

From “Big Red” Hydrick to Goat Dykeman: Eudora Welty’s Navigation between the Fictional and the Real in “Where Is the Voice Coming From?”

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Known for her lyrical evocations of the American South, Eudora Welty’s short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?” is unique in her oeuvre for both its intense topicality and its direct treatment of the Southern racism that is often only obliquely acknowledged in her fiction. This article examines how Welty maintains her characteristically deep sympathy for her characters, and her profound attention to detail, while narrating the event of a horrific and racist murder. Furthermore, by providing biographical details of the real life “Goat Dykeman”, G.W. Hydrick, informed readers see how even in a brief story about contemporary events, Welty is continually aware of regional history and assumptions, and she uses details, sometimes very subtly, to attach layers of meaning to her stories.

Keywords

American South; Southern racism; Civil Rights Movement; Medgar Evers; Byron De La Beckwith; “Big Red” Hydrick; Goat Dykeman

The Circumstances of Welty’s Story

Eudora Welty’s short story “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” was published on July 6, 1963, less than a month following the June 12 assassination of Civil Rights activist and NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers, which inspired the story. As Welty has mentioned in several interviews, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” was written in one sitting (atypical of Welty’s usual writing process), on the night following the assassination, making clear that the story is a profoundly emotional and visceral response to the assassination:

When that murder was committed, it suddenly crossed my consciousness that I knew what was in that man's mind because I'd lived all my life where it happened. It was the strangest feeling of horror and compulsion all in one. I tried to write from the interior of my own South and that's why I dared to put it in the first person. [...] At the time I wrote it – it was overnight – no one knew who the murderer was, and I just meant by the title that whoever was speaking, I – the writer – knew, was in a position to know, what the murderer must be saying and why. (Prenshaw, *Conversations* 83)

The emotional genesis of this story, even amid the racial tensions, hatreds, and violence of a changing South, permits Welty to establish an empathetic discourse: the horror of the murder is mediated by a compassion marked by Welty's authorial voice converging with that of the killer and narrator. This mode of discourse also establishes a conversation between Welty's personal (*interior*) South and the historical (*exterior*) South, or an exchange between the fictional and the actual. By navigating the space between the interior and the exterior, or the fictional and the actual, Welty was able to contribute an important and penetrating statement to the national discussion on racial strife in the South of the Civil Rights era, a voice addressing both Southern racism and Northern generalizations, revealing both individual and collective complexities in Medgar Evers's murder. This perspective is vital in that it captures a violent expression of reactionary resistance in the transformation from a segregated to an integrated American society.

The plot of "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" is characterized by its rapidity of composition and its intense topicality. Directly inspired by a very current and historically charged event, the story offers an alternative to journalistic accounts of the assassination, in tonal opposition to the sometimes racist coverage of Southern newspapers, and in emotional opposition to the often synthetic generalizations of Northern reporting. The element of emotional reportage is affirmed by the fact that *The New Yorker's* 39th issue of July 6, 1963 was rushed into print in order to present Welty's story as soon as possible (Pingatore 400). *The New Yorker*, significantly, presented the story in a major Northern vehicle when a national conversation was taking place outside of but focused upon the South. Welty once observed, in an anecdote recorded by a reporter who called her regarding repercussions from the story, "The people who burn crosses on lawns don't read me in *The New Yorker*" (Prenshaw, *More* 31). Welty's awareness of a *New Yorker* discourse and audience is clarified: "[many] stories I had read [were] written in a synthetic way about

Southerners and their attitudes. They were so 'simplistic', as people say now, with no distinctions made between one kind of person and another. They lacked understanding" (Prenshaw, *More* 67). She later elaborated, "I thought I would write some stories to show what it was really like here, how it was so complicated and how motives were so mixed. How nothing is simple" (Prenshaw, *More* 240).

Before the story was published, Byron De La Beckwith (1920-2001), a California-born white supremacist, was arrested for the murder of Medgar Evers, but, due to legal considerations, numerous factual details that Welty could have incorporated into her story, tying it more directly to the murder, had to be excluded, including time, location, names, and the color of automobiles (Marrs, *One* 184). Welty took advantage of the legal constraints of publication productively to bring the necessarily altered details of the event to the service of a solid narrative strategy. As she mentions in a discussion of technique, "I try in all stories to use the whole physical world to assist me", which she effectively does, within the legal and imaginative space that she establishes between the details of the murder and the details of her fiction (Prenshaw, *Conversations* 260). Within this narrative space between fact and fiction, Welty creates her story of a concrete act of violence within the general conditions of social crisis, a strategy that allows readers to discover the story's focus – the conditions of the assassination of Evers – as they read the story, not before. The readers hear the mental monologue at the time of the actual assassination, establishing the story as an anatomy of the act of violence rather than as a response to the event. The voice is anonymous, and in a sense it is also a plural voice because the speaker is not an aberration from, but an integral element in, a broad social crisis.

