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Investigating Society Journalism: A Eudora Welty Case Study

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Abstract

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There has been little research dedicated to Eudora Welty's early work as a society column writer for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. This lack of information reflects a broader trend of the general dismissal of society journalism as being not a legitimate or valid form of journalism. The impact of such dismissals demand a closer evaluation given the genre is one largely dominated by female authors. I analyze examples of Welty's fiction and society columns side by side and trace similarities between her work in the two genres. By providing evidence of connections between southern literature and society journalism, I seek to legitimize the latter as important commentary on southern culture.

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Introduction

"Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories." – Eudora Welty, "One Writer's Beginnings" 14

Story telling is a tradition deeply intertwined with southern culture. Carl Lindahl describes storytelling as "a means of description, entertainment, and teaching known in all cultures—[it] has played a rich role in the South, where Native American, European, and African storytelling traditions have intermingled and enriched each other for four centuries" (211). Storytelling in the modern sense can take on many different forms yet is the foundation for many features of southern culture. Two such examples are southern literature and society journalism. Even though these two genres share a common foundation in southern culture—storytelling—they differ in their respective reputations. While southern literature is largely recognized and respected within the canon of American literature, society journalism is not. The dismissal of society journalism has broader implications as it is also a genre dominated by female writers. Many, if not all, genres of literature are guilty of this form of gendered suppression. This thesis explores the gendered implications of distinctions between respectable "hard" news and "soft" news characterized by society pages and seeks to legitimize the latter through its connections to writings in a different genre—southern literature. I look closely at the work of Eudora Welty, a southern female writer of both literary fiction and society journalism. Laying both genres of her work side by side reveals marked similarities, and in fact, I argue that the experience of Welty as an observer of southern society informed and shaped her short stories.

Welty's progress as a writer through the newspaper and into literary fiction is needed as a background to this study, and Suzanne Marrs' biography chronicles Welty's life and traces the evolution of her work over the years. Eudora Alice Welty was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on April 13th, 1909, to Christian Webb and Chestina Andrews Welty. As the eldest of three, she was followed by brothers Edward and Walter Welty in 1912 and 1915 respectively. In 1906, prior to Eudora's birth, her parent's first born son passed away at 15 months (1). Welty was close with her parents and enjoyed what Marrs classified as a "sheltered" childhood. Welty's own memories of her early life, chronicled in her speeches in "One Writer's Beginnings," reflect the value placed on literature and reading from an early age in the following passage:

> I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to. My mother read to me. She'd read to me in the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together, which ticked in rhythm as we rocked, as though we had a cricket accompanying the story. Shed read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire, with our cuckoo clock ending the story with "Cuckoo," and at night when I'd got in my own bed. I must have given her no peace. Sometimes she read to me in the kitchen while she sat churning, and the churning sobbed along with *any* story. It was my ambition to have her read to me while *I* churned; once she granted my wish, but she read off my story before I brought her butter. She was an expressive reader. When she was reading "Puss in Boots," for instance, it was impossible not to know that she distrusted all cats. (5)

Likely, Welty was inspired by this story time with her mother, whose devotion to reading modeled a similar behavior which would later be emulated by her daughter. Her mother imparted emotion, color, and creative narrative pace, which perhaps provided the foundation for Welty's narrative voice in both her journalism and fiction.

Welty's mother also informed her early impressions of society, impressions which would provide knowledge and insight for her journalistic writing. For example, Welty talks about the function of correspondence cards by describing her mother's attitude toward this convention of polite society. "[M]other let none of this idling, as she saw it, pertain to her; she went her own way with or without her calling cards, and though she was fond of her friends and they were fond of her, she had little time for small talk. At first, I hadn't known what I'd missed" ("One Writers Beginnings" 12). While it seems paradoxical that Welty would later go on to document the society events her mother seemed to find so unimportant, it could provide context to Welty's own dismissal of her society journalism later in life.

Welty graduated from Jackson's Central High School in 1925 and attended the equally as sheltered Mississippi State College for Women in Columbus. Her choice for college was a compromise with her parents as she wanted to go farther away from home. Welty had already developed a taste for travelling to big cities, but her parents preferred she stay in Jackson and attend Millsaps College. While in college Welty had one of her first experiences with journalism. She had placed a satirical note in the society column of the student paper and "laughed at the formulaic prose of columnists who so often made the significant seem trivial and the trivial significant. She would adopt a similarly subversive irony years later when she actually covered Jackson social events for the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, and even now she feared and resisted being pulled into

that world, which seemed to be her birthright." Welty's mocking of columnists foreshadows her later dismissal of her own journalism through the writing for society pages (Marrs 16-19).

Welty then went on to attend and graduate from the University of Wisconsin in Madison Wisconsin with a Bachelor's of Arts in English. She followed friends to New York and enrolled in an advertising/secretarial program at Columbia University, yet she was "simply indifferent to the business curriculum." Further, she was described as spending "more time on the town than in the classroom or library. Museums and galleries, nightclubs in Harlem or Greenwich Village, movies at the Little Carnegie, night court, Broadway theaters—these were the places that drew Eudora and her friends." Welty's prioritization of the social scene of the city during this time period demonstrated her later interest in society events and happenings of her hometown, regardless of how much she down plays their cultural importance and significance in her later years (Marrs 23-27).

However, after the death of her father in 1931, Marrs described her as being "haunted by the loss of her dearly loved father and by the plight of her equally loved mother, who was racked with grief and guilt," and that anguish spurred in her an intense motivation to cope through writing fiction (Marrs 36). She moved back home to Jackson and began working at the WJDX radio station. After a brief stint in New York, a "tonic" of sorts for her according to Marrs, Welty took on a variety of odd jobs in order to support herself financially, including "an almost two-year stint writing weekly, and subtly tongue-in-cheek, Jackson society columns as a stringer for the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*" (Marrs 42). This statement is the extent of the discussion of Welty's time at the paper in Marrs biography. This truncation of an important part of

Welty's development as a writer reflects not only society's disregard of Welty's society journalism but helps us understand why Welty, herself, showed later a dismissal of her work at the newspaper.

While we do not have much from Welty about her time at the *Commercial Appeal* specifically, she has spoken generally about her journalistic work. Much of Welty's description of her approach and influences in story telling can be reasonably extrapolated to both her approach to journalism as well as generally accepted practices of the genre such as the following quote in "One Writer's Beginnings":

> I suppose I was exercising as early as the turn of mind, the nature of temperament, of a privileged observer; and owing to the way I became so, it turned out that I became the loving kind.
>
> A conscious act grew out of this by the time I began to write stories: getting my distance, a prerequisite of my understanding human events, is the way I begin work. Just as, of course, it was an initial step when, in my first journalism job, I stumbled into making pictures with a camera. Frame, proportion, perspective, the values of light ad shade, all are determined by the distance of the observing eye. (21)

While Welty specified the connection to her photography, the direct reference to the similarities between her writing process for fiction and journalism should not be ignored. Notions of listening, gaining distance to understand human events, frame (of a photo or narrative), and perspective (camera angle or character point of view) are all elements equally applicable to both reporting on society events as well as planning and writing a short story.

