of their farms, but they undermine their own place through a rigid devotion to the romanticized ideal of the southern lady. O'Connor punishes these women, which is typically read as punishment for their rejection of God, but which I read as a denigration of the role they are trying to fulfill.

The third chapter studies Katherine Anne Porter's collection of short fiction *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. Porter examines available roles for women, as O'Connor does, but she also questions the larger social presumption of conformity. The three stories are united by the harmful role that the Old South's traditional expectations play. I argue that Porter condemns those expectations and calls for a society that is more accepting of identities that do not conform.

Finally, I consider Eudora Welty's short fiction and, in particular, her portrayal of African American characters. My investigation of Welty's stories capitalizes on the themes of Southern identity that came in earlier chapters by taking note of how blacks are often confined to a stereotypical role, such as that of the "happy servant." Trauma to the system of patriarchy that oppresses them, as represented by other characters in the story, releases the black servants to be individuals. The parallel implication is for a South that allows its black citizens to inhabit their own identity and not a stereotype.

Together, these stories from Roberts, O'Connor, Porter, and Welty provide a growing charge for discarding the false idolization of the past, adherence to the ideals of

southern womanhood, the social constraints of a provincial society, and stereotypical roles for blacks. While none of these stories were published as political propaganda, I argue that they all have the capacity to instigate change, and were part of the cultural shift of their time.

CHAPTER ONE: ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS

If a scholar were asked to name “the only writer that the South has given the world,” it is unlikely that he would name Elizabeth Madox Roberts, but that is how Ford Madox Ford (unrelated) described her in 1928 (286). Today, Roberts (1881-1941) has been mostly forgotten. Two of her novels and one collection of her poetry are still in print, but she is found only briefly mentioned in syllabi or anthologies. Her most well-known novel, *The Time of Man*, was published in 1926 to great critical acclaim and with much popular success⁴. Her three subsequent novels—*My Heart and My Flesh* (1927), *Jingling in the Wind* (1928), and *The Great Meadow* (1930)—also met with success⁵. With the publication of *He Sent Forth a Raven* in 1935⁶, her popularity began to wane⁷, and her last novel, *Black Is My Truelove’s Hair* (1938) received mostly, although not universally, good reviews, but was not very financially successful (McDowell 28). Robert Penn Warren, writing about Roberts in *The Southern Review* in 1963, posited that this declining esteem and popularity contributed to her disappearance from later critical studies. Warren attempted to renew attention to Roberts because of his continued respect for her work. In describing her, Warren wrote, “the writer’s ear is true, as true as, for

⁴ “It was widely reviewed, and the reviews were uniformly excellent. . . . It was praised by critics and professional writers alike . . . ; it was a financial success also. Chosen as the October, Book-of-the-Month Club selection, *The Time of Man* was later published for an enthusiastic audience in England and, still later, in German, Swedish, Spanish and Dano-Norwegian editions. The Modern Library also published an edition of it” (Campbell and Foster 46).

⁵ The most successful of these was *The Great Meadow*: it “was immediately popular on its publication in March. It was published abroad in England, Germany, and Spain. . . . Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the movie rights and made a movie which added nothing to the luster of the original book. The novel got excellent reviews from the critics and became that rare exception, a work which was both a critical and popular success” (Campbell and Foster 57).

⁶ Campbell and Foster call it “the most obscure of her major novels” (64). “The critics were puzzled by the book, and the reviews were critical of its obscurity” (65).

⁷ “Her later work had declined in critical and popular esteem. . . . more and more we find a dependence on allegory and arbitrary symbolism” (Warren 38).

example, that of Eudora Welty, Caroline Gordon, Andrew Lytle, Erskine Caldwell (at times), William Faulkner, or George W. Harris, the creator of Sut Lovingood” (38). Later Warren goes on to liken Roberts to both Katherine Anne Porter and James Agee in their ability to show “the dignity of the lowliest creature” (38).

Roberts’s stories and novels are set in the South, mostly in her home state of Kentucky, and feature poor whites—Warren’s “lowliest creatures”—who try to maintain dignity in the harshest circumstances. Many are tenant farmers barely scraping by. The short fiction showcases these characters even more than the novels. Roberts published a total of thirteen short stories in her two collections—*The Haunted Mirror* (1932) and *Not by Strange Gods* (1941). Neither collection garnered much attention, although an earlier publication of “Sacrifice of the Maidens” (1930) earned second place in the O. Henry Prize.

Some argue that Kentucky is not southern, but Appalachian. While there is evidence for both regions, I assert that the themes Roberts writes about, particularly in these stories, are southern. Other scholars agree since *The Great Meadow* was republished in 1992 as part of a Southern Classics Series.⁸ Historical evidence also places Kentucky in the South. At its most simple, Kentucky lies below the Mason-Dixon Line, making it part of that definition’s version of the South. Further, it was the last state to free its slaves in December 1865 (Bigham 64). Cultural criticism also identifies Kentucky as southern. In *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity Within Southern Regionalism*, Celeste Ray defines “southern” as the “people, cultures, and traditions that have been situated in the South through time and that have developed or

⁸ Roberts, Elizabeth Madox. *The Great Meadow* (1930). Southern Classics Series. Nashville: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1992.

changed because of that southern matrix” and defines Kentucky as one of the twelve southern states (Ray 3).⁹ The combination of southern history, culture, and themes allow me to add Roberts to this study of southern women writers.

Roberts wrote at a time of great change in the South. Reconstruction had failed, industrialism had completely changed the North, and the South was trying to find its footing in this new era. Roberts, and others of her time, wrote as a way to navigate the changing culture. Roberts herself wrote, “regarding one’s work as an art: the purpose [is] to bring order to the chaos of life as we confusedly perceive it: to experience the returns and rewards that float back from the inward stream of the unconscious when the mind is continually absorbed with these quests” (qtd. in Campbell and Foster 74-75). Roberts attempts to fulfill her purpose of bringing order through her short fiction, in which she exposes the risks that maintaining the old southern order will pose for progress in the face of modernity. In essence, she presents characters choosing between stasis and change. Roberts characterizes the Old South through adherence to tradition—traditional gender roles, traditional farming practices, and traditional emphasis on family honor. These characteristics represent stasis and the isolationist view that there is no need for change. However, through her stories, Roberts shows that clinging to these old southern ideals will result in violence, stagnation, and ultimately the decay, of the culture they attempt to preserve. She is not calling for a radical overhaul of southern culture—her characters display great respect for southern traditions—rather, she offers change as an opportunity

⁹ “For the purposes of this volume we include the following twelve states as “southern”: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, recognizing the ambivalence of Texans in defining themselves as part of the South or as part of the Southwest and recognizing that residents in parts of Oklahoma also define themselves as southerners” (Ray 5).

for a better life and culture. Roberts is advocating for change of Old South ways by encouraging readers to leave behind the legacy of the past in “Record at Oak Hill,” overcome class barriers in “The Haunted Palace,” and embrace the potential of the future in “On the Mountainside” in order to move forward into a changing historical and cultural landscape.

The criticism of Roberts’s work does not reflect this cultural significance. Most of the criticism on Roberts’s work consists of three book-length critical studies that were published between 1956 and 1963, all of which primarily discuss her novels. Earl H. Rovit, in *Herald to Chaos: The Novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts* (1960), does not mention the short fiction at all. Frederick P. McDowell, in the Twayne Series monograph *Elizabeth Madox Roberts* (1963), calls Roberts an “accomplished but not an outstanding writer of short stories” (33), claiming that although her stories are “subtle and interesting,” they lack “depth and symbolic fullness” (35). Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster in *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: American Novelist* (1956), give her slightly higher praise by saying of her short fiction, “Miss Roberts is almost as fine a craftsman in this field as in the novel” (250). These three studies all point to Roberts’s skill in portraying the inner spirit of her characters and in having them, in McDowell’s words, “attain self-awareness and to go beyond such awareness to the definition and creation of a vital identity,” limiting the fiction’s implications and excluding a social importance (preface). These studies provide an important base for Roberts criticism since she would otherwise have been even more neglected, but they do not provide a complete picture of her skill and contribution to culture.

Roberts scholarship was renewed with the founding of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society in 1999, and the subsequent annual conferences led to the publication of three collections of short essays drawn from the conferences. However, these critics still mostly examine the novels and tends to focus on characters' inner lives and discoveries, excluding a larger cultural significance.¹⁰ They may acknowledge the importance of place, but only in what it reveals about the individual.¹¹ I see Roberts's portrayal of the inner spirit as a foundation for a larger commentary on the changing culture of southern identity and a critique of its reliance on the past.

Roberts was well poised to write about cultural change in the South as she lived in a time of great transition. She was born in Kentucky during Reconstruction to parents who both remembered the Civil War clearly (Campbell and Foster 5), and, as with many of her characters, she was part of a "family which was perpetually in reduced or narrow circumstances" (Bradford xi). The challenges of life meant she inherited from her parents a "stubborn strength of character" (Campbell and Foster 6). She was always creative, and wrote her first story at eight years old, her first poetry at age 11 (Campbell and Foster 12). She attempted college at 19 at the State College of Kentucky, but she was forced to return home after not even a full semester because of "ill health and slender finances" (17). She was faced with poor health for much of her life, though she did not learn until

¹⁰ See, for example: Lyndsey Brown, "Transcendent Items: Ellen's Journey" (103-111), Jessica Conti, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'The Scarecrow' and Robert Penn Warren's *The Cave*" (122-131), and Sarah Marshall, "The Confines of Consciousness" (163-169) in *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed H.R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel, West Park, NY: Des Hymnagistes Press, 2012; and Michael Beilfuss, "Exploring the Self, Exploring the Other: Inscape and Instress in The Great Meadow," *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation*, ed. H.R. Stoneback and Steven Florczyk, Nicholasville, KY: Wind Publications, 2008, 186-193.

¹¹ See James Stamant, "Subterranean *Terra Incognita*: Roberts, Still, and Warren," *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed H.R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel. West Park, NY: Des Hymnagistes Press, 2012, 220-228.

1936 that her continued illnesses were mostly related to Hodgkin's disease, for which there was no cure at the time. Over the next years, she ran a private school, taught Sunday School, and spent some time with her sister in Colorado for the "bracing air" that seemed to help her health (20). Roberts finally returned to what had been renamed the University of Kentucky in 1916, and, upon recommendation from a professor, transferred to the University of Chicago in 1917. She flourished there, and created a literary club with members including Glenway Wescott, Yvor Winters, Janet Lewis, Monroe Wheeler, and Maurice Leseman, with all of whom she remained friends after their time together in Chicago. After graduating in 1921, Roberts began what Campbell and Foster refer to as her "great creative period" of the next twenty years when she would write almost all of her novels, poetry, and short stories (39). In 1941, she was inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Roberts's focus on the past was present from an early age. She was always reflective, and her "rich texture of memory . . . gave her a sense of apartness, of separateness from life; a sense of being over here and being able to look off and down on her home and town and regular routine of life" (Campbell and Foster 13). In her short fiction, Roberts offers the reader a reflection on culture by viewing it with that "sense of apartness." In a note to herself, Roberts wrote that her task was "selecting out of consciousness a vein, a flow, which reveals the whole flow" (qtd. in Campbell and Foster 36). The stories constitute that vein which reveals the whole.

Three stories in particular exemplify how Roberts turns to the past in order to help direct a changing present and future. In "Record at Oak Hill," Roberts presents a respect for the past and a need to acknowledge its significant effect on the present, but cautions

against repeating it. The previous generation used violence to relieve their problems, and the effects haunt main character Morna for most of her life. Although she speaks of her father in only the most reverent tones, she does not want the same for her great-nephews, and pushes them to choose differently. In “The Haunted Palace,” Roberts goes beyond providing a caution against the past to portraying a character who defiles the old class order in order to claim her new place. Jess feels content in her life as a poor farmwife, and reacts with fear and anger at the thought of encountering a different life, even if it may be better. However, she is able to use her anger to destroy her fear in the end. “On the Mountainside” presents a dynamic of Old South versus progress that is resolved through a blending of ways—moving forward while not wholly abandoning the past. Schoolboy Newt is convinced that the big town will be better than his remote farm, but reconsiders when he meets a stranger on the journey who expounds about the importance of home. Newt ultimately moves forward, but with greater respect for and remembrance of where he came from. Together, these stories present a conservative advocacy for change in the New South.

RECORD AT OAK HILL

Roberts clearly sets up the farm in “Record at Oak Hill” as an Old South farm. The land has been in farm matriarch Morna’s family since it was initially established. Even the log house that the first pioneers built is still “partially preserved” (52). The phrasing indicates that we should see this place as a relic of the past. In addition to the cabin, the farm is described with many indicators of its age: the “tall old beeches and oaks,” the sundial drawn “long ago,” and furniture “that had been made before the old

war” (51). Morna is described by her great-nephew Richard Dorsey, the current farmer of the property, as “firm and graceful in her old age, past eighty, her face a sequence of fine masculine planes that had grown out of the feminine softness of her youth and middle age” (58). Her place as owner of the farm is solidified not only by her old age to match the property, but also by her increasingly masculine features to match the traditional appearance of a property owner. Morna’s concern about repeating the past is displayed in part through the “old frayed” copy of *Agamemnon* that she reads and quotes from throughout the story, emphasizing the stature of age as well as the cycle of violence. The book appears at the beginning and at the end of “Record,” providing the set up for the story of her father as she quotes a passage about war and adding symbolic significance to the conclusion. In “Record at Oak Hill,” Roberts prompts readers to relinquish the importance of the past through Neal’s unproductive desire for an imagined better time that came before, through Richard’s discovery of the harmful family legacy, and through Morna’s final actions to put away the artifacts of the past.

Spurred by the decaying of the farm, the younger generation—represented in part by Richard—recognizes that the current way of life will not be able to be maintained indefinitely. Morna serves as a symbol for the longevity of the farm, and when Richard wonders about her life, he is also raising a question about the farm’s existence. He wonders, “Will she live forever? Will she live forever?” (60). This question of the farm as a site of transition is also instigated by the political mutterings of his brother-in-law Will Neal, who works at Oak Hill because he lost his own farm in the Great Depression. This was common in the South as many farmers were concerned only with profit and not with longevity of the soil, so they would simply move on when the area was farmed out,

leaving land that would no longer sustain crops for poorer whites. Thus, as Duane Carr points out, “for the failed farmer, unable to eke out a living on depleted soil, there was no place to go and nothing to do except to become a squatter on someone else’s land,” as Neal must in order to support his family (10).

Neal’s experience has made him quite bitter toward modernity and industrialization, and his rantings against the “system” and “conditions” and “too much city-mindedness” (54-55) align him with a strain of thinking similar to Agrarianism. The “Twelve Southerners” explain in *I’ll Take My Stand* that the Agrarians support “a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way,” summing up the distinction in the phrase “Agrarian *versus* Industrial” (xli). The Agrarians idealized the small farm and demonized industrialization, writing that an agrarian society “has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of cities (xlvi-xlvii). The Agrarians do not address the practicalities of a solely agrarian society, but merely warn against the evils of consumption (encouraged by industrialism) and the perils to religion and the arts under an industrial society. That Richard is predominately silent in response to Neal indicates his alliance with a different point of view. Another potential association of the time would be with the Southern Progressivism movement, which was, according to John B. Boles, “not at war with modernity. They accepted the idea of competition, large-scale industry, and the market economy; they simply wanted the system to work more fairly” (446). The Southern Progressives relied on the professional vocations and scholars that the Agrarians eschewed in order to affect positive social changes such as better public

education and child labor laws. These various movements and colliding ideologies were in play in the South in which Roberts was writing just as they are in the story.

Richard is pushed to grapple with the farm as a site of transition when the past quite literally sticks him. As Richard is leaving the old cabin for dinner in the house, he reaches for his coat hanging on the wall, and “a sharp pricking caught at his skin” (57). He begins to investigate, digging at the plaster between the logs, but must leave the project to answer the dinner bell. The object hidden in the wall occupies his imagination. The uncovering of the object and its history directs the rest of the story as well as the direction the farm will take in the future.

Repetition of the past has kept the farm stagnant for generations. Throughout dinner, Richard notices the family legacy that is evidence of the unchanging nature of the farm, beginning simply with his recognition that the dogs he had left in the cabin “were of the strain Morna’s father had bred” (60). He also observes that at the table, “sitting there together, himself, Morna, and the child Dick were a line running back to Tom Laughlin and gathering with him into one being that was present, that was everywhere identical with the whole aggregate” (63). Their family is no different from anyone else’s, and, Roberts seems to be saying, their troubles—maintaining the farm and their way of life in the face of a changing South—are no different from the whole region’s.

The bearing of the past on the present is emphasized by Morna’s recollections of her father, Richard’s great-grandfather, Tom Laughlin. Richard prompts this telling after Morna reads aloud a passage from *Agamemnon* about men “screaming through passion a great noise of war” (60). This quote foreshadows the history of her father’s violence that will not be revealed until the end of the narrative. The story Morna tells of her father

presents him as a myth-like figure of the past; she describes him with “a vaguely romantic cast of speech” (65). Richard notes that “it was hard to make a real, fleshly man of all that he signified in fine ways and courageous opinions,” just as the old South was often romanticized and its problems overlooked (62). Laughlin was polite, religious but not fanatical, “a fine gentleman” who served his country in war, clearly set up by Roberts to represent the best of the past (65). However, Morna acknowledges, when her father returned home, “the War of the Confederacy was over but scarcely finished. Old sores were not healed” (67). Her comments cause the table to begin asking about the particulars of Laughlin’s enemy whom Morna vaguely referenced, but before she answers, she “sank into a reverie, as if she had withdrawn the whole past from the present to defend it” (68). Morna has already been established as a link to the past in the story, but here she is also defender of it, establishing the enemy, Buchman, as somehow a threat to her vision of the past. Morna answers her family’s questions about enemies “quietly, as if she defended all the dead” (70). The dead are all massed together just as the past is treated as one entity, and the past and the dead are represented by the story of Laughlin versus his enemy, Buchman, creating a parallel dichotomy between an imagined past of order and the threat of modernity.

The story of their conflict does not have the same tint of romanticism that Morna’s initial recollection of her father did; she is described as “dreamily brooding” as she recounts the past, already reflecting her unease with the moral of this story, an unease that grows into a need for the next generation to write a different story by the end of her tale. The first detail she reveals about Buchman is that “he is dead” (71). During his life, “he was guilty of a hundred crimes, I reckon,” first of which is that “he didn’t go to the

war. He stayed at home and managed, and got rich” (71). Her telling of her father led to a reverie of defending the past from the present. The story of Buchman leads to more concern for the living. “Vague years closed slowly about her as the covers of an old, slowly fading book inside which was written the record of a life, of any life, of all the living” (73). Just as Richard sees their family connections as replicated in other families throughout the South, so too does she see all the living as facing similar conflicts. Roberts’s generalizations in the story allow us to expand its significance beyond its characters to the larger society of the South.

The magnitude of Morna’s story of the past, and Roberts’s story in which it is situated, is supported by her gaze as she tells it; she looks at her family “as if they were strangers . . . in anger, accusing them” (73). She isn’t seeing the particular people, but simply people who are capable of war, as everyone is. She speaks lucidly and forcefully, insisting that her listeners not separate themselves from the stories she is telling:

Mankind is like that in war. . . . You won’t believe me. I’ll never be believed. War is like that. Keep your peace. War never settles anything. The battles are fought after the war is over. You’re like that in war. You’re all I’m telling you. You’re no better than all I’ve got to say. Buchman was found dead in his own garden. It was never known who killed him. (74)

She has seen war and war’s aftermath, and she clearly believes that new approaches must be used to reconcile the future. She links this judgment of the folly of war directly to the death of Buchman. Her words “it is never known” are carefully chosen. It is not that *no one* knows, but rather that the information is not publicly known. It later becomes clear that Morna had some suspicion or knowledge of the killer, and this has haunted her to the present day, leading to her strongly voiced desire for Richard and Neal to avoid violence and war. By including Morna’s attempt to influence Richard and Neal, Roberts can

influence her readers to come to similar conclusions of choosing a new path for the future.

Repeating the past seems inescapable: Morna sees “the same continually happening” around her although “these events were all a long time gone” (74). With this acknowledgement, Morna decides to continue her story despite her reticence as the knowledge of her story may have some possibility of changing that inevitability. She describes her wedding day as marked by this conflict. As she stood at the altar, she “thought all the time, ‘Who killed Buchman?’ as if the minister might at any time ask it” (75). She is focused not on her husband or on the moment, but on the murder, the past of this conflict grown out of the Civil War intruding on the present. Morna’s story wanders and she tells of the dress and the day, but Richard brings her back to the “fine point of the tale,” causing the reader to also recall the pointed object hidden in the cabin wall that is both “sharp and fine, a blending of things” (57). Morna’s preoccupation on her wedding day leads her to answer the minister’s question, “Do you, Morna Laughlin . . .” as if he had asked the question in her mind, which was “spread over [her] whole consciousness, as if there was not any other question” except “Who killed Buchman?” (76). Morna responds to the minister, “He deserved his death, he deserved his death,” and has to be asked twice more before she responds with the appropriate “I do.” Her inability to dismiss the past has a very real consequence in the present moment of her wedding.

Richard’s mind, as the reader’s, returns to the sharp object in the cabin, the symbol of how the past will influence the present. Richard knows the object “belong[ed] to their past somehow,” but also that “the living give to the trinkets of the dead an excess of meaning,” already a caution against allow the past to hold too much sway over the

present (62). After a brief interlude of the practicalities of the farm—Roberts’s stories often include such a pause in the action that acknowledges the necessities of life as well as allowing the implications of events and discussions thus far to grow in significance—Richard returns to the cabin to pry at the tool, and Neal joins him. What they discover is a “blade, a dagger about twelve inches long, protruded from a handle which seemed now to be the handle of a walking stick” with some small text engraved in the steel (78). As they work on cleaning the blade, the conversation about their present struggles is renewed. Neal harps against “taxes, taxes, taxes!” and Richard uses a magnifying glass to read the etched name in the blade: Thomas Laughlin, Morna’s father (79-80). The overlap of past and present problems highlights the similarities between them, and thus the need to learn from what has come before.

Neal wants to return to an earlier way of living, a mythologized time before when they had “better luck” (91), represented in part by the sword. The sword, to Neal, would provide a tangible way to overcome his problems. He says, “I’d like to get a sword into my own hand, God knows I would. . . . I could strike a dagger into the heart of every glib-tongued, lying salesman” (81). Neal’s fantasy of violence demonstrates the feeling of helplessness prevalent among the poor whites of the South and the general feeling of disenfranchisement. Richard, on the other hand, finds it hard to imagine “anger enough to drive the dagger into a living body” (81). The hidden blade is clearly more than a “trinket of the dead” that Richard earlier impugned, but although they may suspect its history, they do not discuss it. Richard “claimed the intention of the weapon as his own and moved backward into the past, vindicating” (81). Roberts use of “vindicating” could be somewhat ambiguous as to vindicate can mean both to “provide justification or defense

for” and to “avenge.” I argue that Roberts can be indicating both of these with Richard’s claim. Although Morna has not yet revealed who killed Buchman, the reader can probably guess what Richard seems to as well: the sword was hidden because Laughlin used it to murder Buchman, and Richard wants to provide justification for what Laughlin did in—honoring what he believes is right. However, with the additional element of vengeance, Roberts is portraying the desire and the attempt to have retribution against the ephemeral “past” that has caused the current hardship of life. Just as Morna lumped together all of the dead, Richard here is blaming all of the past.

The significance of the story of the blade grows as Richard engages in a reverie similar to one of Morna’s, imagining the past: “they, those young men and their young fathers, lived in turmoil, trying to hold fast to the old representative republic, and seeing, not two causes sharply opposed, but many causes breaking apart and converging” (82). “Many causes breaking apart and converging” serves both as a theme of the story and of the South of this time. There are many differences of opinion, of attitude, of lifestyle; relationships fracture, but the South, for better or worse, remains one region. It is not old South versus New South, but many Souths: the South that values family honor, and also the South where brother fought against brother; a South that wants its women to be “ladylike,” but whose women must work just as hard in and around the house as the men do in the fields. This does not mean, as W.J. Cash acknowledged in his 1941 *The Mind of the South* that “the land does not display an enormous diversity within its borders,” from simple geographic differences to “the economic and social difference between the Southeastern and Southwestern states [that] is so great and growing that they have begun to deserve to be treated, for many purposes, as separate regions” (vii-viii). Later, Carl

Degler supports a view of “continuity in southern history” but still acknowledges that the South is not a “monolithic South, a region without internal differences, a people without diversity” (7). These internal differences cause “breaking apart,” but in the end, Roberts shows that by learning from the past, but not repeating it, the South can converge again and move forward.

In order for Richard, Neal, and Morna to move beyond the past, the story of the sword needs to be revealed; Morna resists the telling of the past, “repelling the question” about the “old relic” (85), but the physical object serves to draw the story out. The final scene of the story is wrought with symbolic importance. When Richard next returns to the house, he finds Morna in her room, standing “in a long purple dressing gown that flowed like a cascade of dark blood beneath the lamplight” (85). Both the regal color purple and the analogy between the gown and blood indicate that Morna represents the whole family, its honor, and its legacy. There is also a “presence in the room . . . a shadow looming in the dark corner” (86), a presence not seen at first but ominously felt, described somewhat as if it is a threat to the others in the room. Once he is seen, Neal is not threatening but restless, moving from corner to corner. Roberts continues to add significance to the scene by the placement of the dagger “on the table in the full light of the lamp. The book in Morna’s hand, the lamp, and the dagger on the table, these three objects stood most clearly before the dark purple and red of the robe she wore” (86). The objects can also be seen as representations of family honor and of its past, and the lamplight throws these into relief. The color of Morna’s robe identifies her position of power as purple often represents royalty. The book—*Agamemnon*—represents the past and the theme of family violence, while Neal lurking in the shadows represents the desire

for that mythologized old order. The dagger represents both the violence of the past and Neal's desired violence in the present. As light often represents truth, the shining of the lamp on all of these points toward a coming resolution of the conflict of these ideas.

Neal's mutterings make the potential for violence mirroring the past's violence clearer. He rants against "big business" and "Mr. Big Myself, genius for finance, holding companies, overlords, parasites" (86-7). His growing anger starts to sound like threats: "he'll be surprised. The dry-sucked orange can rot and make a stench he won't relish. I've said so before. . . ." (87). His words provide a present parallel to the Laughlin's use of the dagger. Buchman's rules benefited only himself and led to trouble for all those who disagreed. Laughlin "righted" the situation, and it seems that Neal wants to copy him. Richard, although he has not participated much in Neal's scheming discussions, seems to consider it now. While looking at her "fine book, the Aeschylus," he says, "What any man dare I durst" (87). He does not elaborate on his meaning, and there are many possibilities, but with the focus on family history in the scene, he threatens to "dare" to imitate Laughlin as well.

The weight of the past keeps Morna silent as Richard questions her about the object he has found. It takes several tries to get Morna to reveal that she knew about her father's "blade that fitted secretly into a cane, a cane-sword" (89). She first avoids Richard's questions, then directly denies: "I didn't know anything certainly. I took the common report as it came . . . Nobody knew who killed him" (89). Her defense repeats the passive "nobody knew" and qualifies her knowledge with the lack of certainty that absolves her of guilt. Her refusal to acknowledge the truth can be explained by her rigid adherence to her family's honor. Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains in *Southern Honor* that

“white southerners reared children to value honor as much as, if not more than, godly conscience . . . honor could be internalized, and when it was violated, guilt was likewise the response” (129). For Morna, it is a matter of family honor to protect what she had come to understand about her father and Buchman when she was a teenager. It is only when Richard describes the cane as “the stick of a gentleman” (89), indicating that her father’s honor won’t be impugned by revealing the truth, that Morna begins to speak about her knowledge of everything that went on in the house, how her parents weren’t able to hide secrets from her because she would find them out, and she always knew that her father’s cane had two parts: “it fitted, the two parts together, so snug you’d never suspect,” but after a time that cane was never seen again (90). Richard presses on, as if interrogating a witness that he already knows committed the crime: “Then came your wedding . . . You were carrying a suspicion and a fear in your mind and you went blank except on that one side. Is that right?” Morna breaks under pressure and calls out, “if I hadn’t been so young, it would never have happened . . . It was a load for a girl to carry” (90). Roberts does not elaborate on the “it” of Morna’s confession. The ambiguity allows the reader to briefly consider that Morna had committed the murder, but it is more likely she is blaming her youth for a lesser crime, but one that haunts her all the same: her inability to maintain the secret.