In creating a story about the incident, Welty took advantage not only of the physical details of the world but also of the landmarks of the political landscape and of underlying Southern assumptions. The narrator references the pro-Civil Rights Kennedy administration, as well as Mississippi's openly racist Barnett administration, indicating the extreme polarities of the political landscape at the time. Governor Barnett's name remains unchanged, and as an ardent segregationist, he serves to represent the racism inherent within the legal and political atmosphere of the South. The assassin says, "[...] and I ain't ask no Governor Barnett to give me one thing. Unless he wants to give me a pat on the back for the trouble I took this morning" (Welty, "Where" 728). Governor Barnett was in office during Evers's murder and, fulfilling the narrator's fictional speculation, was congratulatory toward Beckwith during

the trial, openly shaking hands with Beckwith before the jury deliberated (Stout par. 9). Both the speaker (the imagined assassin of Evers) in the story and Welty are keenly aware of the legal climate of the South during the 1960s. The speaker acknowledges that there is a possibility that he will be arrested and punished, admitting that “[they] *may* try to railroad me into the electric chair”, but the use of a modal auxiliary here indicates the speaker’s thought that this probably is an unlikely outcome (Welty, “Where” 732; emphasis added). Again, Welty’s fiction was borne out by future events. Beckwith was tried twice in 1964, with hung juries both times, and ultimately convicted by a third jury, but only in 1994.

Medgar Evers (Roland Summers in the story) is clearly the antitype to Barnett and the institutionalized racism under his administration. It is tempting to hear in Roland Summers’s name the sound of “roll-on summer”, as if the June explosion of Southern racism might be followed eventually by a summer resolution into a less racially charged South. The hopes of such a Freedom Summer are challenged, however, by the lettering on the side of the borrowed truck that the killer drives to the scene, which reads “No Riders” – as if excluding the freedom riders of the sixties (Welty, “Where” 729). By mentioning Barnett and Kennedy, Welty establishes the political polarities prevailing as integration legislation and the Civil Rights movement developed, polarities in which Evers’s murder stood as a pivotal point of violent contact. But in the midst of the pathos, Welty maintains that there exists a possibility for human transformation. She tells the story of the murder through the first-person voice of the assassin, which both exposes the horror of his act and the vulnerability of his human psychology, a psychology that has been stamped by the social history through which he lives. Welty’s awareness of the murderer’s human condition is shown by her extending of a subtle level of empathy and understanding to the killer, which permits the hope of transformation: because the murderer is constructed as pathetically human, he is endowed by Welty with the capacity to change, along with the society of which he is a member. While Beckwith’s freedom for over thirty years following the murder is clearly a product of institutionalized and legalized racism in Mississippi, it is important to recognize the fact that, although Beckwith was mistried twice, he was never judged innocent, which Diana Hargrove perceives as a watershed moment for the South: “[I]n the context of the time and place, his not being found innocent was a victory for justice and a defeat for Beckwith, who was visibly stunned”, and as Professor Dennis Mitchell suggests, “because he was not exonerated, it was a turning point in the state’s history in regard to race

relations" (Hargrove 78). In her story, Welty incorporates cultural, political, and geographical details of the social environment in which the murder occurred. However, the details are altered; her fiction transforms the facts just enough to reveal human depth that reportage seldom attains.

Jackson, Mississippi was Eudora Welty's hometown as well the location of Medgar Evers's murder. Rather infamously, in an effort to move culpability outside of a Southern sphere, the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* ran the headline "Californian is Charged with Murder of Evers", referring to the fact that Byron De La Beckwith was born in California, despite his having lived most of his life in neighboring Greenwood, Mississippi (Dufresne par. 1-2). Disassociation of Welty's story from the event required a name change for Jackson, Mississippi, and Welty turned the legal necessity into authorial opportunity. Jackson became Thermopylae, identified by Charles Clerc as both a classical reference to the pitched battle at Thermopylae between Spartans and Persians (serving as an allusion to undercurrents of racial war in the South during the Civil Rights era) and as an introduction to a thermal motif that runs throughout the story (393). Welty employs this thermal motif on several levels, perhaps most importantly by placing the murder within the hot crucible of Southern racial tension, in contrast to the duplicity and distancing discernable in the headline of the *Clarion-Ledger*. Both metaphorically and literally, the thermal motif also refers to the heated state of the killer's rage and frustration, to the hellishness of the murder, and to the 92 degree night itself and its physiological relationship to the state of mind that erupted in the murder.