The following years are a whirlwind of frequent and distant travel with the growth of Welty's fiction career, with her first stories "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "Magic" being published in *Manuscript* magazine in 1936. Her career is marked by various awards including such prestigious award as the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* as well as the National Medal of the Arts.

Eudora Welty passed away on July 23, 2001, and is now recognized as an influential female author in the southern United States. However, not all of her work is regarded with the same level of attention and respect. The distinctions between her fiction and society journalism, and the disparity in accolades between the two, carry implications for the genre of society journalism, which I analyze in the following chapters.

In the first chapter, I analyze society pages in general within the context of the journalism genre. After defining "hard" and "soft" news, I establish the gendered aspect of that distinction. Even as women's pages grew larger in newspapers and began to cover more important issues, such as education and foster care reform, society journalism was still dismissed as a lower form of journalism than "hard" news. Yet the importance of society journalism remains: as society columns began to disappear from papers, the towns they covered lost key businesses and cultural centers, thus speaking to society journalism's role as a lynchpin of southern society. Additionally, scholars have found that society journalism, with its demand for accurate fact checking and detailed descriptions of people and events, provided a training ground to develop skills applicable to other sections and genres of writing. Eudora Welty benefited from such training, and the implications of it can be found in the connections between her society pages and her fiction.

In the second chapter, I examine a variety of themes of southern literature as points of connection between Welty's fiction and society journalism. As examples of Welty's fiction, I examine "Kin," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "Why I Live at The P.O.," "Flowers for Marjorie," and "A Piece of News." The latter four stories were published in 1941 in *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*. I selected this collection of stories because they were written closest to the time when Welty was writing society columns for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, from 1933-1935. Specifically, "Death of a Traveling Salesman" was first published in 1936, just a year after Welty's stint at *Commercial Appeal*. Due to the close proximity in time between the examples of fiction and her society journalism, I expect those to provide an accurate representation of her writing style for comparison between the genres. "Kin," first appearing in the *New Yorker* before it was published in Welty's last collection of short stories, *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories*, in 1955. The distance in time between this example of her fiction and her time at the paper allows me to broaden my analysis of the influence of Welty's society journalism on her fiction later in her career.

As one of Welty's longer short stories, "Kin" unveils the drama of a quasi-family reunion and offers a commentary on a variety of themes of southern literature such as the façade of community, gossip, and broad familial connections. Dicey, a young woman raised in Mississippi who left to live in the North, returns home to visit her family. She and her cousin of a similar age, Kate, travel to Mingo, the family's historic home which "sounded in [Dicey's] ears like *something* instead of *somewhere*" (538) to visit an aging great uncle who is being cared for by a distant, supposedly lower class cousin, Sister Anne. The pair arrive at Mingo to realize Sister Anne is hosting a community-wide event featuring a travelling photographer taking towns people's portraits.

Like “Kin,” “Why I Live At The P.O.” is emblematic of the importance of family relationships and connections. The story follows the return of the narrator’s sister, Stella-Rondo, with a child of unknown parentage. Stella-Rondo then embarks on a tirade of gossip against the narrator until the narrator is eventually forced out of the family home and moves into the local post office, as the title suggests. While full of humorous dialogue and the rambling, stream of conscience narration by the jilted sister, the story addresses themes of gossip, dynastic connections, and sense of place that is central to both southern literature and society journalism.

Welty’s short story “A Piece of News” centers on the married couple Ruby and Clyde Fisher. The plot is driven by Ruby reading a news article in which a woman who shares her name is shot by her husband. The story follows Ruby’s internal struggle with the events and ultimate encounter with Clyde, in which she accuses him. While the story is ostensibly determined to be about another woman from another location, the narrator reveals throughout that their relationship is characterized by other instances of abuse. The tone/perspective as well as the plot of the story provide examples of fictional elements with journalistic influences as well as explore themes prevalent to my analysis of themes within southern journalism as a genre.

“Flowers for Marjorie” tells the story of the murder of Marjorie by her husband, Howard. Time seems to stop after Howard, seemingly unprovoked, murders Marjorie and then goes about the town in an overwhelmed frenzy as descriptions of his seemingly mundane yet random actions blur past. While violent and gruesome in its plot, the story explores the idea of slowing time, a central theme in southern culture. The slow pace of life in southern culture is also reflected by the content of society pages. The stories and features that appeared in society pages may not have seemed to qualify as news when

compared to the news of bigger cities. However, in smaller towns, the society page stories depicted the daily life of the towns people, reflected the slower pace of life.

Finally, Welty's first published short story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," explores themes central to both southern literature and society journalism, such as a strong sense of place even in geographic isolation and the importance of family. The protagonist, Bowman, is a lonely traveling salesman whose car breaks down and is taken in for the night by a couple in an isolated area. By the morning, the traveling salesman realizes the depths of his loneliness and lack of family and, after fleeing the home without a word, dies in his car alone of a heart attack, perhaps symbolic of a heart broken by solitude. The fact that the main character, metaphorically speaking, dies of loneliness at the realization he has no family, positions this story as offering perhaps the most explicit commentary on the importance of family in southern culture, which is another strong feature of society journalism.

Using Welty's journalism as a lens for reading her fiction illuminates the development of Welty's particularly southern themes and ideas. My analysis of the connections between the genre of southern literature and society journalism provide an avenue of legitimization for the latter genre. The legitimization of society journalism, an otherwise dismissed genre, is particularly important given this is a genre of writing normally performed by women, especially in Welty's timeframe. The gendered implications of the dismissal of the genre demand a deeper investigation.

Chapter One
Journalism and the Society Page

"You covered the cut of the dress," Ms. Levin said. "But what made it possible, really, and most interesting, was the biography of the past, the color of these people's lives." – Amanda Svachula, "When The Times Kept The Female Reporters Upstairs." The New York Times, Sept. 20, 2018.

During the early 1930s when Eudora Welty was writing society columns for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, female journalists such as Phyllis Levin and many more were kept in "some dark little corner of the *Times*" or the like in newsrooms and newspaper offices across the country. Levin was a prominent biographer of first ladies such as Abigail Adams and Edith Wilson, yet she got her start at the *Times* as a fashion writer for the society pages. Levin's coverage of First Ladies is marked by the same dual characteristics found in a study of women's society pages. On the surface, coverage of first ladies can appear to be about the "cut of the dress" much like her coverage of the social events generally covered in society pages. However, both subjects deal with "the color of people's lives," the heart of journalism and thus of immeasurable cultural value (Svachula).