At finally having released the past through acknowledging it, Morna stands with a new authority. “She was beautiful thus, driven sixty-five years by furies, made beautiful by her denial of these driving fiends” (91). Angela Green argues that Morna “still wrestles with the guilt of her father’s deed, however justified, sixty-five years later, because she recognizes her father’s (and her own) complicity in countering violence with

more violence” (235). In allowing the story into the open, she can also work to change that pattern. Morna’s moment of revelation brings a parallel one from the shadows. Neal is heard again, “his voice breaking into coherence and anger,” the action of Laughlin crystallizing for Neal the action he wants to take:

He had better luck. Something firm to stick a sword into. What we want is a villain to thrust. I could name twenty in America. Something has got to be done, now or soon. Burn! I say, kill, thrust . . . What I want is a blade in my hand. What I want is something to kill. A sword to kill with and a plain point to strike, is what I want. (91)

Neal’s rant has grown throughout the story to this climax heard by all. His anger is unrelenting, and the presence of the dagger in the room makes it seem possible. Problems were solved in the past through violence, so why not now as well? Morna has protected the story of the dagger since she was young, and now that it is out in the open, she sees a new task for herself. She picks it up and says, “the blade is mine. . . . Stand back. . . . Nobody else has any claim on it. It’s mine.” She wraps the dagger in a “soft white silk scarf,” wrapping up the violence of the past with the innocence of her youth, and pushes it “deep among the things inside . . . a chest that stood in the shadow” (92). The last words of the story are “it’s put away now . . . It’s mine” (92).

With this action, Morna hides the evidence of the past, but she also takes the sword out of the space and away from a possible solution for the hardships Richard and Neal encounter. Although she has been linked to the Old South throughout the story, and has protected the traditional family honor of her father, she does not condone his actions for the next generation, does not support a return to past ways. Instead of encouraging

Neal's anger against the new, she encourages him, and her readers, to leave behind the past.

THE HAUNTED PALACE

While "Record" involves characters encountering relics of the Old South and dealing with them, the characters of "The Haunted Palace" experience dissonance as the Old South mixes with the new. Oak Hill is firmly established as a site of the past, but the two farms of "Palace" allow for transition. Jess and Hubert are a sharecropper couple given the opportunity to rent some land around a mansion that had been abandoned by its owners. Hubert has been aspiring to such a chance, but to Jess this is a frightening proposition because she does not feel equal to the wealthy family who once lived there. Jess is content with her life as a poor farmwife, and reacts with fear and anger at the thought of encountering a different life, even if it may be better. However, she is able to use her anger to destroy her fear in the end. She must overcome the class barrier in order to live in her new home, and does so not just by will, but by physically destroying symbols of that barrier. Jess's inability to imagine herself in a different future is also a challenge for the South of the 1930s, and her struggles and solutions can be linked to the South as well. In "The Haunted Palace," Roberts prompts a rethinking of Old South class structure by portraying the progression of a young woman's fear of the unknown, to her agency in repurposing the space previously identified with the upper class, and her eventual triumph over that fear.

The first inclination that Jess is bound by her class is that she feels Hubert's desire to move "had the power of a threat" (6). She has routines and likes knowing the way her

days will go. When one of her friends asks the name of her sow, she tells Hubert of it disdainfully: “as if folks would name the food they eat!” (7), privileging the practical above all else. She allows Hubert to decide when it is time to slaughter and eat the sow, “being glad to have decisions made for her” (8). She is not interested in change or moving forward, or even in learning. Although she turns on the radio, she doesn’t so much listen to it as “let the sound pour over the cabin.” And “out of the abundant jargon that flowed from the box she did not learn” (8). These details add up to satisfaction or at least complacency with her way of life as a poor white woman. In addition, her response to Hubert’s decision to move is telling: “as if more might be required of her than she could perform, Jess was uneasy in thinking of the new place to which they would go. She did not want to go there. ‘It’s a place made for some other,’ she said” (12). Jess cannot see herself living in the house of the upper class. She imagines the house requiring residents who know its norms, who know how to navigate a class unfamiliar to her, and who know how to perform that class’s “work,” which Jess does not.

The farm to which they will move, Wickwood, is defined as a space of the upper class—it *was* “made for some other,” as Jess claims. Jess’s friend Fannie Burt introduces her through stories to the unfamiliar territory of the Wickleys, the farm’s previous owners. Fannie’s stories of the Wickleys’ horse breeding and business make clear in what a different class they lived. Even Fannie, who seems much more comfortable with the idea of this upper class family, “could scarcely divide one Wickley from another. One had gathered the books. One had held a high public office. One had married a woman who pinned back her hair with a gold comb” (16). They are not individuals with names, but an illustration of class difference. Perhaps the greatest indicator of the Wickleys’

difference from Jess, and of their downfall, is the story of a man coming to Wickwood who had cash and wanted to buy the farm, but he is not even considered: “Wickley had called him a hog and sent him away,” confident in the success of his regime (15). Jess asks, ““Where are they now?”” but Fannie did not know (17). All that is left of the Wickleys is a story of their arrogance and the land on which they could no longer afford to live. Wickwood is one of the farms that had “*lost* their former owners. A house here and there was shut and still while the acres were farmed by the shifting men who lived in the cabins or in the towns” (emphasis mine, 11). The owners had not left, abandoned, or been forced out of the properties. Instead, the house has lost them—misplaced them as the order of the aristocracy must be displaced in the new South. Fannie gets her stories from Miss Anne, who had spent some time at Wickwood, and throughout the stories, Jess hears “Miss Anne’s speaking through Fannie’s speaking, reports fluttering about, intermingled, right and wrong, the present and the past” (16). The intermingling of past and present mark Wickwood as a site of transition between old and new.

Jess’s fear of the unknown space and people turns the house into “an entity, as including the persons and the legends of it” (18). As Jess imagines it, the house has more power than she does. Even as Jess listens to Fannie’s stories in her own house, the previous inhabitants “came nearer, to flit as shapes about her [Fannie’s] fluttering tongue.” They are “vague forms, having not the shapes of defined bodies, but the ends of meanings” (19). Because these people are so unfamiliar to her, Jess cannot imagine bodies for these members of a different class. The “meaning” of the shapes indicates the significance Jess sees in them—the family’s inherent ownership of the property and way of life that she has never experienced. She also cannot picture their basic movements:

She could not discover what they might carry in their hands and what their voices might call from the doorways, or how they would sleep or dress themselves or find themselves food. In her troubled thought, while she came and went about the cabin room where the least child lay, shapes without outline, the women of the Wickleys, went into vague distances where doors that were not defined were opened and closed into an uncomprehended space. (12-13)

Jess's lack of knowledge about the family is linked to her inability to comprehend the space in which they lived. She cannot see the shape of the doors in her imagination and thus cannot fathom how to enter what she sees as *their* space. At the same time, the distances and space also represent possibility. Although Jess fears this unknown space, she will also enter it when they move, thus opening up new possibilities for her life.

Jess's fear of the unknown is not abated by arriving at their new home, but the space begins to be transformed by performing familiar work. The new farm seems to have a "strange wideness . . . as if space were spent outward without bounds" (20). Her previous life was confined by the limits of her class, and the possibilities of this place induce fear. The children sense her fear and begin crying, but when Hubert says simply, "Hush your fuss," his "short angry speech" makes the place a little more familiar, and "made her know that . . . their life and their ways of being, would somehow fit into the brick walls, would make over some part of the strangeness for their own use" (20). Jess already recognizes that they will need to "make it over"—refashion the space in accordance with a new lifestyle. Just as Hubert's words brought some familiarity to the space, the lighting of the lamp and cooking of food inside stops the children from crying, and when Jess serves dinner, "they had begun to live in the new place" (21). The familiar act of eating a meal creates a connection between what they knew before and where they are now. As a last attempt of the day to claim the space, "she closed the door to shut in

the space she had claimed for their living, being afraid of the great empty wall that arose outside” (22). Jess does not shut *out* the strangeness, but shuts *in* the familiar. What frightened her upon arriving at Wickwood was the sense of boundlessness, and so she creates a small bounded space whose use can be comprehended and thus can be identified as theirs.

Jess had been contented with her life because, though impoverished, it represented familiarity, and the move into the decaying plantation mansion—a place she was prohibited from under the old South’s entrenched class structures—leaves her feeling unbounded and at sea. She asks repeatedly, “What manner of place is this?” (23). In her life, the practical is the most important, and she is unable to even recognize the functions of the place: “she had no names for all the buildings that lay about her. She was frightened of the things for which she had no use, as if she might be called upon to know and to use beyond her understanding” (23). The separation of the classes leaves Jess feeling unworthy of the space instead of capable of transforming it into her own. Despite her fear, Jess explores some of the buildings in order to be doing some kind of work. She is so disoriented by her exploration, though, that she wonders if she might be in a completely different world, “if hens might be gone from the earth” (25). Hens are the simplest representation of the way of life she knew as a sharecropper, and this place seems so far removed from that world that her previous world may not even exist. In another building, “she was afraid of being called upon to know this strange ribbon of ascent that began as a stair with rail and tread and went up into unbelievable heights, step after step. She opened her eyes to look again, ready to reject the wonder as being past all belief and, therefore having no reality” (26). To Jess, if it is not comprehensible, maybe it

is not real. The domain Jess is familiar with has clear-cut boundaries and functions, and so to her it seems that either this place is real and hens are gone, or this place “has no reality.”

Jess begins to develop agency as her fear turns to anger and she contemplates action that would transform the place. She recognizes its reality when she sees the first familiar sights: “the dust, the webs, and the wheat were a link between things known and unknown” (27). She calls out, “What place is this?” and hears “angry words, her own” echo throughout the empty hall (26-27). The familiar decay only seems to heighten her anger: “What she could not bring to her use she wanted to destroy” (27). If she destroys the unfamiliar, she will not be called on to understand it, but even destruction is exercising power and changing the function of the space, thus showing her first signs of accepting ownership. Before she leaves, she turns and calls out for one of the former inhabitants, “Mollie Wickley! Mollie! Where’s she at?” and feels “sadness . . . because she could not know what people might live in the house” (28). This sadness is the first sign that Jess has any desire to know or emulate the people who lived here before her, but it does not last long as she quickly “hated her sadness and she turned it to anger” (29). Sadness cannot serve Jess here; while anger also has no practical value, it can be acted upon more easily than sadness, and Jess is a woman of action, of work. Also, sadness would indicate an element of pity or regret for the old ways, which she also has no use for. It is also possible that she is beginning to be angry that she has been denied access to this place—to this class of life—for so long. Hubert arrives with the hens, confirming the reality of this unfamiliar space, and Jess is distracted from her sadness, fear, and anger;

there is work to do—everyday living trumps existential concerns, as it does for the next several months of their living at Wickwood.

The conclusion to the story comes in a scene where Jess has transformed the great room she had previously explored by assigning it the more practical task of the space where the ewes will birth their lambs. Although she thought she could never understand such a place, she is now satisfied with such a “good place to come to lamb the sheep” (30). Perhaps more importantly, it is a use far from the hall’s original purpose. This displacement of the decadence of the old symbolizes the displacement of the old model of aristocracy in the South as well. Jess “had a delight in seeing that the necessities of lambing polluted the wide halls” (30). Through “polluting” the hall, Jess is diminishing the stature of the place and of the class that was supposedly “above” her, as well as beginning to make the place her own.

Eventual triumph comes when Jess is forced to face her fear. While they are watching over the sheep, Hubert must go out to the barn for more straw, leaving Jess alone. As she works in the hall, wearing her heavy coat and hooded shawl (30), she encounters something even stranger than the place for which she could imagine no use. She notices “a dim light at the other end of the long dark space that lay before her. She saw another shape, a shrouded figure, moving far down the long way. The apparition, the Thing, seemed to be drifting forward out of the gloom” (31). As she works, she sometimes forgets about the Thing and occasionally notices it. Then “all at once, looking up suddenly as she walked forward, she saw that an apparition was certainly moving there and that it was coming toward her” (32). In the climactic scene, the “creature or the Thing . . . became a threatening figure” (32). Jess shouts at the creature and raises her

club at it. As she lunges toward it, the creature also approaches her. “The creature’s mouth was open to cry words but no sound came from it” (33). The narrative describes how she “beat at the creature with her club while it beat at her with identical blows. Herself and the creature were one. Anger continued, shared, and hurled against a crash of falling glass and plaster. She and the creature had beaten at the mirror from opposite sides” (33). It takes Jess a few moments to understand that she has broken the mirror in the hall, and that the monster was her own reflection, and, although she does not acknowledge it, a representation of her fear. Even after this realization she flings one more oath—“God’s own curse on you!”—at the space where the creature had been, a denigration of the confines that led her to this fear (33).

This tense encounter encapsulates the drama Jess feels in relation to the place. She felt fear of it without knowing what it was. She felt fear of something she could not understand, and the place felt completely foreign. However, just as “herself and the creature were one”—showing a connection she did not understand—so too does she have a connection to this place even if she does not recognize it. This connection helps her feel “accustomed to the place now and more at ease there” (34). In addition, the much wished for destruction of what was unfamiliar gives her power over the place. Even if she is not an upper class lady, she has authority here. In addition to the breaking of the mirror, the work of the ewes lambing has brought “monstrous defilement” to the halls (34). The soiling of the halls has made them useful and part of the world Jess understands. By defiling the once beautiful palace, Jess is also tearing down the class differences of the Old South that made her feel inferior to the Wickleys. Through this triumph of the character over her fear of the unknown and her breach of the barriers of her class, Roberts

is advocating for change of the old South class structure that limited people like Jess and Hubert.

ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE

Although Roberts does not use the trope of the farm to represent the South in this story, “On the Mountainside” deals with similar issues of Old South transitioning into new. The main character, Newt Reddix, is determined to leave his unrefined hometown farm in search of the more sophisticated settlements. While the characters of “Record at Oak Hill” and “The Haunted Palace” are more trusting of the past and move hesitantly into the future, Newt Reddix is confident that change is the right direction. He is not able, though, to simply break from his past and move into a more modern world. Through the drama of his journey, Roberts calls for readers to embrace the potential of the future and of change through the character of Newt and the quest for knowledge that takes him away from home.

As a schoolboy, Newt Reddix already represents the future. H.R. Stoneback sees his name as additionally symbolic: “say it a few times and you may hear, as I do, Newt *Redux*, i.e., the familiar Anglicized Latin form meaning Newt resurgent, Newt renascent, Newt born again” (85). His choices in the story point toward the new for the South’s future as well. Newt is a schoolboy who has been transformed by the arrival of a new teacher in his cove, Lester Hunter, another significant name for Stoneback: “*hunter*, a seeker, quester, in pursuit of specific game; in his case, the fullness of life and learning” (85). Lester has taught Newt “a new way” to listen, paying attention to the individual sounds of the world instead of just “what was happening or what was being said” (3).

Newt, with most of the schoolchildren, is distraught that Lester is leaving. He has revolutionized their world. Even the parents notice a change in their children and try to convince him to stay, but the teacher says he has to go somewhere unrecognizable to the town: “I got to go to the other end of the world” (7). Lester is continually drawn by the different and new, and his leaving is an acknowledgment that Newt’s town is mired in old ways.

Lester’s new way of listening leaves Newt searching for a direction in his life, as the South must decide what path to take forward. The simplest tasks, such as drawing water from the well, produce noises that “gave him some comprehension of all things that were yet unknown. The sounds, rich with tonality, . . . throbbed with a beat that was like something he could not define . . . and a suspicion of more than he could know in his present state haunted him” (9). He continues to detect a beat in the various sounds he encounters, but is unable to define their underlying rhythm, what he divines as a purpose in life. Newt’s sense of what he does not know extends beyond sounds. As he surveys the countryside, he sees that “on every side were evasions. These sights and sounds would not give him enough” (10). The world he is familiar with is insufficient now that he has a greater understanding of its potential. Thus, Newt determines that he will go to “the settlements” where there is a school so that he can understand more of the world (11). His quest for knowledge is not just youthful rebellion—it is a firm determination. When his father suggests his next farm task of clearing a patch of land, “he knew that he would go. His determination rejected the clearing. . . . It rejected the monotonous passing of the days” (12). Newt’s desire, like Morna’s wish for change and Jess’s acceptance of a different order, is a quest for the new. He can even imagine the path he will take: “He

would walk, taking the short cut over the mountains. Two ridges to go and then there would be a road for his feet” (12). Although “there was no willingness offered” from his parents, there is no resistance either, as if his journey is inevitable.

The journey is not a simple one, and requires him to use his past experiences to prevail. The path is covered with “thick-set laurel” to traverse, and “he matched his strength against boughs or he flashed his wits against snarls and rebounds” (13). Steven Florczyk argues that “Roberts employs this description as a metaphor for Newt’s growing pains, but the passage also suggests that he is at odds with a landscape that threatens to restrain him” (101). Newt was inspired by the sounds of nature to take this journey, but it will require both wits and strength to complete it. Despite being “bodaciously tired” after the battle with the laurel, he continues on his journey (14). When he is able to survey his surroundings, he is able to see not the end of his path, but instead more of the same: “another tree-grown mountain arose across the cove, . . . and beyond lay other blue mountains, sinking farther and farther into the air. Back of him it was the same; he had been on the way two weeks now. Before him he knew each one would be dense with laurel until he came to the wagon road” (14). The view being the same forward and back indicates that Newt sees value in both his home and his destination—the future is not bright while the past is dark, but both paths would require determination to follow.

In his journey to the new, Newt, as the South, must engage with those who prefer the past. Newt encounters a cabin on the path, and the sight of human existence “quickenened his desire for Merryman and the cities and counties in the settlements, and this desire had become more definite in his act of going” (15). The house is a marker to him that he is going the right way, and he contemplates his future reward for learning:

“sure, quick gestures and easy sayings that would come from the mouth as easily as breath” (15). Newt’s desire for “easy sayings” seems to belie his knowledge of the tough path ahead, and offers a somewhat romanticized hope of the future being easy once he has gained the right knowledge. This hope sets him up for the weary traveler he meets in the cabin, “an old man” (16) who is on his “way back” (17). Newt sees in the old man “signs of the world”—the “world” being someplace he wants to know (17). The old man does not share his great respect though, and presents a different view from Newt’s of the settlements. The old man is not named, allowing him to be an illustration of a perspective. He has spent time in the settlements, but will not accept the host’s admiration of the place: “I wouldn’t be-nasty my feet with the dust of hit no longer. Nor any other place down there. I’m on my way back” (18). The host does not offer any judgment toward the settlements, but the wife “sat complacently rocking back and forth in her small chair” (18). The hosts are a representation of a present complacency—they see others passing through but do not do any traveling themselves.

Newt is forced to question his commitment to his plan more directly than his real-life counterparts. Newt’s journey was prompted by a desire to learn, and the old man presents a parallel when he speaks of having been “in a study a long time” about going back (18). The old man’s version of studying must give Newt some pause. He holds similar vehemence about his trip now as Newt did about his:

I was a plumb traitor to my God when I left the mountains and come to the settle-ments. Many is the day I’d study about that-there and many is the night I lay awake to study about the way back over Coster Ridge, on past Bear Mountain, past Hog Run, past Little Pine Tree, . . . I’d climb the whole way whilst I was a-layen there, in my own mind I would, and I’d see the ivy as plain as you’d see your hand afore your face. (19)

Both picture the journey they want, but the old man's, perhaps with the benefit of experience, is in even greater detail than Newt's. Newt does not react until the old man describes a part of the trip that Newt recognized from his own journey. Newt "was eager to enter the drama of the world, and his time now had come" (20). He began his travels in order to enter the world, and in this house he encounters a small version of it. To Newt as a young man, it is not a conversation but a drama: they are not merely talking but playing parts. He is able to describe further the place they have in common, and the old man is incredulous, "to think you been to that very spring branch! You been there!" (21).

The intersection of their paths backward and forward leads to a contemplation of the value of each. The old man "gazed at the hearth as if he were looking into time, into all qualities" (22). He has the experience that Newt does not, but he is focused on the past and not the future. He proclaims, "You walked, I reckon, right over the spot I pined to see a many is the year, God knows, and it was nothing to you, but take care. The places you knowed when you was a little shirt-tail boy won't go outen your head or outen your recollections. . . . You won't get shed so easy of hit. You won't get shed" (22-23). Perhaps it is because of the vehemence of these words that for Newt, "a terror grew into his thought" (23), and he becomes focused not on his destination but on his home. He begins to picture in great detail the sights and sounds of his house, the place he has left behind, and he becomes "submerged in a deep sense of it" (24), as if returning there in his mind. The old man continues relentlessly, his voice "defiantly prophetic, 'you may go far, but mark me as I say it . . . Your whole insides is made outen what you done first'" (24). These words offer not only a strong argument for returning home, but also for never

leaving it. In parallel, he seems to advocate for staying in the past—a rejection of learning and change and moving forward at all.

It takes a similar reverie for Newt to grapple with the choice between past and progress. He returns to his memories, which he sees “in terror,” repeating the fear that had struck him at the old man’s first declaration of the importance of home, the symbol of the past for him. The memories bring tears and the images begin “moving more inwardly and dragging himself with them as they went. He was bereft, divided, emptied of his every wish” (24). The old man’s words have had their intended effect since for the first time since his decision, he does not feel the determination that has brought him this far. However, as the house gets ready for bed, Newt begins to experience “delight in the strange room, the strange bed.” He is already experiencing the newness he sought in this journey. As these feelings flood over him, he also begins to feel “a rhythm flowing deeply until it touched the core of his desire for the settlements, laid an amorous pulse on his determination to go there” (25). The strangeness of the hospitable cabin where he stopped helped him put together the sounds and beats he had been hearing from home and his desire for more “learnen” into a rhythm previously unrecognized. His teacher seemed to have this rhythm when he “danced easily, bent to the curve of the music” (5). Newt wanted to “dance as the teacher did, . . . but he would not openly imitate anybody” (5). By taking this journey, Newt has discovered his own sense of rhythm that has connected him again to his determination. The message inherent in the story is that moving forward is not without risks, difficulties, and even some regrets, but it is still worthwhile. In connection with the South, Roberts is writing a path toward modernization while reminding that that path does not have to mean forgetting the past or abandoning

who you once were. It is often seen as part of the character of the South to hold onto the past, but that cannot stop the passage of time. Even after the Civil War and the ending of slavery, historian Carl Degler argues there was not a “major break in the continuity of southern history” (97). The South can change without losing its southern identity, and that is the possibility Roberts is writing.

Roberts wrote, in a note about her collection *The Haunted Mirror*, “the haunted mirror is the human mind, in the illusions of which is seen a reflection of reality” (qtd. in Campbell and Foster 241). Just as the mirror in “Haunted Palace” represents the illusions of inferiority because of her class for Jess, all three stories present a reflection of reality that must be broken down and changed in order for the South to have success. Morna, Jess, and Newt all have pasts that are important to who they are in the present, and who they will be in the future, but they need to leave behind elements of that past in order to continue in their journey. The space they traverse is also important. The farm of “Record” has many markers of the past, the new farm of “Haunted Palace” has signs of the past’s class system that must be overcome in the present, and the wilderness of “Mountainside” provides the impetus for Newt to leave in search of greater understanding of the world. Through these stories, Roberts sketches a path of change that encompasses the past, present, and future of the South.

These three stories reflect and project upon the South in which Roberts was writing, a South she saw as needing to set aside the past and accept some facets of change. Roberts contributes to the changing culture of the South of her time by writing an imaginary South that is more sustainable than the actual one in which she lives because of her characters’ acceptance of change. The characters are not part of any defined

movement or protest advocating for radical change, but they present a path in which the South can modernize somewhat without losing its sense of place. Together, these stories are representative of Roberts's contribution to the cultural identity of the South of the 1920s, 30s, and beyond.

CHAPTER TWO: FLANNERY O'CONNOR

Flannery O'Connor is most often read as a religious writer. While Catholicism was certainly important to her, she also advocates for social change in her short fiction. Three stories in particular—"Greenleaf," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," and "The Displaced Person"—exemplify O'Connor's critiques through the setting of the farm as a microcosm of the South. In each story, O'Connor introduces an intruder into the farm who causes the characters to reflect on the current belief system. Through this reflection, the failure of the central characters—female farm owners—is shown to result from their unwillingness to depart from an idealized version of gender roles: the myth of southern womanhood. Peter Smith argues that these women try to "synthesize aspects of both gender roles in order to maintain their livelihoods" (211), and in doing so, fail to completely fill the requirements of either (225). However, their failure comes not from an attempt to fulfill both genders, but from their choice to cling to the idealized role of the southern lady, which did not afford enough social or economic power to help them, as Smith suggests, "maintain their livelihoods." Each of the three stories ends with a significant loss in varying arenas—life, family, business, and status—showing the multiple effects of adherence to the myth. O'Connor uses these different contexts to make clear that consequences for honoring the myth are not limited to the domestic, and that even if the pursuit of the ideal doesn't lead to death, there is at least a lack of potential for progress. Pursuit of the ideals have created a dead-end for the characters. Thus, when read cumulatively, these stories that use the farm as analogy for southern culture reveal O'Connor's advocacy for women to abandon the adherence to the ideal of the southern lady since it can only lead to ruin.

The myth of southern womanhood has its roots long before O'Connor's time. Women's efforts to modernize their roles after the Civil War were matched by nostalgia for the past. James Cobb claims that "the unattainable perfection of the once-upon-a-time pastoral southern paradise of long ago was quickly and firmly fixed in the postbellum historical imaginations of many white southerners" (74). Nina Baym identifies the concept of the Old South as "a defensive celebration of the lost cause" created in the postbellum era (192). A central component of the myth of the Old South, along with a rewriting of black labor and an exoneration of the role of the plantation master, is the myth of southern womanhood. Anne Firor Scott, in identifying this myth, writes, "if talking could make it so, antebellum southern women of the upper class would have been the most perfect examples of womankind yet seen on earth" (*Southern Lady* 4). Baym identifies the two main characters of the myth: "the Southern belle is a princess, idle and free; the Southern matron a queen, always busy, to be sure, but busy with gracious ceremony and elegant appearances" (193). Catherine Clinton identifies a version of the southern matron—the plantation mistress—and its broad implications: "the image of the plantation mistress was a carefully cultivated distortion of reality meant to embody the grace and ease to which white Southerners aspired" (41).

Many scholars credit fiction with the providing the foundation for the myth of southern womanhood. John Pendleton Kennedy's 1832 *Swallow Barn* is often seen as the first plantation novel, and it includes the first incarnation of the southern belle.¹² Nina

¹² See Clinton, 192; Mary Louise Weaks, "Introduction to Part I: The Antebellum and Bellum South (Beginnings to 1865)," *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks, Louisiana State UP, 2002, 8; Lucinda H. MacKethan, "Domesticity in Dixie: The Plantation Novel and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 227-229.

Baym takes issue with this traditional reading that classifies the female protagonist only as the repository of virtue in the home at the cost of her many other roles. Nina Baym further elucidates the myth by deconstructing its origins in her essay, “The Myth of the Myth of Southern Womanhood.” She argues, “there is no contradiction between presenting a woman as a paradigm of earthly virtue *and* showing her as actively laboring in these ways [as managers, nurses, teachers]. The contradiction is, rather, between the antebellum representation of an active woman and the postbellum representation of a protected, cherished idol, preserved through male sacrifice for the amenities of gracious living” (186). Despite fiction’s disputed role in the origin of the myth, novels and stories certainly helped to perpetuate it.

Although the myth of southern womanhood was most prominently integrated in culture in the postbellum period, it had lasting influence. As Baym states, “the fact that a myth is a myth—that is, a falsehood—does not mean that it lacks power. And if it has power, then it has real—that is, material—effects” (183). These effects carry into the twentieth, and even twenty-first, century with southern women idealized as virtuous and graceful—exemplified in contemporary culture from a “Southern Woman Expo” celebrating the “ideals of being a Southern woman whom [sic] embodies traditions even in this computerized 21st century” to a blog post from the southern magazine *Garden and Gun* claiming southern women are “forever entangled in and infused by a miasma of mercy and cruelty, order and chaos, cornpone and cornball, a potent mix that leaves us good-humored, God-fearing, outspoken and immutable” (Glock). The reality is that women in both antebellum and postbellum eras worked hard, in and out of the home, but the myth remained. The combined catalysts of the early twentieth century (including but

not limited to World War I and industrialization) brought new social and economic opportunities for women, which caused some to begin re-evaluating this ideal. Some protested politically, such as early abolitionists Angelina and Sarah Grimké, but fiction provided a more subtle route to criticize the myth of southern womanhood and its impossible standards for women.