The landmarks and street names leading to Evers's house in Jackson also were required by *The New Yorker's* legal department to be changed. Welty substituted a street name representing the Confederate past, locating the murder in both Southern history and geography. Welty renamed Delta Drive as Nathan B. Forrest Road, an appropriate choice in that Nathan B. Forrest "is a typical street name in Southern towns, honoring one of the great Confederate generals [...] blamed for his soldiers' slaughter of over three hundred black men, women and children [and] also the first leader of the Ku Klux Klan after the war" (Hargrove 87). The killer tells how he learned directions to the site of the murder in the confusing, contradictory, and colloquial terms that define his muddled thinking:

I say, I could find exactly where in Thermopylae that nigger's living that's asking for equal time. And without a bit of trouble to me.

And I ain't saying it might not be because that's pretty close to where

I live. The other hand, there could be reasons you might have yourself for knowing how to get there in the dark. It's where you all go for the thing you want when you want it the most. Ain't that right? (Welty, "Where" 727)

The speaker's repetition of negatives makes clear how the speaker views Roland Summers and the area of town in which he is to be found, which ironically is near his own residence. The speaker asserts, interestingly, that the directions to Roland Summers's house are common knowledge. As Charles Clerc suggests, this common knowledge of the black neighborhood as a place to go for "the thing you want when you want it most" is a sobering reference to Jackson's history of black prostitution for white customers, and to the history of white rape of blacks (394). Nevertheless, the residential proximity of the murderer to his victim is another of the many uncannily prescient details written by Welty before the identity of Beckwith was known. The speaker's equivocations evoke the evasions of a guilty man on the witness stand, equivocations actually untangled in the evidence presented in court during Beckwith's first mistrial: "Two Jackson cab drivers told how, four days before Evers was ambushed on June 12, Beckwith had asked directions to Evers's home" ("Hung Jury" par. 6).

The night of Medgar Evers's assassination, Evers drove a blue Oldsmobile while Byron De La Beckwith drove a white Plymouth (Dufresne par. 12; Stout par. 6). Operating within the legal constraints of publication, Welty altered these details. In the story, it is Summers who drives a "new white car" (Welty, "Where" 728), which stands as a symbol of a black man transgressing a boundary into whiteness. In the story, the killer's social status also is cast into relief: he drives a borrowed vehicle. Throughout the story, the killer is defined as "lower class" by various economic and social markers, such as his guitar, which has gone in and out of hock, and his colloquial and ungrammatical speech. It becomes clear that the killer is threatened not only by Summers's blackness but also by the possibilities of upward mobility that integration presents. As a poor Southerner, the killer relies upon his racial identity for much of his self-esteem. Summers represents the actuality of a black man occupying a position of greater social privilege than the killer himself, marked already by Summers's welcoming porch light and green yard in contrast to the dark porch and "rank weeds" of the killer's own dwelling place (Welty, "Where" 730).

Welty imaginatively altered these details to advance her project of illustrating the complexity of motivation behind the murder. Nevertheless,

beyond the names of the characters and a few other minor alterations, Welty changed nothing from the manuscript that she wrote the night of the murder (Marrs, *Welty* 49-50). Working only from the bare facts known on the morning of the murder, Welty offered not reportage but a penetrating exploration of the circumstances of the event. This exploration produced a profoundly psychological portrait of the killer (as is traced in detail by Nancy D. Hargrove), and an immaculately written story that is a testament to her literary voice and acumen. But far more importantly, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" is an emotional statement within the larger conversation on racism, and most specifically Southern racism. An element of empathy can be seen in the complication, rather than simplification, of the killer's fear and anger. In one sense, the killer was only heeding a collective voice of Thermopylae: "Well, they been asking that – why somebody didn't trouble to load a rifle and get some of these agitators out of Thermopylae. Didn't the fella keep drumming it in, what a good idea? The one that writes a column ever' day?" (Welty, "Where" 729). The violent vitriol voiced by the murderer thus corresponds exactly to violent rhetoric couched in the columns actually published in the pages of Jackson's *Clarion-Ledger* (Marrs, *One* 181-84). The killer's cultural racism is compounded, of course, by his poverty and threatened identity, not to mention a hateful wife, and a brain-baking heat wave. Welty's genius is manifest in her ability to reveal so much layered complexity in so brief a narration.