Journalism scholar Kimberly Voss studied the evolution of the newspaper women's page in her book *Re-Evaluating Women's Page Journalism in the Post-World War II Era: Celebrating Soft News*. As her title suggests, Voss defines the "women's section" of the paper as soft news, characterized largely by feature stories, positioning them in opposition to hard news "or what can be defined as news based on institutions

in the public sphere, such as the government, economy, and law" (135). Further, Voss claims the newspaper industry has long prioritized the issues and interests of the hard news sections over the soft news of the women's sections. Coverage of war and politics fell into the category of hard news while family, fashion, food, styling, and other general human interest stories were considered to be soft news.

Even with the lack of respect given to "soft news" within the industry, the articles that appeared in women's pages began to draw increasingly large audiences and, with that, advertising deals. Voss notes specifically that "[w]hen it comes to readership surveys, results show that readers—especially women—like a mix of both kinds of news" (Voss 135), referring to the need for both "hard" and "soft" news stories. Thus, as more advertisers began to print in the women's sections, it began to take up more room in the paper. This growth occurred simultaneously with the baby boom and the rise of consumerism and commercialism in the 1950s, as advertisers began marketing towards women. The women's section's focus on stories about the household allowed advertisers to market household products to those specific readers. Therefore, even if women's page content was not taken seriously with respect to the other sections within the paper as a whole, women's pages were of financial importance to newspapers as a section that generated revenue through advertisements which now targeted the readers of women's pages specifically.

Regardless of the aforementioned commercial incentive provided by such women's pages, other sections of the newspaper were still seen as more legitimate and important. Researchers offer potentially valid rationale to explain away this phenomena. In particular, Voss provides an example of one dismissal from the journal article, "Hard News, Soft News, 'General' News: The Necessity and the Utility of an Intermediate

Classifciation," by Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky who claim that "communication researchers have noted that soft news 'does not necessitate timely publication and has a low level of substantive informational value (if at all), i.e. gossip, human interest stories, offbeat events.'" (Voss 136).

As women's pages increased in size, newspapers expanded what was included in the sections—a "mixing hard and soft news" as Voss puts it. The expansion made room for what Voss identifies as "more substantial articles" ranging from social to political issues. Women's pages were able to fill a gap by reporting on important social issues that pertained specifically to the previously rigidly defined domestic sphere, such as opportunities for women workers and problems with the foster care system (Voss 136).

While society sections carry a connotation of socioeconomic exclusivity, namely the "who" and "what" that are covered, the expansion of the topics under the jurisdiction of women's pages also saw an effort to increase the definition who was considered to be a part of "society." Voss cites reporter Vivian Castleberry's, a reporter in Dallas in the 1960s, pointed description: "'I looked at society with a small 's' instead of a capital 'S'…" as she considered society to include "'all humanity---the social structure of the community'" (Castleberry 160, as quoted in Voss 139). This mindset shift along with the expansion of women's pages provides evidence of the importance of society pages as a cornerstone of community life. Because the reporters paid attention to the minutia of community life and development, they filled a much-needed hunger for local news and women's roles in society.

Further, these pages are even more important to the basic infrastructure of the small towns they covered. Sam Ford, a Kentucky Press Association award-winning journalist and fellow with Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism,

characterized his rise in the field by his early and initial work with his small town's paper's society page, originally run by his grandmother "Mammaw Beulah." In his town of McHenry, Kentucky, Ford recalls the society page of his newspaper covering everything, "From births and anniversaries to sicknesses and deaths, all the happenings of a town were published for readers to see, once a week, with a dutiful reminder to keep those in the community facing tragedy or illness in your prayers." (Ford). The occurrences documented in his statement mirror some of the events, such as sickness and death, the happenings of a town that find points of connection between Welty's stories and her authored society pages. For example, Welty's short story "Kin" features two young southern women visiting an aging, ill great uncle. In the story, the family places great importance on such visitations and, in general, supporting ill family members. The importance placed on such demonstrations of support reflects the broader importance of family and community in southern literature and, more specifically, in Welty's fiction. Similarly, documentation of illnesses and deaths in society pages is also a demonstration of community and the desire to offer support. Ford's account provides a real world contextualization of the importance of such society pages and their impacts on the southern culture they cover, examples of which can be found in the pages of Welty's fiction.

Ford recalls that "people called Mammaw Beulah on a regular basis to report news they hoped to see in the next week's edition. Or they stopped her at church, or at the store. Occasionally, they might have mailed her something." Ford's recounting of the ways in which community news travelled through the town can be helpful in grounding the occurrences in Welty's fiction in concrete, empirical examples. First, Ford presents the idea that "reporters" for the society pages were often times simply those passing

along town gossip. The prevalence of gossip is an important theme in southern literature and a theme Welty explores heavily in her writing. Thus, the importance of gossip as a means of communication, reporting, and generally a central theme of southern culture connects the genres of southern literature and society page journalism. Simply put, both southern literature and society page journalism are inspired by real people's actions. For example, in Welty's "Kin," the family gossip is centered on the distant cousin who has controversially tasked herself with the care of the aging, wealthy great uncle. The controversial cousin is deemed an outsider, and her presence in the historic home is of the upmost importance to the family, given its potential effects on their reputation in society. Second, Ford's use of the word *news* to describe the town gossip reinforces not only the importance of such information to the townspeople but also the knowledge that such information was considered to be relevant, important news.

Ford concludes by lamenting the disappearance of society columns. Often, these small towns did not have newspapers of their own but instead relied on the printing of society columns comprised of the small town news to appear in larger papers in adjacent cities. Thus, with the disappearance of society columns, the happenings in the small towns they previously covered received less and less news attention. This pattern implies that the main source of news coverage for such small, rural towns were in these society columns. There were also socioeconomic implications to the disappearance of the columns. According to Ford, without the media attention from the columns, "these towns have often lost the general stores, local diners, post offices, elementary schools, and other gathering places that once defined them." The potential connection between the loss of aforementioned economic and cultural centers and the loss of society columns speaks volumes regarding their importance within southern society. Society

columns represent not only a legitimate form of journalism but also as a cornerstone of society and economic prosperity.

Welty's own experience is similar to that which Ford describes. In her article "Eudora Welty's Early Journalism, or How Did Welty Learn to Write like Welty," Welty scholar Pearl McHaney devotes a large section of her analysis to Welty's time at the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* as a society news writer for Jackson, a smaller town to the South of Memphis. The existence of a Jackson society news column in the larger *Memphis Commercial Appeal* paper mirrors Ford's point that often times these society columns served as the sole news source for smaller towns. This solidifies the importance of the Jackson society news Welty wrote about that appeared in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* as historically society columns such as Welty's served as important news sources for smaller communities. This reading is supported by McHaney's statement that the *Commercial Appeal* was the paper read by Welty's parents during her childhood.

Ford recounts how the columns he worked on "made [us] feel a deep sense of place, and a lifelong connection to where we're from." As discussed above, his memories serve as evidence of the importance of the columns within society; however, the language of place and origin also have connections to themes within southern literature. Developing a strong sense of place is another central pillar within southern literature, a concept I deal with more in depth later. The allusion to a sense of place in a discussion of society pages serves as a connection between the two genres, southern literature and society page journalism, in a powerful and important way.