Flannery O'Connor is one writer who used her fiction to explore the myths and realities of southern womanhood. In her short fiction, she presents the catastrophic failure that pursuing the myth of southern womanhood would lead to in the modern era. This contention is in direct contrast to much of the scholarship on O'Connor, which primarily reads O'Connor's stories as depicting characters in need of religious change and occasionally critiquing the class structures of the South. Sarah Gordon, for example, argues, "when O'Connor engages the world, she does not do so to inhabit other consciousnesses or philosophies or points of view in order to demonstrate myriad possibilities for human belief and action; she presents all secular answers, especially humanist social doctrine, in light of the one truth of Christianity" (45). Gordon's insistence on O'Connor's religious message is typical of many other scholars.¹³ O'Connor's characters do often come to a moment of grace in her stories, but this does not limit the stories' significance to the religious. Furthermore, Gordon maintains that O'Connor "did not challenge the subordinate role of woman; indeed, she found in the idea of woman's dependent status a compelling metaphor for the soul's necessary

¹³ See Marshall Bruce Gentry, *Flannery O'Connor's Religion of the Grotesque*, Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986; Richard Giannone, *Flannery O'Connor and the Mystery of Love*, Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1989; Richard Giannone, *Flannery O'Connor: Hermit Novelist*, Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000; Christina Bieber Lake, *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor*, Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2005; Brian Abel Ragen, *A Wreck on the Road to Damascus: Innocence, Guilt, and Conversion in Flannery O'Connor*, Chicago: Loyola UP, 1989; Ralph Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004.

dependence on God” (193). Similarly, Louise Westling claims that “the resentful daughters of the stories are also punished for their pride and are forced to accept their feminine alliance with their mothers” (173). While O’Connor’s female characters are often unable to move out of stereotypical roles, this does not mean that she is not challenging those roles within the stories. Martha Chew alludes to this reading in her analysis of “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” and “Good Country People” where she argues that Lucynell Jr. and Hulga can be seen as “representing two different but equally futile responses to the role of women in the South” (17). I argue that O’Connor does challenge the subordinate role of women and goes further than presenting “futile responses” to the myth of southern womanhood. Instead, her depiction of women’s failure as they pursue the stereotypical role of their gender presents a need for the South to leave behind the idealization of woman as a model of “gracious living.”

O’Connor (1925-1964) is able to critique the South because she is of the South. She wrote in “The Fiction Writer and His Country,” “the country that the writer is concerned with in the most object way is, of course, the region that most immediately surrounds him, or simply the country, with its body of manners, that he knows well enough to employ” (*Mystery and Manners* 28). O’Connor knew the “body of manners” of the South more than well enough to employ them in her fiction. She was born and raised in Savannah and Milledgeville, Georgia, and attended the Georgia State College for Women. She lived away from the South for a few years, beginning in 1945, while she attended the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and spent time at the Yaddo artists’ colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. After leaving Yaddo, she lived with friends Robert and Sally Fitzgerald in Connecticut for a few years until she became too ill with what was

later diagnosed as lupus, the disease that killed her father and would eventually kill her. In 1951, she returned to Milledgeville and lived with her mother, Regina, at their dairy farm, Andalusia. O'Connor remained in Milledgeville until her death in 1964. This period provided her with much material for her stories. Margaret Meaders, a journalism instructor at Georgia State College for Women while O'Connor was a student there, recalled that "Flannery was one of the best observers of what was going on around her that I've ever known. She didn't have to go far to find material . . . Flannery didn't have to invent her characters or her plots" (Paulson 133). Beyond the general immersion in the South, Regina, a "typical Southern lady" (Paulson 132), often served as inspiration for the female farm owners of O'Connor's stories. O'Connor relates incidents in her letters that appear later in the fiction, such as the hanging of sackcloth curtains for the Polish immigrant family in "The Displaced Person" and interactions of her mother with the black workers. Margaret Whitt states more generally that "a place similar to Andalusia figures prominently in many of her stories" and that several "feature a single mother with a single daughter who has either a physical or an attitudinal affliction that makes it necessary to depend on the mother who does not understand her" (7). O'Connor's keen powers of observation gave her plenty of fodder for a critique of southern culture.

Reading O'Connor's portraits of women as positive can be challenging since her characters are so often victims. Teresa Caruso acknowledges, "no doubt an author who routinely wounds, cripples, shoots, and gores her female characters invites some measure of perceived betrayal from feminist readers" (2). However, the wounding and crippling can be read dually as that of the idealized southern lady and of the aspiration to attain the myth instead of violence against the characters themselves. O'Connor wrote about using

unorthodox methods to disrupt entrenched ways of seeing in “The Fiction Writer and His Country”:

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to a hostile audience. . . . to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures. (*Mystery and Manners* 33-34)

Although O’Connor frames this in religious terms, the same methods apply to social change as well. Her audience is used to believing in the myth of southern womanhood, and she is “forced to take ever more violent means” to shift that perspective. O’Connor strives to make clear that it is indeed a myth—a distortion of the truth. Frederick Asals observes that the South of O’Connor’s fiction is one where “traditionally clear separations—black and white, adult and child, male and female, employer and employee, ‘quality’ and ‘trash’—seem to have wobbled, become unstable, blurred in such ways as to release an ever-mounting anxiety until, under the pressure of a tale’s action, it bursts into violence” (4). Making these familiar boundaries unstable is how O’Connor can begin to shift her audience’s perspective on them. What Asals overlooks in his study is the reason behind this instability. Through the use of these shifting boundaries, O’Connor is exposing the perils of adhering to the Old South models of gender.

GREENLEAF

The protagonist of “Greenleaf,” Mrs. May, is submissive to her uncaring sons and avoids acting as the manager of her farm. As a result of this attempt to adhere to the ideals of southern womanhood, she has little success on her farm, has no control over her worker,

and is eventually gored by the stray bull that she could not successfully remove.

O'Connor presents Mrs. May as an example of the consequences for life and livelihood of attempting to maintain these old ideals.

The first scene of the story sets up the story of a distinctly gendered relationship between Mrs. May and an intruder—a bull, “silvered in the moon light...like some patient god come down to woo her” (501). To further inscribe this image, the bull has caught a “hedge-wreath” in the tips of his horns, and as the moon passes over him, he “lowered his head as if to show the wreath” to Mrs. May as a suitor would offer flowers (501). Instead of the gender norms on display, though, Louise Westling contends that “all the rest of the story is prefigured in the language of this passage. The bull’s menacing courtship will be consummated as he is sacrificed like Jesus to release Mrs. May’s rejuvenated soul in death” (162). Seeing conversion in Mrs. May’s death and an overall analogical reading is also evident in Sarah Gordon’s analysis, among others. Gordon argues that “although sometimes these women rebel against social convention and restraint, I believe that the recurrent emphasis in O’Connor is on the necessity for the female [to be] resigned to its weak and subordinate role” (198). To the contrary, I argue that O’Connor presents her female characters’ failure as *due to* maintaining a weak and subordinate role, and thus calls for discarding that mode of southern womanhood. Suzanne Morrow Paulson seems to call for a greater sense of feminine weakness when she reads Mrs. May’s “last discovery” before death as the need for “self-sacrifice rather than self-assertion, affiliation with others rather than competition, the capacity to love others (especially those of the opposite sex), and a capacity for tenderness rather than aggression” (45). While these traits may bring “harmony within the family,” as Paulson

argues, they do not contribute to moving beyond the traditional, subservient model of womanhood that O'Connor desires.

Mrs. May also displays characteristics of conventional feminine concern for appearance: "green rubber curlers sprouted neatly over her forehead and her face beneath them was smooth as concrete with an egg-white paste that drew the wrinkles out while she slept" (501). With these norms set up, O'Connor begins displaying the consequences for this blind adherence to tradition. Mrs. May "had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing as if something were eating one wall of the house. . . . and calmly with the same steady rhythm would continue through the house, eating her and the boys, and then on, eating everything but the Greenleafs" (502). Mrs. May dreams of the future destruction of her place, and it comes about because of her rigid devotion to traditional gender norms. She wants to be the respected southern lady, and so refuses to take any action or acknowledge any success that does not fit that model of society, including the effective management of her farm.

Mrs. May's pursuit of southern womanhood means she does not want to be seen as an ineffective mother. She decides not to rouse her white tenant worker, Mr. Greenleaf, to pen the bull because she can imagine that he will malign her boys' respect for her if she does and thus undermine her status as woman and mother. He would say, "Hit looks to me like one or both of them boys would not make their maw ride out in the middle of the night thisaway. If hit was my boys, they would have got that bull up theirselves" (502). To underscore the importance of her fear of criticism in her decision, Mrs. May essentially repeats to herself twice more what "Mr. Greenleaf would say," all versions emphasizing the greater respect that his boys hold for their mother than her boys

do. The brief description of the next morning's breakfast displays more characteristics of a stereotypical female: "She never ate breakfast but she sat with them to see that they had what they wanted" (504). Although her sons are adults, she sits with them at breakfast in order to fulfill the subservience portion of what she sees as her domestic obligations according to the myth of southern womanhood.

Part of Mrs. May's imagining of a perfect world is one in which her sons also conform to Old South models of gender and will take over the farm when she dies, but "neither of them cared what happened on the place. Scofield was a business type and Wesley was an intellectual" (504). From a more objective viewpoint, both are successful, but Mrs. May sees them only in relation to what she perceives as their proper place. In addition to failing to meet her expectations of taking over the farm, Mrs. May's sons also disappoint her plans for them to marry "nice girls": "Nice girls didn't like Scofield but Wesley didn't like nice girls" (509). She laments, "I work and slave, I struggle and sweat to keep this place for them and soon as I'm dead, they'll marry trash and bring it in here and ruin everything" (505). Since she cannot foresee another southern lady taking her place, she can imagine only ruin for the future. In addition, "work and slave" is quite an overstatement by the evidence of the story, where Mrs. May is seen doing very little besides complaining. Scofield torments his mother with the rhetoric of the courtship he will not actually engage in when he asks, "You want to know, "Sugarpie?" (510). His question is about the ownership of the bull, and he taunts her with his knowledge because it belongs to the Greenleafs' sons, O.T. and E.T.

Despite her sons' failure to live up to her standards, she lauds them to Mr. Greenleaf to maintain an image of power on her farm. The Greenleafs are the kind of

“trash” she worries her sons will marry and bring to the farm. To Mr. Greenleaf, she proclaims that even if they have no farm sense, “Scofield was a successful business man and Wesley a successful intellectual” (507). However, to her boys, she lauds the Greenleaf boys instead: “‘O.T. and E.T. are fine boys, . . . They ought to have been my sons. . . . And you two,’ she cried, ‘you two should have belonged to that woman!’” (511). “That woman” is Mrs. Greenleaf. Although Mrs. May has little regard for Mr. Greenleaf, she deems that “beside the wife, Mr. Greenleaf was an aristocrat” (503). Mrs. May disapproves of Mrs. Greenleaf because “instead of making a garden or washing their clothes”—a woman’s domestic duties—“her preoccupation was what she called ‘prayer healing’” (505). Mrs. Greenleaf does not live by the rules of the cult of domesticity and thus is not a worthy woman in the eyes of Mrs. May. The first time she hears Mrs. Greenleaf in her prayer ritual, Mrs. May “felt as if some violent unleashed force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her” (506). This is a distinct foreshadowing of the bull that gores her at the end of the story, which O’Connor uses to show the absurdity of a woman so attached to idealized gender norms that hearing a woman outside of those norms and being gores by a bull produce much the same effect.

Mrs. May’s lack of control over her worker because of her desire to be a traditional southern woman is evidenced by her attempts to get the stray bull off her farm. Mrs. May first insists that Mr. Greenleaf pen up the bull, but not long after, the bull again escapes because, as Mr. Greenleaf explains, “this gentleman is a sport,” reinforcing the bull’s status as suitor and a male who will not follow a woman’s orders (513). Next, Mrs. May sends word to O.T. and E.T. that if they do not retrieve their bull, she will have their father shoot it. This also yields no results, and so Mrs. May goes to their house to speak

with them. When they are not home, she complains to the black worker, “Do they expect me to take my time and my worker to shoot their bull? . . . He’s eating my oats and ruining my herd and I’m expected to shoot him too?” (516). He replies, “I speck you is,” and Mrs. May “thought furiously” that “I might as well be working for them . . . They are simply going to use me to the limit. . . . I’m the victim. I’ve always been the victim” (516). The victim is a modified version of the southern belle who requires a man to survive, the position Mrs. May covets.

Victimhood is not a new sentiment for Mrs. May. “Everything is against you,’ she would say, ‘the weather is against you and the dirt is against you and the help is against you. They’re all in league against you. There’s nothing for it but an iron hand’” (511). O’Connor’s use of “she would say” indicates that this is a refrain and not just a one-time exclamation. When company is over, her sons use this refrain as entertainment: “‘Look at Mamma’s iron hand!’ Scofield would yell and grab her arm and hold it up so that her delicate blue-veined little hand would dangle from her wrist like the head of a broken lily” (511). Mrs. May’s desired position as a delicate flower of a southern lady is undermined by contemporary life as well as by the basic necessities of the farm. She is “a country woman only by persuasion,” having come to the farm after her husband died and this piece of land “was all he had to leave her” (508). Her “city friends” play into her notion of victimhood: they “said she was the most remarkable woman they knew, to go, practically penniless and with no experience, out to a rundown farm and make a success of it” (511). Success is a relative term—the Mays do not seem to have any extravagances, but they also do not go hungry. Regardless, Mrs. May is certainly not maximizing the potential of the farm in her position as “victim.”

Although others recognize her as not a flowering belle but a “broken lily,” Mrs. May continues to rely on ineffective tropes of gender to persuade Mr. Greenleaf. She puts on a “mournful tone,” and says, “I’m surprised at O.T. and E.T. to treat me this way. I thought they’d have more gratitude. Those boys spent some mighty happy days on this place . . . but they’ve forgotten all the nice little things I did for them now” (518). She is trying to place herself as both benefactress of the past and helpless maiden of the present. She continues, ““Do you know the real reason they didn’t come for that bull? . . . They didn’t come because I’m a woman,” she said. ‘You can get away with anything when you’re dealing with a woman. If there were a man running this place . . . ’” (518-9). As is to be expected by this point in the story, Mr. Greenleaf is unmoved by this line of reasoning. “Quick as a snake striking Mr. Greenleaf said, ‘You got two boys. They know you got two men on the place’” (519). In exchange for a dig at her boys, Mrs. May tries to paint the Greenleaf boys as similarly unconcerned about propriety: ““If those boys cared a thing about you, Mr. Greenleaf,’ she said, ‘they would have come for that bull. I’m surprised at them’” (521). This incident is additional evidence of the failure of traditional gender norms to serve the needs of a southern farm owner. Mrs. May cannot use her gender or status to remove the bull from her property. It’s not so much that she’s a woman but that she has limited herself to the domestic model of womanhood. By presenting Mrs. May’s failure to step outside southern ladyhood, and thus failure to be successful on the farm, O’Connor is critiquing this same tendency in the South. The critique can be extrapolated to the failure of traditional gender norms to serve a modernizing society. The modernization of the South is represented by the Greenleafs’ milking parlor “built according to the latest specifications” (514). Mrs. May still has a

traditional barn and collects cows' milk in buckets instead of "in pipes from the machines to the milk house" as in the Greenleafs' milking parlor (514). Society is moving on without her because she is mired in one way of seeing the world.

Mrs. May's limitations due to her "ladylike" inaction come to a head when she drives Mr. Greenleaf toward the empty pasture where she directs him to corral and shoot the bull (520). When he disappears into the woods, Mrs. May suspects that he is planning to intentionally lose the bull and thus escape having to shoot his boys' property. Mrs. May schemes about her actions when he returns: "She was going to say, 'Mr. Greenleaf, if I have to walk into those woods with you and stay all afternoon, we are going to find that bull and shoot him. You are going to shoot him if I have to pull the trigger for you.' When he saw she meant business he would return and shoot the bull quickly himself" (522). This moment is the first time she has actually *meant* business, and it exhausts her to even consider behaving outside the traditional confines of womanhood. "For some time she lay back against the hood, wondering drowsily why she was so tired. With her eyes closed, she didn't think of time as divided into days and nights but into past and future" (522). Since she has spent most of the story passive and avoiding action, it seems this moment of considering action has exhausted her, but it also created a rift in her world. The shift in classification to "past and future" indicates a change in her thinking after her moment of potential action. Mrs. May seems to be reflecting on her past of unprofitable domesticity and a possible future of action and success.

Soon, though, the consequences for her past of deference to males appears in the form of the "gentleman" bull "crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again" (523). This scene of

reuniting lovers calls Mrs. May back to her familiar role of wooed woman: “She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was” (523). “Intention” is a suggestive word here since a suitor is often said to have “intentions” of marriage. This suitor has more lustful intentions, and “the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip” (523). Mrs. May is caught, both literally and figuratively, by the confining demands of her role as southern lady. From the beginning, her relationship with the bull has been on gendered terms, and the conclusion unites them in death. Mrs. May has placed herself into this situation because of her unwillingness to step outside her domestic role and serve as manager of the farm.

The change Mrs. May had contemplated on the hood of the car is reinforced by her final vision. After she has been gored and trapped by the bull, “she continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene had changed—the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky—and she had the look of a person whose sight has suddenly been restored but who finds the light unbearable” (523). As she previously saw her world divided into past and future, she is now able to temporarily see that future, and “she seemed, when Mr. Greenleaf reached her, to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal’s ear” (524), her discovery of the necessity for change. The failure in her role as manager and subsequent death of this staunch supporter of the role of the southern lady displays O’Connor’s desire to eradicate the myth.

THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN

In “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” Mrs. Crater wants a son-in-law, and Mr. Shiftlet wants a car; both try to use traditional gender expectations to achieve these goals. Both of these attempts backfire—Mrs. Crater loses her daughter instead and Shiftlet, although now in possession of a car, is struck by the realization of the hollowness of the structure that made his deception possible. Most readings focus on Shiftlet’s final moments in the story as O’Connor’s traditional “opportunity for grace” (Whitt 55). Instead, I read the story for its commentary on both Shiftlet’s and Mrs. Crater’s reliance on traditional modes of gender. Their subsequent failures demonstrate the detrimental consequences of adherence to Old South ideals. Thus, the story adds to O’Connor’s argument for eliminating those Old South models of gender.

From the first page of the story, O’Connor carefully identifies the main characters’ adherence to both traditional gender norms and the tradition of the past. As he walks up walks up to the farm, one sleeve “folded up to show there was only half an arm in it,” Mr. Shiftlet chivalrously “tipped his hat” to Lucynell Crater the daughter, “as if she were not in the least afflicted,” and to Lucynell Crater the mother, “swung it all the way off” (173). In addition to his proper greeting, the first conversation between Mrs. Crater and Mr. Shiftlet reflects their mutual respect for tradition. Shiftlet admires the setting sun and proclaims, “I’d give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening.” Mrs. Crater responds, “Does it every evening” (173). Although their level of respect for tradition would not affect whether the sun sets every night, their attention to, and admiration of, it indicates more than acknowledgment of natural phenomena. It not only recurs, but it recurs without change or exception, something that proponents of the

Old South model of tradition also desire. Their joint disapproval of progress is also made evident in Shiftlet's dismissal of "one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut the human heart . . . out of a man's chest and held it in his hand . . . [and] don't know no more about it than you or me." Mrs. Crater echoes, as if in response to a sermon, "that's right" (174).

Throughout the story, Shiftlet insistently refers to Mrs. Crater as "lady," continually calling attention to gender, and opposing it to his masculinity. The Craters' existence on the farm indicates that they've been able to survive without a man, but most of the responsibilities of the farm—"man's work"—have been left untended. Mrs. Crater says, "That car ain't run in fifteen year, . . . The day my husband died, it quit running," as if the car would have refused to be run by her (173). Shiftlet recognizes the assumptions about gender underlying her statement, and he concludes his introduction of himself by stating, "Maybe the best I can tell you is, I'm a man; but listen lady . . . what is a man?" (175). Mrs. Crater's response is a question about the toolbox he carries—for her, symbol enough of his manhood. Shiftlet continues his line of reflective questioning, but Mrs. Crater is focused on the definition of man as worker and provider, and she "sat rocking and wondered if a one-armed man could put a new roof on her garden house"—if he can fulfill the role of a man (175). Mrs. Crater further reveals her attachment to traditional gender norms when she asks, "Are you married or are you single?" (175). Shiftlet, likely already aware of her assumptions, opines about not being able to find "an innocent woman." With his comments, he plays into her assumptions about gender norms and presents himself, to borrow from another O'Connor story, as "good country people," stating that he "wouldn't have any of this trash I could just pick up" (175).

Because of her assumptions about Shiftlet's gender role, Mrs. Crater does not notice his ulterior motives. As she describes her daughter's qualities—"she can sweep the floor, cook, wash, feed the chickens, and hoe," Shiftlet's attention is "focused on a part of the automobile bumper that glittered in the distance" (176). Mrs. Crater's adherence to the definition of female as housekeeper to a man means that she is all too ready to place Shiftlet in the role of that man simply because of his gender even though they've only just met.

Shiftlet performs the work needed to meet Mrs. Crater's expectations of his gender. Within the first week, "he had patched the front and back steps, built a new hog pen, restored a fence," and even taught Lucynell to say her first word, "bird" (176). The ability of a bird to fly away is significant, but Mrs. Crater also does not notice this, and instead she instructs him to teach Lucynell to say "sugarpie" next. He "already knew what was on her mind," a certain signal that he plans to take advantage of the situation (177).

Mrs. Crater's willful self-deception in accordance with the role she expects Shiftlet to be playing continues as he fixes the car and she ignores the potential for him to drive it away once it is fixed. Instead, she again expounds on "the sweetest girl in the world," an "innocent woman" who "can't sass you back or use foul language. That's the kind for you to have. Right there," pointing to young Lucynell (178). In addition to her earlier named housekeeping virtues, with Lucynell's virtual silence, Mrs. Crater has portrayed her as the perfect woman possessing all the qualities of the cult of "true womanhood": piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

By using Mrs. Crater's desire to see Lucynell married, apparently even to a man they've known for so short a time, Shiftlet is able to convince her to pay for him to fix and even paint the car, and further to give him \$17.50 for a weekend honeymoon trip with Lucynell. For their wedding, even her clothing reflects Lucynell as the image of a traditional woman. She is wearing a "white dress" and a "Panama hat on her head with a bunch of red wooden cherries on the brim" (180), both the color white and the cherries symbolizing her purity and innocence, both morally and sexually.

The failure of Mrs. Crater's desired results comes first. Because they *do* live in a world where a doctor in Atlanta had taken a human heart out of a man's chest and did indeed learn more about it than anyone like Shiftlet or Mrs. Crater ever could have imagined, the traditional gender norms they uphold and play into, respectively, do not make for successful lives. Armed now with Mrs. Crater's money and her car, Shiftlet stops at a restaurant with Lucynell, and, when she dozes, he claims she is a hitchhiker he can't wait for and leaves without her (181). Mrs. Crater will not have a son-in-law who, as she earlier expressed approval of, would say, "'Lady, I don't want to take her away, I want her right here,' [and] I would say, 'Mister, I don't blame you none. I wouldn't pass up a chance to live in a permanent place and get the sweetest girl in the world myself'" (178). Instead, she will likely never be reunited with her nearly thirty-year-old daughter whom she never bothered to teach to speak, despite Shiftlet teaching her a word in the first week he was with her.

Mrs. Crater, though, is not the only one punished for relying on these gender norms. Shiftlet happily played into the role Mrs. Crater expected of him for his own benefit, but even though he has gotten a free car, "he was more depressed than ever"

(182). Perhaps in an attempt to alleviate his depression through a version of altruism, he picks up a hitchhiking young boy. When the boy doesn't speak, "Mr. Shiftlet felt oppressed" (182). Whereas he seemed to thrive under the distinct expectations of Mrs. Crater, the boy's silence causes Shiftlet to feel at a loss. He tries to provoke a reaction from the boy by exclaiming, apropos of nothing, "I got the best old mother in the world so I reckon you only got the second best," but the boy only gives him "a quick dark glance and then turned his face back out the window" (182). Shiftlet, seemingly encouraged by any kind of reaction, continues his exposition to regret the day "I left that old mother of mine." The boy responds by placing his hand on the door handle, and Shiftlet says, "My mother was a angel of Gawd" in "a very strained voice" (183). If his mother was an angel, then Shiftlet might be a worthy man himself. Instead, he feels depressed because achieving his goals was not as fulfilling as he'd hoped. Although he only played the part of a traditional man on Mrs. Crater's farm, he seeks to replicate her recognition of him as man who is due respect. By the time of this last declaration, "the car was barely moving," signaling Shiftlet's lack of progress in his current role (183). The boy, unwilling to play into Shiftlet's desires as Mrs. Crater had, cries before jumping out of the car, "You go to the devil! . . . My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!" (183). This denigration of his mother and thus of his status cause a reflection in Mr. Shiftlet.

The effects of this encounter are symbolized by the suddenly appearing clouds "the exact color of the boy's hat" both in front of and behind the car. The boy represents to Shiftlet the world in which traditional gender roles are not recognized and respected. In between these clouds, he "felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him"—

the rottenness being a world that has left behind the limiting traditions of the Old South. Although Shiftlet seems to see the New South as “rottenness,” O’Connor, in chastising Shiftlet, present a different view. Shiftlet prays, “Oh Lord! . . . Break forth and wash the slime from this earth” (183). While he might be praying for people like the boy to be washed away, it is him and his worldview that the storm seems to be chasing. The story ends as clouds begin to thunder and drop rain on the back of the car, and “very quickly he stepped on the gas and with his stump sticking out the window he raced the galloping shower into Mobile” (183). O’Connor shows that Shiftlet is unable to enjoy his moment of success because he must try to escape the storm, as those who try to hold on to Old South gender norms must try to escape progress. Most readings focus on the consequences for Shiftlet at the end of the story, arguing, as Sarah Gordon does, “clearly O’Connor intends for the reader to recognize . . . that if Mr. Shiftlet’s prayer were answered, he would be the first to go” (172). A careful reading reveals his punishment comes not only for his treatment of Lucynell, but for his means of doing so. The characters in “The Life You Save” appear to achieve their goals by using traditional models of gender, but O’Connor ensures that any success they achieve is illusory because the modern world requires updated gender norms.

THE DISPLACED PERSON

In “The Displaced Person,” O’Connor echoes some of the earlier consequences for devotion to the myth of southern womanhood and goes further. The farm owner, Mrs. McIntyre, as a result of her deference to males and her unwillingness to act outside of her domestic sphere, even as manager of her farm, loses her status, her farm, and her health.

The wife of the white farm worker, Mrs. Shortley, does not aspire to being a southern lady, but because her role is dependent on Mrs. McIntyre being one, she faces the same fate. The most common readings of the story are, again, of a “moment of grace” for the protagonist, Mrs. McIntyre, at the end of the story (Whitt 82). Others, like Paulson, focus on the “place” of the title:

The point of this story is that human beings concerned with “place” or social status in the modern industrial world can only “displace” each other as they form ranks against anyone who seems at the time to threaten their position. Forming ranks, choosing sides . . . are basic human drives that must be overcome in order to establish a unified human family, rather than one divided against itself. (64)

Social order is certainly integral to the story, but the final punishments would not have been avoided by the members of the farm treating each other as a family, but by Mrs. McIntyre acting independent of myth of southern womanhood that contributes to the social order of “The Displaced Person.”