Welty's Introduction of Goat Dykeman

One figure whom the killer mentions in Welty's unaltered, first manuscript is "Big Red" Hydrick, who later becomes Goat Dykeman in her published story: "I've heard what you've heard about Goat Dykeman, in Mississippi. Sure, everybody knows about Goat Dykeman" (Welty, "Where" 727). Although critics have noted this reference to Dykeman (Hydrick), little has been written on him, and few readers now know who Hydrick was and why he is evoked by Summers's murderer. On the one hand, Kennedy and Evers are known figures of the Civil Rights movement; on the other hand, Governor Barnett, the murderer, and the editors of the *Jackson Ledger* are all known figures of the segregated South. Hydrick was only locally known as a bootlegger and violent pro-segregationist who was a large figure in Jackson lore and Welty's imagination to be called upon as an archetype of the racist South, in order to reveal a further nuance in the murderer's state of mind.

Although Hydrick apparently was colorful enough to attract local television cameras and newspaper reporters at the time, little has been published on him. The most extensive accessible source on Hydrick's life is his biography, *Big Red: A Biography of the Late G.W. "Big Red" Hydrick*, written by his clearly devoted daughter Willie Mae Bradshaw. Although the book reads more like hagiography than biography, it is illuminating to see how she mythologizes her father. The book provides a window into Southern culture and regional assumptions, through which what remains opaque is perhaps more important than what is openly revealed. Bradshaw's *Big Red* scarcely ever mentions race, much less race relations. However, throughout her book, blackness is an invisible presence which serves to define by opposition the racial identity of the Hydrick family. The closeness of Southern communities is confirmed in the biography as Hydrick and others depend on a network of family and friends for mutual support. Unmentioned, yet implicitly understood, is the fact that this community is exclusively white. Later, when Hydrick eventually runs a bar, Bradshaw does not mention that the patronage was white only, nor is there need to. Assumptions within a cultural context seldom require actual iteration, a fact that lies behind the opaque nature of much historical documentation.

Hydrick came from humble origins, the son of tenant farmers. Although he was raised in a poverty that continued to plague his efforts to raise a family when a young man, the racial identity of the Hydrick family serves, in the biography, to dignify their poverty, while casting the gradual rise from social and economic disadvantage as the result of heroic hard work in the face of adversity. While they certainly were poor, they were "endowed" with their white identity. In fact, they owned so little at first that their only possession apparently was their whiteness. The opposing, yet defining, black racial presence is rarely mentioned, remaining an unstated assumption, but it is implicit throughout the book, after being suggested on the first page. Bradshaw imagines Hydrick's mother, with child, hoeing their rented six acres during a hot summer day: "Her usual almost angelic countenance was marred by the faint suggestion of a frown. Her back was aching, and her auburn hair, pulled back in a soft bun, was damp with sweat beneath her bonnet designed to protect her fair, clear skin from the merciless sun" (3). Although she may be working the fields, as would a poor black farmer, and with child, Fannie Hydrick is a person of "angelic" whiteness, both conscious of the color of her skin and determined to keep it as explicitly white as possible, even while toiling beneath the Southern sun.

Born into poverty and struggling with it throughout young adulthood, Hydrick soon turned to the lucrative business of bootlegging. Mississippi was a dry state preceding and following national prohibition, with alcohol illegal in the state from 1908 to 1966. This long period of prohibition created a thriving bootlegging industry that openly operated in select areas such as the Gold Coast along the Pearl River near Jackson, Mississippi. Bootlegging was culturally entrenched, however often it fell in and out of official favor, with periods of raids by law enforcement alternating with periods of tolerance (Tracy 15-20). Despite the prohibition laws on the books, alcohol was part of Mississippi culture, as exemplified by the Gold Coast culture of alcohol. By becoming a bootlegger, Hydrick found economic success, and became thereby a respected, influential member of the community. Although his operation was raided from time to time, and he even was imprisoned, Hydrick was an accepted member of the community, revered and eventually mythologized. Problematically, but not totally atypically, Hydrick's position as an upholder of Mississippi culture was supported by illegality, and at times, violence. Thus, he is ominously similar to other "heroes" in Southern culture such as, possibly, the murderer of Medgar Evers. The successful bootlegger Hydrick can be compared to Byron De La Beckwith in this: each was willing to circumvent both the law and ethics, however violently, to participate in and act through the opaque assumptions underlying Southern culture and community.