Yet as important as society pages are, as evidenced by Ford's and McHaney's analysis, they were largely ignored as a news form in favor of hard news. However, Voss

quotes media scholar Kay Mills saying, “Hard news and soft news were by no means gender-free terms. Instead, they evoked rich gender implications.” (Voss 135). Society pages fell under the umbrella of women’s pages. While this limited many female journalists by confining them to only writing for the society page, Voss discusses how the female perspective was necessary to the kind of reporting done in this section –

> Dorothy Jurney said in a 1978 speech that the roles of wife and mother in the lives of women added to their journalistic abilities—allowing them to place more of an emphasis on human concerns. ‘These experiences do not rob an able woman journalist of traditional news concepts,’ she said. ‘Rather they add dimension. She sees news value in many areas that seldom occur to a man to be important.’ Family—or more often mothering—was taken seriously in the women’s pages. (Voss 141)

Further, not only was the female perspective crucial to such society page reporting, Voss also noted that the skills developed through reporting done for society pages could be applied to other forms of journalism. Covering important events in people’s lives such as marriages and engagement announcements demanded a prioritization of accuracy and fact checking (Voss 138). Thus, society pages served as a training ground of sorts that better prepared the women who wrote there for other sections and genres, as it did for Welty and her detail-rich and sharp literary style.

McHaney specifically discusses Welty’s “apprenticeship” with society page writing and its implications on Welty’s later fiction. “From the first, Welty has had an incredibly true eye for detail, and we can see that while this leads some writers to write from incident and to create intricate plots, for Welty, her close, detailed observation leads always to revealing the emotions of the human relationships” (McHaney 114). This

passage indicates that while Welty may have derived fictional inspiration from occurrences she reported on for her society pages, one of the most important connections between her work in the two genres comes through in her writing process of "detailed observation." Welty's skill for "detailed observations" regarding human relationships has direct ties to her authorial beginnings in writing society pages which dealt intimately and exclusively with such human relations and emotions (114).

McHaney describes Welty's society columns as storytelling, with all the trappings of vivid description and the keen discerning eye of real reporting.

> She tells stories, creates characters, anticipates occasions, then describes them in action, and finally, recalls the parties in all their glory. She offers up colors, sounds, smells, and family relationships. She criticizes, satirizes, edges up to sarcasm, by never sentimentalizes. (119)

McHaney goes on to list some of Welty's most striking lines within the columns—the brilliant red dress from the Phi Mu event, one bride's bold decision to wear feathers, the monumental event of the debutante ball, and even Jackson's rendition on Mardi Gras (119-120). McHaney asks, "Who does not hear the lovely cadences and catalogues of Welty's descriptions, those rolling phrases that sound familiar from her fiction, the colors that light up every word picture?" (121). She also provides examples of such vivid descriptions from Welty's stories, "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies" and "Music from Spain" (121).

While it is entirely probably that Welty drew some inspiration for her later fiction from characters and events that occurred in Jackson society, McHaney points out that they serve more as an "apprenticeship" rather than a direct parallel (122). While my analysis in the second chapter focusing on the similarities between Welty's fiction and

her society columns may seem similar to McHaney's in purpose, the difference lies in the intent and significance of such comparisons. While both McHaney and I seek to draw attention to the connections between the rhetorical patterns found in Welty's fiction and journalism, I aim to do so in an effort to solidify the importance of society page content through its connection to southern literature.

However, distinct from the connections to southern literature, society pages were important catalysts of change within society in their own right. Society pages were sites of discussions of important societal issues that were within the realm of women's news and thus not of priority to the hard news section. One such example was education. Voss points out that much of the news coverage surrounding education in communities began with reports of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting minutes and activities, as it was seen as a women's club (Voss 143). Primary and secondary education is incredibly critical to the foundation of society as it directly impacts issues like literacy and future income earning potential of future citizens, factors that influence the socioeconomic makeup of society as a whole. Thus, the fact that a substantial amount of its coverage came from society pages, speaks to the importance of the section to society as a whole. Specifically Voss cites Fort Lauderdale as an example.

> A 1961 Fort Lauderdale news story addressed the educational problems that children had when they had poor eyesight. According to the article, one in four children did poorly in school because they could not see the blackboard. A 1963 story in the same newspaper addressed a program to make sure that children's speech skills were adequate. It was based on educational policy set by the state, as the news value (Voss 143).

This example represents substantive, policy change inspired by continuing society page coverage, solidifying its importance within communities.

The racial disparity in coverage of society events is another example of institutional change inspired by society pages. Voss cites an example in the *St. Petersburg Times*, in which women's page editors fought to change the policies regarding covering weddings of African Americans, specifically in the featuring of Black brides (Voss 146-147). While some may write off wedding coverage as insignificant in comparison to the fights for voting rights and equal protection under the law, progress towards equality in the domestic sphere is just as important, given that issues between the public and private are inextricably linked. Any progress towards equality is thus important and therefore newsworthy and deserving of coverage.

Yet, despite its coverage of inarguably important events, issues, and perspectives, there was a consorted effort by the writers in the section to "play down society news" in women's pages. This dismissal was likely in an effort to legitimize women's page work by creating distance from society pages, which were also looked down upon. Backlash against women writers in society pages was also not relegated strictly to male criticism. As evidenced by Welty's controversial membership in the Women's Press Organization in Mississippi, women also perpetuated the divide between journalism that should be considered worthwhile and otherwise, even though this distinction ultimately hurt them by proxy. According to an account in the "Women's Press Organizations in Mississippi, 1894-Present" by Susan Weill

> By the time the list of members was submitted for the 1947-48 NFPW Directory, there were nearly forty members, including Mississippi writer Eudora Welty, whose brief membership raised a bit of controversy.

> According to Maurine Twiss, who joined MPW in 1951, 'Miss Welty was not really a newspaper journalist, and some members thought she should not be allowed.' (303)

The extent of the exclusionary attitude towards society page writing, even by female journalists, demonstrates how extensively this attitude has invaded society's collective consciousness.

Welty, herself, downplayed the importance and significance of her journalism. McHaney opens her article with a discussion of the early journalistic paths many prominent authors have taken, such as Hemmingway and Faulkner. She notes that, similar to many other successful writers, Welty discouraged conversation about her early journalism. McHaney even quotes a conversation with Welty, herself, in which she questioned her on one of her early works, and Welty responded "'Wouldn't it be terrible if I could remember it?'" (McHaney 114).