The story opens by observing Mrs. McIntyre in the role of southern lady as she greets the arriving Guizac family, workers hired from the displaced persons camps in Poland after the war. Mrs. McIntyre “had on her largest smile” and “her best clothes and a string of beads” (285). O’Connor also gives her pointedly feminine physical characteristics: “a little doll’s mouth and eyes that were a soft blue when she opened them” (288). Mr. Guizac, although hired help from Poland, acts as if he is a gentleman suitor and kisses Mrs. McIntyre’s hand. Mrs. McIntyre’s acceptance of this gesture is the first of many indications of her adherence to traditional gender roles. Mrs. Shortley, observing from a nearby hill, is shocked by this exchange. “If Mr. Shortley had tried to kiss her hand, Mrs. McIntyre would have knocked him into the middle of next week, but then Mr. Shortley wouldn’t have kissed her hand anyway. He didn’t have time to mess

around” (286). It is the breach of perceived social order that shocks Mrs. Shortley. Her role on the farm could be threatened if the social order is changed, and this new worker does not seem to fit in.

Guizac marks a new male for Mrs. McIntyre to play her role of southern lady against. In a life marked by the male figures who enable her role, she has been at a loss “ever since the Judge died. . . . I’ve barely been making ends meet . . . But at last I’m saved! . . . That man is my salvation!” (294). It does seem Guizac can keep the farm afloat: he is “an expert mechanic, a carpenter, and a mason. He was thrifty and energetic” (292). Although Guizac is not interested in enacting gender roles, Mrs. McIntyre continues in the role of southern lady that she displayed upon meeting him. She does not participate in the work, but drives to the fields to *watch* him work (292).

Mrs. McIntyre undermines her own position as manager of the farm in order to maintain deference to a male. When she reminds Astor, one of the black workers, that “the Judge has long since ceased to pay the bills around here” (308), O’Connor immediately juxtaposes a note that Mrs. McIntyre kept the last peacock “out of a superstitious fear of annoying the Judge in his grave” since he loved having the birds around (309). In addition, “she always spoke of him in a reverent way and quoted his sayings” (299). Mrs. McIntyre’s reliance on the Judge, in order to play the role of southern lady, weakens her own authority and leads to her collapse. Sarah Gordon also sees the potential for O’Connor’s rebuke of Mrs. McIntyre’s use of the Judge’s words, but she overturns the reading by returning to the story’s theological importance.

If the judge and his words can be said to represent the beliefs of the patriarchy, O’Connor may seem to subvert those lessons through her chastisement of the selfish, uncharitable Mrs. McIntyre. . . . However, because the force that is actually in contention with the judge and his

values is the Church, represented by the priest, we can hardly say that O'Connor is, in the last analysis, rebelling against the essential power of the patriarchy. (190-1)

Despite the Church's presence in the story, the message inherent in it does not have to be theological. We *can* say that O'Connor is "rebelling against the essential power of the patriarchy," and particularly against the established role for women that leaves them weak and subservient.

The Shortleys' place on the farm is determined by Mrs. McIntyre's attachment to her status as lady. Mrs. Shortley serves as confidante and reassurer of Mrs. McIntyre's superiority, and thus has few gender markers of her own. Even the Shortleys' lovemaking is reduced to a cigarette trick in which Mr. Shortley pretends to swallow it and then spits it back out (291). Mrs. Shortley sees herself as "the giant wife of the countryside" (285), a powerful sounding figure, but her only status on the farm is one step above the black workers, an order she is keen to maintain. Her concern with order of the farm is displayed, in addition to her horror of the meeting of Guizac and Mrs. McIntyre as equals, in her simple explanation of the term "displaced person" to the black workers, Astor and Sulk: "They ain't where they belong to be at" (290). She imagines herself with the power to create order when she sees herself as "a giant angel with wings as wide as a house, telling the Negroes that they would have to find another place" (291). This imagines a control over society that neither Mrs. Shortley nor Mrs. McIntyre possess. The imagery of a house also imagines a permanence that her status does not currently afford her. Mrs. Shortley accepts this position because she sees it as mutually beneficial. She "respected her [Mrs. McIntyre] as a person nobody had put anything over on yet— except, ha, ha, perhaps the Shortleys" (288). Despite Mrs. Shortley's confidence in their

position, with arrival of Guizacs, Mr. Shortley knows that he is a “dead man” (297). He recognizes that the way of life that sustains him will not last.

The consequences O'Connor presents for her characters' support of this outmoded ideal begin to be dramatized when Mrs. Shortley overhears Mrs. McIntyre tell the priest, who arranged for the hire of the Guizacs, that she plans to fire the Shortleys. Based on Mrs. McIntyre's inaction in the rest of the story, it seems unlikely that she would follow through, but the only place Mrs. Shortley knows is support of a southern lady. Faced with the prospect of losing that, she instructs her family to pack the car with all of their possessions and leave before Mr. Shortley “adjust[s] another milking machine on the place” (303). The order of the farm has been invisible, and its disintegration is as well. As the Shortleys drive away they pass the black workers, Astor and Sulk, on the way out who “politely did not seem to see anything, or anyhow, to attach significance to what was there” (304). Since Astor and Sulk's position on the bottom of the social order will not be affected by the Shortleys' departure, they have no need to take note of it.

O'Connor's final punishment for Mrs. Shortley's reliance on traditional gender norms occurs as they leave the farm. Mr. Shortley asks, “Where we goin?” (304) and this question forces Mrs. Shortley to confront the realization that without Mrs. McIntyre, she has no “place.” In the moment of awareness that she cannot keep everything and everyone in their proper places and has been “displaced in the world from all that belonged to her” (305), she begins convulsing. Mrs. Shortley had previously prophesied “Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole?” (301). She dies in a scene very similar to this prophecy on their way out of town. “She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and

began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself.” She “apparently intended to rearrange the whole car at once” (304). The car had been carefully arranged in order to fit all of their possessions, just as the Shortleys had neatly fit into the order of the farm. As she dies, Mrs. Shortley’s eyes “seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country” (305). Her “true country” would be a place where her identity would not rely on being submissive to another, and particularly not to someone attempting to fulfill a mythic role. This world did not yet exist, and so she has nowhere to direct her family.

The remainder of the story focuses on Mrs. McIntyre and continues to point out the ways in which her desired role of southern lady is detrimental to her actual status as manager of the farm. O’Connor begins the section by reinforcing Mrs. McIntyre’s deference to males as well as her desire to avoid any managerial aspects of running the farm: “When she discovered the Shortleys were gone, she was delighted as it meant she wouldn’t have to fire them” (305). In the next lines, Mrs. McIntyre recalls another of the Judge’s maxims, reminding the reader of her deference to his default power as man of the farm, even with his absence. Her attachment to Old South ideals reveals that although she acknowledges, “times are changing,” she has not internalized any of that change, and thus is at a loss for how to cope with it. She lectures Astor, “Do you know what’s happening to this world? It’s swelling up. It’s getting so full of people that only the smart thrifty energetic ones are going to survive” (307). O’Connor highlights McIntyre’s blindness to the consequences of that change through Mrs. McIntyre’s incognizance of her previous description of Guizac as thrifty and energetic even though she intends to refer only to herself. Her confidence in her position being secure shows that she doesn’t account for

changes to the patriarchal system that will no longer count her domestic version of femininity among the elite.

The patriarchal system is not the only one contributing to Mrs. McIntyre's position. Anne Goodwyn Jones reminds us that, "in general, historians agree that the function of southern womanhood has been to justify the perpetuation of the hegemony of the male sex, the upper and middle classes, and the white race" (*Tomorrow* 10). Mrs. McIntyre's status is dependent on her class and maintaining the social order of the farm. Peter Smith, who sees Mrs. McIntyre as one of O'Connor's "empowered women," argues that she contributes to her own defeat "by [her] constant assertions about the social hierarchy" (218). While that may be part of her failure, her dependence on the social hierarchy is due to her overreliance on the trope of the southern lady.

Mrs. McIntyre's desire to avoid leaving her proscribed gender role and performing the work of the farm allows for a disruption of the social hierarchy after Guizac's arrival, and without a firm social order, her way of life collapses. Astor reveals a concern about Guizac by saying, "It warn't like it was what he should ought or oughtn't," he muttered. "It was like what nobody else don't do" (307). What "nobody else don't do" is to propose marriage between white and black. Guizac has arranged for the younger black worker, Sulk, to pay for Guizac's cousin to travel from a displaced person camp in Poland to be his wife. When Mrs. McIntyre discovers this plan, she reverses her earlier acknowledgment of changing times and laments, "They're all the same. It's always been like this" (311). Similar to Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," Mrs. McIntyre sees herself as the victim, incapable of fulfilling the "man's role" of managing her workers. In

addition to relying on the Judge's sayings, in this moment of crisis, she also relies on the Judge's space.

When she had cried all she could, she got up and went into the back hall, a closet-like space that was dark and quiet as a chapel and sat down on the edge of the Judge's black mechanical chair with her elbow on his desk. . . . She sat motionless at the desk for ten or fifteen minutes and then as if she had gained some strength, she got up and got in her car and drove to the cornfield. (312)

O'Connor's description of the office "quiet as a chapel" indicates the reverence McIntyre feels for the space. She cannot gain the strength to manage the farm from her own room, but instead must internalize something intangible from the office that allows her to put on the mask of the Judge to admonish Guizac. She manages to speak to Guizac and forbid the marriage, but she gets little reaction from him. Instead, "Mrs. McIntyre felt a peculiar weakness behind her knees," a sensation most associated with love (314). Even with the strength of the Judge's office, Mrs. McIntyre is still susceptible to the threat to her position that Guizac represents as a potential suitor.

Mrs. McIntyre's desire to uphold Old South gender roles invites others to inhabit them as well, meaning that Guizac, as a male, holds the upper hand. As she reinforces her point that he must call off this marriage, "she had the impression that he didn't see her there" (314). Mrs. McIntyre might as well be invisible if she remains adherent to her position as domestic female. She tries to assert herself again by claiming, "This is my place" (314), but it seems Guizac has already recognized the social structure of the farm and has taken his role as dominant male. He simply "gave his little shrug and turned back to the tractor," essentially dismissing her entirely (315). Since she has spent so much time adhering to her traditional gender role, it is not easy to discard.

Mrs. McIntyre wants to defend her “place”—both her property and her status—and Guizac is a boon to one but a threat to the other. As Guizac returns to work, Mrs. McIntyre walks to the top of a nearby hill to watch him, and O’Connor foreshadows the violence that will come, signaling the imminent change to life on the farm.

She narrowed her gaze until it closed entirely around the diminishing figure on the tractor as if she were watching him through a gunsight. . . . “You’re just like all the rest of them,” she said, “—only smart and thrifty and energetic but so am I. And this is my place.” (315)

These words are her attempt to convince herself, since no one else is listening, that she is actually in control. However, “her heart was beating as if some interior violence had already been done to her” (315). Guizac has shown his ability to influence her interior when he made her weak in the knees. The reaction in this scene is to realizing that Guizac is quite similar to herself. If the hired help can be equated to someone of her position, then her position does not hold the power she had hoped it did. Thus, this interior violence is to the unsustainable role of traditional southern womanhood.

O’Connor shows that Mrs. McIntyre’s inability to act is due to her chosen role of deferential female. Mrs. McIntyre refuses to give up her deference to the males in her life: the Judge and Guizac in the first half of the story, and the priest and Mr. Shortley in the latter section. Instead of firing Guizac as she wants to, she seeks the priest’s approval of her plan. She interrupts his talk about Purgatory by exclaiming, “I’m not theological. I’m practical! I want to talk to you about something practical! . . . Mr. Guizac is not satisfactory . . . He’s extra. . . . He doesn’t fit in. I need somebody who fits in” (316). Mrs. McIntyre wants someone who will accommodate her contradictory desires to be a delicate southern woman and maintain the appearance of being a manager. She continues to rationalize her desire to fire Guizac, but the priest does not respond to any of her

claims. Similar to Guizac's reaction when she attempted to assert her dominance, the priest "didn't seem to hear her," his attention fixed on the peacock instead (317). Mrs. McIntyre's firing Guizac could be an attempt to move beyond the domestic female role, but she cannot yet leave behind her need for a male's approval.

Without Mr. Shortley's return, she may have made other attempts at change, but he also upholds traditional gender roles, giving her the feeling when she sees his familiar car "that she was the one returning, after a long miserable trip, to her own place" (318). This sense of familiarity is with a worldview that is no longer productive but is comfortable nonetheless. Mr. Shortley provides her with another man to rely on instead of making her way on her own. In addition, "she had never discharged anyone before. They had all left her" (322). She hasn't had to perform many managerial duties, so she is all the more perplexed in facing her current task of restoring order to the farm.

Mrs. McIntyre's farm is run on class and gender expectations, both of which Guizac threatened, and it is this combination that will result in Mrs. McIntyre's downfall. Mr. Shortley's return at first appears to delay this destruction since he returns some of the farm's social order: "the Negroes were pleased to see Mr. Shortley back. The Displaced Person had expected them to work as hard as he worked himself, whereas Mr. Shortley recognized their limitations" (319). Mr. Shortley also espouses a desire to protect the status quo: "He was not a violent man but he hated to see a woman done in by a foreigner. He felt that was one thing a man couldn't stand by and see happen" (322). As the man of the farm, under traditional gender expectations, it is Mr. Shortley's job to protect Mrs. McIntyre from violence, even if it is only to her perceived role.

It is finally a threat to Mrs. McIntyre's social position that impels her to act. She dreams that "Mr. Guizac and his family were moving into her house and that she was moving in with Mr. Shortley. This was too much for her" (322). Her desire is to restore order to the farm in which she reigns supreme, not to be demoted in it. Thus, she sets off to finally fire Guizac. However, as with most tasks, she imagines that the result will simply occur, and so "she had not thought of what she would say to him, she had merely come" (322). When she is in front of Guizac, she attempts to fire him, but the words don't come out of her mouth. All she can manage is, "This is my place" (323). Then she "walked off, as if she had accomplished what she came for" (323). Even when she attempts to perform her managerial role, she is completely ineffective, and seemingly unaware.

The pretense of lady and manager continues to disintegrate as Mr. Shortley makes good on his vow not to "stand by" and "see a woman done in by a foreigner"—he begins reciting his story of his job being unfairly occupied by a foreigner to everyone he meets. Soon Mrs. McIntyre "found that everybody in town knew Mr. Shortley's version of her business and that everyone was critical of her conduct. She began to understand that she had a moral obligation to fire the Pole and that she was shirking it because she found it hard to do" (324). Once again, it is threat to her status that causes her to attempt to act. She again does not make a plan, but this time she does not need to. On her way, she sees Guizac and Astor working on a tractor, and Mr. Shortley on another tractor on the hill above them. The brake on Mr. Shortley's tractor "slips," the tractor goes hurtling toward the unaware Guizac, Astor jumps out of the way, and, while they hear the cracking of Guizac's back as the tractor runs him over, she "felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and

the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever. . . . The two men ran forward to help and she fainted" (325-6).

Mrs. McIntyre is prevented from having to perform the work of her position as manager by those she relies on, both in terms of formal employment and to uphold her status. More progressive women might take advantage of the situation and flourish as a female farm owner. Mrs. McIntyre, on the other hand, attempts to hold on to the ornamental position she occupied while one of her husbands ran the farm. Her unwillingness to adapt means that the society of the farm collapses when the social order is threatened. Although the intruder is now dead, the damage has been done, and when she wakes up from her fainting spell, "she felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger" (326). The Guizacs were willing to adapt. They came from Poland where they had lived in a brick house, symbolizing greater status than tenant farmers, and Mr. Guizac quickly became the most productive worker on this small southern farm. These are the sort of people who are now "natives" in the South, and those who cling to the traditional model of society have become strangers unable to participate in life. Mrs. McIntyre never recovers from this shock, and deteriorates to the point where "she had to stay in bed all the time with only a colored woman to wait on her" (326). The role Mrs. McIntyre represented no longer has a place in society. She clung to it, and O'Connor demonstrates the result. Without her health, Mrs. McIntyre cannot run the farm, and so her workers leave, and her stock is auctioned off. Without those, she no longer has a farm or the status of a southern lady. At multiple points in the story, if Mrs. McIntyre had left behind the role of the traditional southern woman, she could have been successful. O'Connor shows the

disastrous consequences of clinging to that role, and, through the story, urges women to leave behind the roles of the Old South in order to thrive in the New South.

In a 1963 interview with C. Ross Mullins, Jr., O'Connor stated, "The South has survived in the past because its manners, however lopsided or inadequate they may have been, provided enough social discipline to hold us together and give us an identity. Now those old manners are obsolete, but the new manners will have to be based on what was best in the old ones—in their real basis of charity and necessity" (*Conversations* 104). The farm-owning women of "Greenleaf," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," and "The Displaced Person" cling to the traits of the "old manners"—the southern lady. Because that role is an unrealistic, idealized myth of the past, they fail. The women remain subservient or deferential to males they should be managing, and remain passive in the face of tasks they are capable of completing. Mrs. May serves her sons despite their dismissal of her. Mrs. McIntyre will not act without a male's approval, whether the priest she does not respect or her dead husband. Neither Mrs. May nor Mrs. McIntyre can (or will) influence their workers. Mrs. Crater's property has fallen into disrepair without a male. This combination of traits that would have been respected in the Old South lead to a substantial decrease in quality of life for O'Connor's women. The consequences include loss of health, family connection, and business. Through these stories, O'Connor works to draw attention to the impossibility of any woman fulfilling that myth, the disastrous consequences of the attempt to, and thus the need to discard it.

CHAPTER THREE: KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) was born and raised in the South, giving her a lifelong preoccupation with identity and the past. She wrote about these topics in much of her fiction, and often in her nonfiction as well, but addresses them most directly in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939). In this collection of three long stories—“Old Mortality,” “Noon Wine,” and “Pale Horse, Pale Rider”—Porter critiques blind adherence to traditional representations of social and gender roles. The collection is bookended by two stories featuring Miranda, a frequent protagonist for Porter—“Old Mortality” and “Pale Horse, Pale Rider”—in which Porter dismantles the fiction of idealized southern gender roles and then calls for increased slackening of those gender norms of the past, while revealing the many complicated crossings among cultural expectations necessary to move the South forward. The middle story of the collection, “Noon Wine,” takes a wider approach in the way that it deals with representation of social norms and masculinity. Porter shows the problems that result from her main character’s reliance on conforming to social expectations and reveals that expectations are insufficient for living.

Despite their differing content, the stories were meant to be read together. The chronology in the Library of America collection containing Porter’s short fiction tells us that in 1927, Porter conceived “a long, three-part autobiographical novel called ‘Many Redeemers’” (1026). The chronology later identifies the three stories of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* as those stories. Porter also discusses the three stories as a unit. She reported that “with ‘Pale Horse, Pale Rider,’ ‘Noon Wine,’ and ‘Old Mortality,’ *Ship of Fools* was to be the fourth in a group, but it simply ran away from me” (*Conversations* 67). The

evidence that the three stories were intended to be one entity argues for them to be taken collectively.

The variety of experiences in Porter's life gave her much material to draw from in her considerations of the South. Darlene Harbour Unrue, in her biography of Porter, highlights some major events of her life:

She reached maturity shortly after Queen Victoria died, witnessed the upheaval of World War I, survived tuberculosis and the 1918 influenza epidemic, migrated to Greenwich Village when it was a hotbed of radical politics and experimental art, traveled back and forth to Mexico during the cultural revolution of the 1920s . . . The woman who was thirteen years old when she first rode in an automobile and saw an airplane was invited in the last decade of her life to observe and write about the launching of the twentieth-century's last Apollo spaceship to the moon. (xxvii)

In observing and participating in such transformation in her life, writing about change seems almost inevitable for Porter. In addition, with her varied residences, it seems difficult to pin Porter to one region. However, she maintained, "I'm a Southerner by tradition and inheritance, and I have a very profound feeling for the South. And, of course, I belong to the guilt-ridden white-pillar crowd myself, but it just didn't rub off on me. Maybe I'm not Jewish enough, or Puritan enough, to feel that the sins of the father are visited on the third and fourth generations" (*Conversations* 83). Her comment about belonging to the "white-pillar crowd" has been seen by some as an attempt by Porter to rewrite her poor, rural upbringing. Darlene Harbour Unrue argues instead that it represents the life she lived in the stories of her grandmother, Cat Skaggs Porter, who mostly raised Callie (Katherine Anne's birth name) and was the inspiration for her name change to Katherine. Cat was "a skilled storyteller who entertained her children and

grandchildren with long accounts of her slave-holding family's prosperous life in antebellum Kentucky and Virginia" (*Life of an Artist* xxiii).

Part of being a southerner, white-pillar crowd or not, is a concern with the past. Allen Tate described the Southern Renaissance as "a literature conscious of the past in the present" (272), and Richard Gray extends the notion when he identifies Faulkner's "obsession with the past" as "quite as marked as that of any of his southern predecessors or contemporaries," supporting a designation of southern writers' increased attention to the past (180). Porter's stories work to identify ways to move forward from it, as she expressed difficulty with doing so herself. After the death of her niece, she wrote, "I have stubbornly refused to accept the shock and the suffering. I *will* not reconcile myself; the memory, instead of staying fluid and going on and changing and living, sets itself and fixes upon a point in time where the shock occurred and cannot be persuaded away from it, and slowly turns to stone" (qtd. in Givner 409). In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Porter repeatedly warns against allowing the past to "turn to stone," whether in individual memory or in collective regional memory such as in the South.

Porter also writes about her own experience finding her way through change in her time period. In a 1952 essay, she writes that she "had had time to grow up, to consider, to look again" and to begin finding her way "through the inordinate clutter and noise of my immediate day, in which very literally everything in the world was being pulled apart, torn up, turned wrong side out and upside down . . . even the very sexes seemed to be changing back and forth and multiplying weird, unclassifiable genders" (*Collected Essays* 33-34). She does not express distaste for change, but merely a need to adapt to it. She draws particular attention here to the need she saw for the traditional

expectations of gender to be modified or withdrawn completely in order to allow for complex individuality—where, for example, stereotypical male characteristics can be displayed by females and vice versa. These sentiments are reflected in her short fiction as well.

OLD MORTALITY

“Old Mortality” portrays and breaks down traditional gender norms of both males and females, contributing to Porter’s overall critique of adherence to Old South representations. The story is told in three distinct sections; by dating each section, as Sari Edelstein argues, “Porter draws attention to the fact that the reader is looking backward at a past that has been carefully organized and labeled” (157). “Old Mortality” is a story of the past, a family history of Miranda Rhea, the same Miranda who is central to “The Old Order.” Part One begins when Miranda is eight and her sister Maria is twelve, and they hear a romantic story of belle and suitor—the story of their Aunt Amy and Uncle Gabriel. Through this story, and the actions of the girls’ father Harry in it, Porter draws attention to the expectations of a southern gentleman in society as well as the expectations men hold for women. Part Two occurs when Harry calls Maria and Miranda (ages ten and fourteen) from school to meet the famed Uncle Gabriel and watch a horse race. The events of the day shatter some of the romantic notions the girls hold about the stories of the past, and begin to break down some of the gender stereotypes set up in Part One. In Part Three, Miranda is eighteen and heading to Uncle Gabriel’s funeral. She meets Cousin Eva Parrington, who is an “old maid” and a suffragist, and their interactions cause Miranda to rethink her past. Through the events of the story, Porter critiques gender

norms and also calls for change that goes beyond lip service. Some characters change on the surface, but maintain traditional notions of gender. Porter challenges readers to further change by drawing readers' attention to the incompleteness of these views.

The female ideal is represented through expectations of Maria and Miranda and the girls' perceptions of their Aunt Amy. Aunt Amy is held up as the paragon of a southern woman. This mythical persona is made easier by the fact that she lives only in a portrait, but the family speaks of her as if she represented traditional southern womanhood when she was alive as well. The picture of Aunt Amy "was associated, in the minds of the little girls, with dead things . . . The woman in the picture had been Aunt Amy, but she was only a ghost in a frame, and a sad, pretty story from old times" (181). Although they associate her image with dead things, the expectations associated with her "sad, pretty story" are still very much alive. The impossible standards women are expected to meet are enumerated, from the particulars of her beauty to her riding skills, and Amy is described as meeting them all. The near universality of these standards is also displayed in the characterization of Harry, brother to Amy and father to Maria and Miranda: "he was a pleasant, everyday sort of father, who held his daughters on his knee if they were prettily dressed and well behaved, and pushed them away if they had not freshly combed hair and nicely scrubbed fingernails. 'Get away, you're disgusting,' he would say" (192). Even as young girls, they are expected to adhere to standards of southern womanhood. The use of "everyday sort of father" suggests that his opinions are fairly representative of the norm.

The representations of the past still hold weight in the present. Although Maria and Miranda see the decorations in the portrait as "hopelessly out of fashion" (183), and

thus indicate that they do not want to recreate the images of the past, Miranda believes the qualities she feels no connection to will one day be bestowed upon her. She “secretly believed that she would one day suddenly receive beauty, as by inheritance, riches laid suddenly in her hands through no deserts of her own. She believed for quite a while that she would one day be like Aunt Amy, not as she appeared in the photograph, but as she was remembered by those who had seen her” (185). Miranda’s belief shows her childlike acceptance of the ideals of southern womanhood, but she also recognizes a difference between the stories and reality. That she does not want to be like the photograph indicates that she does not want to be the image of perfection, and perhaps that she has a subconscious understanding of the ideals that surpasses her age: that the images do not create a whole person.

This gap between memory and reality is further illustrated when Harry proclaims, “there were never any fat women in the family, thank God” (182). The girls remember the exceptions of their great-aunt Eliza and great-aunt Keziah, but know that “this loyalty of their father’s in the face of evidence contrary to his ideal had its springs in family feeling, and a love of legend that he shared with the others. . . . it was the feeling that mattered. Their hearts and imaginations were captivated by their past, a past in which worldly considerations had played a very minor role” (182-3). A new truth is created in remembering the past. Actual circumstance is rejected in favor of “family feeling.” Just as the family ignores elements of the past that do not fit the stories they tell, so too do the expectations of gender ignore reality. Amy is held up as the ideal southern belle, and her cousin Eva Parrington is presented as the opposite stereotype: the “ugly daughter . . . an old maid past forty. She believed in votes for women, and had traveled about, making

speeches. . . . Eva was a blot, no doubt about it, but the little girls felt she belonged to their everyday world of dull lessons to be learned, stiff shoes to be limbered up, scratchy flannels to be endured in cold weather, measles and disappointed expectations. Their Aunt Amy belonged to the world of poetry” (185-6). To the young girls, the belle is the ideal and the object of interest, and Eva, although arguably a more productive member of society, is thought of only as someone who has “disappointed expectations,” certainly not a heroine.

Female stereotypes are not the only ones modeled in “Old Mortality.” Gabriel and Harry perform the male roles of suitor and protector, respectively. Neither of these is fulfilling. Harry displays gender expectations by adhering to the gentleman’s code of southern honor, explained by Bertram Wyatt-Brown: “to make all due allowances for another’s provocations with self-denial and restraint and, when required, to react impulsively for the sake of self-esteem and public reputation” (129). At a dance after Gabriel and Amy were engaged, Gabriel reported to Harry that another man had kissed her. Despite differing reports on the matter, Harry immediately shot at the man in order to protect his sister’s honor. This impulsive action had repercussions, and Harry had to leave town for a while. The rest of the family “sat in the twilight of scandal in their little world, holding themselves very rigidly, in a shared tension as if all their nerves began at a common center. This center had received a blow, and family nerves shuddered” (198). Harry’s actions were in adherence to traditional mores of family honor, and the scandal in reaction is a sign that those ideas were no longer so highly valued, even at the time of this memory.

Gabriel is presented as a persistent suitor, and thus conforms to expectations, and the characters of the story also judge him harshly for how he breaks from them in his lack of a gentlemanly career. As Jane Krause DeMouy points out, Gabriel is an integral part of Amy's depiction as the southern belle: "Since she cannot be a belle without the attentions of a swain, . . . [Gabriel] becomes a victim of the sentimental society which glamorizes these roles. . . . Amy's legend is at least partly dependent on the fervor of Gabriel's courtship" (150). The story the family tells requires both of them to play their parts. However, performing these roles led to death for them both. Although Gabriel aptly played the role of suitor, he did not excel in pursuits of money. At one point, Gabriel argued with his grandfather about racehorses, and shouted, "by God, I must have *something*," and argued, "you had racehorses, and made a good thing of them" (189). However, racing horses was not seen as a respectable career. His grandfather retorted, "I never depended upon them for a livelihood, sir" (189). Indeed, when we see Gabriel later in the story, his financial situation varies wildly because of the capricious nature of horse-racing. The narrator also points out, in response to Gabriel's plea, that it was "as if he had not everything already: youth, health, good looks, the prospect of riches, and a devoted family circle" (189). Porter is exposing the inflexibility and narcissism of the version of manhood that Gabriel has latched onto. If he does not have *all* of its elements, it is as if he has none of them. Thus, he feels he has been denied everything.