Bootlegging and racism were facts of Southern culture, entrenched until the late 1960s. Both were widely known but generally unstated elements of the "blind-eyed" assumptions that were sometimes supported by violence. While blacks and whites were mandated to equality under the Fourteenth Amendment, the South circumvented this mandate through Jim Crow laws, enforcing policies of institutional racism and justified by the absurd logic of "separate but equal". Similarly, while alcohol was illegal for decades in Mississippi, a black market tax was levied on sales of bootlegged alcohol, affirming a double standard: while alcohol was nominally illegal, it was taxed like any other product (Tracy 73-78).

As noted, maintaining Southern racism and maintaining the bootlegging industry often entailed violence that too often was assumed to be necessary. Bradshaw portrays her father's proclivity to violence as a reflex of his intensely volatile personality. Despite the romanticizing of her father's bravado, the biography makes it clear that Hydrick loved to display the pistol that he often carried:

It was a well known fact that Big Red carried a gun. It was useful in more ways than one. Not only did it give him authority in handling the potential troublemakers, it was needed for protection. The business involved transactions of big money, and since he came and went at all hours, the pistol was a real necessity for his way of life [...]. (94)

Several times in the biography, Bradshaw recounts how Hydrick relished brandishing this pistol, either in earnest or in jest. She describes his violent threats as righteous anger: “A man who could one moment be jovial and gentle could suddenly become an irate person as he defended his family’s honor or protected what was rightfully his” (103). For Hydrick, the protection of what was rightfully his was not limited to money and liquor – it included his white prerogatives. Bradshaw gives this fact only passing and historically incomplete mention:

Big Red was a staunch segregationist, and Mississippi was facing a real crisis, as integration was in the early stages. During the days of the Freedom Riders, Big Red was deputized by the Hinds County law-enforcement officials in order that he might help keep the law and order during these marches and sit-ins. He wore the deputy’s badge with honor and pride. [...] Fortunately, during the days of the Freedom Riders, there was little or no violence [...]. (198-99)

Bradshaw’s account of “little or no violence” is belied by the historical record. Hydrick’s brandishing of his pistol also occurs in more objective accounts of the Civil Rights struggle. In his *Autobiography of a Freedom Rider*, Thomas Armstrong reports how a photographer who shares his name was pistol whipped by Hydrick on the courthouse steps during a Civil Rights demonstration (148), and according to the “National Report” section of *JET*, published on April 13, 1961, a scalp wound required stitches (“U.S. Probes Violence” 4). Noteworthy here, on March 29, 1961, “Medgar Evers was beaten by racist bootlegger G.W. Hydrick and two white policemen” (Newton 120). After Byron De La Beckwith was arrested for the murder of Medgar Evers, Hydrick reportedly visited him in jail “and advised that Beckwith not confess to anything. ‘I’ve killed a hundred niggers and they haven’t done anything to me yet’, he said” (Ribeiro 38). Presumably, Bradshaw ignores these acts of outright racist violence by placing them under the rubric of “righteous anger”, necessary for the protection of white patrimony.

While only mentioning Hydrick's "staunch segregationism" in passing, the few references Bradshaw makes to Hydrick's relationship with blacks, do indicate that Hydrick was tolerant of black presence only within the strictures of white supremacy. The few blacks mentioned in the biography are either employees of Hydrick or mute, helpless recipients of his paternal largesse. After his newly-found prosperity from bootlegging, Hydrick hired Thelma, a "dear Negro woman" as the household cook (92). During his bootlegging operations, Hydrick often would hire a black man to guard his stash of whiskey. After a particularly lucrative year of bootlegging, Hydrick became charitable: "Borrowing a truck from a friend, he went from house to house picking up underprivileged children of all ages – colored and white alike" (97). Hydrick would take the children to a store and tell the clerk he would pick up the tab for properly clothing the entire bunch, explaining to the clerk, for example, "[t]hat little colored boy over there needs a coat" (98). Nevertheless, this largesse, and seeming tolerance toward blacks, apparently occurred only within the social framework of a white patriarchal relationship, with Hydrick's generosity serving to confirm both his privileged position as a white man and the inability of blacks and poor whites to provide for themselves. When integrationists and Civil Rights activists began to threaten the circumstances behind this largesse, which had been supported by prevailing cultural assumptions, Hydrick became less amiable. As the transition from social subservience to equality altered the cultural assumptions underlying Hydrick's attitude of benevolence, so too did Medgar Evers's killer find his tenuous status more intensely threatened by what he perceived to be the encroachment of black rights upon his assumed white prerogatives.