Even though Welty discounted her newspaper writing, a serious consideration of the reasons for such a stance should be explored. Ford, once again, is helpful in understanding Welty's attitude about this early work. Welty's diminishing of her work as a society reporter, as well as the general difficulty of obtaining examples of her byline in the society pages, mirrors Ford's lamenting of the disappearance of the society pages. Both are evidence of the lack of importance placed on the coverage of community events, and by extension, "women's" issues in general. In other words, society pages were not seen as legitimate forms of journalism, and that could be the reason why Welty does not advertise her work and the reason why society columns are in general disappearing from papers. However, as Ford points out, this is incredibly detrimental to southern culture as a whole as these society pages, such as the case in Welty's own city

of Jackson, serve as a real main news source for small towns. Furthermore, the role gender plays in the consideration of society pages within the context of “real” journalism makes this issue one of even more importance.

Chapter Two
The Short Story and Community Understanding

"And so, plainly, we must distinguish plots not by their skeletons but by their full bodies; for they are embodiments, little worlds." – Eudora Welty, "Looking at Short Stories," 88

Welty's short story, "Why I Live at the P.O." follows the drama of a quintessential, extended southern family. Upon the controversial return of the narrator's sister, Stella-Rondo, the narrator expresses her displeasure with her sister's actions. The narrator characterizes Stella-Rondo's equally as controversial child by her disgraceful lack of manners. "Then Shirley-T. sticks out her tongue at me in this perfectly horrible way. She has no more manners than the man in the moon," according to the narrator (54). This characterization does not come as a surprise, given the narrator described the Stella-Rondo as having "not even the grace to get up off the bed" (51). In fact, most of the narrator's grief with her sister revolves around her lack of grace and manners. The prioritization of manners in southern society is not only a central theme of many of Welty's short stories, but the underpinning of southern society in general. According to Charles Wilson, "the South has stressed etiquette and has attributed much significance to the form of verbal expression and behavior in a group" (96). The debutante balls, teas, garden club meetings, and general conduct of members of high society are all deeply concerned with all the expected proprieties of southern culture. The importance of manners to the narrator of "Why I Live at the P.O." is just one example of the many common characteristics shared by society journalism and southern literature. Other

such themes discussed in this chapter include the following: style, trope of gossip, representation of time, sense of place, descriptions of clothing, descriptions of nature, and explicit references to society events.

The thematic connections between southern fiction and society page journalism as explored in Chapter One, are complimented by stylistic similarities between the two genres, specifically through Welty's crafting of point of view. Generally, journalism utilizes the third person point of view for articles and accounts. Welty also utilizes an objective, third person point of view in many of her short stories, including "Death of a Traveling Salesman" and "Flowers for Marjorie." In the case of Welty's story "A Piece of News," there are thematic implications in this stylistic connection. The story is written in the third person, giving it a descriptive, almost observational, tone similar to that of news articles. While the narrator is describing the character's thoughts in such a specific way that it requires an almost omniscient perspective likely impossible to achieve by a news reporter, the use of third person is significant nonetheless in that it helps establish the report-like tone of the story. Further, the role of the narrator is explored with the progression of the story and the way in which the plot is revealed to the readers. For example, for the first page and a half, the narration follows a figure referred to with generic, feminine pronouns such as "she" and "her." Not until the second page, when the character reads her name in the paper, does the narrator begin to refer to her by name, Ruby Fishers. This progression, first, moves the narrator away from the omniscient position as information is seemingly only conveyed and revealed after it is read in the paper and experienced by Ruby. Distancing the narrator from a seemingly omniscient point of view further supports the reading of an aforementioned news-like tone. Secondly, the fact that the plot is being conveyed via the character reading the news

article, allows for the drawing of an immediate connection between the plot of this southern literary story and journalism. Further, it demonstrates one, albeit far-fetched, example of how newspapers were and are able to shape peoples' perception of events.

Another prevalent shared feature in southern literature and society journalism is gossip. Ford's account provides evidence that gossip served as a means of communicating news about the happenings of towns. Gossip is also a central theme of many of Welty's short stories, including "Kin." One example of the importance of gossip in the story occurs prior to the girls' departure to Mingo, as Kate's mother (Dicey's Aunt) warns the girls about Sister Anne. While "reclining" in Aunt Ethel's room prior to the girls' departure, Aunt Ethel begins her scathing criticism of Sister Anne. Beginning with Aunt Ethel's scolding of Kate for being "unfair" to Sister Anne, Aunt Ethel said "I always say, *poor* Sister Anne" (542). Immediately after this she says, "Maybe [Sister Anne] did well—maybe a girl might do well sometimes *not* to marry, if she's not cut out for it" and later "Poor Sister Anne can't cook and loves to eat. She can *eat* awhile" (543). The undertones are hard to miss. Furthermore, given the importance of marriage in southern society at the time, implying perhaps a woman was not "cut out" for marriage was potentially the most offensive comment one could make to a southern lady. The importance of marriage to southern culture is supported by the fact that, according to Heather Spahr's annotated checklist of all of Welty's society columns that appeared in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, which can be found in the Winter 1999 edition of the *Eudora Welty Newsletter*, of the 45 society columns Welty wrote, 21 were about weddings or engagement announcements (10-15).

This description constitutes Dicey's first impression of Sister Anne which characterizes the rest of the story. The relationship between Dicey and Sister Anne is an

example of the way in which gossip can shape one's perception of people and events. The power that gossip is, therefore, able to hold within social relationships speaks to its importance in southern society. Recalling Ford's commentary on the role gossip plays in society journalism, it is noteworthy that gossip also appears often southern literature. This shared theme connects the genres of southern literature and society journalism.

Gossip appears in Welty's other short stories as well, including "Why I live at the P.O." In the story, the drama between the narrator, identified as "Sister" throughout, and her newly returned sister, Stella-Rondo, is perpetuated by the spreading of gossip throughout the family, or as Sister describes it, "deliberate, calculated, falsehood[s]" (46). It begins on the first night of Stella-Rondo's homecoming with her bold accusation that the narrator insulted their grandfather's, the apparent patriarch of the family, appearance by insinuating he should shave his beard (47). This claim was met by outrage directed at Sister by the entire family, beginning her ostracization. Sister later retaliates by suggesting to their mother that the child Stella-Rondo brought home (whom she claims to be adopted) could perhaps be intellectually delayed, which led to speculation on the drinking habits of the child's alleged father (51). These are just two examples of gossip spread by the sisters until the narrator is eventually cast out from the family and moves into the local Post Office, referencing the title of the story. The sisters' gossip propels the storyline in a way that further reinforces the reality that gossip has the ability to shape people's perceptions, thoughts, and actions. Further, society journalism's reliance on gossip as a means of reporting for content is also evidence of the ways gossip shapes public perception. The central theme of gossip provides yet another link between the genres of society journalism and southern literature and

culture, as Ford reminds us that gossip is one of the methods of generating content for society pages.

Another point of similarity shared between southern literature and society journalism is the sense of place and origin created in both genres. In her book, *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature*, Lucinda MacKethan discusses the importance of setting to southern literature. Specifically in chapter nine, MacKethan identifies Welty as an author who focuses on place in her fiction. Generally speaking, MacKethan says "the feeling for the difference in the way one response to place and to time has a quality specifically southern about it" (181). Specifically, Welty "uses the idea for the need for dynamic concepts of place as a major theme," (182).