Just as Gabriel's performance of the role of suitor confined him to only that role, so too was Amy only able to perform the role of belle. She claimed before her wedding, "Mammy, I'm not long for this world," and her mother tried to tell her that "marriage and children would cure her of everything" (190). Marriage and children might have cured

her of everything because she would no longer be a belle, but she was not interested fulfilling traditional expectations. She wore a gray dress for her wedding, and when her mother objected, she answered, “I shall wear mourning if I like . . . it is *my* funeral, you know” (190). Indeed, she died just six weeks after her marriage, perhaps unable to live in any capacity other than the belle being chased by suitors. But Gabriel cannot give up his part in the story; he plays the “Southern knight so well that he continues the role years after Amy’s death,” still idolizing Amy years after he married again (DeMouy 150).

Part Two begins to break down the standards established in Part One. Maria and Miranda are somewhat prepared for this dose of reality by their voracious reading: they “read as naturally and constantly as ponies crop grass, and with much the same kind of pleasure” (201). Throughout their reading, they realize:

It was no good at all trying to fit the stories to life, and they did not even try. They had long since learned to draw the lines between life, which was real and earnest, and the grave was not its goal; poetry, which was true but not real; and stories, or forbidden reading matter, in which things happened as nowhere else, with the most sublime irrelevance and unlikelihood, and one need not turn a hair, because there was not a word of truth in them. (202)

Even as children, they recognized Aunt Amy’s story as poetry, but their reading helps them realize the significance of it. They have learned the stories they read do not have “truth,” but the stories of their childhood still stick with them, just as the stereotypes of gender abide in the South despite their lack of truth. The connection between the fiction of their books and of their past begins being made when their father calls them out of school to visit Uncle Gabriel, who is racing a horse named Miss Lucy, an heir of Amy’s favorite horse. When they see Gabriel, the spell of the stories of the past immediately cracks. ““Can that be our Uncle Gabriel?” their eyes asked. ‘Is that Aunt Amy’s

handsome romantic beau? Is that the man who wrote the poem about our Aunt Amy?’ Oh, what did grown-up people *mean* when they talked, anyway?’ (206). Miranda, representing those who hold idealized expectations of society, realizes that Uncle Gabriel is not the suave “romantic beau” she had imagined, but a portly drunkard. Gabriel displays that he is still under that spell though, by comparing the girls’ appearance to Amy’s. Gabriel first declares that Maria and Miranda are “pretty as pictures,” but “rolled into one they don’t come up to Amy, do they?” (206). After the race, he elevates their status: “Both of ‘em rolled into one look a lot like Amy, I swear they do” (209). Gabriel, having been educated into the Old South models of gender, holds hope that the girls will become models of the southern belle in the way that he believes Amy was.

Miranda’s expectations of the ideal are further shattered after Miss Lucy wins the race. The girls are invited to see the winning horse, and Miranda notices that the horse’s nose is bleeding, “her eyes were wild and her knees were trembling. . . . That was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight; that was winning, for Miss Lucy. So instantly and completely did her heart reject that victory, she did not know when it happened, but she hated it, and was ashamed that she had screamed and shed tears for joy when Miss Lucy, with her bloodied nose and bursting heart had gone past the judges’ stand a neck ahead” (208). It is not a poetic, beautiful moment of triumph as Miranda expected, but a messy reality that has consequences. Indeed, Miss Lucy will not be lauded for her accomplishments, but bred for monetary gain. Miranda realizes that she believes some things aren’t worth the cost, and performance for the sake of others is one of them. This realization can also be linked to the performance of gender and meeting societal

expectations since the southern belle is also a poetic, beautiful image that upon closer inspection has great costs for women.

Gabriel's continued adherence to the myths of the past are displayed in his relationship with his second wife, Miss Honey, whom he repeatedly compares to Amy, and expects to act as Amy did. On preparing to bring the girls to meet Miss Honey, he tells Harry, "'she's pretty gloomy, and that's a fact,' said Uncle Gabriel. 'She's been pretty gloomy for years now, and nothing seems to shake her out of it. She never did care for horses . . . When I think how Amy wouldn't have missed a race for anything . . . She's very different from Amy, Harry, a very different kind of woman'" (209-10). When Harry, Maria, and Miranda arrive, Gabriel reinforces Amy's importance by introducing them in relationship to her, as "Amy's brother" and "Amy's two little nieces" (211). Despite his acknowledgement of the women's difference in respect to horses, Gabriel cannot separate his expectations for them. Since he views Amy as having perfectly fulfilled the expectations of a southern woman, he sees no other possibility for Miss Honey. Gabriel's reliance on one standard for women again ignores the possibility of individuality. Holding Miss Honey to such an unattainable standard means Gabriel does not see her as much of a woman, or even much of a person. She is left as essentially a hollow being. She has little value to him aside from being a poor substitute for Amy and as a receptacle for his comparisons of them. This life has not served either of them well. The hotel where they stay is in "Elysian Fields" (210), the mythological land of the dead. In addition to the more direct symbolism of Gabriel's prospects, in order for the South to move forward, the ideals represented by the myth-like relationship of Gabriel and Amy must also be relegated to the land of the dead.

At the end of the section, Honey rejects the ideal she has been held to and asserts that she is her own individual by announcing her desire to stay put and not be dragged to another hotel on the capricious nature of Gabriel's winning. Her objection surprises the girls. They had "learned by indirection one thing well—nice people did not carry on quarrels before outsiders. . . . Uncle Gabriel's second wife was hopping mad and she looked ready to fly out at Uncle Gabriel any second" (211). Honey's willingness to argue in public could be read as a sign that she is also of a lower class than Amy, but I read it as Honey refusing to fulfill her expected role any longer and expressing her frustration with unattainable standards. As Harry and the girls leave, Harry says, "'I hadn't seen Gabriel for so many years . . . we thought of getting out for a talk about old times together. You know how it is.' 'Yes, I know,' said Miss Honey, rocking a little, and all that she knew gleamed forth in a pallid, unquenchable hatred and bitterness that seemed enough to bring her long body straight up out of the chair in a fury, 'I know,' and she sat staring at the floor" (212). In their shared knowledge of "how it is," Harry and Honey are signaling that they're aware of all manner of social conformity, which includes gender and the standards of "old times." Harry has shown he accepts "how it is" through his visit, but Honey's body language displays a hatred and rejection of the status quo. Given the attention to her qualities as a woman, Honey's rejection can be read more explicitly as a rejection of the unattainable standards for southern women.

After they leave, the afternoon's events and the potential lessons about southern womanhood are quickly dismissed. When the girls learn the money they won at the races is going in the bank, "Maria and Miranda lost interest. They had won a hundred dollars on a horse race once. It was already in the far past. They began to chatter about

something else” (214). Uncle Gabriel and Miss Lucy are no longer heroes of their kind, but part of the past, a story to be told. The hollow victory at the racetrack is repeated when the girls return to school and tell about their outing. The only classmate they speak to responds only “vaguely” with “that must have been grand” (215). Perhaps their classmate cannot relate enough to be impressed, or perhaps the true importance of the collapsing of their history is lost on those who still hold the ideals abandoned by Maria and Miranda. The idolization of the stereotype has been shown to be misguided, but not everyone in the story, nor in society of the early twentieth century, recognizes that yet.

Porter further complicates her examination of gender stereotypes with Part Three. This section introduces another female stereotype in the character of Cousin Eva Parrington. Eva represents to Miranda the modern woman. She never married and has been fighting for women’s right to vote. Gary Ciuba argues that her career choice of being a teacher and feminist “could not have made more explicit her rejection of the old order, for suffragists were viewed by many in the South as threatening the femininity of women and the privileged status of men” (95). Because of these traits, it seems Eva would be Miranda’s ideal role model. However, Eva surprises her by not confining herself to any one set of standards—she rejects some of the old order’s standards of gender, but maintains other elements as well as its thinking on class. In this way, Porter does set her up as something of an ideal—anyone who subscribes overly closely to one way of thinking will not succeed in modern society. Through her depictions of seemingly contradictory character traits, Porter calls for a more realistic and nuanced understanding of gender roles in the South.

Miranda and Eva first meet on the train, both on their way to Gabriel's funeral. Miranda accidentally sits on Eva's hat, and her apology reflects her immersion in southern codes of behavior: "I'm dreadfully sorry,' she stammered, for she had been brought up to treat ferocious old ladies respectfully, and this one seemed capable of spanking her, then and there" (216). Without prompting, Eva also aligns herself with southern standards for feminine behavior by reminiscing about going to dances and parties with Miranda's father, Harry. However, she also relays how she did not completely live up to the stereotype. Eva admits, "they didn't do me much good, those parties . . . or at least, they didn't serve their purpose, for I never got married; but I enjoyed them, just the same. I had a good time at those parties, even if I wasn't a belle" (217). Both women show here that despite abandoning some of the feminine standards, they still uphold the behavior of their upbringing.

Although Miranda has shown no signs of wanting to be a belle—having career aspirations as varied as being a jockey, a tight-rope walker, and an air pilot, none of them particularly feminine vocations—she fears becoming like Eva. "Across the abyss separating Cousin Eva from her own youth, Miranda looked with painful premonition. 'Oh, must I ever be like that?'" (217). In Part One, she and Maria admired the stories of the past, but felt no connection to the realities of it. Here, she admires the idea of Eva, but is somewhat repelled by the actual person. Eva echoes Miranda's thoughts of their difference by pointing to the separation of their generations: "You young things don't realize. You'll live in a better world because we worked for it" (219). Miranda does, to some extent, realize, thinking that the cause "seemed heroic and worth suffering for," but also that "Cousin Eva so plainly had swept the field clear of opportunity" (219).

Obviously there were still opportunities for advancement since women did not yet have the right to vote, but even after the nineteenth amendment was passed, Anne Firor Scott identifies that one of the major obstacles was “the unwillingness of many women to assume and carry through large responsibilities” (*Southern Lady* 209). Miranda sees Eva’s work as a suffragist as an excuse to not participate herself. She does not want to conform to the standards her father has set—the Old South version of womanhood—but she also does not want to be “like that.” Since she reveals later that she is married, “like that” is not a reference to Eva’s marital status but rather to her outsider status. Miranda has maintained her social standing, and, apparently, her view of its importance; there is room for only one renegade in the family.

Eva’s Old South morality is revealed through her representation of Amy, brought up as the women discuss what Eva calls Gabriel’s “eternal infidelity” of wanting to be buried near Amy instead of Honey (220). Miranda is skeptical of Eva’s harsh judgment and reminds her of the ostensibly great love between Gabriel and Amy; Eva attempts to educate her by presenting a counter-narrative to that romantic story. Eva’s version is one of Amy as a “mischief-maker” who brought her death upon herself (220). Eva pokes holes in the idealization of Amy, revealing that it seems unlikely Amy was so sick from tuberculosis, but that there must have been some other cause of death. Eva also calls renewed attention to the old suitor Amy supposedly kissed at the ball and suspects some further connection between them (223). She suggests that “Amy did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced” and asks, “if she didn’t, what happened, what happened?” (224). Miranda responds, “‘I don’t know . . . How should I know? She was very beautiful,’ she said, as if this explained everything. ‘Everybody said

she was very beautiful” (224). Miranda’s response shows her dedication to the family legend as well as her belief in the superiority of meeting the standards set for women.

Eva again rejects this idealized view of Amy, responding,

not everybody . . . She was too thin when she was young, and later I always thought she was too fat, and again in her last year she was altogether too thin. She always got herself up to be looked at, and so people looked, of course. She rode too hard, and she danced too freely, and she talked too much, and you’d have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to notice her. I don’t mean she was too loud or vulgar, she wasn’t, but she was *too free*. (224)

This critique is telling. Paramount among her criticisms of Amy is that she was “too free.” Although Eva was likely, in part, referring to sexual freedom, her other judgments indicate she disapproves of Amy’s general disregard for feminine propriety. However, the suffragist movement was working for, in a sense, women’s freedom. Although Eva has rejected the role of the belle for herself, she still subscribes to strict standards of both appearance and behavior in judging those who attempt to fill the role. Eva sanctimoniously relates the ways in which she has done what was expected of her, in contrast to Amy. When Eva was sick, she went to the hospital “where I belonged,” and returned to work when she was well (224). Eva has only gone as far as to accept different gender expectations for herself, but they do not extend to others yet.

Some scholars argue that Eva is so critical of Amy because she “is bitter about her past: independence was thrust upon her because she did not succeed in fulfilling her expected feminine role” (Ciuba 51). Since Eva still subscribes to many of the beliefs about the “expected feminine role,” this is certainly plausible. However, this contradiction also illustrates the conflict between appearance of progress and actual progress. Eva appears to have become a modern woman since she is fighting for

women's rights, but her adherence to the social expectations of the Old South prevents her from making true progress in the same way that those ideals hold back the South as a whole. The South can appear to be making progress beyond restrictive gender roles, but people like Eva—willing to make exceptions for themselves but not abandon ideals of the past—were still prevalent.

That Eva still supports traditional representations of womanhood is additionally reinforced when Miranda tries to correct Eva's version of the story of Amy and Gabriel, but Eva responds, "'If you don't understand what I tell you,' said Cousin Eva portentously, 'you will later. Knowledge can't hurt you. You mustn't live in a romantic haze about life. You'll understand when you're married, at any rate'" (222). The layers of hypocrisy are several in her statement. Eva admonishes against living in a "romantic haze," but, as Miranda herself recognizes, Eva's version "is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic" (226). In addition, Eva repeats Amy's mother's view that marriage would solve everything, even though she is not married. Miranda's revelation that she eloped from school nearly a year ago further problematizes Eva's claim to modernity. Eva is "genuinely repelled." She cries, "shameful, shameful . . . If you had been my child I should have brought you home and spanked you" (222). Despite her desire for women's right to vote, she does not seem to believe in women's right to direct their own lives. Almost as a consolation, Eva offers, "I hope you married rich" (222). If Miranda cannot conform to the expectations of her gender and support the family legend by marrying appropriately, Eva hopes that she can at least fulfill the expectation of marrying for wealth. Eva is not the only one who upholds these old standards. Miranda's elopement also caused a rift with her father. She had broken the boundaries of acceptable

behavior for her gender and for her class. When they arrive at the funeral, Miranda greets her father, but “there was no welcome for her, and there had not been since she had run away. She could not persuade herself to remember how it would be; between one home-coming and the next her mind refused to accept its own knowledge” (227). The narrator recognizes that there is a gap between reality and the story being told—Miranda knows the truth but cannot accept it. This knowledge without awareness is true for many of the stories of the family and of the South. The need for change is evident, but it is difficult to accept that knowledge when many still value traditional representations of social and gender roles.

Porter displays the difficulty the South will have in moving beyond its past in Miranda’s certainty that her family’s past need not influence her. The South needs to leave behind the representations of the past, but it cannot simply forget the past, as Miranda seems to want to. She still believes she is separated from the previous generation, just as she felt no connection when she looked at the portrait of Aunt Amy as a child. She thinks, “Surely old people cannot hold their grudges forever because the young want to live too, she thought, in her arrogance, in her pride. I will make my own mistakes, not yours” (228) Inserting the narratorial judgment of “in her arrogance, in her pride” into Miranda’s thoughts indicates Porter’s judgment. Simply because Miranda wishes not to be influenced by the past does not make it so, just as her wish for beauty as a child did not grant it to her. Miranda’s wish is also dangerous. She sees her family as “aliens” and so perhaps does not recognize what she shares with them, as Eva likely does not see the hypocrisy in her judgment of Amy. She feels the lives of the previous generation are completely different from hers:

She resented, slowly and deeply and in profound silence, the presence of these aliens who lectured and admonished her, who loved her with bitterness and denied her the right to look at the world with her own eyes, who demanded that she accept their version of life and yet could not tell her the truth, not in the smallest thing. ‘I hate them both,’ her most inner and secret mind said plainly, *‘I will be free of them, I shall not even remember them.* (229)

The language echoes Eva’s critique of Amy being “too free,” and perhaps Miranda wants to imitate the Amy of Eva’s story—the one who does not adhere to what is expected of her. The problem with Miranda’s cry is that no one has demanded she accept the stories she’s been told. She held them dear for most of her life. She has also had the “right to look at the world with her own eyes,” but she has accepted the view handed to her. The narrator continues, “Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not the past, but the legend of the past, other people’s memory of the past, at which she had spent her life peering in wonder like a child at a magic-lantern show” (230). The comparison to a magic show is apt, as that has been her relationship to the stories of the past and the expectations upon her throughout. She has watched and listened unquestioningly to the legends of the past, often expressing wonder and awe as a child watching magic. Miranda wants to make her own way, but she is similarly idealistic about this future as she was when she believed beauty would be bestowed upon her. It will take more than wishful thinking for the South to move beyond the restrictive gender norms of its past.

The story concludes with Miranda’s romantic contemplation of the future:

I don’t want any promises, I won’t have false hopes, I won’t be romantic about myself. I can’t live in their world any longer, she told herself, listening to the voices back of her. Let them tell their stories to each other. Let them go on explaining how things happened. I don’t care. At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance. (230-1)

Because Miranda feels that the stories she's been told are overly romantic, she refuses to see any truth in them. These romantic stories do not "flatter or confirm" her view of herself as a realist, and so Miranda thinks they must be discarded completely. In her personal writing, Porter cautions against disregarding the past completely: "of the three dimensions of time, only the past is 'real' in the absolute sense that it has occurred, the future is only a concept, and the present is that fateful split second in which all action takes place. One of the most disturbing habits of the human mind is its willful and destructive forgetting of whatever in its past does not flatter or confirm its present point of view" (*Collected Essays* 449). Miranda attempts the "willful and destructive forgetting" of the inconvenient aspects of the past, and Porter censures her for it in the story. This perspective calls for an attitude toward the past that acknowledges but does not revere it, a middle ground not reached in "Old Mortality."

The contrast of available representations for females shows that the current options are insufficient. Earlier in the story, after Eva related her perspective on Amy, Miranda reflected on the problem with disposing of the external expectations of gender but maintaining the internal ones: "'beauty goes, character stays,' said the small voice of axiomatic morality in Miranda's ear. It was a dreary prospect; why was a strong character so deforming? Miranda felt she truly wanted to be strong, but how could she face it, seeing what it did to one?" (224-5). Through the story, Miranda has learned that beauty, such as Amy's, leads to death, and character, shown in Eva, leads to deformity. In addition, Eva's version of change does not sufficiently alter ways of life, and thus does not represent actual progress. Miranda does not want to be like either of them, and this is precisely Porter's point: the existing southern models of gender are not workable, and

more drastic change is necessary. Miranda has repeatedly been disappointed by the failure of reality to match her expectations of gender and relationships, and so she will try to create her own future. Her “hopefulness” in this project is tempered by Porter’s acknowledgement of her “ignorance” as well. Miranda still holds an overly romantic vision of the future, but that Porter allows her to retain hope shows that releasing reverence for the past is a step in the right direction for Miranda’s future and for moving the South forward.

NOON WINE

Porter ends “Old Mortality” with Miranda’s desire to cease remembering her past and move away from others’ expectations of her. The following story, “Noon Wine,” moves to an examination of expectations of males and the consequences of an overemphasis on conforming to those expectations. The setting of “Noon Wine” in Texas may seem to represent a divergence from the concerns of “Old Mortality,” but Porter herself states that they belong together. In one interview, she refers to their connection matter of factly: “With ‘Pale Horse, Pale Rider,’ ‘Noon Wine,’ and ‘Old Mortality,’ *Ship of Fools* was to be the fourth in a group, but it simply ran away from me” (*Conversations* 67). The stories are also connected thematically in their concern with social and gender representations. The characters of “Noon Wine” act as if their assumptions of those roles are the only ones, and that there is no need for change. Porter writes in “Noon Wine: The Sources” that the in “the society of that time and place . . . the elders all talked and behaved as if the final word had gone out long ago on manners, morality, religion, even politics: nothing was ever to change, they said, and even as they spoke, everything was changing,

shifting, disappearing” (723). In “Noon Wine,” Porter shows the detrimental consequences for a character who acts as if his role is static in a world where “everything was changing, shifting.”

The world of “Noon Wine” is occupied with strict boundaries of acceptable behavior, and particularly with the appearance of adherence to those boundaries. Farm owner Mr. Thompson is most interested, throughout the story, with how a person appears: “it was his dignity and reputation he cared about” (244). He is proud of his wife because she is a delicate woman, providing him the appearance of gentility, and he is distrustful of a visitor because he “didn’t take to his looks at all, he couldn’t say why” (253). The consideration of boundaries is reinforced by Porter’s setting of the story on a “Small South Texas Farm,” a place that would be near the border between the US and Mexico. Although this is beyond the scope of traditional southern culture, Porter writes in “Noon Wine: The Sources” that when she tried to trace the origins of the story, she was “confronted with [her] own life” (720) and that her “South—[her] part of Texas was peopled almost entirely by southerners from Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, Kentucky” (721). Therefore, while Texas might not typically be associated with Old South social expectations, it’s reasonable to see them in “Noon Wine.” In addition, the story is temporally situated between 1896 and 1905, straddling the turn of the century and placing it alongside “Old Mortality,” which spans 1885 to 1912. This correlation gives additional evidence that the worlds are similar. Each of the main characters attempts to portray a narrow image of him or herself that conforms to what is “proper.” It becomes clear, though, by the end of the story, that each has a more complex identity. Denying the

multifaceted nature of their selves eventually results in violence, self-destruction, and betrayal.

Mr. Thompson aligns with himself with traditional masculine representations. He has a stereotypically masculine appearance as he is a “tough weather-beaten man with stiff black hair and a week’s growth of black whiskers. He was a noisy proud man who held his neck so straight his whole face stood level with his Adam’s apple, and the whiskers continued down his neck and disappeared into a black thatch under his open collar” (232). He sees himself as an upstanding man of society because he is “a prompt payer of taxes, yearly subscriber to the preacher’s salary, land owner and father of a family, employer, [and] a hearty good fellow among men” (244). These are all traits of outward appearance, which Mr. Thompson prizes most of all: “‘It don’t *look* right,’ was his final reason for not doing anything he did not wish to do” (244). This aligns with traditional southern expectations for behavior, and in particular for the different ways men and women should behave.

Part of Mr. Thompson’s code of conduct is a belief in firm distinctions between men’s and women’s work. The dairy, in Mr. Thompson’s schema, is women’s work; however, his wife is often ill, leaving him with “nearly everything to do” (234). He reflects on what he sees as the mistake of ceding to his wife’s wish for a dairy: “from the first the cows worried him, coming up regularly twice a day to be milked, standing there reproaching him with their smug female faces. . . . Wrestling with a calf unmanned him, like having to change a baby’s diaper. Milk worried him . . . Hens worried him . . .” (243). In contrast, he thinks about his wife, “to whom so many forms of work would have been becoming” (244)—performing this work, for her, would have “looked right.” Since

Mr. Thompson has little choice but to perform “women’s work,” he tries to maintain a masculine appearance while doing so. As he is churning butter, he “seemed somehow to be driving a horse with one hand, reining it in and urging it forward; and every now and then he turned halfway around and squirted a tremendous spit of tobacco juice out over the steps” (232). His concern for appearance does not seem to extend to the farm itself. Even he notes, “it did look like somebody around the place might take a rake in hand now and then and clear up the clutter around the barn and the kitchen steps” (234). However, apparently that is also not his realm of work as “he would sometimes in the slack season sit for hours worrying about it” (244-45). This lack of dedication and devotion to the maintenance of the farm can only be preventing it from reaching its potential. However, Mr. Thompson is unwilling to abandon appearance for prosperity.

Mr. Thompson’s outlook on behavior leads him to be surprised when he hires a new worker, Mr. Olaf Helton, who seems to be indifferent to cultural expectations. Mrs. Thompson observes, “heavens, he looked lazy and worthless” (226). However, he turns out to be an efficient worker, seemingly because he holds little value in appearances. Mr. Thompson notes that “judging by his conduct, Mr. Helton had never heard of the difference between man’s and woman’s work on a farm” (245). His willingness to eschew expected behavior in favor of work is a boon to the struggling farm. The hired man’s attitude makes him seem as if he’s from a different world. When he arrives on the farm, his speech is characterized “as from the tomb” (234), and his physical description includes this death-like air as well: “the pallor of his eyebrows and hair, his long, glum jaw and eyes that refused to see anything, even the work under his hands” (246). Helton brings an air of death to the farm, a symbol of the coming death of its currently valued

representations. His difference is reinforced by his lack of speech. He spends his energy being effective, not effusive. He speaks so little that Mr. Thompson jokes, “he is the closest mouthed feller I ever met up with in all my days. Looks like he’s scared he’ll crack his jaw if he opens his front teeth” (239). Speech is one way that cultural norms are manifested, and Helton’s quietness can be seen as a reflection of his choice to not participate in that culture. Even though he is effective, Mrs. Thompson has a hard time accepting Helton because “he just can’t seem to behave like other people” (247). This attitude reflects the general culture which resists change and difference. Even so, it doesn’t take long until “Mr. Helton was the hope and the prop of the family, and all the Thompsons became fond of him, or at any rate they ceased to regard him as in any way peculiar, and looked upon him, from a distance they did not know how to bridge, as a good man and a good friend” (252). Mr. Helton is able to make the farm turn a profit for the first time in years, and he makes the whole place look better than it ever has. Adherence to the social norms of the past had kept the Thompsons from success, and the appearance of this man who is willing to move between those norms brings them profitability.

Appearance also reigns in the raising of the Thompsons’ two sons. When Mr. Thompson is reprimanding them, he states, “And the next time I catch either of you hanging around Mr. Helton’s shack, I’m going to take the hide off *both* of you, you hear me, Herbert?” (251). As in other situations, Mr. Thompson’s threats are only for the appearance of control; he is never seen actually laying a hand to his children. Mrs. Thompson also engages in the appearance and not the practice of raising children by avoiding having to actually discipline them. For example, she keeps the dinner prayer

brief so her younger son won't have time to eat during the prayer and have to be reprimanded, and when her boys are later caught misbehaving by the hired man, she is "afraid to ask them for reasons. They might tell her a lie, and she would have to overtake them in it, and whip them" (249). She does not promise the whipping that her husband does and does not follow through on; instead, she avoids having to make the threat altogether. She can also see, though, that her husband's dedication to maintaining appearances instead of the farm does not bode well: "She wanted to believe in her husband, and there were too many times when she couldn't. She wanted to believe that tomorrow, or at least the day after, life, such a battle at best, was going to be better" (236), but she is not convinced that it will be. A life dedicated to maintaining the status quo will not allow them to advance, just as the South cannot move forward while clinging to the shallow representations of the past.

Helton's work that does not conform to expectations is more effective than Mr. Thompson's, and so is his discipline. Even in anger Mr. Helton is silent. Mrs. Thompson once chances to observe him reprimanding her boys in what she calls

that kind of queer thing that seems to be giving a warning, and yet, nearly always nothing comes of it . . . If it had been a noisy spectacle, it would have been quite natural. It was the silence that struck her. Mr. Helton was shaking Arthur by the shoulders, ferociously, his face most terribly fixed and pale. . . . Mr. Helton dropped Arthur, and seized Herbert, and shook him with the same methodical ferocity, the same face of hatred. Herbert's mouth crumpled as if he would cry, but he made no sound. (248)

This small act of violence is contained to the simple shaking of each boy. Both boys' silence is indicative of the power they sense within Mr. Helton to do much more than that. What alarms Mrs. Thompson most about the event is that it does not look like she would expect. Helton's silent reprimand, although not a typical form of discipline, is

more effective than the threats without action of the boys' father, evidence again of Helton's achievements that do not require adherence to traditional cultural expectations. Indeed, despite Mr. and Mrs. Thompsons' lack of discipline of the boys, "Mr. Thompson was relieved to find that, without knowing how he had done it, he had succeeded in raising a set of boys who were not trifling whittlers" (252). That he is perplexed by this outcome may be an indication that Helton's stern reprimand, and others like it, may have had more of an influence on the boys than their parents' threats—that real outcomes must be borne out of more than just appearances.