During a raid in which Hydrick eventually threatened a white police officer with a shotgun, he finally faced serious consequences: Hydrick was arrested and taken to court; then he was fined, warned of possible jail time, and told never to threaten a police officer again. Soon after the incident, Hydrick again was raided, and he was sentenced to three months in jail for bootlegging. Bradshaw's account of Hydrick's incarceration is indicative of the cronyism and corruption of the Southern legal system at the time, which would mistry Beckwith twice before releasing him to live as a free man for thirty years. At his request, Hydrick was transferred to the better accommodations of the Hinds County Jail, where he essentially was given the run of the place. Bradshaw indignantly responded to a newspaper article reporting that Hydrick now was "locked up":

Locked up, hell! Why, the keys were never turned on Big Red. When he wanted to leave the jail for a haircut or to tend to business, all he had to do was open the door and leave, using the sheriff's car or a deputy's car for transportation. The sheriff and Big Red had been close friends since childhood. The same was true of the two jailkeepers. All loved Big Red and admired him. [...] So for the most part, Big Red came and went as he pleased. (195)

In terms of legal corruption, racism, and the violent perpetuation of darker aspects of Southern culture, Hydrick is a suitable figure to be evoked, however opaquely, by Evers's killer. Like the killer himself, Hydrick is a figure who serves as a lens through which to examine the assumptions behind the crisis of Southern racial tensions and other troubling issues in traditional Southern culture, heritage, and mythology.

Welty's evocation of "Big Red" is also an alteration of Hydrick's cultural status in his daughter's biography. While Hydrick serves as a cultural icon in Welty's story (a positive icon for the killer), the reader readily understands that Hydrick, or Goat Dykeman, actually serves as a negative icon (representing a warped, unacceptable worldview) in the Civil Rights era. The reader understands that the allusion to the larger-than-life figure of Hydrick contextualizes the violent action of so peripheral a figure as the killer, who sees in the Civil Rights movement the loss of what he understands to be his single remaining source of privilege in a segregated South: his whiteness. In this manner, Welty subtly destabilizes the untenable system of values in the society that helped to produce Medger Evers's murderer – the system that supported a white patriarchy that was perpetuated by the underlying assumptions previously unsuccessfully challenged in the segregated South. Ann Romines, in her article "A Voice from the Jackson Interior", examines the role of the filial in "Where Is the Voice Coming from?": the short story deals with the guiding assumptions passed on from father to son, which maintained a social status quo in the local, Southern patriarchy, assumptions that were challenged only by the federal, pro-integration legislation (114-15). After killing Summers, Welty's narrator stands before the corpse of his victim and swears by his father, "*By Dad*. [...] We ain't never now, never going to be equals [...]" (Welty, "Where" 729; emphasis added). Later, the narrator makes a revealingly negative statement: "Even the President *so far*, he can't walk into my house without being invited, like he's my daddy" (732; emphasis added). The killer thus affirms the assumptions of the cultural figures from

whom his values derive (the local patriarchal figures such as his own father, Hydrick, and Governor Barnett), while sarcastically dismissing the national figures of authority who have become national icons of change. However, by bringing the reader into the killer's mental space, Welty makes it clear to the reader that the inheritance of racism and bigotry has arrived at a dead end, as imaged in the narrator's childless state. Intriguingly, Sarah Gilbreath Ford, in her article on Welty's "serious daring", argues that Welty narrates the story from the perspective of Evers's killer and that "she puts the reader in his place, indicting him or her as a racist who is capable of murder" because the reader is brought into the story and acts as the witness of the incident (35).