Welty, herself, talks about the importance of place in fiction. In her essay, "Place in Fiction," Welty characterizes the importance of place to a story.

> What is there, then about place that is transferable to the pages of a novel? The best things—the explicit things: physical texture. And as place has functioned between the writer and his material, so it functions between the writer and reader. Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course. These charges need the warm hard earth underfoot, the light and lift of air, the stir and play of mood, the softening bath of atmosphere that give the likeness-to-life that life needs. ("Place in Fiction," 128)

Simply put, the place of a story grounds the plot as well as all of the emotions and descriptions within it. The grounding of a story in its setting, as described by Welty above, could also be applied to the grounding of fictional characters and plots in real life inspiration. For Welty, it is reasonable to extrapolate that such inspiration could have

come from her witnessing and later documenting the society events of her hometown. This serves as another connection between Welty's work in both genres of southern literature and southern journalism by demonstrating how both originate from inspiration from real world places, people, and events.

And Welty expertly creates southern spaces. For example, Welty's "Kin" opens with Dicey's comment that Mingo, the family's historic home, "sounded in [Dicey's] ears like *something* instead of *somewhere*," (538). Later, Dicey comments that the "little courthouse town" is "several hours by inconvenient train ride from Jackson, even" and how even "the cut grass in the yards smelled different from Northern grass" (539), really emphasizing how unique the town is from other places she has been. Dicey thought that "Aunt Ethel and Kate, and everybody I knew here, lived as if they had never heard of anywhere else, even Jackson," (539). This isolation reinforces the small town feel and provides justification for the popularity of society columns—residents' focus on the happenings of the town make a lot of sense when the isolation of the town is factored in. The use of a theme of southern literature, geographical isolation and sense of place, to justify the popularity of society columns provides another connection between the genres

Sense of place in an isolated geographic area occurs in other Welty stories as well. In "Death of a Travelling Salesman," the narrator is stranded in a remote location when his car breaks down. The narrator states the following upon the realization he is lost in an unknown, rural setting.

> Bowman had wanted to reach Beulah by dark, to go to bed and sleep off his fatigue. As he remembered, Beulah was fifty miles away from the last town, on a graveled road. This was only a cow trail. How had he ever

> come to such a place? …The cloud floated there to one side like the bolster on his grandmother's bed. It went over a cabin on the edge of a hill, where two bare chinaberry trees clutched at the sky. He drove through a heap of dead oak leaves, his wheels stirring their weightless sides to make a silvery melancholy whistle as the car passed through their bed. No car had been along this way ahead of him. (120)

This quote reflects the isolation of the narrator's setting, similar to that of Mingo which Dicey describes in "Kin." However, even though the narrator is not able to point out any distinguishing landmarks, the vivid descriptions of the scenery as well as the comparisons to known entities, like his grandmother's bed, create a strong sense of place.

Connections to a geographical and communal place are also of great importance in society journalism as well, recalling Ford's account of how the columns he worked on "made [us] feel a deep sense of place, and a lifelong connection to where we're from." The existence of town specific society columns within larger regional newspapers reflects the importance of and pride derived from connection to place in southern society. Additionally, some features of people in Welty's society pages also reinforces the importance of one's connection to a geographical touchstone. For example, in one wedding announcement entitled "Miss Walker Weds Mr. Reynolds In Baptist Church At Jackson: Marriage of Debutante to Kentuckian Is One of Season's Outstanding Events," Welty identifies the groom as a prominent "Kentuckian" and discusses how the match would be a societally beneficial one (Welty as quoted in Spahr 12). The emphasis placed on one's hometown demonstrates how connection to place shapes one's identity in southern culture.

Representations of time in Welty's fiction also provides a lens to analyze connections between society journalism and southern literature. Often, southern society is described as slow paced and sometimes even frozen in time. Charles Wilson describes the daily occurrences typical in southern life.

> According to a 1978 Harris Poll, southerners spent more time than other Americans fixing things around the house, helping others, enjoying the company of family and kin, resting after work, getting away from problems, napping, and "just doing nothing." Many of these are embodiments of passing time in the South, and the poll supports the idea that hanging out, or loafing, has been an intentional recreational choice of southerners and ties in with central themes of southern life. (157)

MacKethan's commentary on Welty's use of place is juxtaposed with her representations of time. MacKethan identifies a trend in Southern culture to prioritize or "exalt" a sense of place, "in order to resist time and progress" (181). Further, "Time and progress belong to the world outside, or so the myth goes; on the plantations or in the small, sleepy southern towns that are the popular images of the South, time is held back by the places themselves" (181). Place and time are, thus, inextricably linked and both are inarguably southern in nature.

In Welty's short story "Flowers for Marjorie," the main character Howard murders his wife, Marjorie, and then throws the clock out the window before fleeing the home (102). He later returns to find the clock shattered on the ground outside and then "knew for a fact that everything had stopped. It was just as he had feared, just as he had dreamed" (105). After he confesses to the police, Welty writes a description of the loud striking of the clock in town (106). While an albeit unusually violent example of this

phenomena, the broken clock reflects Howard's own perception of the slowing down or stopping of time. He goes about his day and time is "stopped" until he is forced to confront his crimes later and time "starts" again, symbolized by the description of the striking clock in the city. The "stoppage" of time while he performs daily activities reflects the slow paced connotation of the day to day occurrences in southern society. The slowed down effect is created through an attention to detail in the writing. A sense for detail oriented writing is one of the skills fostered in her time in society page journalism (McHaney 114).

In "Kin," Dicey and Kate are taken back to visit Uncle Felix, who appears to be frozen in time in a sort of hallucination. The encounter consists of Uncle Felix's war hallucinations, giving Dicey a cryptic note, and the girls continuing to gossip about Sister Anne, who continues to bop in and around the room remarking that "[e]verything comes at once if it comes at all" (558), a sentiment that is also reflected in Welty's description of debutante's full social calendar in one of her columns. This seemingly small detail is reflective of the duality of the pacing of time in southern society—while slow-paced and often almost frozen otherwise, the notion of social events and schedules instills in society members a panic. Welty herself reflects on the presence of this phenomenon in her own life. In the first lecture ("Listening") of her collection "One Writer's Beginnings," Welty recalls the following:

> In that vanished time in. small-town Jackson, most of the ladies I was familiar with, the mothers of my friends in the neighborhood, were busiest when they were sociable in the afternoons there was regular visiting up and down the little grid of residential streets. (12)

This quote describing Welty's own life could have just as easily appeared in "Kin" spoken by Aunt Ethel. A similar quote can be found in Welty's own society column. Spahr recorded that on December 17th, 1933, Welty's column, "Jackson Debs Find Their Life Full of Parties: And as the Holidays Grow Near, the Entertainments Increase," includes the following quote: "'Morning, noon and night' has been the theme song of the debutantes this week, as the holidays draw nearer, the parties grow" (Welty as quoted in Spahr, 12). The rush and whirlwind of Jackson society life as described by Welty is similar to that felt by Sister Anne in Mingo, representing a connection between her society page reporting and her fiction.