Another visitor to the farm, Mr. Homer T. Hatch, uses and then subverts the expectations of male interaction. When he arrives at the farm, he tells Thompson that he's there to buy a horse because "when a feller says he's come to buy something nobody takes him for a suspicious character" (254). Thompson's uneasiness with the man indicates that there is something suspicious about him: "His joviality made Mr. Thompson nervous, because the expression in the man's eyes didn't match the sounds he was making" (254). In addition, Hatch is less than candid about his intentions. Each conversation topic Hatch brings up, from family roots to chewing tobacco, results in frustration for Thompson because the visitor "had a way of taking the words out of Mr. Thompson's mouth, turning them around and mixing them up until Mr. Thompson didn't know himself what he had said" (258-9). Hatch is beginning to unravel Thompson's reliance on traditional codes of behavior.

Hatch eventually reveals the codes of behavior that Helton has disregarded, and instigates the consequences for Thompson's strict adherence to proper appearances. Hatch is essentially a bounty hunter come to round up "escaped loonatics [and] escaped

convicts,” of whom Helton is one (264). Mr. Hatch takes his time revealing what he knows about Mr. Helton, first letting slip only that Helton was in an asylum. He is trying to rile Thompson against Helton, but Mr. Thompson claims that he cannot be prodded to anger: “Now, I mighta got upset myself at such a thing, once . . . but now I *deefy* anything to get me lathered up” (259). Because Helton *seems* normal—“he never acted crazy to me . . . he always acted like a sensible man, to me” (258)—Mr. Thompson tries to brush off Hatch’s implications about Helton. As with many things, though, just because Helton *appears* reputable does not mean he actually adheres to societal expectations. Later, Hatch ‘accidentally’ reveals that Helton’s time in the asylum was because he “jus’ went loony one day in the hayfield and shoved a pitchfork right square through his brother, when they was makin’ hay” (262). The violence that, so far anyway, Thompson can only imagine, has been perpetuated by Helton in a past he’s tried to leave behind. This revelation serves as one of the indications that appearances are insufficient.

Thompson begins to understand that Hatch is not what he appears, but that possibility is still baffling to him: “it wasn’t so much his words, but his looks and his way of talking: that droopy look in the eye, that tone of voice, as if he was trying to mortify Mr. Thompson about something. Mr. Thompson didn’t like it, but he couldn’t get hold of it either” (261). He can identify that something about Hatch doesn’t “look right,” and his only recourse to resolving that conflict is imagining violence. In spite of Thompson’s declaration about not getting angered, it isn’t long after Hatch’s arrival that Thompson “wanted to turn around and shove the fellow off the stump, but it wouldn’t look reasonable” (261). Mr. Thompson is concerned with the appearance of the matter and thus tries to detach himself from the violence he feels compelled to. “Something serious

was going to happen, Mr. Thompson could see that. He stopped thinking about it. He'd just let this fellow shoot off his head and then see what could be done about it" (264).

This violence is presented as seemingly inevitable instead of a willful action. Mr. Thompson also attributes the violence to Hatch instead of to himself, thereby avoiding the implication of any wrongdoing on his part. Thompson's concern continues to be with the appearance of things, not with actions. What seems to be true, but is not actually, will be his downfall.

Mr. Hatch quickly latches onto Mr. Thompson's belief in the importance of seemliness, and exploits it for his own use when he finally gets to his true purpose of wanting to arrest Helton and bring him back to North Dakota. Hatch tells Mr. Thompson, "fact is I counted on your being a respectable man and helping me out to see that justice is done. Now a course, if you won't help, I'll have to look around for help somewheres else. It won't look very good to your neighbors that you was harboring an escaped loonatic who killed his own brother, and then you refused to give him up. It will look mighty funny" (266). At the insinuation of embarrassing him to his neighbors, Mr. Thompson does finally get "lathered up": "'You're crazy,' Mr. Thompson roared suddenly, 'you're the crazy one around here, you're crazier than he ever was! You get off this place or I'll handcuff you and turn you over to the law. You're trespassing,' shouted Mr. Thompson. 'Get out of here before I knock you down!' . . . then something happened that Mr. Thompson tried hard afterwards to piece together in his mind, and in fact it never did come straight" (266).

That "something" that happened is Mr. Thompson killing Mr. Hatch with an axe blow to the head. As Thompson and Hatch were having this exchange, Helton came

around the corner. Mr. Thompson thought he saw Hatch trying to stab Helton, and grabbed the axe to stun Hatch to prevent it, but instead of knocking him out, Thompson killed him. The murder appears to be defensive, but Hatch had threatened Thompson's sense of proper appearances. Thomas Walsh claims that Thompson's murder of Hatch comes about because the "opposing elements of his character, represented by his two doubles, have grown so large that they can no longer be contained within him" (90). In other words, the murder is an attempt to rid himself of the traits he feels are unseemly, and in this way it is the release of the violence Mr. Thompson had been repressing. This violence eventually destroys him as well as Mr. Hatch.

Even though the murder is declared self-defense at trial, Mr. Thompson's image has been mortally wounded. His face is described in two different places as "like a dead man's face" (267) and his "eyes hollowed out and dead-looking" (269). These descriptions mirror those of Helton at the beginning of the story, foreshadowing a coming death both literally and symbolically. The appearance of social propriety that Thompson had clung to is now dead, just as Helton did not aspire to fulfill any social expectations. Both of these changes have come after a murder, and Edward Groff asserts that "each murderer pays for his crime with his own spiritual death" (45). Helton was able to find a new role to fulfill in coming to the Thompsons' farm as a worker, and now Thompson can no longer ignore that his identity is more than just his public persona.

Mr. Thompson tries to fight the death that he feels encroaching by seeking the old stability of outward approval. He and Mrs. Thompson go on daily pilgrimages to "tell every neighbor he had that he never killed Mr. Hatch on purpose" (273). When he feels that "nobody believed him," he turns to his wife, who says each time, "'Yes, that's the

truth' . . . and he added, 'If you don't believe me, you can believe my wife. She won't lie'" (273). His defense is predicated on her morality, which is undermined by the fact that she did not actually see the event. This conflict makes her feel that "life was all one dread, the faces of her neighbors, of her boys, of her husband, the face of the whole world, the shape of her own house in the darkness, the very smell of the grass and the trees were horrible to her" (268). Each face she imagines is one that can judge her and question the appearance of their social respectability.

As Mr. Thompson begins to understand the limits of appearances, although he is already relying on his wife for one lie, he hopes that she will tell one larger lie: "he hoped she would say finally, 'I remember now, Mr. Thompson, I really did come round the corner in time to see everything. It's not a lie, Mr. Thompson. Don't you worry'" (273). He wants to be told that he is a good person, and that he has not acted out of character, but the truth is that his appearance of social propriety did not have substance. For a man so consumed with appearances, this loss of public standing is fatal. "Mr. Thompson felt he was a dead man. He was dead to his other life, he had got to the end of something without knowing why, and he had to make a fresh start, he did not know how. Something different was going to begin, he didn't know what. It was in some way not his business. He didn't feel he was going to have much to do with it" (276). He knows that life will have to change, but his feeling of detachment indicates that it will not be his particular life.

Living in between appearance and reality finally takes its toll on Mrs. Thompson when she has what appears to be a seizure in bed: "Ellie started up after him, crying out, 'Oh, oh, don't! Don't! Don't!' as if she were having a nightmare" (277). Whatever it is

Mrs. Thompson is seeing, wanting it to end leaves her “rolling violently . . . her own hands pulling her hair straight out from her head . . . and the tight screams strangling her” (278). When this stops, her eyes, “wide open, [stare] dreadfully at him,” and then she goes limp. This effect of this inner conflict leaves their sons staring at Mr. Thompson “as if he were a dangerous wild beast,” an image similar to that of Helton after his past had been revealed. This sends Mr. Thompson out of the house to finally reconcile his own identity.

To discard the importance of the representation of a social role, Thompson must first recognize the gap between it and reality. As Miranda noted the difference between her family’s memories and the truth, Thompson knows the way he remembers the incident is wrong, but, “try as he might, Mr. Thompson’s mind would not go anywhere that it had not already been, he could not see anything but what he had seen once, and he knew that was not right” (276). He cannot see the past in any way other than the way he knows is wrong; he cannot correct what he now knows to be a misperception, and even a misjudgment on his part—things were not as they seemed. He cannot rewrite the past, but he can correct his path going forward. The story ends with his self-inflicted death in an attempt to create that “fresh start” he earlier imagined. He brings his shotgun and leans against a fencepost on the farthest end of his fields. He writes a suicide note that reads:

Before Almighty God, the great judge of all before who I am about to appear, I do hereby solemnly swear that I did not take the life of Mr. Homer T. Hatch on purpose. . . . I have told all this to the judge and the jury and they let me off but nobody believes it. This is the only way I can prove I am not a cold blooded murderer like everybody seems to think.”
(279-80)

The note acknowledges his fear of being seen as something he is not and his attempt to rewrite his story. He blacks out the section where he began to write the conclusion to his

justification, “my wife—,” showing that he chooses to no longer rely on Ellie’s lie to absolve him, but hopes his actions will be sufficient. The story ends as he points the shotgun toward his head and “fumbled for the trigger with his great toe. That way he could work it” (280). Mr. Thompson is able to “work” not only his own death, but also a modicum of change beforehand in releasing Ellie from her lie, meaning she no longer has to falsely represent her morality. Mr. Thompson’s death signifies the end of an era of maintaining appearances over substance and a need to conform to expected representations of social and gender roles. Through “Noon Wine,” Porter critiques the South’s adherence to these old representations that take away its citizens’ individuality and ignore the reality of their lives.

PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER

In “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” Porter combines the concerns of the previous two stories by critiquing the need to conform to certain social representations, in particular those of gender. She extends the call for individuality by rewriting the restrictive gender norms of the past and calls for fluidity between gender roles by emphasizing crossings and transitions, and, in the end, the acceptance of contradiction in these roles. The story again centers on Miranda; she is now an adult and working as a journalist during WWI. The events of the story closely parallel Porter’s own life. In 1918, she worked as a journalist and almost died from influenza. While the events of the story as they occurred in Porter’s life took place in Colorado, the story itself has no explicit setting and the themes of the story are decidedly southern.

Miranda's dream at the beginning of the narrative sets up the story as a dream for a better world. In her dream, Miranda wants to escape the busy house, where there are "too many people," and "too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces" (281). The house represents a venerated past and the past's way of thinking that Miranda wants to escape, as was begun to be set up in "Old Mortality." Miranda considers the horses she could choose to ride away, and chooses not her grandmother's horse Fiddler nor Aunt Amy's horse Miss Lucy, but Graylie because he is "not afraid of bridges" (282). This choice is symbolic because the story will require the reader to cross metaphorical bridges. It is a story of movement, crossings, and transitions.

There are many oppositions in life and in the story, but the most prominent ones here are of gender roles. When Miranda wakes, "Her thoughts roved hazily in a continual effort to bring together and unite firmly the disturbing oppositions in her day-to-day existence" (283). Because it is wartime, as Mary Titus points out, "the theater of war controls the roles of the players on the home front . . . [and] control of sexuality is one manifestation of a general tightening of social control over the individual" (162). In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter displays these rigid expectations and the ways in which the characters resist and cross over them, thereby encouraging readers to similarly question these expectations.

The possibility of breaching traditional gender roles is presented in the newspaper office. Miranda and her friend Towney had previously been able to cross gender boundaries to inhabit the male role of journalist—they "had both been real reporters once"—but they have been forced to return to more socially appropriate roles after an instance of empathy for a subject allowed another newspaper to scoop the story they were

working on. The narrator recounts that they “had been degraded publicly to routine female jobs, one to the theaters, the other to society. . . . They knew they were considered fools by the rest of the staff—nice girls, but fools” (287). Despite this appearance of propriety, the women both quietly rebel against the expectations of society for their conformity.

Although the women were previously allowed to break some social conventions, Porter reminds the reader that their culture still values conformity as Miranda and Towney are hounded about buying Liberty Bonds for the war. Although neither has enough money, and says so, they are pushed to conform by supporting the war. Miranda thinks later that this is a “war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever—and to prove our faith in Democracy to each other, and to the world, let everybody get together and buy Liberty Bonds and do without sugar and wool socks” (306). Everyone is expected not only to conform to their assigned roles, but to do so publicly. Because of this, Miranda’s resistance must be kept to herself. She thinks, “Suppose I were not a coward, but said what I really thought? Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war? Suppose I asked that little thug, What’s the matter with you, why aren’t you rotting Belleau Wood? I wish you were . . .” (285). To speak this out loud would be near treason, but she is resentful of the good of the war taking precedence over her own survival. Towney’s resistance is similarly invisible to outsiders. Miranda asks about her project: “What kind of soldier are you knitting that for? It’s a sprightly color, it ought to cheer him up.” Towney responds, “Like hell . . . I’m making this for myself. That’s that” (287). Knitting is an acceptable feminine vocation, but in the time of war, it is expected that everything will be made for the good of the troops, and Towney refuses to comply.

Miranda works to maintain the appearance of compliance with social expectations of her as a woman. She leaves the office to join the “young women . . . wallowing in good works” (287). They have raised money to buy sweets and cigarettes for the men in hospitals, and “Miranda, carrying her basket and her flowers, moved in among the young women, who scattered out and rushed upon the ward uttering girlish laughter meant to be refreshingly gay, but there was a grim determined clang in it calculated to freeze the blood. Miserably embarrassed at the idiocy of her errand, she walked rapidly between the long rows of high beds” (288). That their laughter is only “meant” to sound happy indicates that Miranda is not alone in performing this service only to be seen behaving appropriately, calling greater attention to the way in which social expectations influence the actions of many. Chuck Rounivale, another journalist at the newspaper, identifies what he sees as the true impetus of these “good works”:

It keeps them busy and makes them feel useful, and all these women running wild with the men away are dangerous, if they aren't given something to keep their little minds out of mischief. So rows of young girls, the intact cradles of the future, with their pure serious faces framed becomingly in Red Cross wimples, roll cock-eyed bandages that will never reach a base hospital, and knit sweaters that will never warm a manly chest. (303)

Chuck's tirade is based in some lesser stereotypes of women, but it also acknowledges the truth that most of these good works will not be put to their intended uses, and thus are only for the appearance of doing them.

The men in the hospital also must play their part; most of them are amiable and “willing to be amused at anything,” but Miranda heads toward one with an “unfriendly bitter eye” whose face said “Not having any, thank you and be damned to the whole business” (289). After Miranda sets down her basket and hurries away, she reflects that it

was “like turning a corner absorbed in your painful thoughts and meeting your state of mind embodied, face to face” (289). Neither of them want to, or should be expected to, perform. On her way out of the hospital, Miranda meets another girl, and they initially agree about their dislike of this task, but both quickly turn “cautious” and agree that “it’s all right, though” (289). Again, it is clear that the women are acting out of expectation, but do not feel they have a right to dispute it.

Miranda does not resist all elements of her expected representation; she soon enters into an idyllic relationship that seems to mirror the stories of Gabriel and Amy’s. The relationship allows her to forget her discontent: “that was for yesterday. Miranda decided there was no good in thinking of yesterday, except for the hour after midnight she had spent dancing with Adam. He was in her mind so much, she hardly knew when she was thinking of him directly” (289-90). Adam is a soldier on leave whom she met in her boarding house. Miranda attempts to leave behind thinking of expectations, but returns to the directive to buy a bond and feels uneasy. Although she was “hardened to stories of personal disaster” occurring after solecisms that are “very little more important than her failure—her refusal—to buy a Bond,” she nonetheless finds herself distressed. “No, she did not find herself a pleasing sight, flushed and shiny, and even her hair felt as if it had decided to grow in the other direction. I must do something about this, I can’t let Adam see me like this” (290). This construction equates letting Adam see her less than perfectly coiffed with personal disaster. In this way, Miranda acts very stereotypically feminine. Adam also appears to meet the standards of his gender. He is physically perfect: “tall and heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks, and he was infinitely buttoned, strapped, harnessed into a uniform as tough and unyielding in its

cut as a straitjacket, though the cloth was fine and supple.” In fact, he exemplifies all aspects of southern manhood—appearance, manners, and morality. Miranda reflects on him while they walk together:

Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be. The sacrificial lamb strode along casually, accommodating his long pace to hers, keeping her on the inside of the walk in the good American style, helping her across street corners as if she were a cripple—“I hope we don’t come to a mud puddle, he’ll carry me over it”—giving off whiffs of tobacco smoke, a manly smell of scentless soap, freshly cleaned leather and freshly washed skin, breathing through his nose and carrying his chest easily. (307)

Robert Brinkmeyer, Jr., sums up Adam’s depiction: “appearing as innocent as his unfallen namesake, as golden as the sun god, Adam is the glorified male counterpart of the much-admired Amy” (Brinkmeyer 104). As the model of perfection, Adam cannot actually live, as Miranda acknowledges in seeing him as a “sacrificial lamb.” Other men are also concerned with living up to the expectations of their gender, shown in such ways as their concern over the military-issued wrist watches when “they had always believed that only sissies wore wrist watches” (291). Mary Titus offers a slightly different view of Adam, noting the likening of his uniform to a straitjacket: “Resistance is impossible, the image suggests; to fight against the militarization of the state and each individual within it is only to invite a more complete bondage, as a straitjacket tightens around a resisting body” (164). The men may not want to conform to society’s expectations, but alternatives cannot be accessed, particularly in this time of war. Neither Amy nor Eva provided an enticing model for Miranda to follow, and the male options of sacrificing oneself or bondage to a stereotype are equally unappealing.

Porter presents images of death alongside these expectations, allowing for a reading of the death of them. Miranda and Adam stop their walk to allow several

different funerals to pass them and comment, “did you ever see so many funerals, ever?” (293). An epidemic of influenza is killing large numbers of people, and their ideas along with them. The deaths will allow entrenched representations to be modified. Adam represents one of those old ideals, and because of that, he is doomed as well. Miranda reflects, “she liked him, she liked him, and there was more than this but it was no good even imagining, because he was not for her nor for any woman, being beyond experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death” (296). It is not just that he is going to war, which would likely have killed him anyway, but he has been committed to death “without any knowledge or act of his own.” He is committed to death because the stereotypes of gender are unsustainable and Adam so perfectly represents them—he cannot, as Amy could not, survive.

Aside from Adam’s doomed trajectory, Chuck Rouncivale, the sports reporter in Miranda’s office, provides another example of the available roles for men, and begins to show some resistance to them. Chuck represents the traditional view of men and women, and particularly their roles in wartime. He argues: “I think the women should keep out of it. . . . It was Florence Nightingale ruined wars . . . What’s the idea of petting soldiers and binding up their wounds and soothing their fevered brows? That’s not war. Let ‘em perish where they fall. That’s what they’re there for” (299). Chuck wants women to stay at home and the men to protect their women as was expected under Old South attitudes. However, even he portrays some role reversal: “Chuck was lavishly hardboiled and professional in his sports writing, but he had told Miranda that he didn’t give a damn about sports, really . . . He preferred shows and didn’t see why women always had the job” (299-300). Having the most “hardboiled” critic display a desire for a position earlier

described as a “routine female job” allows the story to display a desire for some mitigation of the harshly defined gender roles of the past. After attending a show with Chuck, Miranda looks at the crowd around her and wonders if others share her resistance to conformity, “what did I ever know about them? There must be a great many of them here who think as I do, and we dare not say a word to each other of our desperation, we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why? Does anybody here believe the things we say to each other?” (304). Miranda sees individuality being destroyed through maintaining belief in traditional social roles, and through her, Porter is questioning assumptions about those roles.

The story also calls for a rewriting of gender expectations through its extended imagery of journeys, crossings, and change. When Miranda reflects on her ten days with Adam, she remembers “they had been crossing streets together, darting between trucks and limousines and pushcarts and farm wagons,” metaphorically crossing dividing lines. The contrast of limousines and farm wagons indicates that these crossings are relevant to many different kinds of people. Miranda and Adam also “climbed a stony trail, and had come out on a ledge upon a flat stone, where they sat and watched the lights change on a valley landscape that was, no doubt, Miranda said, quite apocryphal” (297). The romantic stories of the past are also apocryphal, and the light changing on the physical landscape can also be seen as a changing perspective on the past and its definitions of acceptable representations of men’s and women’s roles.

The danger to idealized visions of gender are translated into physical danger for Miranda, with her romantic vision of life, and Adam, in his seemingly perfectly formed manhood. Throughout the story, Miranda has complained of a headache. The ailment

turns out to be influenza, one of the many cases during the epidemic of 1918. The night before it is discovered, Adam and Miranda are out for a dance. Miranda wishes to say to him, “Adam, come out of your dream and listen to me. I have pains in my chest and my head and my heart and they’re real. I am in pain all over and, and you are in such danger as I can’t bear to think about, and why can we not save each other?” (308). Miranda’s wish that they could save each other would require changing the expectations of male-female relationships, and the sickness begins to do that.

Miranda’s sickness opens another avenue for evidence of crossings and change. In her feverish state, Miranda’s dreams are full of the past. She dreams of “a broad tranquil river into which flowed all the rivers she had known” and of a jungle that contained “all she had ever read or had been told or felt or thought about jungles” (311). All she has known before, though, has not prepared her for this. In the dream, her past self waves to her from the deck of a ship as it sails away into the jungle. This separation of past and present is a continuation of Miranda’s desire at the end of “Old Mortality” to leave the past behind. In one of her moments of wakefulness, in between long stretches of unconsciousness, she and Adam discuss what they “meant to do” with their lives. Miranda says, “you’d get the notion I had a very sad life . . . for all this time I was getting ready for something that was going to happen later, when the time came. So now it’s nothing much” (314). However, since this illness is not the end for her, it seems she has been getting ready for something, and that is being part of a change in social views of gender. As Miranda is ready to give up fighting the illness, she feels that “there were no longer any multiple planes of living, no tough filaments of memory and hope pulling taut backwards and forwards holding her upright between them. There was only this one

moment and it was a dream of time” (317). Being pulled between memory and hope, and movement between the past and present, is a very southern sentiment. If Miranda is no longer feeling pulled between these poles, perhaps she is finding a way to reconcile them, as the modern South must reconcile expectations of gender with reality.

The remainder of the story is fairly preoccupied with death, foreshadowing the death and rebirth that will come at the end of it. When Miranda sleeps again, she has a vision of Adam “in a perpetual death and resurrection,” ending with permanent death (317). Miranda is envisioning the death of stereotypical gender expectations. She wakes up in a hospital where she watches two orderlies cover a dead man with a sheet and push his gurney away (321). The story insists that there will be death, and Miranda slips closer to it, feeling

entirely withdrawn from all human concerns . . . all notions of the mind, the reasonable inquiries of doubt, all ties of blood and desires of the heart, dissolved and fell away from her, and there remained of her only a minute fiercely burning particle of being that knew itself alone, that relied upon nothing beyond itself for its strength; not susceptible to any appeal or inducement. (323-4)

This reflection helps Miranda negotiate her earlier thoughts of cutting off all connections with her family and making her own future. Yet, soon after this, Miranda sees “a great company of human beings” who emerge to be “all the living she had known” (324). She soon realizes, though, that the dead are missing from this vision, and at this thought she wakes to pain. It is only through connecting with her past, both those she knew personally and those she only heard stories of, that she has the strength to continue, a compromise she is only able to make on the brink of death. The outside world reflects Miranda’s place with a compromise of its own: the Armistice.

The changes Miranda has seen while dreaming have not yet taken effect in the waking world, and so Miranda awake does not immediately recognize where she is. She “looked about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will” (326). Her dream world presented the death of stereotypical gender expectations and also allowed the presence of family without reliance on their history, as she had wished for after Uncle Gabriel’s funeral, yet she immediately knows this place is not the same. She reflects on “that bliss which had repaid all the pain of the journey to reach it,” her dream world, and sees “with a new anguish the dull world to which she was condemned” (327). The sameness of the world is emphasized by the nurse, who each day says, “‘it is morning . . . morning again, my dear,’ showing Miranda the same monotonous landscape of dulled evergreens and leaden snow” (327). This routine does not indicate a change outside the walls of her hospital room, or even outside her own head.

In order to move forward, Miranda must make external changes in order to match the ones she imagined in her dreams and, against her wishes, play her part in society: “for it will not do to betray the conspiracy and tamper with the courage of the living; there is nothing better than to be alive, everyone has agreed on that” (328). In order to look her role, Miranda puts together a list of products for Towney to bring her before she leaves the hospital, including lipstick, perfume, makeup, and a walking stick. Mary Titus argues that she requests the items necessary “to sustain the illusion that she is a living woman” (165). In a mental dialogue, Miranda adds a humorous image: “Lazarus, come forth. Not unless you bring me my top hat and stick. Stay where you are then, you snob. Not at all.

I'm coming forth" (329). Miranda is returning from the dead, but only on her terms. Titus points out that "Miranda's clothing holds in tension the image of woman costumed as a woman with lipstick and perfume, and the image of a woman costumed as a man with top hat and cane" (166). She may conform to some of society's expectations of her, but she will begin to rewrite her gender.

The ending is a contradictory mix of hopefulness and despair. Miranda feels both of these emotions in thinking about Adam, who died of influenza in a military camp: "now you need not die again, but still I wish you were here; I wish you had come back, what do you think I came back for, Adam, to be deceived like this?" (330). Her question indicates that she reflects on their time together as something of a deception. She was preoccupied with the intensely masculine Adam, and it is almost as if he was not real, and it was his very adherence to the stereotype that meant he had to die. However, Miranda is also somewhat more hopeful, thinking in the last line of the story, "No more war, no more plague . . . now there would be time for everything" (330). Now there will be time for her to accomplish what she has spent her life "getting ready for," the "something that was going to happen later" (314). I argue that "something" is affecting change on traditional social representations. The clothing that Miranda requests from Towney is gray, and, as Darlene Harbour Unrue points out, gray is neither darkness nor light, or it is both at once (*Truth and Vision* 157). Miranda will represent neither male nor female expectations, but some of each. Similarly, through "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter is calling for readers to abandon the need to conform to strictly held representations of gender and allow for more fluidity and seeming contradiction.

All three stories contribute to a call for a loosening of narrow representations of identity. Those who attempt to confine themselves to the traditional ideals, such as Gabriel and Amy in “Old Mortality,” are not successful, while progress is made by those willing to accept contradiction. Even though Eva still holds to Old South morals, she is able to imagine some alternatives for females other than the southern belle or matron. Confining oneself to certain representations also does not allow for living a full life, as shown in “Noon Wine.” Instead, allowing for contradictory elements of identity, such as Miranda’s request for both lipstick and a top hat, provides the greatest opportunity for moving into the future.

CHAPTER FOUR: EUDORA WELTY

Eudora Welty is regarded as one of the masters of short fiction, and in particular of the southern short story. While her talent is widely acknowledged, the cultural and political significance of her stories has only recently begun to be investigated. In several of her short stories, Eudora Welty represents southern culture and what she sees as necessary and perhaps inevitable change. Welty depicts a direction for the transition from Old South to New by portraying the dismantling of the power structure of the Old South, and in particular its historical power over blacks. With the controlling force gone, blacks are empowered to be individuals instead of stereotypes and to find new, more hopeful paths for their futures.

Welty is the only one of the four authors I study to include black characters as protagonists in her short fiction and to write towards a changed future for the South's black citizens. Elizabeth Madox Roberts's stories do not include any black characters at all. While Flannery O'Connor includes incidental black characters, any moral of her stories is focused on changing the attitudes of the white characters, not on the lives of the black characters. Katherine Anne Porter does write about an interracial friendship in *The Old Order*, but she uses it more to focus on the role of the white woman breaking the social codes of her time. As Chandra Wells points out, "Porter's interracial female friendship is ultimately an essential part of this larger project to re-envision the southern past from a female viewpoint" (780). Wells also investigates three unfinished stories by Porter that include interracial friendships and concludes, "this raw, unpolished material provides an important contrast to the depiction of Nannie and Sophia Jane in *The Old Order*, as it reveals dimensions of interracial female friendship that Porter found

problematic and, as evidenced by her struggles with and ultimate abandonment of these narratives, could not finally resolve” (763). Thus, Porter’s stories also cannot be read for any substantive message about the lives of blacks in the South. Welty’s work that I study here shares the same time period and still attends primarily to women, but her portrayal of opportunity for blacks offers a departure from the themes of Roberts, O’Connor, and Porter.