Conclusion

In response to criticism from friends that "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" and Welty's other works were not openly activist enough, Eudora Welty published the essay "Must the Novelist Crusade?" in October of 1965 (Bryant 44), in which she presents *emotion* and *character* as the fundamental project of fiction, operating within an entirely different sphere from journalism, editorialism, and activism: "The writing of the novel is taking life as it already exists, not to report it but to make an object, toward the end that the finished work might contain this life inside it, and offer it to the reader" (Welty, "Must" 804). Welty claims that fiction's purview is the space in which character and emotion are revealed, and only within this range of discourse can fiction play any role in the events of the day: "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).

"The Demonstrators", published in November of 1966, and in many ways a fictional companion piece to "Must the Novelist Crusade?" has been seen by some critics as a response to the mode of discourse often found in newspapers, particularly the racist newspapers of the South in the 1960s, i.e., the expression available to fiction versus the expression available to reportage (Pingatore 402, 406-07). It is the story of a white doctor who is called to a black neighborhood to treat the victim of a double stabbing. His domiciliary visit leads him into a space of increasing social complexity, from the relations between blacks and whites to an intersection of law and medicine, in which the black community is unwilling to give him information necessary to care for the

victim because of their fear of legal repercussions. When the doctor makes his visit, he crosses the dividing line between segregated communities, but he thereby discovers that, despite racial segregation, he shares a community and history with the members of the black neighborhood. The victim is the maid in his building; it is across the porch of the house he visits that the dresses of his sister, his mother, and his wife, hang, after they have been sent out to be washed; he is given a drink of water from a teacup which “might have been his own mother’s china” (Welty, “Demonstrators” 743). Newspapers are a motif throughout the story: at the beginning the doctor sees a headline about anti-war demonstrators; the floor of the house he visits is lined with old newsprint; he speaks to an activist who gave a misleading statement to a Northern newspaper; and the morning after his visit, he reads in the morning paper about the double stabbing he had treated. The complex interactions and relationships of the doctor’s visit, which have unfolded over thirteen pages, moving across communities, and between memory and event, are reduced to a few columns of racist perspective and incredible simplification. Welty, through the juxtaposition of the newspaper article about the stabbing and the event itself, emphasizes that the newspaper is incapable of telling the “true” story, of inhabiting the space of character and emotion that gives meaning to the actual event. “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” also speaks from this space of character and emotion, in opposition to the generalizations presented in reportage.

By narrating “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” as a first-person monologue, Welty prevents characterization of the killer as a monster. However disquieting or even horrifying the narrative and narrator may be, by telling the story of Medgar Evers’s murder from the killer’s interior point of view, Welty makes it clear that his motives and actions are those of a complex human being, however warped they might be. Furthermore, Welty does not portray the killer as an anomaly in the South, but as an individual consciousness within a larger cultural, political, and historical context. Contextualizing the killer through the allusions and images that she enlists establishes that he is an individual acting out a scenario scripted in the collective regional culture of which he is a member. In other stories and novels, Welty presents a more lyrical vision of the South, a vision which often has been criticized for evading harsh political realities. While Welty clearly is empathetic with Southern culture, having written predominantly about the South, in “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” it is very clear that Welty had a profound and unromanticized understanding of the uglier side of Southern psyche and

history. Nonetheless, by portraying the killer as a vulnerable and fear-ridden human being, Welty allows for the possibility of transformation. The killer leaves his gun behind on Summers's lawn because the gun was too hot to hold onto. His guitar, however, has gone in and out of hock, but he has never abandoned it, and at the end of the story he grasps it to play. The song he plays at the end of the story is sad, but it also suggests the possibility that a lyrical and harmonious South might follow the violence of transition. The story conveys the problematic cultural and historical assumptions that the killer has inherited, and for which he fears a foreseeable disintegration. However, when he picks up his guitar, the reader is reminded of elements of Southern history and culture worthy of preserving and perpetuating in subsequent generations.

Welty's story is clearly a condemnation of Medgar Evers's assassination and of the motives behind it, but through the process of adding subtle layers of complexity to the story, the layers of character and emotion, she emphasizes that fiction can reveal a deeper level of truth than reportage, which is generally based on so-called facts, especially when a discrepancy exists between truth and fact. Thus, the word "voice" in the title of Welty's story, which is in the interrogative form, could refer to the intricate issue related to who has the voice of authority in narrating truthfully and reliably the murderous event that forms the context of her narrative to inform the public of the harsh realities of the Civil Rights era and the racial tension between African Americans' demand for equality and underprivileged white American supremacists' fear and paranoia, because their whiteness was being threatened by the alterations in the social hierarchy that had divided the American South, racially, culturally, and economically.

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