Connected to, yet further developing a sense of place and time, family and dynastic connections are also a central theme in Welty's stories and in society journalism. Ted Ownby discusses the prevalence of family in southern literature. Ramifications of the importance of family has such a large and turbulent history and presence in southern culture that it cannot be defined by one feature.

> Perhaps the best generalization is that people in the South have often used the concept of the family to think and argue—and have sometimes used it to fight—about who they are and want to be. To some southerners, family means a group of people one sees at reunions or holiday dinners and honors in cemeteries or pictures on mantles; to others, family means an expectation of sharing work and resources and the goal of living up to the family name; to still others, family has to do with frustrations about wrongs handed down through the generations. To many, but far from all, people in the South, family seems a nearly permanent relationship,

although the nature of that relationship has changed over southern history. (55)

In “Kin,” Aunt Ethel goes on to describe the familial relations of the impending event – “Well, she’s a remote cousin of Uncle Felix’s , to begin with. Your third cousin twice removed, and your Great aunt Beck’s half-sister, my third cousin once removed and my aunt’s half-sister, Dicey’s—" (540). While seemingly simply a reminder for Dicey as to just who these people are, the summarized family lineage reflects the importance of dynastic connection in southern culture which also appears in society columns in which people’s descriptions including to whom they were related. The family represented in “Kin” is an example of Ownby’s description of family as “group of people one sees at reunions or holiday dinners and honors in cemeteries or pictures on mantles” (55).

This demarcation of lineage especially shows up in marriage announcements in society pages. Sometimes the couple was related not only to their parents, but also grandparents. On April 14th, 1935, Welty’s society column entitled “Jackson Society Subdued By Observance of Lent: Ann Sullens Will Marry Lieut. Merwin Dickson On May 23,” included the following description of a society member – “‘Adine Wallace, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Wallace,…’” (Welty as quoted in Spahr, 15). The importance of dynastic connections in southern society is alluded to in other Welty society columns as well. On June 10, 1934, Welty’s column was entitled “Miss Helen Hargrave Weds James F. Cabell at Jackson: Marriage, Solemnized at Galloway Methodist Church, Unites Prominent Families,” which reflects the idea that one’s family connection matters even in the context of marriages. The ability to write about family

connections in the context of society journalism prepared Welty to later write stories that focused on families in the south.

The importance of family connections being recorded in society pages is even explicitly referenced in Welty's "Kin." Upon Dicey's arrival, Aunt Ethel said the following:

> "Oh-oh. Word has penetrated even Mingo, Miss Dicey Hastings, that you're in this part of the world! The minute you reached Mississippi our little paper had that notice you laughed at, that was all about your mother and me and your grandmother, so of course there's repercussions from Sister Anne." (540)

Dicey's entrance to the town spurred a society page article about her entire lineage, reflecting the value of family in southern culture. Further, the fact Dicey "laughed" at the notice, is evidence of the lack of respect for the content of society pages, as discussed at the end of the first chapter.

In Welty's "Why I Live At The P.O." opens with the narrator's description of her family. "I was getting along fine with Mama, Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo until my sister Stella-Rondo just separated from her husband and came back home again" (46). The family all lives in the same household, and the drama surrounding Sister's decision at the end of the story to move out reveals that this living arrangement is not only a common one but an important expression of family values. The living situation in the story is emblematic of Ownby's description of family as meaning, "an expectation of sharing work and resources and the goal of living up to the family name," as the family shares their resources in a shared living situation (55).

The importance of family connections is perhaps no more evident than in “Death of a Traveling Salesman.” After spending the night and realizing the seemingly odd, old couple is actually a young, content couple expecting a baby, the protagonist is faced with impending loneliness of the road and the overwhelming realization of his own lack of family and solitude. After leaving the home of the couple, the protagonist dies suddenly of a heart attack, the timing of which implies it was the stress of this realization that caused his death. The fact that this story presents death as the alternative to family life, the incredibly important “permanent” relationship of family as Ownby puts it, speaks volumes on the importance of familial connections to the perseverance of not only a happy life, but life itself.

Another example of detail orientated writing, a commonality between the genres of society journalism and southern literature, focuses on fashion. Welty’s society pages and fiction are both characterized by vivid descriptions of clothing. According to *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, “fashion also expresses the nature of society—its ideas, values, and roles” (Lauer 61). This positions the documentation of fashion trends, such as in Welty’s society columns, to the documentation of societal values in general. In “Kin,” the first physical description of Sister Anne is her attire. Although dark in mood and tone, the care with which Dicey describes Sister Anne’s dress, a “rather girlish, black taffeta with a flounce around it,” is similar to Welty’s own description of outfits worn by brides and debutantes at society events in her columns (548). In comparison, on May 27, 1934, Welty’s society column “Miss Mackey Recent Bride: Ceremony Was One of Outstanding Events of Week” describes the bride’s clothing: “Miss Mackey wore a Patou model in a white satin, princess fashioned, with high neckline, long sleeves, buttoned back, and train. Her lace cap was caught with

orange blossoms, from which fell a veil of illusion." (Welty as quoted in Spahr, 14). Welty's society column "Court' of Louis XIV to Be Ball Motif: Committees Completing Arrangements for Carnival Ball," appearing in the *Commercial Appeal* on February fourth of 1934, is another example of Welty's descriptive clothing accounts. "The ladies, in brocades, silver and gold, in velvets and silks of the brilliant period will be escorted by courtiers equally grand in silk knee-britches and square-cut coats with lace jabots" (Welty as quoted by Spahr, 13). The similarities in the descriptions of clothing found in Welty's work in both genres is evidence of Voss's and McHaney's claims discussed earlier that society pages provided a training ground in detailed writing and in Welty's sharp eye for trends in cultural events.

Descriptions of nature are also a common occurrence in both Welty's fiction and society journalism. In "Kin," Dicey comments on the difference in the smell of the grass in Mingo compared to her home in the North (539). This reference to the grass emphasizes Dicey's outsider status as well as the stark difference between her southern hometown and the north. The sentiment also comments on the isolation of the town and points to its nature, a central theme in southern literature. A connection to nature in comparison to the urban landscape of northern cities further differentiates the South not only geographically but also is reflective of the deeper connection to nature as a result of its abundance felt and explored by southern writers. According to Drew Swanson "these outdoor spaces [recreational gardens] reinforce connections between southerners, their agricultural past, and the present" (118). This trend is further exemplified in the story frequent and detailed mentions of flowers in the story, from Aunt Ethel's roses to the landscaping and wisteria of Mingo.