Welty’s take on these issues carries on the strains of Progressivism, a social and political movement that created many positive changes in the South. However, racial equality was not one of them. Although Progressivism as a movement died out by the 1920s, social change did not end with it. Welty, having lived through Progressivism, picks up some of its principles and translates them into a drive to modernize society by humanizing perceptions of African Americans who had been stereotypically portrayed as “coons,” “Sambos,” savages, or happy servants. Welty identifies these stereotypes in her short stories, but shows how the characters are individuals who do not fit those limiting roles. By actively working to humanize blacks in her short fiction, and thus perhaps influence her readers’ perceptions of blacks, Welty is also working towards racial equality in society. Three of Welty’s stories in particular—“Livvie,” “The Burning,” and “The Curtain of Green”—show a character who transforms from the “happy servant” to an individual. Marlon Riggs’s 1986 film *Ethnic Notions* points out that several stereotypes of African Americans can be grouped under the heading “happy servants,” including the Sambo, the Mammy, and the more generic faithful slave, loyal to the white man who “cares” for him. These stereotypes have existed since the heyday of slavery. Micki McElya, in *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*,

notes that these fictional versions of blacks were “designed to provide reassurance that their authors’ patriarchal benevolence was real, and was recognized and appreciated by those they enslaved” (4). Thus, a stereotype was born that portrayed African Americans as happy in their subservient positions and it is this misconception that Welty seeks to challenge.

Welty contests the stereotypes most directly in her stories “Livvie,” “The Burning,” and “The Curtain of Green.”¹⁴ In “Livvie,” Livvie and Solomon, an African American couple, have a relationship that more closely resembles the overseer/slave dynamic than husband/wife as Livvie is essentially imprisoned by her much older husband. Delilah in “The Burning” is literally imprisoned by slavery to Miss Theo and Miss Myra until she is set free by their deaths. “The Curtain of Green” offers a more limited look into the relationship between Mrs. Larkin, a white property owner, and the neighborhood black worker, Jamey, who assists in her garden. Welty spends most of each story setting up the constraints of the Old South that Mrs. Larkin and the “captors” of both Livvie and Delilah represent. The “captors” die or lose their power by the end of their stories, opening space for Livvie, Delilah, and Jamey to explore their individuality and have their own lives. This outcome mirrors the social struggles of the mid-twentieth century in which all citizens of the modern South faced the prospect of moving forward with their lives beyond the strictures of the Old South, and in particular the possibility for the New South to recognize blacks’ humanity and their potential to enrich modern

¹⁴ “Powerhouse” also considers racial themes, but I am not discussing it as it has been widely addressed in works such as Appel 148-64; Suzanne Marrs, “The Huge Fateful Stage of the Outside World,” in *Eudora Welty and Politics* 69-87; Harriet Pollack, “Words Between Strangers: On Welty, Her Style, and Her Audience,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 39.3 (1986), 481-505; Peter Schmidt, *The Heart of the Story: Eudora Welty's Short Fiction* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991), 39-48.

society. This is not a limited message, but a theme throughout her work. Alfred Appel, Jr. sees in Welty's stories a "pattern of endurance manifest in the Negroes" (142). It is more than just endurance, though, as endurance only indicates continuing on a given path. Welty's black characters survive when traditions are destroyed, and they carry on to new paths where they can claim the respect and equality they deserve, and that communicates optimism for the future of the South.

Eudora Welty's background contributes to her ability to write about these topics because she lived in the historical crossroads between Old and New Souths. She was born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi. She lived there for much of her life and often uses it as a setting in her stories. Her father died in 1931, and her subsequent closer relationship with her mother is exhibited in her stories through what Michael Kreyling calls a "master theme" of mother-daughter relationships in her fiction (1). She was interested in reading, writing, and photography from an early age. Welty attended college first at the Mississippi State College for Women and then at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to study literature. Her train trips between college and home lead to Kreyling's identification of a second "master theme": traveling (3). At her father's urging, Welty also completed a one-year business course at Columbia University in New York City, increasing her exposure to various cultures through her travels and schooling. A major influence on her life and work came from her time as a publicity agent for the WPA in Mississippi in 1935-1936. Many of these photographs were exhibited and later published. Her experiences traveling the state and meeting people served to broaden and intensify her already keen powers of observation. Welty herself said "I learned from my own

pictures, one by one, and had to; for I think we are the breakers of our own hearts” (*One Time* 11). She also based some of her short stories on photos she’d taken. Welty’s first short stories were published in 1936; in total, Welty produced four collections of short stories and five novels, as well as many essays and various publications of photographs. She was much lauded as well. Welty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist’s Daughter* in 1973. She also won several O. Henry Awards and had stories in *The Best Short Stories* collections. She was the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship and was elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Though much has been written about Welty’s fiction, little has been written about the racial and social issues she examines. Most Welty scholarship focuses on her literary achievement and the technical success of her stories. The high praise is warranted, but what is missing is study of the social commentary that her technical success allows her to include. In addition, because of Welty’s status as a southern woman, much criticism limits itself to praise instead of analysis. Books about Welty often begin with an homage to the woman herself, conflating the author and her fiction.¹⁵ Another trend in Welty scholarship is to emphasize her universal appeal, thereby limiting the significance of the South in her fiction. The most notable example of this belief is Michael Kreyling in *Eudora Welty’s Achievement of Order* (1980), where he argues that the label of southern writer diminishes Welty’s achievements. This tendency to universalize overlooks Welty’s significance as a southern author, especially as she is using her fiction to write into a changing cultural South.

¹⁵ For example, Jan Nordby Gretlund’s *Eudora Welty’s Aesthetics of Place* (1994).

The inclination to treat Welty's work as apolitical stems partly from her essay "Must the Novelist Crusade?," in which she answers the title question with a definite negative. However, she also speaks, in a 1977 interview with Jean Todd Freeman, about her response to getting midnight phone calls in the 1960s with people asking why she wasn't writing in protest of the race problem in the South. Welty told Freeman, "I felt like saying I didn't need their pointers to know that there was injustice among human beings or that there was trouble. I had been writing about that steadily right along by letting my characters show this" (*Conversations* 182). Although Welty disdains explicit "crusading" in fiction, she is well aware of the author's ability to include political thoughts in her fiction and perhaps even influence readers. Indeed, she states in the essay that "we are more aware of his [the author's] moral convictions through a novel than any flat statement of belief from him could make us" (809). She adds that "great fiction shows us not how to conduct our behavior but how to feel. Eventually it may show us how to face our feelings and face our actions and to have new inklings about what they mean" (810). These comments allow for not just political thought, but the possibility of action as well.

Welty repeatedly spoke of fiction's connection to and even influence on life. It is misleading to take her argument against crusading in fiction as her complete eschewing of the political. In an interview with Bill Ferris, Welty said:

I think a work of art, a poem or a story, is properly something that reflects what life is exactly at that time. That is, to try to reveal it. Not to be a mirror image, but to be something that goes beneath the surface of the outside and tries to reveal the way it really is, good and bad. Which in itself is a moral. I think a work of art must be moral. The artist must have a moral consciousness about his vision of life and what he tries to write, But to write propaganda I think is a weakening thing to art.
(*Conversations* 165)

Welty's fiction is not propaganda, but that leaves plenty of space for political and cultural implications. In fact, she goes on to say in the same interview, "I've written stories about human injustice as much as I've ever written about anything" (166). Her own words add evidence that Welty's stories can be read for their cultural critique.

There are some exceptions to critical works that de-regionalize and de-politicize Welty's work. One is the collection *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?* (2001), edited by Harriet Pollack and Suzanne Marrs, and another is *Eudora Welty, Whiteness, and Race* (2013), edited by Harriet Pollack. The essays in these books lay the groundwork that allows my reading by exploring the ways in which Welty included politics in her fiction without explicitly "crusading." My reading contributes not just the importance of politics, and in particular racial tensions, in Welty's short stories, but also the assertion that these themes mirror the necessity for social change and influence the changing social culture of her time.

In the introduction to *Eudora Welty and Politics*, Pollack points to Judith Fetterly's idea that, in Pollack's words, "narrative is *always* political" (2). The political discussions may not be overt or set in a traditional political arena, but they are still present. In her essay "Welty's Transformations of the Public, the Private, and the Political," Peggy Prenshaw posits that over time Welty comes to view "her citizen's voice as singular, slight, and largely ineffectual in setting or effecting social policy" (37). That is not to say she sees herself as voiceless, but that instead of affecting public policy directly, the "private and local sphere . . . is the place where informed and persuasive deliberation occurs, where speech legitimated by authority of experience and identity can be spoken and heard—the site, finally, where meaningful action can occur" (37). Welty

illustrates this “private and local sphere” in her short fiction, and it is there that she is able to more subtly advocate for change. Pollack similarly argues for Welty’s quiet voice of change in “Reading Welty on Whiteness and Race,” where she observes that “the daring in Welty’s art is oblique rather than straightforward, which is not at all the same as masked, ‘hidden,’ or silent” (7). This matches Welty’s insistence of not providing an explicit moral but allowing the fiction to speak for itself, as hers does. Marrs’s and Pollack’s collections consider how “Welty’s photography, prose, and fiction intersect that sphere of racial status quo and change” (Pollack, “Reading Welty” 14). However, as with many authors, “fiction” primarily refers to novels, and the short stories are discussed much less frequently, and I argue that the stories are an important contribution to Welty’s cultural work.

Welty’s words support this reading of hopefulness for blacks: “I do feel that private relationships between blacks and whites have always been the steady thing. I believe in human relationships anyway, for understanding. And I’ve always had faith that they would resolve problems” (*More Conversations* 114). She sees hope here not in political policies, but in change through private life and relationships. Because of this view, Welty presents these kinds of “human relationships” in her short fiction in order to stimulate cultural change in the South. Although Welty’s comments support the importance of private relationships, scholars tend to see the relationships as corresponding to public political conversation that is relegated to the private sphere instead of seeing it is the relationships that are doing the political work. Peggy Prenshaw makes an observation that is representative of this view. She argues that Welty’s fiction “displays a persistent regard for political negotiations but displaces such negotiations

from political sites to what she regards as—and indeed, what has traditionally been regarded as—the private sphere, private, perhaps, because these sites are so often the domain of women” (24). I see Welty displaying and advocating for change *through* the private relationships, not as displaced political work that belongs in the public sphere, but as purposefully placed political work within the traditional feminine sphere.

LIVVIE

“Livvie” is one such story that uses private relationships to investigate a problem and propose change; it was first published as “Livvie Is Back” in *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943), and won a first prize O. Henry Award.¹⁶ The newly married Livvie and the much older Solomon are an African American couple who represent some of the dynamics between Old South and New. Although the Old South was dominated by whites, Solomon embodies the adherence to tradition and society’s expectations that characterized that way of life. Livvie is essentially held captive to Solomon and serves him faithfully in household duties. However, at the end of the story, Livvie stands on the threshold of autonomy, serving as a symbol for the humanizing transformation of blacks from stereotypes to individuals. Welty uses these black characters in white roles to advocate on behalf of black women. She shows that although African Americans are emancipated, they remain confined by the same gendered limitations that white women experience.

¹⁶ There are multiple possible interpretations of the original title—that Livvie is “back,” at the end of the story, to her youth, to the land of the living, or to a place of autonomy, or something else entirely. None of them are completely supported by the story, which is perhaps why Welty changed it.

Welty provides many details in the story seemingly intended to display Solomon's adherence to traditional societal expectations of the South, and in particular to the white model of the South. Solomon runs a farm and is "very dignified, for he was a colored man that owned his land and had it written down in the courthouse" (276). Danièle Pitavy-Souques sees this situation as "repeating the white planter's acquisition of property and power over people" (98). She goes so far as to see "Livvie" as a retranslation of slavery and Solomon as representative of white status "through an ironical displacement" (97). Solomon's ownership of the land is appropriately recorded, and from the first line of the story, it is clear he views Livvie as property as well: "Solomon carried Livvie twenty-one miles away from her home when he married her" (276). She does not even have the agency of entering the marriage of her own free will.

Even though Solomon is not a plantation owner, he is placed in a position of ownership of his farm and of Livvie—and one of gendered power typically reserved by the southern patriarchy for white men. In addition, the reference to Solomon being "colored" is one of very few instances of racial coding in the story, and even so, he is described as having a "lightish face" (280). His lighter color further mitigates his racial status and allows Welty to place Solomon in the typically white role. Nina Jablonski explains that, very early in U.S. history, lighter skin was privileged:

slaves as well as masters recognized that lighter-skinned slaves had higher status. The desirability of light over dark, as perceived by slavers and the enslaved alike, presaged the development of modern colorism, the systematic favoring of lightly over darkly pigmented people in employment, education, marriage, and other spheres of social life. (150)

Giving Solomon lighter skin explains his high status in the community, but by giving even a "lightish" African American a role typically reserved for white men, Welty can

also indirectly critique the white patriarchy and expose it, through Solomon, as a dying social status.

The descriptions of Livvie portray her as little more than a complacent slave or servant. Livvie is only acted upon, never doing the action. After being (likely figuratively) carried to her new home, away from the land and society she knows, Livvie admits that “he was good to her, but he kept her in the house. She had not thought that she could not get back” (276). Livvie is isolated from all interactions outside the house: “there was nobody, nobody at all, not even a white person. And if there had been anybody, Solomon would not have let Livvie look at them” (278). Despite this initial sense of loss in not being able to “get back,” Livvie expresses only acceptance of her situation. As part of her fulfillment of her assigned role, Livvie cooks and cleans in the house without complaint. The reader is reminded that this is not a labor of love, but merely work. Before their wedding, Solomon asks if Livvie will leave her “winter” husband and later “pine for spring.” Although Livvie answers, “no indeed,” the next line betrays her ambivalence about Solomon: “whatever she said, always, was because he was an old man”—elders must be respected, and Livvie obliges (276). There is no mention of any kind of romance between the two. Livvie expresses loyalty, not happiness, with her position in the house. Livvie continues this attitude of subservience “while nine years went by. All the time, he got old, and he got so old he gave out. At last he slept the whole day in bed, and she was young still” (276). Presumably those nine years were so alike that the story needs no further description of their passing.

In the Bible, Solomon is a wise and wealthy king; in “Livvie,” Solomon is described with regal imagery, further underscoring his ability to wield king-like power in

the house. His complete control is emphasized by his ownership of all of the furniture and most of the pictures in the house. Many of Solomon's possessions are also associated with the spiritual three (indicating the trinity),¹⁷ and the bed Solomon sleeps in has "polished knobs like a throne." To contrast Solomon's great age, there is a picture of him as a young man over the bed. Then, he had "a fan of hair over his forehead like a king's crown" (279), another connection to King Solomon and an image of his position of power. Underneath this image of youth and power, Solomon's hair now "lay down on his head, the spring had gone out of it" (279-80), indicating the diminishment of his power. However, even as he "got so old he gave out," he still maintains control of the house from that bed: "he lay in a dignified way with his watch beside him" (279). The watch holds the dual symbolism of the time Solomon has left as well as his attempt to maintain dominance over Livvie's time. Solomon's spirituality and his attempt to control his world are also illustrated by the "line of bare crepe-myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a colored bottle, green or blue. There was no word that fell from Solomon's lips to say what they were for, but Livvie knew that there could be a spell put in trees, and she was familiar from the time she was born with the way bottle trees kept evil spirits from coming into the house" (277-78). Solomon made the bottle trees by hand over the nine years of their marriage. Bottle trees are rooted in ancient superstition and folklore. They likely originated in West Africa and were brought to America by slaves. Their purposes vary, but are generally thought to lure evil spirits by the bright colors of bottles on the ends of stripped tree branches and trap them inside, where they are killed by the sunlight

¹⁷ These include "a three-legged table with a pink marble top, on which was set a lamp with three gold feet" (276) and "rose bushes with tiny blood-red roses blooming every month grew in threes on either side of the steps" (277).

shining into the bottles (Cialdella). Since Livvie is not allowed to leave the house, Solomon also tries to prevent evil from entering to take her away.

Livvie as caretaker is reinforced by imagery of Solomon as a child instead of a tyrant or even a king. Livvie sometimes thinks “that the quiet she kept was for a sleeping baby, and that she had a baby and was its mother. When she stood at Solomon’s bed and looked down at him, she would be thinking, ‘He sleeps so well,’ and she would hate to wake him up” (279). Livvie’s image of Solomon as a sleeping child recalls her sole possession in the house: “a picture of the little white baby of the family she worked for” before she was married (277). The image of the white child is evidence of her position as caretaker instead of partner. She has traded the baby for Solomon, but she is still serving. The connection of Solomon to the child is also evidence of Solomon’s diminishment as he nears the end of his life, as well as the decline of his power. However, even in his sleep, he seeks to control time: “even through his sleep he kept track of it [time] like a clock, and knew how much of it went by, and waked up knowing where the hands were even before he consulted the silver watch that he never let go. He would sleep with the watch in his palm, and even holding it to his cheek like a child that loves a plaything” (281). Welty’s comparison of the watch to a “plaything” indicates its waning significance with Solomon’s weakening as well. A dead man can no more control the living than a child’s telephone can make calls.

The physical objects and descriptions of the house reinforce the status quo. Solomon sleeps under a large quilt that his mother made “in her life and old age” (277). It is an accomplishment that has “twenty-one different colors, four hundred and forty pieces, and a thousand yards of thread” (277). His mother’s work serves him in

accordance with the expectation for women to serve men but not be acknowledged for it. The quilt is somewhat ironically called “Trip Around the World,” although there is no evidence that Solomon has done any traveling and he will not even allow Livvie to travel farther than the “chicken house and the well” (281). The house Livvie and Solomon spend those years in is described as “nice” at least three separate times (276, 277, 278), and Livvie and her cooking are also given the adjective (278, 280, 281), calling extra attention to the word. The Latin root for nice is “nescius,” meaning ignorant or stupid: the “nice” house is keeping Livvie ignorant of her possibilities in life because it is, on the surface, sufficient. However, “nice” is fairly mediocre praise and identifies the house and situation as less than ideal. Livvie is not happy, but feels she *should* be satisfied with the provisions she’s been given. She isn’t being harmed, but lack of harm doesn’t mean the status quo is satisfactory. The added use of nice for Livvie (she “knew she made a nice girl to wait on anybody” [280]) brings out the agreeable (or inoffensive) definition of the word. Livvie knows how to play her role and do exactly what is expected of her. Welty uses “nice” to show how Livvie is subdued into maintaining her role as a stereotype—the “loyal servant”—and maintaining the status quo.

The impending change of power structures is first implied when Solomon will not even taste the “nice eggs” Livvie has made. She then feels “the stir of spring close to her. It was as present in the house as a young man would be” (280). This is the fulfillment of Solomon’s fear that she might pine for spring as she now feels its presence. It is also a foreshadowing of his death and the control of winter that will end then, as well as a foreshadowing of the impending actual presence of a young man in the room. Livvie notes through the window the activity of the forbidden fields, and the contrast of

Solomon “sound asleep while all this went around him that was his, Solomon was like a little still spot in the middle” (281). That “little still spot” sounds less like a man sleeping and more like a graveyard plot, as Livvie implicitly understands Solomon’s nearing death. The activity outside inspires her to imagine if she went out and worked the fields “like other girls, . . . and shamed the old man with her humbleness and delight” (281). Again, he is not her husband, but “the old man.” Her knowledge that delight would bring shame to her husband is further evidence that the benign “nice” is the highest praise she can manage in his house. Despite their lack of connection, Livvie immediately regrets her “cruel wish” and stays in the house cleaning and simmering a chicken broth until it is “right” and she can pour a “nice cup-ful” (281). It seems Livvie’s future is outside the “lonely house” that is built like “a cage” (288); however, thus far Livvie’s only knowledge of her possibilities besides being a “nice girl to wait on anybody” come from her brief gazes out the window towards the field.

Shortly after Solomon refuses the broth, Livvie is introduced to a representative of the world’s possibilities, and the breaking of Solomon’s control is further evidenced by a visitor arriving at the house. This is uncommon since Solomon keeps Livvie so isolated and because the house is so “far away from anywhere” (284). But Livvie sees a white lady coming up the path who at first “looked young, but then she looked old” (282), as if simply approaching Solomon’s house has aged her. After repeated knockings, Livvie opens the door a crack, and a large woman, named Miss Baby Marie, enters through that crack, “though she was more than middle-sized and wore a big hat” (282). Miss Baby Marie is an imposing presence, and the only thing Livvie knows to do is gaze

“respectfully” (282). This is another type of person that Livvie has been trained to respect because of their social standing—in this case the simple fact of being white.

It is clear from Livvie’s responses, or lack thereof, to Miss Baby Marie, that she is still ensconced in her servant role. When Miss Baby Marie opens her little suitcase and begins arranging her wide array of cosmetics around the front room, Livvie is bewildered by the choice and by the presence of the outside world in this isolated house. Miss Baby Marie asks, “did you ever see so many cosmetics in your life?” and Livvie tries to answer “no,m,” but “the cat had her tongue” (283). Again when Miss Baby Marie asks if she’s ever tried cosmetics, Livvie tries to answer no, but is unable. Her being unable to speak is evidence of her complete unfamiliarity with how to navigate anything that comes from outside the house. Alfred Appel, Jr. calls her the “‘tempter’ in Livvie’s prison-paradise” (195). Since the highest praise for Livvie’s situation is that it’s “nice,” Appel’s version of paradise is rather lackluster. However, he does get at the paradox of the “nice” house that isn’t harmful but is constraining, and Appel points to Miss Baby Marie’s role in opening Livvie’s eyes to other possibilities.

Miss Baby Marie enters the house through a cracked door, and she also cracks the door to the outside world and autonomy for Livvie when she opens her suitcase of cosmetics. When Miss Baby Marie pulls out the last item, lipstick, and offers it to Livvie, “her hand took the lipstick” (283), and Livvie’s individuality is sparked. It is again a passive action—it is not Livvie, but Livvie’s hand that takes the lipstick, but it is a symbol of the outside world that was previously forbidden. The scent carries her away from the house and back to her “home that she had left” (283), and causes her to act seemingly without being aware of it. Putting on the lipstick and looking in the mirror,

“her face danced before her like a flame” (283). The thought of home returns some measure of freedom to Livvie, and putting on the lipstick is her first small act of defiance. The flame she sees in the mirror is the spark of recognition of her possibility to be an individual and have autonomy.

Miss Baby Marie’s visit is a turning point for Livvie as igniting the flame in Livvie also ignites a possibility for change. The saleswoman’s visit is the first time Livvie verbalizes her subservient position, and this acknowledgement leads to her eventual transition. When Livvie is offered the cosmetics for purchase, she says, “Lady, but I don’t have no money, never did have” (283). Livvie is kept from further interaction with this world by Solomon’s control. Miss Baby Marie offers to come back another time, and for the first time, Livvie explicitly acknowledges Solomon’s power by telling the saleswoman, “my husband, he keep the *money* . . . He is as strict as he can be” (284). She emphasizes “money,” perhaps avoiding acknowledging that really Solomon controls all areas of her life. Miss Baby Marie pushes Livvie to break expectations when she asks to see Solomon before she leaves. The two women peer into his bedroom, much as one might look in on a sleeping child. Miss Baby Marie emphasizes his weakness with her comment, “my, what a little tiny old, old man!” (284). After this comment, the two women look at each other and “somehow that was as if they had a secret” (284). Livvie watches Miss Baby Marie leave, and “all the time she felt her heart beating in her left side. . . . it seemed as if her heart beat and her whole face flamed from the pulsing color of her lips” (285). Looking in on her husband with the saleswoman has created the same effect as putting on the lipstick—inflaming her heart—because the invasion of her husband’s privacy would also be a transgression in Solomon’s eyes, and of those

traditional expectations that he represents. The visit is also a turning point because Livvie has a realization: “‘he’s fixin’ to die,’ she said inside. That was the secret. That was when she went out of the house for a little breath of air” (285). Aside from the new feeling of her heart beating, Livvie, who usually abides by Solomon’s desire for her to stay in the house, ventures away from her prisoned space and from her role as his servant.

Livvie is helped in her transition away from servitude by “a man, looking like a vision,” she meets on her walk away from the house. He is dressed in Easter best, and he is soon standing next to her and has introduced himself as Cash. With very little description, it is already clear that he is the antithesis of Solomon. His name alone separates him from the husband that gives Livvie no money. It is significant that his clothes are described as “Easter best” as Easter is a time of death and rebirth, which foreshadows the upcoming death of Livvie’s role when Solomon literally dies, and her rebirth as an individual. Cash’s youth, in contrast with Solomon’s age, is also shown through his quick jumping across the river to be with Livvie. This is the kind of encounter that Solomon wanted to prevent by keeping her in the house:

They began to walk along. She stared on and on at him, as if he were doing some daring spectacular thing, instead of just walking beside her. It was not simply the city way he was dressed that made her look at him and see hope in its insolence looking back. It was not only the way he moved along kicking the flowers as if he could break through everything in the way and destroy anything in the world, that made her eyes grow bright.
(285-6)

Cash is also a figure of power here, but it is power over the outside world instead of over her. His seeming ability to “destroy anything in the world” means that he can likely destroy the prison of nice in which she lives.

Cash is problematic, though: since he shares Solomon's gender, it would seem he is also part of the patriarchal system that suppresses Livvie. In addition, Livvie recognizes the tune Cash is humming as one she's heard from the fields and suddenly knows that "Cash was a field hand. . . . Cash belonged to Solomon" (286), and thus Cash contributes to the system that keeps Solomon in power over both Cash and Livvie. Although Cash is a field hand for Solomon, he "was a transformed field hand. . . . he had stepped out of his overalls into this" (286). Yet when Livvie reflects on "this"—Cash's clothing—she realizes another problem: "how was it possible to look so fine before the harvest? Cash must have stolen the money, stolen it from Solomon" (286). Welty includes an interesting note in Cash's description. His Easter-best clothes are fairly straight forward as markers of upcoming rebirth and as a contrast to Solomon; however, Welty also notes, "he had a guinea pig in his pocket" (285). This is a perplexing addition to his outfit. Some dream interpretation sources claim the guinea pig symbolizes a need for experimentation or risk taking.¹⁸ Leaving the house was the first of Livvie's risks, but Cash encourages many more. Livvie is initially frightened of the code-breaking Cash, but when he draws her into his arms, "she fastened her red lips to his mouth, and she was dazzled by herself then, the way he had been dazzled at himself to begin with" (286). The kiss is one of very few actions in the story of her own accord; it seems she's accepted his defiance of the social order, and considers that if he is capable of stealing money from Solomon, he may also be capable of stealing Livvie away. Cash's transformation fans the flames of Livvie's transformation, as well as an escape she had previously only barely considered.

¹⁸ See, for example, www.dreammmoods.com

Livvie is still mired in her subservient role, though, and with the kiss, she suddenly senses that Solomon will die soon, “that he was the same to her as if he were dead now,” so she turns and runs toward the house (286-7). Cash runs too, passes her, and turns around to throw a stone into the bottle trees. He is rattling the bars of the cage that holds Livvie in. Cash beats her into the house and is standing in the front room, with the guinea pig peeping out of his pocket, when she gets there (287). Livvie rushes into Solomon’s room where “old Solomon was far away in his sleep” (287). Although his body is physically present, his mind—his means of controlling—is not.

Cash again pushes the boundaries of his assigned place by following her into the room. The description of his face “so black it was bright” (287) directly contrasts Solomon’s, who was earlier described as “lightish” (280). Solomon’s face, under the watching eyes of Cash and Livvie, “told them like a mythical story that all his life he had built, little scrap by little scrap, respect.” He built his “lonely house,” but Cash and Livvie see that “it grew to be the same with him as a great monumental pyramid”—used by the Egyptians as tombs of the rulers (288). The house he worked so hard to build and protect will also seal away his control over the world. As they see this in his sleeping face, suddenly Solomon is wide awake. Livvie stands still: “as if something said ‘Wait,’ she stood waiting. Even while her eyes burned under motionless lids, her lips parted in a stiff grimace, and with her arms stiff at her sides she stood above the prone old man and the panting young one, erect and apart” (288). In between Solomon and Cash, Livvie is standing between the past of being a servant and the future of possibility, as well as between winter and spring, frailty and virility.