References to nature and floral arrangements also appear in Welty's society columns in detailed accounts of bridal bouquets and mentions of garden parties. For instance, Welty describes multiple bridal bouquets, specifically those carried by Miss Walker and Miss Mackey, as consisting of some combination of orchids, gardenias, and lilies of the valley ("Miss Walker Weds Mr. Reynolds In Baptist Church at Jackson: Marriage Of Debutante to Kentuckian Is One of Season's Outstanding Events" and "Miss Mackey Recent Bride: Ceremony Was One of Outstanding Events of Week").

While Welty's society columns are, of course, totally focused on events and happenings intown, society events are also directly mentioned and used as plot points in Welty's fiction. In "Kin," Dicey's return to Mingo is immediately marked by an extensive social event calendar as she recalled that they "had of course had so much to catch up with, besides, necessarily, parties" (538), a direct reference to the sort of events Welty recorded in her columns. Aunt Ethel, both names capitalized as familial relation, serving as almost another first name to distinguish dynastic connections, opens a correspondence card from one Sister Anne, requesting their presence in Mingo to visit Uncle Felix. The correspondence card could act as a symbol for society page events, the invitation to the cultural occurrences written about and documented in the pages. In "Listening" Welty speaks of her own experience with these cards.

> Everybody had calling cards, even certain children; and newborn babies themselves were properly announced by sending out their tiny engraved calling cards attached with a pink or blue bow to those of their parents. Graduation presents to high-school pupils were often "card cases." On the hall table in every house the first thing you saw was a silver tray waiting to

> receive more calling cards on top of the stack already piled up like jackstraws; they were never thrown away. (12)

The inclusion of society cards in Welty's fiction reflects how Welty was influenced by the societal happenings of her town. The occurrences she so carefully observes and translates for her readers also inspires details of her fiction. The inclusion of such details could also be read as evidence of the effects of Welty's "training" in society pages for detailed writing.

The gendered aspect of news consumption discussed in the first chapter is also alluded to in Welty's "A Piece of News." After Clyde returns home and Ruby shows him the newspaper, he responds, "'A newspaper!' Clyde snatched it roughly and with a grabbing disparagement. 'Where'd you git that? Hussy'" (16). While likely related to previous allusions to Ruby's potential infidelity, this disparagement by her husband also points to the importance of the targeted audience for these newspapers. Ruby is put down for having a newspaper and later is accused of misunderstanding it. This positioning reinforces the society's gendering of news consumption and reflects my analysis of the relationship between society pages compared to hard news—women were not considered a part of the news world in the traditional sense. The societal occurrence is mirrored in the couple's interaction.

In conclusion, a line in Welty's "A Piece of News" gets to the heart of the comparison between Welty's fiction and society journalism. The first mention of the newspaper occurs when Ruby Fisher begins to examine the physical newspaper. "She did not merely look at it—she watched it, as if it were unpredictable, like a young girl watching a baby" (13). In the narrator's description, there is a direct comparison between the newspaper and human life, almost as though the news is like a human life.

This is particularly noteworthy as it connects the subject of society pages to that of news in that the central focus of both are exactly that—story telling about human lives.

Chapter Three
Implications

"I think there was a lot of hard work that went into getting where you all have gotten," Ms. Levin said, "and it has paid off immeasurably." – Amanda Svachula, "When The Times Kept The Female Reporters Upstairs" The New York Times, Sept. 20, 2018.

The work of the society page journalist has been overlooked for far too long, and Welty is a prime example of this phenomena, both in her own dismissive attitude toward her own early writing as well as in the general tendency of researchers' failure to even consider her early work. Whether through their financial importance as a revenue generator through advertising sales or through their thematic connections to southern literature, society pages provide a record of cultural events, and these records contain the values and daily matters of southern society.

Society pages have provided a platform for social change when other sections deemed such issues unimportant, such as education reform in primary school and racial equality in the coverage of social events. They also provided the foundation for small town businesses and cultural centers, as Ford documented. Often, society columns served as an important source of news coverage for small, rural towns. The modern emergence of news deserts in these aforementioned small, rural towns is a lasting effect of the lack of media attention given to them. As society columns provided a voice for small town life and social change, the gendered aspect of the columns also represented the voice of female journalists at the time. As Voss notes, "soft news" is not a gender free

term, so many female journalists were confined to these pages. Yet they carved out a place for themselves and created a space for important social commentary and societal level change.

The connections between Eudora Welty's society journalism and fiction is an integral component of an argument for the importance of society pages. The stylistic and thematic similarities explored in the second chapter provide evidence of the profound impact of Welty's training in the society pages. As McHaney puts it, these pages are where Welty learned to write like Welty (113). Given Welty's prominence within southern literature, it is safe to say southern literary culture would be much poorer without her unique narrative voice that was honed and crafted during her time as a Jackson society column for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.

Afterword

The research and writing process of this thesis has been full of excitement and surprises as well as blockages and stumbles. One obstacle to my research for this project has been the lack of access to Welty's society pages. Initially, I struggled to even find documented evidence of her work at the newspaper. Marrs' biography dedicated barely a page to her time at the *Commercial Appeal* and made sure to distinguish the work as not traditional journalism. Further, my research regarding the history of the paper revealed little to no mention of having Welty on its staff.

At first, I was perplexed by this. I would have expected such a prominent and well-known author such as Welty to have extensive research done on all of her written work, especially her published works such as newspaper articles. Further, I expected the publications for whom she wrote to have emphasized her work or at least have easily accessible documentation of her time spent there. However, this was not the case. When I contacted the University of Memphis, who now holds the archives of past issues of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, they informed me they had no knowledge of Welty having worked for the publication or of her articles existing within the paper.

While this lack of information is likely due to a lack of prioritization of women's writing in southern literature at the time, I think it is deeper than that. As mentioned before, extensive research has been done on Welty's novels and fiction, but her journalism has been given little attention and largely left out of academic discussion and research. McHaney is, of course, one exception. This furthers my findings and arguments regarding the gendered element of distinctions between high and low genres of writing. The society pages were regulated to female journalists and those writings are the hardest to find. Whether passively overlooked or actively erased from the academic

and news memory, often these articles embody the female voice and perspective on cultural events and phenomena. The fact that is the subject that is being overlooked is revealing as to society's prioritization of voices.

However, both scholars and news editors alike overlook society columns. This represents a missed opportunity. The notion that the events covered in this section are purely "women's events" is a vast oversimplification. Southern society is composed of the very themes and events revealed in topics found in southern literature: descriptions of community, family, weddings and parties are relics of cultural values and commentaries. Society pages, too, offer such commentaries, making the women who wrote them among the principle documenters of history. The work of the society pages writers should be valued as such. This is a lesson I have learned through this process and one I plan to take into consideration as I begin my career as a journalist. I hope to one day be able to depict southern culture a fraction as eloquently, vividly, and powerfully as Welty did in her fiction and society journalism.

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