The change of order is initiated when Solomon recognizes the potential relationship between Cash and Livvie and says, “young ones can’t wait” (289). On realizing that she has failed her duties to Solomon, Livvie breaks into tears—not, it seems, at his dying, but at a failure of duty she had been complicit in. Even now, though, as she hands him a glass of water, “he did not see her” (289). Livvie is not an individual to Solomon but a servant. Since Livvie has not known any other life for the past nine years, her initial reaction is fear. Solomon ignores her and gives a mini deathbed speech:

“So here come the young man Livvie wait for. Was no prevention. No prevention.” . . . Solomon gave a cough of distaste. Then he shut his eyes vigorously, and his lips began to move like a chanter’s. . . . “God forgive Solomon for carrying away too young girl for wife and keeping her away from her people and from all the young people would clamor for her back.” (289)

Solomon recognizes in his final moments the futility of trying to keep control over the world although he still has distaste for the idea of her freedom. Regardless, after his speech, he offers Livvie his silver watch, and with this offering she “hushed crying” (289). When she has taken the watch, “he was dead” (290). Although Solomon disapproves of Livvie having a life outside his house—and symbolically disapproves of modernity taking hold in the world—with his final action of voluntarily releasing the watch, he also relinquishes his attempt at holding time still. The watch does not drop out of his hand after he dies—he chooses to give it to Livvie. His relinquishing of control belies Ruth Vande Kieft’s vision of “Livvie” as a “juxtaposition and equal weighting of opposing sets of values” (51). The control of Solomon and the freedom of Livvie are certainly in juxtaposition, but they are not given equal weight or power from the start. It is only in the end that Livvie is released.

Livvie's brief interactions with the outside world have shown her that more is possible in her life, and after the exchange of the watch, there are no more tears. Livvie simply "left Solomon dead and went out of the room" (290). If Solomon had treated Livvie as wife instead of as servant, she may have wanted to care for time the way he had. However, with Solomon gone, she has no need to perform her role of loyal servant. Cash follows her and lifts her up and begins spinning her. "The first moment, she kept one arm and its hand stiff and still, the one that held Solomon's watch. Then the fingers softly let go, all of her was limp, and the watch fell somewhere on the floor" (290). With this, Livvie also relinquishes her deference to the old order, not even noting its passing. Initially she is limp in Cash's arms, seemingly being possessed again by another. As they move around the room, though, they stop in the "brightness of the open door," and she "rested in silence in his trembling arms, unprotesting as a bird on a nest" (290). Standing in the doorway, they are on threshold of a new life. As a bird on a nest, Livvie is in a place of safety, a place of beginning: the beginning of a transformation to an individual. Cash has the experience to teach her to fly, and to leave behind the role that has confined her for so long. The scene outside reinforces this as "the redbirds were flying and crisscrossing, the sun was in all the bottles on the prisoned trees, and the young peach was shining in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring" (290). The birds, the young tree, and the springtime light all emphasize the new life that is now open to Livvie with the control of Solomon's watch over and a new era of empowerment to action beginning. With Livvie's possibility also comes the parallel possibility for the New South to recognize the potential of blacks to be more than a subservient workforce in modern society.

THE BURNING

Welty also uses the “loyal servant” stereotype to engender social change in her short story “The Burning,” which is set at the end of the Civil War, the literal end of the Old South. It was first published in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1951, when Old South ideologies were not yet defeated (it was later included in the 1955 *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories*). The story’s setting is the stereotypical Old South. Miss Theo and Miss Myra play the parts of genteel southern ladies, and Delilah, their house slave, acts as their loyal and contented servant. However, the story ends with Misses Theo and Myra’s deaths, and the possibility for Delilah to make her own life as an individual, breaking out of her role as stereotype. These changes represent Welty’s vision of a South that leaves behind the model of white southern aristocracy and allows African Americans to direct their own lives instead of living in prescribed roles. Despite the power of this story, in an interview with Jan Nordby Gretlund, Welty called it “the worst story I ever wrote” because it’s so “involved and curlicued around with things” (*Conversations* 221). It is that very nature of weaving multiple stories together that allows Welty to give this picture of past and future in one.

Welty sets up the social status of the sisters and their downfall in the first lines of the story. House slave Delilah “ran on into the parlor, where they were. They were standing up before the fireplace, their white sewing dropped over their feet, their backs turned, both ladies” (581). “They” are Miss Theo and Miss Myra, the ladies of the house. They are introduced as upstanding (literally and morally), they are genteel as shown by their sewing, and their place in a parlor with a fireplace shows their status. Their “white”

sewing reinforces their race, and their implicit power over Delilah because of it. Welty begins the story with an intrusion on this idyll that is the beginning of the collapse of the sisters' way of life: "a horse was coming in the house, by the front door" (581). There is no time to be immersed in the old world—it is already being defiled. The two sisters attempt to turn a blind eye to this degradation. They keep "their backs turned to whatever shape or ghost Commotion would take when it came," but even turning their backs cannot spare them the sight because they face the large Venetian mirror over the fireplace and still see the image of their downfall enter the parlor.

The sisters' position of gentility, illustrated in the room by their position in front of the mirror, means they cannot see the full picture of what has entered their home and the demise it brings. They cannot see distinct shapes in the mirror, but instead see "a white silhouette, like something cut out of the room's dark. July was so bright outside, and the parlor so dark for coolness, that at first nobody but Delilah could see" (581). In mythology, a white horse is ridden by a knight in shining armor, come to save the damsel in distress. The ensuing rape of the two sisters makes clear that they are not the ones to be saved. Delilah, the sisters' servant, as the only one who can see the situation, allows the possibility that she may be the one to survive. Albert Devlin points out that the whole story is working toward that demise: "in presenting the culture of Miss Myra and Miss Theo, Welty never wavers in her conviction that it must bow to temporal necessity" (131). This is clear simply from the moment of history portrayed, but "the inevitability of loss is reinforced as well by seasonally portentous imagery which marks each sister for doom" as both sisters are described physically with autumnal and winter imagery (131).

The endpoint of “The Burning” goes beyond “temporal necessity” to a freeing that allows progress.

The sisters do not see the loss of their place as inevitable, and so attempt to hold on to their status even in the face of violation. None of the events are directly stated, but the terror is implied. Instead of a rescuer, the horse carries in two war-weary soldiers who approach and likely rape each of the sisters. As Patricia Yaeger aptly describes in “‘Black Men Dressed in Gold’: Racial Violence in Eudora Welty’s ‘The Burning,’” “Welty’s prose twists, proliferates, withholds, maddens” (188). Miss Theo and Miss Myra are still associated with southern female gentility even in the midst of this act. Miss Theo says, “‘step back, Delilah, out of harm’s way,’ . . . in such a company-voice that Delilah thought harm was one of two men” and as a soldier approaches and pushes down Miss Myra, she is distinguished by the appositive, “who flitted when she ran” (582), an image that portrays her as light and stereotypically feminine. When Miss Theo picks up Miss Myra from the floor and deposits her in a chair, Myra is “asleep somewhere, if not in her eyes” (583), likely dissociating herself from the trauma of the violation.

Welty initially presents Delilah as a stereotypical happy slave, holding the horse’s bridle, “a good obedient slave in her fresh-ironed candy-stripe dress beneath her black apron. She would have had her turban tied on, had she known all this ahead” (583). Not only does Delilah fulfill her role as loyal servant by obeying orders, but she wishes she could be more “presentable” by having her turban tied on as she does so. Delilah’s place here is significant not only in her physical description, but also in that she sees herself in the large mirror. The mirror is symbolic throughout the story, as Vande Kieft describes, “the elegant mirror is the symbol of a way of life: placid, decorative, sheltered, lived at a

remove, out of touch with reality, and supported by slaves” (130). Viewing the room through the mirror makes the events seem at a remove. The sisters attempt to pretend their house is not being invaded by viewing the intruders only through the mirror. That does not stop the terror that follows, and neither does Delilah’s view of herself as slave cement that role for the future.

The sisters’ devotion to the culture of the Old South is reinforced by the noises ignored from upstairs while the soldiers are in the house. “Nobody went up there without being seen, and nobody was supposed to come down” because Phinny lives there (582). Phinny is heard throwing down his breakfast plate and then his cup, but no one acknowledges him. Theo and Myra have tried to keep Phinny hidden because, as is revealed later, he is a mixed-race boy and thus socially unacceptable. Delilah’s role as a “good obedient slave” means that she also does not try to save him even though it’s quite possible that Phinny is her son, fathered by the absent brother of Theo and Myra.

Although the soldiers are from General Sherman’s army and are there to burn down the house and the order of the Old South, they appeal to its basic tenets of social decorum to influence the women. “Miss Myra’s soldier,” as if they are in a sanctioned relationship, appeals to Theo’s sense of order to get them out of the house: “Lady, they told you. . . . And when your own people tell you something’s coming to burn your house down, the business-like thing to do is get out of the way. And the right thing” (584). Since there appear to be no options remaining, Theo slaps Myra to try to bring her back to her senses and get them out of the house. Myra responds by “slowly lift[ing] her white arm, like a lady who has been asked to dance,” still unable to leave the narrative she has known all along (585). Michael Kreyling confirms this with his description of Myra as “a

damaged magnolia [who is] locked in the past and in a fossilized role of lady as ornament” (171). Stuck in that role, Myra has no recourse against her male attackers.

As a servant, Delilah is also stuck at the whims of others, but she experiences a split when she is dragged out of the house and onto the grass, also likely raped by the soldiers. She “screamed, young and strong, for them all—for everybody that wanted her to scream for them, for everybody that didn’t; and sometimes it seemed to her that she was screaming her loudest for Delilah, who was lost now—carried out of the house, not knowing how to get back” (585). Delilah screaming for Delilah suggests a divide between the Delilah who served the sisters and the Delilah who is now screaming, a symbolic shift of worlds. Delilah and Livvie share a sense of being brought to a place they don’t know how to get back from—Livvie to Solomon’s lonely house, and Delilah to servitude. Although the events of the story are certainly not positive—including being sexually claimed and likely violated—they are the precursor to the end of the women being “brought” places instead of going of their own volition.

The burning of the house begins to break down the barriers of the Old South. Delilah watches “soldiers and Negroes alike” loot the house, “the front now the same as the back,” propriety having no place anymore (585). Within the codified structures of slavery, only whites could enter through the front door—blacks would use a back or side door—but now that barrier for blacks has been breached. The silver is “tied up like a bag of bones,” similar to the bag of bones that Delilah will later tie up (586). After the house is emptied, the soldiers get ready to burn it. “To Delilah that house they were carrying the torches to was like one just now coming into being—like the showboat that slowly came through the trees” (586). For Yaeger, this new vision of the house is a “new ontology of a

plantation that *can* be burned down” (emphasis mine, “Black Men” 195)—the possibility that the world will not remain unchanging. After the house is burned, Theo and Myra pick up Delilah out of ditch “with her eyes scorched open” (586). Although it may be a literal effect of the fire, it is also a figurative result of the day—she must see the world in ways she never has before.

The sisters’ elision of Delilah’s personhood is emphasized when they walk, accompanied by Delilah, through the burned out town, identifying what used to be in each place, “naming and claiming ruin for ruin,” as if they are reconstructing the world they’re leaving behind (587). Ignoring any possible impact on Delilah, the sisters bring up the topic of Phinny’s parentage. Acting as the gallant older sister, Theo declares, “I can reproach myself now, of course, with everything” (588). Myra insists Theo cannot be responsible for everything because Phinny was her baby. Theo argues, “hush, dearest, that wasn’t *your* baby, you know. It was Brother Benton’s baby” (588). After Myra continues to protest, Theo asks, “don’t you know he’s black?” Myra answers, ““he *was* white. . . . he’s black *now*” (589). Children of one African-American parent and one white parent are often born white and slowly darken over their first few months. Myra insists that she had the baby, but she can’t remember the specifics, adding doubt to her claim: “you hide him if you want to. . . . I had him, dear. It was an officer, no, one of our beaux that used to come out and hunt with Benton” (589). In this debate between them for ownership of a child they wouldn’t acknowledge and didn’t save from the burning house, they do not even acknowledge the possibility of Delilah as mother. Her role as servant is incompatible to Theo and Myra with the role of mother. Although the truth is obscured, it seems likely that the sisters are trying to maintain propriety by covering up a

relationship between Delilah and Benton. They recall that “he was so good after that too, never married” and that he stayed at home, perhaps to be near Delilah (588). Any possible evidence of this Old South transgression has been burned with their home.

When Delilah later returns to the house, there is evidence that she is the mother as she muses, “he was her Jonah, her Phinny, her black monkey; she worshiped him still, though it was long ago he was taken from her the first time” (594). That “long ago” may well be at his birth. She also notes her “motherly image” in the mirror and then gathers Phinny’s bones from the ashes to carry with her. The other items she gathers all have material value, so there seems little reason to gather the bones aside from an emotional connection, such as mother to son. Welty’s ambiguity regarding Phinny’s parentage draws attention to the acceptability that Benton, or any white man, could father a child with Delilah (or any black servant) without having record of it or responsibility for the child. Although the story is mostly concerned with racial roles, this situation evinces an indirect critique of the system of white patriarchy, similar to the one offered with the power abused by the patriarchal Solomon in “Livvie.”

The sisters would rather die than face a world where their race and social status does not hold value, so after a brief rest in a hammock, Theo unties it and readies the rope into nooses. Without any conversation with Myra, Theo holds out two lengths of rope to Delilah and directs her to take them up the tree. Delilah “made the ropes fast to the two branches a sociable distance apart, where Miss Theo pointed.” Again without conversation, or at least no conversation relevant to Delilah, “they settled it” (591). “It” is who will be hanged first, and Myra claims the dubious honor. She climbs atop Delilah, and kicks her in the head on the way down. Theo seems to be proud of herself: “I’ve

proved,’ said Miss Theo to Delilah, dragging her by more than main force back to the tree, ‘what I’ve always suspicioned; that I’m brave as a lion’” (591-2). Miss Theo’s continued farce throughout the ordeal is that she is strong—stronger than Myra, and strong enough to keep their tradition alive. She has ignored every sign of its doom, turning her back to the horse entering her parlor and naming the ruins as if they were still part of the town. Theo ties her own knot around her neck, and falls with such force that her rope breaks after it has broken her neck, and she lies still on the ground. The act of the sisters’ suicides is only implied, not directly stated. Just as they cannot acknowledge the end of their way of life, Welty does not explicitly acknowledge their deaths.

With Miss Theo and Miss Myra dead, Delilah is no longer their loyal servant and thus no longer subject to their orders and must find her own way. She spends “a day and a night or more” lost before she finds her way back to the house. In this time of being lost, Delilah is navigating a new path, one not directed by white women, and not in service of them either. When she climbs over the “stepless back doorsill, . . . she was lost still, inside that house” (593). Her role as servant no longer exists since there are no mistresses to serve. She tries out a different role for herself: she picks up a book and

read out from it, “Ba-ba-ba-ba—trash.” She was being Miss Theo taking away Miss Myra’s reading. Then she saw the Venetian mirror down in the chimney’s craw, flat and face-up in the cinders. . . . Though the mirror did not know Delilah, Delilah would have known that mirror anywhere, because it was set between black men. (593)

She recognizes the mirror because men of her race are holding it up, because she has likely cleaned it often, and because she also sees in it the history of her race—as Yaeger points out, “her ancestors created the wealth that enabled its purchase” (“Black Men” 191). This recognition gives way to a vision of the past. She sees people walking through

what she guesses “was Jackson before Sherman came,” and she sees small figures doing “what men had done to Miss Theo and Miss Myra and the peacocks and to slaves, and sometimes what a slave had done and what anybody now could do to anybody,” and with this sight, “the mirror felled her flat” (594). Delilah sees and recognizes the past, and lies waiting for its path to take her away as it has her mistresses. She waits for “all this world that was flying, striking, stricken, falling, gilded or blackened, mortally splitting and falling apart, proud turbans unwinding, turning like the spotted dying leaves of fall, spiraling down to bottomless ash” (594). Just as the house and the old order have been turned to ash, so too do proud turbans unwind. She sees slaves and servants released from their roles.

This seemingly incongruous bit of mysticism does more than delay Delilah’s exit; the vision inspires ownership and autonomy in Delilah. Yaeger explains Delilah’s vision as Welty showing that

even when history maims your people, you can still appropriate (lift/pinch/embezzle/purloin) the past’s dead citations and give them outrageous life. That is, Welty recognizes in Delilah much more than the power to care for white people’s things. Delilah appropriates and remaps these things’ meanings. She possesses a dream vision, a role usually bestowed on poetic white men. (“Black Men” 192)

As someone previously owned herself, Delilah had no possessions. Now she is free to gather up whatever may have value or use to her. When she gets up, she hunts in the ashes to find Phinny’s bones and wraps them up with a section of her skirt, then walks away, “walking stilted in Miss Myra’s shoes,” carrying Miss Theo’s shoes, wearing as many of Myra’s rings as she could fit on her fingers as well as her hair combs, and carrying the “Jubilee cup” on her head (595). She is carrying everything of value that she can.

In the conclusion of the story, Delilah escapes the town, the soldiers, and her life of servitude through crossing a river. When she reaches the river, she wades in to cross it, her throat stretched “like a sunflower stalk above the river’s opaque skin, . . . her treasure stacked on the roof of her head” (595). She will be able to transcend the color of her skin and use the remnants of the society that oppressed her to find a new life. In addition to escaping the soldiers, crossing the river also alludes to escaping slaves crossing the Ohio River as the final step to safety and freedom just as Delilah is now heading toward her freedom. The last line of the story indicates her confidence in her survival: “she had forgotten how or when she knew, and she did not know what day this was, but she knew—it would not rain, the river would not rise, until Saturday” (595). Critics like Devlin have recognized the “historical accuracy” of “The Burning” in relation to the destruction of white society (126), but the renewal of life for Delilah is the weighty final message with which Welty leaves readers, inspiring hope for southern readers to similarly see the individuality of black citizens of the South.

THE CURTAIN OF GREEN

Welty writes a similar message of the end of one era of power in “A Curtain of Green.” The story was first published in 1938 in *Southern Review* and appeared as the title story of a collection in 1941. It is set in Mrs. Larkin’s garden, and the typical reading is that Mrs. Larkin’s garden work is a quest for power over nature, or at least to lose herself in nature, since she has witnessed her husband killed by a falling tree.¹⁹ However,

¹⁹ See, for example, Carol Ann Johnston, *Eudora Welty: A Study of the Short Fiction*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997; Michael Kreyling, *Eudora Welty’s Achievement of Order*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State

I read it as a larger struggle in which the garden is a battleground not just between order and chaos, but also between black and white. Mrs. Larkin's daily garden work is similar to the agricultural work that is the representative industry of the South, allowing us to see the implications of the story as relevant to the South as well.

The first indication of change for the South is that, although gardening is often viewed as appropriate for women, Mrs. Larkin does not follow the social conventions for gardening. The neighbors can only observe her work through an upstairs window because the garden is so overgrown. When they do spot her, she appears "over-vigorous, disreputable, and heedless" (130). She even works in "untidy" men's overalls, "with her hair streaming and tangled where she had neglected to comb it," further removing her from typical women's garden work and expectations (130). Beyond her attire, Mrs. Larkin also rejects the common custom of sharing the output of her garden as the neighbors note, "she certainly never sent a single one of her fine flowers to any of them" (131). The disorder and overgrowth of the garden makes them believe she is certainly not working toward "*beauty* at all" (131). In fact, "just to what end Mrs. Larkin worked so strenuously in her garden, her neighbors could not see" (131). This is similar to Roberts's story "Record at Oak Hill" when Morna states that "it was not known" who killed Buchman. It is not that either Mrs. Larkin's purpose or Buchman's murderer are *unknowable*—they are simply unknown to observers. The neighbors cannot make sense of what she is working for because it does not fit with the common purpose of control over the garden: "to a certain extent, she seemed not to seek for order, but to allow an overflowing, as if she consciously ventured forever a little farther, a little deeper, into

UP, 1980; Suzanne Marrs, *One Writer's Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002; Ruth Vande Kieft, *Eudora Welty, Rev. ed.*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.

her life in the garden” (131). Indeed, “to the neighbors gazing down from their upstairs windows it had the appearance of a sort of jungle, in which the light, heedless form of its owner daily lost itself” (132). The “light” Mrs. Larkin becomes indistinguishable from the “blackness” of the garden, indicating the mixing of worlds the story both predicts and advocates. The disorder of her garden can also be seen as a desire for a disordering of the Old South.

Welty presents this conflict of the South through contrasting black and white symbols as well as through the interaction of the black and white characters. The association of the garden with a jungle brings to mind the stereotype of blacks as savages who live in a jungle. In addition, Mrs. Larkin works through “ceaseless activity” to “cope with the rich blackness of this soil” (131). Mrs. Larkin’s skin and house are pointedly white (134, 135), and she works to “beat down” the weeds in this space, just as whites worked to beat down blacks both literally and figuratively in the Old South (133). Beyond the symbolic contrast of black and white, Welty also writes an encounter between Mrs. Larkin and Jamey, the African-American boy who occasionally works for her. Jamey fulfills the “happy servant” role. The neighbors can recognize Jamey’s pleasant whistling tune when he enters Mrs. Larkin’s garden because they hear it so regularly in the neighborhood.

Conflict arises when Mrs. Larkin notices that Jamie is not working and thus not fulfilling his role. She realizes that “hers was the only motion to continue in the whole slackened place” (133). She calls out to Jamey, but he sits “motionless,” with even the sound of his whistling ceased. He “negligently stirred the dirt with his yellow finger” with a “soft, rather deprecating smile on his face; he was lost in some impossible dream

of his own” (133). Jamey is not following her directive but is lost in his own thought, an initiative that ignores her authority and indicates his selfhood apart from his role as happy servant. Mrs. Larkin moves to exercise her power over Jamey; although Jamey is still, Mrs. Larkin sees a “look of docility” in him that “began to infuriate her.” As she nears him, she “noticed him closely for the first time—the way he looked like a child” (133). Welty offers this contrasting moment of compassion that does not fit with the worker/overseer dynamic, but does point to the humanity of both individuals. However, Mrs. Larkin is still the overseer here, and she approaches Jamey, knowing “she had to make him finish before it began to rain” (132). This need arouses within her an instinctive response:

A feeling of stricture, of a responding hopelessness almost approaching ferocity, grew with alarming quickness about her. When she was directly behind him she stood quite still for a moment, in the queer sheathed manner she had before beginning her gardening in the morning. Then she raised the hoe above her head; the clumsy sleeves both fell back, exposing the thin, unsunburned whiteness of her arms, the shocking fact of their youth. (134)

It is as if something else is controlling her. The very “whiteness” of her arms calls attention to the racialized tension here with whites’ power over blacks being the order of the day.

Welty moves the story away from the narrative of violence that would have been common in the Old South. Mrs. Larkin sees that “the head of Jamey, bent there below her, seemed witless, terrifying, wonderful, almost inaccessible to her, and yet in its explicit nearness meant surely for destruction” (134). These varying descriptors display Mrs. Larkin’s, and the story’s, acknowledgement of more depth to Jamey than his role as servant, and her resistance to standard race relations. Despite this brief awareness, Mrs.

Larkin still sees Jamey as meant for destruction, and understands that she could be the bringer of that destruction. She knew “such a head she could strike off, intentionally, so deeply did she know . . . so helpless was she, too helpless to defy the workings of accident, of life and death, of unaccountability” (134). Her helplessness may refer to her inability to prevent her husband’s death, but she also seems to feel helpless in the face of black/white relations. She has power over Jamey because she is white and he is black. Patricia Yaeger in *Dirt and Desire* notes that “Curtain of Green” focuses not “on southern racism as an epic event but as a quotidian praxis, a sadistic solution to the ordinary riddles of everyday life” (63). Simply because of their color, it is acceptable, even expected, for Mrs. Larkin to take out her frustrations on Jamey. She considers the power she has: “life and death, which now meant nothing to her but which she was compelled continually to wield with both her hands, ceaselessly asking, Was it not possible to compensate? to punish? to protest?” (134). She did not have power to stop her husband’s death, but she has power to protest the “quotidian praxis” of racism and violence toward blacks in the South, and she lowers her hoe that she has been holding above Jamey’s head throughout these musings. “She stood still where she was, close to Jamey, and listened to the rain falling. It was so gentle. It was so full—the sound of the end of waiting” (134). Mrs. Larkin has been waiting for an answer to why her husband was killed, to how she should live her life in a world that does not make sense to her. The act of raising the hoe was an experiment to continue the old order. But that is not where the world is heading. Instead, with the rain falling, it can, as it often does, symbolically wash away the past.

Welty places Mrs. Larkin at a point of choice: behind her is “the signal-like whiteness of the house” and in front of her is Jamey’s dark face (135). Between these

images of white and dark, Mrs. Larkin stands ready to be swayed either way. She knows that “soon the loud and gentle night of rain would come. It would pound upon the steep roof of the white house.” When the image of night takes over the whiteness of the house, one era will end: “the day’s work would be over in the garden. She would lie in bed, her arms tired at her sides and in motionless peace: against that which was inexhaustible, there was no defense” (135). When her work is over, it also signals the end of her attempt to control the dark soil and Jamey’s dark skin, just as Solomon relinquishes control of his watch at the end of “Livvie.” With these realizations, “Mrs. Larkin sank in one motion down into the flowers and lay there, fainting and streaked with rain” (135). In the traditional readings of Mrs. Larkin coping with the death of her husband, her fainting is seen as symbolic of her final release: Vande Kieft writes, “her sleep has the look of death: there is the suggestion that only by sinking herself into final oblivion will she ever be released from her burning compulsion to wrest meanings from nature, to impose order on chaos” (17).²⁰ However, Mrs. Larkin does not die. Jamey scrambles toward her, concerned for the “shapeless, passive figure on the ground” (136). The gaze has reversed from the white looking over the black: “now, in this unseen place, it was he who stood looking at poor Mrs. Larkin” (136). He calls her name until she moves, ensuring she is not dead—only her control has experienced a death—then runs out of the garden, as he is free to do. Susan Donaldson reads this moment as a “that of a white woman from whom a glance and a word can serve as a death sentence to a black man” (59). While Donaldson sees Jamie’s exit as the end of his narrative, I see it as the beginning. As with the deaths

²⁰ Appel comes to the same conclusion: “her immolation in the flower bed suggests that Mrs. Larkin will discover no answers, will find no solace in a dream world, and that her final release can only come through oblivion—in sleep and, ultimately, death” (33).

of Solomon, Theo, and Myra, this symbolic death of Miss Larkin frees Jamey from the limiting role of servant and allows Welty to display his individuality in his concern for her. Jamey will continue on. The day's end and Mrs. Larkin's submission to it also indicates her submission to the end of white control over black. She has succeeded in her goal to lose herself in the jungle of her garden, and has stopped trying to make order out of the chaos that cannot be shaped.

“Livvie,” “The Burning,” and “The Curtain of Green” all end with freedom of choice and a future for a central black character in the South, or in a land that represents the South. Furthermore, each story ends with those who had held control relinquishing—by force or by choice—that control. With these narratives, Welty reveals a South that similarly needs to give up its control over blacks, allow them to move forward into better positions that do not involve servitude, and recognize their humanity and individuality.

These social implications of Welty's text are not placed there by hindsight, but are part of Welty's work in her time. In a 1972 interview with William Buckley, Welty spoke about the issues she'd tried to address with her work:

I assumed that my whole life I had been writing about injustice, if I wanted to, and love and hate and so on. They are human characteristics which I had been able to see long before it was pointed out to me by what happened in those years [the 1960s]. I was always against it, but what I was writing about was human beings” (*Conversations* 100)

Just as in “Must the Novelist Crusade?,” Welty rejects any interpretation that generalizes her characters, instead insisting on seeing them as individuals. The South of Welty's time had not yet managed to release blacks from the stereotypes they were perceived as filling, and Welty's stories attempt to help that process.

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